**ECOSOC Dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UN development system
in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Second Phase**

Briefing Session – *New Context*
**17 December 2015, 10 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.,
Conference Room 1, UNHQ, New York**

Summary by the Vice-President of ECOSOC

The second phase of the ECOSOC Dialogue was launched on 17 December 2015 with a substantive Briefing Session to discuss: (a) the impact of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for the development cooperation vision of the United Nations and (b) the findings and recommendations of recent high-level panels on peace operations and the peacebuilding architecture that are also relevant for the UN development system. The Briefing Session was attended by large number of Member States and other stakeholders.

1. Opening

H.E. Mr. Alejandro Palma Cerna, Vice-President of ECOSOC stated that the second phase of the ECOSOC Dialogue should mark a step change in this consultative process and result in the formulation of concrete proposals for strengthening the UN development system in response to the requirements of the 2030 Agenda. The purpose of the Briefing Session was to set the stage for this collective journey. Participants were also informed that the ECOSOC Bureau is in the process of establishing an independent team of advisers to the Bureau, which would assist the Bureau in concretizing, analysing and prioritizing options for strengthening the UN development system. The Bureau would submit those to Member States for their consideration. This team of advisers to the Bureau would be expected to consult extensively with all key stakeholders at different levels as well as through active participation in the various workshops and retreats of the ECOSOC Dialogue process.

Ms. Helen Clark, Chair, UNDG and Administrator, UNDP emphasized that the UN development system must continually demonstrate capacity to adapt to change in response to the challenges of the times, and business-as-usual is not an option for the Organization following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The breadth, complexity, and interlinked nature of the new agenda calls for integrated approaches which bring together minds, capacities, and resources from across the development, human rights, humanitarian, and peace and security pillars of the UN system. Just as countries agreed in Paris in December that no single nation can address the climate change challenge on its own, similarly, no single agency working in isolation can make an optimal contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The UNDG has agreed on a set of core principles that will guide its collective support for the realization of the sustainable development goals. The UNDG standard operating procedures will also be an important instrument in this regard. She also highlighted the important role the 2016 QCPR resolution of the General Assembly could play as a strategic framework to facilitate the implementation of the SDGs.

Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs[1] stressed that more than ever, an integrated, coordinated approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is necessary due to the deep inter-linkages and mutual dependencies among the goals and targets. This integrated and coordinated approach would require considerable change in mind-set, method and action in the UN development system. This approach would similarly need to give way to new forms of cooperation, which particularly aim to capitalize on opportunities for synergy in programming and operations across UN entities. He highlighted that analytical scenarios undertaken by DESA for the Rio+20 Conference in 2012 had concluded that the broad pursuit of sustainable development is far superior compared to a strategy based on achieving single-issue objectives in isolation. This means that the results, impact and cost-effectiveness of development activities can be significantly increased if implemented in a coordinated fashion.

2.   Key Messages

The salient messages emanating from the presentations and discussions during the Briefing Session are summarized below:

The implications of the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda can be expected to have significant impact on the future development cooperation vision of the UN. The universality of the new development agenda, for example, marks to some extent the end of rigid division between developed and developing countries. This change in the nature of international cooperation may also have implications for how high-income countries interact with the UN development system: in the past, this was primarily through development agencies, but in the future may involve much greater involvement of domestic sector ministries.

The commitment to leave no-one behind will also require more effective engagement of the UN development system in least-developed countries and those affected by conflict as well as targeting the most marginalized groups in countries that are doing better in average growth and social development. It will also require rethinking of current fragmentation and compartmentalization of the humanitarian, development, and peace and security work of the UN.

The 2030 Agenda goes beyond the Millennium Development Goals to recognize that there are shared development challenges that require collective responses by Member States. The pursuit of sustainable development has therefore become the responsibility of all countries as equal partners, both individually and collectively through strengthening of international cooperation.

The analysis of the 2030 Agenda conducted in Colombia also suggests that the UN development system will increasingly need to adapt its service delivery models to the specific needs of different country groupings. This is particularly true to deliver on the needs and priorities of the increasing, and increasingly diverse middle-income countries, who are both in need of targeted assistance, but also repositories of knowledge and expertise that can and should be shared across countries with the support of the UN development system. While there is no boilerplate, since in each country approaches will need to take account of the specific political economy and development conditions, it should be possible to develop a vision of the spectrum of engagement. Adequate space should be

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[1] His address was delivered by Mr. Navid Hanif, Director, Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, UNDESA.

allowed to further explore needs and potential of middle-income countries to realize the 2030 Agenda.

Rethinking what the UNDS should and should not do

There is a generally shared view that the UN development system is at an inflection point where important changes will need to be made if the Organization is to be able to capitalize on the opportunities provided by the 2030 Agenda. The UN development system will also need to carefully re-think what it should do, and not do, in the post-2015 era. Furthermore, it will be important for Member States to move quickly in repositioning the UN development system so that the momentum generated by the new development agenda is not diminished.

The core challenge facing the UN development system, as well as the Organization as a whole, is a systemic one, i.e. limited ability to ensure inter-linkages and integration across sectors and entities largely because of the original functional design stipulated in the UN Charter based on the principle of decentralization. This organizational design also makes dynamic cooperation among the three pillars of the Organization highly challenging. Addressing this systemic weakness, according to several participants in the Briefing Session, may require a process of rethinking the institutional architecture. The institutions we currently have may not be able to withstand the challenges of the integrated responses needed. Addressing this systemic weakness may require leaving some institutions and processes behind.

A more integrated, coordinated organizational model is needed

No one agency "owns" any of the goals, and all will require collaboration in the implementation process. An integrated, coordinated approach to implementation of the 2030 Agenda that enables the UN development system to effectively capitalize on opportunities for synergy across entities in programming and operations will require strong commitment to policy coherence, common purpose, cooperation and more unified organizational presence. Competition among UN entities wherever it exists will need to give way to commitment to a more horizontal organizational model.

This approach, while recognizing each entity's unique identity, will also call for greater emphasis on the establishment of integrated frameworks across the UN pillars at the country level based on shared strategic outcomes, root cause analysis, risk assessment and management, planning and monitoring, underpinned by enhanced coherence in funding, more strategic and effective leadership of UN-wide development efforts as well as reliable data.

In his presentation on Colombia's approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Minister of National Planning highlighted that 47 of the targets of the 2030 Agenda are considered directly relevant for the country's peace process. Colombia has already integrated a number of targets in its current national development plan. Further analysis has revealed that 24 of the 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda would require some additional statistical measure at the country level. Thirty-four targets will also need to be addressed at the multilateral level, with potential implications for the work of the UN development system.

The 2030 Agenda can serve as an entry point for addressing current fragmentation and compartmentalization of the humanitarian, development and peace and security pillars of the UN. The three pillars are currently managed differently and this approach needs to be revisited.

Revisiting programming and representational models at country, sub-regional and regional levels

The drive to work together and to define a spectrum of country engagement may also require a commensurate spectrum of representational models that could allow for more cost-effective and coherent organizational presence at country, sub-regional and regional levels. For example, the most vulnerable countries logically require the greatest field presence and breadth of representation, whereas moving up the income spectrum, strong country engagement can still be ensured through lighter and more unified representation.

"Delivering as One" is the floor and not the ceiling

The UN development system must adapt its programme delivery models to the specific needs of different country groupings. A spectrum of country engagement needs to be developed and deployed taking into account the specific political economy and development conditions. The "Delivering as One" approach is the floor and not the ceiling.

A reboot of knowledge and delivery partnerships

The new agenda will also provide a real test of the knowledge and delivery partnerships that the UN development system can foster. While there are established delivery partnerships in some areas of the 2030 Agenda, in many others, the knowledge of what works and the delivery partnerships are new and will require a strong boost to get them to effectiveness and scale. This will require the development of effective capacity for capitalizing on opportunities for partnerships in finance, data and implementation, including consolidating those existing ones that are not working effectively. Improved provision of data for policy-making is also critical in this regard so that policy-makers and development practitioners can be better informed about the impact of their decisions on development progress.

Mechanisms for stricter priority setting

Finally, it was also highlighted by several participants in the Briefing Session that many UN development system entities continue to experience decline in core funding. This trend will require the UN development system to put in place mechanisms for stricter priority setting in work planning. It was also pointed out that development cooperation budgets in some donor countries are currently under strain due to the significant increase in the number of refugees in Europe. This situation may pose some risk for the funding of operational activities of the UN system in the near-term. There were also strong calls for stepping up efforts to defragment the funding architecture of the UN development system in response to the requirements of the 2030 Agenda.

3. **The way forward**

An important objective of the second phase of the ECOSOC Dialogue process should be to develop concrete proposals and options for strengthening the UN development system in the six focus areas: functions, funding practices, governance structures, organizational arrangements, capacity and impact and partnership approaches. Such proposals and options should be grounded in solid understanding of the comparative advantage of the UN development system in different country contexts. It was also recognized by some participants that some options might need to go further than has traditionally been the case in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) by the General Assembly. The high-level team of advisers to the ECOSOC Bureau is expected to play an important role in assisting Member States in concretizing, analysing and prioritizing proposals and options for strengthening the UN development system.

The upcoming quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of the General Assembly of operational activities of the UN system will also provide an important opportunity for Member States to transform this instrument into a more strategic framework for guiding the role of the UN development system in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This rethinking process could include revitalization of key system-wide instruments such as the next generation of UNDAFs, further strengthening the standard operating procedures and enhancing the role of UN resident and humanitarian coordinators in guiding UN-wide efforts at the country level.