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Operational activities for development segment

Summary record of the 24th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 25 May 2023, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Massari (Vice-President) (Italy)
later: Ms. Stoeva (President). (Bulgaria)
later: Mr. Chimbindi (Vice-President) (Zimbabwe)

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In the absence of Ms. Stoeva (Bulgaria), Mr. Massari (Italy), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 7: Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation (*continued*)

(a) Follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council (*continued*)
(A/78/72-E/2023/59, A/78/72-E/2023/59/Add.1 and E/2023/62)

Interactive discussion: "Supporting just transitions towards the Sustainable Development Goals at the country level"

1. **Ms. Zoghbi** (Representative, Sustainable Development Goal 7 Youth Constituency of the Major Group for Children and Youth and Senior Advisor, Student Energy), moderator, said that the panellists would discuss, inter alia, lessons learned from joint programmes and funding opportunities for just transitions. Women of all ages should be a part of any discussion of just transitions. In the area of clean energy, transition solutions should bring more women into the energy-sector workforce, create jobs in the new energy technologies and prioritize local community needs at all times.

2. **Mr. Qu Dongyu** (Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)), panellist, speaking via video link about joint support programmes for just transitions and bottlenecks for inter-agency collaboration, said that just transitions were integral to his Organization's core mission of promoting sustainable food systems. FAO helped countries and local communities to design and implement policies and projects to create greener agrifood systems in collaboration with many partners, including other United Nations agencies. Insufficient human capacity at the local level, incomplete data and coordination problems were the greatest bottlenecks to effective collaboration. FAO was endeavouring to overcome them by improving data collection and working with expert teams to develop multi-year transformation plans. In the case of collaborations with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the resident coordinators, joint programming and a holistic, cross-sector approach were key. FAO was also integrating the climate and decarbonization agenda into its food security and nutrition strategies at the global and country levels.

3. **Mr. Rai** (Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations), panellist, addressing the same

topic, said that the United Nations resident coordinator and country team provided crucial support to his Government in aligning national development plans with the principles of just transition and promoting the development of key sectors. There were 17 United Nations agencies with offices in Nepal and nine additional agencies implementing programmes.

4. Nepal faced two major bottlenecks for a just transition and sustainable development. The first was underfunding, not only of the resident coordinator's office and the United Nations agencies but also of efforts at the national level, where massive investment was needed to harness the enormous potential of hydropower. In addition, Nepal lacked adequate institutional capacity to devise and implement development policies and plans.

5. **Mr. Garnier** (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Transforming Education Summit), panellist, speaking via video link and addressing the same topic, said that, in the lead-up to the Transforming Education Summit, the national teams of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had worked with Governments to carry out national consultations on the crisis in education and prepare national statements of commitment based on those consultations. Currently, a UNESCO-led steering committee of high-level representatives of Member States and education stakeholders was following up on the commitments made. The national teams had also helped to identify thematic action tracks for urgent attention which had given impetus to effective global and national initiatives involving, inter alia, UNICEF, the World Bank, UNESCO and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

6. One of the main bottlenecks for transforming education was a lack of funding. The United Nations needed to be able to work with Governments to make more funds available, including by helping them transform their tax systems. The other major bottleneck was a lack of synergy among United Nations agencies.

7. **Mr. Kallon** (Resident Coordinator in Zimbabwe), panellist, speaking via video link on the same topic, said that Zimbabwe needed to transition to carbon-neutral production and consumption at the lowest possible cost while simultaneously enhancing prosperity for those left farthest behind. In that context, clean energy production should be a priority. The current United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework involved 20 initiatives and programmes undertaken in partnership with Governments, business, civil society

and academia. With \$10 million in funding from the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, several United Nations agencies were working jointly to leverage an additional \$31 million from the private sector to finance an innovative renewable energy programme.

8. **Mr. Todi** (Deputy General Manager, Sustainability, Mahindra Group), panellist, speaking via video link on the role of the private sector in achieving just transitions, said that just transitions benefited both communities and businesses. With corporations increasingly wealthier than many countries, their actions would have a tremendous impact on the transition to net-zero. It was essential to sensitize business leaders to the need to ensure that corporate net-zero strategies created decent, clean jobs and supported workers and communities. A firm supporter of just transitions, the Mahindra Group believed that it could rise only if others rose. It had provided skills training for around 100,000 people over the past three years, with the ultimate goal of training 1 million workers, and it was participating in the Think Lab on Just Transition launched by the United Nations Global Compact to help to shape businesses policies on just transition.

9. **Mr. Rai** (Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations), addressing the topic of the support required for countries to achieve just transitions, said that his country's current social protection system was fragmented and hampered by a large informal economy. The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions could help Nepal develop integrated social protection, generate employment and avoid economic regression during and after graduation from the least developed country category in 2026. Nepal needed scaled-up support from its development partners, including the United Nations development system.

10. **Mr. Todi** (Deputy General Manager, Sustainability, Mahindra Group), speaking via video link and addressing the topic of necessary cultural shifts, said that corporations needed to see everyone as equal and be willing to act. They must become corporate climate activists, combining the best qualities of corporate culture and activism. To be effective activists, corporations needed to build the capacity of leaders and employees, integrate the principles of just transition into everyday strategies and operations, and work more collaboratively, not only with civil society but also with each other.

11. **Mr. Garnier** (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Transforming Education Summit),

speaking via video link and addressing the topic of United Nations initiatives to help countries leverage digital transformation, said that if countries were unable to harness the digital revolution to close education gaps, current inequalities would grow exponentially. Action was also needed to prevent the commodification of knowledge, which would endanger the vision of education as a human right and global public good. The two flagship United Nations initiatives to exploit digital resources in education were Giga, a project to connect every school to the Internet, and Gateways to Public Learning Resources, a multi-partner platform that would enable free access to quality learning resources on a global scale. Unfortunately, while the United Nations had a great responsibility to support the expansion of connectivity and the creation and sharing of educational content, it did not have the power or the resources to meet that responsibility effectively.

12. **Mr. Kallon** (Resident Coordinator in Zimbabwe), speaking via video link about what the United Nations development system needed to support countries as they embarked on just transitions, said that it was critical to provide adequate and predictable funding for the resident coordinator system. In addition, Governments must have adequate financial resources to invest in poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Partnerships between the United Nations and multilateral and bilateral partners were indispensable, as were global pooled funds, which could catalyse private investment.

13. **Mr. Pamungkas** (Indonesia), noting that his country would need significant support in the form of technology transfer and financing to meet its target of carbon neutrality by 2060, asked how the United Nations development system could provide additional support at the country level for bilateral and multilateral financing and technology transfer arrangements.

14. **Mr. Lages** (Portugal) asked how the reinvigorated United Nations development system could operationalize the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions.

15. **Mr. Hada** (Observer for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR)) said that human rights provided important guardrails at a time of shrinking fiscal space and were key to expanding and sustaining investment in just transitions to sustainable development. UNHCR was stepping up partnerships with United Nations economists in order provide advice to Governments on aligning economic policies with State human rights obligations. It was also working to strengthen the

application of the “leave no one behind” principle in United Nations country analysis and programming.

16. **Mr. Rai** (Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations), responding to the question raised by the representative of Portugal, said that the resident coordinator was now the highest ranking United Nations official at the country level, with the authority to coordinate the in-country work of all United Nations development entities, and development entities were required to base their country programme documents on the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework developed in consultation with the Government concerned. That revitalized resident coordinator system had the power to reinvigorate the entire United Nations development system. At a time of multiple crises, it was critical for that system to scale up its support for just transitions, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions would promote the creation of more and greener jobs in developing countries.

17. **Ms. Pindera** (Canada) asked the panellists how gender equality and women’s empowerment were being addressed in their areas of expertise, particularly with respect to the energy sector, which was one of the least gender-balanced sectors in the global economy.

18. **Mr. Kallon** (Resident Coordinator in Zimbabwe), speaking via video link, said that, as key stakeholders, women must be given the opportunity to participate in the transition and must participate effectively in productive sectors.

19. **Mr. Todi** (Deputy General Manager, Sustainability, Mahindra Group), speaking via video link, said that the needs of the fossil fuel sector tended to make it gender-imbalanced. The renewable energy sector required very different skill sets and capacities. Thus, the transition to green energy provided an opportunity to create gender equality in the workforce. With that in mind, the Mahindra Group consciously designed its skilling programmes to target young rural women.

20. **Mr. Garnier** (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Transforming Education Summit), speaking via video link, said that advancing gender equality and girls’ and women’s empowerment had been an important theme of the Transforming Education Summit. Despite progress, girls and women continued to be excluded from education and certain careers. Education must cease to reinforce and reproduce traditional gender stereotypes.

21. **Ms. Zoghbi** (Representative, Sustainable Development Goal 7 Youth Constituency of the Major Group for Children and Youth and Senior Advisor, Student Energy), said that, worldwide, only about a quarter of women graduates took diplomas in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and the proportion was even lower in her country, Brazil. Girls’ interest in STEM should be encouraged beginning in primary school, and companies and organizations should visit secondary and tertiary institutions to talk about work opportunities for young women in the STEM fields. She urged the participants to mentor and guide young people, who often did not see the opportunities available.

22. Efforts to achieve gender equality in STEM careers must extend beyond education. In the energy sector, for example, young women often needed advanced degrees to find employment, which made renewable energy an unrealistic career path, especially in developing countries. Furthermore, those who did enter the renewable energy workforce were less likely than men to remain in it and were not in leadership positions.

23. **Mr. Ratsimandresy** (Madagascar) said that the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions was supposed to create 400 million jobs by 2030. He wondered if the International Labour Organization had a vision for how that could be accomplished.

24. **Mr. Rai** (Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations) said that, in the face of multiple global crises, the poorest countries would be left behind without more support in terms of funding, technology and human resource development. The creation of new, greener jobs hinged on the availability of appropriate technology, and Nepal reiterated its appeal to the developed world to facilitate the transfer of technology. While establishing the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries was a step in the right direction, it needed adequate funding to be able to give the least developed countries access to technologies that could lead to greener jobs and just transitions.

25. **Mr. Kallon** (Resident Coordinator in Zimbabwe) said that just transition and sustainable development went hand in hand. Existing partnerships for sustainable development should be galvanized to support Governments to lead and own the process of just transition in their own countries. The energy mix and green jobs were critical. It was important to ensure that young people had access to those jobs.

26. **Mr. Garnier** (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Transforming Education Summit) said

that justice was impossible without equality. Global investment in education was grossly unequal, ranging from \$8,000 per pupil per year in high-income countries to \$50 in low-income countries. With such inequality, it would be impossible to attain Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education for all and, as a consequence, many of the other Goals. Investing in education paid for itself. The United Nations was in a position to promote more equitable and efficient investment in education.

Interactive discussion: “Strengthening accountability on system-wide performance and results”

27. *Ms. Stoeva (Bulgaria), President, took the Chair.*

28. **Ms. Ruder** (Assistant Director General, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), moderator, said that accountability enhanced trust in the United Nations system, and trust was a powerful incentive for both funding and collaboration. The panellists would discuss what actions the executive boards and governing bodies could take to support the reform of the United Nations development system and what steps the system itself had taken or could take to strengthen that reform; how the Council and the operational activities segment could be strengthened to improve accountability and oversight of the development system; and how the system itself was ensuring improved transparency and accountability through streamlined data.

29. **Ms. Stoeva** (Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations and President of the Economic and Social Council), panellist, said that the Council could improve accountability in the United Nations development system by considering how to strengthen its guidance in resolutions and decisions; by ensuring consistency in the messages conveyed to the different governing bodies; and by exploring ways to use the wealth of information in the comprehensive analytical reports and the quadrennial comprehensive policy review to inform decision-making.

30. **Ms. Chan Valverde** (Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations and Vice-President of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services), panellist, said that the executive boards were ultimately responsible for the efficient operation of their agencies, which meant, inter alia, ensuring implementation of the development system reform, coherence among programmes and sharing of lessons learned. The executive boards on which she served were taking steps to improve the presentation of

reports and to ensure that all system entities implemented the reform fully. During informal consultations with the New York-based agencies and the Development Coordination Office (DCO), they had discussed most of the items on the checklist for United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities and how the list could be used to simplify the presentation of reports, facilitate their harmonization, improve reform oversight, address potential bottlenecks and challenges, and provide accountability across the system. They had stressed the importance of ensuring top-down and bottom-up accountability for the implementation of the reform everywhere, including in the resident coordinator system and DCO. They had also suggested including the checklist under the agenda item on implementation of the reform of the United Nations development system, in order to provide an opportunity for annual evaluation and finetuning. For example, it might be useful to include additional questions specific to each entity’s mandate, as well as to discuss how DCO could provide methodological and advisory support tailored to the needs of individual entities or governing bodies.

31. **Ms. Bahous** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)), panellist, said that UN-Women was working with the residential coordinators, country teams and other United Nations entities to deliver as one United Nations. For example, UN-Women had collaborated with UNDP and the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon to develop a joint United Nations programme of action on increasing women’s political representation in Lebanon that had helped to boost the number of women elected to the national legislature in the 2022 elections and had succeeded in reducing hate speech against women during the election campaign. Her agency had also coordinated a coalition of government and civil society actors whose advocacy had brought an electoral gender quota bill to the floor of the Lebanese legislature for the first time. UN-Women supported country teams in developing common country assessments and Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, was spearheading the application of financial resource-tracking tools such as gender markers, and deployed gender and humanitarian expertise to support the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. With respect to accountability, in 2022, UN-Women had launched an interactive transparency portal that complied with the International Aid Transparency Initiative standard.

32. **Mr. van der Straaten** (Observer for the Kingdom of the Netherlands) said that United Nations

development system entities should cooperate on the basis of comparative advantage and should comply with the Management and Accountability Framework, including by fully aligning their country programme documents with the Cooperation Frameworks. They should have mechanisms in place to measure the efficiencies gained through inter-agency cooperation and should share aggregated and disaggregated efficiency data. In addition, resident coordinator reporting should be improved. His delegation welcomed the development system reform checklist and urged all Member States and United Nations development system entities to use it.

33. **Mr. Kyslytsya** (Observer for Ukraine), speaking in his capacity as President of the Executive Board of UN-Women, said that system-wide accountability was encoded in the DNA of UN-Women, which had been established to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women across the United Nations system. Its operations on the ground were highly valued, and he opposed the recommendation that they be reduced in scope.

34. **Ms. Sánchez García** (Colombia) said that, as a member of the UN-Women Executive Board, Colombia agreed with its President on the importance of the work of UN-Women. The reform of the resident coordinator system had improved both coordination and accountability in Colombia. She asked how States could provide guidance in a more coherent, efficient and integrated manner and how reporting and oversight could be improved without overwhelming the agencies and the States.

35. **Mr. Hjielmaker** (Sweden) said that the development system reform checklist would be helpful for both development system entities and Member States. Many entities were treating the reform as an add-on. The joint projects described by the Executive Director of UN-Women were examples of the kind of engagement that was needed from all system entities.

36. The very useful briefings held in the run-up to the operational activities segment and in the context of the executive board meetings could be improved by having agencies present their work jointly, rather than individually. Lastly, Member States needed to be coherent in their instructions and actions vis-à-vis the executive bodies.

37. **Mr. Cruvinel Barenho** (Brazil) said that there should be a checklist for programmes with similar timelines, which would make it easier to compare results and help to avoid competition among entities.

38. **Ms. Olsen** (Denmark) said that her delegation appreciated the system-wide evaluation of the response of the development system to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-wide Evaluation Office. For the work of the System-wide Evaluation Office to have an impact, Member States must follow up on its evaluations by issuing guidance to system entities and closely monitoring their response. All system entities should participate in the operational activities segment, including those without an executive board, and evaluations of system-wide performance should take into account the perspective of civil society partners.

39. **Ms. Bahous** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) said that UN-Women partnerships with Member States should remain flexible. She welcomed the delegations' interest in how reporting could be streamlined. As the ambassador of her country, Jordan, to the United Nations, she had been acutely aware of the importance of close partnerships between Member States and United Nations entities, and she had worked hard to build such partnerships, which were more important than ever in the context of the current global crises and the pressing need for results.

40. UN-Women remained fully committed to implementing the reform of the United Nations development system. Currently, 31 per cent of its programmes were joint. Together with its sister agencies, UN-Women was taking forward the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, which had demonstrated the importance of an all-of-society, human rights-based approach.

41. **Ms. Chan Valverde** (Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations and Vice-President of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services) said that, as an executive board vice-president, she was working to reduce States' reporting burden and to make the review process more dynamic and interactive. Reports should be user friendly, not only for States but also for the general public. With respect to the idea of a programme checklist, the presidents of the different boards had discussed the need to harmonize the programme development process, and they hoped to consider the topic in the annual sessions. Lastly, it was important to mainstream both the gender and the environmental perspectives across the entire development system.

42. **Ms. Stoeva** (Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations and President of the Economic and Social Council), recalling her time as President of the Executive Boards of UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services, said that executive board members needed to absorb and understand an extensive, highly technical literature in order to be able to ask the questions needed to ensure accountability. Most board members were not prepared for that task. Training and onboarding sessions should be organized for newly elected members of United Nations executive boards and even members of the Council.

43. *Mr. Chimbindi (Zimbabwe), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

Closing of the segment

44. **The Deputy Secretary General**, speaking also in her capacity as Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, said that the operational activities for development segment had convened at a critical juncture, with hard-earned advances towards the Sustainable Development Goals lost and humanitarian needs rising at an unprecedented pace. During the segment, she had heard examples of how the repositioned United Nations development system had come together to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; expressions of strong support for the resident coordinators and country teams, including reference to the ‘development DNA’ of the country teams, and calls to continue to build on the reforms and to strengthen the profile, selection and pace of deployment of new resident coordinators. She had heard significant demand for United Nations support to help countries mobilize the means to implement the 2030 Agenda, as well as calls to place human rights at the centre of development work by, inter alia, strengthening the work of the development system to promote gender equality and combat sexual harassment and exploitation.

45. She took very seriously the delegations’ perspectives on those and other remaining challenges, such as better aligning the regional assets to country needs, strengthening accountability and coherence at the country team level, and doing more faster to help countries move firmly towards 2030. She had noted the delegations’ requests for even stronger support and for increased focus on data, innovation and best practices around the world. She was committed to keeping the delegations closely engaged with the resident coordinator system, including by exploring different formats for interaction with resident coordinators during their annual retreat in New York. The delegations’

feedback was important; it was one of the reasons why the operational activities segment mattered tremendously. A number of informal preparatory briefings had been organized in the run-up to the segment, and regular informal exchanges with Member States and country groups would continue to be convened to provide updates on the reform and on preparations for the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September. The delegations would also continue to be briefed on the revised resident coordinator system results framework and the new System-wide Evaluation Office.

46. The Sustainable Development Goals Summit would offer a critical opportunity to change course on the journey to implement the 2030 Agenda. The country teams were better positioned than ever to help countries prioritize key pathways and policy accelerators in support of country priorities, and they were joining forces to place unprecedented emphasis on the means of implementation. Delivering on the funding compact would be critical in that regard. More core funding would increase the ability of the system to provide policy support and to catalyse means of implementation that would enable it to move away from projectized, small-scale support. The time had come for a definitive solution to ensure sustainable, sufficient and predictable funding for the resident coordinator system. As the backbone of all United Nations development system activities, the resident coordinator system was critical to the system’s ability to scale up. An inclusive and transparent consultative process would soon be launched on funding the resident coordinator system, alongside a dialogue on how to reinvigorate the funding compact. She looked forward to the adoption of a Council resolution to guide the work of the United Nations development system over the coming year and help to consolidate the reforms.

47. **The President**, summing up, declared the segment closed.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.