2012 Operational Activities Segment

Summary

Highlights of the
Dialogue with Chairs of Executive Boards of Funds and Programmes
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon
Tuesday, 17 July 2012

The Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UN-Women, WFP and UNICEF engaged in a dialogue with UN Member States on the question of how Executive Boards can foster enhanced policy coherence among the funds and programmes in areas such as reporting on development results, programming and common administrative services at the country level. Nine Member States made statements and posed follow-up questions on topics covered by the representatives of the four Executive Boards.

Views from Executive Boards of Funds and Programmes and Member States

The session with the Executive Boards of Funds and Programmes complemented the perspective of programme countries and of the Executive Heads of Funds and Programmes on critical issues to be addressed through the 2012 QCPR. As was emphasized by the session moderator, it is the Executive Boards to whom much of the governance of the UN's operational activities for development is entrusted. In this sense, the representatives of the four Executive Boards of Funds and Programmes focused on the future challenges of governing for coherence across a UN development structure that includes a diversity of governing bodies.

A central theme emerged from the overall session proceedings: there is a need for a fundamental realignment of how the UN development system works at the headquarters level, which in turn touches upon multiple management and governance issues. A summary of the issues stressed by the dialogue between the representatives of the Executive Boards and Member States follows below.

UN development system in a changing development landscape

Finland and the representative of the **UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS** Executive Board recognized the importance of the participation of the Executive Boards of Funds and Programmes in the Operational Activities Segment to assist ECOSOC with its oversight functions over UN development operations. It is the first time that such a dialogue was taking place in this Segment and **Finland** supported institutionalizing this practice. **Bangladesh** stressed that future dialogues should be structured in a way that leads to real development impact on the ground. The representative of the **UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS** Executive Board suggested that such objective could be realized by organizing dialogues around specific topics, such as Common Country Programme Documents (CCPDs), selected administrative services, etc.

The representative of the **UNICEF** Executive Board stressed that the challenges of the new development landscape call for effective ECOSOC oversight mechanisms over how the UN development system functions and delivers and how individual UN entities are held accountable for development outcomes and impact.

The representative of the **UN-Women** Executive Board highlighted that in addition to the policy guidance to be established through the QCPR, the effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of UN operational activities for development also depend on broader political decisions of structure and

governance that must be considered and weighed by Member States. In the drive to such greater system-wide coherence, the **Russian Federation** called for a reinforcement of the principles of untied aid, universality, and national ownership and leadership. Additionally, the **Philippines** and the representative of the **UNICEF** Executive Board emphasized that care should be placed on not eclipsing the niche mandates or comparative advantage exercised by individual entities of the UN development system.

The role and authority of the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of Funds and Programmes were also viewed as needing reconsideration in light of the new development landscape. Though it was recognized that the Joint Meeting is voluntary in nature and void of specific mandates, a common view among panelists and Member States was that we have reached a time and context that call for changes and new alternatives. One proposal by **Canada** and the representative of the **UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS** Executive Board was to provide the Joint Meeting with decision-making authority over common issues, particularly on the approval of CCPDs and in advancing the simplification and harmonization of business practices. Another alternative voiced by the representative of the **UN-Women** Executive Board, in his personal capacity, was for UNDG to encourage programme countries to adopt CCPDs and support the evolution of UNDAFs into CCPDs. **Cuba** stressed that such encouragement had to be mindful not to eliminate the current option of choices available to programme countries with respect to programming instruments. The representative of the **UNICEF** Executive Board argued that diversity of choice should be seen as a strength, providing flexibility, responsiveness and mitigating conditionalities.

Funding architecture

All members of the panel addressed the increasing imbalance between core and non-core resources, noting that a deteriorating core funding base poses risks to the neutrality, capacity and equity of UN development assistance. For Executive Boards to be able to address the imbalance, the representative of the **UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS** Executive Board argued that UN development entities first need to calculate and present their respective critical mass of resources that would be required to deliver and fulfill development mandates.   The representative of the **WFP** Executive Board in particular argued that predictable funding over multiple years remains as critical as the core/non-core imbalance. **Cuba** also noted that the effectiveness of UN operational activities for development depended more on a sufficient level of resources than on structural or organizational reforms.

Common programming instruments and Delivering-as-One approach

The representatives of the Executive Boards of **UN-Women** and **WFP** stressed that the lessons and best practices identified by the DaO independent evaluation must be incorporated into UN development operations, with consideration that the QCPR should reflect the DaO approach as the new way of doing business. **Bangladesh** referred to DaO as a litmus test for the Resident Coordinator System, where improved performance at the field level is of paramount importance. With such litmus test, a key question that emerges is how can DaO be used to develop a coherent, unified and integrated strategy from the multitude of macro-level initiatives currently in place (Rio +20, MDGs, Istanbul Plan of Action for LDCs, post-2015 agenda, etc.), as well as the diversity of guidelines stemming from multiple governing boards? Of key importance in this process, as stated by the representative of the **UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS** Executive Board, is the adoption of a single reporting format for operational activities by the UN development system at field level.

A common theme of discussion throughout the session was the need to streamline UNDAFs and other common programming frameworks, such as CCPDs, particularly to reduce transaction costs and bureaucratic burdens on programme countries and UN entities. The representative of the **UNICEF** Executive Board argued that UNDAFs must become a flexible and nimble tool capable of adapting to a

wide diversity of field realities. **Tunisia** added that UNDAF streamlining must give particular attention to coordination, reporting and evaluation practices.

The representative of the **UN-Women** Executive Board argued for making South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation the standard practice across all UN operational activities for development, not merely an add-on or an afterthought. The current traditional model of "donor-recipient country" was seen as insufficient in the new development landscape and therefore in need of being complemented by a real and visible shift that taps the capacity and knowledge of South-South and triangular approaches.

Resident Coordinator System as keystone of system-wide coherence

Strong consensus emerged in making the Resident Coordinator System more effective in its coordination and coherence functions. The representative of the **UN-Women** Executive Board noted the importance of empowering the Resident Coordinator in terms of being able to deliver the requirements that would be expected from adopting DaO as a standard model. The representative of the **WFP** Executive Board called for modifying the RC selection process, emphasizing key competencies for leadership and team-building which are at the core of the UN truly being able to deliver as one. The **Philippines** noted that regional governmental bodies are a staple of UN projects within their nation-state, therefore suggesting that partnerships with local and rural governments should be increasingly leveraged by the RC system.

The representative of the **UN-Women** Executive Board also emphasized that strengthening the role of the RC cannot overlook how the effectiveness of this position is impacted by headquarters-level relationships, as well as the authority that it is able to exercise over the quality and accountability of the UNDAF process and in harmonizing and simplifying administrative services at the field level. In terms of coordination functions, **Tunisia** urged that RCs must be proactive in making accessible to programme countries the knowledge and expertise of non-resident agencies.

Harmonization and simplification of business practices

The **Russian Federation** called upon the Executive Boards of Funds and Programmes to take ownership in improving the simplification and harmonization of business practices of UN operational activities for development. The representative of the **UNICEF** Executive Board stressed that reforms must not fall pray to the temptation to solely focus on process and business and administrative issues, but rather that the fundamental point should be to facilitate development outcomes and impact that transform the lives of the poor and vulnerable groups. A balance should be struck between these two complementary but seemingly opposing objectives.

Both of the representatives of the **UN-Women** and the **UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS** Executive Boards noted the need to improve upon unnecessary bureaucratic costs by investing in sustainable technology that can be shared across UN entities, such as information systems. The representative of the **UNICEF** Executive Board argued that it is unrealistic to expect that ERPs can be merged into one behemoth data system. Rather, the focus should be on the manageability of multiple systems that can communicate and share data across different platforms to tackle the complexity of global development challenges.

The representative of the **UN-Women** Executive Board also recommended exploring the feasibility of a lead agency or of a regional business centre model to achieve significant simplification and harmonization across a wide spectrum of common business services. While these two models would be of particular relevance in countries with a large volume of administrative services, any chosen alternative

would still require a differentiated country approach in order to avoid a cookie-cutter or a one-size-fits-all approach in implementation. The representative of the **WFP** Executive Board referred to the harmonization lessons of its cluster system and urged that any reform efforts in this field should build upon the best practices of this experience.

Monitoring and evaluation

Efficiencies and resources need to be more effectively shared across UN entities, which can be achieved through the standardization of reporting, programming instruments, and results frameworks. The **Russian Federation** called for a significant improvement in the quality of evaluation of UN operational activities for development. It further stressed that careful consideration should be given to an indicators system that can provide effective accountability for development results, while taking care that the complexity involved in putting in place such a system does not overshadow or detracts from the usefulness or purpose served by evaluation reports.

The **Philippines** argued for the development of a scorecard as a feedback mechanisms to monitoring and evaluation systems. The representative of the **UNICEF** Executive Board observed that the integration of a scorecard system within UNDAFs and CCPDs would be relatively easy but warned that its development involves high transactions costs and complexity burdens, plus additional core-resource implications to make it operational. The **Philippines** also argued for a greater inclusion of the private sector and civil society organizations in the evaluation of UN operational activities for development.