AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB: A CONCEPT NOTE

1. BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

Access to knowledge is a crosscutting issue that supports all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the aspirations of Agenda 2063 of the African Union, and such, there is no single goal for universal access to information, rather, a number of targets support selected goals through access to information. In addition, it is recognized that there is a need to expand easy, quick and affordable access to knowledge practically for every development priority articulated in the SDGs noting the role of Information and Communication Technology as a means to enable information access and drive progress across the three pillars of sustainable development - economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Access to information is therefore considered as a development catalyst.

A review of Knowledge Management (KM) in the United Nations System by the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations (JIU) documented in a recent report (A/72/325) indicates that knowledge is a valuable core asset of the United Nations system organizations and their best comparative advantage. The review found that KM is an important contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[1]. The report further indicates that although there is extensive KM experience in the United Nations system, it tends to be confined within individual organizations and even within different parts of a single organization. The findings show that KM remains a challenge, with few common practices implemented on a UN -system-wide basis. The review highlighted several gaps: limitation in knowledge sharing, duplication of knowledge, gaps in identify knowledge needs to achieve SDGs with current resources, gaps in generating timely knowledge, challenge in having adequate resources to deliver a fully functional KM function to mention a few.   In addition, The SG's report *General Assembly resolution 71/243*[2] indicates the need for a strengthened KM function to help improve UN system's capabilities to generate, classify, archive, retain, share and re-use knowledge, and move towards a system-wide open data collaborative approach for a common and accessible knowledge base (para. 205).

It is against this background that the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB, building on relevant available knowledge management systems will contribute to identify, select, organize, disseminate and transfer critical *knowledge* relevant for the UNDS system to accelerate the realization of the SDGs, as identified in the JIU report. Potentially, this will strengthen UNDS responsiveness to Member Countries for knowledge and innovations in support of the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063, as well as possible areas of joint publishing among other functions.

I. VISION

The Africa Knowledge Management Hub (AKMH) is a coalition between UN agencies that aims to strengthen the KM function of UNDS and will support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 by harnessing knowledge fit-for-purpose that is contextualized. The AKMH will help address the KM gaps and needs of UNDS to effectively support the Members in collaboration with sister entities and development partners.

The AKMH will be an online resource center that will offer access to the most essential knowledge related to the SDGs in Africa. The AKMH will promote interdepartmental, system-wide and multi-

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[1] Petru Dimitriu. (2016). Knowledge Management in the United Nations System. https://www.unjiu.org/en/reports-notes/JIU%20Products/JIU_REP_2016_10_English.pdf. Last accessed in December 2017

[2] A/74/73 – E/2019/4g

stakeholder collaboration by providing a space that facilitates access to recent knowledge, networking across development partners, practitioners' civil society, Community of practices and learning. AKMH will also harness the skills and expertise of all agencies.

The AKMH will promote harmonization and standards in KM for all agencies, sharing lessons-to-be-learnt and relevant practices. The AKMH will bring visibility to knowledge generated by regional UNDS and support knowledge sharing, reduce duplication and promote effective collaboration and in the generation of new knowledge,

The AKMH will support the implementation of all the O/IBCs working groups by promoting the effective adoption and implementation of the KM function. The AKMH will be governed by UNDS and managed by a secretariat. The AKMH's content will be produced and copyrighted with the originating agencies. To develop a functional AKMH, there is a need to develop a long-term vision supported by adequate resources.

The AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB will, therefore, be an online ecosystem that takes advantage of the advanced emerging information technologies and methodologies, ensuring integration and interoperability of the distributed UNDS knowledge systems. This will constitute a "mashup" of different knowledge types including statistical data, raw data, datasets, publications, a roster of experts, discussions forums based on Communities of Practice (CoPs), multimedia, learning resources, development news, social media on both Agendas 2030 and 2063 availed via web services. Taking into consideration that every UNDS entity manages its knowledge based on its knowledge needs and gaps to fill, the role of the regional hub will focus on developing and providing knowledge services that collate and organize knowledge from the multiple and disparate sources to provide institutional as well as individual end-users with an at-a-glance view acting as a *one-stop-shop* offering seamless access to knowledge and regional expertise. The online environment will also enable users to discover relevant knowledge availed through various targeted knowledge services as well as collaborate, consult and network. In addition, to promote interoperability and integration of the disparate UNDS knowledge systems, knowledge and information management standards and IT tools will be availed whilst capacity building and documentation of best practices as well as failures will ensure that KM practices can be of use across the region.

Fig 1. AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB
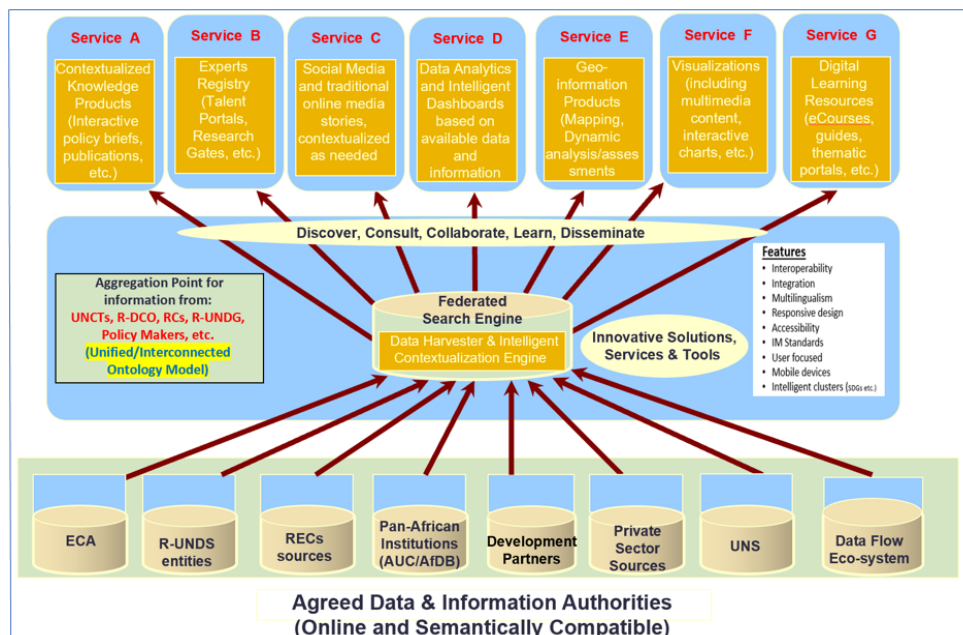
II. METHODOLOGY /SCOPE

a) *Administrative considerations*

Noting the need for the regional UNDS agencies to maintain autonomy in the institutional KM services, the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB will be a service provider that will overarch these services and will focus on developing policies, methodologies and training materials for harnessing the regional knowledge and availing it according to the described context of the KM hub above. Issues under consideration therefore include:

1. A dedicated KM Task Force that is fully resourced (Financial and Human). Expertise to include KM information technology at professional and general service levels.
2. The KM Taskforce will develop and institute a regional KM governance structure with clear terms of reference, lines of responsibility and accountability, ensuring representation from across the R-UNDS entities. These will ensure collaboration (One UN) and collectively responsibility in harnessing and centralizing KM efforts within the R-UNDS.
3. The KM Task Force will develop a KM strategy and framework that is inclusive and will inform the information architecture, content, workflows, activities as well as tools and standards. (Policies, guidelines, tools, standards, SOPs). The AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB will be a services layer, as described in figure 1 above.
4. The Task Force will undertake an R-UNDS-wide audit to assess, identify existing KM expertise and best practices, knowledge systems and standards that can be leveraged as quick wins to facilitate creation, organization, sharing, application and transfer of UNDS knowledge over the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB. The R-UNDS will likewise assess, identify the ideal needs of R-UNDS to define and specify the best and realistic knowledge the R-UNDS needs to operate and full-fill our mandates in a modern way. The audit will also highlight the KM status in each entity with the aim of building on what exists, harmonizing and bringing to par the KM practices such that each entity will have capabilities to equally participate in the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB services.
5. The Task Force will develop a resource requirement and mobilization plan to fund the development of the KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB possibly with different options and various scenarios for maximum value and development subject to needs and what is available.
6. The Task Force will supervise the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB
7. The taskforce will develop a communication plan to make the Hub widely known and will cost it so as to ensure funds are available for its launch and promotion over a sufficient number of months.

b) *Services Layer vs. Autonomy*

The approach of the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB is to develop a services layer whilst maintaining the autonomy of institutional KM services from which the KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB will collate the knowledge at a regional level. Issues under consideration include:
1. Understanding the level of maturity of KM services in the different entities
2. Ensuring a standardised approach to managing knowledge across the entities including the use of common standards and tools.
3. Entities to have autonomy with capabilities to share institutional knowledge with little human intervention.
4. Capacity building to entities with weak KM functions to strengthen their capabilities to manage and share knowledge at the institutional and regional levels.

c) *Technical considerations*

To establish the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB, several knowledge systems and methodologies working together in synergy need to be considered namely:

1. *Knowledge Systems* that collect (or retrieve), process, manage, archive, preserve and distribute knowledge products and data integrated with usage and impact monitoring tools;
2. *Expertise-locating tools* that support finding subject matter experts and establish rosters of expertise;
3. *Collaboration and networking tools* that facilitate team development, professional forums, communities of interest, chats, communities of practice and virtual teaming.
4. *Search-and-discovery tools* include search engines that look for topics, recommend similar topics or authors and show relationships to other topics as well as contextualize different knowledge types, giving a user seamless access to various distributed online knowledge databases
5. *Decision Support:* Tools that seek knowledge in large volumes of data. For example, analytics and reporting software that allows users to discover patterns of knowledge in data.
6. *Big Data tools*: that store, manage and explore high velocity, variety and volume data such as data. When leveraged, these enable discovery of knowledge in high volumes of structured (e.g. database tables) and unstructured data (e.g. documents, conversations).
7. *Publishing tools:* that facilitate a common workflow for authoring of identified joint publication/reports by the R-UNDS. The infrastructure will support publishing activities from drafting, submission, reviewing, checking for plagiarism to publication reproduction.
8. *Information and KM standards:* These include common metadata standards, exchange protocols, ontologies and taxonomies, guidelines, policies.

d) *Content considerations*

Identifying relevant knowledge types of the UNDS. The KM strategy will incorporate issues on content (knowledge gaps, emerging needs, etc.) to be addressed by UN agencies and then harnessed over the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB.

III. EXPECTED OUTPUTS

1. AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB acting as a service to the African UNDS knowledge whilst enabling autonomy of its constituent Knowledge Management Services.
2. An interactive online portal providing a framework for bringing together knowledge from the African UNDS and member states in real-time, with contextualized knowledge services and can be consulted in five languages (French, Spanish, English, Portuguese and Arabic according to the largely used official languages on the continent.
3. An Experts database for African experts
4. An online interactive space facilitating consultation, collaboration, networking and sharing of knowledge between the UNDS entities and member states

IV. RISKS/CHALLENGES

1. Whilst the importance of knowledge as a strategic resource in an organization such as the United Nations is widely acknowledged across all ranks of the management in the UNDS, KM has always been approached as an afterthought, as evidenced in the JIU report (A/72/325) and from the practical experience. KM services are poorly resourced (HR and Financial) and rarely engaged by the knowledge-generating departments/Division. Moreover, there is no policy mandating the

integration of KM in programme/project planning to ensure that all knowledge (tacit and explicit) is captured, managed throughout the programme/project cycle. Common practice is that KM services come at the end of the programme/project circle to capture the resulting publications, hence a significant amount of knowledge produced is lost, resulting in poor evidence and evaluation of the overall impact of the programme.

2. Feedback from member states through the member states surveys indicate that the UNDS knowledge products are mostly technical materials that are not digestible by different audiences, hence demonstrating the impact of the work programmes using knowledge uptake has been challenging. Methodologies for evaluating the impact of the UNDS knowledge are yet to be fully developed and various challenges exist including lack of authorship which blocks the use of bibliometric analysis, tracing the use of grey literature by member states to influence policy development, etc.

3. The fact the hub will also work on providing different km products adapted for different users – as some of the UN agencies already do (content for media, children, practitioners, etc).

4. The approach of the Regional KMH is to develop a services layer whilst maintaining the autonomy of the institutional KM services from which the Hub will collate the knowledge at a regional level. Currently, most KM services of the UNDS entities operate with merger resources. The current assumption is that the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB will operate with the resources of the UNDS entities which will probably fail due to lack of dedicated coordination and resources.

5. Knowledge is a crosscutting issue for all the Opportunity/issues-based coalitions (O/IBCs) that have been identified to serve as the main vehicle for delivery of the implementations of the SDG's recommendations. Therefore, the KMH initiative should part of every O/IBC to ensure that KM is mainstreamed into all the O/IBC activities.

6. Equal ownership of the African KMH is imperative to facilitate well-resourced and functional KM services. Given the current circumstances where the SG is expecting the reforms to be delivered with the existing budget and funding is not committed of this extra activity, innovative ways of funding should be explored to build on existing resources as well as avail additional funds to develop and sustain the KMH.

V.   OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities are presented in the form of low hanging fruits that can quickly be leveraged to fasten the rollout of the Regional KMH. These include

1. Investments in existing KM systems that can be quickly adapted and re-used for the KMH. For example, *Access to Scientific and Socio-economic Knowledge in Africa (ASKIA) Federated Search Engine* at http://askia.uneca.org, which collates knowledge from multiple disparate knowledge bases in real-time, compares the results on relevance, clusters, de-duplicates and contextualizes it over a single view. The ASKIA Federated Search Engine is localized and multilingual and can be consulted in five languages (Fr, En, Ar, Sp, and Pt). The Federated Search Engine was re-used in the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB for COVID-19 @ https://knowledge.uneca.org/covid19/ with excellent results.

2. Existing KM expertise within the region that will develop the ToRs, scope (areas and types of knowledge) and implementation plan for the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB.

3. The reforms provide an opportunity for the UNDS to collaborate, resulting in savings that can be re-used in the development of the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB. Ex. development of common KM services at the UN regional hubs as part of the common back-office services and joint publishing on identified knowledge products will enable savings.

VI.   CONCLUSION

This concept note highlights important considerations, both technical and policy, necessary for the establishment of the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB. Several risks (foreseen challenges) are highlighted and to address them, several recommendations are being proposed namely: allocation of more resources (financial and HR) for KM activities both at the institutional and regional levels; enacting policies and executive directives are necessary to ensure that KM is an integral part of R-UNDS organizational strategy; integrating KM in Programme and Project Management to ensure that all emanating knowledge products (both tacit and explicit) from UN Agencies *programme cycles are documented, collected, used, enriched, shared and accessed using appropriate* technologies for a full KM system, to facilitate the production of targeted SDG-related content such as policy briefs, videos, extension and learning materials etc. for different audiences including policymakers, researchers, Government officials, employers' and workers' organizations, development partners, activists and students. This will enhance visibility and accessibility of UNDS regional knowledge products; reviewing the current publications policy to remove authorship barriers will enhance the impact assessment analysis of the knowledge products; investing in developing appropriate impact assessment methodologies for UNDS knowledge; and strengthening linkages and collaboration across sectors/divisions/agencies within and across institutions will systematically and gradually promote joint planning across the R-UNDS and foster collaboration in co-creating and sharing knowledge. The proposed recommendation will consequently institutionalize and strengthen KM in the UNDS which is a precursor to the successful development and implementation of the AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB.

VII. WAY FORWARD

Phase 1

1.1. Constitute the KM Task Force
1.2. Share the concept with KM TF members
1.3. Collect feed from TF members
1.4. Consolidate the feedback into the concept note

1.5. "Submit the Concept Note to the R-UNSDG secretariat "CA

Phase 2

Online deliberations by the Task Team Members on:

1.1.   Governance structure (Roles, Responsibilities and reporting)
1.2.   Review of the Terms of Reference including the constitution of the relevant working groups
1.3.   Resourcing of the KMH (HR and Financial)
1.4.   Development of a road map and guiding principles

Phase 3

1.1. Development of the African Regional KM Framework and implementation plan,
        paying attention to monitoring indicators from implementation to operability of the system

1.2. Scoping and review of regional KM landscape (Identify existing platforms, standards and best practices)

1.3. Implementation of AFRICAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB