

ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment – RC System. Remarks by Robert Piper, UN RC/HC Nepal

“Strengthening the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator: role of accountability frameworks, resources and results reporting”

While UN coherence should make money go further through efficiencies gained, should reduce transaction costs for Programme Governments, should strengthen the voice of the UN and so on and so forth, for me the rationale for coherence **starts with a somewhat more existential and compelling goal** – how ensure the UN Development Group is able to **respond to the contemporary needs of our Governments**, and how to avoid the UN’s development work at the country level, slowly but surely, **sliding into irrelevance**.

Three trends, in particular, profoundly shape the future of the UN Development Group’s work and relevance at the country level. And we will ignore them at our peril:

First, most of the Governments we serve, are today **more than capable** of managing their own **sectoral programmes** competently. SWaPs, basket funds and other on-budget, Government-managed sectoral programmes, are **without doubt the way of the future**. The lions’ share of development resources over the coming decades will go to SWaPs. Not incidentally, I think the UN – and its funders – can **share some credit** for this enhanced Government capacity.

This clear trend towards SWaPs signals **the demise** of the UN Development Group’s management of **large-scale sectoral projects**. The bread and butter of many agencies 20 years ago – vaccination campaigns, agricultural extension projects, urban water supply whatever – are in their **sunset years**. We **must not cling onto a past role**. Rather we need to **celebrate this progress**, hopefully bask in some of the **reflected glory** and move on.

Second key trend – there has been in parallel, an **exponential growth** of competent, **local** non Government institutions – think tanks, Universities, consultancies and of course NGOs – which are able to provide a lot of **good quality** technical support to Government.

This impressive growth in technical capacity in local markets also means **the UN has become an expensive option in the development market place**. Again, we can take some pride in the growth of these local service providers. The UN – and its funders - have invested heavily in local NGOs, in universities, in think tanks over the last 3 decades. But the bottom line is that the UN finds itself increasingly priced out of a large swathe of the market for development services, if you will. Now more than ever, then, we need to be sure that when and where the UN works, it is strategic and at the **high end of the value-chain**.

Third and finally, our principle clients – our programme Governments – are over the last decade increasingly coming to a **new set of development priorities**. These issues are what might be described as the **horizontal** issues, 'horizontal' in the sense that they **cut across the Cabinet table**. They are complex in the number of variables involved, complex in the number of institutions required to successfully address them, the spread of expertise required etc.... **Issues like Youth. Climate Change. Democracy. Conflict. Equity. Migration.** Such issues are putting an **enormous strain** on Government systems. And particularly straining Government's ability to minimize the gap between policy vs. implementation capacity. NB/ This is not a uniquely developing country phenomenon.

This growth in prioritization of these horizontal development challenges (NB/ they aren't necessarily new), has the most important implication for the future of the UN's development work – both in a negative and positive sense.

On the negative side of the balance sheet, we should recognize that just as our Governments' structures are poorly designed to meet these challenges, unsurprisingly, this poor design is also reflected in the **out-moded design of the multilateral system**. Just as youth cuts across the cabinet table of a Government, so too, it cuts across the UNCT kitchen cabinet. Unless Member States are going to develop a greater appetite for multilateral redesign (NB/ UN Women was such), **then the UNDG is going to have to get much better at working horizontally across our current institutional borders**, in order to remain useful to Governments confronting these development challenges.

On the other hand, and more positively, if the UNDG can overcome its architectural constraints, the UNDG is uniquely qualified to assist Governments to address these types of issues. No other development partner of Government has the breadth of expertise, the depth of analysis, the spread of well established Gov relationships etc.. **All, in theory**

at least, 'living under the same roof'. If we do this right, we should become the partners of choice for Governments dealing with some of the toughest development issues they are dealing with.

Not incidentally, **we'll know we are making head way** if we start to see the UNDG's **constituency** in Government start to **shift a little**. The people in Government losing sleep about these horizontal issues are typically, not sectoral ministers. Rather, they are Prime Ministers, Planning Ministers, Finance Ministers, Cabinet Secretaries etc. The ones who can see better how they need more effective collaboration inside Government to make headway and to use GOV resources more efficiently.

So three key trends that are fundamentally shaping the role of the UN's development work at the country level: (1) **strong Gov capacity** to manage sectoral programmes with SWaPs the way of the future, requiring the UN system to wean itself off large-budget, sectoral interventions, (2) an ever stronger market of **national institutions** more cost effective than the UN, requiring us to really shift towards high value, strategic support and (3) emerging **new horizontal development priorities**, placing a premium on the ability of different members of the UN Development Group to collaborate and **creating a world of opportunity if we successfully do so**.

The **RC's role**, quite simply, is **to position, cajole, and rehearse our UNCT to be able to respond to these new demands**. To help let go of yesterday's demands and to successfully transition to tomorrow's. To be ready for these new realities and hopefully heightened expectations from new constituencies.

Obviously **leadership** is critical. Identifying the **strategic entry-points** ^{is important}. Focusing on **results**. More authority might help to speed up this transition process. But the authority RCs need may not be the kind bestowed by memo's or by wielding a big stick on behalf of the donors. Rather we need the **kind of authority that is earned from peers** that recognize you are **bringing something valuable to their work**. Without that, in my view, no amount of work on accountability frameworks will make a significant difference in the leadership role of RC's.

To get there, the importance of **high quality UNDAFs** can't be underestimated. It should be the document which precipitates this dialogue with Government. Where strategic priorities are identified. Where the UN is positioned on the right issues. Where we get a chance to move

Government in its perception of us from donor to something new. The UNDAF has to become **the frame** that keeps us on track over the 5 years that follow.

And the glue that will hold the UNDG together at the country level, will come from **results**. We lead highly motivated teams that are idealistic and committed. In places like Nepal, if we can make measurable, transformative changes in the lives of lower castes, bonded labourers, adolescent girls, for example, UN coherence will be built on the firm foundations of **success on issues that matter to us and to you**.

This is why in Nepal our UNDAF formulation process has started this year with a Country Analysis not organized around the familiar programmatic axes of our development work. Rather, **our CCA** is structured around an analysis of **who are the vulnerable groups** in Nepal and **what** are the **structural reasons** for their vulnerability. This way we can better identify the entry points to help Government find truly transformative policies. This analysis will also then form the base-line for our eventual M&E framework. And designing programmatic responses to these vulnerabilities will only come when we get to the UNDAF formulation stage, with Government.

Because results matter to us, and to the Government of Nepal I should add, we are working backwards from people and their needs to programmatic priorities. Not the other way around.

A country like Nepal is also testing us on coherence and leadership across a broader range of **potential institutional fault lines** than is typically the case:

First. We have **a peace process** aimed at not only short-term issues like mine clearance and elections but also explicitly long-term social, economic and political transformation. Our economic and development work goes to the heart of what Nepal's peace process is about. And the **need for coherence in fact goes well beyond the UNCT**. Hence in Nepal, as RC, I was asked by the wider Development Partner group to facilitate the preparation a shared Peace and Development Strategy for Nepal. This Strategy was launched in January and brings together all of Nepal's Development Partners and the UN system under a common approach to building peace. **A properly resourced RC system** then, can help bring coherence **even beyond** the UN family.

Second, in Nepal we are trying to **overcome the institutional fault lines typical to such transition situations** with vacuums left by departing political or peacebuilding missions, rapid draw-down of a humanitarian operation and so forth. We have been fortunate to have had sufficient time to plan for this transition period – and donors willing to support us – in

order to prepare properly for this particular set of coherence challenges. The **Nepal Transition Support Strategy** brings peacebuilding, humanitarian and development planning and analysis into a single integrated RC/HC Office. At the back of the room are brochures describing this **temporary bridging** set up. **A properly resourced RC system** can also help manage fragile transitions more effectively.

And Third and finally, **Nepal's natural hazard profile**, with annual disasters and a large scale earthquake on the cards, requires much greater coherence between humanitarian and development actors, Government and Non Governmental, short vs long term players. **The links between RC and HC roles, with ISDR back-up**, have been especially useful in helping us build a Risk Reduction Consortium for Nepal, which includes all the UN, the multilateral development banks, the Red Cross movement, the European Commission, and the Governments of the US, UK, and Australia so far, in a dramatically scaled-up, common workplan to address risk. With the much greater sense of urgency it deserves.

We have been asked to provide some concrete recommendations. I offer 3 in closing:

First, **Programme country Governments** can help UNCT's make the necessary transition by **raising expectations and awareness amongst Prime Ministers**, Ministers of Planning, Ministers of Finance, Cabinet Secretaries that **the UNCT is especially suited** to assist with the horizontal development challenges that are keeping them awake at night. **More can and should be expected of us by the Governments we serve.**

Second, **Donor** Governments can help UNCT's make the necessary transition by **shifting more funding streams to more thematic, horizontal structures**. More MDG Achievement Funds, trust funds for adolescent girls, Gender Based Violence Funds. Not asking for more money as such. Rather, asking for funding structures to start shifting to modalities that are better aligned to the UNCT's natural advantages today, rather than those of yesterday.

And third, **Member States** generally, could help by remembering that - as you discuss UN coherence, RC leadership, and quadrennial reviews - that in some ways, RC's are trying to make the most out of what you have given us to work with. **Much of our efforts are about trying to make our outmoded architecture work for contemporary needs**. Rather than fiddling at the margins, please be more ambitious about reform- we need more of the kind of ambition that led to the birth of UN Women. Again, not necessarily adding new

organizations, not looking for more money, but **re-organizing current investments** to ensure your UN is able to stay current with the demands of the times.

Thank you.

Objective

This panel is expected to come up with practical proposals to strengthen the lead role of the resident coordinator in coordinating the support of the UN system to programme countries, based on a reflection of the main challenges from the perspective of both the government and the resident coordinator.

Suggested Questions

The following questions are intended to guide panelists in preparing for their participation in the panel discussion:

- 1) Is national ownership and leadership enhanced when the resident coordinator clearly leads and coordinates the UN country team? Is the resident coordinator sufficiently accountable to the government on results achieved through UNDAF? Is the RC playing a satisfactory role in helping national authorities coordinate overall external assistance?
- 2) Does UN system coherence at the country level depend more on national authorities or on the role of the resident coordinators? How should the RC best play its role in representing the United Nations country teams to the government, while also maintaining the UN agencies' direct lines of communication with national authorities to fulfil their mandated activities?
- 3) What are the major challenges facing the leadership role of the UN Resident Coordinator at the country-level? What are the possible ways to empower the UN Resident Coordinator, including greater use of pooled funding mechanisms (e.g. MDTFs)?

