

# **ECOSOC Dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UN development system in the context of the post-2015 development agenda**

## **Retreat 2**

**26-27 February 2016, Greentree Foundation, Manhasset, New York**

### **Summary by the Vice-President of ECOSOC**

The second phase of the ECOSOC Dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UN development system in the context of the 2030 Agenda was kicked off in the new year with a retreat on 26 and 27 February at Greentree, hosted by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

The purpose of the retreat was to frame the priorities of the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, and discuss preliminary proposals in this regard that emerged over the course of the first phase of the Dialogue and that had been submitted by Member States upon a call by the Vice President of ECOSOC on 25 January 2016.

The retreat also provided an opportunity for the recently established Independent Team of Advisers to the ECOSOC Bureau to listen to Member States and voice their initial views in support of the Member States' discussions.

The retreat was structured in two plenary roundtable discussions that aimed to capture how the UN development system should evolve to be fit to deliver on the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda and to respond to the key questions on the reorientation of the UN development system to deliver on agreed functions moving ahead. The session was followed by two working groups held in parallel to enable a frank and free-flowing exchange of views on specific preliminary proposals, and reporting back in plenary.

The President of ECOSOC opened the retreat pointing out how national and global development challenges are changing at a much faster pace than the capacity of the United Nations to deal with them. He noted that the adoption of the 2030 Agenda added further complexity to the expectations of Member States for the work of the UN system in the new era. He underscored the importance for the UN development system to examine every aspect of its work to adapt so as to remain relevant, and pointed out the value of the ECOSOC Dialogue in providing a vital platform in that regard.

The Vice President of ECOSOC echoed the President in highlighting the importance of the retreat in helping to define the overall strategic direction for the UN development system to translate the vision of the 2030 Agenda in results on the ground, and to begin concretizing and prioritizing issues ahead of the upcoming workshops. He welcomed the members of the Independent Team of Advisers and encouraged them to be bold and imaginative in their proposals.

USG Hongbo Wu delivered the Deputy Secretary-General keynote speech. He underscored the necessity for the United Nations system to rise to this moment in history. He was clear that the system still struggles to speak with one voice, and that human and financial resources are not marshalled as coherently and effectively as possible. He was also clear that Member States at times do not back their calls for reform with the right decisions. He noted that so far reform efforts have not been enough and that yesterday's achievements, such as the Delivering as One approach, should be treated as today's baseline and push on. In his view, there are five key areas of focus: integration, systematization, financing, interconnection and optimization of the UN's

vast potential. There's a need to think across sectors and work horizontally, backed by a system of strategic governance that fosters innovation, risk-taking and the ability to stay ahead of fast-moving events. The financial and operational silos that block a system-wide and systematic approach can be overcome through incentives, leadership and a shift in funding practices. The era of short-term thinking must end and interconnections running across different parts of the United Nations must be strengthened. The peace, humanitarian, human rights and development pillars of the Organization need to come together to drive sustainable development – the Ebola response shows that this is possible. The Organization holds unique legitimacy, paired by neutrality, universal membership, global reach and convening authority and must draw on its untapped absolute and comparative advantages moving forward. The Deputy Secretary-General concluded by saying that the United Nations have to continue their lifesaving work to respond to crisis, provide food and shelter, build peace and resilience, and pair it with an equal investment in pre-empting and preventing challenges. “We have a generational responsibility that we must seize with both hands”, he said.

The Under-Secretary-General of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs was called on to provide an update on the ECOSOC Dialogue and the 2030 Agenda. He spoke of the implications that the new development vision brings for the UNDS and summarized it through the lens of the key messages that emerged over the course of the first phase of the ECOSOC Dialogue, i.e. the need for clarity on functions, adequate and predictable funding, strategic governance system-wide, integration of UNDS at global and country level, and national ownership. He pointed that while we know *what* we need to do, the task at hand is *how* it needs to be done. He called for bold proposals by the Independent Team of Advisers and concluded by underlining the importance to tune actions and mindsets to the transformation that the new development landscape requires.

#### *Do less, enable more*

Member States agreed that the UNDS should continue to focus on its role as a convenor, broker and clearing house, but doing less and enabling more. The system's role as a supplier should be carefully reviewed following a comparative analysis of its strengths to capture its niche. Poverty eradication, capacity building, South-South, triangular and North-South cooperation, knowledge sharing and investing in data collection and analysis for qualitative measurements remained at the top of Member States' preferred functions for the UNDS. What emerged strongly was the need to tailor support according to country needs and to focus on impact. The specific needs of middle-income countries were highlighted (from building resilience, capacity and institutions, to transferring knowledge, technology and enabling partnerships and South-South cooperation). Notwithstanding that adequate funding is vital, participants from both the MICs and LDCs ends noted that change is not about new and more money, but about strategic and innovative ways to use resources to maximize impact.

#### *From donors to investors*

Participants suggested that rather than the volume of funding, there is a need to focus on the structure to channel it, which should allow and facilitate a strategic and system-wide approach in line with national priorities. Participants mentioned the need of assessed contributions for the UN norm-setting role and for system-wide coordination to enable the delivery of key core functions. The option of a system-wide budget could be considered, supported by better use of local resources, domestic mobilization, and modern taxation systems, to be pursued with the support of the Organization to increase ownership, and secure revenues to complement ODA while breaking dependency on it. The mindset must change from donor to investor. And while the debate on the need for ODA and core resources continued to remain at the center of the discussions, the need to shift the argument from core vs. non-core resources to tied vs. untied aid gained momentum in light of a funding reality that is not likely to change. The

dysfunctionalities of the General Assembly Fifth Committee were also highlighted as a priority to address for a funding architecture that is fit to today's needs.

#### *Leadership and authority are key*

The debate over the necessary governance changes at both global and country level touched on the need for global systems that better reflect the interests of developing countries, that adopt better working methods but that primarily exert the strategic leadership required to guide the Organization into a new way of doing business. The importance of Member States' coherence and active engagement within different governing mechanisms both vertical and horizontal throughout the system, including specialized agencies, was noted as critical. At country level, ensuring a Resident Coordinator's system that has the mandate, authority and resources to call on the system to act as one was reiterated as the key starting point. Ultimately, leadership accompanied by authority was underscored as of the essence for a UNDS that is up to the challenges of the 2030 Agenda.

#### *A UN presence that is functions-based coherent, effective and efficient*

The importance of ensuring the right kind of competence and skillsets to respond to the 2030 Agenda was also highlighted repeatedly, along with the need to ensure presence at regional, sub-regional and country level that is coherent, effective, efficient, and based not on form, but on functions. Headquarters structures must undergo systemic change to support efforts on the ground and embrace an integrated approach that goes beyond entity allegiance. The need to revitalize regional offices, including a much closer collaboration with other regional intergovernmental organizations to better serve the needs of countries was also noted.

In that regard, Member States reiterated the request made during the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment and recent briefings for entity-specific data and statistics on programme and personnel costs in relation to programme delivery at national, subregional and regional level, to feed into the discussions of the Dialogue. Additionally, it was requested that such information be synthesised to provide an overall mapping of the coverage of different agencies by location.

#### *Give jobs, not aid*

The need to move towards an integrated approach that brings together the humanitarian, peacebuilding and development pillars of the Organization was underscored, but with numerous notes of caution that development priorities must remain at the core and that the already limited resources and attention dedicated to long-term priorities cannot be diverted in response to the immediate needs of emergencies. As a participant put it, protracted crisis necessarily imply development interventions, which are not sustained by mere assistance but by structural support for job creation and similar interventions that allow populations to exit from their dependency status; what is needed, therefore, is for humanitarian resources to be directed to development interventions and for the Organization to include an exit strategy during its assessment phase. Similarly, others argued that directing resources to prevention, relief and resilience efforts does not equal a diversion of resources, but rather an investment in the sustainability of efforts. Ultimately, the importance of common analysis, joint planning, joint appeals and multi-year joint plans at country level were deemed as the necessary way to operate moving forward, to break the loop of siloed interventions and move towards a One UN framework to operate.

#### *Partnerships beyond leveraging*

Harnessing the strengths of outside players was also stressed as critical for the Organization to remain relevant, and in fact embedded in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda. The importance of the

UN as a catalyst, and of partnership approaches that preserve the principles and standards of the Organization were noted. Most importantly, the need to fully embrace the strengths and the abilities of partners to support, influence and deliver was stressed as vital. Partnerships can no longer be entailed as fundraising exercises, but as strategic tools to mobilize, deliver and impact at scale, in the footsteps of examples such as Sustainable Energy for All and other similar, system-wide efforts. The need for the United Nations to have the capacity to engage in a system-wide approach to partnership was reiterated.

### ***The path forward: a systematic line of strategic actions***

A preliminary set of concrete proposals and incentives were proposed as a systematic line of strategic actions, as follows.

- *System-wide strategic planning*: A common, **unified strategic plan** should guide the UN approach at system-wide level
- *Coherent and strengthened strategic governance*: **One joint development board** could be considered, with the possible inclusion of other stakeholders, such as civil society and other partners (models already exist in some UN entities). The managerial role of the board(s) and ECOSOC's in giving strategic guidance to the system should be strengthened and more clearly defined.
- *Strategic system-wide management with associated authority*: **One senior leader** with the authority to draw the system together and command action in the implementation of SDGs (similar to the call by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations for a DSG for peace and security)
- *Aligned strategic budgeting*: Alignment of budget planning cycles of UN entities with the UN regular budget cycle, to become a **4-year budget cycle** for enhanced predictability and longer-term planning
- *Strategic integrated planning*: **Multi-year joint plans** that bring together the humanitarian, peacebuilding, human rights and development pillars together into one UN framework
- *Strategic partnership*: **A partnership mechanism** under the leadership of the Secretary-General to guide a system-wide approach for multi-stakeholder partnerships at scale, based on accountability, transparency and results

### *A strategic 2016 QPCR*

Working from the understanding that Member States guide how the 2030 Agenda is operationalized through the QCPR, a number of proposals were put forward for a strategic 2016 QCPR resolution.

In that regard, some Member States suggested that an early appointment of two co-facilitators to guide the QCPR development and negotiation process in a strategic direction and ensure the full potential of the QCPR as a governance tool would be helpful.

There was broad consensus that the next QCPR should be derived from a longer term view on how Member States intend to direct the UNDS over the coming 15 years. While the 2030 Agenda provides a unilaterally agreed vision for development, the QCPR could provide the space for a much needed long term view for how the UNDS would adapt to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Actions could be broken down into manageable inter-related components to be introduced progressively with each QCPR cycle. In that respect, six to eight priorities could be identified as options for the upcoming QCPR to focus.

- One area of focus could be how the UN could be repositioned to provide **differentiated support** to Member States. Differentiation could be defined along regional lines, by thematic issue or level of development, among others.
- A re-profiling of staff could also be considered.
- **Rationalizing and aligning arrangements and presence at regional sub-regional and country level** for a more integrated UN teams is key;
- Consideration could be given to having an **independent Resident Coordinator**, i.e. an individual to serve outside of UN entities allegiances.
- Another area of focus could be on improving coherence and integration moving beyond the current DaO approach, supported by **systemic reform at headquarters**.

There was a strong call for the inclusion of language on **compliance by the specialized agencies**.

It was also noted that the QCPR could provide a vision for **multi-stakeholder engagement** in the work of the UNDS for implementation and follow up.

Furthermore, participants stated that the QCPR should be **targeted and clear** enough to allow it to be an adequate and dynamic follow-up mechanism, moving away from a focus on details which misses some of the larger systemic issues.

Finally, there was general agreement that a new name for the QCPR should be considered, to reflect its role as a system-wide strategic governance tool.

Other proposals included the possibility of an independent mechanism to undertake a **comprehensive mapping and assessment of mandates and “who is doing what and where”** to allow informed decision-making; a look into **selective mergers of UN entities** through a similar independent process; and the **reform and strengthening of ECOSOC** to better fulfil its role in guiding the UNDS actions on sustainable development and climate change, perhaps with a full-time and adequately-resourced President, to better reflect today’s priorities and reframe its substantive focus.

Overall, the retreat was grounded in broad consensus that the United Nations must fundamentally reform itself, and do so quickly, to stay relevant. At the same time, Member States recognised that it may not be feasible to mandate comprehensive change all at once. While the urgency of reform was highlighted, Member States also recognized the need for change that does not treat the UNDS as a blank sheet, and builds on achievements. Technological and other changes that characterize the new era will make the next fifteen years faster than the previous – whether to the benefit or the detriment of the Organization is for the United Nations to seize.