2018 Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards
UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP

Background Paper – Topic 1

"Joint efforts to strengthen coherence, collaboration and efficiency in the field – effective ways to deliver results together to successfully address programme country priorities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda"

This background paper will serve to inform the morning session on the above-mentioned topic at the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP on 1 June 2018.

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for "system-wide strategic planning, implementation and reporting in order to ensure coherent and integrated support to implementation of the new Agenda by the United Nations development system" (para 88). Accordingly, and in response to the 2016 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR), efforts to strengthen coherence, collaboration and efficiency across the United Nations development system are underway to ensure it can provide the high-quality services required for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As outlined by the United Nations Secretary-General in his report of 21 December 2017 on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, the system is thereby guided by the principles of reinforcing national ownership, developing country-contextual responses, and ensuring the effective delivery of development results on the ground, with an overarching focus on efforts to leave no one behind.

2.   The reinvigorated United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG, formerly UNDG) is a driving force behind these efforts. Country capacity assessments attuned to the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and, accordingly, a new generation of United Nations development assistance frameworks (UNDAFs, calling for comprehensive, holistic, evidence-based and transformative results, are the basis for rethinking the activities, presence and composition of United Nations country teams (UNCTs), as outlined in updated guidance issued by UNSDG last year. Guided by the common approach of Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS), United Nations entities and other development partners are working together with countries to provide tailored and integrated support in contextualizing the 2030 Agenda and assessing development priorities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the country level, progress has been made as regards common business operations strategies, particularly optimization of support services efficiencies through greater leveraging of location-independent shared services, but also in relation to joint programming. The Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda was recently established to provide programme countries with catalytic support for integrated policy to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, drawing on the multisectoral policy expertise of the United Nations development system.

3.   A number of global initiatives have been launched to strengthen system-wide coherence for integrated support on the 2030 Agenda as well as to address the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The New Way of Working initiative brings humanitarian and development (and, where relevant, peacebuilding) actors in protracted crisis settings to foster greater synergies and planning around collective outcomes. Efforts, however, are still needed at country level to strengthen alignment between UNDAFs and humanitarian response plans in country settings, where relevant.

4.   UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women have included a common chapter in their strategic plans for 2018-2021, in which they pledge to harness their collaborative advantage in six thematic areas as well as on operational issues. Likewise, FAO, IFAD and WFP share a common vision for the sustainable development agenda. The WFP country strategic plans outline how WFP works in partnership with other United Nations entities to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The chapter on country strategic plans allows the Executive Boards to readily assess whether the United Nations is addressing the country's needs in a holistic manner.

5.   This background paper presents concrete examples of joint approaches and innovative partnerships to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda that aim to address country priorities and to overcome obstacles hindering coherence, collaboration, efficiency and effectiveness in delivering common results for sustainable development.

II.   KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

6.   Matching the ambition of the 2030 Agenda, our common goal must be a 21st-century United Nations development system focused on people, on delivering results for the poor and marginalized, and on providing integrated support across familiar architectures.

7.   Some of the areas where more work is needed include reaching a common understanding of coherence principles and standards, as well as consistent application of the standard operating procedures (SOPs). The SOPs provide a frame for developing context-specific strategies and interventions to enhance overall coherence and effectiveness of the United Nations at country level; and implementation rates continue to increase across United Nations country teams. However, uneven application of principles can pose challenges for consistent measurement of progress in achieving coherence within joint United Nations work at country level. Different business models and enterprise resource planning platforms among agencies, different approaches to staff orientation and varying capacities in building partnerships and coherence can result in practical obstacles to full application of coherence principles and agreements, and can also lead to delays, even where there is good will for collaboration.

8.   As identified in the Secretary-General's report on implementation of the QCPR, Resident Coordinators hold limited capacities and authority to effectively coordinate UNCT activities or hold UNCT members accountable for joint results. The same report also notes that Governments view the lack of coordination and competition for resources as important obstacles to a clear division of labour at country level.

9.   There is a need to create an enabling environment and additional incentives for collaboration. While the establishment of the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda is a first step, more financial incentives are needed to encourage United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to work together. Accountability and oversight needs to be reoriented to focus on the results collectively achieved by the system, rather than on the processes and structures. It is likewise necessary to define clear results, roles and responsibilities of each agency in joint programmes, according to the mandates and specialties of each agency, in order to avoid confusion among the counterparts regarding the technical assistance provided by each. Duplication in business operations and lack of standards and mutual recognition principles can also be a hindrance for effective collaboration.

10.   Current guidance recommends ensuring comparative advantages of different stakeholders in joint initiatives. However, there is a lack of commonly understood concepts of comparative advantage or normative efficiencies in selecting operational partners, which may result in missed opportunities for efficiency gains or for the most effective delivery.

11.   All entities are committed to the integration of human rights, gender equality and the normative agenda into their United Nations policy, programme and operations work at all levels. However, challenges remain regarding the integration of sensitive issues, such as sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, exacerbating inequality and hampering progress across the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

12.   As identified in the Dalberg report (of June 2017) on the functions and capacities of the United Nations development system, the 2030 Agenda demands specific skillsets of United Nations staff. Obtaining these skills remains a challenge due to decreased resources for training and professional development and because of persistent challenges with recruiting and retaining top talent. Skills and competencies of staff in initiating, planning, implementing and contributing to joint/integrated policy and programming approaches differ from agency to agency; these are especially dependent on agency presence in the country or access to the right level of expertise.

13.   The lack of resources available for several SDG goal areas at country level also impedes the ability of relevant United Nations development entities to provide high-quality support, policy advice, data capacity and technical and operational support to national Governments.

III.   EXEMPLIFYING INITIATIVES

14.   A number of joint initiatives address the key issues and challenges mentioned above. This section serves to exemplify some of the promising initiatives with potential for upscaling.

Addressing multidimensional problems through integrated multisectoral responses

MAPS – an approach to integrated SDG implementation support

15.   Among the initiatives with potential for upscaling is the application of the MAPS approach, for example through 'MAPS missions and engagements'. Since their incubation in 2016, MAPS missions have become increasingly inter-agency initiatives, with representatives of 22 different United Nations entities having participated by March 2018. They involve teams of global and regional experts working closely with UNCTs to provide tailored advice and to help foster high-level national ownership of the SDGs as well as stakeholder engagement.

16.   Mission reports – including, so far, 12 'SDG Roadmaps' co-authored with Governments – have taken a comprehensive, integrated approach across multidimensional issues. In some countries, such as Mali and Ukraine, these missions have also helped to initiate operationalizing humanitarian-peace-development linkages.

17.   Lessons learned include that MAPS missions need to go further to ensure that longer-term outputs and outcomes are clear. More systematic engagement, capacity building and co-investment – between the United Nations entities and together with other partners – is required to deliver sustained SDG implementation support, both through specific MAPS missions and through a wider package of MAPS engagements. A shared, systematic and rigorous approach to the definition of multisectoral SDG accelerators and integrated analysis and policy advice will be required, including to key challenging issues around the environment, human rights and alignment with other international agreements.

Country case: Dominican Republic – United Nations agencies collaborating around SDG indicators

FAO, OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN-Women and WHO/PAHO joined the efforts to support the Dominican Republic on SDG implementation through an integrated policy support MAPS mission from 27 November to 1 December 2017. Through the high-level and multi-stakeholder consultations, the mission produced an SDG Roadmap, laying out integrated analysis and recommendations for SDG mainstreaming and acceleration. The final recommendations, including accelerators identified in the areas of multidimensional poverty, competitiveness and decent work, sustainable consumption and production, resilience and an inclusive State, were presented to the Government in March 2018, and have begun to influence joint, inter-agency work and coordination in the country. Notably, the UNCT, through its inter-agency group for coordinating joint work on SDGs, is incorporating the SDG Roadmap recommendations as part of its workplan; through this mechanism, joint work reflecting the SDG Roadmap has begun. This includes new multi-agency coordination with the national statistics office to strengthen national capacities for reviewing feasibility levels, available baselines and available metadata for SDG indicators. The SDG Roadmap has also laid the ground for new inter-agency collaboration to work towards poverty eradication in partnership with the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development. Further MAPS engagement is expected to support the Government and the UNCT to implement the recommendations.

National Zero Hunger Strategic Reviews – inclusive, country-led exercises

18.   The national Zero Hunger Strategic Review (ZHSR) is an inclusive, consultative and country-led exercise. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges a country faces in achieving SDG 2 by 2030, through extensive analysis and multi-stakeholder consultations. Although focused on SDG 2, the interdependent nature of the 17 SDGs mandates that the strategic review incorporate the multisectoral dimensions of food insecurity and malnutrition. In addition to providing a baseline and determining gaps in the national food security and nutrition response, the strategic review identifies priority actions to achieve SDG 2. These inform the plans of national stakeholders and partners, including WFP and other United Nations agencies.

Country case examples

19.   In Afghanistan, FAO, UNICEF and WFP have co-funded the ZHSR. Stemming from this collaboration, these three agencies have signed an agreement to support a secretariat for the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition agenda. In Nigeria, the ZHSR counted on strong buy-in from the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture and the African Development Bank, and now includes FAO, UNICEF and WFP in the support of the Zero Hunger Forum (the follow-up mechanism established to oversee implementation of the ZHSR).

Multi-stakeholder thematic platforms and global initiatives

20.   An effective way of addressing overlapping mandates as well as the integrated and universal nature of the SDGs is establishing multi-stakeholder thematic platforms that bring together a wide array of expertise. Such platforms can increase the effectiveness of financing, attracting investment into a single fund and deploying it to a variety of different actors based on collective and nationally owned strategies.

21.   The **Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN)** movement has inspired a new way of working collaboratively to end malnutrition, in all its forms. With the Governments of SUN countries in the lead, it unites people – from civil society, the United Nations (including UNICEF, UNOPS, WFP, and WHO), donors, businesses and researchers – in a collective effort to improve nutrition. SUN currently supports more than 60 countries.

22.   The **Water Sanitation and Supply Collaborative Council (WSSCC)** is active in 141 countries and is a multi-stakeholder membership and partnership organization that works with poor people, organizations, governments and local entrepreneurs to improve sanitation and hygiene at scale. Its United Nations members include UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women, among others.

23.   The **Every Woman, Every Child** global movement aims to implement the ambitious Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030). The diversity of the movement is reflected in its partners stemming from Governments, the business community, philanthropy, youth groups, civil society and multilateral systems. The 2017 progress report highlighted how multisectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships are working to ensure equitable access to high-quality and affordable care. However, the lack of disaggregated country-level data makes it difficult to monitor progress.

24.   The **Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action** is a partnership of 52 international organizations, including UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF, and governmental and non-governmental members. It works to strengthen the capacities of young people, for example, to plan and carry out small-scale social and community development projects in emergency and post-crisis environments, provides mentorship and thus enables them to become multipliers for peace. 'Guidelines for and with Young People in Humanitarian Settings: Programming for Today and Tomorrow' are being developed in consultation with Compact members as well as young people affected.

25.   The **Spotlight Initiative**, a new partnership launched by the European Union and the United Nations (UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women), aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. It galvanizes political commitment at the highest levels and contributes to achieving the SDGs and more specifically Goal 5 on gender equality. The initiative aims at listening to girls and women by undertaking wide and inclusive consultations, to design policies for impact and to change behaviours and attitudes in a comprehensive approach. It is backed by an initial dedicated financial envelope of €500 million and targets a limited number of countries for impact.

Supporting countries in special circumstances

26.   Several initiatives are being implemented to ensure a relevant, context-specific response to complex challenges in countries in special circumstances in a way that benefits the poorest and most disadvantaged groups in society.

New Way of Working – in responding to protracted crises

27.   The New Way of Working stemmed from the need to find a solution to break the impasse of responding to protracted crises primarily through short-term humanitarian interventions over multiple years. At the core of the New Way of Working is the commitment to articulate and achieve concrete, measurable, time-bound collective outcomes that aim to reduce needs, vulnerability and risk, as instalments towards achieving the SDGs particularly in protracted crisis contexts. This is done by having the articulation of humanitarian and development responses be guided by joint analysis, multi-year planning and multi-stakeholder participation, while operationalization relies on the comparative advantage of a diverse group of actors. A number of countries, such as Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Somalia and Sudan, heeded this call and embarked on the process of bringing the in-country humanitarian, development and peace communities together to try to agree on collective outcomes, either by adapting the new UNDAF guidelines, incorporating humanitarian requirements, or by ensuring the UNDAFs and the humanitarian response plans are better aligned.

Country case: Somalia – collaboration in a fragile setting

In Somalia, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC) brought together the United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, donors and the Government to align the humanitarian response plans with the Resilience and Recovery Framework together with the national development plan for Somalia. This was done by focusing efforts around four collective outcomes deemed to be crucial to ensuring not only that the crisis needs were met, but also that international and national efforts were able to reduce needs, risks and vulnerability.

The collective outcomes were centred around the following four areas: food insecurity; durable solutions; basic social services; and climate-induced hazards. These collective outcomes will, over the course of the next three years, ensure that both humanitarian and development planning instruments complement each other towards common goals that build on each other's strengths and in pursuit of strengthening national capacity and ownership. Crucially, this has received the backing of the Government and key donors in order to harness better both bilateral and domestic financing towards collective outcomes.

An example of good inter-agency cooperation is the Resilience Pillar Working Group under the Somalia Development and Reconstruction Facility. A partnership coordination project is in place with donor partners to implement the Resilience and Recovery Framework. This supports overall efforts to strengthen the capacity of the relevant institutions for the implementation of the Disaster Management Policy that has already been drafted by the Federal Government of Somalia. This partnership includes UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP as well as other members of the UNCT.

Delivering on the commitment to leaving no one behind

28.   Taking explicit action to tackle widespread and growing inequalities between people, communities and social groups – and advance equity in SDG outcomes and opportunities is a universal imperative, and especially critical in situations of fragility. It is an opportunity for integrated action to holistically address the inequalities, exclusion, marginalization and other injustices.

29.   In the context of implementing the SDGs, acting explicitly on the pledge to 'leave no one behind' offers an opportunity to advance understanding about the people left behind and the reasons why; to strengthen local capacities to identify and track the relative progress of the poorest, most excluded, marginalized and vulnerable; and to advance accountability and improve delivery through the participation, voice and engagement of those groups, communities and people.

30.   The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) called on the United Nations system to ensure the SDG review process and mechanisms at global and national levels maintain a focus on 'leaving no one behind', monitor progress in reducing inequalities and eliminating discrimination, and carry out systematic analysis of all available disaggregated data and other quantitative and qualitative data collected on and by marginalized groups. To support these efforts, a UNSDG Operational Guide on Leaving No One Behind is expected in the second quarter of 2018.

Progress on Common Chapter implementation

31.   UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women have acted collectively on moving ahead with the implementation of the "Common Chapter" of their strategic plans for 2018-2021. In April 2018, the four heads of the agencies sent a joint letter to all their respective country and regional offices on the implementation of the Common Chapter. The letter was accompanied by a more detailed internal note on translating the Common Chapter into common action. In some countries, the agencies are already implementing the Common Chapter, and these country offices are being encouraged to build on existing mechanisms, such as the UNDAF and the country capacity assessments, to identify and promote initiatives to support the implementation of the Common Chapter.

32.   At the global level, the four agencies are identifying 'accelerator initiatives', which build on and leverage existing programmes and structures at country level where there is potential to deepen their partnership. These initiatives will target transformational results through the collaborative efforts of the four agencies. They may include initiatives with a geographic or a thematic focus, aligned with the six areas of collaborative advantage mentioned in the Common Chapter. Regional offices of the four agencies have been asked to help identify ongoing initiatives that can help Common Chapter implementation, and are encouraged to continue monitoring and supporting closer collaboration. The upcoming regional UNDG meetings and the new UNDAF formulation processes have been identified as providing a key opportunity to identify accelerator initiatives.

IV.   CONCLUSION

33.   The global development discourse calls for systems and processes that will deliver more contextualized, coherent and coordinated support towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda under national ownership and leadership. Moving forward, the United Nations development system will continue to strengthen integrated approaches at the country level, including through strategic alignment of its substantive focus and prioritization with national priorities, while being consistent with United Nations norms, standards and principles. This is one of the fundamental tenets of the repositioning of the United Nations development system.

34.   Just as countries will be measured on their progress towards the SDGs, so too should the United Nations performance be measured, individually and collectively, in terms of its contribution to helping countries achieve the SDGs. The United Nations system overall must become more accountable for delivering results, including collective results, not just accountable for compliance with processes. This is where the UNDAFs must become more robust, strategic, focussed, operational, and results-oriented for collective engagement – rather than being a mere compilation of different United Nations activities. This is where the United Nations needs to effectively leverage the vast resources and capacities that exist outside of its own system.

35.   The Common Chapter provides an important foundation to drive joint action on a set of results linked to the SDGs and based on mandates provided by respective executive boards. The four agencies are together aiming to leverage the Common Chapter to deepen collaboration and achieve greater impact through the collective pursuit of shared outcomes, supporting the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The UNDAF formulation process and, where relevant, the country programming cycle remain a key focus for this joint engagement.

36.   The CEB recently adopted the United Nations Leadership Framework, which outlines the cornerstones of a United Nations leadership culture aligned with the 2030 Agenda; it calls for strengthened accountability, mutually within the system, and to beneficiaries and the public beyond. United Nations leaders recognize that ultimate accountability is to the people that they serve – especially the most vulnerable, excluded, or marginalized. The Leadership Framework recognizes that leadership can and should be exercised not only by formally designated leaders but also by all staff. As such, the expectations outlined in the framework apply to all United Nations staff, at all levels, in all locations.

V.   TENTATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS / WAY FORWARD

1. To strengthen coherence of the United Nations development system activities at country level, it will be critical to enhance the capacity and authority of Resident Coordinators, as well as their impartiality. An effective Resident Coordinator function will help address coordination challenges, reduce resource competition, and strengthen focus on joint results.
2. To improve incentives for collaboration, develop clear performance criteria that reward collaboration. This includes, for instance, funding of management budgets from headquarters to the field are weighted in favour of prior collaborative programming.
3. To allow clarity of decision-making, provide explicit guidance on comparative advantages, including definitions and indicators. This should include clarity on location dependent and independent services with due respect to subregional capacity.
4. Support multilateral thematic issue platforms that support Member States in their SDG implementation, including the initiatives mentioned above (SUN, WSSCC, Every Woman, Every Child, Spotlight Initiative and the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action).
5. United Nations entities should ensure SDG targets are clearly mapped against strategic plans, and monitoring and reporting is aligned to the common United Nations reporting. Enhance use of UNInfo as an online tool to align reporting on UNDAF and joint activities.
6. United Nations agencies should agree on mutual recognition principles to improve collaboration.

VI.   QUESTIONS FOR THE BOARD TO CONSIDER

1. How can technology be used to enhance coherence and efficiency within United Nations work? What sort of investments are needed to enhance staff capacity and system capabilities in the use of automated operational facilities to boost efficiency? What innovative forms of support to programme countries are needed to respond in a coherent and integrated manner to country priorities?
2. What further measures would better enable Resident Coordinators to work across the development-humanitarian-peacebuilding continuum?
3. What key authorities and capacities must be enhanced for an effective Resident Coordinator role in the context of the 2030 Agenda? How can a consistent application of these authorities across the various accountability systems in the United Nations be ensured?
4. What needs to change in the profile of teams at country, regional and global levels to enable the United Nations to deliver strategically on capacity development needs, including in leveraging the kind of financing and partnerships needed for the 2030 Agenda?

_____