



STATEMENT BY MR. A. GOPINATHAN, ACTING PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON TRIENNIAL COMPREHENSIVE POLICY REVIEW OF OPERATION ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AT THE SUBSTANTIVE SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL ON JULY 9, 2004

Mr. President,

My delegation welcomes this opportunity to participate in the discussions on the operational activities for development of the United Nations system. We thank the Secretary General for the report prepared under the agenda item and Under-Secretary-General Jose Antonio Ocampo for his valuable introduction of the report. We associate ourselves with the statement made by the distinguished Permanent Representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77. While we shall address main aspects of the triennial comprehensive policy review in the forthcoming 59th session of the UN General Assembly, we would like to provide a few comments on issues covered in the report.

Mr. President,

The undisputed objective of the operational activities of the UN system continues to be to assist developing countries in their efforts towards achieving sustainable development and eradication of poverty. It is important, therefore, that we do not lose sight of this objective in our attempts to create a procedurally sound and efficient system, with the excessive focus on processes that has, unfortunately, come to characterise our approach. As we consider the issues surrounding the reform process of the UN operational activities, we should ask ourselves whether we are losing our way in the maze of procedures and systems, to the ultimate objective set out in the MDGs. Ms. Thoraya Obaid, in her statement yesterday, conceded that the focus on processes, though critical issues in themselves, at times obscures the real purpose of the reform. As we take stock of the comprehensive policy guiding the operational activities for development, we should have a critical look at the concepts of evaluation, harmonisation, results-based management, etc. It is heartening to note that the UN system itself is taking a hard look at some of these questions.

Mr. President,

The operational activities of the UN system have been underpinned over the years by their distinctive characteristics of objectivity, neutrality and impartiality. It is the preservation of these characteristics that has enabled the developing countries to continue to repose their faith in the UN development system. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that nothing is done that might affect these characteristics adversely and thus erode the credibility of the system vis-à-vis the developing countries.

The comparative advantage and added value of the UN system operational activities for development is the principle of country-driven programming. It is national leadership which leads to national ownership and ensures that the programmes are in keeping with national priorities. Funds and programmes would generally do well if they keep national priorities and national ownership at the forefront of their planning process. This recognition by the UN system is to be welcomed. In the area of developing national capacities, it is important for the UN system to be able to respond with flexibility and in conformity with national plans and priorities.

Mr. President,

Simplification and harmonisation are useful to the extent that they would lead to reducing transaction costs for recipient governments. We perceive the added value in harmonisation of the programming cycles of funds and programmes with one another; however, from the perspective of the developing countries, the most important objective would be for harmonisation of the programming cycles with the budgetary and planning cycles of recipient governments. The field experience of UNFPA has also brought out the difficulties in adapting to new tools and processes, which is not an easy process and is often time-consuming. We note with great concern the observation in Secretary General's report that in the process of simplification, at least for the moment, an additional burden has been created for governments and the UN system. Further, the impact of the CCA and UNDAF processes on the system's cost-effectiveness remains difficult to assess while these processes have already created additional work load for their preparation. It was acknowledged by the Executive Director of UNICEF yesterday that UNDAF preparation has too often become overly complex, rigid and time-consuming. Additionally, efforts at harmonisation with bilateral donors run the risk of undermining recipient country ownership or even introducing implicit conditionalities in the UN's operational activities. This obviously would not be in tandem with our objective of keeping national priorities and ownership at the forefront of our planning and activities.

My delegation has held consistently that coordination of external assistance should be undertaken only by the recipient government. The exercise of coordination by the UN should be confined to assistance through the UN system. Field-level coordination is one of the most significant challenges to the effectiveness of the UN development cooperation. Field-level coordination should be carried out by national authorities. This would ensure that the organizations of the UN system are contributing in a coherent manner to national development plans and priorities.

Mr. President,

MDGs are in the nature of global targets. They represent a commitment for global partnership for the achievement of these targets. The impact of the MDGs and the global compact which they represent should be on the availability of regular resources for the operational activities of the UN system. The direct impact on the nature and orientation of these activities may be limited by the primacy which needs to be accorded to national development plans and priorities. It is important to make available untied contributions to the core resources for developmental activities. We agree with the Secretary General on the need for adequate, stable and predictable funding which is necessary for supporting the efforts of the developing countries to achieve the MDGs. We are, therefore, concerned to note the increasing imbalance between "core" and "non-core" contributions to the UN agencies and the proliferation of earmarked resources. Similarly, while we are heartened to note that the core resources of both UNDP and UNICEF have increased, we are cognisant that a part of the improvement is explained by exchange rate movements rather than by real increase in donor contributions.

The need for the UN system to be more cost-effective is well-recognised. It should be able to implement country programmes with much lower administrative/management and support costs. We have noted that the report also dwells on this issue. In this context, it would be useful to have an analysis, separately for each fund, programme or agency, of the proportion of funds spent for the so-called advocacy, awareness generation and sensitisation activities on which several developing countries have expressed reservations, and those spent for actual programmes and projects which contribute towards capacity-building and make a tangible difference in the lives of the poor.

India has been a strong advocate of South-South cooperation. We support increasing cooperation amongst the countries of the South while integrating the inputs of the developed countries through triangular partnerships as a useful means of furthering the development objective. It would be useful to explore ways of how the UN development system can contribute more effectively to enhancing South-South cooperation.

Mr. President,

The UN system can play an important role in mobilising international resources for development cooperation aimed at assisting developing countries attain internationally agreed development goals. Working towards a fairer multilateral trading system and assistance to developing countries for skills-upgradation and human resource development would contribute to helping them meet the challenges of globalisation.

We look forward to participating actively in the triennial comprehensive policy review of the operational activities of the UN development system in the 59th session of the General Assembly. We shall work closely with other delegations to ensure provision of guidance and oversight to the funds and programmes.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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