

2014 Substantive Session of ECOSOC
Operational Activities for Development Segment
“The changing landscape: what does it mean for the UN system?”
24-26 February, ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters

The first operational activities for development segment in the new ECOSOC cycle will take place 24-26 February 2014 at UN headquarters in New York. The segment aims to start a forward-looking dialogue on how to adapt the UN system to important changes taking place in the broader development landscape. In the view of many stakeholders, the UN development system is at an inflection point. As a result, the UNDG has recently launched an internal dialogue on how to make the UN development system fit-for-purpose. Member States are also deliberating on a new development agenda with focus on sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Many of the changes in the global development cooperation environment are well-known. For example, there is a large number of new public and private actors in both developed and developing countries engaged in development cooperation; official development assistance (ODA) is under stress due to budget constraints in a number of donor countries; and new technologies and knowledge are enabling fresh solutions to long-standing development problems. Even more importantly, the capacity of developing countries has significantly increased in the recent decade and the geography of poverty has changed in a major way.

The past two decades have also seen the intensification of global challenges such as sustainable development which require collective action. Responding to these and other global challenges may call for a shift away from fragmented projects to greater emphasis on strengthening the catalytic and normative role of the UN system.

The past decade has also seen increasing number of social upheavals and multiple natural disasters and humanitarian crises in many developing countries that needed quick response and significant resources.

The reforms initiated in 1997, including the establishment of the UNDG and UNDAF and the strengthening of the UN resident coordinator system, among others, have contributed to improved coherence of the UN system. Recently, UNDG has developed standard operating procedures (SOPs) for countries adopting the delivering-as-one approach with a view to enhancing system-wide coherence and reducing transaction costs for Governments, other national stakeholders, development partners and UN country teams. The SOPs provide an integrated package of guidance on programming, leadership, business operations, funding and communications.

Against this backdrop, the 2014 operational activities for development segment of ECOSOC aims to contribute to an understanding among Member States, UN leaders and other stakeholders of the need to adapt to change. With this in mind, the segment will, inter alia, attempt to address questions such as the following: how can the UN system be made fit-for-purpose in a post-2015 era with focus on sustainable development and poverty eradication? How can the specialized agencies exploit more effectively their comparative advantage in norm- and standard-setting in a post-2015 era? What are the lessons learned from issue-based alliances within the UN system and what is their potential as a future business model for the Organization? How can the UN system improve its effectiveness, efficiency and results in countries in transition from relief to development? Are the SOPs likely to lead to sufficient simplification and harmonization of business practices and reduction of transaction costs and efficiency gains at the country level?