

TCAP Virtual Meeting of NLO/NLA/RCA-NR and ARASIA Representatives

Thank you Mr Chairman,

Mr Chairman

Ms Jane Abaya, Director of TCAP

Section Head TCAP, Mr Gashaw Wolde

RCA Focal Person, Mr Sinh Van Hoang

Esteem RCA National Representatives

Director of RCARO

My respected colleague and Chair of ARASIA

NLOs and NLAs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Good morning or good afternoon, depending on your time zones. First and foremost, I would like to thank the secretariat for inviting me as the current RCA Chair to give my remarks on behalf of RCA and I am certainly honoured to do so in my capacity. I would also like to congratulate my colleague, Mr... from Pakistan for being elected as chairman for this meeting and I am sure his able stewardship will steer this meeting to a fruitful conclusion.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

2. Cooperative agreements that promote science and development in key regions around the world strengthen the work of the IAEA to spread the benefits of peaceful uses of nuclear technology. The first such cooperative agreement is the Regional Cooperative Agreement for Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology for Asia and the Pacific, more popularly known by the acronym RCA.
3. RCA is an intergovernmental agreement among the IAEA Member States located in South Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific and the Far East. Established in 1972, RCA's objectives are to promote, coordinate and implement cooperative research, development and training projects to support the peaceful application of nuclear science and technology amongst the Government Parties to the RCA.
4. RCA consists of 22 Government Parties, namely: Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Palau, Philippines, Singapore,

South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. Evidently, RCA covers a wide range of geography (from South Asia such as Pakistan & India to the Pacific Island States), various population sizes (populous China and India to PICS), and diversity in the capabilities and capacities of nuclear science and technology, strategic interests, socio-economic standings and societal needs and well-beings. These represent both challenges and opportunities for the RCA, both in terms of management and strategic priorities and programmatic activities.

RCA Management and Strategic Directions

5. However, for RCA, we believe that what is important is to adhere to the countries requirement and need. As such, RCA priorities cover a wide range of thematic areas, wherein, the cooperative projects are implemented through the IAEA Technical Cooperation programme mechanism, within four main sectors: agriculture, environment, human health and industry.
6. To address the challenges, various working groups has been formed to tackle specific issues, piecemeal, to ensure that RCA is managed according to the agreed Guidelines and Operating procedures (RCA GOR) and these groups would then report to the council of national representatives through yearly organized meetings such as the NRM and GCM. These ensures the participation of Government Parties at all levels to help manage the RCA.
7. One such group is the Medium-Term Strategy (MTSC) for 2018-2023 which is the key strategic plan for improving RCA's development effectiveness. It articulates how RCA can best discharge its Mission and utilizes the instruments and processes at its disposal to maximize its contribution to the development goals of its Government Parties. The MTS sets out the Vision, Mission and a set of strategic directions and priorities for the RCA as an extension of the Medium-Term Strategy for the period 2012-2017.
8. RCA has conducted a Mid Term Review, a first-of-a kind, using a highly systematic approach to measure the agreement's performance against set objectives and pre-defined indicators in the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) document. The data/information collected will be analysed to identify recommendations to increase performance, refined and then repeated for a final review at end of the MTS's tenure and provided as input into the next MTS working group planned for 2024-2029.

9. Now, RCA is preparing the drafting of the RCA MTS for 2024-2029 together with Regional Programme Framework (RPF) of RCA projects for the betterment of RCA and for the benefit of the region, as a follow-up to the working group on developing the Medium Term Strategy 2018-2023 which are now concluding their works. This is to ensure sustainability and that RCA are moving in the right direction according to regional needs. The focus would be to support RCA Government Parties to materialize their SDGs in a more effective and efficient manner (by 2030). The Regional Programme Framework will be developed based on the priorities of the RCA GPs obtained through a survey and the analysis of the outcomes of the past RCA projects. I would like to commend the Program Advisory Committee (PAC) for realizing this on behalf of RCA.
10. To assist in the management of RCA activities in the region, RCA has established a regional office (RCA RO), hosted by ROK, the one and only regional office under the TC regional cooperative framework. This arrangement has been effective in carrying out many promotional and outreach activities in response to local needs, supplementing the RCA Programme. The RCA Regional Office (RCARO) is also hosting the RCA website which is an important vehicle for information exchange and archiving the data/information for easy storage and retrieval where and when needed, accessible at any time and day.
11. RCA has no problems in sharing all these management strategies and its experiences with other agreements, if need be. Cooperation between all the agreements is of vital importance to enrich our knowledge and experience, learn from each other, for the benefits of all member states and the nuclear community at large.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

Evaluating Impact

12. In the last 48 years, the Agreement has contributed to the development of technical and human resource capacities in the region through more than 150 TC projects. Hence we believe that the time is ripe for conducting an impact assessments study to clarify how and to what extent those projects, broken down according to thematic area, have shaped and contributed positively to the rising quality of life in the region.
13. RCA has thus conducted the first impact study of several planned socio-economic assessments of RCA projects, using mutation breeding projects as

the pilot study in which the impact assessments are designed to identify value added beyond the primary research undertaken by individual countries.

14. The impact assessment found that the RCA has supported a significant body of mutation breeding research, including over 7,300 promising breeding lines with superior quality traits to previous crops, and 254 mutant varieties of crops certified and officially released among the region. The key impacts of this research include increased food production, enhanced environmental protection, strengthened regional capacity and capabilities and growing competitiveness in international markets.
15. More impact studies will be carried out in other thematic areas in the future to look for the impact of nuclear technology to the socio-economic development in the region.

50th Anniversary of the RCA

16. The Regional Cooperative Agreement (RCA) will celebrate its 50th Anniversary in 2022. RCA is looking forward to the preparation of detailed work plans including concrete budgetary proposals for the 50th Anniversary. The theme for the celebration is “The RCA 50 years and Beyond”. In conjunction with the celebration, the Exhibition and Ministerial Conference will be conducted to showcase its value and socio-economic impact to the region over the 50 years through RCA projects.

IAEA Supports and Network Collaborating

17. RCA takes note that due to COVID-19 pandemic, the regional activities planned in 2020 have been adjusted, most of them to be carried out using videoconferencing, resulting in a saving of 1.2 million EUR for 2020 with a similar amount anticipated in 2021 as well. RCA in close cooperation with the TCAP secretariat is planning to utilize this access budget for procurement of equipment and accessories for selected projects and GPs.
18. The recent unprecedented event of the Covid-19 pandemic has forced many countries to impose a Restricted Movement Order in order to control the spread of the virus that caused the disease through restricted movements, social distancing and stay at home policy. Hence, the ability to conduct socio economic activities including the RCA programmes, and in order not to lose sight of RCA management through the usual means is very much hampered and innovative ways of doing things has to be sought.

19. However, doing activities in this mode is unprecedented for RCA GPs and conducting the business in this manner calls for a whole new ball game, much different from the physical meetings that we are all used to. Conducting meetings in this new way is much restricted by the technology itself and by the disparity of technological advancement in various member states or Government Parties. Hence, a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been developed for conducting the meeting in a more effective manner, including the choice of platform or the technology to be used and the manner that the meeting be conducted, since many of the mechanism for controlling physical meetings are no longer applicable for online meetings.
20. Under these new norms, RCA Programs need to be adopted and adapted by all GPs in sustaining the Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology for Asia and the Pacific during this pandemic. To date, 23 virtual meetings under RCA projects have been conducted so far in 2020, which shows a timely response and great endeavour of the RCA to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic. Savings from conducting the events in such a manner will be used to strengthen GP's infrastructure to support future and emerging programs/projects.
21. In fact RCA is proud to note that we are among the first to conduct the yearly National Representative Meetings (NRM) via virtual mode in April 2020, which sets the precedence for conducting other such meetings within the IAEA system, including the procedure for rotation of RCA Chairs. In that note I would like to thank my secretariat, RCA FP, NRs and all those that have helped to materialize this through very thoughtful and innovative thinking, making such meetings successful, without losing sight of the management of the agreement.
22. Looking into the future, RCA will continue to strengthen its strategic direction though the implementation of the Medium Term Strategy working group, development of the Regional Programme Framework and will be conducting more impact studies in other thematic area. RCA is also working hard to innovate itself through reviewing and adjusting all the RCA's current operating mechanisms with the aim of building an RCA which is innovative, responsive, effective, and efficient.
23. I pay my sincere gratitude to his Excellency Mr Rafael Grossi, IAEA's Director General, Mr. Dazhu Yang, Deputy Director General – Technical Cooperation, International Atomic Energy Agency, Ms. Jane Gerardo-Abaya, Director -Technical Cooperation Asia Pacific, Mr Gashaw Wolde, Section Head TCAP and Mr. Sinh Van Hoang, RCA Focal Point, for their presence and continued support since the inception of this programme and to organize

these virtual events. A special thanks to all RCA NR's and RCARO delegates for your presence, support, and teamwork in implementing all the RCA Programmes during this challenging time.

Thank you Mr Chairman and all for your attention.