

Invitation for Member input: Medium-term Strategy 2018-2022

Introduction

The Medium-term Strategy (MTS) is a strategic framework that defines IRENA’s “vision, strategic directions, objectives and activities” over the course of five years (A/1/DC/8). The Agency’s first MTS was adopted at the third Assembly session in January 2013 (A/3/DC/14). During the mid-term review in 2015, the Council recommended, and the Assembly agreed, that the discussions on the next MTS should be integrated into regular Council meetings in the course of 2016 and 2017 to enable a sustained and inclusive framework for engagement.

At its seventh session in January 2017, the Assembly took note of the Council recommendation that the process of the development of the MTS 2018-2022 would include a call for written contributions from Members. This would align the MTS process with the development of the Work Programme and Budget for 2018-2019, ensuring the complementarity of effort. It was also agreed to convene a consultative Working Team comprising interested Members, facilitated by the United States of America to maintain dialogue on MTS between Council meetings. Members’ contributions provided in response to this Note will therefore also feed into the work of the Working Team. A notional MTS Working Team Schedule is appended to this Note.

Medium-term Strategy 2013-2017

IRENA’s vision for its MTS 2013-2017 was defined to be, “the principal platform for international cooperation, a centre of excellence on renewable energy and a repository of policy, technology, resource and financial knowledge, and support for countries in their transition to a renewable energy future”. The MTS envisaged IRENA to become an authoritative global voice for renewable energy, delivering its mandate through leadership along three key pillars:

- Centre of excellence for renewable energy;
- Renewable energy advisory resource for countries;
- Network hub of country, regional and global programs.

An external evaluation of IRENA undertaken in 2015 has shown that the Agency has become a credible global voice for renewable energy that is delivering to Members’ expectations. The MTS helped IRENA guide its focus during the programmatic cycles, and its flagship products have equipped countries with the tools necessary to better understand the evolution of renewable energy technology and policy, their domestic potential and the role that renewables could play in the development of their energy sector.

Over the course of the first MTS, IRENA has tested different paths and directions, and established a range of successful activities. But with declining costs and an accelerating energy transition incorporating large shares of renewables, and with countries looking to transform their energy systems, IRENA needs to align its strategic focus and programmatic activities to a new reality, which has evolved dramatically since the development of the first MTS, including in terms of its role in decarbonisation and climate change mitigation.

MTS 2018-2022

Renewable energy today offers a new economic, social and environmental frame of reference. In recent years, it has emerged as an economically attractive answer to climate and energy security concerns, and has opened new opportunities for sustainable livelihoods for those who lack energy access. Its business case is strong and continuously improving with falling costs and technology advancements. Renewable energy is an opportunity to create new jobs, democratize energy sources and provide energy independence at a local level. It also offers the prospect of deploying low-cost technologies in the remotest and poorest areas of the world to lift millions out of poverty. Renewables are now synonymous with an immediate, available and sustainable solution for meeting growing global energy demand, with the potential to transform the production, use and distribution of energy.

It is in this dynamic setting that IRENA needs to define its strategic direction and objectives for the upcoming five years. The mission statement for the next strategic period should convey that the transformation of the energy sector is not a burden the world must shoulder, but an economically viable and environmentally sustainable enabler of change. With its global, focused mandate and strong engagement of Members, IRENA is uniquely placed to play a leading role in the transformation of the energy system, deploying the benefits of renewables across sectors, economies and communities.

This approach was supported in the MTS discussions held at the 11th and 12th Council meetings in 2016 (C/11/DN/6 and C/12/DN/5). Members noted a wide range of drivers for renewable energy deployment, including decarbonisation, employment, economic priorities, energy security, access and social wellbeing. They also noted that, while the deployment drivers may differ, IRENA's strategic direction should remain focused on the transformation of the energy sector, which is a common objective for all. Members highlighted some of their key priorities that should be considered as the Agency charts its new path. These include:

- Highlighting renewable energy investment as a means to achieving economic, social and environmental objectives;
- An active role in the achievement of SDG7 on energy, and streamlining renewables across the SDG agenda;
- Playing a key role in the context of climate change mitigation, including supporting countries in the implementation of NDCs;
- Integrating energy access as a strategic priority;
- Concrete technical advice to countries in realizing their energy transformation;

- Engaging with the private sector and finance institutions to better understand and reflect their needs and concerns;
- Deepening the focus on innovation;
- Mainstreaming the collaboration and engagement with the private sector;
- Keeping track of market trends and technological developments (costs, markets, utility models);
- Considering renewables in the context of the energy system (power and end-use), including the infrastructure and efficiency needs;
- Shaping the global energy agenda, including through involvement in some of the key multilateral processes (UN, G7, G20, etc.) and with key regional entities;
- Providing a platform for multi-stakeholder networks; and
- Facilitating peer-to-peer interaction to share knowledge and experience, provide advice and accelerate the global learning curve.

Recognizing the near-universal membership and growing demands on the Agency, Members also stressed the importance of effective prioritization, and of striking the right balance between upstream work and action at the country and regional level. There was a common understanding that human and financial resources will have to be made available if the Agency is to advance its important mission, and that this aspect should be incorporated in the MTS 2018-2022. In this context, it was emphasized that IRENA should recognize where it can make a unique contribution and capitalize on its comparative advantages that set it apart from other entities. These include:

- Strong Members' engagement in the work of the Agency. IRENA should proactively access and leverage Member expertise, including in the provision of technical assistance where appropriate.
- Intellectual capital accumulated through programmatic work and interaction with countries. While maintaining excellence in its analytical work, IRENA should place a greater focus on dissemination and outreach, as well as the application of its advice, methodologies and tools to support action at the country level.
- Growing credibility and authority based on its global membership and substantive products. Members stressed that IRENA's brand name and convening power are its major comparative advantage, which should be used deliberately to achieve strategic objectives and advance its programmatic agenda.
- Open and inclusive framework for collaboration. IRENA's flexible and dynamic model of work enables it to adapt quickly. As the sector grows and demand for the Agency's services increase, agility remains a key trait, as does the leveraging of partnerships and alliances for greater effectiveness and sustainability of effort. This includes collaborative efforts with other organisations and institutions to foster complementarity and avoid duplication.

The next MTS period will require a careful consideration of how IRENA's comparative advantages can be effectively prioritised and deployed to drive change at all levels. To facilitate Members input, a number of questions are listed below. Members are invited to provide their views on these, as well as other questions they deem relevant for the discussion on the 2018-2022 strategy.

Questions:

1. In shaping the new MTS, what do Members see as the major emerging themes that should influence IRENA's medium term strategy?
2. Considering drivers for the future deployment of renewable energy, what are the areas of IRENA's work where additional emphasis is needed or in which strategic adjustments should be made?
3. Given the vast amount of knowledge and experience in national administrations, what are the avenues to systematically contribute Members' knowledge, expertise and skills to IRENA's programmatic work?
4. Bearing in mind the growing and diverse needs of Members, some of which are beyond the Agency's capacity, how can the Agency ensure the most balanced and objective approach to selection of priorities?
5. How should the resource requirements be integrated in the MTS? Would Members be prepared to make specific proposals and commitments beyond the biennial programmatic cycle?
6. In addition to countries, are there other sources of voluntary funding that may be considered? What would be the mechanisms to ensure that IRENA retains its credibility and perception of an unbiased, objective international organisation?

Appendix: Notional MTS Working Team Schedule

Medium Term Strategy Working Team

As noted above, at the 12th IRENA Council Meeting, the Council agreed to create an MTS consultative Working Team, facilitated by the United States.

- The Working Team will work through the Programme and Strategy Committee.
- The United States will coordinate with the IRENA Secretariat and Working Team Members to integrate input, feedback, and advice into the development of the MTS.
- Members of the Working Team will be asked to provide their feedback and advice to the IRENA Secretariat, throughout the duration of the MTS drafting process.

Timeline

- **16 February 2017**
IRENA Secretariat: Distribute Call for Feedback on 2018-2019 Work Programme and 2018-2022 MTS. The IRENA Secretariat will distribute a formal request for Member feedback on both the next two-year Work Programme as well as the MTS. The IRENA Secretariat will append a U.S. document that outlines MTS Working Team Schedule.
- **16 February 2017 - 15 March 2017**
Solicit Feedback from Member Countries
- **15 March 2017 – 20 March 2017**
Compilation of Country Feedback
- **21 March 2017**
Informal Meeting on Margins of Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue, Berlin, Germany. The United States and the IRENA Secretariat convene present Members to discuss progress made in the development of MTS.
- **April 2017**
Solicit Further Feedback from Members
- **April 2017 (date TBC)**
Webinar with Members. The United States and the IRENA Secretariat will convene a webinar to present consolidated feedback from Members.
- **25 April 2017**
Develop MTS Outline. Based on input from Members, the IRENA Secretariat shares an outline of the MTS for consideration by the 13th Council.
- **22- 24 May 2017**
Present MTS Outline at PSC and Council. The IRENA Secretariat will present the draft outline to Members at the PSC meeting.
- **Summer 2017**
Draft MTS. The IRENA Secretariat will draft the MTS with the goal of presenting it to Members at the 14th Council Meeting in November.