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Operational activities segment

Provisional summary record of the 25th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 14 July 2000, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Niehaus (Vice-President) (Costa Rica)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation

Follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council: progress report on the implementation of the triennial comprehensive policy review (E/2000/46; E/2000/46/Add.1; E/2000/46/Add.2 and Corr.1, E/2000/CRP.1)

1. **Mr. Civili** (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs), introducing addendum 1 to the report of the Secretary-General contained in document E/2000/46, said that the operational activities segment of the Council's session would review progress in gearing programming, execution and evaluation arrangements for operational activities with the aim of maximizing support for national development and national efforts to implement follow-up to global conferences.

2. The annex contained a detailed description of the management process for the implementation of General Assembly resolution 53/192 and related resolutions. Its tables provided an update to earlier information, stating specific guidelines, targets and time-frames for further implementation. The main body of the addendum attempted to cover all aspects of resolution 53/192 in an informative and concise manner so as to focus on the elaboration of firm recommendations for action by the Council.

3. Drawing attention to the impact evaluation process, contained in sections II and XII, he emphasized that the process was both important, as an integral part of the triennial comprehensive policy review exercise, and unique, as the only existing source of an independent overview and performance assessment of the entire United Nations development system. He noted that the credibility of the evaluation process was well established and had generated much interest within the system, programme countries and the donor community. Successive triennial policy reviews had repeatedly stressed the importance of evaluation and had provided extensive guidance on modalities and priority objectives.

4. The common country assessments (CCA) and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) processes were also very relevant in that

context since a sound data framework and clarity on programme objectives and their relationships were both incentives to effective monitoring and evaluation. Such assessment and framework processes contributed vastly to the coherence of the system and its responsiveness to country requirements, the main underlying objectives of resolution 53/192.

5. He referred to the impact of the evaluation process on capacity-building, as outlined in section XIII of the addendum. Capacity-building was a crucial area in respect of which developing countries and the international community must have a clear sense of what could reasonably be expected of the United Nations system.

6. Having elaborated on the main impacts of evaluation, he made special mention of section XI of the addendum on humanitarian assistance and peace-building, underscoring the need for comprehensiveness and coherence among all forms of assistance to countries in crisis.

7. Turning to the issue of national execution, he noted that a distinction must be made between national execution as a financial arrangement, and the basic objectives underlying the national execution modality, which must engage the system as a whole. In that regard, he mentioned that United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recently reported that in terms of UNDP's programme expenditures, the national execution modality had risen from 3 per cent to almost 80 per cent of the total in 1999.

8. Overall, the report under consideration (E/2000/46) and its addendum showed that the system had continued to make steady progress in adapting to the changing requirements of developing countries and in improving coherence, efficiency and impact along the lines recommended in resolution 53/192.

9. **Mr. Khare** (India) acknowledged that considerable progress had been achieved in the implementation of resolution 53/192, but emphasized that nowhere was the need for immediate follow-up action more apparent than in the provision of core resources for the United Nations funds and programmes. India was deeply concerned that shortfalls in those resources were undermining the capacity of the United Nations system to promote national development.

10. His Government shared the view that impact evaluation was a necessary input to the next triennial policy review, but it should also include an evaluation of the impact of UNDAF, which should be evaluated in terms of the value it added to the work of the United Nations. As mentioned in paragraphs 22 and 39 of the addendum, (E/2000/46 and Add 1) the case of India had shown how UNDAF, under national ownership, had attempted to tackle the key issues of gender-equality and decentralization in a holistic manner and had promoted the participation of civil society.

11. His Government was however perplexed by the assertions that support to Governments in achieving the goals of the major United Nations conferences was at the core of work carried out at the country level, and again, in paragraph 64, that the focus of conference follow-up had in recent years shifted to national implementation modalities and mechanisms. Undue emphasis at the national level was neither desirable nor acceptable, particularly at a time when commitments for resources at the international level remained unfulfilled.

12. Noting the decision of the United Nations Senior Management Group on strategic goals, as outlined in paragraph 26, he said he did not approve of removing decision-making powers on certain issues from Governments, and cautioned against attempts to operationalize such decisions through UNDAF. He hoped that the views expressed by Member States on the Secretary-General's reform proposals would be taken into consideration for future action.

13. With regard to collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions, he stressed that complementarity did not necessarily imply congruence: the priorities of donors and recipients were different and should not be integrated. Collaboration should not be used as a means to legitimize ideas such as the comprehensive development framework (CDF) and the poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSP) which at the moment were still pilot exercises. Furthermore, attempts to promote complementarity between the United Nations system and financial institutions should be made at the field level, with recipient Governments exercising a coordination function.

14. India was in favour of harmonizing the programming cycles of the funds and programmes and was gratified that they had adopted information technology and made efforts to redress the gender

balance through the appointment of resident coordinators. He also noted the increasing focus on women's empowerment, but pointed out that the results-oriented assessment report (ROAR) issued by UNDP had painted a less rosy scenario.

15. With reference to paragraph 91 (d) in section VIII of the addendum, relating to common premises and sharing of administrative services, he suggested that teamwork was a primary prerequisite for supporting recipient Governments in implementing their national priorities. That process could be facilitated, as proposed in sub-paragraph (h), through greater use of information technology, including the establishment of "virtual" United Nations Houses.

16. Although India provided humanitarian assistance to the extent possible, his Government did not believe that special developmental situations should be a major part of the mandate of United Nations funds and programmes. Given the overall climate of shrinking resource flows, it was important to ensure that scarce development resources were not diverted to serve other purposes and that additional resources were provided by the international community.

17. **Ms. Gras** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that forward movement on the Secretary-General's reform programme had been encouraging, as was the progress reported on the operationalization of CCAs and UNDAFs. However, the European Union was aware that transaction costs had been high and that the impact of reform would be limited if further action was not taken. Development framework plans should progressively lead to a system of joint programming of funds through joint country programmes, defined on the basis of national development priorities, in which the intervention of each agency would be defined in relation to its comparative advantages and the resources it was able to mobilize. Such an approach would increase impact and coherence, avoid redundancy and duplication, simplify programming procedures and thereby increase recipient countries' capacity for coordination and appropriation. She therefore proposed that the Council consider the feasibility of that approach and the possibility of submitting such programmes to the joint session of Executive Boards. The exploration of ways to increase coherence between the programmes of agencies and the UNDAF and an independent assessment of the CCA/UNDAF process could be carried out concurrently.

18. In terms of field-level coordination, she said the European Union shared the view that impact and visibility of the United Nations system would be enhanced through further coordination and welcomed the progress achieved, inter alia, in the implementation of the system of United Nations Houses and shared services. In that connection, a precise account of the situation should be drawn up, with particular reference to potential management savings and priorities for the period defined. Policies on the selection and training of resident coordinators had also progressed, and she reiterated the importance of broadening the recruitment base to include women and of the involvement of all agencies.

19. The European Union proposed the organization of well-prepared joint meetings of the executive boards of the funds and programmes, which should play a more active role in ensuring the implementation of recommendations for the improvement of coordination, harmonization and simplification of procedures. Moreover, there were a number of other areas with great potential for joint collaboration.

20. The European Union endorsed the high priority accorded to follow-up to global conferences and gender equality, as well as the regional dimension in the restoration and maintenance of peace.

21. Humanitarian assistance, the reconstruction of States and long-term development measures were ongoing operations inherent in a comprehensive and continuous movement to advance; the European Union therefore was in favour of implementing a comprehensive assistance strategy for countries in crisis, bringing together all partners, with the local authorities exercising a coordinating role. The Union fully concurred in the need to implement comprehensive strategic frameworks, and to strengthen links and complementarity between UNDAFs and the consolidated appeals of countries in crisis.

22. Dialogue and further cooperation between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions was to be encouraged, as well as the application of impact evaluations of operational development activities to the strengthening of national capacity and poverty eradication. Impact evaluations constituted an intrinsic aspect of the triennial examination of operational development activities and those proceedings should be covered by the Secretariat's regular budget and

constitute one of the priorities of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

23. Finally, in the follow-up to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 on the evaluation of operational development activities, a work plan and a timetable should be established within the framework of the next review.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.