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Operational activities segment

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 26th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 13 July 2006, at 10 a.m.

<u>President:</u>	Mr. MÉRORÈS (Vice-President)	(Haiti)
later:	Mr. KARIYAWASAM (Vice-President)	(Sri Lanka)

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In the absence of Mr. Hachani (Tunisia), Mr. Mérorès (Haiti),
Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION:

- (a) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE COUNCIL (A/60/74-E/2005/57,
A/60/83-E/2005/72 and A/61/77-E/2006/59; E/2006/58 and E/2006/60;
E/2006/CRP.1)

Mr. CIVILI (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs) said that the report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 59/250 (E/2006/58) provided an update on the key actions undertaken to improve the functioning of the United Nations development system by making it more responsive to country-level priorities, more focused on national capacity development, more inclusive in its approach to inter-agency collaboration and more committed to reducing the administrative and procedural burden of development cooperation. With regard to the report giving comprehensive statistical data on operational activities for development for 2004 (A/61/77-E/2006/59), he noted that, as part of efforts to improve the accuracy and coverage of statistical information on operational activities, the Secretariat was working with the humanitarian agencies to develop a more standardized humanitarian reporting system and was working towards greater harmonization of its methods of data collection and analysis with those of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The basic question raised in the 2004 triennial comprehensive policy review had been how the United Nations development system could achieve better integration with national efforts and how it could improve its own coordination and coherence. Improved coordination and coherence were important, but were only the means to an end. The fundamental issue was the relevance of the United Nations development system to the challenges of a new century. It was to be hoped that the next policy review would be a further step towards identifying those challenges.

The outcome of the operational activities segment would be highly relevant to shaping the expanded role that the Council had been called upon to perform with a view to strengthening the effectiveness of the development cooperation architecture through the new Development Cooperation Forum. The Forum was a potentially powerful vehicle for enhancing the impact of global cooperation efforts in pursuit of internationally agreed development goals.

Ms. MTSHALI (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the fundamental characteristics of the operational activities for development of the United Nations system should be their universal, voluntary nature, their neutrality and multilateralism, and the ability to respond flexibly to the needs of recipient countries. As noted in the Secretary-General's report (A/60/83), current practices had not succeeded in securing an adequate volume of core resources for the United Nations development system. The use of non-core resources to supplement the funding of operational activities clearly constrained the United Nations in the pursuit of its comprehensive development agenda. While some countries had commendably committed themselves to a target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product (GNP) for official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries, and between 0.15 and 0.20 per cent of their GNP to the least developed countries, there was a need to increase the reliability and predictability of funding with a view to the attainment of internationally agreed development goals. It was also important to refine and standardize data and statistical practices concerning funding for operational activities, including by making a clearer distinction between funding for humanitarian assistance and long-term development cooperation channelled through the United Nations.

In addressing the long-term challenges facing recipient countries, it was essential to take into account the need for capacity-building. By adopting General Assembly resolution 59/250, Member States had recognized that capacity-building and ownership of national strategies were essential for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations must make fuller use of available national expertise and technologies in the implementation of operational activities and must ensure that developing countries were able to draw on the whole range of its services and experience.

In providing guidance for the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review, the Economic and Social Council should focus on: assessing the effectiveness of the United Nations system's development assistance in helping developing countries to eradicate hunger and poverty and achieve sustained growth and sustainable development; reviewing the steps taken by the system to ensure country ownership and leadership of operational activities for development; ensuring the alignment of operational activities for development with national efforts and priorities; reviewing the adequacy, predictability and long-term stability of United Nations development funding; and identifying further steps to streamline and strengthen the United Nations development system so as to ensure a smooth transition from relief to development.

Ms. FERNANDEZ (Observer for Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries (Bulgaria and Romania), the candidate countries (Turkey, Croatia and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), the stabilization and association process countries and potential candidates (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia) and, in addition, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, said that the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals depended to a large extent on the successful reform of United Nations operational activities. The triennial comprehensive policy review was a tool for implementing the commitments made at the 2005 World Summit to make the United Nations country presence more coherent, efficient and effective. The reports before the Council showed that substantial progress had been made in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 59/250. The European Union welcomed the updated matrix included in the report of the Secretary-General (E/2006/58) and encouraged the Secretariat to continue refining the matrix, with the use of quantifiable targets, measurable benchmarks and well-defined time frames and the inclusion of a longer-term planning perspective. It also welcomed the report of the Executive Committee of the United Nations Development Group on steps taken by the Group to implement the triennial comprehensive policy review (E/2006/CRP.1). However, the reports showed that more needed to be done to build on the progress towards "one United Nations" at the country level, as reflected in the Cape Verde and Viet Nam pilot projects.

On the question of national ownership and leadership, progress had been made in aligning common country assessments (CCAs) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) with comprehensive national development strategies, in particular with

poverty reduction strategies. It was important to ensure the input of civil society and the private sector to such strategies since full national ownership required the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. The role of UNDAF was crucial to development cooperation since it provided the strategic direction for the United Nations system as a whole.

The European Union strongly welcomed and supported the efforts by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to simplify and harmonize their rules and procedure. It encouraged specialized agencies to follow that example and welcomed the adoption of resolutions by several of their governing bodies to align their operational activities with the outcome of the triennial comprehensive policy review.

The commitment to gender-balancing within the United Nations country teams should be implemented without delay. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) had expertise in that area that needed to be better utilized. The European Union also wished to emphasize the importance of generating sex-disaggregated statistics, gender-specific information and the analysis required to make gender-inclusive policy decisions.

The transition from relief to development, and its funding, was a challenge facing the whole international community, and particularly the United Nations. The European Union hoped that the new Peacebuilding Commission and Standing Fund for Peacebuilding would pave the way for a more efficient United Nations response in post-conflict transitional situations through increased coherence with other agencies and actors involved. The roles and responsibilities of United Nations actors in that regard needed to be further clarified.

The European Union supported the strengthening of the resident coordinator system and understood that the resident coordinator should have the necessary authority to take decisions and provide leadership as well as the resources to carry out his or her coordinating functions efficiently. It welcomed the new appraisal system for resident coordinators, who should be considered as neutral team leaders promoting, inter alia, a system-wide culture among staff at the country level.

The evaluation and monitoring of the United Nations system's performance should be improved by using harmonized standards. More systematic advantage should be taken of lessons learned; for that purpose system-wide monitoring and evaluation was of the utmost importance. Both quantitative and qualitative data should be collected and analysed, and appropriate use should be made of national data and expertise.

She would be interested to know how the United Nations was taking forward its capacity-building agenda in developing countries and how it could make more systematic and effective use of its full capacity to support the development efforts of developing countries. She would also like to know more about the ideas generated in the knowledge management task force of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, and about how system-wide knowledge management was to be introduced. There was a need to make better use of the specialized agencies in that regard and to develop new mechanisms for involving non-resident agencies in operational activities at the country level.

The European Union was pleased to note that the number of joint programmes had been increasing rapidly and urged further intensification of joint programming at the country and regional level. The funds and programmes of the United Nations Development Group should invite the specialized agencies to join them in moving towards a common programming cycle. Progress in coordinating operational activities in the transition phase from relief to development, as evidenced by the development of joint programmes by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the members of the United Nations Development Group, was a further sign that the reforms made to the United Nations development system were bearing fruit.

To further improve the performance of United Nations operational activities, the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review should place greater emphasis on the normative dimension and on the idea of linking development, human rights and security. There was a need to find better ways of measuring development impact, to establish better funding mechanisms and modalities, to make better use of lessons learned, to harmonize standards system-wide, and to utilize the experiences of the joint programming and joint country programmes to make the

United Nations a more relevant development partner. The European Union hoped the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence would prepare a comprehensive analysis and make recommendations on United Nations operational activities and would make a constructive contribution to the 2007 policy review.

Mr. MILLER (United States of America) said that the Secretary-General's report on progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 59/250 (E/2006/58) had identified a number of points that Member States needed to address at the operational activities segment: first, the United Nations development activities should support development priorities formulated with national ownership and leadership; second, capacity-building should be a high priority in that context; and, third, the United Nations should enhance its own capacity to produce results in the field of development, including through the reform process.

His Government took the view that countries bore the primary responsibility for their own development, including for policy formulation and resource mobilization, and that the role of the international community and the United Nations was to support national efforts. The ultimate goal of capacity-building was to enable developing countries to become independent of international development assistance, not to consign them to perpetual dependency. United Nations agencies that performed some governmental functions, such as public procurement, should make local capacity-building a top priority with a view to handing the work over to national authorities within a reasonable period. The United Nations needed to improve the way it delivered development services. Experiments with new forms of coordination at field level should be monitored to see if they lived up to their promise. Coordination was not an end in itself and should be the means to produce results. His Government looked forward to further discussion of that important issue when the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence issued its report.

At a time when many funds and programmes and specialized agencies were introducing results-oriented management and budgeting, focusing on funding alone would undermine the progress many operational agencies had made in linking funding with performance. It was important to maintain the voluntary nature of funding for operational activities, as enshrined in

General Assembly resolution 59/250, and it was encouraging that the main Secretariat documents for the session had ceased making recommendations for non-voluntary funding modalities. His Government believed that a mix of core and non-core resources was the best way of achieving a variety of development objectives under different circumstances. United Nations funds and programmes provided the most tangible benefits to the people in need of assistance, and Member States should work together to continue to improve their effectiveness and efficiency.

Mr. CHULKOV (Russian Federation) said that the triennial comprehensive policy review should define the parameters for discussing all issues relating to the functioning of the United Nations development system, including reform processes. The Secretary-General's report showed that the reform process was generally on track but also highlighted some weaknesses. His country supported measures aimed at national capacity-building and welcomed efforts to align United Nations activities with national plans and strategies. It was not, however, convinced of the need to transform (UNDAF) into a common country programme document.

While the resident coordinator system needed further strengthening, it would not be useful to radically change the way the system was run by creating an additional coordinating structure in the Secretariat. Any strengthening of the powers of resident coordinators must be accompanied by adequate measures to increase their accountability to Member States and organizations of the United Nations system. He looked forward to receiving proposals on the comprehensive accountability framework for resident coordinators and on ways of ensuring the mobilization of resources for the whole United Nations system. There was a need to begin making arrangements for broader participation by all concerned United Nations agencies in the funding of the resident coordinator system.

The degree of fragmentation of the work of the United Nations system should not be exaggerated. What was required was not a merger of the agencies but more effective collaboration between the specialized agencies and the non-resident agencies or agencies with a limited country-level presence. He supported the establishment of a working group on

non-resident agencies within the United Nations Development Group and said that Member States should be kept informed of the content of the report the working group was to submit to the Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

He fully supported greater collaboration with the regional commissions, which had considerable technical and analytical expertise in a wide range of areas of interest to Governments. Resident coordinators had an important role to play in improving cooperation with non-resident agencies. His delegation was ready to consider ways of streamlining the process of preparing and adopting country programmes but felt that the process should continue to be dealt with by the individual executive boards.

He did not believe that the joint office model necessarily made for the most integrated and efficient use of resources. The Cape Verde exercise had yet to be assessed; it was important that the assessment of that exercise should be transparent to Member States. He supported the work on alignment of the regional technical support structures and regional offices, including the alignment of regional coverage and the establishment of common regional offices. The work on cost recovery should focus on principles, not on defining a single recovery rate and scale. He welcomed the inclusion in the report of a multi-year dimension, which had improved the quality of the annual statistical data.

The forthcoming triennial comprehensive policy review should confirm the leading role of Governments in defining methods and priorities for cooperation. It should also confirm the need for funds and programmes to maintain their individual organizational identities and independence, the voluntary nature of operational activities and the need for greater efficiency and accountability within the resident coordinator system. Lastly, it should call for the involvement of non-resident agencies in work at the country level and for the more effective use of the wide range of expertise available in the United Nations system.

Mr. AMIRBAYOV (Observer for Azerbaijan) said his Government advocated a balanced and pragmatic approach to increasing efficiency and transparency throughout the United Nations system. The Economic and Social Council was an ideal forum for a

dialogue on international development cooperation between all stakeholders, including the international financial institutions, regional development banks, the private sector and civil society.

It was important to assess the efficiency of operational activities at both the country and the system-wide level, taking due account of local services and, where possible, making use of input from local experts. It was also important to learn from the feedback given by beneficiaries on their capacity-building development needs.

Given the importance of regional coordination in assessing operational activities, his Government appreciated the input of its regional partners, especially the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), in the activities of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. His Government recognized that only sustained growth and stable macroeconomic performance could reduce Azerbaijan's dependence on foreign finance for its development. Azerbaijan had already had some success in developing its infrastructure, services and small and medium-sized enterprises in pursuit of its development agenda, but still faced many challenges, including the ongoing conflict with Armenia. As a result of that conflict, nearly one fifth of the country's territory was under occupation by the Armenian armed forces, depriving hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons of their basic right to return to their homes. Consequently, his Government was finding it difficult to address some of its development challenges fully and promptly.

Ms. MUDIE (Australia), speaking also on behalf of Canada and New Zealand, said that the triennial comprehensive policy review was an important part of a continuous cycle of reform. It was a process from which the United Nations system should constantly learn so that it could evaluate and revise its operations in such a way as to enhance the effectiveness of aid and build up the capacity of partners. The progress made by the United Nations system in the simplification and harmonization of procedures was particularly welcome: in that connection, she singled out for praise the strengthened resident coordinator system, the joint office pilot project in the Cape Verde and the use of a harmonized CCA-UNDAF in Viet Nam as

part of a country-led and country-owned process. She also welcomed the steps taken to harmonize cost recovery rates and improve monitoring and evaluation, including the endorsement of system-wide norms and standards for evaluation. While some progress had been made in the areas of gender equality and transition, more needed to be done to track expenditure designed to achieve gender equality, and to find a solution to the ongoing funding and coordination gap in the area of transition. There was also a need for improved post-disaster needs assessment, coordination, planning and inter-agency interaction, including between development and humanitarian agencies.

Expansion of the joint office model and the introduction of a more accountable and transparent resident coordinator system were to be encouraged. But, more critically, improved harmonization of the CCA-UNDAF process was essential for streamlining country operations and fully implementing nationally set goals. It was a pity that the executive boards had felt that the recent proposal to enhance national authorities' ability to own and streamline United Nations activities had gone too far. It was to be hoped that they would move swiftly to at least approve the country programme format and accelerated approval process.

She welcomed the work of the working group of the United Nations Development Group in developing operational guidelines for United Nations country teams on building up the capacities of partner countries. Further strengthening of national capacity was required, especially in the context of new aid modalities. Capacity development was also important beyond national governments - at local and provincial levels, in the non-governmental organization sector and within civil society. The Secretary-General, in conducting the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review, should seek ways to further enhance support for capacity-building, which should include an assessment of the human resources available within the United Nations system to support capacity development and national priorities. As a critical element of relief, transition and development, capacity development needed to be enhanced at all those stages.

Ms. YANG Ningning (China) expressed satisfaction that the United Nations agencies had made progress in strengthening recipient countries' capacity-building and programme ownership, that aid activities were increasingly in line with countries' own

development strategies and that programme costs had been reduced while programme effectiveness and resource mobilization had improved. However, the capacity of the United Nations system to maintain its universality, neutrality and multilateralism had been severely hampered by the failure to increase the stability and predictability of its core resources.

Since national capacity-building for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals depended essentially on the countries themselves, it must be mainstreamed into the priorities of the United Nations development system. The various funds and programmes had already expanded their capacity-building activities with substantial inputs of resources; it was to be hoped that they would also strengthen system-wide coordination and avoid duplication. She was in favour of better coordination between the United Nations Development Group and OCHA in the delivery of assistance to disaster-affected countries, including disaster prevention and management assistance, in order to speed up the transition from aid to development.

Account should be taken of differing national conditions and requirements when implementing harmonization measures, and steps must be taken to ensure the participation of Governments in operational activities for development. Her Government did not agree that the joint office model was necessarily the most effective way forward, but it did support the various agencies' efforts to share knowledge so that recipient countries could benefit from their expertise.

South-South cooperation had huge potential for enhancing countries' development. She hoped that the United Nations development system would devote more resources to consolidating such cooperation and that more donor countries would help fund it. Regarding the preparations for the 2007 policy review, she supported the idea of drawing on lessons learned for assessing the impact of activities designed to help recipient countries in their efforts to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable economic and social development.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that development was increasingly seen as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing economic, social and environmental dimensions. The United Nations should address those dimensions in a comprehensive manner. The functions and activities of the individual organizations of the United Nations system varied,

but had a common purpose: the need to simplify and harmonize the system could therefore not be overstated. Efforts to harmonize its activities should be driven by criteria and procedures set by the wider United Nations membership. The resident coordinator system should be strong and accountable. Proper monitoring and evaluation of United Nations activities would enhance their effectiveness, and the streamlining of complex rules and procedures would reduce transaction costs and improve programme results.

United Nations country activities should be coherent with national development strategies; the preparation and implementation of UNDAF must be in line with national priorities; and agencies' programming cycles must be needs-based rather than supply-driven. The credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations development system relied on a stable, predictable, long-term and expanding resource base. The multi-year funding framework was a critical step forward in revitalizing and stabilizing resource funding and in linking resource benchmarks and targets on a long-term basis. However, while it was effective as a planning device, it had not yet produced the necessary critical mass of core contributions.

There was an emerging consensus that funding constraints and a lack of coherence were severely restricting the ability of the United Nations system to support Member States. Operational activities must be reinvigorated and supported with adequate funds if the huge challenges that faced humankind were to be met.

Mr. ERIKSEN (Observer for Norway) said he was pleased to note that progress was being made in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 59/250, although there was room for further improvement of the updated matrix. Increased bilateral and multilateral ODA was crucial to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Greater effectiveness, better coordination and closer alignment with national priorities were not meant to reduce the need for funding; they were needed to strengthen the link between funding and development and to ensure that the funding provided contributed to development in partner countries while strengthening those countries' capacity to combat poverty. The core budgets of the United Nations funds and programmes needed strengthening, and he urged countries in a position to increase core funding to do so.

He commended the progress made in aligning United Nations development plans with national development strategies. Since the United Nations system was not a major funding source in most partner countries, it was crucial that it should utilize its comparative advantage at the country level by contributing to capacity-building, giving technical advice and promoting United Nations standards. That called for a strengthened resident coordinator system in which the incumbents had the authority to provide leadership and coordinate the work of the United Nations development system and were perceived as representing all United Nations agencies. He encouraged the executive boards of the relevant funds and programmes to continue to explore ways of increasing joint programming. All United Nations agencies should join efforts to make the “three ones” - one programme, one team, one leader - a reality and so improve the system’s visibility, accessibility and credibility.

He welcomed UNDP efforts in the field of gender-mainstreaming, and said that UNIFEM could play a catalytic role in mainstreaming gender issues throughout the United Nations system. The recommendations of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence would doubtless provide guidance on those and other issues.

Mr. CHAVE (Observer for Switzerland) said that there was a growing and welcome division of labour in the management of the United Nations operational system between the General Assembly, which focused on general policy aspects and guiding principles, and the Economic and Social Council, which focused on the practical and operational aspects of their implementation. Moreover, some specialized agencies were showing a growing interest in the implementation of the triennial comprehensive policy review, which was a very positive sign that all the skills available within the United Nations system were being mobilized for the benefit of the developing countries.

The current harmonization and simplification effort aimed inter alia at rationalizing the management processes of United Nations bodies would benefit those receiving United Nations assistance. To support that effort, it would perhaps be useful for the headquarters of the various agencies to issue specific communications to their staff in the field to help them understand the need for a commitment to the policy review process. It was

encouraging to see that pilot projects had been set up in Cape Verde and Viet Nam, as the approaches taken in those cases recognized the fundamental need to ensure flexibility and to take into account the specific circumstances in each country. UNDAF had increasingly become a tool to ensure such flexibility.

The problem of the transition from emergency assistance to development work was quite complex and was being discussed in a number of forums, including the United Nations Development Group, humanitarian circles and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, but the fragmented nature of such discussions was not conducive to finding convincing solutions.

The increase in resources made available to United Nations agencies had mainly been in the form of extrabudgetary resources, with core contributions decreasing. That was regrettable and dangerous, as the quality of activities depended on the ability of agencies to maintain strong and competent central services. It was difficult to justify that a generous country of just 4 million inhabitants should ensure one fifth of the funding of an institution such as UNDP. Consideration should be given to financing the core budgets of operational organizations using assessed contributions. However, extrabudgetary contributions were not inherently counterproductive, provided there were guarantees that the greatest possible portion of such contributions met the operational needs set by the respective agencies' intergovernmental governing bodies.

Mr. AL FARISI (Indonesia), after associating himself with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that it was particularly important that various initiatives taken by the United Nations system had been carried out in close collaboration with recipient developing countries. Measures had been taken to allow for a greater degree of national ownership of development programmes and to ensure their sustainability. It was imperative to achieve better government leadership through stronger coordination and coherence in policies and programme activities. At the same time, donor competition at the country level should be avoided. Earmarking would be unnecessary if national development priorities were taken into account.

More would be accomplished if the constituent agencies of the United Nations system harmonized and simplified the relevant rules and procedures of their operational activities and engaged in joint evaluations of such activities. An effective resident coordinator system would ensure shared management of resources as well as coherent decision-making, all of which would strengthen good governance, in particular in operational development-cooperation activities. Resources for development must be made available on a continuous, more predictable basis. Notwithstanding an increase in overall resources in the United Nations system, the stunted growth of core resources was of serious concern.

South-South cooperation should not be overlooked as a means of generating development resources and building the capacity of developing countries. For such cooperation to yield its benefits fully, it must be mainstreamed into the cooperation activities of the United Nations system. The increasing frequency of natural and man-made disasters had serious implications for operational activities, as they sometimes abruptly halted development activities, causing funds to be re-routed to rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. The impact of such disasters must be factored into the development process as part of its costs. It was therefore heartening that the Secretary-General's report (A/61/77-E/2006/59) had included data on humanitarian assistance contributions and expenditure. However, in future such data should be presented in a more refined and detailed format so that it would present a clearer picture of what was happening. A common, standardized humanitarian assistance reporting system would be very helpful in that regard.

Mr. TRIBUSH (Observer for Belarus) said that it would be important in the forthcoming triennial comprehensive policy review to take into consideration United Nations activities in countries with economies in transition, and to encourage greater input from the field. In the past, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs had conducted a survey and distributed a questionnaire, which in Belarus had been used as an analytical tool by the Government, United Nations agencies and other partners. A similar exercise in early 2007 would provide an important extra dimension to the policy review.

Ms. GHANASHYAM (India), having associated herself with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that in

conducting the triennial comprehensive policy review, it was necessary to determine whether the reforms had reduced transaction and administrative costs and the reporting burdens of the development agencies, thereby enhancing their capacity. The Secretary-General should include in forthcoming reports details of the savings in financial and human resources that accrued to the system thanks to the reforms, as such information would provide useful insights for discussions during the next policy review.

The principle of national ownership was not being used to the desired extent in the work of some of the development agencies. Operational development activities must take into account the need to promote national capacity-building in developing countries, as it had been recognized that capacity development and ownership of national development strategies were essential for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In implementing operational activities, the United Nations development system must use available national expertise and technologies to the fullest extent possible. Regrettably, the Secretary-General's report indicated that that was not always the case.

Current funding practices, through both assessed contributions and voluntary funding, had not succeeded in securing adequate core resources for the United Nations development system. It was acknowledged that the insufficiency of core resources represented the single most important constraint on the system's performance. Non-earmarked contributions were vital for coherence and harmonization, as earmarking led to selectivity and fragmentation. Additional core resources must be generated, and the reliability and predictability of such funding must be increased.

Mr. SOW (Guinea), having associated himself with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that there was a need to carry out evaluations in pilot projects. The capacity of the United Nations system to contribute to development should be bolstered, with a particular emphasis on achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The slippage in support for the core funding of United Nations funds and programmes was of serious concern, as it limited the ability of such agencies to respond to needs rapidly and with flexibility. The development activities of the international system should be universal,

voluntarily funded, neutral and multilateral so as to ensure that they could respond to the needs of the most vulnerable countries, without regard for example to coverage of such needs in the media. It was necessary for funding to be more balanced and more predictable. The Council must work with the main coordination bodies, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Central Emergency Revolving Fund to improve the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance in the United Nations system.

Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. CABRAL (Guinea-Bissau) said he agreed with the representative of the United States of America that development assistance must not consign developing countries to perpetual dependency. The developing countries had the best understanding of their own populations' needs. They must bear responsibility for their own development, and must draw up their own development plans to meet those needs. Development must be endogenous, not exogenous, and development assistance must be devised to support their development plans, and not the other way around. Therefore, in the debate over whether aid should be provided on a voluntary basis, it was crucial to remember that such assistance corresponded to the principles of the United Nations. Any system of compulsory contributions, while perhaps useful to increase the predictability of financing, would in practice undermine healthy competition, and thus the efficiency, effectiveness and diligence of the system. The most important aspect of any assistance was the extent to which it achieved results. In deciding on priorities for development plans, it was imperative to ensure sufficient support for education and health. At least 10 per cent of the budgets of developing countries should be allocated to such programmes.

With regard to the comment made by the observer for Switzerland, he said that while it was understandable that a country of 4 million people should not have to bear the burden of covering one fifth of the core budget of an international agency, it was quite natural that those who had resources should be the ones to provide the support.

Mr. AHO-GLELE (Benin), having associated himself with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 was a prime example of

United Nations system operational activities for development. Given the current emphasis on the need for coherence and synergy in United Nations operational activities and on progress towards implementation of General Assembly resolution 59/250, and in the context of preparations for the forthcoming triennial comprehensive policy review, he requested information on whether any steps had in fact been taken to ensure a coordinated and coherent approach at the field level to implement the Programme of Action.

Ms. PICHYAKORN (Thailand), having associated herself with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said she looked forward to receiving a full report on the joint office pilot programmes undertaken in Cape Verde and Viet Nam. With regard to implementation of the joint office model referred to in General Assembly resolution 59/250, however, she agreed with the representative of China that different national conditions must be taken into account: there could be no one-size-fits-all approach. She recalled that the headquarters of ESCAP was located in Bangkok and expressed concern about how joint offices would coordinate with regional commissions and avoid duplication of efforts. Her delegation wished to stress that the adoption of the joint office model should in no way diminish the role of the regional commissions.

Ms. MANN (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said her Organization's vision of a strengthened United Nations development system reflected the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. With the assistance of external partners, countries must lead their own development processes through mechanisms such as nationally-owned development strategies, including poverty reduction strategies, and joint assistance strategies. The use of existing government management systems contributed to greater national responsibility for managing external financing and accounting for its use. Country leadership of programmes would require new ways of doing business; the difference in capacities and characteristics of countries would determine the level of, and timetable for achieving, ownership. She cautioned however that a one-size-fits-all approach could not meet the differing needs of the developing countries; greater flexibility and responsiveness to countries' needs and the use of the principle of subsidiarity in United Nations support mechanisms would enhance effectiveness.

The strength of United Nations assistance was its neutrality, evidence-based nature and validation through field-testing in different national contexts. With stronger country ownership and country-led partnerships, knowledge, strategy, policy and capacity assistance would be more important than more traditional forms of assistance. Assistance would increasingly take the form of services and products, with greater emphasis on knowledge-based assistance in areas such as best practices, policy development and capacity-building, with a view to meeting international norms or respond to transboundary threats. Such assistance was part of the process of joint problem-solving with Governments and assistance-providers.

She agreed that there should be only one leader for United Nations country teams; FAO country-level representatives were instructed to support the resident coordinator system, which should be strengthened. Her Organization had had a good experience with the OCHA model; OCHA had a coordinating role but no implementing function, which guaranteed impartial leadership, reduced the competition for funds and prevented duplication of activities. FAO was an active participant in the UNDAF process, but recognized the need for a programme document outlining United Nations system support. It did not have multi-year resources to programme at the country level but was introducing tools to assist Governments in setting priorities for FAO assistance. That process was linked to national planning and the UNDAF process.

FAO participated in a number of common services at the country level, where they were more cost-effective; it shared common premises with other agencies in 21 countries. Policy on country offices was, however, guided by cost considerations and the fact that FAO had premises made available free of charge by the respective Governments, mainly in ministries of agriculture.

With regard to coordination at the field level, she called for the simplification and harmonization of systems and procedures by all assistance-providers in order to reduce costs to partner and donor countries as well as to the United Nations. Such harmonization should ideally be based on national systems and procedures. FAO was ready to participate, on a pilot basis, in a

joint office in Viet Nam. However, the effectiveness and cost benefits of that type of office needed to be fully assessed, and FAO had requested that the matter be discussed by the Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

Substantive coordination could best be managed through a cluster-based or thematic approach involving entities with relevant technical competence and facilitated by the substantively competent entity, or by each entity on a rotating basis. In the context of a single country programme, that would allow better use of system capacity and allow resident coordinators to focus on management coordination and overall coherence.

With regard to the “three ones” mentioned by the observer for Norway, she said that the fourth “one”, “one budget”, had not yet been clearly articulated and therefore she could not comment on it. However, the “three ones” system raised a number of questions of accountability, including the accountability of: the resident coordinator and country team to Governments and donors; the country team to individual entities’ governing bodies, the United Nations Development Group and the Chief Executives Board for Coordination; the team leader to the team; and the team to the leader.

In November 2005, the FAO Conference had adopted resolution 13/2005 on implementation of General Assembly resolution 59/250. An oversight committee and an interdepartmental working group had been established to guide implementation and report thereon to the FAO Conference in 2007.

She stressed that reform should be aimed at improving the impact of the assistance provided and that cooperation which focused on substantive themes, tasks or clusters was more likely to yield concrete development results. Reform for reform’s sake was not meaningful or productive. Her Organization and WFP were currently discussing how food-security theme groups at the country level might be utilized to achieve better results. The eventual participation of other relevant entities, alignment with country priorities and dialogue with Governments and donors were likewise envisaged.

Mr. MERTENS (World Health Organization (WHO)) said WHO was committed to harmonizing its operational development activities. Action had been taken to ensure that

WHO continued to implement its country-level activities in accordance with member States' priorities, coordinate with the United Nations system, encourage harmonization, use the triennial comprehensive policy review to guide its work at the country level and examine ways to further rationalize procedures and reduce costs.

The 2006 World Health Assembly had discussed collaboration with the United Nations system, including in the context of the reform process, and with other intergovernmental organizations. Reference had been made in particular to the 2005 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council and to collaboration with sister entities of the United Nations system and international financing institutions in the areas of the Millennium Development Goals relating to health, development and humanitarian action, as well as in relation to specific initiatives such as tobacco control and the coordination activities of the Interagency Pharmaceutical Coordination Group.

More than 80 per cent of WHO country offices were actively involved in the United Nations reform process. Country cooperation strategies were elaborated in consultation with member States and contributed to the UNDAF process and other mechanisms such as national poverty reduction strategies. There were currently more than 100 country cooperation strategies linked to national priorities in the areas of health and social development.

Some development issues, however, particularly those related to health, were cross-cutting and could not easily be captured within a country-oriented model; they included the development of norms and standards for cross-border or cross-regional issues such as HIV/AIDS, polio eradication, access to affordable drugs, migration of health workers or the threat of a human pandemic related to severe acute respiratory syndrome or avian influenza. In accordance with its mandate therefore, WHO was focusing on those issues as well as on country-level development.

A one-size-fits-all approach to development planning at the country level had its limitations, but a country-specific approach based on genuine country ownership was in fact better received by both beneficiaries and international development actors. He

hoped bottom-up initiatives, such as the one in Viet Nam, could be further developed and would lead to discussions on the issue of coordinated leadership within United Nations country teams.

The World Health Organization was committed to the “three ones” principle, but he cautioned that a WHO study on its experience within country teams over a period of five years showed that sometimes country teams behaved more as groups of entities than as teams. Groups worked towards common objectives, with each member contributing in its own way, whereas genuine teams shared responsibilities, problems, workload and successes. The diversity and wealth of expertise of the United Nations family was a strength and should be used to reinforce the “three ones” principle, by maintaining the highest work standards but in a creative and less process-oriented environment.

Results-based management was part of internal reform at WHO and its secretariat was committed to improving its managerial processes through transparent and improved human resource management, information and communication technology systems and strategic planning frameworks. Those efforts and the commitment of member States would help WHO maintain the highest standards of accountability and ethics and apply those same principles to its work within the United Nations family.

Mr. CIVILI (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs) thanked delegates for their constructive comments, which would provide a sound basis for preparing the next triennial comprehensive policy review. The convergence of opinions among delegations and regional groups augured well for a speedy conclusion of negotiations on the draft resolution on progress towards implementation of General Assembly resolution 59/250.

He shared delegations’ concerns regarding the amount and types of resources available for development, and stressed the importance of finding the appropriate modalities for allocation of those resources. Debate in that regard should continue on the technical and policy levels, and that issue would be reflected in the report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence.

With regard to the issue of information management and knowledge-sharing, he noted that the agencies of the United Nations system increasingly identified themselves as “knowledge institutions”. The sharing of knowledge should be part of the coordination process; accordingly, the Chief Executives Board for Coordination had established a task force on knowledge-sharing to develop a system-wide strategy and define deliverables to facilitate evaluation of the progress made.

He reassured the representative of Benin that the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 was very much a priority. An inter-agency network had been established and the results of the high-level meeting on the mid-term comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Programme of Action to be held in New York in September would provide guidance for executive heads and programme managers on the effective implementation of the Programme of Action.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.