

ECOSOC Dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UN development system in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Delivering the 2030 Agenda: The role of the UN development system in middle-income countries

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H.E. Laura E. Flores, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Panama to the UN

Mr. Vice-President,
Excellencies,

Panama aligns itself with the statement delivered by Thailand on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and in our national capacity would like to add a few additional comments.

The 2030 Agenda mandates us to leave no one behind.

The World Bank estimates that MICs are home to five of the world's seven billion people, and represent a dramatic 73 percent of the world's poor people. Paradoxically, these same MICs represent about one third of global GDP and are major engines of global growth.

These numbers have been repeated so many times in so many ways that they seem to have lost their impact.

But, in simple terms, we say that it will be impossible to eradicate poverty if the UNDS fails to adapt to the specific needs of the so-called MICs. Also, the single most efficient way to reach the largest number of people living in poverty is through the effective empowerment and support of MICs.

Furthermore, income inequality remains higher in middle-income countries than in other groups. Therefore, bringing MICs fully in to the 2030 Agenda will require access to a diversity of resources, including global public goods. The mobilization of the means of implementation will require the

leveraging of resources – including tax policies, an improved risk and disaster management, and an unprecedented level of policy coherence.

The DESA report published earlier this month in preparation for this meeting suggests that “Middle Development Countries” should replace the term “Middle Income Countries.” It also posits four clusters for classification, including Lower, Middle, and Higher Development Countries along with Conflict-Affected Countries.

We tentatively support the idea of recognizing the special needs of Conflict-Affected Countries and would also include the concept of Countries at High Risk of Conflict. These differentiations would encourage the UNDS to be better prepared and pro-active when security situations deteriorate.

And here, I would like to underline the message that Panama believes that this next phase of engagement of the UNDS with the world’s development needs IS NOT a zero sum game. In other words, adapting to the special circumstances of MICs should not have to imply fewer financial resources destined to the still critical needs of the LDCs, particularly in Africa, the landlocked countries and the SIDS. We strongly believe that if we leverage the means of implementation, if we are innovative and truly optimize our resources like the 2030 Agenda demands, we shall see a transformation that takes us beyond the current cooperation paradigm... Mass customization is so increasingly prevalent elsewhere in our market-driven economies, why not apply the same principle when delivering cooperation? We certainly have the sophisticated systems and technologies to do so.

For example, Panama notes that in past years, the UNDS has been efficient at “Knowledge Brokering” by creating highly focused information networks at the regional and sub-regional levels. In Latin America, a multi-

stakeholder approach spearheaded by UNFPA has been greatly effective in tackling adolescent pregnancy in the Andean region.¹

In Panama, with the support of UNDP, and as an immediate action to implement the 2030 agenda, we are matching the 200+ SDG indicators with those of projects that NGOs and companies have been implementing. This is proving extremely effective in engaging these important partners that are critical to the implementation of the agenda. As they become aware that they are already contributing, they are inspired and motivated to continue to do so.

We therefore strongly support expanding the role of the UNDS as a “broker” or “match-maker” between existing practices and desired outcomes; between sources of funding and recipients. It is high time to optimize and consolidate the broad network of stakeholders that the UN has engaged over the past 7 decades. The consolidation of partnerships will be crucial to minimize redundancy, increase engagement, foster innovation and maximize impact.

Also, the goal must be the establishment of win-win-win partnerships where the success of programs is not measured by the fulfillment of tasks by stakeholders, but on the measurable impact and long-term follow-up of our actions.

In our view, it is imperative for the UNDS to offer new and innovative models for its representation at the national level. These new models must be coherent with the concept of national ownership and gravitate towards advisory services that are strategically targeted to fill the gaps in national capacities. A concrete suggestion that comes to mind, in terms of leveraging human resources capacities within the UNCT, is to appoint National Officers rather than international representatives as heads of some of the agencies and programmes. This would extol the capacity

¹ *Knowledge Brokering*: Another example: UNDP has helped to operationalize an information network that monitors and shares regional practices in toxic waste management in the Mekong River Basin countries.

building that has marked progress in each country over the years, in addition to saving much needed resources.

Let me conclude by calling on the board members of UNDS entities to keep an open mind and to embrace constructive criticism in the true spirit of reform. Let us keep in mind that if the UNDS fails to adapt to the new reality of the 2030 Agenda, billions of people will remain overlooked, ignored and silenced by the status quo.

Thank you.