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Introductory statement on the JIU report “Policies and platforms in support of learning: towards more coherence, coordination and convergence”

A/75/713 (JIU/REP/2020/2), Add.1

Introduced by Inspector Jorge Flores Callejas, Chair of the Joint Inspection Unit

Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates,

I have the honor to introduce the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Policies and platforms in support of learning: towards more coherence, coordination and convergence”, as referred to in document A/75/713 under the symbol JIU/REP/2020/2.

As the main asset of the United Nations system is its staff, learning is an indispensable tool in enhancing quality and efficiency for achieving organizational goals. Through learning, staff can develop new knowledge and skills, acquire new competencies and improve attitudes. Learning is an essential condition for the organizations and their staff to adapt in a highly competitive environment. It is also a transformative force that can break down silos, stimulate inter-agency cooperation, create synergies and increase efficiency.

The main objective of this review was to identify and recommend ways to optimize the intellectual capital represented by the staff of the United Nations, by means of learning. In addition, the review sought to analyze and assess the current status of policies and platforms supporting learning in the United Nations system and identify the potential for more coherence, coordination and convergence; inter-agency and system-wide collaboration in support of the needs arising from the 2030 Agenda and other strategic goals; roles of various providers of learning services and the potential of e-learning platforms and other technology-based forms of learning.

Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates,

Allow me to briefly highlight five key findings of this review.

1. The agreement that learning is strategic is not always substantiated by facts.

The review found that while there is general agreement on the principle that learning is strategic, the principle is not always put in practice. Short-term solutions are developed at the expense of holistic talent management systems.

2. The need for creating a new culture of learning.

A new culture of learning implies the understanding of a new reality, where learning also takes place beyond its traditional forms and can augment knowledge at all stages of an international civil servant’s career.

3. A comprehensive and systematic perspective on inter-agency cooperation is missing.

In the absence of a comprehensive and systematic perspective on interagency cooperation, the review found conflicting views and lack of clarity as to which operational requirements are not sufficiently met at the system-wide level.

4. The use of opportunities brought by new technologies remains random and inconsistent.

The importance of technology-based learning platforms emerged as a key issue for the review. In the United Nations system, innovation in learning through the use of new technologies is not an abstract concept. The growing digital infrastructure amplifies the ability of United Nations organizations to access and use nearly unlimited knowledge resources. The same technologies offer unprecedented networking options, which should be used for more coherence, coordination and convergence among the United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies at the system-wide level.

5. There is a need for more engagement and commitment by the staff themselves.

While the responsibility of the organizations and managers is critical in creating an enabling environment for learning and talent development, it is also the duty of individual staff members to seek proactively to enrich their professional skills throughout their careers. Staff members should commit themselves to continuous learning.

Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates,

Based on the review findings, the report makes nine formal recommendations, two of which are addressed to the governing bodies and seven others to the executive heads of the participating organizations. In addition to formal recommendations, the report makes 17 informal recommendations addressed to the executive heads and learning managers of the organizations.

The Joint Inspection Unit was pleased that organizations of the United Nations system welcomed the report and its findings, noting that the report provided valuable insights to support learning and development in the years to come.

Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates,

My final two comments relate to some reactions from participating organizations as compiled and summarized by CEB which I believe need to be addressed.

A remark on the learning of languages states that: *“The report would have benefited from a greater recognition of the role of multilingualism in achieving a harmonious workplace and an agile workforce”*. As we emphasized since the beginning, in the terms of reference of the project, and reiterated it in the report itself, the current work of the United Nations on languages was not part of the scope of this review. The JIU recognises the importance and relevance of multilingualism to its participating organizations and has undertaken a separate review on multilingualism which will be published shortly.

JIU also observes that some recommendations are only partly supported by some organizations. In this regard, we would like to point out that recommendations were formulated to address specific issues that arose from data gathered from learning professionals in the United Nations system. The recommendations are conceived in a way that is realistic and feasible and several organizations have accepted them for implementation.

Thank you very much for your kind attention, and I welcome any comments or questions you may have.