

2012 QCPR – Expectations: issues, process, outcome (14 July 2011)

Speaking points: Thomas Gass

- **Do countries truly own and lead the programmes of the UN system?**

Before answering this question, **one first has to agree upon what countries can realistically expect in terms of ownership and leadership.** The UN operational system is a public service. No single country should own or lead it. Many a misunderstanding in the UN stem from unrealistic expectations in this regard.

The UN operational system for development has to meet two sometimes opposing expectations:

On the one hand, there are the mandate, the values and approaches which are established by the UN membership in its entirety through the GA and the respective Boards or Governance mechanisms – (we have reduced boards, but experiences have shown us that when it comes to crucial issues, the board only has as much authority as the plenary is prepared to give). So the ownership and leadership in terms of has to be shared.

On the other hand, the UN operational system has to serve the specific needs of a host country. So the specific nature of the service, the product to be delivered at the country level has to be owned and lead by the receiving country.

The role of the QCPR is to set the frame and balance of this system. If this Resolution is not sufficiently ambitious and if this consensus is weak, we the member states, create a vacuum which is invariably filled by the bureaucracy of the System and its organizations. We member states then loose (give up) our ownership and leadership – first to the respective boards and then to the bureaucracies! De facto we ask the civil servants of the system to tell us what we should think! *And then the Boards have to establish the specific guidance. The ownership and leadership of the UN operational system at the global level is only as strong as our QCPR resolution and Board decisions are ambitious and coherent.*

At the national level (of the programme country), I strongly believe that ownership and leadership, is only as strong as the internal coordination of the UN. Coordination has frequently been rejected by the G77 as being a front or a pretext for rationalization and reduction.. That may partly be true.. Its obviously disconcerting for donors to see that much of their funds end up in unnecessary duplication and turf wars.. on the other hand, an uncoordinated un system weakens governments' leadership and makes it extremely costly'. Within a UN Country Team a large part of the work of the staff of each UN organization at the national level is spent reporting to their respective hierarchy and governance system.. instead of placing more emphasis on accountability towards the beneficiary (hosting) country.

- **Recommendations for a successful 2012 QCPR**

I would give the following advice to achieve a successful outcome in the 2012 QCPR:

- QCPR is not just a resolution; it is the end point of quadrennial reflection on how the system must evolve. ***It cannot be reduced to the old G77-OECD polarity..*** That would be a recipe to slowly but surely make the UN Operational system irrelevant, as it is replaced by IFIs, large INGOs and new intergovernmental mechanisms such as G20, etc.
- ***Informal dialogue among missions and among delegates*** during coming year is absolutely vital to the exercise. There is only so much that the excellent DESA and DOCO reports can provide. This dialogue needs to be “a géometrie variable”, meaning in various configurations. Missions must engage their capitals and they must think out of the box!
- In terms of process: ***Let DESA prepare the first draft*** based on a number of informal dialogues with all the groups.

- Has there been visible progress in making UN system's support to national development priorities more relevant, coordinated, effective and efficient? If so what may have contributed to this?

- The UN Support can be highly relevant and yet totally inefficient. Because the beneficiary does not pay the bill for the UN Systems services, the beneficiary has no incentive to require efficiency - on the contrary! And yet such an exploitative approach will deplete the system of its resources and its credibility (ie. Its ability to attract resources). Because the UN Operational system is not funded with assessed but with voluntary contributions, this exploitative approach is ruining the system.
- Coordination has frequently been rejected by the G77 as being a front or pretext for rationalization / reduction – an excuse for not paying.. That may partly be true.. Its obviously disconcerting for donors to see that much of their funds end up in unnecessary duplication and turf wars.. on the other hand, an uncoordinated UN system weakens governments' leadership and makes it extremely costly'. Within a UN Country Team a large part of the work of the staff of each UN organization at the national level is spent reporting to their respective hierarchy and governance system.. instead of placing more emphasis on accountability towards the beneficiary (hosting) country.

- What are the main challenges facing the UN development system at the country-level?
- *Although UN Organisations potentially have highly qualified and professional experts on staff and at hand, the system as a whole is very slow in adapting to the challenges of a changing context :*
 - because of the difficulty to reach a consensus in the GA and the Boards on what we need and want the system to do.. (It took five years to create UN Women even though this was such a common sense decision)
 - because when we have finally come to a consensus, the bureaucracy and inertia of the system then has to be overcome .. (Over 5 years ago we started requiring the main Funds and Programmes to participate in *SWAPs and Budget Support* .. We're still waiting for implementation...; In 2004 and 2007 all agencies, funds and programmes were asked to *report back on implementation of the TCPR on an annual basis*, I suspect that in several of the specialized agencies, the TCPR/QCPR is not even known (never mind implemented); We have asked the SG to lead a process to facilitate staff mobility within the system, to standardize cost recovery, common shared support units and project implementation units, (I'm thinking of the long list in OP 120-121 in Res 62/208.. I hope the evaluation that ECOSOC has mandated DESA to conduct will be very sharp and clear on these questions.
- *National execution and SWAPS..* There are still representatives of organizations out there discrediting the Governments implementation capacity, convinced that no child can be protected, no election decently organized, every human right violated – unless a given UN organization is in charge..
- *Big back offices... and big Headquarters..* drive the struggle to mobilise resources.. and result in a strongly offer driven system! Isn't it strange that I get a red carpet by an agency because I've provided 100'000 USD to support a local programme, and don't even get invited to the annual programming event –even though my government pours millions into the same agency as core funding.. Big Back Offices (BBO's), invariably compete with national implementation and make it more difficult for the UN to build national capacity..
- *Transition :* SG's Report on the UN in the aftermath of conflict (2009).. pointed to the challenge of the funding / coordination gap after the departure of a SC-mandated (or HRC – mandated) mission.
- *Weak coordination and country level leadership:*

(See comments on coordination)

- What kinds of improvements are needed to maximize the country-level performance of the UN development system and its long term results? Is there need for a radical reform?

- A serious look at cost-efficiency is needed.
- Merge back offices and reduce big HQ's (more merges)
- One Fund at the local level..
- ...

- What is the UN development system likely to look like in ten years?

My vision (wishful thinking perhaps).. (2021) (2012 – 2016 -2020)

- *In ten years time, the ECOSOC will be discussing and eventually adopting the implementation plan of the 2020 QCPR..* That QCPR will have hopefully coincided with an ambitious push by the UN Member States to reform the system..
- In ten years time *the gap between LDC and countries in conflict or transition, on the one hand, and medium income countries, on the other hand will be even bigger.*
 - o In the prior, the UN has to become better at making itself dispensable.. establish a better continuum between peacekeeping/early recovery and development.. be aware of the risk of a big UN actually hampering the growth of the host country..
 - o In the latter, the UN has no business competing with large NGOs or INGOs, or with the government for that matter. Its real relevance is its capacity to provide policy based services.. *So need for big operations..*
- In ten years time, the emerging economic powers (BRICS) have finally fully joined the group of voluntary donors to the UN operational system.
- In ten years time, the UNCT is a one stop shop for government services. The RC reports to the host governments and the same report is used in the boards..
- In ten years time, the agencies and organizations that do not implement the GA and ECOSOC resolutions and refuse to participate in the efforts for more coordination at the local level, are encouraged to leave the UN System and to become regular INGOs.

