

Agenda Item 99: Operational Activities for Development

Statement by Mr. Bhagwant S. Bishnoi, Counsellor on October 25, 2001

Mr. Chairman,

We associate ourselves with the statement made by Iran as Chairman of the Group of 77 on operational activities for development. We thank the Secretary General for the excellent report on the "Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system" as well as the complementary reports on the multi-year funding frameworks and the UN Development Assistance Framework. We are particularly pleased that the report on the triennial policy review responds, to a considerable extent, to the views expressed at the substantive session 2001 of the Economic and Social Council.

2. The Secretary General's report clearly states that, in order to be relevant to national development, the UN system has to move beyond issues of management reform to issues of substance and away from "coordination among system organisations and common premises of UN country offices to coherence with national policies and programmes". We agree with this completely, but the responsiveness of the various Funds and Programmes to the priorities of developing countries varies considerably.

UNDP

3. The UNDP is the flagship for the development activities of the UN System. Its priorities can best be viewed through its Strategic Results Framework. Its six goals, in order of the importance attached to them by the UNDP, are governance, poverty, environment, gender, special development situations and UN support. These priorities, particularly the premises on which they are formulated, represent a donor-driven agenda - one in which, regrettably, the views of programme countries do not seem to have been taken into account.

4. Good governance is, undoubtedly, good; when movement away from political, economic or social oppression springs from within a society that is developing and is in harmony with local culture and values. In the context of an asymmetric donor-recipient relationship, it, however, implies a moral superiority of the donor and a superiority with regard to insights into what would be in the best interests of the South. The advice of the donor is seldom welcome as it represents a criticism of the governments, systems, peoples and cultures of the South. It implies that the donor knows better.

5. Environment is another over-arching goal of the UNDP. We have no quarrel with the goal of sustainable environment management. However, we know that it is the unsustainable patterns of production and consumption in industrialised countries which are responsible for the state of the environment today. We, therefore, find ourselves unable to identify with a framework which seems to increasingly give greater priority to regulatory environmental regimes than to poverty eradication.

6. Poverty eradication is a goal in the Strategic Results Framework which we can completely identify with. The UNDP, however, assigns as much of its resources, for the achievement of this objective, to the area of policy advice as it does to expanding the asset base of the poor. The focus is on what it views as high leverage, high impact and catalytic activities. Such activities, it is felt, give donors, and in this case the UN system, greater voice, greater recognition and greater visibility. The question, however, is whether outsiders should prescribe policy solutions, or whether they have a superior capability of doing so and, indeed, of whether it is legitimate for them to attempt to do so. The legitimacy is also questionable as in a donor-recipient relationship, the borderline between advice and conditionality often gets blurred. We support micro interventions; they enhance understanding and provide replicable solutions. If they are good, they will also influence macro policies.

7. Special development situations are another priority which has, in recent times, increasingly intruded into the agenda of the UNDP. We are aware that donors are often attracted to high profile situations. While we recognise the need for humanitarian assistance and have ourselves always been forthcoming, we would not like to see a diversion of the already scarce resources for development. We would certainly not want peacekeeping and crisis and post conflict situations to become the sole occupation of the UN system.

8. We are aware that donors frequently debate the relative merits and de-merits of positive and negative conditionalities. The UNDP, however, seems to make such debate infructuous by offering a menu with five donor-dictated goals - presumably, on a take it or leave it basis. This is neither positive nor negative but complete conditionality.

UNICEF

9. We can identify with the organisational priorities - girls education, integrated Early Childhood Development, immunisation plus, fighting HIV/AIDS and protecting children from violence - which are identified in the proposed medium term strategic plan for the period 2002-2005. The interventions envisaged are a mix of technical assistance, capacity building, small scale funding, support for basic services as well as advocacy and policy support. We have no difficulty with this. We are, however, reminded that in 1950 there was a move to transform UNICEF into an organisation which would only provide advocacy and advisory services. This, fortunately, did not come about. Our view, which we continue to hold, was that the welfare of children cannot be mediated solely through good governance; giving food to the hungry and medical aid to the sick are important for the survival and development of the child. The debate between a rights based approach and a development approach to poverty eradication has been long and inconclusive. We believe, and our experience confirms, that the eradication of poverty is an essential pre-requisite for respect of human rights and not vice-versa.

UNFPA

10. We are also happy to express our satisfaction with the UNFPA. Its priorities - reproductive health, a balance between population dynamics and social and

economic development and women's empowerment - are shared by us. The tools which the Fund employs include both the strengthening of national capacity and advocacy. We particularly applaud its efforts, given its advocacy role, to find balanced expression between universal principles, national aspirations and cultural identities.

WFP

11. The resources of the WFP have, over the years, been increasingly directed for emergency assistance at the cost of its development projects. While emergency assistance is important, we believe that food aid to the poor, which enables them to utilise development opportunities, should not be neglected either. It is also our view that the WFP's recourse to "directed multilateral funding" detracts from the spirit of multilateralism.

Mr. Chairman,

12. We take a close and critical look at the operational activities of the UN system because these carry the UN's message into the real world and impact on the lives of millions. Attempts to impose an agenda which is only donor-driven would, if successful, compromise the legitimacy of multilateralism. Programme countries would also not be able to identify with an agenda in the shaping of which they have had little role. We have, therefore, over the years always played an active role in all deliberations which determine the direction of the activities of the Funds and Programmes.

13. Our voluntary contributions have also been proof of our commitment. The United Nations Special Fund was established in 1958. For its first five years, India's financial contribution amounted to 36% of the total contribution of all developing countries. The UNDP was established in 1966. Our voluntary contribution in the first year itself was US\$ 3 million. Our contributions to the core resources of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP in the year 2000 amounted to US\$ 6 million. This figure was more than that of any other developing country.

14. We have already commented on the high quality of the report A/56/320 which has been presented to us. We endorse most of its recommendations. With regard to Recommendation 6, we are, however, not clear if ECOSOC has any mandate to provide guidance to bilateral aid agencies, NGOs and the private sector. We cannot also accept the element of Recommendation 8 which calls for harmonisation of the coordinating frameworks of different multilateral institutions. The frameworks established by international financial institutions are often based on conditionalities. We cannot accept the incorporation of these or any other conditionalities in the framework of the development assistance provided by the UN system. Finally, we cannot agree with Recommendation 17 if it is to have the effect of subordinating the development role of the United Nations to the requirements of conflict prevention and peace building. We look forward to working with other member States on the resolution relating to the triennial policy review.