

**Informal summary of the
2010 ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment
Dialogue session on *Country-level capacity: is the UN system equipped to respond to the needs
and priorities of the programme countries?***
**9 July 2010
New York**

Chairperson	H.E. Mr. Alexandru Cujba, Vice-President of ECOSOC
Moderator	Mr. Nikhil Seth, Director, Office of ECOSOC Support and Coordination, Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Speakers	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mr. Farrukh Hamraliev, Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Tajikistan2. Dr. Carlos Pando Sanchez, Director of the Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation, Peru3. Mr. John Hendra, UN Resident Coordinator, Vietnam4. Mr. Richard Kennedy, Deputy Representative of UNIDO New York5. Mr. Nicolas Rosellini, Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Regional Director, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific

1. INTRODUCTION, CHAIRPERSON AND MODERATOR'S REMARKS

H.E. Mr. Alexandru Cujba, Vice-President of ECOSOC emphasized the timeliness of the topic for the panel. With the preparation and roll-out of a large number of new United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF) scheduled in 2010 and 2011, the UN system has to provide a highly professional support to Member States, in alignment with their national priorities. Recently the “convergence” of the global financial and economic crisis, the volatility of food and fuel commodity prices and climate change challenge has also demanded the United Nations development system to provide timely and relevant support to programme countries.

Mr. Nikhil Seth, the Moderator said that:

- i. Vulnerability and volatility are key issues for countries today. There is a significant impact of external shocks such as the financial crisis and volatility of commodity prices on addressing development challenges facing the world today.
- ii. No country is free from the process of globalization today but there is no one magic formula. Each country has different needs, capacity and resources.
- iii. The knowledge base has been democratized, with the new mode of knowledge management. This has an impact on activities for development.

Those emerging trends have to be fully taken into consideration, in discussing how to improve the developmental impact of the UN system work.

2. SPEAKERS' PRESENTATIONS

2.1 Minister Farrukh Hamraliev of Economic Development and Trade, Tajikistan said that the needs and priorities of programme countries are reflected in their strategic documents such as national development strategies and poverty reduction strategies (PRSP). These national priorities are defined according to the Millennium Development Goals. Accordingly the effectiveness of cooperation is based on the degree of achievement of the goals, specified in the national development strategies of the programme countries. UN agencies in Tajikistan continuously strengthen their capacity by assessing and addressing increased country needs. Since 2008 they have enhanced their capacity and performance through the appointment of experienced staff and employing new strategies. During 2009, the number of UN agencies resident in Tajikistan increased from 15 to 19. This is a significant progress.

The Joint Country Partnership Strategy (JCPS) 2010-2012 was completed together with the main donors, International financial institutions and UN agencies in mid-2009. The new UNDAF for 2010-2015 was endorsed in October 2009.

Capacity building and leadership need to be strengthened. Ensuring gender equality at the country level is a priority. It would be desirable to enhance the country capacity of the UN agencies, taking into full account of various priority issues of Tajikistan such as gender equality; promoting sustainable environment and energy efficiency; de-forestation; water conservation; alternative and renewable energy; appropriate technology; advocating for increasing Government and International Investment in the social sector, particularly in the areas of health, education and social welfare; strengthening Local Government Capacity; enhancing disaster preparedness; and promoting Human Rights and Social Inclusiveness.

2.2 Dr. Carlos Pando Sanchez, Director of the Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation, said that Peru aligned the strategies for solving its main development challenges with the internationally agreed development goals and the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action. The UNDAF 2006-2011 in Peru is the result of an inclusive and participatory process that involved national, district-level, and Local authorities. Peru's UNDAF fully reflects a common vision with the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the UN country team.

The UNDAF reflects a joint programming effort to strengthen cooperation within the UN system, bringing together organizations' human resources and expertise, capacities and comparative advantages based on their mandates.

The implementation of UNDAF has allowed improvements in the areas of: establishment of decentralized UN agencies' offices in accordance with the country's decentralization plans; synergies in national, district-level and local actions contributing to achieving best results; increased sense of ownership of joint projects that contribute to achieving the best results; and strengthened upstream role that the UN system has assumed in technical and policy advice for the government, as a neutral and legitimate partner.

There are some challenges such as achieving the development results in alignment with the Paris declaration and Accra (AAA) and/or strengthening transparent, harmonized and effective collective actions. Also, Peru is a middle-high income country; therefore international organizations need to engage the private sector, such as through private-public partnership for poverty alleviation.

2.3 Mr. John Hendra, UN Resident Coordinator in Vietnam, noted that the UNCT in Viet Nam has shifted from an agency-based approach to thematic clusters with the setting up of Programme Coordination Groups (PCGs) between the UN and the Government of Viet Nam. Staff of different UN and Government agencies are working together to jointly plan, monitor and review the One Plan implementation. Facilitating joint advocacy, policy advice and dialogue, and joint research will be the basis of UN interagency thematic teams in a co-located "One UN Green House" in Vietnam. This

approach has enabled an orientation towards outcomes, new collaborative ways of working, and a greater awareness of accountability.

There has been a recent shift in the UN role from service delivery to more upstream policy advice and advocacy. Concurrently, the country team in Vietnam has shifted from an agency-based service delivery to coordinated policy advice. The team is collectively helping address cross-Government, multi-sectoral issues which are predominant in Middle Income Countries environment (e.g. demographic transition, climate change). Delivering as One in Viet Nam is facilitating joint advocacy, policy advice and dialogue on the basis of the UN interagency thematic teams.

The UNCT needs to move quickly to re-profile its staff to meet the growing demand for upstream policy and technical advice. Currently staff profile of the UN in Viet Nam is not significantly different from the staff profiles in pilot countries with LDC status, for instance. Changing the staff profile and skill mix in Vietnam and in any country is a complex process, with investment and time required.

Delivering as One has allowed the UN system to address cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, HIV/AIDS, environment and others. In Viet Nam, the UNCT has been “walking the talk” by boosting advocacy, and deepening policy engagement and support on gender equality.

The UNCT Gender Mainstreaming Strategy 2009-2011, is building on the UNCT’s staff capacity and accountability for gender equality. It is supported by dedicated staff resources. As a result, greater visibility, voice and impact on gender equality have become evident and the UN comparative advantage on gender has been recognized by stakeholders.

2.4 Mr. Richard Kennedy, Deputy Representative of UNIDO New York Office, focused on addressing country level capacity from the perspective of a relatively small specialized agency,

UNIDO believes that an improved system wide coherence and cooperation is a major reason why country-level capacity has increased significantly.

Internal management practices and processes reform efforts by UNIDO have been a key to allow the organization to do more with less. Providing more services with a smaller staff and changes in the approach to management has made UNIDO services more effective and relevant at the country level. This has been accomplished in a variety of ways:

- *Updated policies and strategies for human resources and workforce planning.* Recruitment, for instance, is more systematic and rigorous. Planning and staff career development planning has been revised as part of Union’s new Human Resources Management Framework;
- *Strengthened capacity to field staff* and implementation of a new Field Mobility Policy designed to encourage rotation of technical headquarters staff to the field. This has allowed to decentralize a significant amount of work to the country and regional level, making services more effective by virtue of their being performed closer to those receiving the services;
- *Increased delegation of authority* so that field staff are able to make more decisions at the country level, speeding up the process of providing services;
- *Field presence and cooperation with UNDP.* To better respond to country needs, UNIDO has concluded an agreement with UNDP, hiring national liaison experts in 18 countries to work for UNIDO under the day-to-day supervision of the UNDP resident representative. This has proven to be a cost-effective way of increasing capacity, of getting better knowledge of country needs and priorities, and coordinating technical cooperation activities in country, both with national counterparts and with other UN agencies;
- *Strengthened field staff expertise* through regular training sessions and skills seminars on technical and managerial areas.
- *ICT investment.*

2.5 Mr. Nicolas Rosellini, Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Regional Director, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, explained that the functions of UNDG Asia- include: provision of a coherent and coordinated technical support to UNCTs; quality assurance support to UNCTs in UNDAF and other UN programming processes; Resident Coordinator and UN Country Team Oversight and Performance management; and “trouble shooting” in difficult country situations, dispute resolution, etc.

Some of the key findings of the UN country level capacity assessment in Delivering as One pilot countries are:

- The mix of UN interventions (policy advice, program, finance, etc) are the same in all countries irrespective of context, income level and development needs;
- There is an Increasing demand by governments, donors and UN leaders for UNCTs to focus on upstream technical and policy support;
- There is a need for the UN development system at all levels to develop its own capacity to respond to this demand in a coherent and coordinated manner.

Some of the challenges posed by the diversity of countries (LDCs, Middle Income Countries, Crisis Countries, Pacific Island Countries, etc) in the Asia-Pacific region were that:

- Increased commitment of regional agencies is needed to provide a coordinated and coherent strategic advice and technical support to UNCTs for UNDAF programming processes and other country needs related to achievement of the MDGs, climate change, economic crisis, etc;
- Mapping of UN technical expertise in the region is seen as an important area of work to be undertaken;
- Emerging UNDG priorities further emphasize the role of regional UNDG-Regional Directors Teams (RDTs) to streamline and focus substantive support to countries in consultation with the UNCTs

Also, recently the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), headed by UN ESCAP, and UNDG- Regional Director Team Asia-Pacific (RDT-A-P) further clarified their respective roles: the RCM will take the lead on regional policy and normative matters, with RDT A-P leading in-country level programme support and oversight.

3. Question/Comment-and-Answer session

It was noted that the **MDG framework** is being reflected reflecting itself in national development programmes and plans. The MDGs are not just a global framework. They are adopted by programme countries and fully reflected in their national policy frameworks, as seen in the presentations by Tajikistan and Peru as well as others;

3.1 Resident Coordinators and UNCTs

Resident Coordinators have a central role in making possible the effective coordination of UN system operational activities for development at the country level. They must ensure that the UNCT is effectively responding to national priorities. It is important to continue improving the transparency and competitiveness of the recruitment processes of RC in order to find the best candidates from both inside and outside the UN system. The current use of the Resident Coordinator Assessment Center for testing the agency-nominated candidates provides an important tool to this. Resident Coordinators must also be trained to sustain an updated knowledge of issues that various UN agencies cover, as they represent the UN as a whole. It was said that further progress is needed to empower the Resident Coordinator and to

ensure his/her full accountability. There is some progress in delineating the responsibilities of RC and UNDP managers.

3.2 Decentralization and field mobility

Decentralization of staff is important to make the work of the UN more relevant to country priorities. Panelists also highlighted that field mobility policy has been very important for their offices and is necessary to improve efficiency and effectiveness. At the same time, it is important that agencies are able to attract and retain a wider variety of highly qualified staff and to make progress on human resources reform to this end. Regional offices should be equipped with skills and expertise that can be deployed in country offices if needed and upon request.

3.3 The role of Non-Resident Agencies

NRAs have been addressing ways to participate more fully and effectively in UNDAF and joint programming processes at the country level, as they have critical capacity to respond to governmental priorities.

3.4. Use of national expertise

- UN Country Teams should fully use national expertise. Using national systems is an important part of reducing transaction costs and creating institutional memory at the country level. The sustainability of national capacity building is greater if the use of national staff is maximized.

Taking advantage of national expertise further assists UN Country Teams to conform to principles of aid effectiveness, national ownership, and national capacity development.

3.5. UN comparative advantages

Beyond operational delivery, the comparative advantage of the UN is its normative work and operational-normative linkage. The UN system is the guardian of norms and standards (e.g. MDG, IADGs and human rights conventions such as CEDAW and CRC). Its normative role complements operational functions in a way that no other development actors can demonstrate.

There is a growing demand by Middle Income Countries (MICs) growing need for “upstream” support and other developing countries for policy advice, advocacy and other “upstream activities” aside from management of projects and programmes. Thus, UN country teams need to be equipped with capacity to help programme countries in developing appropriate strategies to meet the Millennium Development Goals and reduce poverty. Concerns were raised on whether UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies are sufficiently receptive and responsive to this type of demands from the field.

3.6 Regional dimensions

There was a consensus about the important role of regional support to country-level activities. From the evidence of Asia-Pacific region, it was recognized that Regional director teams (RDTs) are becoming increasingly involved in support to country-level programming and coordination processes. Their advice is often sought. On cross-cutting issues such as gender and climate change. To help to strengthen the regional support capacity, the functions of quality support and assurances have to be further clarified. Regional coordination mechanisms (RCM) headed by regional commissions also can play complementary and supplementary roles in supporting the UN country teams together with the RDTs.

3.7 Promoting gender equality and other cross-cutting issues

- DaO has improved the UNCT's approach and performance on gender mainstreaming as well as on addressing other cross-cutting issues such as environment and HIV/AIDS. The UNCTs are rightly positioned to boost engagement of actors including civil society in support of gender equality and cross-cutting issues. RC and UNCT staff should strengthen the accountability frameworks on gender through various efforts such as developing benchmarks and a set of indicators, using score cards, introducing gender budgeting;

3.8 South-South Cooperation

- South-South Cooperation needs to be an important modality which UNCTs should support. UNCTs need to show more of what is being done in this area and assist in leveraging its benefits. The UN system should take measures to mainstream support for S-S and triangular cooperation.