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**Report of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of  
UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP**

**19 June 2017**

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## **I. Operationalizing the decisions of the QCPR, specifically taking into consideration climate change and building resilience**

1. The President of the Executive Board of UNICEF opened the joint meeting by welcoming the participants of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP. He also welcomed the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. He stressed that since the first joint meeting of the Boards in 1998 the United Nations system had become a synergistic whole achieving impressive results. The 2016 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR) was a critical opportunity for change and reform and, together with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, provided a solid basis for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, reflecting each organization's comparative advantage. Climate change and youth/adolescents were specific examples of goals that could only be achieved through inter-agency collaboration. Addressing the needs of youth and adolescents, he noted, was one of the most pressing goals and the United Nations system had to come together to invest in their future.

2. In her opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations highlighted the importance of engaging with youth and protecting the environment within the 2030 Agenda and the global political and development context. Youth represented a cross-pillar investment and young people contributed to peace, prosperity and political dialogue and acted as agents of change. Ensuring their health, well-being, protection, education and skills, especially of girls and the most vulnerable, would provide the foundations for achievement of the goals. The 2030 Agenda and the 2016 QCPR review gave the United Nations development system the road map to become fit for purpose. The Executive Boards had a critical role to play in ensuring synergy and providing strategic guidance at the country level. Greater system-wide coherence should focus on strengthening leadership around results, along with a coherent interface between the Office of the Secretary-General Office and the governing bodies, including a more integrated governance architecture.

3. The UNICEF Deputy Executive Director (Programme), highlighted that climate change was central to all the goals and an issue that affected those most in need. Development work had to integrate systems able to anticipate climate-related shocks to reduce their impact, which required system-wide action in analysis and data collection; joint planning, approaches and actions; and targeted programming that maximized agency comparative advantages. The Executive Director, UNOPS, underscored that the 2016 QCPR called on the United Nations system to work together more effectively and efficiently for better delivery of results. Key to the success of all development interventions was resilient infrastructure, efficient procurement and collaborative actions in planning, designing and implementing programmes, which required the multiple competencies of the United Nations system working together through an impartial resident coordinator.

4. The Deputy Executive Secretary, Southern African Development Community, discussed the collective role of the United Nations system in supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda and building resilience at the country level against the backdrop of the 2015 drought and impending famine in the southern African region. A coordination unit was created to bring in United Nations system organizations with a humanitarian and recovery mandate, mobilize resources and raise awareness at the national, regional and global levels. Success also derived from high-level United Nations support. The humanitarian and development teams combined planning and budgets and worked closely together – a major factor in ensuring that resilience-building began in the midst of crisis. This resilience approach was successful because it was system-wide, and addressed the issues and underlying conditions that had created the crisis in the first place.

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5. The United Nations Resident Coordinator, Maldives, presented United Nations country team collaborative work, including developing the new United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and implementing the standard operating procedures within the experience of the Maldives. The country had in the past 20 years graduated from a least developed country to a middle-income country. Climate change, however, remained a formidable challenge, which was capable of wiping out hard-won gains. The United Nations was the country's most crucial development partner, but it depended on many non-resident agencies. Coordination was key to success, including through a much tighter and focused UNDAF grounded in human rights and built on "delivering as one" and the standard operating procedures. The Resident Coordinator also noted the difficulties in aligning UNDAFs with agency-specific plans, the duplicative reporting they presented and how they took away from time that could be devoted to implementation. Strong national support and incentives guaranteed a strong and united country team. Country teams would benefit from less burdensome planning processes and aligned agency operating systems.

6. The presidents and vice-presidents of the four Executive Boards, the heads and deputy heads of the six United Nations organizations and members of the Executive Boards were actively engaged throughout the session and provided a number of comments on the role of the United Nations development system in addressing climate change, resilience and youth engagement, most notably that:

- (a) Climate change and youth engagement were ideal areas for system-wide approaches since the answers to addressing both were systemic in nature and required a whole-of-society approach;
- (b) Resilience was a core concept that was multidimensional in nature and allowed broader development choices;
- (c) The humanitarian-development-peace nexus was the perfect mechanism for the United Nations system to work together to build resilience to climate change;
- (d) The system had a key role to play through its convening power and awareness-raising capacity in addressing climate change and youth;
- (e) The system had to use its comparative strengths to ensure its collaborative advantages;
- (f) Data collection, disaggregation and capacity for planning and measuring results were key to reaching vulnerable communities and building resilience;
- (g) The joint meetings of the Executive Boards needed further strengthening, including a more integrated Executive Boards governing structure; and
- (h) The common chapters of the organizations' strategic plans should flesh out how system-wide coordination would help to leave no one behind, strengthen partnerships, build resilience, ensure an impartial United Nations resident coordinator, build national capacity, and pursue joint business operations, supported by common results and indicators and a joint resource mobilization strategy.

7. In conclusion, the UNDP Administrator and Chair of the United Nations Development Group stressed that the 2016 QCPR called on the United Nations development system to work in a new way. The challenge was overcoming the fact that the organizations continued to function as before, with little institutional alignment to incentivize staff to work together. The common and unified 2030 Agenda was clear and compelling. The system had to delve deeper to fix its institutional alignment challenge in order to succeed and meet the 2030 Agenda vision. It should also pursue financing which, as opposed to programme-centred focus of funding, sought to build the broad capacities of national and local communities to better use and generate resources. Similarly, Member States and donors had to create the conditions that encourage the United Nations system to work together.

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8. The Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the New York Office, United Nations Environment Programme, presented the system-wide strategies adopted by the United Nations Development Group High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) and the collective role of the United Nations development system in supporting climate change and resilient development. At the policy level, the HLCP offered an example of an inter-agency entity acting as one through a coordinated approach ideal for holistically addressing issues, such as climate change, and a model for country teams at country level, as articulated in the new UNDAF guidelines. The strategic approach to climate change action adopted by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination was an excellent example that prescribed integrated collaborative action to deliver co-benefits across the entire 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement. It aimed to foster collaborative action in eight impact areas where shared expertise was needed and ensured joint approaches to climate change. The roll-out to regional and country teams would take place in 2017. The High-Level Committee had been active in coordinating system-wide climate action in previous high-level forums as well.

9. In closing, the President of the Executive Board of UNDP/ UNFPA/ UNOPS thanked delegations and the six United Nations organizations for their participation in the morning segment of the joint meeting.

## **II. Working with adolescents and youth to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals**

10. The Vice-President of the Executive Board of UN-Women welcomed members of the four Executive Boards, the representatives of the six United Nations organizations and the invited guest speakers representing youth to the discussion on working together with adolescents and youth to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

11. In opening remarks, the Deputy Executive Director (Management), UNFPA, highlighted that despite much progress in recent decades for young people, women and girls, growing inequalities were denying many access to benefits. Young and adolescent girls were especially vulnerable since many challenges, such as adolescent marriage and childbearing, continued to persist. Such conditions exacerbated the cycle of poverty and poor health for women and girls. It was why empowering young people, especially women and girls, was key to reducing intergenerational poverty and seizing the demographic dividend. Development planning had to focus on young people, safeguarding their human rights, removing barriers to participation and investing in their capacities. Further, young people had to be an integral part of the solution, recognized and engaged in the design and implementation of programmes.

12. The representative of the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth, one of the young guest speakers, gave a presentation on young people shaping and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Youth groups had played a seminal role in influencing the 2030 Agenda and were engaged in taking direct action on the ground, creating formal spaces to hold governments accountable, or drafting shadow reports on government policies. They were involved in areas such as sustainable consumption and production, humanitarian response, mapping the effects of disasters, cleaning up the environment and applying indigenous knowledge and practices where modern approaches exacerbate inequalities. The United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth embraced a collective membership approach to inspire knowledge exchange for the goals and to help youth to understand the 2030 Agenda. The representative appealed to Member States and the Executive Boards to continue to engage with youth in implementing the goals, and to elevate youth to permanent observer status in the General Assembly.

13. The Youth Advocate and UNFPA Youth Innovation Fellow, the other young guest speaker, gave a presentation entitled “Youth leadership and engagement in the United Nations – opportunities, challenges and the way forward”. Despite its diversity, the current generation shared common characteristics across borders. They were digital natives inhabiting a more democratic space. And they were the first generation in the spotlight of international development. Their challenges included vulnerability,

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inequality, misinformation and exploitation by power groups, violence (especially in conflict settings), and unemployment or employment in precarious conditions. A one-size-fits-all solution was not the answer, however. Data showed that youth participation and leadership in policies and formal decision-making were low across the globe. Youth had starkly different interests in different places and had a trust deficit in established governing structures, including the United Nations. The way forward should focus on: (a) building trust by spotlighting United Nations *values* against those of other power groups seeking to recruit youth; (b) creating the *right spaces* for youth, focused on modern youth political aspirations and issues-focused concerns; and (c) fostering *horizontal democratic structures* as opposed to hierarchical structures. The best support to youth was building their skills and resources so that they could make a difference.

14. In turn, the Executive Director, UN-Women, stressed that focusing on youth, women and girls was the best way to ensure that “no one is left behind”. Youth and women were at the forefront of many modern challenges, but were also resilient and drivers of change. The Secretary-General had made a strong commitment to deliver for and with youth, especially young women, through a coherent and coordinated United Nations development system. Investments in youth and women had a high guaranteed rate of return, and should include empowerment, job creation and skills building, especially in the most disadvantaged communities, and be done through partnerships and at scale. It was estimated that almost 90 per cent of future jobs would require digital literacy, a skill youth already possessed. Inter-agency work was the best approach to supporting youth and had already engendered successful strategies targeted at youth.

15. The presidents and vice-presidents of the four Executive Boards, the heads and deputy heads of the six United Nations organizations and members of the Executive Boards were again actively engaged throughout the session and provided a number of comments on how the United Nations could work with adolescents and youth in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, most notably that:

- (a) Youth as agents of change were critical to achieving the goals – they were not simply beneficiaries, because their role extended from advocacy to substantive participation in planning and implementation;
- (b) Young people’s inclusive and meaningful participation at all levels was critical to addressing their needs and ensuring that they acted as accelerators in achieving the goals for all in societies;
- (c) Youth strategies and programmes had to account for young people’s diversity and the complexity of their specific needs;
- (d) Partners and country teams should engage young people in formal and informal decision-making at national and local levels and integrate their priorities in policy processes, including in strategies and road maps for the goals and through the UNDAF process;
- (e) Partners should focus on removing obstacles to and support youth participation in all phases of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including in creating civic space for youth, supporting their roles in localization, collecting data and reporting, and fostering enabling environments for their involvement in implementation, monitoring and accountability;
- (f) Partners should build trust in the United Nations and its values, foremost by promoting youth capacities and participation to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and by engaging youth in the different spaces where they gathered (e.g. social media, music and gaming);
- (g) Global, regional and national indicators, data collection and analysis should be youth-focused and youth-relevant;
- (h) Societies should equip young people with decent jobs and life skills, invest in public education, support young people as social and civic actors, support youth organizations and focus on engaging vulnerable youth, including young women and youth in crisis settings;

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- (i) Partnering with grass-roots organizations to reach the most marginalized youth and promoting volunteerism are key ways of having youth engage in achieving the goals and ensuring that “no one is left behind”; and
  - (j) Youth-focused programmes required adequate funding to have a sustainable impact. The vision of the United Nations youth strategy aimed to ensure that by 2030 young people’s rights were protected and promoted, their specific needs addressed, and their role as agents of change in conflict prevention, development and peace recognized, valued and promoted.

16. In summarizing the discussion, the Deputy Executive Director, WFP, stressed the importance of synergy within the United Nations development system for youth and youth opportunities, especially at the country level. While creating formal and informal spaces for youth engagement was crucial, financing remained a challenge. The international community needed to internalize its responsibility toward young people when engaging youth as change agents for the 2030 Agenda.

17. In closing remarks, the Vice-President of the Executive Board of WFP welcomed the enthusiasm and readiness of the guest speakers on behalf of youth to engage in implementing the goals, and encouraged Member States and the United Nations system to give them their full support. He also commended Board members and the United Nations organizations for their commitment to working together to support and engage youth on the 2030 Agenda, which was a model to be followed.

18. The President of the Executive Board of UNICEF closed the meeting by thanking delegations and the six United Nations organizations for their active participation and rich discussion.

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