

## **JIU CONTRIBUTION**

### **PARA 45 of UNGA Resolution 71/243 (QCPR)**

#### **SUMMARY**

1. Improvement in the governance of the United Nations development system must be part of an integrated approach to strengthening its ability to extend effective support for Agenda 2030. With the requirement for horizontal cooperation and integrated approaches never more urgent, the question is how best to enable this while maintaining the dynamism stemming from the varied composition of the UN development system. Concerns about fragmentation are not new. Over time, attention has consistently been drawn to two main themes: the need for a central “brain” to plan overall priorities and positioning; and more unified system-level decision-making on programmatic issues. The latter has not taken root; instead, integrative measures have focused on mechanisms applied to the country level. Bearing in mind that the individual entities and their governing bodies are the main drivers in the UN development system, it is important first to define what functions require system-wide level direction. Issues that require attention in the context of Agenda 2030 include the strategic capacity to guide the system, bridging the normative-operational divide, and improving the functioning of the resident coordinator system to address the policy aspects of that role, accountability arrangements, and how the horizontal function at the country level can be reinforced at corporate levels. Accountability to Member States requires, inter alia, greater insight on system level results and more robust reporting by Executive Boards and specialized agencies to the ECOSOC. To be meaningful, horizontal accountability needs to be defined with a clear picture of how authority and accountability are aligned. CEB should examine how it can draw operational and normative responsibilities together, clarify how initiatives are resourced, where authority resides, and the reasonable role of Member States in defining objectives and assessing results.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

2. In its resolution 71/243, the General Assembly requested that the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) be consulted by the Secretary-General in respect of requests made in paragraph 45 of that resolution. The broad parameters of how the JIU works are governed by its Statute, contained in the Annex to resolution 31/192. As per Article 11 of the Statute, this work takes the form of reports, notes, and confidential letters. The JIU was not asked to carry out an independent review in relation to paragraph 45, but in view of the request made by the General Assembly, it takes this opportunity to draw attention to factors that it considers should be taken into account.

3. The issues raised in paragraph 45 – the governance of the United Nations development system, the role of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and accountability and transparency – have been recurring themes over a long period of time. What draws fresh and

urgent attention to these issues, as well as to other fundamental matters addressed in other parts of the resolution, is the requirement for effective support of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The General Assembly has framed the QCPR as a whole as:

“the main instrument to better position United Nations operational activities for development to support countries in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a coherent and integrated manner ...recognizing that this requires a United Nations development system that is more strategic, accountable, transparent, collaborative, efficient, effective and results-oriented”.<sup>1</sup>

4. The governance issues are also framed in the same terms by paragraph 44 of the resolution:

".... the governance architecture of the United Nations development system must be more efficient, transparent, accountable and responsive to Member States and able to enhance coordination, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of the operational activities for development within and among all levels of the United Nations development system in order to enable system-wide strategic planning, implementation, reporting and evaluation to better support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".<sup>2</sup> The response to paragraph 45 should meet the test of these objectives.

5. It is thus clear that enabling the UN development system to play its part in implementation of the 2030 Agenda is the prism through which to consider the issues. This merits emphasis because while the issues are not all inherently new, the policy framework in which they now arise is new. In this connection, the Unit notes the interplay among the review of the functions, capacities and gaps in relation to Agenda 2030 of UN entities that carry out operational activities for development requested in paragraph 19 of the resolution, decisions the General Assembly may take on proposals based on that review (paragraph 20), and decisions on the governance architecture that directs and oversees these operational activities for development.

6. The JIU observations are organized and presented in relation to each part of paragraph 45.

**PARAGRAPH 45 CHAPEAU AND PART (a): Also stress the need to improve the governance of the United Nations development system, and in this regard, requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Joint Inspection Unit, to present to the Economic and Social Council by the end of June 2017 for its consideration and to the General Assembly at its seventy-second session for review and further action a comprehensive report containing options, with an assessment of their implications, as**

---

<sup>1</sup> A/RES/71/243 pp 2

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, op 44

**well as advantages and disadvantages, for improving the accountability and overall coordination of the entities of the United Nations development system and their oversight by Member States, while paying due attention to the importance of ensuring collaboration between the entities under the mandates of the Assembly and the specialized agencies, including;**

**a) Improving the role of the Economic and Social Council in providing overall guidance to and coordination of the United Nations development system, with a view to strengthening its effectiveness and avoiding duplication, in particular through the revitalization of its operational activities for development segment, so that the Council may better fulfil its mandate;**

### **JIU Observations**

7. Agenda 2030 puts forward an integrated, indivisible and universal development agenda. It represents a frame of reference for the entire UN development system. It embraces mandates spread out across the system and demands more integrated planning and action. As seen by the foregoing citations from the resolution 71/243, it casts into sharp relief the question whether and how the UN entities involved in the operational activities for development can be made to function as an integrated, mutually reinforcing system, and how governance can be improved accordingly.

8. Current consideration and decisions on this should be informed by – not limited by – past experience. In a variety of contexts, this issue has long been vexing and subject to numerous reviews, studies and proposals. A Background Note prepared by the United Nations Secretariat as an input to the ECOSOC Dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UN development system in the context of the post-2015 development agenda lists 20 such reviews, starting from 1969.<sup>3</sup>

9. One of the themes evident in the array of analyses and reflections on the UN development system has been a shift from a focus on the performance of individual entities, with their often sectorally focused mandates, to the performance of the system as a whole. This is in line with the view that many pressing development challenges require multidisciplinary approaches falling outside the singular expertise of any one entity. This evolution is both mirrored and reinforced by how the content of T/QCPR resolutions has changed in scope since their inception in 1980.

10. In terms of governance arrangements that correspond to the attention increasingly devoted to performance of the system as a whole, proposals have been made over the decades for horizontal, system-level governance and accountability and more effective strategic capacity For

---

<sup>3</sup> Background Note, Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, pp 23-34.  
[http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/qcpr/pdf/desa\\_paper\\_governance.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/qcpr/pdf/desa_paper_governance.pdf)

example, a group of experts tasked by the General Assembly with making proposals to make the system "fully capable of dealing with problems of international cooperation in a comprehensive manner"<sup>4</sup> had recommended in 1975, inter alia, the integration of all UN funds and programmes for technical assistance into a United Nations development authority and the development of a system-wide planning unit.

11. In the same vein, a far-reaching JIU report on UN reform completed over 30 years ago drew attention to limitations in the effectiveness of UN operational activities for development stemming from fragmentation and an overly sectoral approach. Fragmentation was reflected in the multiplicity of entities providing assistance, the dispersal of resources into the myriad of small projects, and complex intergovernmental machinery that defies coordination and common purpose.<sup>5</sup> Further, the United Nations system had developed a sectoral approach which both aggravated the fragmentation by adding numerous entities that have a hand in UN development cooperation, each with their own outlook that undermined the application of integrated approaches required to tackle contemporary development challenges.<sup>6</sup> It pointed to the need for a central intellectual capacity to assess development requirements and opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

12. The Coherence Panel of 2006 which led to *Delivering as One*, for example, recommended the establishment of a Sustainable Development Board that would progressively take responsibility for the oversight of all funds and programmes. That aspect of its recommendations was not adopted. The Independent Team of Advisors, co-chaired by Juan Somavia and Klaus Topfer, that supported the recent ECOSOC dialogue in 2015-16 on the longer term positioning of the United Nations development system, also made proposals in the same direction, but these too have not gained traction.

13. Integrative action that has been taken has found fruit primarily at the country level. It has taken the form of planning and programming processes such as common country assessment, the UNDAFs and similar instruments for joint programming, the resident coordinator system and the *Delivering as One* approach.

14. The limitation of a primary focus on field level reform is that those at country level still need to depend on vertical entity silos. There is no corresponding central direction to mirror these arrangements, so that the linkage between governance at the country level and the corporate level is ambiguous. For example, no single body approves an UNDAF. The upshot is that the United Nations development system is in fact made up of a number of different layers and clusters of organizations. It has neither a legal personality nor financial identity. System-wide accountability is elusive and the nature of the accountability of senior officials for the

---

<sup>4</sup> A/RES/3343, December 1974, OP.5

<sup>5</sup> Bertrand, para 95-96

<sup>6</sup> Bertrand, paras 104-5

<sup>7</sup> Bertrand para 180

exercise of system-level functions has not been defined. There is also no meaningful mechanism for ascertaining system-level results. It is less a “system”, with the cohesion that term implies, than a grouping of entities with varying degrees of association that share broad principles under a UN flag.

15. While proposals for new mechanisms for central decision-making that have been made over the years have not been adopted, importance has been attached to improving the effectiveness and role played by existing bodies, such as the ECOSOC. Irrespective of whether Member States choose to consider new mechanisms or focus instead on trying to improve the functioning of existing machinery, the Unit emphasizes the importance for change to be driven by specific, well defined purposes and take into account the diversity of requirements and the complexity of the institutional and partnership landscape embodied in the Agenda 2030. More specifically it suggests the treatment of governance take account of the following considerations.

#### ***Functions That Require Central Governance***

16. The current reality is that individual entities and their related governance mechanisms continue to be the main engine rooms of the United Nations development system. Funders provide support to individual entities not to the system as a whole. Bearing this in mind, a point of departure may be to focus first on defining functions that require and are amenable to system-level guidance in order to enable the 2030 Agenda.

17. What these should be is up to Member States to determine. The Unit notes that analysis on this is actively underway. Functions that have been identified include: the need to identify and mobilize system-wide integrated strategic planning; generation of data; defining the system-wide normative and standard-setting agenda; development of system-wide SDG monitoring mechanisms and assessment and reporting of results; providing guidance on the framework for multi-stakeholder partnerships; and innovative finance and the linkage between extra-budgetary funding and integrated support.<sup>8</sup> The latter is a critical issue because traditionally funders have looked to the individual entities for accountability for resources, not to the system as a whole. But mechanisms such as pooled funding developed through the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund office have illustrated pathways for collaborative financing that may be developed further.

#### ***Funding Architecture***

18. The governance of the system cannot be separated from how it is funded. More than 75 per cent of resources are earmarked contributions. While they may or may not be aligned to the policy and programmatic priorities of the organization's concerns, the earmarked contributions are not directly subject to the governance mechanisms of the entities. Further central bodies such as the ECOSOC have no resources to allocate. Consideration of how to strengthen accountability for system functioning at the country level will need to take account of the connection between command over resources and accountability for performance.

---

<sup>8</sup> See Bruce Jenks and Homi Kharas, *Toward a New Multilateralism*, April 2016, Chapter 7.

### ***Normative-Operational Divide***

19. The logic of the 2030 agenda involves a strengthening of the normative, knowledge and policy advice functions of the UN development system. Thus a major challenge is bridging the large gap between norm and standard setting activities and their realization on the ground. Consideration could be given to how to draw these threads together. Options could include: a tighter connection between the operational and integration segments of the ECOSOC; re-examining the relationship and roles of the UNDG and CEB/ HLCP; re-examining at the country level how UNDAFs can integrate normative dimensions; and devoting more attention to the assessment and assessment of the results of normative work.

20. This issue also connects to the role of the resident coordinator. Should the focus be the coordination of a multitude of project activities undertaken by various entities? Or is greater importance to be attached to the integration of policy services at the request of host authorities? More broadly, Agenda 2030 requires looking in depth at the future functioning of resident coordinators. There are clearly limitations imposed by the gap between the coordination arrangements at the country level and the guidance coming from agency headquarters. Can country level coordination and integration advance without more headquarters support? There remains a core tension between the call for more horizontal accountability and the reality that the accountability systems in place are vertical in nature.

### ***Representation***

21. Participation in governance is always an important issue to ensure legitimacy and stakeholder engagement. A broad range of challenges related to representation can be explored, such as whether different functions (normative agendas as distinct from operational work) may benefit from different arrangements, and the place of non-state actors. The establishment of Executive Boards through General Assembly resolution 48/162 led to stronger representation of donor countries. It is reasonable to consider whether the significant changes in funding patterns over the last 20 years suggest a need to re-examine the pattern of representation. At the time resolution 48/162 was adopted almost all contributions from the main donor countries to the funds and programmes were in the form of core resources. Now the highest share of overall resources is in the form of non-core contributions which are not subject to formal review at the level of the Boards. The JIU notes that in the UN system, there is experience with a variety of models for constituting governing bodies.

### ***Strategic Planning Capacity***

22. Resolution 71/243 identifies enablement of system-wide strategic planning as one of the purposes of improved governance. This reflects the importance for Agenda 2030 of the provision of integrated policy support. The requirement is to define the capacity needed to think strategically about the positioning of the UN development system as a whole, which in drawing strength from its pluralism, is better equipped to leverage its assets. The placement and

resourcing of such a function will need careful consideration to ensure it is not trapped in formalistic inter-agency structures and is situated close to the highest level of leadership.

**PARAGRAPH 45 (b): Defining clear and accountable roles across the system and improving its transparency, accountability and responsiveness to Member States;**

**JIU Observations**

23. Consideration of roles across the system will need to take account of the findings and recommendations that result from paragraph 19 and 20 of the resolution that address functions and capacities. Other issues related to accountability, including to Member States may also be pertinent.

24. Does accountability require assessment of results at a system-wide level? This issue was raised by the Coherence Panel and was at the centre of the pilot initiative for independent system-wide evaluations of operational activities for development which were initiated consequent to resolution 67/226. It remains unresolved to this date.

25. Is the accountability of Executive Boards for carrying out the direction of the General Assembly and the ECOSOC sufficiently robust? The functions of those Executive Boards include implementing the policies put forward by the General Assembly and the coordination and guidance received from the ECOSOC and to ensure that the activities and operational strategies of each fund and programme are consistent with the overall policy guidance provided.<sup>9</sup>

26. Is personnel performance management at all levels of staff aligned with the strategic and operational objectives of organizations?

27. What are the specific requirements for horizontal accountability and how is that accountability connected to authority and responsibility? Can accountability be meaningful if disconnected from authority and influence over resource and personnel decisions?

**PARAGRAPH 45 (c): Enhancing the transparency of the activities of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the United Nations Development Group to ensure their effective interaction with and improve their responsiveness to Member States, while respecting their working methods, particularly with regard to the implementation of cross-system issues, through regular briefings to the Economic and Social Council.**

**JIU Observations**

28. The issue of the responsiveness to Member States, and related transparency, of the United Nations Chief Executives Board and its subsidiary machinery (HLCM, HLCP, and the UNDG) is

---

<sup>9</sup> A/RES/48/162 Annex OP 20-21

a complex matter. On the one hand, the need for inter-secretariat mechanisms to collaborate and coordinate, in accordance with working methods they themselves elaborate, is self-evident and compelling. On the other hand, in the absence of strong inter-governmental mechanisms to provide operationally meaningful direction at a system-wide level, the CEB mechanisms are the closest approximation available for action on cross- system issues that concern Member States.

29. To help reconcile these interests, the CEB could give thought to certain measures, including reviewing its committee structure to draw more closely together operational and normative responsibilities and provide effective support for results-based planning across agencies. It could consider whether arrangements based on purely voluntary participation of all entities can be improved upon in terms of producing results. It may also wish to consider making clear how initiatives are resourced, where authority resides, and the reasonable role of Member States in defining objectives and assessing results.