

Rome Centre for Sustainable Development

Draft Strategic Framework 2021-23

1. Introduction¹

The Steering Committee of the Africa Centre for Sustainable Development, at its June 2020 meeting, agreed to revisit the mandate and purpose of the Centre with a view to preparing it for a new phase of activity. UNDP named an Interim Director, launched the recruitment of two senior posts at the Centre, and undertook a first institutional and administrative review of ACSD, followed by:

- a **Vision Statement** for the new Centre (to be known henceforth as the Rome Centre for Sustainable Development)
- revised **Terms of Reference** for the Steering Committee, and
- a **Transition Plan** for the period leading to the new Centre becoming operational in January 2021.

The Steering Committee also invited UNDP to prepare a Strategic Framework for the first three years of the Rome Centre's operations, together with a Work Plan for 2021. These are to be considered and adopted by the Steering Committee I. Together with the final administrative and financial reviews and the recruitment of the two senior posts, this should permit the Rome Centre to be operational on the intended schedule.

In drawing up the Strategic Framework, UNDP has been guided by a series of inputs. Key among these are:

- the description of the functions of the Rome Centre set out in the Transition Plan and elaborated in section 3 below
- The key UNDP strategies and policy frameworks in the field of sustainable development.
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- the IMELS strategic framework for international environmental cooperation 2020-22, which envisages a role for the Rome Centre in ensuring that the international cooperation activities implemented by the Ministry in partnership with UNDP are coordinated, transparent and coherent.

¹ Note that this opening section will be dropped – or seriously shortened - once the Strategic Framework is adopted. It is retained here to provide important context.

² Bureau for Policy and Programme Support of UNDP

- ongoing elements in the existing programme of cooperation between UNDP and IMELS, embodied in existing legal agreements signed by the two parties.
- where they exist, concepts for proposed activities contributed by international partners.

This Strategic Framework – and all the activities envisaged within it – aim to advance the shared purpose on which UNDP and IMELS have agreed to build their cooperation. The Rome Centre is seen as an important vehicle that enables this shared purpose to be progressed with efficiency, coordination, and a spirit of innovation.

2. [Contextual Basis for the Strategic Framework](#)

The Rome Centre will become operational in its new form in 2021, a year that, for at least two reasons, will prove exceptional in the continuing struggle to achieve sustainable development. First and most important, it is everyone’s fondest hope that it will prove to be the year in which our planet emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and that concerted efforts are made seriously to shape the inclusive and sustainable world of the post-COVID era. There is a broad consensus in the international community that we cannot simply return to the pre-pandemic period and that, indeed, the disruption caused by the pandemic offers an important opportunity for a *global reset*, for transformative development – in short to *recover better*. In approaching the Strategic Framework, the Rome Centre must root itself solidly in the optic of this emerging world and contribute to new approaches that will ensure the full implementation of the 2030 sustainable agenda.

Second, in terms of international cooperation for sustainable development, 2021 will see the convening of a series of international forums at a level and concentration not seen since the historic year of hope, 2015. Given the need to agree and structure the post-COVID green recovery and, through this, to reboot the relationship between humans and their planet, these convenings take on special importance. The Strategic Framework must be built around the opportunity that these global convenings present and shape a strong contribution to these from UNDP and Italy through the Rome Centre, ensuring the continued centrality of the Centre’s role in supporting the UN’s ‘Decade of Delivery’ of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Of particular importance are the following³:

- The Conferences of the Parties of the three Rio Conventions – UNFCCC (the 5th anniversary of the Paris agreement), UNCBD and UNCCD
- UNEA 5
- Italy’s G20 Presidency and its key role in the G7
- The Rome Food Systems summit

The Strategic Framework must weave the two foundational opportunities together and aim to influence the post-COVID recovery through targeted and strategic input to the major intergovernmental forums listed above. In this respect the Strategic Framework also considers the UNDP Green Recovery Plan as the most recent and sharpest articulation of UNDP’s perspective on the challenges and opportunities of the post-COVID recovery.

³ This list is indicative and not exhaustive

This central strategic framework is articulated in a series of relevant thematic areas chosen as priorities for the Rome Centre.

For the articulation of the thematic areas consideration is given to the “Atto di Indirizzo e Programmazione per la Cooperazione Internazionale Ambientale (2020-22)” as well as other strategic documents from the Ministry (IMELS Contesto Temi Azione and IMELS Priorità Politiche 2020).

Within this broad frame, the Strategic Framework for the Rome Centre will focus particularly on three inter-connected strategic thrusts – Climate Change, Sustainable Development and Nature Protection. These thrusts include, among others, also Renewable Energy, as a key component of the global decarbonization effort and, as such, central to the Climate Change effort leading into COP 26 – with Italy as a co-convenor – and beyond and Nature-Based Solutions that span both the Climate Change and Biodiversity agendas and are an important tool in the strategies being prepared for CBD COP 15. Land and ecosystem restoration – central to the UNCCD agenda - are also key pathways both to mitigate and adapt to climate change and to reverse biodiversity loss. Thus, a Climate-Sustainable Development-Nature Protection focus for this Strategic Framework offers an approach which builds on synergies and embraces the wider community that the Rome Centre is intended to serve.

3. Mandate of the Centre: the five central functions

The Vision Statement for the Rome Centre articulates five central functions for the Rome Centre⁴. The Strategic Framework, in Section 8 below, sets out the broad areas of activity of the Centre under these five same central functions. The five functions are briefly described here:

- a) To serve as a facilitator of IMELS-UNDP cooperation

The central purpose of the Rome Centre is to ensure the effective implementation and further development of the expanding cooperative programme between IMELS and UNDP, together with the partnerships that are developed and implemented under this cooperative programme. This liaison and facilitation function will include not only UNDP Headquarters. The Rome Centre will work with and through UNDP’s Regional Bureaus, Regional Hubs and Country Offices to facilitate smooth delivery of the activities and projects that make up the cooperative programme.

- b) To provide input to UNDP’s global policy development and deployment capacity.

The Rome Centre will provide input to support UNDP’s global policy initiatives and will be aimed to advance the interests of UNDP, with reference to themes and areas of the IMELS-UNDP programme of cooperation.

- c) To leverage wider partnerships with key actors on the international sustainable development agenda

⁴ Note that the reordering of these functions is here departs from the order in the Vision Statement.

The Rome Centre will facilitate the development of partnerships with key actors on the international sustainable development agenda, including international organizations and programmes and countries beyond the G7, starting with G20 countries. These partnerships are largely aimed at key governments and intergovernmental organizations committed to both the thematic and geographical priorities of the Rome Centre (but see e) below). Key partnership targets envisaged under this three-year strategic framework are elaborated at Section 7 below.

d) To serve as a source of knowledge, expertise and support services

Under this function it is envisaged that the Centre's facilities in Rome shall be used to host project-related activities, training courses, specialist meetings, etc. in respect of specific cooperative activities...

e) To serve as a centre for cooperation among Italian specialized institutions and research centres and those in other parts of the world

Under the three-year strategic framework, a systematic effort will be made to identify suitable Italian institutions – academic, research, private or NGO – that could usefully participate in and contribute to the deployment of the cooperative programme, where appropriate, in partnership with equivalent institutions in the target geographies of the Centre. The Centre will play the supporting role in identifying the potential of both Italian and recipient country organizations to participate as appropriate in the broader activities under the cooperative programme.

4. [Thematic Priorities of the Centre](#)

As agreed at the June 2020 Steering Committee, the thematic scope of the Rome Centre will strategically prioritize a wider group of partners and substantive areas that can accelerate implementation of the 2030 agenda. Within that broad agenda and consistent with its transformative ambition the central thematic areas of focus for the Rome Centre lie within the three related areas of Climate change, Sustainable Development and Nature Protection and in particular in the many areas where these three topics overlap. Of central relevance to this priority focus of the Rome Centre are the international frameworks for cooperation in the fields of climate (UNFCCC), nature (UNCBD) and land preservation and restoration (UNCCD).

Beyond the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, several important international agreements further help to target the focus of the Rome Centre. For example, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, also adopted in 2015, provides a new global framework for financing sustainable development by aligning all financing flows and policies with economic, social, and environmental priorities.

The focus on Climate change, Sustainable Development and Nature Protection is not intended as a straitjacket. The links between these priority themes and other environmental issues are

multiple. The momentum of ongoing activities within the IMELS-UNDP cooperative programme and emerging areas of agreement reflected in both strategic framework documents (see Section 2 above) point to clear areas where new activities may be identified, developed and deployed in the period 2021-23.

5. [Space for Innovation](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic has strongly underlined how quickly priorities and perspectives can change, and how maintaining a capacity for resilience and innovation is fundamental to the success of any cooperative enterprise. Above it is noted that neither a Strategic Framework nor an annual workplan must represent a straitjacket but must maintain a capacity for flexibility.

For this reason, the Strategic Framework proposes to maintain a space for innovation within the cooperative programmes that the Rome Centre will anchor. This space will be used to introduce and review proposals for expansion of cooperative activities across new themes (within the overall framework agreed for the Centre), new geographies or new partnerships.

The activities of the Rome Centre and the range of cooperative agreements between UNDP and IMELS have provided for a wide range of activities addressing climate change, within which a focus on renewable energy has been included. Within the priority focus areas of Climate change, Sustainable Development and Nature Protection, and with the increasingly dire IPBES reports and the imminence of CBD COP 15, a dedicated range of activities on terrestrial and marine biodiversity should be added to the cooperative framework, underpinned by the Rome Centre.

A key emerging topic is Sustainable Finance. None of the priorities of the Centre will successfully be met unless the financial system aligns with the requirements of the 2030 Agenda. Increasingly, sustainable finance is understood to be the hard nucleus of the sustainable development challenge. It is certainly key to prospects for a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore this topic could become a focus of the UNDP-IMELS cooperation facilitated by the Rome Centre.

Over the coming three years, it is possible – indeed likely – that other new facets of the IMELS-UNDP cooperative programme may be proposed and developed. This is a desirable outcome and the space for it must be provided under the Rome Centre’s design.

6. [Areas of Priority Geographical Focus](#)

Also agreed at the June 2020 Steering Committee was to broaden the geographical focus on the Rome Centre to embrace all parts of the globe in which UNDP is present, with due attention to the regions and countries of priority designated in IMELS’ *Atto di Indirizzo e Programmazione per la Cooperazione Internazionale Ambientale (2020-22)* as well as other strategic documents from the Ministry.

From these guidance documents it emerges clearly that, while in the medium and long term, the Rome Centre’s focus will gradually expand to embrace – in principle at least - all

developing regions and emerging economies, a focus for the period of this Strategic Framework will be centered on:

- Africa
- Mediterranean
- AIS/ASEAN countries, Caribbean, Pacific SIDS

Given the initial Africa focus of the ACSD, this continent still dominates in the Centre's programming, such that many of the ongoing activities under the IMELS-UNDP cooperative programme are firstly oriented towards the Africa continent. However, during the period of this Strategic Framework, the Rome Centre shall expand its focus to those Mediterranean countries that are priorities for Italy and to the Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean, Pacific and AIS grouping/ and to the ASEAN countries.

7. Partnerships

- Rio Conventions – UNFCCC, UNCBD, UNCCD

Partnerships aimed initially at the Conferences of the Parties of the three Rio Conventions will be elaborated in the first quarter of 2021 as a matter of highest priority. These will address urgent initiatives that, first, feed into the respective COPs and then pick up and implement – in association with the Rome Centre - specific cooperative activities that emerge from COP decisions and the frameworks that they adopt. Special priority will be given to partnership activities that strengthen the post-COVID Green Recovery.

- Rome-Based Agencies – FAO, IFAD, WFP

UNDP with the three Rome-based agencies will input into the Food Summit 2021. Partnerships with will target input to the Food Systems Summit in 2021 and, subsequently, identify cooperative activities deriving from this that can be implemented in association with the Rome Centre. Again, a strong focus will be on action that adapt food systems to the requirements of a green, post-COVID recovery.

- UNEP

The Rome Centre will facilitate development of a partnership to be launched at UNEA 5 in 2021 and that focuses on cooperation around a post-COVID green recovery. [This will build on the recent UNDP-UNEP partnership agreement, signed earlier in 2020]

- UN Energy

Energy is one of the three central focal areas of BPPS's Nature, Climate and Energy practice. In 2021, UNDP will place particular emphasis on its Energy Pledge, building on the role of the UNDP Administrator as co-chair of UN Energy. A strong focus on renewable energy development and energy access will be developed in partnership with IRENA, SE4ALL, UN Energy, and the Climate Investment Platform. Renewable energy is already a central topic in the UNDP-IMELS partnership, and this effort will be expanded through the participation of a wider range of core partners, including an exploration of the role of key Italian institutions.

- “Green Helmets for the Environment”

Within the focus of Nature Protection, the Rome Centre will facilitate the development of a partnership with the initiative of the “Green Helmets for the Environment” which have the mission of protecting UNESCO’s natural sites inscribed in the World Heritage lists.

- G20 and G7

Italy’s G20 Presidency comes at a crucial time and presents a unique set of opportunities to advance sustainable development in the context of the post-COVID green recovery. As the UN system’s Sherpa for G7 and G20, UNDP is uniquely positioned to carry forward initiatives around climate change, sustainable development and nature protection from the Italian G20 presidency into subsequent G20 presidencies, and to ensure cross-linkages with the G7 in 2021 and beyond.

The Rome Centre is well placed to organize support to the Environment Ministers’ summit (in both its environmental and climate tracks) under the Italian G20 presidency and, drawing from the results of that summit, identify elements that can be developed and taken forward within the work plans of the Rome Center.

8. [Present and Planned Activities](#)

- a) To serve as a facilitator of IMELS-UNDP cooperation

The core function of the Rome Centre will be to serve as a liaison and facilitation hub between the host government, and other partners (Country/organizations), Rome-based agencies, and other development organizations by providing, operational support, communications, and profile-building to the cooperative programme of work between IMELS and UNDP. The Centre has the benefit of proximity to IMELS and two key functions stand out. The first is to identify environmental cooperation opportunities (initiatives/projects) delivering SDGs and Paris agreement in the target countries and regions outlined above. This includes building on the UNDP-IMELS cooperative programme as well as on the priority partnerships mentioned above.

Second, the Rome Centre will be entrusted with ensuring effective communications among UNDP, IMELS and other partners: providing effective governance arrangements and secretariat services; and proposing new activities to ensure the success of the Rome Centre objectives. The Rome Centre will further expand relevant partnerships as envisaged in the objectives of the Strategic Framework.

- b) To provide input to UNDP’s global policy development and deployment capacity.

The Rome Centre will provide services to expand and support the existing and new cooperation activities between IMELS and UNDP, [In this capacity, it is envisaged the Rome Centre’s thematic priorities would include supporting government’s low carbon energy transition, implementation of NDCs, up-scaling Nature-Based Solutions and preservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, as well as sustainable finance.] Geographically, as noted above, while Africa will still remain a focus area for the Centre, support would extend to those

Mediterranean countries that are priorities for Italy and to the SIDS in the Caribbean, Pacific and the developing countries in the wider AIS grouping and ASEAN countries.

- c) To leverage wider partnerships with key actors on the international sustainable development

The Rome Centre's mandate is to strengthen existing strategic partnerships with key intergovernmental organizations working on the core thematic focus areas of Climate change, Sustainable Development and Nature Protection in the target geographical areas for the Centre so as to advance and consolidate. a 'green recovery'. Partnership agreements will be negotiated with the organizations set out in Section 7 above as a matter of priority. First priority will be given to negotiating or expanding partnership agreements with those partners convening major global events in 2021. These include the Conferences of the Parties of the three Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, UNCBD ad UNCCD), the convenors of the Rome Food Systems Summit, and the 5th United Nations Environmental Assembly. The SC will identify the most relevant entry points and opportunities to execute these partnerships in line with the substantive and geographic priorities of the Centre (e.g. with UNCCD for the Sahel; UNEP-MAP for the Mediterranean, etc.

- d) To serve as a source of knowledge, expertise and support services

A key function will be to develop both expert and administrative capacity to support activities under the Centre's mandate. Under this function it is also envisaged that the Centre's facilities in Rome might be used to host project-related activities, training courses, specialist meetings, etc. .

- e) To serve as a centre for cooperation among Italian specialized institutions and research centres and those in other parts of the world

Under the three-year strategic framework, a systematic effort will be made to identify suitable Italian institutions – academic, research, private or NGO – that could usefully participate in and contribute to the deployment of the cooperative programme and partner with equivalent institutions in the target geographies of the Centre in order to anchor the Centre as a globally recognized hub for international development cooperation and research.

9. [Towards a Workplan for 2021](#)

Drawing on this Strategic Framework, a Workplan for 2021 will be prepared and submitted to the Steering Committee. This Workplan – which will be attached as an annex to the Strategic Framework – will focus both on the continuation of existing activities under the UNDP-IMELS cooperative programme and on the key events of 2021 – the COPs of UNFCCC, UNCBD, UNCCD, UNEA 5, and the Italian G20 Presidency. In respect of these five priorities, the strategic framework will focus on the IMELS/UNDP input to the five key events.