



**Economic Commission for Africa
Committee of Experts of the Conference of African
Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
Thirty-ninth meeting**

Addis Ababa (hybrid), 17–19 March 2021

Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

Statutory issues**Recent organizational changes in the
Economic Commission for Africa secretariat****Note by the Executive Secretary****I. Background**

1. In early 2018, the secretariat of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) launched its restructuring process, which was essentially framed around the vision of delivering on “Ideas for a Prosperous Africa”. The reforms were driven by the need to increase the influence of the Commission on the African transformational agenda with a strategic delivery model aimed at (a) aligning ECA activities with the changing demands and priorities of member States, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union; (b) bridging the development gap by strengthening and building new network alliances, and by working in a comprehensive and collaborative manner; and (c) strengthening traditional partnerships and developing new strategic partnerships within the continent and globally within global policy engagements. In this regard, the Executive Secretary presented a note (E/ECA/CM.39/7) to the thirty-ninth session of the Commission/Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development that articulated the rationale for the repositioning as well as the main organizational and programmatic changes.

2. Over the course of 2017, the United Nations embarked on a profound reform process, outlined in the Secretary-General’s report of July 2017, on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a better future for all (A/72/124–E/2018/3), and his follow-up report of December 2017 (A/72/684–E/2018/7). As stated by the Secretary-General in the first of those reports, the reform was designed to set up “a United Nations development system that is fit for purpose for the 2030 Agenda”. The regional reform process has since clarified the value proposition of the regional United Nations development system. It also revamped the way the regional United Nations development system works and deploys its assets to support countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

* E/ECA/COE/39/1.



3. In the context of operationalizing the above twin reform processes at ECA after almost three years of implementation and consolidating the gains from the reconfigured programmatic orientation of the Commission, several rounds of consultations were organized within the senior leadership management team and among a cross-section of ECA staff, as well as with ECA traditional partners, which have resulted in effecting the necessary cost-neutral adjustments to scale up impact.

4. The purpose of this brief note is to inform the annual session of the Commission/Conference of Ministers about the recent developments requiring the secretariat to effect minor organizational changes for improving the coherence, profile and visibility of ECA interactions with the African Union Development Agency, working with the African Union in a more optimal and effective way, adjusting to the regional reform process in better supporting its implementation, as well as for readjusting the programme structure of ECA subprogramme responsible for driving its agenda on climate change, environment and natural resources management.

II. Highlights of the organizational changes

5. In the light of the extensive consultations conducted within and outside ECA, some minor organizational changes were effected, which are briefly highlighted below.

A. Africa Regional Collaborative Platform, working with the African Union Development Agency, and coordinated support to resident coordinators/United Nations country teams

6. During the two years since the ECA restructuring, the United Nations regional reform aimed at harnessing the regional assets of the United Nations development system to achieve the 2030 Agenda was in full swing. In his 2019 report on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of United Nations system operational activities (A/74/73–E/2019/4) to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General put forward recommendations in five key areas of transformation to guide the longer-term reprofiling and restructuring of the regional assets. These recommendations are being rolled out in five regions, including the Africa region.

7. One of the key aspects of the Secretary-General's recommendation is the creation of the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP), absorbing all previous coordination mechanisms – the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM)-Africa and the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group – into a single platform providing a light and agile internal collaboration mechanism for the United Nations system at the regional level. RCP-Africa is designed to optimize what exists, ensure coordination, and foster collaboration and co-creation, as well as optimal use of assets, across the United Nations development system entities at the regional level. RCP-Africa is also expected to bring leadership, accountability and clarity to system-wide goals, activities and results at the regional level in support of country-level United Nations action. The Platform will be serviced through a joint secretariat in which ECA is a member, alongside the United Nations Development Coordination Office Regional Office for Africa and the United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Africa.

8. Also emerging from the ongoing United Nations regional reform and preliminary assessment of the recent ECA institutional reforms is the need for

better institutional cohesion, synergy and delivery of the work of ECA with the African Union Development Agency, the work with the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and through the Inter-Departmental Taskforce on African Affairs. The same imperative also applies for the interface of ECA with the Development Coordination Office Regional Office for Africa in working with the Resident Coordinator offices in the Africa region in a more coordinated and systematic way.

9. In response to these reform-related changes, it was deemed necessary to recalibrate and fine-tune institutional arrangements within ECA to ensure that the ECA portion of the functions pertaining to the joint RCP-Africa secretariat, as well as the corporate coordinated support to the African Union Development Agency, are delivered effectively. In line with the principle of central coordination to eliminate fragmentation of responsibility and authority, the Executive Secretary has taken a decision to integrate the three pieces – ECA support for the African Union Development Agency, the RCP-Africa joint secretariat, and coordination of the African Union–United Nations partnership – under one pillar and reporting framework.

10. The organizational changes put in place involve moving the New Partnership for Africa’s Development Section from the Regional Integration and Trade Division, with its post and non-post resources, to the Strategic Planning Oversight and Reporting Division, and anchoring it as a Unit within the existing Standards and Quality Assurance Section. The Unit was renamed the System-wide Coherence Support Unit, and the scope of the Section’s functions was broadened and renamed the Systems-Wide Coherence and Quality Assurance Section.

11. The new Section has expanded its mandate to handle the three components: support for the joint secretariat of RCP-Africa, the African Union Development Agency and the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and coordination of the ECA work with the resident coordinators/United Nations country teams. The Section is responsible for ensuring internal coherence and collaboration (interfacing the RCP) and coordinating ECA system-wide support for the African Union Development Agency (interfacing the African Union–United Nations RCP). The Section is also responsible for facilitating ECA engagement collaboration with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, through the Countries of Focus ECA Menu of Service Lines.

12. The changes will rationalize the use of resources while maintaining the integrity of the functions that are inherently interlinked. Locating the Unit in the Strategic Planning, Oversight and Reporting Division will ensure a single coordination point and gateway for streamlined interactions with the African Union Development Agency, avoiding fragmentation and duplication as well as yielding benefits in terms of efficiency and value added. The new Unit will also ensure internal ECA-wide coherence by breaking down functional silos, and will help foster horizontal linkages with other divisional functions, such as planning, monitoring and reporting.

B. Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management Division

13. The Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management Division is a critical component for ECA in relation to delivering on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The overall objective of the Division is to advance inclusive and sustainable development, through enhanced climate resilience of member States, supporting the transition to a green economy through judicious use of natural resources and strengthening capacity to harness new technologies and innovation.

14. The configuration of the Division has changed at different points, linked to availability of resources and the needs of the wider organization. The proposed reorganization was deemed necessary following the conclusion of programmes in the previous Natural Resources Section, which has depleted the capacity in this Section. It was also a response to creating a stronger identity for the Division.

15. The reorganization is aimed at building on existing capacity and providing a framework for future growth and contribution to the overall objectives of ECA. The reorganization is not aimed at radical changes, but rather emphasises the key outcomes that the Division seeks to deliver in a more holistic fashion. It also reflects the desire to be able to react effectively to the challenge imposed on the organization by COVID-19, to be able to reorient support towards “building back better” for member States more effectively.

16. The Division was previously organized into three Sections: (a) The Africa Climate Policy Centre; (b) Green Economy, Technology and Innovation Section; and (c) Natural Resources Section. While the Division will continue to be divided into three Sections, these Sections were reorganized as follows going forward: (a) African Climate Policy Centre; (b) Green and Blue Economy Section; and (c) Innovation and Technology Section.

17. The Office of the Director was strengthened to address cross-cutting themes that involve the whole Division, and this includes natural resources management, which is no longer a Section, but the role and function of that Section is being delivered by the Division as a whole with direction from the Office of the Director.

18. This approach also seeks to strengthen the coordination of activities related to the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, not only within the Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management Division, but also across ECA.

19. More specifically, the Division has been reconfigured as follows:

(a) Office of the Director: The Office of the Director will provide overall coordination to all activities and functions of the Division. The former staff of the Natural Resources Division have been reassigned to the Office of the Director in order to provide deliverables related to the previous work of the Section, by linking up with the capacity available in all Sections of the Division. The aim is to also strengthen the strategic capacity of the Office in relation to mobilization of resources, strengthening of reporting and improving the communication of the Division;

(b) African Climate Policy Centre: The Centre has a strong track record in implementing projects with strong impact, and leadership on matters concerning climate change on the African continent. In the context of scarcity of resources available, the aim is to strengthen the core posts available under the regular budget to improve organizational certainty. At the same time, the “branding” of the African Climate Policy Centre as a policy centre will be strengthened to generate additional resources;

(c) Green and Blue Economy Section: The Section will continue to lead the organization and follow up of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development process in conjunction with partners within the Division and across ECA. It will continue to provide support for transitions to more sustainable economic models in member States. It is important to note that the blue economy is an expression of the concept of the green economy in a marine environment. As such, the functions associated with the blue economy will also be encompassed in the work of the Section. In the medium-to-long term, the aim is to strengthen the technical capacity available in the Division to address the specific needs related to the blue economy;

(d) Innovation and Technology Section: The Technology Section has been separated from the Green Economy Section, which reflects the reality of the types of projects and work being undertaken. The overarching goal of harnessing technology for the needs of sustainable development remains fundamental, and an individual Section can contribute more meaningfully to initiatives spanning the entire ECA, including the Digital Centre of Excellence. The Innovation and Technology Section will continue to focus its work on harnessing innovation to meet the challenges of sustainability and accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

III. Conclusion and next steps

20. As reform is a continuous process, the ECA secretariat will continue to provide co-leadership to the roll-out of the recommendations of the Secretary-General in Africa in advancing the regional reform. The work of ECA will also continue to be guided by the implementation of the joint African Union–United Nations Framework for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, which will contribute to a strengthened partnership and coordination between the United Nations organizations and the African Union Commission, for collective achievement of the African development agenda.
