

ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment
High-level Panel on

**“Strengthening the UN development system’s responsiveness
to the different needs of programme countries”**

New York, Thursday, 10 July 2008 (3:00pm – 5:45pm)

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The views I wish to share stem from my experience as Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Pakistan; as well as having served as a UN staff member with an agency, a fund and a programme over the past three decades.

At the outset, I wish to underscore that the efforts to ‘deliver as one’ are yielding positive results; in that there is

- better coordination among UN entities at the country level
- a common understanding of the need to reform
- a stronger team spirit among UN staff; not only among HoAs
- a better alignment with national priorities

The experiences show how much more the UN can be than the sum of its parts. I experienced this first hand in the wake of the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan where the UN’s performance was coherent and cohesive – it was truly impressive.

I want to make two main propositions, namely that (i) while the direction of the reform is good, the speed is not; and that (ii) the effectiveness and efficiency of these efforts can be improved considerably.

I do not under-estimate the complexities involved in reforming the UN development and humanitarian system. Such reforms are not only a technical matter that can be resolved among UN entities. Ultimately, they are political in nature that will need the support of and agreement among member states.

In spite of the complexities, I do believe that reform can – and must – quicken its pace; that reform can – and must – result into more tangible outcomes; and that reform can – and must – reduce transaction costs.

Two important aspects need urgent attention in my view to foster UN reform at the country level.

First, progress towards the four ‘Ones’ is uneven. It is most encouraging vis-à-vis the ‘One Programme’, the ‘One Budget’ and the ‘One Leader’. It is least impressive for the ‘One Office’ – which not only includes the common premises but the all-important business practices such as procurement, human resources, financial reporting, and IT platforms.

Seen from the perspective of the country level, one year of piloting frequently looked like ‘Reform without Change’ – when you are being asked to reform but you cannot change much – particularly not when it comes to existing business practices.

Thus, real progress is being made towards ‘programming as one’; ‘funding as one’ and ‘acting as one’; but the ultimate goal is to ‘deliver as one’. ‘Delivering as one’ will remain an elusive goal if we do not see much faster, more pro-active and more determined engagement from headquarters on the ‘One Office’ – both interagency wise and intergovernment wise.

Everyone will agree that it is not a sound business proposition for country offices to pilot with corporate business practices. Such matters are global in scope and must be addressed globally – this means at headquarters. That is an area that cannot be omitted from the proposed evaluation of the 8 pilots. We need to look more closely how hard headquarters, Executive Boards and Governing Bodies worked towards UN reform, especially vis-à-vis the ‘One Office’.

The second aspect that needs our attention – apart from the ‘One Office’ – is the fragmentation in the UN programme. The UN’s portfolio of projects at the country level is often a series of interventions that are considered as important from the perspective of either individual UN entities, or individual government departments, or individual donors. The result is seldom an UNDAF that is sharply focused or strategically positioned. It will take a well coordinated government; a more focused UN and disciplined donorship to lessen the degree of fragmentation and to solidify the cohesiveness of the UN at the country level.

Two steps can be considered to help overcome fragmentation.

The first one is to apply the principle of subsidiarity more strongly in managing the UN’s development and humanitarian work. It stems directly from the principle of national ownership. Decision-making authority must come closer to the level where the action takes place – i.e. with the UNCT and the respective national or sub-national authorities. Adequate authority – accompanied by adequate accountability – must be given to the UNCT and the RC. ‘Management without Authority’ will not yield the desired results after 2 years of piloting at the country level – no matter how hard they labour at it.

The second step is to adapt the incentives for UN staff to promote change and to practice UN reform. Ultimately, it is the UN staff who will either foster or delay the change we seek in the UN. At present, the incentive structure continues to be agency-specific. Reporting lines remain within the organisation. Colleagues and supervisors at the regional and global levels tend to pay more attention to how well country-level staff promote and implement agency-centric priorities and positions – which may not necessarily fit with the national priorities or with a strategically focused UNDAF. In truth, there are few awards for staff to practice UN reform at the country level. Stronger incentives will be essential to change the mindsets needed for ‘delivering as one’.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the priorities that occur at this juncture to foster the UN to 'deliver as one' at the country level include: (i) unifying the business practices; (ii) applying the subsidiarity principle more consistently; and (iii) streamlining staff incentives so that they become the change we want to see in the UN.

Thank you.