



STATEMENT BY HON'BLE MR. VAYALAR RAVI, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF INDIAN DELEGATION, on Agenda Item 90: Operational activities for development: (a) Operational activities for development of the United Nations System; (b) Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system at the SECOND COMMITTEE 59th Session of the UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 04 November 2004

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation welcomes this opportunity to participate in the discussions on the operational activities and the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. We thank the Secretary-General for the comprehensive documentation prepared under the agenda item. We associate ourselves with the statement made by the distinguished Permanent Representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77.

Mr. Chairman,

The Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review process, during this session, enables Member States to take stock of the functioning of the operational activities of the UN and to make recommendations for future direction based on current context and conditions for the design and delivery of UN operational activities for development in the long-term perspective. The review assumes an added significance this year as the recommendations we make would build up to the Major Event in 2005 for reviewing the progress made and the prospects for the achievement of the MDGs.

Financing of the UN development system and the measures for ensuring stability, predictability and continuity in the flow of core resources merit our attention. Given the new tasks and challenges and the goals and targets of the MDGs, the comprehensive review needs to take a close look at the gamut of issues involved in financing the work of the UN development system. In this context, the increasing imbalance between “core” and “non-core”

contributions to UN agencies and the proliferation of earmarked resources is a matter of concern to us. To take an example, core resources comprise only 43% of UNICEF's overall resources. While the core resources of UNICEF showed an overall increase of 30% between 2000 and 2003, much of this increase was due to increase in private sector contributions. Government contributions to core resources increased by only 17% during this period. The other resources, on the other hand, grew by 60% during the same period, while other emergency resources grew by over 120%. The need for funding humanitarian emergencies is undeniable and the principle unexceptionable. India supports, and within its limitations, provides humanitarian assistance to those in need. However, the Funds and Programmes of the UN development system can fulfil their respective missions and mandates and assist developing countries in their efforts for achieving their long-term development goals and targets only if the former are provided with adequate, stable and predictable contributions to their core resources.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the new and additional demands placed by peace-building and conflict prevention, as well as humanitarian and other emergencies, should not be met at the expense of development cooperation activities. The diversion of the Funds and Programmes from their original mandates, often with their excessive focus on soft areas of development, and the diversion of their precious resources from developmental activities to humanitarian and other emergency assistance and other areas, are matters of serious concern.

The Secretary-General is also right in pointing out that adequate investment in development interventions can prevent huge expenses for peace-keeping operations in the future. We would, therefore, like to add our voice to those calling upon developed countries to take concrete steps towards reaching the agreed target of providing ODA at the level of 0.7% of GNP at the earliest.

Mr. Chairman,

The last comprehensive review devoted considerable energy of the UN system to the reform process. The Funds and Programmes of the UN development system have spent considerable energy and resources on implementing these recommendations. The benefits of these reforms have not always been as anticipated. Difficulties in adapting to new tools and processes have been cited in the recent past and the process of such adaptations has often proven to be time-consuming. The process of simplification did add an additional burden for the governments and the UN system while the impact of the Common Country Assessment and the UN Development Assistance Framework processes on the system's cost-effectiveness appears to be difficult to assess, even as these processes have created additional workload for their preparation. It is necessary to ensure that the processes involved in the preparation of UNDAF do not become overly complex, rigid or time-consuming.

It would be useful to divert the excessive focus on procedures and processes that has unfortunately come to characterise our approach, in a more productive direction. Our long journey of institutional structuring and restructuring often appears to overlook the basic objective to create a procedurally sound and efficient system. We cannot afford to lose sight of our ultimate objective of sustainable development and eradication of poverty, particularly as we come closer to the deadlines agreed to for achieving the objectives and targets of the Millennium Development Goals.

In this context, we particularly emphasise the need for national capacity-building and the sustainability of such efforts. We agree with the Secretary-General's recommendation on the need to adopt measures that ensure sustainability in capacity-building activities, including further development of national execution modalities, where required, so as to maximise support to national capacity development.

In the context of enhancing capacity for national execution, a brief reference to UN-Office for Project Services is called for. We all would do well to recall the circumstances in which UN-OPS was established as a separate entity almost a decade ago. It might be useful to seek an evaluation of the performance of UN-OPS over the past decade in relation to its objectives and mandate and its cost-structure, particularly with regard to the extent to which it has helped developing countries in enhancing their capacity for national execution. Such a review could also look at whether the interests of the developing countries would be better served if the UN-OPS were to be re-integrated with UNDP and subjected to its financial rules and disciplines. As we contemplate further measures in institutional reform in the Un system in the run-up to the 2005 Major Event, we should also take a close look at the development system and examine possible ways of improving efficiency and effectiveness.

The significance of South-South Cooperation cannot be emphasised enough. The development experiences of countries that are in various stages of development are closer to each other and countries of the South can benefit tremendously from exchanges of such experiences and best practices. Contributions of the developed countries through resources for replication of successful experiences or experiments from one developing country to another, as also technological know-how, can only add a positive dimension to South-South Cooperation. Bodies of the UN development system could, therefore, make a positive contribution by mainstreaming, in their programmes and through their country-level activities and country offices, modalities to support South-South Cooperation.

The process of replicating lessons learnt, even though these may be the "best practices" from another developing country, needs careful and sensitive handling. Even in terms of "best practices", there is no "one-size-fits-all". It is

important to understand and absorb the socio-cultural, traditional and historical sensitivities involved. The process poses challenges to development agencies as they attempt to promote “best practices” and their replication. Here again, the close involvement of the recipient country would be extremely important.

Mr. Chairman,

We have consistently held 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.

The fundamental criterion that must guide us in our reflections is that of improving the effectiveness of the UN’s development work. If further coordination amongst UN agencies in the field or harmonisation of their plans with national budgetary cycles of the recipient countries improves the ability of the UN system to deliver better, these should be welcomed. Savings made by improved field-level coordination, harmonisation or pooling or sharing of resources can be considered useful if they provide additional resources for the UN’s developmental activities. These measures cannot be supported where they either bring in elements of conditionality or add additional burden on the recipient countries. Before we look at other procedures for institutional reform, therefore, it would be useful to make a cost-benefit analysis of the reforms that have already been carried out.

It is an acknowledged sovereign right of every country to decide to accede to any particular international Convention or Treaty. Similarly, policy formulation is the responsibility of the recipient country and best left to respective national governments. It would, therefore, also 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 in tandem with resources spent for actual programmes and projects which contribute towards capacity-building or in making a real difference to the lives of the poor.

Mr. Chairman,

We cannot reflect on the operational activities of the UN system without recalling their distinctive characteristics of objectivity, neutrality and impartiality. It is important to uphold these characteristics in the interest of the credibility of the system.

As we take a comprehensive view of the operational activities of the UN development system, it is also necessary once again to reiterate the importance of the principles of the country-driven programming, national leadership and ownership. It is important for the UN system to be able to respond with flexibility and in conformity with national plans and priorities. It is also important for the UN system to develop its processes on how to interface the national priorities and needs with the overall global agenda. Notwithstanding the global agenda that may give overall directions to the system's activities, it would be useful to remember that the needs of the country can best be understood and articulated by the recipient country itself.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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