Address to ECOSOC on "Effectiveness of UN System Support for National Capacity Development"

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Dear Vice-President, Panel members, my friend Jens Wendel, Delegates,

Allow me to be candid as you deserve. For me to be able to try to match your expectations, I rather speak on my personal capacity.

Current global dynamics means that the world is changing at a rapid rate. This also means the UN no longer enjoys its traditional preserve in development. The world of development and the inter-relational nature of development cooperation have become extremely complex and nuanced.

We are witnessing far more assertive developing countries and consequently a proclivity towards regionalisation with stronger regional groupings, further fragmenting once globalized domains of power.

Furthermore, these new emerging actors are calling for, and in many ways changing the global economic system. The world is indeed becoming multi-polar. Moreover, the organisation's partnership with traditional donors in providing technical assistance to Member States within a development envelope is not as straightforward as it used to be.

The global development space got smaller with the arrival of private foundations (from both the developed and developing world), which have committed more resources over a relatively shorter period of time since

their debut on the world scene than traditional donors in the last few decades.

In my view, there is need for greater understanding of the increasingly complicated and complex nature of new and emergent players in the development scene and the impact on the role of the UN. Ultimately, a major shift in the world order means a similar shift of the functions of the organisation. The UN has historically always had the capacity to re-adjust itself to changes in the world and this year sequence of events is proof of that.

Let me cover 5 challenges as I see them:

1. **Strengthening internal processes for new global dispensation**

The UN though still relevant, must reposition itself within the international landscape. In so doing, it must look inward and strengthen its internal processes for effective global leadership in the years ahead. This is because, today's development actors are nimble and responsive to emerging realities and emergencies on the ground and do so at a fast pace.

This is particularly evident during outbreaks of epidemics, war or famine in different parts of the world, where International Non-Governmental Organisations (iNGOs) backed by development partners move swiftly to provide assistance. As a result, their presence in different parts of the world has also provided them with an elevated presence and status globally, and has in some instances taken over key interventions.

One main reason for their agility, visibility and ability to deliver on the spot is their flexible internal processes that allow them to be more responsive and adaptive to changing environments. To meet current and future needs, institutions such as the UN need adaptive bureaucracies backed by more simplified rules and regulations that enable rapid responses to those who most need our assistance. In addition, the UN Development System (UNDS) will have to rationalise its effectiveness vis a vis the administrative cost of delivery. I therefore suggest a review of the efficacy of our current operating standards in the context of a changing world, and a thorough examination how they impinge on areas such as travel, logistics and procurement with respect to our operations and activities. Apart from a more bureaucracy-friendly disposition, the institution can consider making corresponding changes to planning, budgeting and programme delivery to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. With tremendous experience within the organisation in both administrative and programme reforms, there is a great deal we can draw from strengthening our internal systems that support our external work.

2. The challenge of coordination in a blurred development environment

The overlapping and blurring of development issues means that a high degree of effective coordination is now required more than ever before, especially given increased actors in global development. For instance, peacekeeping is no longer just a specific aspect of peace and security and has increasingly become a major development challenge touching on other aspects of socio-economic development, including health, employment, and education with impacts on economic and social policies.

This example demonstrates the blurring of the development environment, which ultimately impacts on UN activities. As a result, it may be expedient for us to develop newer strategies for rolling out our activities (programming) backed by streamlined processes for delivery (administrative systems), including our ability to determine effectiveness (accountability mechanisms).

Such strategies could align field operations and programme activities in the growing areas of humanitarian aid, political assistance and socio-economic development, etc, with a focus on how these areas inter-relate. This will go a long way in minimising duplication and replication of our efforts with higher degrees of complementarities at the national, regional and global levels.

3. Balancing Member States' role with the rise of regional entities/blocs

Current dynamics has also altered and created different channels for the UN in addition to inter-state cooperation. Of particular importance is the rise of regional governance in the past few decades (and particularly since the end of the cold war) in various areas, including economy, trade, finance, health, development and environment as well as peace and security. Consequently, there is a more pronounced presence of regional entities who are gaining a greater and stronger voice worldwide. Member States often go through such entities to articulate regional common positions and have become the vehicle for negotiations on key issues. It is now commonplace to have an EU position or African, Latin American and Asian positions during global negotiations. An example is the

Climate Change debate and negotiations that have ensued. Furthermore, the mandates of these organisations are derived from the same Member States and even though their role may not be operational, they often provide much needed political legitimacy, such as endorsing activities led by international organisations working in their regions. Hence, the involvement of and/or tacit support of regional entities for smooth delivery of UN operations and interventions is important in strengthening the regional cooperation and diplomacy function of the organisation. In light of this fact, I suggest an articulated position on how the UN could engage with regional organisations in a different way given their evolving role.

4. Custodian of Global Public Goods (a widely discussed concept)

Overall, and despite the changing dynamics, the UN still remains a strong pillar of the modern international relations system, with a unique political, legal and moral leadership in dealing with global challenges. It also has an additional role as custodian of Global Public Goods. A case in point is the Post-2015 Development Agenda and SDGs, based on global ideals of universal and equitable principles and standards. Undoubtedly, the UN can provide custodianship in many other areas and aspects of the new agenda, including, for example development statistics as a Global Public Good.

I would like to reiterate that sustained sources of funding will be important in supporting the work of the UN not just in its traditional role as an honest broker in the international system but also to ably lead the world on the implementation of this important agenda.

5. Capacity development has to respect not just ownership but also transformation

We are at the end period set for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, a process which requires paying close attention to what remains to be done and scaling up on on-going efforts. As work progresses to shape the post-2015 development agenda through the Sustainable Development Goals, developing countries also have to factor in mega-trends. These include shifts in political and economic power structures as well as changes in demographics, urbanization, inequality, technology and the environment.

It is evident that in order to be able to use the opportunities and meet the challenges arising from the current development landscape, developing countries need to strengthen capacities at individual, institutional and policy and strategic levels.

Capacity development which is still often wrongly conflated with human resource development needs to evolve towards the support to processes, mechanisms and outputs for promoting strategic initiatives, policy dialogue and advice, and knowledge networks. It requires ownership and leadership by the concerned country and must be underpinned by the spirit of partnership rather than a donor mindset and continuous striving for results and reporting.

It follows then that the starting point for assessing the effectiveness of UN system support for national capacity development is to have an accurate understanding of national priorities and to use delivery systems

to overcome capacity gaps. Efforts to promote system-wide coherence in order to reduce duplication and reduce transactions costs have been enhanced by the Resident Coordinator arrangements, the UNDAF process and movements towards common administrative services.

However, the search for system-wide coherence is still replete with challenges. Transactions costs are not necessarily been reduced if agency specific processes only pile up additional UNDAF processes. It is also important not to overload small economies with higher ODA dependency with even more demands. There continues to be fragmentation due no doubt to different budgetary and programme procedures of up to thirty-seven different entities and the continued tension between core and non-core resources. Coherence is certainly not enhanced if there is no agreed platform for assessing the results of UNDAF at country level. Even more so if UNDAF is perceived as heavy in demanding from national entities reporting standards that compete with scarce resources.

Everybody recognizes that support to strategic initiatives is key for national capacity development. This is quite evident in the support given by the UN system to the articulation of national development plans and strategies. The UNDAF is certainly a useful tool for alignment of UN support to national development plans and contributes to the implementation of global norms and standards at national level.

However, UNDAF has not proved as effective as it should be in reducing duplication of efforts and competition for funding. Indeed, if we are to measure effectiveness through the results achieved then we must also be candid in admitting that there continue to be gaps between intentions and actual outcomes in UNDAF.

Given the ownership imperatives of national capacity development, it is essential that development cooperation undertaken by the UNDS enhances rather than reduces policy space.   The UN is a trusted collaborator of developing countries, perhaps because unlike other partners it does not impose conditionalities. This is not a path that it should seek to tread. The UN is also well appreciated for its efforts in providing developing countries with early support to deal with emerging crisis or trends. The focus on transformation is very important in this regard.

We must bear in mind that to be effective in promoting policy dialogue and providing advisory services, the UN must take heed of country specific circumstances. This is not as obvious as its sounds since there is only a thin dividing line between pushing for implementation of global norms and standards and encroaching on national policy space. The call for increased coherence for transformative policies and a tighter fit between normative and operational activities must also take this view into account.

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UNDS capacity development efforts must take into account the changing landscape.