

Informal Summary
ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment
**Inter-active Plenary on “National ownership and leadership, and capacity
development: have they become a reality?”**

9 July 2010
10.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.

Following the formal opening of the Operational Activities segment, the Vice-President of ECOSOC, H.E. Ambassador Alexandru Cujba, introduced the plenary session on “*National ownership and leadership, and capacity development: have they become a reality?*” The session shared the highlights of discussion from the previous day’s informal Experts’ Roundtable on the same subject participated in by high-level officials from the capitals of programme countries, including ministers and heads responsible of development cooperation, including that of the UN system, namely: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Nepal, Peru, Tajikistan, Tanzania, and Vietnam.

Dr. Sevacious Likwelile, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (Tanzania) and Mr. Ahmed Shide, State Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Ethiopia) presented the highlights of the morning and afternoon sessions of the Experts’ Roundtable, respectively. The morning discussion focused on the role and contribution of the UN development system to national development within the framework of national ownership and leadership, while the afternoon session focused on the challenges for capacity development to strengthen national ownership and leadership of the national development processes, including management of external partnerships. (*). The open forum was moderated by Prof. Solita Collás Monsod, former Secretary of Socio-Economic Planning in the Government of the Philippines.

Delegations agreed that national ownership and leadership, and alignment with national priorities are crucial to the achievement of national development goals. Donor countries (EU) expressed their commitment to align with national development plans and planning cycles. The importance of broad-based ownership was also stressed. Capacity development was also considered as key and the participation of women deemed essential.

Some delegations cited the need for external partners to recognize the presence of national expertise, and that in providing financial assistance, the use of national capacities should be promoted.

The discussions cited the good examples that have emerged from Delivering as One, including reinforcement of national ownership and leadership, as evidenced in the programme country pilots Ethiopia and Tanzania. The existence of institutionalized dialogue mechanisms with external partners in facilitating cooperation among donors, including on DaO was highlighted.

Two issues drew active debate: one is on policy conditionalities linked to external assistance such as in the case of direct budget support; and second is on the use of national versus external expertise which could take up a large portion of assistance provided. The panellists shared the view that use of external expertise should be a clear decision by national authorities to be channelled where there is clear lack of national capacities. They should be complementary, with a view to building national capacity.

Other points raised during the discussion were the unique role/s for the UN development system in the overall external assistance partnership, building ownership through inclusive processes, and the future of reforms in the UN system.

- In sum, the key points that emerged from the discussions were as follows:
- First, that national ownership and leadership, and capacity development were critically important in achieving national development goals and sustained development.
 - Second, comprehensive, well-formulated national development plans and strategies prepared through inclusive processes are key to strong national ownership and leadership in managing external partnerships. So are well-developed platform for coordination of external assistance. The development of national capacities in this regard is essential.
 - Third, the United Nations has a key contribution to make in national development processes as a long-standing and trusted partner in countries. This includes supporting governments in the management of external assistance.
 - Fourth, the UN system's development assistance has become more demand-driven and better aligned with national priorities and planning processes. Delivering as One has demonstrated a more coherent and efficient way in this regard.
 - Fifth, conditionalities tend to undermine national ownership and leadership. In such cases, the UN is seen to have a potential role as mediator, helping to provide objective assessment and policy space.

** Note: Summaries of each of the morning and afternoon sessions of the Experts' Roundtable are separately posted.]*