



2011 ECOSOC OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES SEGMENT

Informal summary

Dialogue with the Executive Heads of the United Nations Funds and Programmes on “Looking to the future of operational activities for development of Funds and Programmes: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats”

10:00 am – 1:00 pm, 15 July 2011, Geneva

In opening the dialogue, H.E. Mr. Gonzalo Gutierrez Reinel, Vice-President of ECOSOC welcomed Ms. Michelle Bachelet and Mr. Babatunde Osotimehin’ participation in the dialogue for the first time. He noted that the development landscape is changing. The UN system needs to review how far it has gone in making its support to developing countries more relevant, flexible, effective and efficient and address persisting weaknesses and obstacles. The dialogue offered an opportunity to hear how funds and programmes are doing in the current development cooperation landscape. What they have achieved. How they are addressing difficulties and changing “old patterns” of cooperation. How they are gearing to address new challenges. Executive Heads were expected to advise on how UN system’s operational activities should evolve, and what important areas should be addressed in the next Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR).

Presentations

Ms. Helen Clark (UNDP) pointed out that in view of the heightened risk of development setbacks and difficult financing landscape, funds and programmes must identify the emerging opportunities, and work strategically together to pursue them.

The growing number of development actors and the increasing use of new technologies to make citizens’ voices heard offer optimism, energy, and opportunities. It requires the UN system to improve its systems to share what it knows and to learn in order to address the shifting needs, realities, and concerns of citizens. The convening power and impartiality of the UN would enable it to connect development needs and solutions with global consultations.

In the challenging resource environment, UN support must target initiatives that have catalytic impact, for example investment in women and girls and activities that maximize the synergies across different strands of development work, for example, those that address security, peace and development holistically.

Ms. Clark furthermore highlighted the importance of improving the coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency of the UN development in order to make it truly “fit for purpose” in the 21st century. The upcoming General Assembly review of UN system’s operational activities (QCPR) should focus on coherence for results, not process. The UNDAF rollout countries, the Delivering as One and voluntary adopter countries and countries emerging from conflict or crisis provide ground for testing innovative solutions.

Referring to the recent Civilian Capacity Review, Ms. Clark emphasized that the experience of the Funds and Programmes can be used to develop shared guidelines on civilian capacity across a wide range of key actors. There are however administrative and human resources hurdles which have made it difficult for the different arms of the UN to work effectively together. She called for continuous support for initiatives to reduce such obstacles, for example joint workplan and harmonization of business practices. Partnership with all actors is of paramount importance for a nimble and effective UN system.

Ms. Michelle Bachelet (UN Women) stressed that supporting gender equality and women’s empowerment offers a tremendous opportunity for the UN system to make a difference on the ground and enhance the relevance and impact of its work. However, the UN must approach the challenge collectively. The creation of UN Women was a new opportunity to enable the UN system to work in a more coordinated way. Essential for collective success is the development of effective leadership and accountability, which requires strengthened partnerships, joint programming, and adequate and predictable resources.

Experiences from joint programming on gender equality among UN system agencies show the potential to bring implementing partners closer, and thus avoid UN agencies and line ministries working too much in silos. They also leads to greater national ownership and better alignment with national priorities. It is important to evaluate more systematically the impact of initiatives in bringing agencies together to contribute to gender equality. Mr. Bachelet informed the Council that UN Women is launching an effort with other UN organizations to undertake a joint evaluation of joint programming.

Ms. Bachelet finally noted that gender equality remained under-invested in, which needs to be changed. The UN has to increase significantly the priority it gives to investments in the area of gender equality. She proposed that gender markers be institutionalized across the UN system to enable it to account for its investments in gender equality.

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin (UNFPA) emphasized the importance of working together to support investments in women and young people and the critical role of solid data and analysis in effective development planning, policymaking and programming. Drawing on UNFPA’s experience, he highlighted the advantages of joint programming. He furthermore called on the UN to conceive its support within the comprehensive development challenge and not as “individual champions of bits of the development agenda”. It is thus very important to focus on coordination and strengthening national capacity and systems. Small operations lead to thinly distributed resources, leaving little space for policy dialogue. In this connection, UNFPA is investing in strategic partnerships and at the same time improving its evaluation, monitoring and oversight so as to enhance accountability.

Mr. Martin Mogwania (UNICEF) encouraged the UN to move its coherence agenda from a process to a results-orientation approach. At a time when the UN has fewer resources, achieving more results more efficiently requires that organizations rely on each other and recognize and apply comparative strengths, through learning from experience, building partnerships and streamlining processes.

The UN should use rigorous, evidence-based decision making and normative principles to guide its actions, which should be reflected in the next GA review of UN system's operational activities (QCPR). At country level, an empowered UN Resident Coordinator is critical. By recognizing and utilizing the comparative strengths of respective agencies, the UN country team (UNCT), led by the UN Resident Coordinator (RC), obtains the greatest and more efficient results.

Partnerships need to build on national leadership, comparative-advantage and MDGs. In response, the systems used by agencies must be harmonized and aligned. Mr. Mogwania supported a more coherent approach to identifying, monitoring and reporting on results, as the relevance and sustainability of the UN will depend to a large extent on its capacity to deliver, document and report on results.

Mr. Mogwania closed by suggesting that the QCPR take into account, among others, an equity-focused approach, a more streamlined UNDAF process, context-specific UNDAFs, rational agency participation, streamlining planning, monitoring and reporting requirements and lessons learned from the Delivering as One.

Mr. Ramiro Lopes Da Silva (WFP) spoke about the urgent need to scale up nutrition interventions. The UN system tended to work alone, leading to unsustainable and unsystematic nutrition programmes. Changes are underway. He encouraged the UN system to seize the opportunity and capitalize on the global momentum for nutrition.

Referring to REACH, a facility to bring all stakeholders together to combat child under nutrition, Mr. Da Silva explained the importance of leveraging comparative advantages to support country-level efforts. The breath and depth of UN presence as well as the complementarities of its mandates ensured the success of REACH. Each agency focused on what it could do best, leveraging its core competencies and comparative advantages.

He then noted that donors are increasingly looking for programmes that offer the highest value-for-money and meet defined goals. It is important for the UN to measure results and monitor progress in a way that does not add burden to national governments.

Interactive discussion

In the subsequent interactive discussion, Pakistan, Belgium, Bangladesh, Italy, Russian Federation, Spain, the United States, Norway, Nepal, Germany and the International Labour Organization took the floor. The following issues were highlighted by speakers:

1. Results-orientation: There were calls for the UN system to demonstrate its results and impact. Between now and 2015, the UN must show results of its operational activities, with the support of measurable indicators to explain to the world how the UN has taken up the challenges it faces.
2. Engaging other actors: Other actors, including the emerging economies and foundations, play an increasingly important role. For example, foundations are now financing policy work for the government. The business models of the UN should be reviewed in this context.
3. Funding: Funding is closely linked to results and impact achieved by the UN system. The fact that the UN continues to rely primarily on the contribution of 10 donors raises concerns. Emerging economies and other actors should also be invited to contribute to the core activities of the UN. There should be more emphasis on the effective use of resources. In this regard, the UN was called on to abandon all travel in business class for its officials.
4. Cost of coordination: The cost of coordination was perceived to be related to the commitment of actors to “be coordinated” (the higher the commitment, the smaller the cost). The question as to how the UN could scale down its coordination costs was asked. It was suggested that support to the resident coordinator system should be cost shared among UN agencies.
5. Assistance strategy for Middle Income Countries (MICs) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs): Two threads of thinking emerged. On the one hand, there was a strong appeal for the UN system to focus on the large vulnerable population in MICs. On the other hand, it was felt that the needs of the MICs should be met primarily by resources raised domestically and that UN operational activities should continue to focus on the LDCs. Government systems in LDCs are often bypassed due to their slowness and inefficiency. It is therefore key to improve national systems rather than bypass them.
6. Next steps for UN system Coherence: Current coherence agenda is driven by the One UN Fund and the Multi-Donor Trust Funds (MDTFs), which are subject to uncertainties. Donors wondered if certain funds should still be set aside to provide incentive for coordination.
7. TCPR implementation and QCPR preparations: It was felt that progress by the UN system in implementing the 2007 GA review of UN system’s operational activities (TCPR) was not adequate. Specialized agencies should be engaged more closely in the follow-up to the TCPR. Now, there is need to identify the areas where progress can be achieved more easily. The next GA review in 2012 (QCPR) should take some distance from a process-oriented approach and focus on results. This can be done by using evaluations to identify how the processes can make an impact.

In response, Executive Heads affirmed their commitments to coordination, regardless the availability of additional funding. In fact, there is notable progress in working together in the field, for example, in the area of maternal health, but clear tools and indicators are needed to show that global commitments were translated into specific actions and results. In this connection, Member States also needed to coordinate with each other, to ensure that development assistance works best.

One Funds and the MDG Fund (MDG-F) were welcomed as a modality driving joint programming among UN system organizations. In this regard, the need to learn lessons from the MDG-F was stressed. There were concerns about the fact that coordination is underfunded. Donors have clearly indicated their intention to withdraw funding for coordination functions. UNDP is making efforts to bridge the gaps, including funding for the resident coordinator office.

There was strong support for a stronger results-orientation. The UN is requested to report against expected results. However, in practice, results are not always measurable. For example, it is difficult to measure cultural change. Attributing a result to a specific contribution is always challenging. Country-specific reporting is sensitive. Therefore, the UN system must “get the balance right”.

Executive Heads acknowledged the importance of engaging other actors. Positive experiences from UNFPA and UNICEF were shared in this regard. While recognizing the utility of a broader dialogue with all actors at high level, it was also cautioned that such broad dialogue may make it difficult to achieve consensus and attribute results.

The challenges posed by the imbalance between core and non-core funding were emphasized. UN system’s funding is to a larger extent earmarked. It limits the flexibility to serve the populations whose needs are unmet. Earmarked funding is also supporting smaller scale interventions. These issues should be addressed in future discussions to improve outcomes and results.

PARTICIPANTS

CHAIRPERSON/MODERATOR: **H.E. Mr. Gonzalo Gutierrez Reinel**
Vice-President of ECOSOC
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PANELLISTS: **Ms. Helen Clark**
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Executive Director, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and
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