RCG's Secretariat

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RCGs Secretariat support services and activities

2023-2024 Report

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Content

1. Introduction 1
2. Scope 1
3. Services in 2023 -2024 2
3.1. Daily regular operations and processes 2
3.1.1 Communication and correspondence, managing requests 2
3.1.2 Manage the Secretariat´s legal, finances and staff obligations 3
3.1.3 Maintain working tools and repositories 3
3.1.4 Maintain basic protocols and organisational procedures 4
3.1.5 Communication and dissemination activities 5
3.1.6 Manage consultation processes 6
3.2. Support to meetings and meetings´ reporting 6
3.2.1 RCG ECON - 2023 Technical Meeting, 5 to 8th June, Brussels 7
3.2.2 RCG NANSEA and Baltic - 2023 Technical Meeting, 6 t0 9th June, Gdansk, Poland 7
3.2.3 RCG LP- 2023 Technical Meeting, 26 to 28th June, St. Julians, Malta 8
3.2.4 RCG LDF- 2023 Technical Meeting, 3 to 6th July, Palanga, Lithuania 8
3.2.5 RCG Med&BS - 2023 Technical Meeting, 29th August to 1st September, Madrid 9
3.2.6 2023 RCGs Decision Meeting, 27th September, Brussels 9
3.2.7 2021, 2022, 2023 RCG Med&BS annual meeting reports 10
3.3. Support intersessional activity 10
3.3.1 RCG ECON 10
3.3.2 RCG NANSEA and Baltic 10
3.3.3 RCG LDF 11
4. Conclusion 11

1. Introduction

The RCGs Secretariat service has its most recent background in the progress made and the results of the SECWEB project "*Developing mechanisms to support the planning and execution of administrative tasks and the branding and online visibility of the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs), with the aim to establish a long-term supportive structure*".

One of the objectives of SECWEB project, it was to establish a long-term stable supporting structure, however it revealed more complex than expected, from a legal and administrative perspective. More time it was needed to find and define the funding mechanisms and a long-term plan to maintain the Secretariat.

Upon finalization of SECWEB project, the short-term/low value subcontracting of the Secretariat service by each Member State (MS) was launched, adapting the procedure to the legal requirements for service procurement that each MS raised (financing limit, need for a contract or not, need to open the procedure to offers from other providers...). Maintaining the Secretariat as a permanent support structure to the RCGs is essential to guarantee funding efficiency, to reinforce experts' engagement and for strengthening the regional cooperation in the context of the DCF.

The RCGs Secretariat began its services in March 2023. This report covers the activities undertaken by the RCGs Secretariat from March 2023 to February 2024.

2. Scope

The technical specifications for the RCGs Secretariat services have been defined according to the experience gained within the implementation of SECWEB project.

The Secretariat provides high quality administrative support to the Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs), developing coordination, facilitation, and liaison roles among the whole network of RCGs, and, in particular, with RCG chairs, National Correspondents (NCs) and the European Commission. In addition, the Secretariat is responsible for maintaining and further develop the RCGs communication strategy and its activities.

Given the different background and context of the RCGs, the working methodology for the Secretariat allowed some flexibility to adapt to the specificities of each RCG. However, the overall service and protocols benefit from a common approach.

The main tasks for 2023 were presented and agreed at the 2022 RCGs Decision Meeting, see table below for details:

List of tasks
1. Daily regular operations and processes:
1.1. Manage daily communication and correspondence with the RCGs stakeholders
1.2. Maintain and manage interaction/requests records
1.3. Draft official letters, reports, etc
1.4. Manage the secretariat's legal, finances and staff obligations according to the annual plan and guarantee due diligence and accountability of the service
1.5 Maintain working tools and repositories such as: 1.5.1. Stakeholders' database 1.5.2. Maintenance of virtual repositories, website and working areas. 1.5.3. Other databases, logbooks or records agreed in the annual workplan for the Secretariat
1.6. Maintain basic protocols and organisational procedures updated and accessible for the interested parties:

List of tasks
1.6.1. Participants´ itinerary (chair and co-chair mandate and remits) 1.6.2. Rules of procedure 1.6.3. Terms of reference of RCG
1.7. Communication and dissemination activities: 1.7.1. Web, e-newsletter & Social network maintenance and promotion 1.7.2. Corporative image and branding strategy maintenance 1.7.3. Become the Stakeholders´ focal point and helpdesk for the RCGs network 1.7.4. Manage consultation processes (questionnaires and surveys)
1.8. Elaborate (in consultation with the RCG and ISSG chairs) a year-around work plan, with key performance indicators (KPIs) and targets for implementation and monitoring, and subject it to approval during the RCGs annual meeting cycle
2. Support to meetings and meetings' reporting
2.1. Support the RCG chairs to prepare, set up, announce and manage the RCG Technical Meetings, Pre-decision and Decision Meeting
2.2. Support the RCG chairs across the reporting process from RCG meetings (from the compilation of inputs to the final edition and dissemination)
3. Support intersessional activity
3.1. Support the RCG chairs to organise and monitor the intersessional work and achievements
3.2. Provide administrative support for the design and launch of new initiatives by the RCG network

3. Services in 2023 -2024

3.1. Daily regular operations and processes

3.1.1 Communication and correspondence, managing requests

In the last twelve months the Secretariat maintained an active bidirectional communication, mainly by email, with the RCGs network, in particular with RCGs chairs, national correspondents and DG MARE team. The secretariat email account secretariat@fisheries-rcg.eu has been used as the main communication channel; requests and consultations from RCG chairs, ISSG chairs, NCs and also end-users were received and duly managed by the Secretariat team. The traffic of the Secretariat email account is high, on average we receive around 250 emails per month, this traffic could be double at the busiest months closest to the celebration of technical meetings.

In addition to the day-to-day communication, some of the most relevant communication activities involved the distribution of the drafts Regional Work Plans 2025-2027 to NCs for feedback before submission to COM, and the revised RWPs following STECF evaluation (STECF-23-26).

Throughout the year there was an active communication with RCG chairs, in some cases like RCG NANSEA and Baltic, the Secretariat took part in their regular meetings and followed up on the different issues, such as meetings with end-users, nominations and updates of ISSG participants list, data call, and the preparation and organization of the annual technical meeting.

The main communications associated with the RCG annual technical meetings have also been channelled through the Secretariat; these are the save-the-date, registration, agenda and instructions, reminders, SharePoint access, social dinner, follow up report contributions, distribution of draft report, and final report publication among others.

3.1.2 Manage the Secretariat´s legal, finances and staff obligations

In 2023, the funding scenario for the Secretariat services followed that agreed on the 2022 RCGs Decision meeting; in which, each Member State (MS) contributes to the share of the service according to the amounts set in the long-term financial plan. As mentioned previously, there are still constraints to find a funding mechanism that suits all MS. Therefore, to avoid disruptions of the Secretariat service, a short-term/low value subcontracting of the Secretariat service by each MS was launched, adapting the procedure to the legal requirements for service procurement for each MS.

Thus, CETMAR submitted to each MS a formal offer for the provision of the "RCGs' Secretariat services", pending approval by each MS. Upon receiving MS approval CETMAR adapted to the administrative procedure required by each MS. Overall, 23 MS have accepted the service. This required that CETMAR tailored 23 different administrative procedures, from negotiated contract, direct invoicing, online invoices, split payments, etc. From July onwards, CETMAR started issuing the invoices according to the systems set by each MS. This required a significant amount of administrative support not only for the invoicing process but also for the follow up of payments.

The Secretariat team run with the dedication of one-member full time, two members part time, administrative support and IT staff support. As well as the forefront Secretariat work there is a substantial amount of internal team work to make sure that the requests are duly and timely managed and to ensure the full coverage of the Secretariat services to all RCGs and their network.

3.1.3 Maintain working tools and repositories

The maintenance of working tools and repositories has been an important part of the service since they are essential assets for enhancing the coordination at regional level. As well as maintaining these working spaces, the Secretariat has also advocated for their wider use among RCG network, in particular RCG chairs, as to guaranty a successful handover from one chair to the next RCG chair.

- *Maintenance of working areas, website and virtual repositories*

  The ***virtual working spaces*** on Teams for each RCG have been maintained and updated with relevant information. These working spaces are mainly used by the RCG chairs, one of the advantages of these working spaces is the availability of historical records for the incoming chairs.

  The multilateral and bilateral agreements ***repository*** has been updated with relevant agreements between MS. It is worth mentioning, that the Secretariat relies on the information shared by NCs and ISSG chairs to have the information up to date.

  The repository can be consulted through the RCGs website RCGs Multilateral and Bilateral Agreements´ Repository

  The different sections of the RCGs ***website*** have been periodically updated, for example: information about RCG chairs; intersessional subgroups; the highlights about RCGs work https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/news/; relevant events are available for consultation on the website calendar; and the RCG microsites Baltic; ECON; LDF; LP; Med&BS; NANSEA.

  Besides, the Secretariat completed the administrative procedures to renew the website hosting and domain package.

- *Stakeholders' database*
  https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/stakeholders/

  The stakeholders´ database was presented and tested at the respective RCGs annual technical meetings. The stakeholder´s database developed within SECWEB project is currently still hosted by ILVO. This fact implied that some steps on the account verification were problematic. These issues were identified in the testing sessions and were solved in collaboration with ILVO.

  During the last four months, a lot of effort has gone into populating the Stakeholder´s database to make it fully operational. In order to so, we followed a step wise approach, we first reached to RCG chairs, NCs, ISSG chairs, end-users, and the remaining RCG network. This approach allowed us to check and verify each account timely. In addition, the database vocabulary has been fine-tuned as more registers were validated. There has been a significant progress, 70 people have registered, however more time and resources are needed to have a fully operational database.

- *Other databases, logbooks or records*

  RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic have developed their own databases for: ISSGs, and Decisions and recommendations. The Secretariat has actively contributed to the maintenance of both databases; in the case of the ISSGs database, the Secretariat in close collaboration with NCs has updated the ISSG participants list for the season 2023-2024. In Sep 2023, the Secretariat updated the decision/recommendations database, after the Liaison meeting and Decision meeting.

  We have implemented online registration forms for all the RCGs technical meetings, the online forms are directly managed through the RCGs Secretariat SharePoint using google forms. This has proven very efficient and it has saved the RCG chairs a lot of time. Another advantage is that the presence lists are easily drawn from the registration list.

  The Regional Work Plans for NANSEA, Baltic and Med&BS needed some amendments after the STECF evaluation, some of the RWP tables required feedback/inputs from NCs. The Secretariat, in close collaboration with RCG chairs, provided online links to edit RWP tables, the feedback process is still on going.

3.1.4 Maintain basic protocols and organisational procedures

There are a number of procedures and protocols that are accessible on the RCGs website and updated periodically by the RCGs Secretariat in collaboration with RCG chairs. These are:

- *Rules of procedure*
  The RoPs are available on the website, under each RCG microsite you will find the RoPs for the respective RCG. Recently, the RoPs have been modified to adjust according to the RCGs visual identity.

- *Mandate and remits of the RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic*
  The document has been updated clarifying the role of RCGs vs. ICES, following the decision NANSEA BALTIC_ 2023_D01: *RCG Mandates and remits' document should be updated with clarification about the role of RCGs vs. ICES, i.e., ICES has the scientific coordination and RCGs has the decision-making process and coordination of resources among MS.*
  Mandate and remits RCG Baltic and NANSEA_v2

- *Terms of Reference*
  In consultation with RCGs chairs, the ToRs for the new season, 2023-2024, have been updated and are available online under each RCG microsite on the web.

- *Participants´ itinerary (chair and co-chair mandate and remits)*
  The Secretariat is currently in the process of developing a series of guidance documents as part of the service contract by DG MARE (MARE/2023/LVP/0002). These documents are developed taking into consideration the experience gained supporting the RCGs during the last three years, and paying special attention to the needs identified during this process. The guidance documents will be available on the website once the final version is validated.

3.1.5 Communication and dissemination activities

The communication and dissemination activities are focused to promote visibility and engagement towards the RCGs and the Intersessional Groups. Reinforce the branding of the RCGs is also key in the communication strategy.

- *Web, e-newsletter & Social network maintenance and promotion*
  The website, newsletter and social media have been maintained and fed periodically with the latest RCGs news and updates.
  Website
  The website initially developed by AZTI within SECWEB project, it has been migrated to CETMAR´s servers in order for CETMAR to be able to maintain, update and develop new website contents. The RCG´s website domain name and hosting are now managed by CETMAR.

  News
  News with the RCGs highlights, in particular from RCGs technical meetings have been published on the news section. The fourth issue of the RCGs newsletter was released on 1st Dec 2023. In 2024, the Secretariat published the highlights of several ISSG meetings.

  Social media
  In parallel to the news section the Secretariat has been managing the Twitter (X) account.

  Calendar
  The dates of the RCGs annual technical meetings and ISSG meetings are updated regularly and can be consulted on the website.

- *Corporative image and branding strategy maintenance*
  The Secretariat has reinforced the use of the established RCGs visual identity using the corporative image in all communications and RCGs documents. Documents templates have been created/updated whenever needed for RCGs purposes. At the end of 2023, all the RCGs templates were updated to incorporate the new EU co funding logo.

- *Become the Stakeholders´ focal point and helpdesk for the RCGs network*
  After the initial Secretariat pilot experience with SECWEB project, in 2023 the Secretariat has reached out to the whole RCGs network, consolidating relationships and working procedures not only with the RCG chairs but also with ISSG chairs, key end-users and RCGs experts. For example,

the Secretariat has become the focal point for managing experts access to ICES SharePoint. Also, focal point for NCs when it comes to appoint/nominate national experts to the different RCGs. Additionally, during this period several ISSG chairs have sought the Secretariat assistance for organizing their meetings.

3.1.6 Manage consultation processes

During 2023/beginning 2024 the Secretariat gave support to the following consultation processes:

- *Questionnaire on Fish Processing*

In April 2023, in preparation for the *Fish processing data collection workshop* within the scope of RCG ECON, and in collaboration with ISSG Fish processing chairs the Secretariat distributed the questionnaire and received feedback from MS and experts. Feedback was compiled and forwarded for analysist to the ISSG chairs.

- *Survey on AER/FDI data call harmonization*

June 2023, the ISSG on Métier and transversal variables asked support from the Secretariat to distribute the survey to the NCs. In order to address the task on harmonization of data submission for AER and FDI data calls (landings, effort and capacity). The RCGs Secretariat distributed the questionnaire and sent the appropriate reminders.

- *Questionnaire – Regarding financing of RCGs Secretariat*

In June 2023, the ISSG National correspondents asked the Secretariat to launch the questionnaire. The Secretariat send the communication, also kept track of feedback and sent reminders. At all times, Secretariat kept a fluent communication with ISSG NCs chairs in order to complete the consultation successfully within the deadline.

- *EU survey regarding other data sources on environmental impact of fisheries*

July 2023, following indications from DG MARE and RCG Med&BS the Secretariat developed a survey on the EU survey platform concerning other data sources on environmental impact of fisheries. The questionnaire was distributed to the national correspondents of Med&BS regions. Timely reminders were sent although the response rate remained low.

3.2. Support to meetings and meetings´ reporting

Supporting the 6 RCGs in their Annual Technical Meetings has been the top priority for the RCGs Secretariat during 2023. Not only to support the RCG chairs in their busiest period but also as a good opportunity for the Secretariat to engage with the whole RCG network and vice versa. The experience gained at the annual technical meetings has been very valuable and of crucial importance to draw the work plan for next season.

In general terms, we present here the main support activities carried out, it is not intended to be an exhaustive list of activities but more an illustration of the portfolio of activities available for future references.

3.2.1 RCG ECON - 2023 Technical Meeting, 5 to 8th June, Brussels

- *Prior to the meeting*

– Preparatory meeting with RCG chairs and DG MARE to go through the meeting ToRs and other practicalities.
– Communicate Save-the-date, preliminary agenda, organizational tips.
– Set up the registration system.

- *During the meeting*

One member of the Secretariat team attended the meeting online. In this case, due to the clashing of dates with RCG NANSEA and Baltic annual technical meeting the support given to the meeting was in remote.

– Take detailed notes, in particular during the discussions that took place in plenary after the presentations.
– Support point for online participants.
– Presentation on the status of the Secretariat.

- *After the meeting*

– Follow up with presenters and rapporteurs the contributions to the report, compilation of documents
– Report co-edition
– Distribute the draft report for feedback
– Integration of feedback in consultation with chairs
– Final editing and publication of report on the RCGs website

3.2.2 RCG NANSEA and Baltic - 2023 Technical Meeting, 6 t0 9th June, Gdansk, Poland

- *Prior to the meeting*

– Take part in the preparatory meetings with RCG chairs.
– Communicate Save-the-date, preliminary agenda, organizational tips.
– Set up the registration system.
– Act as contact point for managing access to RCG SharePoint within ICES.
– Distribute templates (presentation and instructions for presenters and rapporteurs).
– Elaborate the technical meeting report template.
– Upload "General information" to the SharePoint.

- *During the meeting*

One member of the Secretariat team attended the meeting physically in Poland, Gdansk.

– Responsible for the presence list.
– Take detailed notes, in particular during the discussions that took place in plenary after the presentations.
– Presentation on the status of the Secretariat.
– Meet with chairs to draw conclusions and outputs of the meeting.
– Taking pictures, managing social media.

- *After the meeting*

– Follow up with presenters and rapporteurs the contributions to the report, compilation of documents
– Report co-edition
– Distribute the draft report for feedback
– Integration of feedback in consultation with chairs
– Final editing and publication of report on the RCGs website

3.2.3 RCG LP- 2023 Technical Meeting, 26 to 28th June, St. Julians, Malta

- *Prior to the meeting*
  – Several preparatory meetings: briefing with incoming chair; agree upon the role and activities for the Secretariat.
  – Assist with the preparation of preliminary agenda.
  – Communicate Save-the-date, preliminary agenda, organizational tips
  – Set up the registration system.
  – Act as contact point for managing access to RCG SharePoint within ICES.

- *During the meeting*

One member of the Secretariat team attended the meeting physically in Malta.

– Take detailed notes, in particular during the discussions that took place in plenary after the presentations.
– Presentation on the status of the Secretariat.
– Provided online meeting platform for virtual participants.

- *After the meeting*

– Follow up with presenters and rapporteurs the contributions to the report, compilation of documents.
– Integrate text contributions and first draft report.

3.2.4 RCG LDF- 2023 Technical Meeting, 3 to 6th July, Palanga, Lithuania

- *Prior to the meeting*

– Communicate Save-the-date, preliminary agenda, organizational tips
– Set up the registration system.
– Act as contact point for managing access to RCG SharePoint within ICES.

- *During the meeting*

One member of the Secretariat team attended the meeting physically in Lithuania, Palanga

– Take detailed notes, in particular during the discussions that took place in plenary after the presentations.
– Presentation on the status of the Secretariat.
– Taking pictures, managing social media.

- *After the meeting*

– Follow up with presenters and rapporteurs the contributions to the report, compilation of documents
– Report co-edition
– Distribute the draft report for feedback
– Integration of feedback in consultation with chair
– Final editing and publication of report on the RCGs website

3.2.5 RCG Med&BS - 2023 Technical Meeting, 29th August to 1st September, Madrid

- *Prior to the meeting*

– Communicate Save-the-date, preliminary agenda, organizational tips
– Set up the registration system.
– Act as contact point for managing access to RCG SharePoint within ICES.

- *During the meeting*

Two members of the Secretariat team attended the meeting physically in Madrid.

– Supervision of SharePoint document uploads
– Taking detailed notes, in particular during the discussions that took place in plenary after the presentations.
– Provided online meeting platform for virtual participants.
– Presentation on the status of the Secretariat
– Meet with chairs to draw conclusions and outputs of the meeting
– Taking pictures, managing social media

- *After the meeting*

– Follow up with presenters and rapporteurs the contributions to the report, compilation of documents.

3.2.6 2023 RCGs Decision Meeting, 27th September, Brussels

- *Prior to the meeting*

– Develop preliminary agenda
– Compile in a dossier all the recommendation and decisions from the different RCGs, share with NCs and RCG chairs

- *During the meeting*

One member of the Secretariat team attended the meeting physically in Brussels, and one more member followed the meeting remotely.

– Facilitate the meeting, opening and introduction of each RCG chair
– Take notes during the meeting, in particular if there were any comments after the presentation of the decisions and recommendations.

- *After the meeting*

– Update dossier with comments and relevant information, decisions agreed or not, etc.
– Distribute and publish the final RCGs Decision Meeting report online.

3.2.7 2021, 2022, 2023 RCG Med&BS annual meeting reports

The Secretariat, upon a request from DG MARE, collaborated in the process of finalizing the outstanding reports. The Secretariat formatted the draft reports, managed the correspondence and the flow of information with RCG chairs in first instance and the consultation with NCs, JRC, GFCM, STECF. This process is currently on the final stage. As a result, the RCG Med&BS annual reports for 2021, 2022 and 2023 will be published on the RCGs website soon.

3.3. Support intersessional activity

3.3.1 RCG ECON

During 2023, the Secretariat gave support to several ECON ISSGs:

- *ISSG Fish processing*
  ISSG Fish processing met in April 18-19, the Secretariat sent the invitation and circulated the questionnaire to the MS. The Secretariat also facilitated the online platform and recorded the meeting. In addition, a dedicated SharePoint on Teams was created for ISSG chairs and participants to exchange information. The results from the questionnaire were compiled and store in a dedicated folder.
- *ISSG Capital values*
  ISSG Capital values on regional comparisons and sharing of knowhow for the evaluation of tangible and intangible capital held an online meeting on 13-14th March. Meeting platform, dedicated folder on Teams.
- *ISSG Alternative Segmentation*
  3rd workshop on alternative approach to the segmentation under RCG ECON chaired by Jörg Berkenhagen and Erik Sulanke that took place on 3 to 4th May 2023. The Secretariat send the invitation to the workshop. Meeting platform, dedicated folder on Teams.
- *Workshop on harmonizing the AER and FDI data calls*
  Online workshop to carefully work on inconsistencies between data provided to FDI and AER for each MS following the outcomes of the STECF FDI EWG 23-10 analysis. The workshop was chaired by Zeynep Hekim from JRC and took place on 11 and 14th Dec 2023.

In 2024:

- *ISSG Developing Quality Assessment system*
  The ISSG met from 18-20th March in Salerno, with the possibility to connect online. The Secretariat managed the communications and registration of participants; drafting of official letters; provided the online platform for the meeting; created a dedicated folder on Teams.

3.3.2 RCG NANSEA and Baltic

The support to the intersessional activity initiated with SECWEB project was extended and continued throughout 2023.

- *RCG chairs meetings throughout the year cycle*

The RCG NANSEA and RCG Baltic despite of having numerous ISSGs to handle and a large number of experts in their network they benefit from long-standing established procedures and logbooks. Which makes

it easier for chairs to keep track of all their duties and activities throughout the year. In order to keep track of the good flow of the RCGs work, RCG chairs (normally 4 or three of them) meet regularly, at least once a month, or even once a week at their busiest periods.

During the past year, the Secretariat has accompanied the RCG chairs in their periodic meetings, facilitating greatly the communication and the assignment of tasks. Tasks that by nature were purely administrative have been conducted by the Secretariat.

- *ISSG End users*

The ISSG End users, composed by the RCGs chairs, usually meets twice a year with ICES Secretariat and DG MARE. In the last year, the RCGs Secretariat has been actively involved in these meetings. Giving organizational support: setting the doodle; convening the meeting; providing minutes, but also taking part in some of the technical discussions, in particular those relevant to streamline the communication between RCGs and ICES community.

- *ISSG National Correspondents*

The Secretariat supported several consultation processes that took place within the scope of the ISSG NCs; namely, consultations that took place in June and December 2023 regarding the funding mechanism for the RCGs Secretariat.

3.3.3 RCG LDF

- *ISSG SPRFMO Observer Programme*

ISSG SPRFMO-OP meeting in January 2024, Vilnius. The Secretariat supported the correspondence and drafting of official letters.

4. Conclusion

In 2023-24 the activity of the RCGs Secretariat in support of the RCGs has been developed with dedication and professionalism. The Secretariat team showed strong commitment at all times, producing quality work and developing a trusting relationship with the RCGs network.

RCGs showed differences in the level of engagement with the RCGs Secretariat. The interactions and feedback with the RCGs chairs, and the network as a whole, are more fluent in some RCGs than in others. These differences may lay in the functioning of the RCG itself and the relationships build during the pilot testing of the RCGs Secretariat.

The Secretariat is fully committed to achieve the same level of engagement across the RCGs with targeted efforts and careful planning. In order to achieve this goal, it will be highly desirable to have a long-term funding plan for the Secretariat.