

FINAL
02-24-2015

Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director
Remarks
ECOSOC Dialogue with Executive Heads
QCPR and Fit-for-Purpose in the Post-2015 Era
February 24, 2015

Thank you, Ambassador Mejía, for your remarks and your leadership in the ECOSOC.

And thank you also to Helen Clark who, with her customary clarity, on our collective behalf answered the questions posed to this panel.

Looking beyond UNICEF-specific programmes and planning, let me take this opportunity, today, to complement her responses with three messages:

- (i) Processes are important but results are what matter;
- (ii) To achieve these results, UN coherence is essential for all of us – from here in this room to the field; and
- (iii) We have a ways to go, of course, but thanks in part to the current Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), we are getting more coherent in our joint work and have the tools to get much better still. And we must.

Let me begin by recalling why we're here. We're here because, far too often, an adolescent with AIDS is ostracised from her community. A boy is snatched from school by an armed group -- made to maim and kill. A 10 year old girl is forced to undergo the ritual of female genital cutting. A mother's baby dies in the first month of life.

Preventing tragedies like these are why we're here today. These people – and the millions like them – are at the heart of our discussions. Debates about processes and structures, important as they are, are not ends in themselves. They are a means to achieving the only thing that matters:

Results. Practical results. The practical results the world needs from the United Nations.

The UN is a rights based organisation. And UNICEF is specifically built around the rights of children. Rights to health... education...protection...and participation. For all.

But a recognized right is not necessarily an executed right. Rights are brought to life not simply through pronouncements... but through policies and persistent commitment...through strategic investments...through practical actions. For without action — without results — the rights enshrined in conventions and declarations amount to little more than words on paper.

Governments, communities, NGOs, UN agencies and businesses have worked to translate those rights into results. Into more people immunized. More people educated. More with access to nutrition, water and sanitation.

But for millions of children... mothers... families...and communities, life is not better. They are being left behind.

The burden for carrying their cause forward rests on all our shoulders. And we can do so by making progress for the most disadvantaged a central focus in the post-2015 agenda, building on the results we've achieved to date.

Doing so will require ever greater coherence in how we think, organize and act on the multiplicity of challenges we face. Because the challenges are both multiple and inter-related.

I know we all want to see Sustainable Development Goals that are not only comprehensive and comprehensible, but coherent also in the relationships among them.

Climate change, for example, produces disease and resource scarcity. Conflict interrupts education, exacerbates poverty and inequalities, and threatens financial stability. Just as such problems are inter-related, so must be the solutions. The kinds of coherent solutions that will be the focus of the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai next month.

Beyond acting on the connections among the SDGs, turning all the post-2015 agenda into action will require a continued focus on making sure that UN agencies work ever more closely together at both the global and, especially, the country level to support governments.

The current QCPR has provided an important step forward in creating coherence at the global level. It has enabled us, for example, to simplify programming approaches so that they have a common results focus and are more consistent -- which avoids overburdening national governments. It has also enabled us, for the first time, to align our global strategic plans with the QCPR cycle. We all hope that the shaping of the new QCPR will build on these positive achievements.

In the dialogue of the last few days, we've heard a clear call from many Member States for the UN to maintain a strong focus on delivering results for the most vulnerable, especially in Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States, and countries suffering from conflict and crisis. We're hearing an equally strong call for the UN to provide technical assistance, policy advice and capacity development support for sustainable development and reducing inequities. We hear this from countries in all contexts -- not least from Middle Income Countries. The UN Development System needs to respond to these calls with an approach tailored to the priorities and circumstances of each country.

Another critical part of strengthening coherence at the global – indeed at all levels is south-south co-operation – which the QCPR rightly calls on the UN to support. It is not only happening by global design. Communities, countries and regions are responding to — and seizing the opportunities of — the realities of a changing world. Increasingly, we see partnerships for action come alive through south-south and triangular co-operation, as countries share ideas and best practices with one another on how to grow economies, build infrastructure and improve access to social services for their citizens.

For example, through the Scaling-up Nutrition, or SUN, movement, countries, governments, organizations and businesses are gathering around a common cause — to design and deliver targeted programmes to alleviate malnourishment in the world's poorest communities. In doing so, they are sharing not only inspiration but best practices.

South-south co-operation is also well-positioned to help in humanitarian emergencies and in building resilience during and beyond these crises. Countries like India, Indonesia and South Africa are already sharing their expertise in resilience-building with other countries travelling the same path.

It is at the country level where the QCPR has been especially significant, and the new QCPR can be more positive still. The current QCPR provides us with a framework for turning coherence into practical action within UN Country Teams by improving how UN agencies work together -- for example, through more extensive joint programming that avoids duplication and fragmentation; developing lighter and strategic results-focused UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and common budgetary frameworks; joint messaging on policy issues of common concern; and investing in integrated common services where it demonstrates efficiency gains and effective results.

This enables UN Country Teams to work together to deliver results and reach the most disadvantaged more than ever before. To stay fit for results, we need to work harder towards an agile UN workforce that can operate in both development and humanitarian contexts and, especially, attract women, including from the south, in senior leadership positions in UN Country Teams.

As Helen described, the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are giving us a great opportunity to deliver as one and accelerate results at country level with both government partners and within the UN. For example, through the UN Country Team Results Groups.

Within each UN Country Team, Results Groups bring together the agencies working in each substantive area to pool their respective strengths so that we achieve measureable, tangible results together. All, of course, within that country's UN Development Assistance Framework.

Take the example of the Health Results Group in Viet Nam (including WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS and UNICEF, together with the World Bank), which supported the Ministry of Health in its national equity analysis on health MDGs. An equity lens has enabled the government to implement provincial strategies that specifically target the most vulnerable ethnic minority children and women in remote and mountainous areas.

As we developed the SOPs, we've also been developing frameworks and tools to accelerate results and ways to monitor them.

The MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) -- as Helen has mentioned -- is helping us to do just that -- accelerate results in a number of countries. And the Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES), which enhances programming by identifying bottlenecks sub-nationally, helps monitor progress in overcoming them through disaggregated data. It is already being used in several countries by governments and other UN agencies to support the regular and "real-time" monitoring which helps us better target the most vulnerable.

So, as we go forward, in working hard to enhance our coherence across the UN system, I hope we can build on the current QCPR and its Standard Operating Procedures.

The SOPs are good in principle -- and even better in practice. Not simply for the sake of coherence but for the sake of our effectiveness. They can help us succeed now and help us accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals in the coming years.

I should draw here the obvious parallel between the importance of coherence in UN development programmes and the ways in which the UN and other agencies collaborate in humanitarian emergencies through the 'cluster' approach, which enables relevant agencies with comparative advantages to work together to deliver results.

And we must also work hard to achieve greater coherence in breaking out of the conceptual and bureaucratic boxes separating long-term development programmes and our short-term emergency responses. When we respond to a humanitarian emergency, every action we take must be designed with an eye to its longer-term impact, thus also investing in development goals such as establishing resilient health, education and protection systems.

Following Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, for example, the government, partners and donors are now working together to 'build back better' in the affected areas. Not just by restoring what was there before, but by putting in place new systems that can improve the health and well-being of communities today and into the future. At UNICEF, we are supporting the safer designs for schools that can withstand floods...and the use of better pipes to protect water systems in case of future disaster. In this way, humanitarian response and development are reinforcing each other.

And conversely, the existing emphasis on strengthening its primary health care system has strengthened Ethiopia's resilience against drought and other natural challenges.

In all these areas, we're working to achieve greater coherence in our planning and our programmes at the global and – most importantly – the country and community levels. The new QCPR is an opportunity for us to do all of this and more.

Which brings me back to where I started: the people at the heart of our work. The people at the heart of the current QCPR. The people who will be at the heart of the new QCPR.

As we in the UN properly first work to support governments as they work to improve people's lives, so must we all listen to the people themselves. Include them ever more in our discussions. And support them as they design and pursue their own solutions. For who knows better what communities need than the communities themselves?

As we need them, so they need all of us to be fit to deliver on the promise of the post-2015 agenda. An agenda that promises all those who have the least that which they need the most: results.