

ECOSOC Dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UN development system in the context of the post-2015 development agenda

**Workshop 3: Governance
13 May 2015, UNHQ New York**

Summary by the Vice-President of ECOSOC

I. Overview of presentations

Vice President of ECOSOC, H.E. María Emma Mejía Vélez acknowledged the complexity of the discussions on governance of the UN development system (UNDS). She said that notwithstanding this complexity, it has to be aligned with the priority functions of the system in the post-2015 context. Horizontal governance and accountability will need to be strengthened in the new context. She therefore urged participants to focus on what changes would be necessary in governance, including the representation of Members States. The effectiveness of governance systems was also highlighted as a key issue for further review.

Mr. Navid Hanif, UN DESA, said that the governing structures for system-wide guidance have not kept pace with adaptation of structures at country level and those of funds and programmes. Current governing bodies have limited capacity to advance policy coherence and interoperability in programming and operations across UNDS entities. There is wide variation in ability of individual entities' governing bodies to provide regular strategic guidance, which is dependent on a number of factors (e.g., size, level of expertise among members, frequency and quality of meetings and implementation tools). The exponential growth in non-core funding has also changed the development landscape and raised critical questions regarding the role of individual and system-wide governing bodies in providing strategic direction and oversight of operational activities for development. He also mentioned the representation has to reflect the current geo-economic realities.

Representing the UNDG, **Ms. Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen, Chair of the UN Development Group's Advisory Group**, noted that UNDG highly values increased coherence in policies, procedures and positions across all governing bodies, as mandated by Member States. The UNDG recognizes and respects the diversity of models and practices among UNDG members. The primary purpose of any improvement in governance should be to help deliver results for the people served by the UNDS. The issue of governance falls in the domain of Member States and the UNDG will be guided by their deliberations.

Mr. Rahul Chandran, independent expert from the UN University, stressed the need for form to follow function. The current system is the result of historical shifts

which in aggregate have not resulted in a very effective overall apparatus. The new agenda calls for change, but it also raises some tension, especially between the global and local levels and the relative balancing of the normative and operational aspects of the UNDS' work. Further, he stressed that the development objectives that are on the agenda are among some of the hardest, most intractable issues facing societies. While recognizing the need for a realistic approach to UNDS governance, the discussion on the governance of the UNDS should avoid mere "tinkering" with governance structures and be grounded in a sound understanding of emerging opportunities and constraints. A total re-think is required.

H.E. Ambassador Gerda Verbug, Chair of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) highlighted the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach to governance, and explained how CFS's practice of engaging multiple stakeholders from civil society and the private sector has strengthened its work and delivery on the ground. The model followed by CFS has important lessons for other multilateral development organizations preparing for the new post-2015 agenda, which calls for a partnership-based approach that is strongly results-based. She emphasized the importance of focusing on a set of key priorities for value added, rather than spreading resources too thin.

H.E. Ambassador Taonga Mushayavanhu, President of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board participated in the discussion via video-link from Geneva to showcase the experience UNAIDS, as the first joint and co-sponsored programme in the UN, who in addition, has civil society representation in its governing body. Since its inception, UNAIDS was based on a model which takes an integrated approach to a key development challenge, HIV/AIDs, recognizing the inter-linking health, economic and cultural aspects of HIV/AIDs.

Mr. Samuel Beever, President of the WFP Executive Board joined by video-link from Rome to speak about the experience of WFP's recent reform efforts to ensure that governance is able to keep pace with new tools. WFP's governance model is organized in direct response to the organization's mandate and agreed functions. The Board prioritizes the end results produced by WFP operations, especially those at country level. Four mutually reinforcing frameworks—strategy; policy; oversight; and accountability—ensure the governance system remains effective and legitimate. One new innovation within the governing board which has reaped impressive dividends is the practice of holding informal consultations with WFP implementing partners in advance of formal board meetings, which has deepened the engagement among all WFP members, improved efficiencies in formal decision-making process, and delivered better results on ground.

II. Key messages

Repositioning of governance arrangements cannot be fixed in isolation

If form must follow function, the discussion on governance structures cannot be disconnected from the other six subject areas of the dialogue, and requires alignment of functions, funding practices, capacity and impact of the United Nations development system, partnership approaches and organizational arrangements

Funding practices directly affect the effectiveness of governance

The exponential growth in non-core resources over the last two decades or so had made the current governance systems ineffective, as those resources were not subject to oversight of the Executive Boards. There is need to recognize and address governance matters relating to funding sources.

Governance structures should be more reflective of the playing field

Changes in the representation of Member States in governing bodies may not be enough in a post-2015 world. It is critical to think about how different stakeholders, from civil society to the private sector, can have a voice within governing bodies. This will allow to harness the strengths of all partners – whether in terms of civil society reach or private sector means, resources and innovation. The experiences of UNAIDS and the Committee on World Food Security, as well as relevant models from the public and private sector should be analyzed and lessons learned fed into the changes that will be required to make governance of the UN development system better fit to a post-2015 context.

Transparency, effectiveness and accountability as core organizing principles

Transparency, effectiveness and accountability for results should become the organizing principles of the specific governance structures of various UN entities.

III. Emerging priorities

System-wide, entity and national level governing structures need to be revisited

The tectonic changes in the geopolitical, economic and development cooperation landscape over the past couple of decades require a serious rethinking of the current governance arrangements to ensure fit-for-purpose at three levels: (i) UN system-wide level, (ii) level of Executive Boards of agencies, funds and programmes, and (iii) national level, including the engagement of and accountability to beneficiaries and national governing structures. The inter-agency arrangements for coordination such as UNDG and CEB were also frequently mentioned.

Rethink and strengthen system-wide governance

The post-2015 development agenda will have critical implications for the governance of the UNDS that can no longer be addressed by making cosmetic changes. To translate the post-2015 aspirations into reality, governance arrangements must be improved to allow the UNDS to effectively respond to the universal, yet differentiated nature of the new development agenda.

A “whole of system” approach to UNDS governance structures is needed

A fundamental re-think of the UNDS governance structures is needed, based on an improved “whole-of-system” approach to UNDS operations in rapidly changing development contexts. In the same way that governments are having to strategize on integrated approaches for implementing and measuring progress on the new sustainable development agenda, the UNDS needs to address the lack of coherence and integration in its governance structures and systems to support Member States to deliver a universal and unified post-2015 agenda.

Address the legitimacy and capacity of UN system governing bodies

The specific governance structures of the various UN entities must be made more equitable through appropriate representation. It must also be made more effective through enhanced expertise of its members and through improved working methods rooted in transparency, impact and accountability. The principles of equity and effectiveness should be mutually reinforcing within governance systems, taking into account the diversity of the UN development system.

Effective guidance and oversight based on coherent and high quality reporting

Member States must be in a position to exert their oversight, without micro-management, to hold the system accountable and ensure results’ quality. Readily available and accessible information for decision-making should be ensured, including improved, reliable and consistent data, information and analysis to drive system-wide coherence and effectiveness. This will also have positive knock-on effects for facilitating and streamlining reviews and follow-up of progress on the new development agenda.

Improve horizontal coordination and accountability at intergovernmental and inter-agency levels

A shift to a UNDS characterized by greater emphasis on integration in response to the demands of the post-2015 development agenda will require the UNDS entities to develop stronger capacity for horizontal coordination at both, the intergovernmental and inter-agency levels, with a view to strengthen complementarities and synergies .

IV. **Moving forward**

Moving forward, trust among all partners will be essential for mobilizing collective action and ensuring meaningful change. For this, “all options should be on the table” to ensure an open and inclusive dialogue around the varied priorities and concerns of Member States with regard to UNDS governance.

An overarching common strategic framework for the UNDS could be developed in support of the delivery of a universal and unified post-2015 development agenda

With Delivering As One, many entities have adopted robust results frameworks at the country level. At corporate level, a similar model could be developed into an overarching common framework that cuts across agencies specificities, to enable coherent and effective support of Member States in delivering a universal and unified post-2015 development agenda, and reviews and tracking of progress.

System wide instruments of governance should be strengthened.

The QCPR should be made more strategic and the whole UN development system, including the specialized agencies, should abide by it. It was also mentioned that CEB and UNDG should be given stronger role in implementing QCPR and system wide coordination but then these should report more frequently to Member States. It was clarified that these were inter-agency coordination arrangements and should not be seen as policy making platforms like the inter-governmental bodies.

A “mandated baseline of core resources” should be explored

In response to the rise of non-core resources and need for greater system-wide strategic planning, it was proposed that a “mandated baseline of core resources” be explored. This implied the possibility of assessed contributions for ensuring certain level of core resources.