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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 23rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Monday, 12 July 1999, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. MANGOAELE (Lesotho)

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The meeting was called order at 3.15 p.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
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(b) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
(continued)

Dialogue with the Mali country team

Mr. ROSE (Resident coordinator) introduced the members of the United Nations team in Mali and the representatives of the Malian Government who had come to participate in the dialogue. The members of the close-knit and enthusiastic team led by him were working in a country which was one of the poorest in the world but which had in recent years made substantial progress in the political, economic and social spheres.

Ms. HANE-BA (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) described the geographic and demographic situation of Mali, a vast land-locked country with a very ancient civilization, most of whose 9.8 million inhabitants were concentrated in the south and south-west regions. The relatively high - given the country's resources - average annual population growth rate (2.2 per cent) was due largely to the high fertility rate (6.7 per cent). The large proportion of young people (54 per cent) was putting great pressure on the health and education services.

With regard to the political context, since 1992 - when President Konaré had been elected by universal suffrage - Mali had been a civilian, democratic republic pursuing a policy of decentralization aimed at bringing the State and its citizens closer together. A State governed by the rule of law was being built up gradually but resolutely. Political and ideological pluralism was a reality, reflected in the existence of numerous parties, NGOs and associations. Freedom of the press was also a reality. There were women holding very senior positions, even if the representation of women at those levels needed to be strengthened still further.

Economically, Mali was one of the least advanced countries in the world and depended very heavily on cotton-growing, the production of gold and animal husbandry. The devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 had led to productivity gains in certain sectors, and in 1997 the country had become the second largest producer of cotton in the world, thanks to which it had achieved growth of more than 4 per cent between 1994 and 1996 and an increase in per capita GDP. Moreover, thanks to the vigorous application of a policy of

structural adjustment it had been possible to reduce the budget deficit and contain inflation. In the light of those encouraging results, the IMF and the World Bank had reduced Mali's outstanding external debt by about US\$ 250 million.

Ms. KIANIAN-FIROUZGAR (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)), describing the social situation, said that Mali was the 166th country out of 174 in the world human development ranking, although it had gained five places between 1995 and 1997. More than two thirds of the population lived below the poverty line. The adoption in 1990 of a sectoral policy for health had led to an increase in the proportion of the population living within five kilometres of health services and to an increase in certain other health indicators. However, the maternal mortality rate remained high (577 per 100,000), as did the child and infant mortality rates. Vaccination coverage was poor and the malnutrition rate very high. Half of the population had no access to safe water. Despite clear progress during the past decade, schooling remained a major challenge. More than two thirds of the population over 15 years of age were illiterate. The basic social services accounted for 13 per cent of the expenditures from the State budget and for 20 per cent of the contributions made by development partners. The annual amount of ODA was US\$ 50 per inhabitant, compared with the average for LDCs of US\$ 29. The contribution of the United Nations system represented only 8 per cent of the total ODA, but its qualitative impact was very significant owing to the support provided for national capacity-building.

Mr. AG TELFI (Malian Ministry of Economy) presented the various strategies devised by Mali with its partners in order to improve the situation which had just been described. First of all, in order to strengthen peace within the country and in the subregion generally, Mali had produced, in cooperation with the United Nations system, a development framework for the North and signed the small arms moratorium of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Then, in order to improve public administration, it had stepped up the process of democratization and decentralization and was endeavouring to achieve greater equity as between the sexes and different sectors of society. In addition, it had set itself the following targets: a 13 per cent decrease in the incidence of poverty between 1998 and 2002; a decrease of at least 30 per cent in mother and child

morbidity and mortality by 2002; and an increase - thanks mainly to the resources becoming available as a result of debt relief - in the proportion of public expenditure accounted for by basic social services, so as to attain the 20/20 Initiative figures in 2002. In order to increase productivity and competition, it was endeavouring to bring about greater public involvement - and especially a stronger economic role for women by facilitating their access to land and loans - and to mobilize savings and financial resources. High priority was being assigned to the optimum utilization of human resources. Lastly, it should be noted that Mali had ratified most international conventions and undertaken to implement the recommendations of the major conferences organized under the auspices of the United Nations.

Mr. ROSE (Resident coordinator) said that all the United Nations agencies were supporting the Malian Government in the implementation of strategies relating to the social sphere, and especially of those relating to health and education. The donors had pledged financial contributions totalling US\$ 600 million in support of the national strategy for combating poverty, as compared with the US\$ 373 million which had been requested by the Malian Government. That showed how carefully the strategy had been worked out, with broad popular participation. Among the other activities to which the United Nations agencies had contributed were the creation of an Observatory relating to sustainable human development and the fight against poverty, a programme for restructuring the cereals market, and the activities of the Joint Commission on North Mali, which had been given the task of coordinating efforts to bring about lasting peace in that region.

The activities of the United Nations were based on three principal instruments: the country strategy note, which specified Mali's needs during the period 1997-2001 in the area of public administration, in the social and production sectors and with regard to infrastructures and good governance; the development assistance framework (UNDAF), which constituted the follow-up to the country strategy note and whose different sections covered the conduct of public business, the social sector and the production sector; and, lastly, the country assistance strategy (CAS) of the World Bank. Drawing on those instruments, the United Nations agencies had, working together, made substantial progress with vaccination campaigns, in the fight against AIDS and in combating illiteracy among women and girls in the North. Among their

numerous partners within the Government was the Joint Commission on Assistance Reform, whose excellent performance in managing and coordinating assistance could serve as an example to other countries.

The challenges facing the resident coordinator were of several kinds. At the decision-making level there were: the growing complexity of the priorities at a time when the human and material resources are declining; the enormous difficulties encountered by underfunded institutions; and the dual role of close Government partner and member of the largest group of development promoters. At the technical level, the main problems related to the adaptation of the means to the changing needs of the country in the regional and the global context, the modalities of programme implementation within the framework of decentralization, and the harmonization of the data from and the analyses performed by the various partners. In conclusion, he emphasized the need to make the system run more smoothly, to ensure that it evolved as a function in particular of the relations with the World Bank and the IMF, to acquire more financial and human resources and to rationalize the administrative operations of the various institutions.

Ms. TRAORÉ (Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) said that her Government greatly appreciated the contribution of the United Nations system, which was based on relevant programmes and in conformity with the guidelines laid down by Mali in its country strategy note. The UNDAF, while being a United Nations instrument, had nevertheless been drawn up with account taken of the priorities of Mali, which was among the countries selected for the pilot phase. That having been said, Mali would like the team to place the accent on making the most of the human resources in those sectors where Mali had natural advantages, to continue backing the country's efforts to mobilize resources for the major programmes and sectors, to support its activities directed towards the coordinated monitoring and evaluation of those programmes and to continue endeavouring to harmonize field activities with national strategies. Given the onerousness of that task, she would like to see more human and financial resources being made available to the resident coordinator's team, the institutions coordinating their activities in such a way as to achieve maximum synergies, and the United Nations going through with the construction of a common building on the land assigned to it by the Government in Bamako.

Ms. PÄIVÖKE (Observer for Finland) said she welcomed the progress made by Mali in various social sectors - especially health and education - and the existence of a true partnership between the United Nations and the Government. She had doubts about the usefulness of the new comprehensive development framework adopted by the World Bank, given the fact that Mali was one of the country's selected for the pilot phase of the UNDAF. What was the Government's position regarding the various instruments, and especially the relationship between the UNDAF and the comprehensive development framework?

She would like to see the results of the self-evaluation which the country team was currently performing in Mali. To what extent had the Government been involved? Incidentally, there appeared to be a real desire to include gender-specific elements in development programmes. Apart from literacy campaigns among women and girls in the North, however, what progress had been made thanks to that policy and what were the chances of sustainability? What conclusions could be drawn at the present stage?

Lastly, a programme of reform and harmonization of assistance procedures was under way. The exercise was a very useful one and could serve as an example to other countries. She hoped, therefore, that lessons would be derived from it for broad dissemination among interested countries.

Ms. BLACKBURNE (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) noted that none of the speakers had mentioned the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa. What role did such initiatives play in the activities of the United Nations in Mali? With regard to the UNDAF, for which Mali was one of the pilot countries, there had apparently been differences - surprising ones in some cases - between the proposals which the resident coordinator had transmitted to New York and the version finally adopted. She would welcome a clarification in that matter.

Mr. WINNICK (United States of America) said that the case of Mali tended to confirm that the development programmes of the United Nations produced their best results when the Governments concerned assumed responsibility for them. He would like to know more about the interaction between civil society and the programmes, funds and specialized agencies of the United Nations. Were non-governmental organizations participating in public awareness and operational activities? With regard to the situation in the north of the country, he requested information about how the transition

was being made from a humanitarian assistance situation to a development process. Lastly, he would like to know how the rights of the population were being promoted, especially by UNICEF.

Mr. ROSE (Resident coordinator) said that Mali was not participating in the pilot phase of the comprehensive development framework, but that the questions raised in the UNDAF context were of the same kind. The Government had not been consulted directly either about the report which had been presented or about the evaluation which it contained. The reason why the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa had not been mentioned as such was that it was closely integrated with the actions being carried out. Unlike the UNDAF guidelines the common country assessment guidelines had evolved a great deal and had been considerably fleshed out. Lastly, the Malian Government was directing operations so well that the donors did not feel the need to play the principal role.

Ms. KIANIAN-FIROUZGAR (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that UNICEF's programme of cooperation with Mali during the period 1998-2002 had been drawn up with account taken of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The programme had four main aspects: the right to survival (health, food, water, sanitation); the right to education and development; the protection of rights (child labour, genital mutilation of women, etc.); and public awareness and mobilization activities. UNICEF was examining, together with the Malian Government, the extent to which the laws in force were in conformity with the provisions of the aforementioned conventions.

Ms. YABRUDY (World Bank) said that Mali had been selected as a country suitable for participation in the comprehensive development framework or the country assistance strategy (CAS). In the latter case, the Government was required to consult with all elements of civil society.

Mr. AKODJÉNOU (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that, of the 140,000 refugees who had left the north of the country at the beginning of the 1990s, more than 132,000 had returned. He underlined the need to bear in mind the socio-economic rehabilitation needs of those people following the departure of the UNHCR from the region, on 30 June 1999. For about 10 months, the UNHCR had been endeavouring to bring

the matter home not only to the authorities, but also to the United Nations and the other development partners. Among the UNDAF-related activities, a thematic group had been established and harmonized programming of the various United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies had been introduced. Within the framework of the Joint Commission, the European Union was providing advice and monitoring operations at the level of governors. In addition, the Malian Government had just established a national agency for the development of the North. Selective bilateral activities were being carried out not only by European Union countries, but also by countries such as the United States and Canada. Lastly, in his view the problem of poor coordination would probably be overcome through gradual decentralization.

Ms. TRAORÉ (Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) said that the aim of the strategic approach adopted by her Government was not only to meet national needs but also to ensure fulfilment of the international commitments entered into by it. The United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa was being taken into account in all of the Government's strategies (good governance, decentralization programme, promotion of the social sectors, etc.). Lastly, the Malian Government regarded the UNDAF, the comprehensive development framework and the common country assessment as programming tools enabling it to avoid having to navigate without charts.

Ms. DESSALLIEN (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that all the socio-economic indicators showed that women were very disadvantaged in Mali. The activities of UNDP were directed especially towards the education of girls in the north of the country (where the fraction of the girls attending school was small), income creation, microlending mechanisms and the participation of women in decision-making at the national and the local level. A national strategy for the advancement of women, operating mainly at the political and the juridical level, was also in place. Moreover, there existed a mechanism for informal consultation with the Government in that area. UNDP was endeavouring to involve women in its projects and programmes, but women did not always have the necessary time owing to their economic and social activities. Women's NGOs were playing a fundamental role. Lastly, the multiplicity of tools developed by the different agencies was to some extent hampering gender-specific integration.



Mr. OULD DEIDA (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that the education of young girls and literacy campaigns among women were a priority of the Bamako group, which was carrying out two very promising experiments in the south and centre of the country. The gap between the literacy rate for girls (40.3 per cent) and that for boys (59 per cent) had decreased appreciably. Lastly, UNESCO and UNDP had, with the support of the Malian Government, launched a programme of education in human rights at the country's schools and universities.

Ms. MAMBU-MA-DISU (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that the fight against AIDS and that against malaria were top priorities of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa. For example, the UNAIDS thematic group was participating not only in the elaboration of strategies, but also in field activities within the framework of the national programme for combating AIDS. Moreover, the Malian President had been dealing personally with the Director-General of WHO and his colleagues with regard to the fight against malaria.

Ms. YABRUDY (World Bank) said that Malian NGOs had, for the first time, been requested to execute a World Bank project concerned with the "basic population". Moreover, the effects of the structural adjustment in Mali would be evaluated within the framework of the Structural Adjustment Programme Review Initiative.

Ms. HANE-BA (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that the purpose of UNFPA's programme of cooperation with Mali was to promote increased utilization of the reproductive health services, especially on the part of women and girls, by increasing the awareness of politicians and community leaders and of men in general and by improving access to high-quality care. To that end, UNFPA was helping the Malian Government to set up health centres. All its programmes involved sex-specific evaluation indicators and promoted equality between the sexes. They were providing support to the Malian Government in the fields of policy formulation, training and capacity-building. In addition, UNFPA was implementing a programme for promoting the education of the population in general, but especially of girls.

Mr. OKADA (Japan) asked what the key to success in the cooperation between the country team and the Malian Government was. He also asked how cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions was organized - for example, within the framework of the common country assessment.

Mr. LEGGERI (Italy) asked how cooperation with FAO - or, more precisely, the follow-up to the World Food Summit - fitted into the UNDAF.

Mr. TOMASI (France) said he agreed that coordination seemed to be functioning well, but wondered about the multitude of initiatives and mechanisms. If the UNDAF had been elaborated on the basis of a participatory approach, what was - for example - the specific contribution of the comprehensive development framework relative to the CAS? It was fair to ask whether the local authorities were really in a position to cope with such a profusion and whether the international community was not in the process of overwhelming Mali with pilot schemes, as it had done in other developing countries.

Mr. DEMBRI (Algeria) requested a breakdown of the approximately 10,000 refugees still outside Mali (especially in Algeria) and asked who would look after them in future. In addition, he emphasized the factors which, in his view, explained the encouraging results achieved by Mali. The Malian Government had managed to turn the country into a veritable laboratory of democracy, involving all of the nation's most dynamic elements in the dialogue on strategies and in the process of decentralization. Despite the difficulties connected with the structural adjustment programme, the public authorities had made great efforts in the fields of education and health. That being so, the Government's recommendations with regard to strengthening of the resident coordinator's team, an increase in financial resources and an intensification of technical assistance deserved to be heeded.

Mr. ROSE (Resident coordinator) said he subscribed fully to the remarks made by the representative of Algeria. In response to the representative of Japan, he said that Mali had adopted a very constructive attitude and that the country team found the national climate extremely stimulating. Also, one should not overlook the impact of the financial crisis within the United Nations system, which was causing the various system entities to intensify their coordination activities and increase their efficiency. As far as cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions was

concerned, the UNDAF and the CAS were two parallel processes. The World Bank had been associated with the former and, similarly, had kept the resident coordinator informed of the results of the CAS.

Mr. BADAQUI (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that Mali had been one of the first countries to draw up a national food programme in cooperation with FAO. Joint projects with WFP and IFAD were in hand. Also, Mali had demonstrated creativity in the field of food security by launching, with the help of donors, an ambitious programme for restructuring the cereals market, with two objectives: to liberalize the cereals network and to gradually establish a complete food security system for warding off major crises. He described the principal features of the programme, which had led to a distinct improvement in food security in rural areas, although problems remained in urban and peri-urban areas. Responsibility for financing the programme as a whole was being gradually transferred to the State.

The good results achieved through the cereals market restructuring programme were attributable partly to its special features - a long-term approach to the problems involved, multi-year indicative programming three years in advance and consensual decision-making - and partly to a particularly effective pluralistic coordination structure: management committee of donors, steering committee, technical committee and joint financial monitoring committee. Thanks to those various elements, the cereals market restructuring programme was a model which could usefully be followed in other countries.

Mr. AKODJÉNOU (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that of the 8,000 refugees who had not yet returned to Mali, 1,000-1,500 were in the south of Algeria, 2,000 were in Mauritania, 4,000 were in Niger and a few hundred were in Burkina Faso. At the end of June, 200 persons had returned to Gao and Kidal. The UNHCR was maintaining a presence in Bamako in order to monitor the repatriation process until its conclusion. The programme for the rehabilitation of repatriated persons and the development of the North was clearly a determining factor in inducing the last refugees to return to Mali.

Ms. TRAORÉ (Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) said that the key to the success of cooperation in Mali was the dialogue which had begun with all partners, both within and outside the United Nations system. As an LDC,

Mali had chosen to speak frankly with its cooperation partners since it had everything to gain thereby. The Malian State had decided on its strategic goals - that had been the subject of the country strategy note which had been formulated in 1998 and on the basis of which the UNDAF stated the specific activities to be carried out. The various mechanisms which had been put in place, with the assistance of multilateral or bilateral partners, corresponded to the various stages of the cooperation process: consultation, joint implementation and follow-up. Thus, they did not involve duplication and were perfectly amenable to management by the Malian authorities, who had a firm grip on them.

Mr. AG TELFI (Malian Ministry of Economy) said that the current reappraisal of the international system of aid to Mali should stimulate consideration of the modalities whereby the Government consulted with all of its various partners. It would inevitably lead to greater coherence and better coordination, and hence to enhanced operational effectiveness.

Ms. YABRUDY (World Bank) said that coordination between the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations system took place at several levels. In the area of strategy there were periodic meetings, about once a month, to determine joint approaches. At the sectorial level there was consultation among all the donors, especially within the thematic groups. Lastly, at the operational level - in other words, in the field - all the agencies worked together in the implementation of specific projects.

Ms. KIANIAN-FIROUZGAR (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the results achieved in Mali were due in large measure to the personality of the resident coordinator, who had built around himself a very cohesive country team. Such cohesiveness was complemented by the interest which the national authorities, including the President himself, were displaying in very practical ways in the functioning of the resident coordinator's team.

The risk of a dissipation of effort could not be denied, but it should be borne in mind that the strengthening of strategic planning capabilities took time and that the focus would in future be primarily on activities in the field.

Mr. ROSE (Resident coordinator) emphasized the importance of the process of reforming international aid, which should meet the concerns reflected in the statement made by the representative of France.

The PRESIDENT concluded that the good work done in Mali was the result of close cooperation between the Government and the institutions of the United Nations system. He warmly thanked the Mali country team for its contribution to the debate.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.