

Report of
the 7th Meeting of the Working Group on
RCA Medium-Term Strategy Coordination
17-20 February 2020, Vienna, Austria

1. Introduction

Upon approval of the 48th RCA General Conference Meeting (GCM) held on 13 September 2019 in Vienna Austria, the Seventh Meeting of the Working Group on the RCA Medium Term Strategy Coordination (MTSC WG) was held from 17 to 20 February 2020 in Vienna, Austria. The adopted Agenda of the Meeting is in **Annex 1**.

The Meeting of the MTSC WG had eleven (11) participants and observers comprising representatives from AUL, BGD, JPN, MAL, NZE (by videoconference), PHI, ROK, and RCARO. The Interim Chair of PAC and RCA-FP also participated. The meeting was chaired by the representative from AUL. The List of Participants is in **Annex 2**.

The meeting was officially opened by the Director of TCAP, Ms Jane Gerardo-Abaya who affirmed the importance of the MTSC WG both in directing the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the RCA MTS but in also the broader strategic direction of the Agreement, especially as it headed to its 50th Anniversary and a new MTS. She affirmed the commitment of the new DG to TC and the RCA noting his desire for a larger program based on developing public-private partnerships.

The stated purpose of the meeting was to:

- Review and evaluate progress on the MTSC WG work plan for 2020; and
- Review the MTSC WG Terms of Reference (ToR) to determine status of functions with a mind to finalising the work of the MTSC WG.

It was expected that the meeting would produce the following documents for consideration by the 42nd National Representatives Meeting (NRM):

- Proposed updates to RCA documents including the GOR to reflect endorsed recommendations, as required;
- Updated WG MTSC Work Plan;
- Working Group Meeting Report

AUL noted the significant work that had been completed by the MTSC WG at the previous meeting, notably the substantial guidance document for PAC on how to undertake the MTR. He saw that with the completion of this work, the MTSC WG would move to a new phase, pivoting to other areas resulting from recommendations made throughout its deliberations, as it slowed down and moved towards its finish. Review of the WG's TOR would be undertaken to verify that its objectives were complete. NZE noted the MTR guidance for PAC was an important "step-change document that had the power to be transformative for the Agreement".

2. Plan for Conduct of the MTR

The Interim Chair of PAC gave a presentation on the Committee's plans to conduct the MTR of the 2018-2023 MTS as requested by the 38th NRM and 41st GCM. The presentation is included as **Annex 3**.

PAC thanked the MTSC WG for the guidance document on conducting the MTR. Noting that he would need to confirm with his PAC colleagues at their meeting the following week, he indicated that he intended to utilize the methodology set out in the MTSC WG guidance with some modifications in order to finish the study within the stipulated period. He also noted that the outcome of the review should lead to recommendations that would improve the implementation of the RCA Programme. His presentation included additional criteria that could be used in assessing RCA Governance and on Programme Soundness. He further indicated a tentative timeframe for delivery of the MTR at the 49th GCM as per the following timetable (subject to discussion and approval at the following PAC meeting):

Activity	Time Frame	Responsibility
Data Collection	15 th April - 31 st May 2020	PAC Chair, PAC Members
Data analysis	1 st – 30 th June 2020	PAC Members
First Draft of the report	10 th July 2020	PAC Chair, PAC Members
Feedback from PAC members and MTSC	15 th – 31 st July 2020	PAC Members, MTSC Chair
Finalization of the Report	10 th August 2020	PAC Chair
Submission of Background Paper for circulation to NRs	15 th August 2020	PAC Chair
Presentation at 49 th GCM	18 th September 2020	PAC Chair

AUL thanked PAC for committing to an ambitious timetable and committed the MTSC WG to work with PAC as needed to help meet this timetable. He said that while the methodology in the MTSC WG guidance would help, the amount of time that would be needed to undertake this work should not be underestimated. Accordingly, if PAC found that during conduct of the MTR further time was needed, the MTSC WG would support an extension of the report until the 43rd NRM. Either way, he noted that the review by the MTSC WG could be done by electronic correspondence.

PAC raised a number of other issues around what the results may come from the review, essentially recommendations on improving the performance of the RCA. AUL welcomed this approach noting that the purpose of the MTR was to identify and ultimately rectify shortcomings in programme performance.

Recommendation 1

The MTSC WG recommends that the 42nd NRM endorse PAC to conduct the MTR of the MTS, presenting the report to the 49th GCM (or 43rd NRM if further time is needed).

3. Outcome Monitoring

The RCA-FP gave an update on the Secretariat project on *Case Studies of Social and Economic Value of RCA Projects*. The report is included as **Annex 4**. The project is continuing, with a second meeting to undertake a case study on mutation breeding projects held in November 2019. The case study is expected to be completed by July 2020.

NZE provided an overview of how the outcome monitoring methodologies that had been explored over the course of the MTSC WG deliberations might be incorporated into RCA documents, including the GOR. The presentation is included as **Annex 5**. There was extensive discussion in this regard noting the need to balance:

- a) the difficulties experienced in defining an outcome methodology;
- b) the desire to have an outcome monitoring fully integrated into the project life cycle from design through to review and close out; and
- c) that full integration would be very difficult given the continuous life cycle of project design and review.

Ultimately, it was decided that two revisions would be made to the GOR to enhance outcome monitoring of RCA projects, specifically:

- a) a new Section 1.8, Part 1 highlighting the importance of and broad parameters for setting the MTS, including outcome monitoring;
- b) revised Annexes 12, 13 and 14, the National Report Template for the First, Mid-Term, and Final Review Meetings, highlighting the single sentence outcome harvesting methodology, and recording of project activity completion; and
- c) a new Annex 16 explaining outcome monitoring methodologies.

The proposed changes on outcome monitoring are included in the comprehensive amended version of the GOR attached as **Annex 6**.

In making these proposed changes to the GOR, it was noted that they can only go so far and ideally that they would be accompanied by training for LCCs and NPCs on how to apply outcome monitoring, conducted at relevant project Coordination Meetings. Recognizing that this would carry a financial cost, it was considered that it would add significant value and that it is something that should be considered by the NRs.

Recommendation 2

The MTSC WG recommends that the 42nd NRM request the Secretariat to provide training on outcome monitoring to relevant stakeholders (e.g. LCCs, NPCs, NRs etc.) through appropriate fora (e.g. project Design Meetings, Coordination Meetings).

In addition to the changes noted above, significant consideration was also given to undertaking a significant strategic overhaul of the GOR. There was recognition that despite recent updates to the GOR, both by the MTSC WG and a dedicated GOR working group, these changes had been largely administrative in nature. The GOR has evolved significantly over the years and a more systematic review of the document to make sure it is achieving its purpose may be valuable. Ultimately, the MTSC WG decided this was outside the scope of its work, but encourages the NRs to consider such a strategic review. Such a task could be undertaken either by the anticipated new Working Group to draft the MTS 2024-2029 or a dedicated Working Group.

Recommendation 3

The MTSC WG recommends that the 42nd NRM commission a *strategic* review and update of the GOR, either by MTS 2024-2029 Drafting WG or a dedicated WG.

4. Extrabudgetary Activities in Project Design

AUL noted that the decision of the 48th GCM requiring project designs to include 25% of their budgeted to be allocated to extra-budgetary activities had not be actualized in the GOR. To this end, a new paragraph to Section 1.7, Part 1 was proposed reflecting this decision. The proposed new text is included in the comprehensive amended version of the GOR attached as **Annex 6**.

In making these changes, it was noted that it could be an appropriate time for a follow-up letter to the 2018 Declaration from the RCA Chair calling for 400 000 EUR per year in extra budgetary contributions, especially as the 50th anniversary of the RCA would be in 2022, mindful that no further obligations should be placed on GPs.

Recommendation 4

The MTSC WG recommends that the RCA Chair send a letter to the Permanent Missions of all GPs following up on the 2018 Declaration, highlighting the lead up to the 50th anniversary of the RCA would be an opportune time for EB contributions.

5. Project Participation Forms (PPF)

JPN gave a presentation on the usability and broader issues of the PPF. The presentation is included as **Annex 7**.

It was agreed that parts of the PPF were not user-friendly and could be streamlined. There was significant discussion about the purpose and use of the PPF, and whether large parts of the document – or even all of it – were needed in light of some redundancy with the National Report Template for First Coordination Meetings that was typically filled out not long after the PPF was submitted. PAC also questioned why the information collected in the PPF was not collated during the project design phase. Ultimately it was decided that the PPF still had value

in terms of “officially” registering a GPs intent that to participate in a project. Even if parts of it were repetitive with other documents, this was an important step in baselining information for a project and helping the LCC refine the project plans.

Some changes were made to the PPF to make it more user-friendly. These changes included:

- added check boxes throughout the document to make response options clearer;
- made minor phrasing changes throughout document for clarity;
- added clarification to Part 2 that indication of potential RRUs did not place any obligations on GPs;
- greatly simplified Part 3C; and
- simplified and merged Parts 3D and 3E into one section.

The proposed modifications to the PPF are included in the comprehensive amended version of the GOR attached as **Annex 6**.

6. Regional Resource Units (RRU)

BGD and MAL presented their observations on the guidance on RRUs presented in the GOR, as well as its application based on the recent experience of GPs completing PPFs. The presentation is included as **Annex 8**. Some potential issues identified with the RRU guidance included:

- Designation of RRUs are self-nominated with no formal verification or qualification process;
- RRUs actually needed to be identified during project design stage; and
- There was concern among some GPs that nominating as an RRU may place them under legal or financial obligations to undertake the role, leading to a reluctance to make such nominations.

This last point was addressed by making revisions to guidance on RRUs in the GOR. The proposed modifications are included in the comprehensive amended version of the GOR attached as **Annex 6**.

The concept of verification created significant discussion. Noting that a formal verification process would add credibility to the RRU concept, it also had potential negatives, namely, potential discouragement if RRU nominations were rejected, and significant effort in both establishing and implementing a verification scheme. There was also consideration if the RRU scheme was actually still required, or it could be changed from a self-nominated to an appointed (by LCCs) process as often the RRUs nominated weren't actually needed or utilised in a project. It was noted that in some respects that the LCC and NPCs on a project should undertake a needs first and *then* identify if RRUs could address any identified gaps. Ultimately given the potential implications of such a decision, it was decided that the NRs should consider these issues at the upcoming NRM.

Recommendation 5

The MTSC WG recommends that the 42nd NRM consider whether a systematic review of the RRU concept is required. Such a review could consider aspects such as:

- Whether RRUs should be:
 - self-nominated or appointed by project stakeholders
 - identified prior to project initiation or following a needs and gap analysis
- Whether a verification or qualification process is required
- What would be the resource implications of the above if they were adopted

7. Summary of GOR Changes

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that the 42nd NRM approve the suggested changes to the GOR reflected in **Annex 6**. These changes include:

- A new paragraph in Section 1.7, Part 1 reflecting the principle of identifying EB activities in project design;
- A new Section 1.8, Part 1, describing the need for, and broad parameters to be considering in, drafting an MTS;
- Minor clarification revisions to the advice on RRUs (Section 3, Annex 1);
- A revised Project Participation Form (Annex 11) to provide clarification on some parts and make it more user-friendly;
- Revised National Report Templates for the First, Mid-Term, and Final Review Meetings (Annexes 12, 13 and 14, respectively) to include outcome monitoring aspects;
- A new Annex 16 explaining outcome monitoring aspects; and
- An updated MTSC WG Terms of Reference (Annex 6) to reflect changes approved at the 48th GCM.

In approving these changes, it is recommended that the RCA Chair instruct RCARO to publish the new GOR on the website.

In making the recommended changes to the GOR, it was frequently noted that much of the information collected in the PPF should actually be collated by the prospective LCCs during project design. It is recommended that the RCA Chair request National Representatives to remind prospective LCCs of this, particularly in light of the ongoing 2022-2023 project design cycle.

Recommendation 7

The MTSC WG recommends that the RCA Chair request NRs to remind prospective LCCs of the importance of early and ongoing engagement with potential counterparts during the project design life cycle.

8. 2024-2029 MTS

Noting that it was anticipated that the 42nd NRM would form a WG to start drafting the 2024-2029 MTS, AUL presented a working paper on what concepts should be considered by this WG. This paper is attached as **Annex 9**. AUL affirmed his willingness to be part of the drafting WG for the 2024-2029 MTS.

Recommendation 8

The MTSC WG recommends that the 42nd NRM note the MTSC WG considerations for the 2024-2029 MTS and provide these to the anticipated drafting WG.

9. Review of MTSC WG Terms of Reference (ToR)

Given the substantial work completed by the MTSC WG at its 6th meeting (i.e. the guidance for PAC on completion of the MTR), a strategic review of the functions of the WG as noted in its ToR was conducted. This review is included as **Annex 10**. The MTSC WG concluded that all twelve of the functions in the ToR had been addressed, noting that a number would require ongoing review as the MTR and ultimately Final Reviews were completed.

During the course of the meeting, it was noted that there may be some similarities between the ToR of the MTSC WG and that of PAC. To this end, a cross-referencing exercise was done between the two ToRs. The results of this exercise are included as **Annex 11**.

Ultimately there were only a few areas of overlap between the two ToR and most of these were understandable (e.g. both groups are asked to advise on the drafting of the 2024-2029 MTS, but each WG will bring different perspectives). The one area of overlap that was a concern was function 2(b), Point 3 of the PAC ToR which requested them to advise NRs on “mechanisms to identify funding opportunities through donors outside the IAEA”. The MTSC WG was of the view that this should not be a function of PAC and that the NRs should consider if the PAC ToR needed updating in this regard. PAC supported this view.

Recommendation 9

The MTSC WG recommends that the 42nd NRM consider whether they want PAC to be advising on “mechanisms to identify funding opportunities through donors outside the IAEA”, and amend their ToR if required.

10. Review of Annual Work Plan

The MTSC WG reviewed the Annual Work Plan 2020 in light of discussions at the 7th meeting with a mind to update actions and identify new actions for the Annual Work Plan 2020. AUL noted that all actions had been completed except for three, pertaining to follow-up from the MTR, or ongoing engagement with the Secretariat project on *Case Studies of Social and Economic Value of RCA Projects*. He noted that while the number of actions was getting small, they would require significant work following completion of the MTR by PAC

The updated Annual Work Plan 2020 is included as **Annex 12**.

Recommendation 10

It is recommended that the 42nd NRM endorse the MTSC WG Annual Work Plan 2020.

11. Closing

It was agreed that the next meeting of the MTSC WG would not be needed until the MTR had been presented by PAC to the NRs. If this was delivered to the 49th GCM as anticipated, the 8th Meeting of the MTSC WG would be hosted in Vienna, Austria from 25 to 28 January 2021 subject to possible alignment with PAC meeting schedule.

The Chair thanked the WG members, RCARO, PAC, and the RCA-FP for their active participation and contributions at the Meeting and wished them a safe journey home.