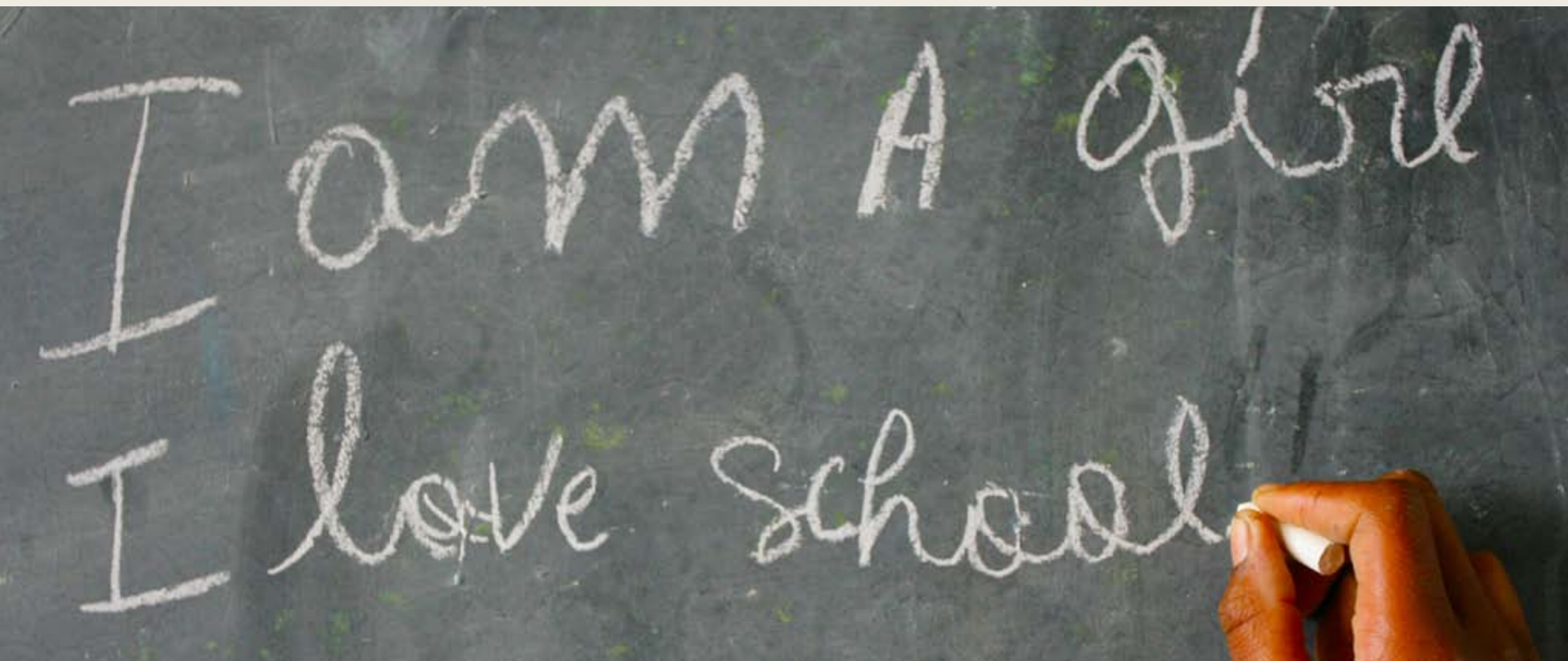


Empowering the United Nations system to act on the United Nations Development Agenda



UN Photo, Kibae Park

1 Leadership, coordination and accountability: evaluating the United Nations system's work on gender equality and women's empowerment



► Background

A panel discussion focused on “Leadership, coordination and accountability: evaluating the United Nations system’s work on gender equality and women’s empowerment” was organized as part of the 2011 ECOSOC session held in Geneva, in order to provide an opportunity for dialogue on the progress made by United Nations agencies in the mainstreaming of gender equality.

The discussion highlighted the leadership of the newly-created United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN) in streamlining gender-sensitive policies and coordinated efforts to promote gender equality throughout the United Nations system, as called for by UN WOMEN's founding resolution and, subsequently, by the adoption of the 2010 ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration on "Implementing the internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women."

The panel further emphasized the increased role of United Nations funds and programmes, specialized agencies, and, in particular, of UN WOMEN, in the standardization of gender-sensitive organizational norms, policies and programmes throughout the United Nations system. Furthermore, the dialogue served to express and define priorities, in order to scale up successful practices and address the remaining challenges for the development of a more comprehensive and holistic approach to the gender dimension in the works of the organization, as a whole.

► Discussion

Leadership role of UN WOMEN

One year ago, the establishment of UN WOMEN signalled a great momentum of political will for the revitalization and prioritization of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Its founding resolution comprised it with the "additional role of leading, coordinating and promoting the accountability of the United Nations system in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women", and the entity has been honouring such commitment since its creation.

In conjunction with UN WOMEN's establishment, the adoption of the 2010 ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration on "Implementing the



internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women” fostered an unprecedented opportunity to advance efforts in cross-agency cooperation and coherence, as well as in the mainstreaming of a gender perspective throughout the United Nations system. Both of these landmark achievements came about as part of a broader United Nations reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates, which allow the Organization to have greater impact in the lives of women and girls around the world.

Consequently, UN WOMEN has been actively engaged in addressing the need for increased collaboration of United Nations agencies in both the normative and operational dimensions of their work. The agency’s activities and leadership role during the year since its creation have contributed to the development of more coherent and efficient ways of using the expertise, experience, resources and competitive advantages of sister agencies in advancing the cause of gender equality.

UN WOMEN has also intensified efforts to strengthen cooperation between United Nations agencies and the Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other international mechanisms for the protection of women and will continue to support their measures to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women. Furthermore, the agency has also worked on highlighting the importance of including internationally agreed principles of gender equality throughout the system’s policies and activities, emphasizing the importance of the Beijing Platform of Action, the Cairo Consensus and the Millennium Declaration, particularly with regard to MDGs 3 and 5.

UN WOMEN’s efforts in this area are critical for achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women and the reduction of poverty worldwide; yet, the entity cannot make progress alone. Additionally,

mainstreaming a gender perspective throughout the system allows the entity to reach vulnerable women all over the world by working through sister agencies in countries other than the 78 where UN WOMEN has direct presence on the ground.

Progress to date

The mainstreaming of gender equality across all agencies and at all levels of the United Nations system is critical for the progress in achieving gender equality, eliminating violence against women and empowering their participation in the social, political and economic spheres of society. Considerable progress has been made in this regard. Initiatives by UN WOMEN, UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, UNFPA and WHO, among other United Nations agencies to scale up efforts for coherence, partnerships and collaboration, including the incorporation of a gender-sensitive perspective into their agendas, strategic plans, policies and programmes, are already yielding positive results.

In this regard, joint reports, joint programming and joint programmes continue to be greatly encouraged, as to avoid duplication, enhance the effectiveness of programmes, ensure clear division of labour and make the best use of agencies’ expertise and strengths. These components, encompassing a multi-faceted and multi-stakeholder approach, are crucial to maximize the impacts of United Nations policies and programmes on the ground. It is important to note that progress in this area could not have been made possible without the political will and support shown by Member States, along with the increased willingness of agencies to leave branding behind, in order to prioritize having a greater impact on the ground.

Furthermore, coherence at the international, regional and country levels has increased by utilizing mechanisms, such as executive director meetings and the Global Inter-Agency Network for Women



UN Photo, Eric Kanalstein

and Girls, regional frameworks and regional coordinators, as well as resident coordinator programmes, respectively. These initiatives have sought to incorporate a gender perspective in all United Nations activities, keeping in mind that the greatest challenges for gender mainstreaming have been observed at the country level, where the work of agencies has the greatest interface with governmental, cultural and social norms.

Initiatives, such as H4+ (comprised of UNFPA, UNICEF, the World Bank, WHO, as well as UNAIDS), were cited as great examples of inter-agency collaboration, cooperation and coherence. *Delivering as One* was also noted as a groundbreaking approach, which has translated into increased effectiveness, strengthening of harmonized practices and greater cohesion. Furthermore, the activities of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) have also greatly contributed to the promotion of coordination, leadership and coherence across the system.

It was also noted that examples of successful initiatives in specific programmes or areas have been underpinned by clear division of labour, development of common strategies and coherent plans, as well as increased focus on maximizing comparative advantages and great emphasis on national leadership and ownership.

UNFPA and UNICEF, for example, joined forces on their work to raise awareness of the dangers of female genital mutilation, utilizing each agency's expertise to tackle this sensitive issue. Another great example of inter-agency collaboration is the "Safe Cities" initiative, which brought similar projects previously led by UNICEF, UN HABITAT and UN WOMEN, forming a more solid and coherent initiative.

Partnerships with other stakeholders have also proven greatly beneficial. UNFPA, for example, has made great strides in partnering with faith-based organizations, in order to expand its reach at the

country level. Similarly, many agencies have boosted efforts in partnering with the private sector, benefiting not only from their financial contributions but also from their skills and management experience. This has led to enhanced effectiveness, identifying the actors better suited to contribute in specific areas.

All of these initiatives have generated valuable opportunities for wider system-wide coherence, joint gender policies and projects and it is vital to enhance the visibility of such success stories and build upon them, in order to show the outcomes and results of efforts in this area and mobilize further support and resources.

Funding

In order for UN WOMEN and all United Nations agencies to realize their full potential and fulfil the high expectations set forth by their mandates, they must count on the necessary tools and appropriate funding. It is imperative to address the challenges of inadequate financial and human resources, in order to make further progress in the mainstreaming of gender equality throughout the United Nations system.

Although the creation of UN WOMEN served as a catalyst to mobilize funding for the gender-equality agenda for its initial activities, it must strive to keep the momentum to secure stable and predictable financial resources necessary for the work of the agency.

Greater efficiency achieved through increased use of competitive advantages is a great incentive to mobilize donations for this area. Funding is, after all, a critical factor for ensuring accountability, as well as an area which can benefit from joint programmes and system-wide coherence. Cooperation, coordination and clear division of labour by agencies in areas relating to gender equality lead to the reduction of duplication, a more efficient use of resources and faster progress in specific areas targeted, which has resulted in the

development of more effective programmes, utilizing the strengths and experience of each agency. The increased effectiveness of such initiatives, in turn, has great potential for attracting additional financial resources.

Accountability

The United Nations system, as a whole, remains fully committed to strengthening accountability processes and mechanisms to adequately assess progress and gaps with regard to gender mainstreaming at all levels. As such, United Nations agencies will continue promoting support, monitoring and capacity-building programmes, in order to foster a culture of accountability and transparency.

As agencies seek to advance in this area, however, it must be emphasized that a comprehensive approach is needed. We must no longer view accountability as a mechanism of punishment but rather as a useful process for assessing gaps, while paying particular attention to incentivizing and highlighting success stories. The development of a more holistic approach to gender markers, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms can then, in turn, lead not only to the identification of remaining challenges but also to the acceleration, replication and scaling up of effective initiatives.

Additionally, it was emphasized that accountability and effectiveness are only possible, if the necessary investment in building competencies and capacities is made. Efforts focused on providing the necessary gender-sensitive tools include standardized measures and policies, training of new recruits, sensitization of managers and accessibility of staff to relevant information and e-learning materials. The United Nations system should also continue to explore innovative ways to increase accountability, including through the increased role of ECOSOC as a forum to mandate and report on accountability

measures, as well as by exploring the creation of accountability commissions for specific programmes and initiatives.

Overall, accountability was stressed as an area that has seen advances but remains a major challenge in the implementation of gender-sensitive policies. In order to achieve substantial advances in this area, we must begin to see progress in terms of improvements in the lives of women and girls, which are more difficult to measure yet, critically important to take into account. To achieve further progress in this area, United Nations agencies will continue promoting a culture of accountability, with a particular focus on the integration of gender sensitive policies in the works of the organization at all levels.

Way forward

- United Nations agencies must continue to draw from their combined strengths to support their national partners, ensuring that all actors, policies and operational activities follow a gender-sensitive perspective, in accordance with the principles of gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- Member States are urged to provide the necessary funding and continue to mainstream the gender agenda across their ministries, national institutions, national plans and strategies and budget allocation, in order to continue progress in the achievement of gender equality.
- The donor community is urged to continue and scale up their support for mainstreaming initiatives, enabling agencies to invest in building competencies and capabilities at all levels, including through the increase of voluntary unearmarked funding.
- United Nations agencies should further undertake efforts for capacity-building at the country and regional levels, as well as at Headquarters, including training for new recruits, management sensitization, the development of gender-sensitive e-learning materials and the employment of gender experts to support, monitor and evaluate efforts at the country level.
- Agencies must build on lessons learned, replicate successful efforts of inter-agency cooperation in specific countries, programmes and issues, as well as in general planning, drafting of reports, data gathering and policy development.
- UN WOMEN should continue its work to translate normative advances and standards into the operational realities.
- Accountability measures, such as gender markers and evaluations and the creation of gender units should continue being developed, while paying particular attention to efforts to accelerate, scale up and replicate successful initiatives.
- Agencies should continue the development of gender-sensitive strategic plans, coordinated country-level programmes, collection of desegregated data and effective analysis of data through a gender-sensitive lens.
- Agencies should facilitate cooperation and coherence by encouraging joint programmes, joint programming and joint reports.
- All initiatives must maintain focus on country ownership and partnerships at the national level.
- All stakeholders should promote attention to issues disproportionately affecting women and girls, as well as to issues of particular relevance to gender mainstreaming and increased system-wide coherence.

Conclusion

No endeavour by the United Nations to promote peace and security, development and human rights can succeed without applying a gender perspective; and we must see coherence, leadership and accountability and prerequisites for effectiveness in this area.

As a result, coherence and cooperation among agencies will keep on playing a key role in all activities of the United Nations system. Together, United Nations agencies will continue to promote understanding of gender equality as a core issue of cross-cutting nature, while remaining aware that efforts in this area require time, resources, patience and perseverance.

Furthermore, the key to accelerating progress in gender issues will be to continue encouraging a non-traditional outlook, which incorporates innovative approaches to the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all policies and programmes. United Nations agencies, under the able leadership of UN WOMEN, will continue to address the remaining challenges and gaps in the incorporation of a gender perspective across the United Nations system, in order to harness full benefits of their work and expertise.

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2 Dialogue with Executive Heads of United Nations funds and programmes: “Looking to the future of operational activities for development of funds and programmes: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats”

Background

The Economic and Social Council holds an annual dialogue with the Executive Heads of funds and programmes as part of its discussions on the United Nations system’s operational activities. The objective of the dialogue is to keep under review the progress made by funds and programmes in implementing the General Assembly guidance on the United Nations system’s operational activities for development.



UN Photo, Christopher Herwig

This year's dialogue presented an opportunity to reflect on the priorities of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of the United Nations system's operational activities (QCPR) to be conducted by the General Assembly in 2012. Ms. Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN WOMEN, and Mr. Babatunde Osotimehim, Executive Director of UNFPA, joined the dialogue for the first time, along with Miss Helen Clark, Administrator of UNDP, Mr. Martin Mogwanja, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and Mr. Ramiro Lopes da Silva, Deputy Executive Director of WFP.

Overview

The annual dialogue between ECOSOC and the Executive Heads of the United Nations funds and programmes focused on "Looking to

the future of operational activities for development of funds and programmes: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats." The discussion highlighted the challenges faced by the United Nations development system in a changing development landscape, as well as innovative solutions applied by the funds and programmes. The Executive Heads showed strong commitment to strengthen results through improved coherence, effectiveness and efficiency. Important areas that could be addressed in the upcoming QCPR of the United Nations operational activities were also recommended.

Discussion

Shifting approach in a changing development landscape

Against a backdrop of heightened risk of development setbacks and financial austerity, funds and programmes must identify the emerging opportunities and work strategically together, in order to be "fit for purpose" in the twenty-first century. New opportunities rest with the growing number of development actors and the increasing use of new technologies, which makes citizens' voices heard. The United Nations system should improve its systems to share what it knows about policies that work and to learn, in order to address the shifting needs and concerns of countries and citizens. The convening power and impartiality of the United Nations also ensure the connection between the changing development needs/solutions and global consultations.

With increasing funding constraints, United Nations support must target initiatives that have catalytic impact, for example, investment in women and girls and activities that maximize the synergies across different strands of development work, i.e., those addressing security, peace and development holistically. Countries developing new United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), the Delivering as One pilot countries, countries having voluntarily

adopted this approach, as well as countries emerging from conflict or crisis provide ground for testing innovative solutions.

The special needs of the LDCs should be addressed as a priority. United Nations operational activities should continue to focus on the LDCs, in order to strengthen national capacity. The slowness and inefficiency of national systems in LDCs are often times used as a pretext for not using them. It is, therefore, critical to improve national systems rather than bypass them. On the other hand, the United Nations must be reminded that the middle-income countries (MICs) are home to the largest vulnerable population. The needs of MICs should not be forgotten. Resources raised domestically are of primary importance in those countries.

Reinforcing results orientation

The United Nations system should strengthen efforts to demonstrate results and impact. With the support of measureable indicators, the United Nations needs to explain to the public how it has taken up the challenges. In the same vein, the United Nations needs to move its agenda to improve system-wide coherence from a process to a results-orientation approach, which should be reflected in the upcoming General Assembly review of the QCPR.

However, in practice, results are not always measurable. For example, it is difficult to measure cultural change. Attributing a result to a specific contribution is always challenging. Country-specific reporting is sensitive. Therefore, the United Nations system must “get the balance right”. It is important that the United Nations measure results and monitor progress in a way that does not add burden to national governments.

To maximize results, the United Nations should use normative principles agreed internationally and rigorous, evidence-based decision-making to guide its actions. It requires a more coherent



UN Photo, Sophia Paris

approach to identifying, monitoring and reporting on results at Headquarters. At the country level, an empowered United Nations Resident Coordinator (RC) is critical. By recognizing and utilizing the comparative strengths of respective agencies, the United Nations country team (UNCT), led by the RC, can achieve the greatest and more efficient results.

At a time when the United Nations has fewer resources, achieving results more efficiently requires organizations to rely on each other and recognize/apply comparative strengths, through mutual learning, building partnerships and streamlining processes. However, there are administrative and human resources hurdles. Initiatives to reduce such obstacles, for example, joint workplan and harmonization of business practices should be given continuous support.

In fact, the United Nations system organizations have achieved notable progress in working together in the field, for example, in the area of maternal health, but clear tools and indicators are needed to show that global commitments were translated into specific actions and results. In this connection, Member States also need to coordinate with each other, to ensure that development assistance works best.

Building partnerships within, and beyond, the United Nations for greater results

Partnership with all actors is of paramount importance for a nimble and effective United Nations system. Partnerships need to build on national leadership, comparative advantage and MDGs. Other actors, including the emerging economies and foundations, play an increasingly important role in development cooperation.

The business models of the United Nations should be reviewed in this context. The United Nations organizations should conceive their support as part of the comprehensive development challenge and not as “individual champions of bits of the development agenda”. Small operations lead to thinly distributed resources, leaving little space for policy dialogue.

Partnership within the United Nations system has shown great value in addressing cross-cutting challenges. Supporting gender equality and women’s empowerment offers a tremendous opportunity for the United Nations system to work collectively. Essential for collective success is the development of effective leadership and accountability, which requires strengthened partnerships, joint programming and adequate and predictable resources.

Nutrition is another area where collaboration has been successful. United Nations system organizations used to work alone, leading to unsustainable and unsystematic nutrition programmes. Changes

are under way. REACH, a facility to bring all stakeholders together to combat child undernutrition, is a success story of partnership. Each agency under REACH focuses on what it can do best, leveraging its core competencies and comparative advantages. The breath and depth of United Nations presence, as well as the complementarities of its mandates, ensured the success of REACH.

Joint programming has many advantages. Experiences from joint programming on gender equality among United Nations system agencies show the potential to bring implementing partners closer and thus, avoid the situation where United Nations agencies and line ministries work in silos. Joint programming also leads to greater national ownership and better alignment with national priorities. At the same time, it is important to evaluate more systematically the impact of initiatives in bringing agencies together to contribute to gender equality. UN WOMEN is making efforts in collaboration with other United Nations organizations to undertake a joint evaluation of joint programming. UNFPA is also investing in strategic partnerships and, at the same time, improving its evaluation, monitoring and oversight so as to enhance accountability.

Improving funding system and allocation

The results and impact of the United Nations system cannot be achieved without adequate and predictable funding. The fact that the United Nations continues to rely primarily on the contribution of 10 donors raises an alarm. All donors, as well as emerging economies and other actors, can play a more important role in contributing to the core activities of the United Nations. On the other hand, the United Nations system should pay greater attention to the effective use of resources.



UN Photo, M. Wild

The challenges posed by the imbalance between core and non-core funding are many. United Nations system's funding is, to a larger extent, earmarked. It limits the flexibility to serve the populations whose needs are unmet. Earmarked funding is also supporting smaller scale interventions. These should be addressed in future discussions in relation to improving outcomes and results.

Funding allocation is suboptimal. Gender equality remained underinvested. The United Nations must increase significantly the priority it gives to investments in the area of gender equality. Gender markers should be institutionalized across the United Nations system to enable it to account for its support to gender equality.

Ways should be explored to fund the cost of coordination. Coordination is important but underfunded. However, there was a perception that the current coordination costs are high. Some donors are not willing to fund coordination functions, which have an impact on the functioning of the Resident Coordinator system (RCS). UNDP is making efforts to bridge the gaps. Cost-sharing among United Nations agencies is a way to fund the RCS.

One United Nations Fund and the MDG Fund (MDG-F) are modalities conducive to joint programming among United Nations system organizations. However, these funding modalities are subject to uncertainties. It was felt necessary to set aside funds to provide incentive for coordination. Regardless of such funding, funds and programmes should remain committed to coordination.

Strengthening TCPR implementation and QCPR preparations

There is a need to accelerate the implementation of the 2007 Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR). Specialized agencies should be engaged more closely in the follow-up to the TCPR. With one year left for implementation, areas where progress can be achieved more easily should be identified.

The QCPR should take some distance from a process-oriented approach and focus on results. This can be done by using evaluations to identify how the processes can make an impact. The QCPR should also take into account, among others, an equity-focused approach, ways to streamline UNDAF process, and ensure UNDAFs are context specific. Rational agency participation, streamlining, planning, monitoring and reporting requirements and lessons learned from the "Delivering as one" are also important.

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