This is the fifth edition in the series of Question & Answers with ECA’s Executive Secretary about issues that concern and impact the organization and staff. In this edition the ES speaks about programmatic matters, including the Mid-Year Programme Performance Review, preparation of the medium term programme framework, reviews of ECA Programme Budget for 2020 by General Assembly Committees, ECA’s 2021 programme plan, quality assurance policy and ECA’s approach to programme delivery in Countries of Focus (CoF). The ES also spoke about some aspects of her meeting and discussion with P-3 staff members.

1. Hello ES and welcome to the fifth edition “Q&A with the ES” series. During the last town hall, you spoke about ECA’s approach to programme delivery in Countries of Focus and underscored the need to speed up efforts in implementing the strategy. Why a new approach? Does ECA now intervene only in Countries of Focus?

ES: During the restructuring process, one of the key challenges to effective delivery the SLT agreed on was the entrenched siloed and fragmented approach to planning and delivery at the Commission. To best address this challenge, the SLT agreed on the need for an integrated and coherent approach that fosters joint planning whereby subprogrammes cluster their deliverables to create critical mass of investment and activity in countries and jointly plan and deliver interventions in countries. This brings considerable benefits: it enhances programme impact, builds functional teams, improves cost and operational efficiency, and boosts ECA image and credibility in member states.

Considering resource and capacity constraints and other prioritization criteria, the five SROs selected twenty-two countries in total from their respective subregions as Countries of Focus for 2019 and beyond. The countries are:

- Egypt, Mauritania and Sudan (North Africa)
- Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Liberia (West Africa)
Cameroon, Chad, Congo and DRC (Central Africa)

DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Seychelles (East Africa)

Namibia, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Southern Africa)

Let me stress that subprogrammes will still be able to respond positively to requests received from other member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) provided that such requests are reviewed, our comparative advantage established, and quality of the proposed support assessed and approved. Countries of focus will be reviewed yearly and changed as needs arise in member states, performance of existing COF, and based on resource availability.

The strategy is ambitious, answers the "how" question and puts forth a simplified and ‘actionable’ standard operating procedures (SOPs). I am excited about its potential and, as I often say, any strategy is as good as its execution. I encourage all Directors and staff at large to take the initiative to reach out to others who are doing work targeting same countries to plan and deliver together

2. The mid-year programme performance review meeting was held on 11 July 2019. Give us a highlight of what the meeting achieved and key learning points.

ES: The meeting provided a space for information and knowledge sharing across the ECA. Overtime we would like all ECA staff to be aware of the work done by the ECA. The meeting allowed us to take stock of progress made in implementing planned activities during the period from January to June 2019. A key highlight of the meeting was to highlight results achieved by divisions which we should be collectively proud of but also to highlight areas for improvement. Over time we hope it will also showcase performing divisions and programs, and reinforce our focus on the SDGs and the strategic directions. The meeting also gave us a good deal of information to assess progress against planned results and deliverables.

The data visualization showing ECA interventions by ECA’s three core functions, strategic directions and targeted counties is the kind of innovative data analytics that we want to see more, it shows us clearly where we are making progress in a transparent manner. The visuals supplemented the presentations and helped bring out areas for improvement. The fact that Chiefs did the presentations for the first time I hope was rewarding and empowering. We need to start unpacking and linking results to clearly identified teams so recognition is also transparent and as a whole we identify our assets. I am sure it will also trigger new team dynamics and incentivise Chiefs to take a broader view of and to engage with what their Division and others do. We need to build more cross divisional teams and I hope this helps to bring about this momentum. In addition to sharing experiences, the process enabled us draw very important lessons in a number of areas, including the need to have sharper focus on assessing performance against SMART quantitative targets.

As we refine the process, the focus on results will become clearer. To move from ideas to actions we need to build a culture focused on results and translated into our activities. As it was our first internal programme review meeting since I joined ECA, we will use these as learning points to refine the approach, meeting format, interactions, time management etc. The online survey launched to gather feedback from staff on the review meeting will help us generate the inputs we need as we continue improve. A second forward looking review is planned for September and we will use that to sharpen the format. This is a new open format
and I want to sincerely thank all staff for participating and engaging fully. We hope to build in more time for engagement in the September session.

3. **Following the Secretary-General’s management reforms aiming at streamlining and improving planning and budgeting processes, entity-specific biennial programme plans, also known as strategic frameworks, are being phased out and Biennial Programme Budgets are replaced with annual programme plans. 2019 is the last year of ECA’s revised Strategic Framework for the biennium 2018-2019. What is ECA doing to adjust to this new approach to planning and budgeting? How is the new programming approach going to strengthen organizational learning and accountability?**

**ES:** I am glad you raised this question. As early as November last year, the SLT, has been discussing how best ECA can adjust to and embrace the changes called for by the shift from a biennial to an annual budget. Discussions are still on going with the UNHQ to ensure that the new program budget approach is strategic, result oriented with tighter integration of results with resources and clearer linkages with the SDGs.

One of the key initiatives we are working on. – which was also echoed by the Conference of Ministers during its 52nd session - is the development of a medium-term programme framework representing the full scale of our ambition and range of ECA’s programmatic offer over a period of three to five years. The framework, building on the strategic directions, will provide strategic guidance for ECA’s work by articulating our collective strategy, commitments and actions in support of Africa’s development priorities and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It will also serve as a basis for deriving robust result focused annual plans and budgets.

I want to encourage colleagues to watch out for invites and actively take part in planning workshops as we collectively shape the Organization’s programme framework over the medium term.

The Secretary-General has identified strengthening the implementation of results-based management in the Secretariat and holding managers and staff accountable for the delivery of results, as critical aspects for shifting the management paradigm. This is consistent with ECA’s audit reports and we hope to also make progress on this.

In addition to regularly monitoring programme performance, we therefore must ensure that subprogrammes are systematically evaluated for a more in-depth understanding of what is working, what is not working and why, and whether the programmes are having the intended impact, and the level of individual staff engagement to deliver on programs. ECA’s evaluation policy will be reviewed during the last quarter of 2019 to ensure alignment with UN reform requirements and SDG related norms and standards.

Evaluations will critically examine programme implementation to draw conclusions about relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and/or impact. Evaluations will inform programming, planning and budgeting decisions and allow for the introduction of corrective actions, if required. With the support of SPORD’s evaluation section, ECA staff at large will be continuously engaged in program evaluations to determine relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact. With the support of SPORD’s evaluation section, the SLT will continue to ensure that evaluation findings and recommendations will inform programming.
planning and budgeting decisions and allow for the introduction of corrective actions, if and when required.

4. **In June, the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) reviewed ECA’s 2020 proposed programme plan and 2018 programme performance report.** What is your overall assessment of how the session went? Any issues raised that are relevant to staff?

**ES:** CPC members commended ECA on its work, especially our new focus on the private sector, they also commended our knowledge-based focus and regional areas of focus. Overall their statements reflected strong support to the work of ECA and other Regional Commissions (RegComs). Members were particularly pleased to see the recognition of the role of the private sector and encouraged ECA focus on the same in our 2020 plan; and welcomed the attention given to developing data and statistics capabilities, encouraging the use of big data. Our work in championing the AfCFTA and advancing the use of technology, gender equality, were singled out for praise by Committee members. Most of their questions sought clarification on contextualizing the work of ECA to the broader development context including challenges and gaps faced during implementation. They commended our selective focus on the SDGs. They reiterated support for ECA’s strategic and pledged to support our program.

In terms of feedback, CPC members encouraged more South-South cooperation and inter-regional exchange of best practices among RegComs and requested updates on how the UNDS reform had impacted the work of the RegComs, particularly the cooperation between the RegComs and the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system. CPC also encouraged us to better disseminate our publications beyond member States (to the private sector, academia and civil society). One member of the Committee urged us to consider creating a standalone subprogramme focused on youth and employment – given its importance to the continent. Another Committee member stressed the importance of effective M&E system, including linking resources with results, and of reporting on efficiency gains using clear and quantifiable targets, in line with the full ambition of the SG reform agenda.

Overall, the session went very well. Our 2020 plan was well received and the reception is a reaffirmation of the good work of ECA and of the right ‘direction of travel’ in terms of our vision for a prosperous Africa.

5. **The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) conducted its review on 2020 budget proposal on 14th June 2019. How did it go and what are the highlights?**

**ES:** The ACABQ Programme Budget review session was conducted via arranged VTC from SRO-EA where I was representing the Deputy Secretary General at the Africa 2030: Sustainable Development Goals Three-Year Reality Check Conference in Kigali chaired by the President of Rwanda. Colleagues in Addis served as additional witnesses via VTC. The Committee posed specific questions on the proposed requirements and budget performance especially on expenditure patterns covering the year 2018 and 2019. Clarifications were sought on the alignment of subprogrammes with SDGs and questions on the use of consultancy services and the staff development plan were also raised. The ACABQ also sought updates on the status of vacant posts, in particular on those posts which have been vacant for more than two years (5 posts which are now filled) and solicited explanation on how ECA plans to achieve the proposed productivity gain in 2020. Additional clarifications were also sought regarding the criteria for translating documents into other languages.
Responses were provided orally and, where necessary, responses were provided in writing. Written responses covered the reason for the low expenditure rate and updates on current budget utilisation, the list of vacant posts and the recruitment status, the basis for translation of publications in other languages in the sub-regional offices, ECA’s efforts in complying with advance purchasing of air tickets, the nature of ECA’s contractual services, justification for the increase in other staff cost under EDM (spell out), the nature of ECA’s partnership with IDEP, plans to purchase vehicles in 2019 and justification as to why the staff cannot carry out the work proposed to be performed by consultants for each consultancy proposal per division/SRO.

The committee appreciated the clarity and comprehensiveness of the presentation and the effort put into the preparation of the 2020 budget proposal and was satisfied with the responses and clarifications provided during the VTC. The committee will prepare its report after reviewing the written responses and will make recommendations on the programme budget to the General Assembly for its approval. We will be informed of the GA’s approval of the 2020 Programme Budget by 31 December 2019.

6. **Given the recently completed restructuring processes at ECA and the ongoing UN reforms, how is ECA going to ensure that its knowledge products and services remain relevant, timely and impactful in this highly competitive global and regional space?**

**ES:** First we will need to focus on producing relevant, solid data driven, innovative and impactful reports. That has been the case with the health report for example, demonstrated by the continuous use and mention of it. We believe the ERA and the ARIA should get the same pick up. Our work on monitoring the SDGs is another good example of a relevant product. We can no longer depend on recycling reports. ECA strives for excellence, and as such, every final product or service intended for public release such as major ECA’s publications, corporate events, strategic planning instruments and programmed deliverables identified in the ECA’s Annual Business Plan must go through mandatory quality control and assurance review processes using the standards and tools developed by the Standards and Quality Assurance Section (SQAS) of Strategic Planning, Oversight and Results Division (SPORD) for this purpose. In fact, SPORD is currently updating the ECA’s Operational Quality Policy and Plan: 2014-2017, building on the gains from the implementation of that Plan and using lessons learned from that experience to introduce the required changes for a more systematic and improved quality management system and approach at ECA. And, needless to say that the revised policy document will be informed by the new ECA’s strategic directions and outcomes of the repositioning exercise of the UN development system.

This policy document will basically seek to define how ECA will verify that its products and services are sound, relevant, tailored, timely, accessible and influential in order to ensure that they are indeed fit-for-purpose. I am, therefore, confident that, once rolled out during the early part of the last quarter of this year, ECA’s updated quality management system, including its quality conceptual framework, principles, objectives, expected results and approach to assuring quality will go a long way in better equipping us to attain our quality objectives consistently and assert our role as the premiere Think Tank of reference on African development issues.
7. Based on the 2019 calendar of corporate requirements, preparation for the 2021 Programme Plan and Performance Information will commence during the week of 5 August. What is the roadmap to get ECA’s final submission to Programme Planning and Budget Division (PPBD) in New York? And what should staff expect?

**ES:** The CPC discussed, amongst others, the budget format and expressed their views and expectations, which will be used as a starting point for the drafting of the 2021 proposed programme plan and performance information.

PPBD is making a handful of improvements to the format and, during the week of 10 July, the five RegComs had a meeting with the PPBD team to get a sense of their expectations and what the revised format looks like. RegComs provided their inputs to further refine the format. PPBD intends to finalise the amendments to the format and accordingly update the guidance on the programme plans for 2021 and programme performance information for 2019, as part of the 2021 annual budget. A small PPBD team will be in Addis during the second week of October 2019 to run a 2-day hands-on workshop on operationalizing the guidance. The workshop will focus on format improvements, including actual drafting of subprogramme plans, strategies and reports for 2021.

8. We are happy to learn that ECA has taken up the role of the Coordinator of the five Regional Commissions, which passes on a rotational basis across the Regional Commissions. What do you see as the priorities in your role as the Coordinator or the five RegComs?

**ES:** ECA took up the role of Coordinator of the five Regional Commissions from ECLAC. The formal handover from the outgoing Coordinator and my dear friend Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of ECLAC, took place at the Meeting of Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions held on 17 July 2019 in New York and on the side lines of the HLPF. The meeting agreed that the tenure of the incoming Coordinator will be a year and half from July 18, 2019 through December 2020.

In the context of the current reform of the UN regional architecture, ECA as the Coordinator will take the lead in articulating common positions by RegComs related to the regional dimension and role of RegComs in negotiated declarations and resolutions. I will represent the RegComs in a number of Management meetings in NY and elsewhere and for the HLPF will work closely with DESA for example to ensure good collaboration.

As coordinator, I will also work toward facilitating and strengthening collaboration between the five Regional Commissions, as well as between the Regional Commissions and other parts of the UN system. This will be an excellent opportunity to promote South-South cooperation in areas of interest to all the Regional Commissions as well as to exchange best practices. I am looking forward to working and building a strong relationship between the other Regional commissions and ECA as part of this process and while some staff are already working with me on this I hope more will take an interest in this.
9. In your recent meeting with the P-3 staff members, you discussed issues around UN reforms, AU reforms and the Regional Integration Section & NEPAD Section. Could you throw some light on the points raised and your responses to the staff members?

ES: I have been having regular meetings with staff members across different levels in the organisation. In my recent interaction with the P-3 staff members, issues raised focused on (i) the AU and UN reforms and their implications on the NEPAD program in terms of whether programme implementation continues or is paused, also considering the SG’s report to ECOSOC (ii) the evaluation of the NEPAD program itself (iii) Collaboration between the NEPAD and Regional Integration Section in RITD.

I have stressed that the NEPAD programme implementation should continue whilst we await the creation of the AU Development Agency (AUDA) as SG’s report to ECOSOC includes the NEPAD Program. The SG has requested that, ECA also work to support the AU.

ECA also needs to define how to work with each of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and how to coordinate the work with all the RECs. Some of the work has already started on ensuring that ECA has the required levels of coordination with the RECs, starting with the first two meetings. I have also sent out letters in the last month to the Heads of the RECs indicating that there is need to have more interactions. There is need to be effective and clear on the deliverables and this is where we come back to the work plan. The next AU summit will focus on the integration of RECs this will provide more guidance.

On the NEPAD, RITD within section collaboration, we agreed to discuss with the director, while stressing the need for cross sectoral work.

10. We understand that after your intervention the last time, representatives form the management and staff side worked collaboratively to find a solution for the deadlock between the two sides regarding the Transitional Space Policy and the Flexible Work Space implementation. Could you tell us what has been agreed as the way forward?

ES: As indicated in the last Q&A (No.4) a joint management-staff team was constituted to review staff concerns regarding the Transitional Space Policy (TSP) and to propose a workable solution with respect to the plan for transitional space moves. Accordingly, the joint DoA-Staff Union (SU) team worked collaboratively and agreed on a transitional office space standard called ‘Hybrid As-is’ which could address the immediate additional space requirements due to Flexible Work Space (FWS) pilot project and the on boarding of UNDCO, as part of the UN reform and new partners GGGI and Digital Earth.

The joint team arrived at the Hybrid As-is standard after conducting an intensive audit of the vacant office space currently available in the Niger Building and conducting a space occupancy pattern study as well as standardizing of the inconsistent space occupancy as per different category of grades.
It is important to note that this Hybrid As-is space standard is a transitional solution as it could only accommodate ECA’s immediate requirements for additional office spaces of Niger L2 occupants due to the FWS pilot project and the on boarding of UNDOCO, GGGI and Digital Earth. FWS would be implemented fully in ECA in other floors over time. When this happens and at the time of recapitalization of the entire Niger Building, ECA would revisit the approach to have another space standard to accommodate its medium- and long-term space requirements.

Thank you ES, for your time and the responses.