

Wednesday, 25 February 2015

**Morning Session on Effectiveness of UN system support for national capacity development**

**Moderator**

Jens Wandel, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director, Bureau of Management

**Special speaker**

Executive Secretary of Regional Commission

**Panellists**

H.E. Kikeo Chanthabuly, Vice Minister, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Lao PDR

Peter Oganga Mangiti, Principal Secretary, Ministry of State for Devolution and Planning, Kenya

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**Speaking Note for Vice Minister:**

**Mr. Moderator,  
Distinguished Panellists and Delegates,  
A Very Good Morning,**

**It is a great honour for me to join this panel discussion on “effectiveness of the UN System support for national capacity development”, an area which I think is one of the most critical in the discharge of the mandate of the UN system at country level. Before going to the specific questions, I wish to thank Mr. Moderator for his introductory remarks and special speaker who have just presented their views.**

**Allow me now to turn to the first questions:**

- 1. How effective is the UN development system in building national capacities in programme countries, e.g. in terms of supporting the development of policies, institutions and systems? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the UN development system in this regard e.g. compared to other development partners?***

I am of the view that capacity building has been central to United Nations operational activities from the very beginning. With the experience in Lao PDR, through our long-standing collaboration with the UN agencies, capacity building is now seen as an endogenous country-driven, long-term process at the core of development, which requires the involvement of all sectors. We now acknowledge that external support should not be limited to enhancing individual

skills but should also address institutional, organizational and social dimensions.

UN agencies in Lao PDR have made considerable progress in supporting and strengthening institutional, organizational and social dimensions of capacity building through the introduction of a results-based management approach by adopting common principles and a standard format for UNDAF results reporting. This in turn has been an effective tool in building national capacities. Many UN organizations have adopted Results-Based Management (RBM) or other results-based approaches, within the context of strategic programming orientations to improve programming management efficiency and effectiveness and enhance organizational learning and accountability for results. Although it is too soon to assess the impact of these approaches on UN organizations' activities at the country level, their introduction has generally helped enhancing the organizations internal planning coherence and has contributed to greater attention to performance measuring and monitoring from a narrow focus on processes and outputs delivery to outcomes, impact, and partnership. It has noted that success at the project and programme level could be translated into development results due to the fact that connection between organization activities and outputs and country's results should first be established to determine whether an organization is choosing its intervention strategically and is utilizing its comparative advantage effectively.

Also, attention of the UN agencies in Lao PDR is being paid to capacity building of local level institutions, which is becoming more important for development assistance, in line with decentralization as part of governance reforms. There are indications of increased demand for use of national/local capacities including the use of national volunteers as well as professionals, particularly in community-based programmes.

Now on the second question:

***2. What are the challenges in measuring both agency-specific and system-wide results and impact in capacity development delivered through operational activities of the UN system?***

While the UN agencies have applied the results-based approaches for capacity development activities, main difficulties of implementation of results-based approaches include:

- **Firstly, attribution of results:** As performance assessment moves away from inputs to various levels of results (outputs and outcomes) along the causal chain of the logical framework, it is more difficult for organizations to credibly attribute results to their own activities particularly if the volume of invested organization resources in the country is modest compared to that of other development actors.
- **Secondly, performance incentives:** Performance measurement and incentives of current RBM systems continue to be focused on agencies' output delivery as planned for a specific programming cycle, rather than on the contributions that these outputs make to the achievement of sustainable country results and on the organizations' performance in relations to these. This leads to supply-driven rather than demand-driven

decision making for programme management. More demand-driven approaches would lead to a better focus on the capacity building dimensions and recognize and address capacity and resource gaps both at the national and UN system level before programmes are implemented.

- **Thirdly, harmonization of results-based approaches:** Even though the focus on results is emphasized in most organizations and most of them have introduced results-based logical frameworks, there is still a great variety of definitions of effectiveness, objective and target, and of performance measurement systems. Organizations are at different stages of implementation, with, in general, a limited capacity to apply this approach at the country level and involve national partners.
- **Lastly, data and statistics:** The lack of available and accurate data and statistics is a significant hindrance to a more comprehensive use of results based approaches within the system and programme countries.

On the last question:

- 3. Is the current model of delivering operational activities of the UN development system at the country level sufficiently geared towards building national capacities and systems? If not, what are the main obstacles facing the UN development system in this regard? Do the delivery models of other development cooperation actors at the country level such as the regional and multilateral development banks and the bilateral donors provide valuable lessons from which the UN development system can learn in this regard? What could be the vision for the evolution of the national execution modality of UN development system entities in the post-2015 era?***

Delivering operational activities of the UN development system at the country level sufficiently geared towards building national capacities and systems is basically about the capacity of the UN system to respond to evolving needs of recipient countries. The UN system's presence in the field and its adequacy have been addressed several times by the General Assembly in the past. Support to recipient countries by the UN system requires staff with technical skills in virtually all domains of human activity, as well as skills to assist in the formulation of national development policy, addressing multi-sectoral issues such as poverty reduction or gender mainstreaming. It requires also that UN staff be skilful in reconciling competing demands for programmes in a context of scarce resources.

Measures taken to enhance field-level capacity of the UN system in my opinion may include:

- First of all, the adequacy of the UN field presence is particularly affected by the quality of the staff mobilized as much as quantity. Towards the end of the 1990s and since then, many efforts have been made by UN organizations to better prepare their personnel to meet the changing demands placed on the system, in particular the need for greater coordination and to handle issues at

the policy level, in the field.

- Secondly, comprehensive organizational learning and staff development strategies were implemented to reshape technical, office management and general competencies.
- Thirdly, staff rotation was systematized and mobility encouraged, not only within the same organization but also between organizations.
- Fourthly, in general there has been an increased focus on national and regional level activities, through greater delegation of decision-making to field personnel and, in cases when it was possible, greater decentralization of resources. Decentralization is meant to better respond to the needs of the recipient countries in a timely and effective manner. Field presence is also an important way to demonstrate the value of the UN in the eyes of the people.
- Fifthly, support at the regional level: In order to better support its presence in the field, there is an on-going trend within the UN system whereby organizations are transferring more resources and more authority to the regional and sub-regional levels.
- Sixthly, the evolving development priorities and dynamics require that the UN system country-level presence be suitably adjusted. Not every organization can establish adequate field presence but, overall, the UN system field presence should reflect priority sectors and issues.
- Seventhly, in enhancing the technical capacities of field offices, where and when needed, care should be taken to avoid increasing the transaction costs of programme delivery.
- Eighthly, improved coordination and more coherent programming, particularly programming of strategic value which is frequently related to cross-cutting issues, require a diversity of expertise which is not necessarily available in one single agency.
- Ninthly, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can facilitate mutual access to knowledge, including access to technical and referral services of any part of the UN system.
- Lastly, one of the most difficult issues in development Knowledge Management (KM) is to create a knowledge culture and get people motivated to share what they know. Motivations to share knowledge come from the understanding that knowledge is perishable, short-lived and rapidly loses value if not exchanged.

Mr. Moderator,

Now allow me to stop here and listen to other panellists' views on the issues related to our session today.

Thank You for your kind attention.