

Informal summary of
“Dialogue with the Heads of Funds and Programmes”
ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment

10.00 a.m. – 1.00p.m, 16 July 2009

Geneva

Chairperson and Moderator:

H.E. Mrs. Carmen Maria Gallardo Hernández, Vice-President of ECOSOC

Panel Members:

- **Ms. Helen Clark, Administrator of UNDP**
- **Ms. Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA**
- **Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF**
- **Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Deputy Executive Director of the World Food Programme**

In her introduction, the Vice-President, highlighted the importance of the dialogue with Executive Heads through which the Council exercises its role as the principal body to coordinate, economic, social, humanitarian and related work of the United Nations system, including development cooperation and operational activities for development, and exercises its oversight over the boards of the four funds and programmes. The Vice-President said that topics to be discussed by each of the speakers mirror mandates of the TCPR, viz.: the role that the UN development system can play in assisting developing countries to manage new aid modalities; capacity development as a core mandate of the UN development system, including in the area of technology innovation; and the role of the UN system in ensuring attention by Member States in providing social safety nets and protection to the most vulnerable particularly in the current context of the crises.

The first speaker, **Ms. Helen Clark, Administrator of UNDP**, spoke on “*Development effectiveness in the new aid environment*”. Ms. Clark described a drastically changed aid environment facing a potentially sharp decline in aid targets as a result of the financial crisis. She warned of the tendency for ODA levels remaining depressed not only during but even after a crisis. In light of the financial squeeze, she urged all to harness all financial and other resources for development, including taking practical measures such as improving tax collections systems to increase revenues, and budgetary reallocation to priority social spending. She also urged development effectiveness through ensuring that development interventions are mutually reinforcing and utilized to maximum development effect, geared to reducing poverty, meeting the MDGs, and promoting sustainable development. She expressed hope that donors not only stand firm on their Gleanaeagles commitments but consider these as minimum considering the effect of the crisis. She also urged greater South-South cooperation. UNDP and the UN development system support aid effectiveness through, among others, strengthening government capacities to manage and coordinate ODA, and working together to create more systemic impact and change. She expressed optimism that the MDGs can be met with strong political will, committed development resources, strategic partnerships, and right policy interventions.

Ms. Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA, spoke next on “*Data for development – challenges and opportunities in national capacity building*”. She stressed the importance of relevant, quality, and timely data to sound policy-making, development, advocacy, and policy dialogue. She highlighted the increased demand for data in light of monitoring achievement of the MDGs and its greater importance in light of monitoring the impact of the crisis. Recent work in this regard includes the vulnerability alert system that can inform on the identification of vulnerable groups. Similarly, WFP’s Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis supports analysis and the development of the UN strategy on food security and nutrition. She highlighted the UN’s long-running support to the development of national capacity to collect, analyze, and disseminate data and statistics, citing the work of various UN agencies in their respective areas of expertise. She cited specific examples of successful development and effective use of data and information systems such as in HIV/AIDS prevention; the campaign against female genital mutilation; and post-conflict reconstruction. She stressed the need to mobilize funding support for national censuses, as well as development of national capacities. She encouraged donors not to impose additional burden on national capacities with new initiatives, to coordinate statistical capacity building efforts, and harmonize methods, as well as information requirements. She encouraged making information more widely available and user-friendly. She stressed the vital importance of capacity building in data management to good governance and promotion of human rights.

Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF, spoke on “*Capacity building and innovations in technology*”. She discussed how innovations in technology increasingly support development and humanitarian work, providing examples from the work of UNICEF and its partners, such as those presented at the Web4Development Conference in February. She cited the rapidly expanding use of mobile phones technology to overcome the absence of traditional communications infrastructure, and its uses in transmitting vital information for agriculture, nutrition, and health management. She cited the collaboration among governments, UN organizations, and partners, such as: academia (mobilizing students to participate in innovations); the private sector (supporting technology development, upscaling, and contributions in kind); NGOs (designing delivery systems to the communities e.g., making solar panels affordable); and professional organizations. She pointed to the role of young professionals, local capacities, and local populations in the programme countries in creating local sustainable solutions.

The last speaker, **Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Deputy Executive Director of the World Food Programme**, spoke about “*Social protection and safety nets for the most vulnerable in a time of crisis*”. Mr. Mistura highlighted the role of WFP in implementing safety nets to mitigate the effects of the food, fuel and financial crises: the programme in 2008 and 2009 supported 31 million people in 26 countries, mobilizing US\$5.1 billion overall to cover among others, food assistance (supporting social and livelihood protection), and school feeding programmes (helping school retention). He pointed to the predictability of many shocks and risks which therefore can be potentially prevented and mitigated through national and household risk management strategies. WFP is currently shifting from an annual relief to a more predictable multi-annual support which serve as predictable and counter-cyclical safety nets such as in Ethiopia and Kenya. Such safety nets also support inclusive growth strategies. He also cited the range of targeted food assistance measures that WFP is deploying globally to cope with the global economic crisis, such as a cash/food voucher programme for local food purchase by households (as a response to high food prices) such as in Egypt and Burkina Faso. Such food-based safety nets reduce the need for repeated emergency appeals for recurrent crises. He also cited the importance of food-for-work which helps during periods when food production cannot be undertaken. He also stressed the importance of partnerships in providing various forms of safety nets which need more than one party to hold up.

Interactive discussion

The ensuing question and answer session elicited a range of comments and discussions on the following issues:

Responding to the crises and meeting the MDGs:

- How are UN system agencies helping mitigate the impact of the crises in programme countries? Has there been a change in demand for assistance? How do already existing programmes respond to some of the underlying causes of the crises?
- With the lack of progress in some of the MDGs, what does the UNDG intend to do beyond 2015 if MDGs are not met?
- How is UNDP supporting efforts by programme countries in fiscal consolidation and expenditure reallocation?
- On the \$20 billion for Food Security, what are WFP's plans for implementation considering the issue of absorptive capacities of recipient countries and effect on local food security?
- What are the latest developments on the joint UN-WB action on the financial crisis?
- Can the UN provide data on global vulnerability assessment?

Aid effectiveness and funding:

- How are UN organizations responding to the increasing demand especially by some donors for demonstrable results and the linking of funding to results? Increased coherence does not seem to result in increased funding resources.
- How can the UN system more effectively communicate information on results, considering attribution of UN's contribution to global and country-level outcomes?
- How can the UN system help generate more funding and get donor countries to make good on their funding commitments?
- Are there strategies in response to the resource implications of the crises? What is the UN's flexibility in programming including reallocation among countries in response to greater needs during the crisis?
- How have modalities for programmes/projects changed with capacity and institutional development?
- The importance of South-South cooperation was pointed out.

Capacity building (on technology innovation and data)

- Elaboration on capacity constraints in the conduct of censuses/surveys was requested.
- The important contribution of technology, including ICT, was acknowledged; but it was also noted that initially capital outlays are large even if recurrent costs may be low.

Other issues on the TCPR implementation:

- How are agencies contributing to the implementation of the management and accountability system, including the firewall for the RC system? There is need to report on this by the funds and programmes.

- How well are non-resident agencies participating in country-level programming under the Delivering as One UN initiative?

In response, the heads of the funds and programmes agencies gave the following views:

Mrs. Clark, UNDP said that ODA will be critical to meet the shortage of funds in many countries to meet the MDGs. The UN has an important role to play in advocating for donor countries to keep their pledges. Getting results is not easy, and depends on many factors including externalities (recession, crises). Agencies have to improve on how they set outcomes and benchmarks. While the UN development system needs to be accountable for every dollar spent, accountability also rests with other key actors. She noted the multiple levels of reporting that agencies need to render (reporting to the Boards, donors, country-level, etc.).

Mrs. Obaid, UNFPA referred to accountability for results and cited existing accountability frameworks linking management actions to results. She pointed to issues regarding attribution for results. Collective reporting is being developed including through the HLCM with regard to harmonization of business practices, but despite joint efforts, only New Zealand has provided funding support to the Plan of Action for Harmonization. With regard to the UN system response to the crises, she pointed to the opportunity for horizontal (compared to vertical) planning that takes into account cross-sectoral issues. With regard to resources, in as far as UNFPA is concerned, it is not known what resources will be available in 2010 as donors have not indicated amounts as of July. On the conduct of censuses, UNFPA has a donor roundtable for the conduct of 2010 censuses. For countries with capacity constraints, capacity development is part of the technical assistance for the conduct of censuses. As to flexibility on budget reallocation, UNFPA reallocates based on the countries' delivery rates, but the Executive Board is strict on reallocation decisions.

Ms. Veneman, UNICEF noted that with regard to meeting the MDGs by 2015, efforts need to be redoubled, refocused, and continued with a sense of urgency based on where the biggest remaining problems are located. She highlighted the importance of partnerships which made possible significant achievements such as in eradication of measles, combating malaria, etc.. The MDGs provide a common results framework for accountability. Resources need to be allocated where there are gaps. She also cited the increasing joint efforts in results reporting at country level. In response to the crises, she highlighted the importance of interventions which if unattended can have long-term drawbacks, such as children's nutrition and education. Further elaborating on the cost of technology, she cited the high repayment rates for solar panels. As for the relevance of investing in ICT in transition situations, she pointed to their use in income generation, and addressing issues affecting women.

Mr. de Mistura, WFP stressed that with regards to accountability for results, a lot of interventions take time to produce results, such as agricultural productivity improvement, and both capacity development as well as direct intervention are needed at the same time in some cases. Results must be differentiated as to short-, medium-, and long-term. As for the use of the \$20 billion Food Security fund, there is still inter-agency planning going on.