



# Economic and Social Council

*Provisional*

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## Substantive session of 2013

Coordination segment

### Provisional summary record of the 29th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 10 July 2013 at 3 p.m.

*President:* Mr. Hoxha (Vice-President) ..... (Albania)

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Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation: reports of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Office for Project Services and the Executive Boards of the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and the World Food Programme (*continued*)

*Dialogue with the Executive Heads of United Nations funds and programmes*

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.*

**Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation: reports of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Office for Project Services and the Executive Boards of the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and the World Food Programme** (*continued*).

*Dialogue with the Executive Heads of United Nations funds and programmes*

**The President** noted that, in its resolution 67/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR), the General Assembly had asked the United Nations development system to find a better balance between vertical actions taken to enhance the effectiveness of its component agencies, and horizontal action intended to strengthen the coherence and transparency of the system as a whole. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) had adopted an action plan for the QCPR as well as a common framework for monitoring implementation of that plan. The QCPR, which constituted an effective instrument of accountability, was being gradually integrated into the new strategic plans of United Nations agencies.

**Mrs. Clark** (United Nations Development Group (UNDG)) said that the QCPR had given a new impetus to reform of the United Nations and had helped to improve outcomes from the United Nations development system. Consistent with the guidelines emerging from the QCPR, UNDG had established global strategic priorities, namely support for countries' efforts to eliminate poverty and speed achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, support for broad-based engagement around the design of the post-2015 development agenda, support for action taken in countries that were in or emerging from crisis situations, and support for efforts to strengthen national capacities. With respect to the strategic positioning of the United Nations development system in member countries, more than 100 new framework plans for development assistance would be implemented over the coming four years, and this would provide support for countries wishing to implement the "Delivering as one" initiative. It should be noted in this regard that, in the context of the reform of operational practices currently under way, the United Nations country teams that were preparing the framework plans for development assistance were at the same time designing operational strategies to ensure effective implementation of those plans, an approach already adopted in 13 countries.

**Mrs. Brandt** (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the QCPR action plan called for common actions and indicators that would be applied by all members of UNDG, as well as by those United Nations agencies that are not covered by the QCPR. The plan embraced six broad themes. The first was to instil a culture of results and to improve reporting on the results obtained. To this end, UNDG was promoting the use of the framework it had developed for speeding achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and this would allow country teams to identify obstacles and account more effectively for the results obtained. At the same time, the system as a whole would be able to monitor the equity of outcomes, thanks to which UNICEF could better assess the degree to which progress in the development area was helping the most vulnerable and marginalized children. The development of standardized operating procedures was also an important step in the move from a process-based approach to a results-based approach. The second theme of the action plan was to intensify efforts to strengthen national capacities, and to rely more on

national systems for promoting sustainable development. The third theme was to establish programme priorities. Particular stress would thus be placed on eliminating poverty, promoting sustainable development and expanding South-South and triangular cooperation. The fourth theme involved simplifying and harmonizing the programming and operational procedures of institutions, while the fifth related to improving the operation of the resident coordinator system, and the sixth dealt with reinforcing financing, in particular by broadening the donor base. The QCPR action plan also addressed a number of other areas, such as regional cooperation, evaluation and reporting.

**Mr. Osotimehin** (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that UNFPA was working to implement results-based management, consistent with the General Assembly resolution on the QCPR. It had made significant progress in harmonizing its operating practices and in implementing the “Delivering as one” initiative. UNFPA had been a driving force in preparing standard operating procedures for countries wishing to adopt the “Delivering as one” approach. With these procedures, country teams, Governments and partners had available a set of clear and simple guidelines for programming, mobilization, activities, financing and communication. They were based on seven broad principles, namely the priority role of national Governments, lower operating costs, empowerment of country teams, flexibility, delivering as one, accountability and respect for United Nations values, rules and standards. Generally, United Nations agencies should pool their efforts to overcome roadblocks, especially at headquarters. A significant factor in this regard would be implementation of the proposed action plan for standard operating procedures, which was intended in particular to reduce transaction costs. One of the measures proposed for reducing those costs was to ensure that the common description of the United Nations development assistance frameworks were supplemented by annexes dealing specifically with the various agencies, detailing each agency’s contributions to the activities of the United Nations country teams and to the “Delivering as one” programme. Those annexes would replace the country programme descriptions and would be submitted for approval by the executive bodies.

**Mrs. Rasmusson** (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the risks facing vulnerable populations were being heightened by demographic growth, conflicts, climate change and natural disasters, as well as unequal access to resources. In recent years, agencies working in the humanitarian and development fields had highlighted the need to link preparedness and sustainable development. It was therefore of the greatest importance that the United Nations should be in a position to address the multidimensional nature of problems, and to function in a coherent and integrated manner. The integrated evaluation and planning policy recently adopted was part of a broader framework of guidelines formulated for the entire United Nations system in order to ensure coherence. That policy provided minimum rules for integrated planning and sought to ensure coherence between the integrated strategic frameworks and other planning frameworks, in particular the United Nations development assistance frameworks and global tendering procedures. It could result in combining various planning frameworks and harmonizing planning modalities, an approach currently adopted on an experimental basis in Mali and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Moreover, the United Nations was playing an essential role in countries emerging from crisis situations, where risks were high. Risk management was a responsibility to be shared among all players, who must work in a concerted and coordinated way to attenuate risks. Achievement of the strategic objectives, especially in transition situations, depended on the effectiveness of risk management instruments used, and the partnerships in place.

WFP was gearing its risk management mechanism to its strategic objectives, and integrating this question into the planning and implementation of all its activities. Its country offices had introduced an effective procedure for identifying the main vulnerabilities and the associated risks.

**Mr. Doraid** (UN-Women) welcomed the unprecedented emphasis that the General Assembly resolution on the QCPR had placed on gender equality and women's empowerment as key elements in the operational activities of the United Nations system, and its stress on accountability in the context of activities for promoting gender equality. Consistent with that resolution, UNDG was paying increased attention to these issues and was using various instruments such as results monitoring scorecards. It was currently working to constitute a roster of gender specialists who could provide technical assistance to country teams. For its part, UN-Women would continue to support United Nations agencies in a broad range of fields relating to gender equality, and it was playing a lead role in implementing the United Nations action plan for gender equality and women's empowerment (UN-SWAP), which established system-wide standards for carrying out tasks. Gender equality was an eminently cross-cutting issue for the entire United Nations development system. Implementation of decisions flowing from the QCPR remained one of the priorities of UN-Women. That would require a coordinated approach throughout the United Nations system, and forums for intergovernmental coordination as well as the support of member states within the governing bodies of the agencies concerned. To this end, UN-Women was calling on member States to spare no effort in giving concrete effect to the gender equality elements in the General Assembly resolution on the QCPR.

**Mrs. Clark** (UNDG), speaking as Administrator of UNDP, said that the difficulty and extreme diversity of the resident coordinators' task demanded constant readjustment of performance evaluation and candidate selection procedures. Forty-one per cent of the group of resident coordinators were women. She reviewed what had happened during the two years since the last session of the Council in Geneva, time which had been spent in consultations, negotiations and the search for an ideal cost-sharing formula. The formula adopted was based on three components: an annual fee, set in relation to the size of the organization; the relative importance of the institution in terms of its staff and its budget devoted to development; and the "system load", measured in terms of each entity's role in the assistance framework. While it was understood that all institutions and all funds and programmes should make their contribution beginning in 2014, the fact that budgetary cycles were out of phase meant there was a transition period during which donors would have to be called upon. To decide what should be covered in the financing of coordination, the agency had inventoried the essential functions of the resident coordinators and of the United Nations country teams – analysis and strategic planning, oversight of the country programming cycle, representation of the Secretariat, human resources, support for national coordination systems, assessment and management of support services, communication and advocacy work, joint mobilization of resources and funds management. She recalled the commitment to apply the QCPR scrupulously and to ensure follow-up to it, and she said she was counting on the support of member States when it came time to present the budget items for cost-sharing to the institutions and to the Secretariat.

**Mr. Rodriguez Nicolat** (Mexico) was pleased with the prominence attached to results-based management, and said it was important to provide proper funding for the resident coordinator position.

**Mrs. Bahar** (Indonesia) noted with satisfaction that the QCPR resolution bridged the gap between the strategic vision defined at headquarters and its implementation at the country level. She asked how effective the resident coordinator system had been in ensuring the coherence, coordination, efficiency and accountability of entities at the country level.

**Mrs. Magni** (Observer for Italy), noting that a great many institutions would be starting a new strategic planning cycle in 2014, asked to what extent each entity of the system had already transposed follow-up to the QCPR resolution into its strategic plan.

**Mrs. Kuko** (Albania) asked whether the growing problems encountered in providing multiyear funding might have an impact on implementation of the QCPR action plan, particularly when it came to supporting each country's development priorities. She wondered what joint measures could be taken and what indicators might be defined at the country or regional level with respect to procurement systems. Lastly, she wanted to know whether the data gathering methods in place for overseeing implementation of the action plan were to be harmonized, or whether it was up to each country to establish its own methods.

**Mrs. Clark** (UNDG) said that having onside the executive boards and the decision-making bodies of all the agencies and specialized institutions was essential for system-wide action in the United Nations. Beyond the core funds and programmes, all entities must share the available funding. She believed that all agencies were taking steps to prepare strategic action plans for implementing the QCPR resolution.

**Mrs. Brandt** (UNICEF) said that, with respect to the financial systems and the situation of each country, the UNDG action plan had clearly established the different stages. What was needed next was to assess progress in light of the plan's indicators, with due regard to the national context. She noted that the resident coordinator system, together with United Nations teams, had allowed the United Nations to position itself strategically in many countries.

**Mr. Osotimehin** (UNFPA), who had been involved in negotiations concerning the financing of resident coordinators, confirmed that for UNFPA and UNDP the implementation of a joint strategic plan had helped to strengthen coordination and to make more effective use of available resources. He also confirmed that the countries engaged in the "Delivering as one" initiative had obtained excellent results.

**Mrs. Rasmusson** (World Food Programme (WFP)) reported that the WFP executive board had adopted a strategic plan that bore the clear imprint of the QCPR. On the question of burden and cost-sharing, she specified that the cost of the resident coordinator system was duly integrated into the WFP management plan, which was to be approved by the executive board in November. Lastly, there could be no doubt about the effectiveness of the resident coordinator system in terms of boosting coherence in the field, as the terms of reference of the Programme's country representatives included the mandate to cooperate with the resident coordinator.

**Mrs. Steninge** (Denmark) asked how the standard operating procedures would help United Nations agencies to align their activities more closely with national priorities. She also wanted to know in what ways national authorities had been involved in the effort to improve risk management.

**Mr. Aminul Haq** (Observer for Bangladesh) asked what strategy had been followed for improving the quality and quantity of financing in cases of duplication

of aid, and what strategy had been adopted for joint monitoring of the QCPR by national authorities and the resident coordinator.

**Mrs. Fotina** (Russian Federation) requested details on the set of general indicators mentioned by Mrs. Brandt, and asked to what extent standard operating procedures would influence the work of United Nations agencies in countries that had not joined the “Delivering as one” initiative.

**Mrs. Måwe** (Sweden) asked whether timelines had been established for implementing all the standard operating procedures across the United Nations system.

**Mr. Osotimehin** (UNFPA) said that no specific schedule had been established for applying the standard operating procedures. As the QCPR had been adopted several months earlier, he expected that these procedures would soon become the universal working method. He also noted that the “Delivering as one” initiative had been launched specifically to avoid overlap or waste of resources.

**Mrs. Brandt** (UNICEF) said that the undg action plan and common indicators had been developed by a team representing nine specialized institutions, funds and programmes, and that the team’s proposal had then been adopted by the group as a whole. The intent had been to use existing indicators as far as possible for monitoring the QCPR action plan, to avoid having two parallel sets of indicators.

**Mrs. Rasmusson** (WFP) said that the activities carried out with national Governments in the area of risk management consisted of holding workshops with Governments and their partners.

**Mrs. Nicod** (Observer for Switzerland) asked what additional arrangements were being considered to increase the share of core contributions. With respect to results-based management methods, she requested details on how the joint results presented at the country level would be linked to an overall assessment of system-wide results.

**Mr. Cunningham** (Ireland) observed that, according to the country team surveys for 2013, gender equality was one of the areas in which there was the most competition among United Nations agencies, whereas the expectation was that there should be greater cooperation on their part. Noting that the gender equality scorecard had been completed by only half of the country teams, he asked what provisions had been made to promote its greater use.

**Mrs. Chan** (Observer for Fiji) wanted to know if there were plans to place greater emphasis on strengthening the national capacities of small island developing States for implementing the QCPR action plan.

**Mr. Song Shangzhe** (China) stressed the priority of combating poverty and asked if there were plans to increase the resources allocated to that field of action.

**Mrs. Fladby** (Observer for Norway) was pleased with the follow-up to the QCPR action plan, and in particular the agreement reached between UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN-Women on the new cost recovery framework, which should make it possible to avoid cross-financing. She asked for a view on the outlook for financing the “Delivering as one” programmes, recognizing that, while the number of countries interested in those programmes was growing, the financial resources available to the United Nations agencies were modest and would be shrinking. She also asked for further information on the strategy planned by undg for broadening the donor base.

**Mrs. van Aardenne** (Netherlands) asked whether there was a common mechanism for identifying problems that might be encountered by self-starter countries under the “Delivering as one” programme, and any interesting innovations they might be able to pursue.

**Mrs. Clark** (UNDG) said that the new cost recovery rates agreed between UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN-Women, which were to come into effect on 1 January 2014, were fully consistent with the fundamental principle that there should be no cross-financing. In fact, the decision adopted called for specific discounts to encourage certain types of contributions. Capacity-building was prominent in the QCPR action plan. In small island developing States, some services could be staffed by a single person and if that person should leave, the capacity-building effort would have to start over again. With respect to financing the “Delivering as one” programmes, it was the task of resident coordinators to mobilize resources on behalf of the United Nations system; the “Delivering as one” funds were greatly appreciated by the resident coordinators and the country teams, as they allowed the strategic allocation of resources to key areas, a point that should argue in their favour among donors as well. In terms of broadening the donor base, it was to be hoped that the economies of scale flowing from greater convergence in the world economy would in time promote further support for core funding, as well as an expanded range of donors.

**Mrs. Brandt** (UNICEF) said that eliminating poverty was still a central concern of UNICEF, as were gender issues. With respect to the “results culture”, the QCPR action plan represented a successful step for it reinforced the principle of results-based management. It would be a challenge to synthesize results at the country level and thereby facilitate a more general assessment at the world level, but progress to date on that point was encouraging.

**Mr. Osotimehin** (UNFPA) pointed out that, if they were to be effective, cost recovery measures would also require further work with donors. Gender equality was a priority for UNFPA, which was pursuing its coordination efforts in that area with UN-Women. With respect to the training of national experts, UNFPA was guided by the standard for execution of operational activities in its capacity-building programme for national institutions. The monitoring of self-starter countries in the “Delivering as one” programme was being done with the help of the standard operating procedures and UNDG also had tools for extracting relevant lessons and sharing them with member States.

**Mr. Doraid** (UN-Women) said that the apparent “competition” emerging from the survey of United Nations agencies was not surprising, as it involved major cross-cutting issues inherent in the mandate of all agencies, such as gender equality and the environment. With respect to the gender equity scorecard, the number of responses was already encouraging; the message sent to country teams for promoting its use was that it would in time produce a pay-off in terms of equality. Joint action in the area of gender equality had recorded significant progress, with a doubling of programmes; the system of resident coordinators had been particularly useful in this regard, as UN-Women currently had a presence in only 70 countries.

*The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.*