

**ISSUES NOTE – ECOSOC 2010 OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES SEGMENT**

**Dialogue session: “Country-level capacity: is the UN system equipped to respond to the needs and priorities of the programme countries?” (3:00 – 5:00 PM, 9 July 2010)**

**I. Background**

The United Nations General Assembly<sup>1</sup> has recognized the need for “the range and level of skills and expertise assembled by the United Nations system at the country level to be commensurate with that needed to deliver on the priorities in each country’s United Nations Development Assistance Framework, in line with the national development strategies and plans, including PRSP where they exist, and to correspond to the technical backstopping and capacity development needs and requirements of developing countries”.

Each country requires a different mix of capacities from the United Nations country teams. Least Developed Countries might face a broad range of challenges often spanning the whole development agenda. The demands of middle-income countries are different from those of least developed countries or vulnerable states. Their focus areas may include addressing pockets of poverty and inequality, addressing environmental challenges, mobilizing new technologies, developing macroeconomic or trade policies, as well as ways of engaging in international governance mechanisms. As repeatedly underscored by United Nations Member States, there is no “one size fits all” response.

The system must also be able to respond to the emergence of new development needs. For instance, recently the convergence of the global financial and economic crisis, the volatility of food and fuel commodity prices and climate change needs has challenged the United Nations development system to provide adequate and timely support to programme countries in demand.

In 2009, capacity assessments of United Nations Country Teams were conducted in Albania, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam and Botswana. In 2010, other countries including Papua New Guinea will also conduct a capacity assessment. The 2009 capacity assessments showed that there is considerable need for strengthening the policy and technical advisory functions of the UN system organizations. A shift from programme management to such advisory support is envisaged in some countries. However, in some countries, the need remains for the United Nations to continue to provide programme management support.

The number and type of United Nations system organizations represented in United Nations Country Teams has an impact on the support provided by the United Nations system to programme countries. At the same time, programme countries should have access to the full range of resources of the United Nations development system, regardless of whether organizations are resident or non resident.

A recent report of the United Nations Secretary-General on human resources challenges within the development system at the country level (E/2009/75) highlighted that a growing number

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly resolution 62/208 on , the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system

of United Nations organizations, including some specialized agencies such as UNIDO have continued to decentralize their capacity.

The study also found out that access of the recipient countries to the range of skills and expertise from the United Nations system varies and could be enhanced. Non-resident agencies (NRAs) have been addressing ways to participate more fully and effectively in UNDAF and joint programming processes at the country level, as they have critical capacity to respond to governmental priorities. For example, support to trade policy and entrepreneurship requires the engagement of UNIDO, UNCTAD, the International Trade Centre – the United Nations entities with direct responsibility for those issues. Some innovative options are being piloted including the introduction of NRA coordination officers. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) aims at enhancing the engagement of non-resident agencies in country programming processes and improving the access of the UN country teams to the expertise and experience of NRAs.

Regional Director Teams are becoming increasingly involved in support and advice on country-level substantive programming areas and coordination processes. In order to strengthen the current support capacities at the regional level, an effort is being made to further clarify the roles and functions of quality support and assurance peer support group and to strengthen the regional and sub-regional support to the country teams. Both Regional Directors Teams and the ECOSOC-mandated Regional Coordination Mechanisms (RCM) have complementary roles in supporting the UN country teams.

The United Nations system has been encouraged to intensify efforts to achieve gender balance in appointments at the global, regional and country levels for positions that affect operational activities for development, including high-level and resident coordinator posts. As of early 2010, 36 per cent of all designated Resident Coordinators are female and 51 percent of them are from the South. At the same time, the UN system is monitoring and evaluating system-wide gender mainstreaming at the country level, by using the UNCT Performance Indicators for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (Scorecard).

## **II. Objectives of the panel**

This session aims to achieve following objectives: (a) share experiences with regard to aligning the capacities of the United Nations system to respond to national priorities and emerging needs, (b) improve understanding of the role of the Regional Director Teams and their responsibilities in the area of quality support and assurance; (c) discuss the extent to which gender mainstreaming into country programmes and gender equity and parity in staffing have been achieved across the UN system.

## **III. Suggested questions**

The panel will start with presentations by panelists, followed by questions and answers. Panelists are encouraged to limit their presentations within seven minutes. Participants from the floor should also speak no longer than three minutes, and are strongly discouraged from delivering written statements. The following questions could guide the discussion:

1. To what extent do UN Country Teams currently have the mix and expertise and skills to adequately respond to needs and priorities of programme countries?
2. To what extent is there a need to enhance access by programme countries to the full range of mandates and resources of the UN system, including non-resident agencies, taking into account their specific needs and priorities?
3. What is the role of Regional Directors Teams and the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) in supplementing country-level capacities of the UN system?
4. How well do the UN Country Teams work in addressing gender equality and women's empowerment as a cross-cutting issue?