

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

Workshop 4: Organizational Arrangements, Capacity, Impact & Partnership Approaches

27 May 2015, Westin Hotel, New York

Summary by the Vice-President of ECOSOC

I. Overview of presentations

Vice President of ECOSOC, H.E. María Emma Mejía Vélez opened by highlighting how changes in the broader global development landscape have impacted the UN development system's approaches to organizational arrangements, capacity, impact and partnerships. She acknowledged important efforts at coherence and coordination made by the system, through Delivering as One (DaO) at country level, the UNDG and the restructuring of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) for Coordination. At present, there is need to look whether current organizational arrangements adequately equip the UNDS to achieve the goals and targets set within the post-2015 development agenda. The rise of new development actors and the data revolution will also have important implications for the capacity and impact and partnership approaches of the UNDS in the post-2015 context, and should be discussed in tandem with strategizing for how the UNDS can best organize itself in the years ahead to maximize its relevance and effectiveness.

Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, UN DESA, stated that the QCPR represents one of the first opportunities for the UN to translate the SDGs into something operational. The task at hand should not be under-estimated given the breadth and depth of the transformation needed both within societies, and within the UN development system for the agenda to be successfully implemented. In the end, the QCPR is what we make out of it. There are many strategic passages in the 2012 QCPR --for example, regarding South-South cooperation, UNDS activities in conflict-affected states and complex humanitarian emergencies—which the Dialogue participants should keep in mind. This could help to rebalance away from what some have come to view as micro-management of the UNDS.

Mr. Navid Hanif, Director of ECOSOC Support and Coordination, UN DESA, opened by noting that the UN system's organizational model has been shaped by proactive policies such as the one introduced by system wide coherence panel and demands like the humanitarian situations. At the country level, Delivering as One (DaO) was designed purposefully as a system and has achieved some success. But will DaO only be sufficient for implementing the new integrated agenda? With regard to the regional level, most current platforms are geared towards coordination. These have helped in improving information sharing and cooperation but the new agenda has placed increase emphasis on regional level implantation and review. What new platforms can be created at the regional level? At the global level, the organizational arrangements of the UNDS have adapted and improved in

many ways in the past decade or two, but there are continued calls for improved coherence and measurability of system-wide efforts. Changes in funding realities, the growing importance of results-based management and reporting made issues of capacity, impact and partnerships increasingly central to the longer-term positioning of the UNDS. Impact has presented challenges to the UNDS owing to difficulties in measurement and attribution. Innovative partnerships are already a reality for many entities, but their centrality in terms of the implementation of the post-2015 agenda will require new thinking on oversight and accountability at all levels.

Speaking on behalf of the **UNDG Advisory Group, Ms. Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen**, emphasized the centrality of the QPCR and reconfirmed that its implementation remains at the forefront of all inter-agency mechanisms. The Delivering as One (DaO) experience has demonstrated its ability for achieving results, and it is important to remember that DaO is a relatively young modality. The Standard Operating Principles [SOPs] are still in the process of being rolled out, and are expected to greatly contribute to increasing coherence, effectiveness and efficiencies at country level in the years ahead. At the same time, UNDG acknowledges the importance of valuing diversity and differentiation—both within UNDS entities' varying practice and expertise as well as across different country contexts. Organizational arrangements will need to adapt according to national circumstances in order to be as relevant as possible. A new concept that merits further reflection in the context of the next QPCR in particular is that of “mutual recognition” of individual entities' procedures. She stated that capacity of the staff has to be strengthened and the human resource management policies should change. The Secretariat should be given more autonomy in this regard.

Mr. Bruce Jenks, independent expert, stressed that understanding the historical underpinnings of the current system is critical to the discussion of how it might adapt. In any discussion about fragmentation within the system, we should remember that the UNDS' experience of building communities of interest in health, education, etc. is an extremely important asset in today's world of networks and partnerships. At the same time, looking at UN country presence across different programme countries, it is challenging to discern a coherent, strategic approach to how the UNDS engages at the country level. The Dialogue should be anchored in a discussion of functions in order to adequately address organizational arrangements of the system. In particular, the Dialogue could consider homing in on the key issues and entry points which are deserving of system-wide response and execution. He presented five possible scenarios for re-designing the organizational arrangements.

Joining via video-link from Kampala, **Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa-Onochie, UN Resident Coordinator for Uganda**, spoke in her capacity as the head of a 21-member country team for the past three years. She highlighted the importance of rooting the UNDAF in national ownership by aligning what the UNCT does at the country level with longer-term national development strategies and plans (e.g., Uganda's Vision 2040). As part of this process, the UNCT successfully coordinated the roles and responsibilities of other development partners in support of Uganda's national development strategies. Uganda and the UNCT have also benefited greatly from hosting one of the UN Global Pulse data labs, which has facilitated engagement with Government and other partners to unleash the new data revolution and fill gaps in development data with new data sources. The RC confirmed that the adoption of Delivering as One (DaO) has promoted convergence on the ground for those implementing while strengthening capacity and reducing transaction costs for government and other

partners. An innovation in Uganda has been the integration of humanitarian and development assistance by embedding a programme that supports refugees and host country institutions into its core programming and funding. Despite the benefits of DaO, some of the donors have not wanted to support it. This greatly impacts on how we organize ourselves. But great progress continues to be made through DaO, even in this early phase, and its principles need to be implemented in their entirety. The country teams should be given time and space to fully embrace this modality.

Mr. Daniel Lopez-Acuna, independent expert, stated that the UNDS needs better measurements for capacity development. Any re-formulation will require major changes and guidance that must go beyond the framework of the QCPR. It is important the QCPR be strategic in nature. The changes should not be limited to something like a “QCPR-plus” or “DaO-plus”; a paradigm shift is needed. In the evolution of the work of the UNDS, we have reached a situation where we have bi-lateralized the UNDS. At country level, the shift in focus has been towards project management, to respond to the financial landscape. This has been at the expense of expanding capacities and brokering knowledge. Further, the UNDS needs to boost the capacity of the system to engage in strategic partnerships to multiply the impact of the UNDS. This is easier said than done. Multi-stakeholder partnerships and issue-based coalitions can be good but must not undermine the core programmes of the UNDS or governance by Member States. A challenge is identifying clear goals around which these can be organized and avoiding partnerships for partnerships sake.

Mr. Jens Wandel, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau of Management, related capacity to the UNDS’s ability to innovate at the country level in finding appropriate, context-specific solutions, including the capacity to create feedback, iterative effects so that the UNDS can determine whether what it is doing is meaningful and makes an impact, and to exit if things are not working. There is also the capacity to act together, and the capacity for transparency, which leads to a discussion of personnel and whether the UNDS has the staffing support it needs. One way forward might be to “publish our personnel and our capacity”—similar to what some other organizations do—so that the highly qualified, skilled profiles of many people in the UNDS can put to good use by RCs and other who have little way of accessing their expertise under current personnel arrangements. We also need to think about the capacity to partner, so that it is not simply about knowledge expertise and financing, but also about the voluntary nature of modern partnerships for transformational purposes. When we talk about results, when we are discussing data and whether we can track whether we are transforming something or not. We need to create space for a data revolution. A partnership is essential for this, as the UNDS will not be able to do this alone, nor should it. Normative work to create data philanthropy is a potential avenue for the UN.

Ms. Valerie Julliard, UN Resident Coordinator for Guatemala, joined via video-link to discuss the importance of capacity, impact and partnerships in a middle-income country (MIC) with a history of an internal armed conflict. The Guatemala UNCT is made of 20 UN entities and a personnel of some 660. The UNCT has found that the greatest overall demand from Government and civil society partners is the UN system’s unique blend of a normative framework with operational support for institution-building. In Guatemala the UNCT has partnerships in key areas of analysis, public advocacy, programming response etc., while maintaining this clarity of roles amongst all. The UN is seen as both a reference and an ally, as well as an adviser and partner in action. Lessons learned by the UNCT include: (i) Capacity building efforts must be tied to clear results; (ii) Capacity building needs to focus

on how Governments and civil society can be supported symbiotically to ensure effective and sustainable results from their efforts; (iii) Impact can only be achieved when a shared long-term integral vision with Government counterparts is spelled out with goals and outcomes agreed; (iv) Impact is also most likely to occur when driven by a bottom-up process.

II. Key messages

Adaptation of organizational arrangements should be based on a discussion of content and process, or the “what”....

There is a need to forge and consolidate a consensus on which core and emerging functions will be expected of the UNDS in support of the post-2015 development agenda. Without this, the status quo will prevail. The alignment of the UNDS functions will require deep changes in the way the system approaches its organizational arrangements, capacity, impact and partnerships.

.... And the “how”to do so in a coherent, integrated and effective way

Further, the UNDS will be expected to do things in an increasingly coherent and integrated way to support Member States in delivering the post-2015 agenda and the SDGs so as to “leave no one behind”. Greater clarity on how organizational arrangements would adapt to new realities and priorities is contingent upon agreement on core and emerging system-wide functions of the UN development system,

Strengthening coherence and leveraging the strengths of diversity

The diversity of the UN development system entities is a strength that needs to be better harnessed in support of an integrated and universal post-2015 agenda. In that regard, coherence and effectiveness requires more than coordination. The importance of flexibility and adaptability is also paramount. Some Member States pointed out that to live up to the implementation challenge of the new agenda, mandates will need to be periodically reviewed to ensure a reduction of overlap of UN entities.

Intensifying efforts at capacity-building and use of national institutions and systems

Capacity development is a core function of the UNDS, and the use of national systems, institutions and capacities is central to the way programmes are designed at country level. At present, national capacities are being insufficiently used in the areas of procurement, financial management, monitoring, reporting and evaluation, which also lessens impact. The UN development system will need to enhance the impact of its work by strengthening the use of national capacities, systems and institutions.

Take informed, innovative approaches to partnerships aligned with UN goals, principles and standards

Over the past decade, there has been a major increase in demand for partnerships with the UN development system. While this is a very positive development, it is also important to ensure that such partnerships are fully aligned with UN goals, principles and standards. In that regard, there is need to re-assess how the UNDS interacts with other actors, and reflect this within new organizational arrangements.

The QPCR 2016 should give a clear strategic vision forward

This is a unique moment to position the UNDS to be the best instrument that it can be. The QCPR 2016 needs to build on the progress through the dialogue and go beyond system-wide “housekeeping” to give a clear, strategic vision to the UNDS in its support for implementation of the new agenda. The more ambiguous the QCPR, the more the tendency to micro-manage it. One suggestion was that the UNDS could draft an internal paper ahead of the QCPR which would serve as a strategic guide for functions and arrangements that would support system-wide coherence, and could serve as a starting point for Member States to prepare the actual QPCR Resolution.

III. Emerging priorities

Rallying and organizing around strategic sets of system-wide objectives

A significant hazard in the post-2015 context is that individual entities “un-bundle” the 17 sustainable goals and 169 targets to align to their individual mandates, instead of rallying and organizing around strategic sets of system-wide objectives. Further, the issue-based definition of the SDGs carries an inherent risk of further reinforcing funding silos, competition over resources and fragmentation of action in coming years. This is particularly true in conflict-affected states and in situations of humanitarian crises, where missions and UNCTs often operate in parallel, leaving huge room for improvement in organizational arrangements, capacity and impact in these contexts.

Look for the strategic entry points and “integrators” for system-wide action

A discussion that specifically targets the strategic, integrating issues that bring the UN system together in unique, value-added ways would advance critical decisions forward. What are the entry points where system-wide approaches make a vast difference in terms of impact? What are the incentives that bring the system together in these contexts? Identify areas of how the system can work together and then channel the funding accordingly. As part of this, it would be useful to define what inspires integration, including mechanisms that might already be in place and those that do not yet exist within the system.

Universal support through tailor-made organizational arrangements, modalities and instruments

Universal support does not imply universal presence, and a concept of universal presence would result in further fragmenting the system and its resources. In terms of universal support, there should be no one size-fits-all approach to organizational arrangements for the UNDS. New organizational arrangements and modalities are needed that take into account the different country contexts, needs, capacities, partnerships including the role of other development actors. Similarly, core instruments will need to be contextualized and adapted country-by-country to maximize relevance.

Build a modern workforce for the 21st century

To better support implementation of the post-2015 development, the UNDS needs a workforce that has the necessary capacities, flexibility, mobility as well as the ability to transcend agency-specific identity and allegiance. This is, arguably, one of the biggest internal challenges within the UNDS as part of the transition to the new development agenda, which will require a significant culture change in mind-sets.

Drive innovation in measuring system-wide progress

With the exception of the broad category of direct service delivery, impact level results attribution is notoriously difficult, even at individual agency level – let alone system-wide. Measuring impact of system-wide results requires much more thinking, discussion and work, as does monitoring results together. There is need to agree to common definitions to facilitate common understanding and reporting. In addition, the UNDS has too little capacity to measure multi-dimensionality and long-term impact.

IV. Moving forward

Support greater impact at the regional level

The nature of the post-2015 development agenda will necessitate strengthened and new roles for the UNDS at regional level, beyond coordination and information sharing. There is need for the UNDS to explore options for new and strengthened regional and/or sub-regional platforms, and instruments on data, statistics, monitoring and reviews of progress, as well as on transborder, intra-regional and cross-regional issues, and provide specialized support to country offices. Prospects for sub-regional and regional forms of “Delivering as One” in some contexts could prove especially useful, and the current sub-regional UNDAF 2012-2016 for Barbados and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States may yield some useful lessons for replicating this approach.

Integrate selectively and strategically

A focus on “strategic integration” may help advance the discussion of UNDS organizational arrangements. Rather than trying to address all matters that need to be fixed, the focus would be those issues and challenges that require fully integrated, system-wide responses as well as those entry points where the UN makes its biggest impact by working as a system in a coherent way, for example, the development-humanitarian nexus. In that regard, the next QCPR would be an essential instrument to define the policies, principles and broad action lines that would underline such a concept of strategic integration.

Looking into the potential of interagency “mutual agreements”

Complementary to the ongoing efforts at harmonization of business practices, operational policies, rules and regulation, the idea of “mutual recognition” of individual entities’ procedures could be further investigated. In contexts where harmonization may be less feasible or would be too costly, such mutual recognition agreements could allow the system’s individual entities to better leverage each other’s strengths for maximum impact, by both, capitalizing on diversity to engage externally based on core functions and drawing in mutual strengths to operate in effective, efficient and integrated ways .

Leveraging partnerships

Partnerships in the UN development system should harness the strengths and reach of internal and external organizations in support of UN goals. Sometimes, the role of the UNDS will end at leveraging the partnerships without necessarily leading or being directly involved in them. There is also need to re-assess how the UNDS interacts with other actors, and reflect this within new organizational arrangements.

The next generation of the QCPR

The role of the 2016 QCPR is a critical element of the discussion. In that regard, an important question that is yet to be tackled is whether the QCPR remains process-oriented or whether it would be helpful to also add content. It's not just about doing things in a coherent, coordinated and effective way, but it is also about doing the right things. There is a need to define the strategic issues for the QCPR in order to make it more strategic and politically attractive.