

**INTERNATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY AGENCY**

Tenth meeting of the Council

Abu Dhabi, 23 – 24 November 2015

**Report of the Director-General  
on the Review of the Medium-term Strategy 2013-2017****I. Introduction**

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Assembly Decision A/3/DC/14 of 14 January 2013, which requests the Director-General to “submit to the Assembly, at its sixth session, midterm evaluation of the Strategy with the view to its further refinement.” It provides an overview of the Medium-term Strategy (MTS) 2013-2017, key findings of the review, and recommendations on the way forward.

2. The review of the MTS is a culmination of a year-long process that involved broad consultations through several rounds of discussions with Members in the context of IRENA’s governing body meetings. Early discussions on the Agency’s strategic priorities commenced in 2014 in the Committee and Council meetings of June and November, within the context of discussion of the future financing of the Agency. The Council Chair also led a discussion on emerging strategic priorities in a meeting titled, “The Global Energy Transformation: The Increasing Relevance of Renewable Energy and the Evolving Role of IRENA” with the participation of Members and external stakeholders in November 2014. The Assembly, at its fifth session in January 2015, considered the outcome of the Council deliberations and provided further input on the subject. Members were also invited to provide input to the upcoming work programme, which contained insights of high relevance for the review of the MTS. Upon invitation from the Director-General in July 2015, Members also provided written input to the MTS review process.

3. Another important element of this process has been the external evaluation of IRENA’s impact. In view of the significant expansion in the number and depth of activities undertaken by the Agency over the past four years, a qualitative evaluation of the programmatic activities and their impact was undertaken. The results of the impact evaluation will be part of the Annual Report of the Director-General, and they have also informed the review of the MTS. The evaluators gathered information and feedback, including through interviews and surveys of Members, private sector representatives, other key external stakeholders, and IRENA staff. The evaluation brought about a number of advantages, including impartiality and the ability to look at matters from a fresh perspective.

4. The MTS review was undertaken in parallel with the development of the Work Programme and Budget for 2016-2017, which included a number of strategic discussions on the future of the Agency, and substantive contributions to the preparation of the new biennial Work Programme.

5. Combined, these inputs provided a sound foundation upon which the review of the current MTS was built. They also contributed to the formulation of key findings and strategic priorities, and guided the identification of steps forward.

### **II. MTS 2013-2017**

6. The MTS 2013-2017 was developed at the request of the Assembly in its first session to, “clearly define vision, strategic direction, objectives and activities of the Agency” (A/1/DC/8). In the course of 2011 and 2012, the Director-General, in cooperation with the Council, undertook extensive internal and external consultation. The process required significant time as it was taking place in the early stages of the Agency’s existence, at a point when its programmatic activities were still evolving, and the position of the Agency in the global energy landscape had yet to be defined.

7. Following this process, the Director-General submitted his report on the Medium-term Strategy of IRENA (A/3/25) to the Assembly at its third session in 2013. Guided by the overall vision outlined in the Statute and based on the outcome of the consultative process, IRENA’s vision for its MTS was defined as follows: “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 to support countries in their transition to a renewable energy future.” The MTS envisages IRENA as an authoritative global voice for renewable energy, acting along three pillars:

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

8. The MTS takes a unified approach in which all relevant activities are integrated within these pillars. They cut across programmatic themes and internal organisational structure, and are independent of the funding source. The MTS also defines five fundamental values that guide the Agency’s work:

- Supportive of developing and developed countries to further the adoption of renewable energy and ensure energy access and security to all;
- Neutral/unbiased among all renewable technologies (bioenergy, geothermal, hydropower, ocean, solar and wind);
- Responsive, nimble, lean and action-oriented;
- Respectful of diversity;
- Grounded in integrity, accountability and transparency.

9. To date, the MTS 2013-2017 has provided overarching guidance and served as a roadmap to the Agency’s activities by helping to focus programmatic priorities. The clarity provided by the MTS framework was particularly helpful in the development of successive work programmes and in the monitoring of progress through the Director-General’s progress and annual reports.

### **III. Review of the MTS 2013-2017**

10. Within the current MTS framework, IRENA has completed two programmatic cycles. In 2013, the Agency formulated its Work Programme along a new organisational structure, reflective of the strategic vision of the MTS, and refocused the programmatic activities along the three pillars of the MTS. The MTS has served as a critical tool for ensuring that IRENA’s programme is balanced between its

upstream work and support to countries and regions, and in focusing its efforts to be the voice for renewable energy in the global arena.

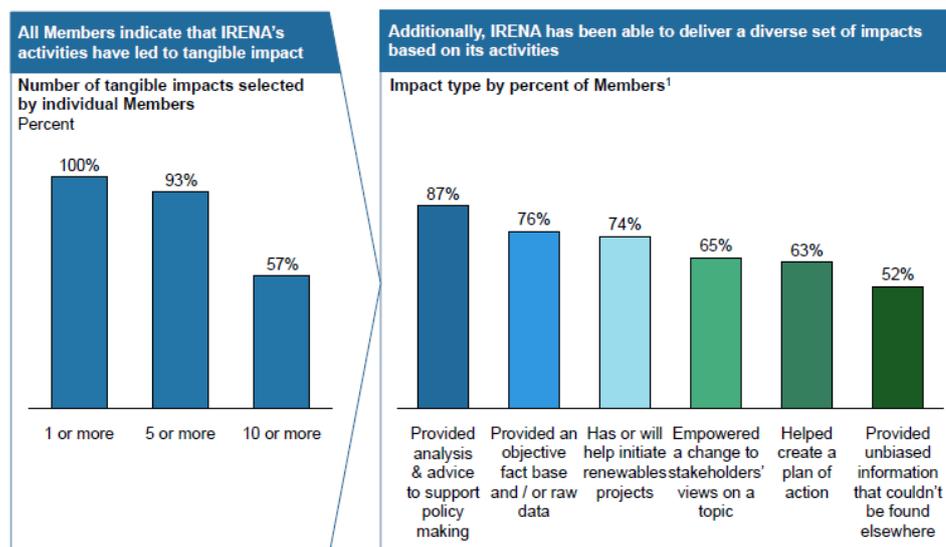
11. The MTS review, based on Members' feedback, includes five key findings:

- i. **IRENA's programmatic activities are closely aligned with its strategic vision and objectives.**

12. The MTS has provided programmatic stability that was necessary during the formative years. While IRENA was developing its institutional and programmatic foundations in a rapidly changing environment, both in the renewable energy sector and a broader global context, the MTS ensured that the strategic direction was maintained, resulting in programmatic output yielding concrete results. External evaluation of IRENA shows that its activities are far-reaching and that they are achieving tangible impact in advancing the vision articulated in the MTS. In addition, the MTS has facilitated IRENA's institutional development by enabling the introduction of the biennial programmatic cycle and by facilitating the transition from a divisional programme approach to one that is structured around thematic areas and common objectives.

### IRENA Impact Review, 2011-2015

All responding Members indicate that there has been tangible impact as a result of IRENA activity



SOURCE: 2015 Member survey results, n=46  
<sup>1</sup> Percent of Members selecting each impact type at least once

- ii. **MTS 2013-2017 is relevant in its strategic direction.**

13. The MTS remains a valid framework that can guide IRENA's programmatic work for the remainder of the period. Feedback from Members, as well as evaluation of IRENA's impact, shows that the Agency has made substantial strides in becoming the global voice for renewable energy. It also indicates that being the voice for renewable energy operating through the pillars of knowledge, advice and network hub is still as relevant today as it was when the current MTS was developed. The current MTS framework may therefore credibly continue to guide the Agency's operations for the remaining period of the MTS.

**iii. While the MTS strategic direction remains relevant, IRENA's programmatic activities have to reflect the changing environment.**

14. The renewable energy landscape has dramatically evolved, and new drivers for the development and deployment of renewable energy have emerged. IRENA's membership has almost doubled since the Agency's inception, adding new and more diverse needs and perspectives on the strategic direction of the Agency. IRENA has also matured as an institution, both in its administrative structures and its programmatic outputs. As a result, the context in which IRENA operates today differs significantly from that of 2012 when the current MTS was developed. IRENA should continue to respond to global topics and developments, as well as lead and define paths for the global community to follow. The feedback received from Members highlighted a number of priorities that should be considered leading up to 2017:

- a. Renewable energy and climate change. Climate change represents a major global challenge which requires solutions on many fronts. In preparations for COP21 in Paris, the focus on climate action has taken hold worldwide. Renewable energy is seen as one of the key solutions to climate change, which is also reflected in renewable energy ambition contained in many Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) submitted to date. IRENA should mainstream climate in its programmatic activities to become an enabling instrument to support countries in their efforts to decarbonise energy, and use the momentum to promote the business case for renewables in the energy sector and other sectors.
- b. Energy sector transformation. Renewable energy has progressed significantly in the power sector and, as its share grows, so does the importance of ongoing technology, policy and market development. Further, accounting for some 60% of global energy use, end-use sectors are central to the transformation to a sustainable future. With its global membership base and a focused mandate, IRENA is ideally-placed to be at the cutting edge of the developments in this ongoing transformation by sharing the latest information, providing recommendations and advice, stimulating action and acting as a convener of all stakeholders that need to play a part in the energy transformation.
- c. Sustainable Development Goal on Energy (SDG 7). SDG 7 is providing an important reinforcement to the efforts to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy, as well as to highlight that the path to sustainable energy requires interconnected effort. Renewable energy and energy efficiency are complementary in the effort to meet growing energy needs in a sustainable way. Universal access is key to alleviating poverty and stimulating economic growth, and there is an opportunity to design an efficient new system based on the modular and decentralised nature of renewable energy. IRENA should support the global efforts to achieve SDG 7, and play a leading role where required.
- d. Benefits of renewable energy. Contextualising renewable energy both within the broader energy sector and in different economic and social settings greatly assists in making the case for renewable energy. IRENA's work to date in this context has been effective but limited, and efforts should be made to expand it where there is the most potential impact. Demonstrating renewable energy benefits for energy security, employment, local value chains, productive use, and resource suitability will make the case of renewables even stronger.
- e. Fostering partnerships. Positive developments in the sector and IRENA's growing membership mean that the Agency should make even greater efforts to forge strategic partnerships. This should include identification of synergies with initiatives and organisations active in the sector, establishment of strong links with financing institutions,

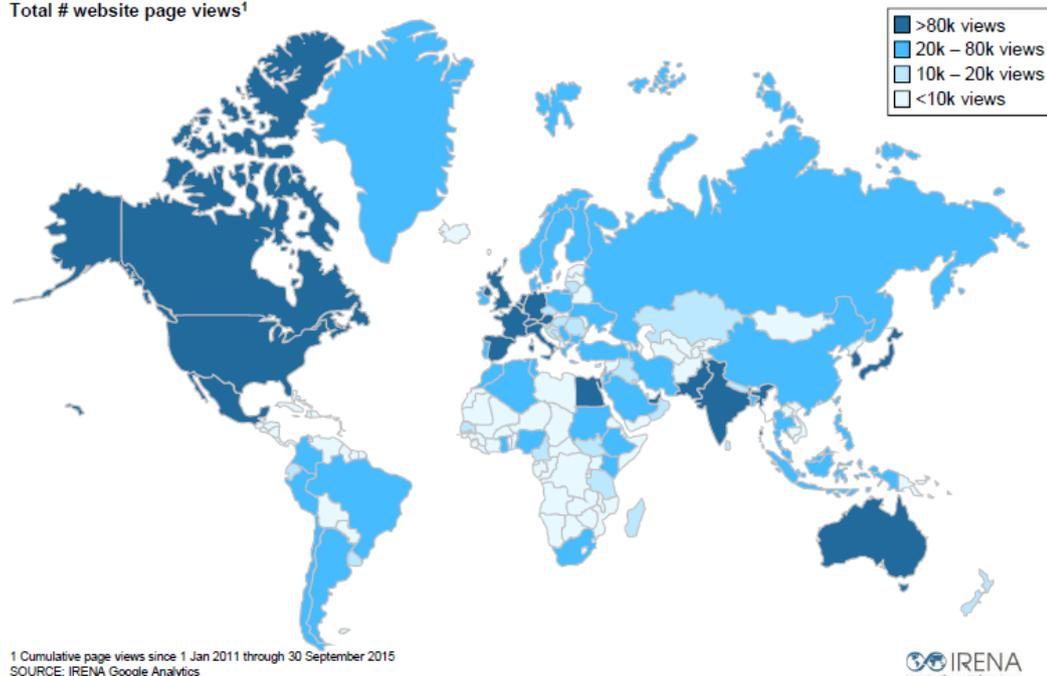
and creation of country and regional networks that can offer continuum and sustained effort to support on the ground implementation of renewable energy plans and strategies.

- f. Engagement with private sector. While mindful of the necessity to remain and to be perceived as impartial, IRENA should bolster its engagement with the private sector. This engagement should include the companies that are developing renewable energy strategies and committing to ambitious targets.
- g. Targeted programmatic activities. In view of the growing demand and limited resources, IRENA should prioritise its programmatic activities on those that are likely to yield the greatest impact, and where IRENA has comparative advantage. Programmatic activities should integrate communication and outreach strategy to facilitate targeted dissemination.

### IRENA Impact Review, 2011-2015

**IRENA's footprint is truly global, providing insights to Members and non-Members alike**

Total # website page views<sup>1</sup>



#### iv. The remaining two years of the MTS will be a decisive period.

15. External evaluation has shown that IRENA has become a credible agency with a global voice for renewable energy that is meeting Members' expectations. IRENA has tested different paths and directions and established a range of successful activities. The Agency should now sharpen its programmatic focus with a clear emphasis on qualitative impact. Both the Agency and the renewable energy sector evolved much faster than anticipated, so the choices made in the coming few years will be decisive in shaping IRENA's place in the global landscape. This period should be used to facilitate dialogue on the future strategic direction of the Agency.

v. **The development of the MTS 2018-2022 should be an inclusive process.**

16. The next medium-term strategy should be developed in close cooperation with Members. This process should also benefit from the engagement of external stakeholders who bring a valuable perspective in shaping the next phase of the Agency.

**IRENA Impact Review, 2011-2015**

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|  <b>Africa Clean Energy Corridor (ACEC)</b><br>Growing renewable energy deployment and investment in Africa to strengthen economic growth, job creation, energy access & bankable projects  |  <b>Environmental &amp; resource sustainability</b><br>Clear messaging on RE benefits on both the environment and for resource sustainability to enable policy-makers   |  <b>REsource / Knowledge hub</b><br>Providing global renewable knowledge in a free and accessible search engine   |
|  <b>Capacity building (cross-cutting activity)</b><br>Improving capacities in institutions to expedite deployment of RE   |  <b>Financing renewables</b><br>A dataset to improve transparency, in collaboration with the GCF, on investment flow, incentives & financial support which underpin RE deployment   |  <b>REmap 2030 &amp; other roadmaps</b><br>A comprehensive roadmap on options for deployment and actions for doubling the global share of renewable energy by 2030                                  |
|  <b>Capacity building for entrepreneurs</b><br>A pilot program focused on building the on-the-ground capacities required for RE deployment in decentralized systems   |  <b>Global Atlas</b><br>The global online compendium of resource maps and resource potential information to assist the private and public sector in prioritization and concept studies  |  <b>Rethinking</b><br>The publication to inform that global debate on the transformative potential of renewable energy technologies and address rising global energy challenges                     |
|  <b>Enabling Regional Action</b><br>Integrating the energy market for renewables and building opportunities in regions: Central America, Pan-Arab, South East Europe, ASEAN   |  <b>GREIN (Global Renewable Energy Islands Network)</b><br>A knowledge hub and best-practice sharing network to improve knowledge of solutions and conditions for investment in renewable energy applications on islands                                |  <b>RRAs (Renewable Readiness Assessments)</b><br>Country-led process to devise country-level forward looking policy & technology plan for renewables deployment                                    |
|  <b>Cities</b><br>Ensuring cities employ RE as a critical component for future plans: a compendium of city-relevant RE information to empower city-level decision makers  |  <b>RE Jobs</b><br>Empowering decision makers with knowledge of renewables job statistics and the other benefits associated with RE deployment  |  <b>SIDS Lighthouses</b><br>Partnerships to accelerate renewable energy deployment in SIDS  |
|  <b>Country support &amp; advisory services</b><br>Needs driven technical analysis, in collaboration with other organizations, to provide tailor made solutions to recommendations made in RRAs  |  <b>Policy analysis &amp; the IRENA / IEA policy database</b><br>In-depth policy analysis, information and regional-market analysis to inform the global debate, bolster the business case for RE and empower decision-makers globally                 |  <b>Standards and Quality Assurance</b><br>Building greater investor confidence by raising awareness on the need to deploy standards and quality assurance policy on a global and national level   |
|  <b>RE Costs</b><br>The global source for renewables cost data for 5 technologies: comprehensive information, tools & analysis of the true cost competitiveness of renewables globally to inform decision making and build the business case for RE |  <b>Power system integration (Planning, grids &amp; storage)</b><br>A comprehensive set of knowledge resources for planning, grids & storage, including roadmaps, guidelines for technologies and stability & variability assessments                 |  <b>Statistics</b><br>The most complete, up-to-date and freely accessible global renewable energy statistics database   |
|  <b>Decentralized energy: Mini-grid, off-grid</b><br>Enabling the deployment of renewables into mini-grids, off-grid and rural electrification through policy assessment, best-practice sharing and a policy database                               |  <b>Project Facilitation</b><br>Facilitating deployment of RE projects by matching investors to projects (Marketplace), assisting managers to create bankable RE project plans (Navigator) and facilitating investment in developing countries (ADFD) |  <b>Technology status &amp; outlook</b><br>A set of briefs and technology status updates with objective information for policy makers, private companies and the public on renewable technologies |
|  <b>Facilitating international cooperation</b><br>Increasing IRENA's visibility and global voice for renewable energy through strategic messaging targeted at global policy and decision-makers   |  <b>Knowledge dissemination</b><br>Ensuring the wide dissemination and access to IRENA activities, reports and materials to amplify impact and bolster the business case for RE amongst many audiences  |  <b>Partnerships</b><br>Enabling the delivery of recommendations and policy-advice at the country and regional level  |

**IV. Conclusions**

17. Based on the feedback received from Members, review of the progress to date, and the conclusion of the external evaluation, the MTS 2013-2017 will remain the guiding framework until its expiration. Programmatic activities will continue to be aligned to reflect global and institutional priorities and the Agency will focus on the strategic goal of being the global voice of renewable energy.

18. The processes that contributed to the MTS review have been instrumental in the development of the Work Programme and Budget for 2016-2017. IRENA has incorporated the feedback received, and reflected the evaluation's outcome in the planned future programmatic activities. To underpin the implementation of the next programmatic cycle and better prioritise programmatic work, IRENA has defined three strategic priorities: 1) continuous emphasis on strengthening the business case of renewable energy; 2) catalysing regional action; and 3) strengthening IRENA's effectiveness through strategic partnerships. These strategic priorities remain true to the MTS 2013-2017 and will further the Agency's mandate as the global voice for renewable energy. With these underpinnings, IRENA will be able to further advance and effectively implement the MTS 2013-2017.

19. The next medium-term strategy will be considered by the Assembly in its eighth session. Building on the ongoing trend of targeted discussions on strategic and programmatic matters, the discussion on the future strategy of the Agency will be integrated in the Council meetings to enable a sustained and inclusive framework of engagement. Discussions will enable a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to the formation of the future direction of the Agency, while highlighting priority areas.