

Informal Summary

Operational activities segment

Panel discussion with the UN Regional Directors Team of Latin America and the Caribbean on effectiveness of the United Nations development system at the regional level

Geneva, 11 July

Chair:

H.E. Mr. Idriss Jazaïry (Algeria), Acting Vice-President of the Council

Moderator:

Mr. Denis Aitken, Representative of the Director-General for Partnerships and UN Reform, WHO

Panelists:

Mr. Valdrack Jaentschke, Vice-Minister for Cooperation, Nicaragua

Mr. José Luis Machinea, Executive Secretary, ECLAC

Ms. Rebeca Grynspan, Assistant Administrator and Regional Director, UNDP/LAC

Mr. Nils Kastberg, Regional Director, UNICEF/LAC

Ms. Marcela Suazo, Regional Director, UNFPA/LAC

1. INTRODUCTION

Following brief introductory remarks by the chair of the meeting, **H.E. Mr. Idriss Jazaïry**, the moderator **Mr. Denis Aitken** welcomed the Vice-Minister for Cooperation from Nicaragua, the Executive Secretary of ECLAC and members of the Regional Directors Team (RDT). He recalled that the Latin America team, which was going to present its efforts to enhance coordination and cooperation at the regional level, was a frequently quoted example of successful cooperation at the regional level. He said that their work demonstrated that the dichotomy between the funds and programmes and the specialized agencies had dematerialized, at least in the Latin American region.

2. PRESENTATIONS BY THE PANELISTS

Mr. Valdrack Jaentschke (Nicaragua) said that the MDGs are only a minimum basis for development. He noted that at the mid-point towards the 2015 target date, progress achieved toward the Goals was not very encouraging, as inequalities were increasing and not decreasing between and within countries. He said that in Latin America poverty had decreased and a few countries were projected to meet the MDGs. But many groups of society had not benefitted from the progress. He added that this was also true for Nicaragua. To improve the situation, there needs to be new ideas, commitments and cooperation between the poor and rich countries. We must leave behind a lack of focus and splintering of aid and strengthen the UN system capacity to assist developing countries. He reiterated that the universal and voluntary nature and the neutrality of the UN should remain a hallmark of UN system assistance. Priority should be given

to the strengthening of ownership and realignment with national priorities. He also stressed the importance of reducing duplication.

Mr. José Luis Machinea (ECLAC) said that the role of the regional commissions, as the regional outposts of the United Nations, was to promote the UN development agenda and to promote regional cooperation. **Mr Machinea** noted that to strengthen coordination of policy formulation and to avoid duplication within the region, regional coordination meetings had been held since 2004/5 to formulate a common UN response. In addition, he reported that the UN system had closely cooperated on the regional MDG progress report and that ECLAC was carrying out the role of an analytical back-up for many of the UN agencies. With regard to coordination of technical cooperation, he said that ECLAC was participating in Resident Coordinator meetings to exchange information and share knowledge. With regard to policy content, he noted that a major challenge for the region was to create a balance between aid going to social and productive areas and to address the worrisome trend of decreasing ODA to the region, given the large number of people still living in poverty. He called for a joint effort of the UN system and donors to reverse the declining ODA trend.

Ms. Rebeca Grynszpan (UNDP), reminded participants that while Latin America was a middle income region, poverty remained a major concern, including in the high-middle income countries, where 60% of the poor live. She recalled that the mission of the RDT¹ was to enhance UN system-wide coherence at the regional level and to support UNCTs at the country level to achieve sustainable human development. She presented four main pillars to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the UN and to build a common agenda with joint objectives and leadership: First, strategic programme support; second, a regional action plan; third, appraisal, accountability, feed back and support on the CCA/UNDAF progress and fourth, the creation of a UN knowledge sharing platform. She reported that the results of the measures taken today included: putting the MDGs firmly on the political agenda of the countries; progress in disaggregating data, which is of particular importance given the large inequalities in the region; establishing a Regional Interagency Standing Committee on emergencies; providing guidance on HIV/AIDS; establishing a task force for the development of an interagency knowledge sharing platform; and conducting a joint review and appraisal of Resident Coordinator / UN country team performance. She said that challenges remaining for the future included advancing co-location of offices; providing stronger substantive and operational support to UN country teams; supporting the UN Coordination Function; strengthening the interagency regional perspective; providing support to UN pilots and Joint Offices; enhancing South-South Cooperation and advancing the recognition of the role of the UN family in middle-income countries.

Ms. Marcela Suazo (UNFPA), said that the RDT recognized the challenge of working in a middle income countries where global progress has been made towards the MDGs, but where large inequalities remained. Joint and coordinated work is a sine qua non for the region as well as for the team. She recalled that in 2003 the three Ex-Com agencies, which had since been joined by other UN agencies, had identified four key areas of joint action: First, a response to the General Assembly within the framework of the TCPR; second, processes aimed at strengthening accountability and feed-back on action at the national level. Third, providing support for strategic programming and guiding the UNCTs to help them meet national priorities. In this regard, she cited the example of maternal health and HIV/AIDS. The fourth priority area is interagency support and coordination in crisis and emergency situations for which the “Risk Emergency, Disaster task force for Latin America and the Caribbean” (REDLAC) was created. She also said

¹ Core RDT: UNICEF,UNDP,UNFPA,WFP,UNAIDS, PAHO,ECLAC, OCHA,UNIFEM,OHCHR,ILO (FAO,UN Habitat and UNHCR and other agencies are participating depending on the agenda)

that RDT was supporting the “One UN” pilot in Uruguay and was working actively on strengthening efforts to co-locate facilities in the “city of knowledge” in Panama.

Mr. Nils Kastberg (UNICEF) explained that the RDT was trying to build regional ownership by closely working together with other regional organizations. He cited the examples of the eradication of cholera and the feminization of HIV/AIDS. **Mr. Kastberg** stated that Brazil wanted to provide expertise in the area of HIV/AIDS to other developing countries but donors did not have a mechanism to support the proposed activity. This illustrated that the current development cooperation set up is not suited to support South-South cooperation. With regard to the dwindling ODA to middle income countries, he cited a letter by President Arias of Costa Rica who called upon the UN system to stay engaged in his country to speed up the alleviation of poverty. **Mr. Kastberg** noted that the United Nations did not require large funds but that the continuation of a minimum of funding, to be used in a strategic manner, was essential to influence key public policy decisions. He also noted that influencing the public policy process will require presence in Latin America, including at the municipal level and that this was often wrongly seen as a proliferation of UN offices. As the previous panelists, **Mr. Kastberg** stressed the importance of addressing the needs of the most vulnerable groups of society. He also briefly touched on the issue of emergencies and the central emergency relief fund (CERF). He said the UN’s capacity to assist countries in preparing for recurring catastrophes and emergencies was hampered by the fact that the CERF could only be accessed once a catastrophe had hit a country. The TCPR could consider how to broaden the terms of the CERF to address this constraint.

3. DISCUSSION

Following the presentations by the panelists, **Belgium** and the **Philippines** asked the RDT to provide examples of the **benefits of the new RDT structure** such as elimination of duplication, facilitation of staff mobility, higher satisfaction from programme countries and evidence of savings. **Indonesia** requested the RDT to elaborate on how the experience of the RDT team in the LAC region could be applied in its own region. **Ms. Grynspan** said that good coordination at regional level can significantly help to improve coordination within countries, for instance through quality assurances of the CCA/UNDAF. Good coordination at the regional level can also help to better leverage knowledge and capacity that exists within the UN system. **Ms. Marcela (UNFPA)** said that the recent Declaration of Managua (an outcome of the workshop on coherence) will enable the RDT to initiate a dialogue to establish priority frameworks for the region which in turn will allow dialogues at the national level. The RDT can help in the advocacy of topics such as gender or indigenous populations. In response to **Bolivia** and **Canada**, which asked which mechanisms the RDT was envisaging to assess the success of its coordination efforts, **Ms. Grynspan** said that a proper evaluation system had yet to be put in place, but that this was not easy.

With regard to the **coordination of the RDT with other UN system entities**, the **Philippines** asked how ECLAC and other non-resident agencies (NRAs) were placed in the new structure. **Indonesia** asked Mr. Machinea to elaborate on how he saw ECLAC’s role in the new structure. **Mexico** asked the panelists to elaborate on their cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions. **Mr. Machinea** said that at the global level, there was lack of recognition of the importance of the regional level of development. Cooperation had improved at regional level. Major improvements had been achieved with regards to cooperation between the regional and country levels. **Mr. Kastberg** stressed that ECLAC provided in particular analytical support for the funds and programmes and that there ‘were exchanges which did not take place before’. **Ms. Grynspan (UNDP)** said that the RDT tried to cooperate with regional intergovernmental bodies.

It was also hoping to open up spaces for discussion, analysis and meeting at the regional level for governments as well as civil society.

Canada asked about the role of the RDT in **the implementation of the TCPR resolution**, such as the guidance of the UNDG gender task force. **Mr. Kastberg (UNICEF)** explained that UNDG guidance went directly to the UNCTs. But the RDT was ensuring that cross-cutting issues relevant across the region, such as gender and indigenous issues, were adequately reflected in the CCA/UNDAFs.

With regard to the **establishment of a regional-hub** in Panama and the co-location of offices, **Sweden** and **Canada** said they welcomed the regional support hubs. **Sweden** said that ideally, in the future, there should be fully integrated regional hubs bringing together resources for CCA/UNDAF oversight and quality support. Those hubs should link to Regional Commissions for analytical support. **Mr. Kastberg** noted that co-location facilitated cooperation among the UN system entities. A concrete example would for instance be to send a joint mission to a country rather than everyone going on its own.

Barbados, Haiti and Bolivia expressed their concern about the ability of the RDT to support all the countries of the region with their diverse needs from one regional hub in Panama. In response, **Ms. Marcela** said that the decision to locate the UN regional hub in Panama was based on a feasibility study. **Ms. Grynspan** said that despite the importance of the regional efforts, one should not lose sight of the fact that the UNCTs had the most important contact with the countries and that the RDT worked through the UNCTs. **Ms. Grynspan** also explained, in response to Barbados, that all RDT members had structures for the Caribbean and that the RDT was supporting the efforts of these offices from the regional level. At the same time, she acknowledged that the concerns of the Caribbean countries still needed to figure more prominently in regional strategies.

Belgium asked whether there was any **obstacle at central level preventing the RDT from working together** effectively. **Ms. Grynspan** said that one example was that the various agencies were using different information systems.

Belgium also asked the RDT to elaborate on whether the same good interaction which was seen at the regional level could also be observed at the country level. **Mr. Valdrack Jaentschke (Nicaragua)** noted that agencies had problems to agree at the national level as agencies had their own priorities.

Canada was interested to learn more on what kind of guidance the TCPR could give in the area of **disaster risk reduction**. **Mr. Kastberg** cited the example of the recurring droughts in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay: much could be achieved with US\$ 5 million, in particular for the indigenous population, if the CERF could also be accessed to prepare for reoccurring crises.

With reference to the **coordinating role of ECOSOC**, **Mexico** suggested that ECOSOC establish a multi-year programme for addressing MDGs, and that reports such as the ECLAC's recent MDG report could be aligned with this work. **Mr. Machinea** noted that up to now ECLAC had been arranging its work around the MDGs and had looked at specific MDGs in greater depth in different years. He said that the idea of aligning the work of ECLAC with the priorities on the ECOSOC agenda was a good one. Also on the role of ECOSOC, **Costa Rica** said that while the 2007 ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration had just been adopted, the RDT should reflect on the messages it is sending.

Costa Rica asked the panelists to elaborate on the **crucial factors of the progress** made towards the MDGs in Latin America and the role of the UN system organizations. **Saint Kitts and Nevis** asked how the RDT would support the country in addressing growing problems such as unemployment or crime. **Haiti** said that in the Latin American and Caribbean region, it was the country in greatest need of technical assistance and capacity building.

More generally, **Colombia** expressed its concern that there is a lack of awareness by the international community of **the need to support middle income countries** in achieving the MDGs. It inquired how the support of the UN system to these countries could be made more tangible. **Mr. Valdrack Jaentschke (Nicaragua)** said that a large part of the people are remaining poor regardless of the impressive progress made in UN system coordination at the regional level. There was a problem in the way poverty is measured. He cautioned against micromanaging countries' development and putting conditionalities. **Mr. Machinea (ECLAC)** agreed with Costa Rica that despite sustained economic growth, the number of poor had remained high in Latin America, given the high level of inequalities. This required the urgent attention of the international community. At the same time, he pointed out that better quality social policies and social institutions had been put in place.

With regard to decreasing foreign assistance, **Mexico** said it stopped receiving funds based on its GDP figures. Mexico suggested that instead of basing their decision on GDP figures, Executive Boards could also take into consideration the challenge of inequality which Mexico and other middle income countries were facing. **Mr. Kastberg** concurred with Mexico that ECOSOC could invite Agencies Executive Boards to review the criteria that they use to define Middle Income Countries. On ODA, the **Philippines** and **Barbados** asked what had been the main cause for the decline of ODA to the region and how this could be addressed.

Mr. Machinea emphasized the importance of a successful conclusion of the Doha Development Round, without which middle income countries would be very hard hit, especially if coupled with decreases in ODA. He noted that middle income countries do not only benefit, but also contribute to development in the context of South-South Cooperation.

Overall, **Ms. Grynspan** concluded that while significant progress had been made, we cannot afford to be complacent. **Mr. Valdrack Jaentschke** said that the Panel had shown that not all was rosy and that the challenge of assisting middle income countries needed to be treated seriously.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mr. Aitken, in his concluding remarks, said that, for WHO, not having a regional dimension to an issues was unthinkable, noting that regional responses were often quicker and were able to take into account the different needs of countries much more easily.

In his closing remarks, **H.E. Mr. Idriss Jazaïry** said that, by the nature of the topic, the panel had been long on process and short on outcome. He said that another session would be needed to hear from the RDT how this "acting together" which they had described during the discussion had lead to concrete changes in outcomes. He said that the problems that middle income countries were facing today would be the problems which other developing countries would have to deal with in the future. In some cases, new problems arose as development advanced (e.g. drug control or domestic violence). The key problem of how to address the growing gap between the rich and the poor, which the Latin American region is grappling with today, is around the corner for many African countries.