



Remarks of Helen Clark, Chair of the United Nations Development Group

On the occasion of the United Nations Development Group Meeting

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Introduction

Greetings to all participating in this third UNDG meeting for 2009.

I have just returned at the weekend from Thailand where a highlight was my meeting with the UNDG Asia Pacific group, and then the opportunity to address that group together with Resident Co-ordinators gathered from throughout the region.

Thus, that meeting brought together the global, regional, and country levels of the UNDG – something I would like to repeat in future when the opportunity arises.

Today's meeting has some decisions to take on the guidance note on mainstreaming environmental sustainability in country analyses and UNDAFs, and on common country procurement.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the two very solid documents produced. On the former, we are increasingly called on to mainstream environmental sustainability into our work. On the latter, I hope that in time our guidance on procurement will be able to extend to sustainable procurement as well.

This meeting will also hear reports on work related to “Delivering as One”, and to the work of the UNDG's MDG Task Force.

My comments at this opening session will range across the issues raised by these agenda items.

First, on the MDGs – and on how critical our “joined up” efforts are to supporting their achievement.

Meeting our development challenges

We all know that this is a very challenging time to be carrying out a development mission.

There are only six years left to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Now, as a result of the global recession, there is a risk that advances which have been made are stalled, or even reversed.

Across the UN, in the year leading up to the 2010 MDG Summit at the General Assembly, we must work to generate increased political momentum for achieving the MDGs. We need to hold donors to their commitments on ODA, including those made at Gleneagles by the G8 in 2005 and reaffirmed as recently as the G20 meeting in Pittsburgh last month.

But meeting the MDGs will also depend on policies and capacity within countries to implement them.

This is where the United Nations Development Group has an important role to play.

We need to work country-by-country to identify where the gaps are in achieving the MDGs, and what more we could collectively do to overcome them.

This effort needs to be strategic, and it needs to be mutually reinforcing, as progress towards each MDG is linked to progress on others.

One way or another, all our mandates relate to the MDGs. This makes it all the more important that all parts of the UN development system work together to support each other's work.

Taken as a whole, financial resources for the UN's development operations equate to nearly 20 per cent of total ODA.

If we each rely on our small share of that for impact, we will not be maximizing what we can achieve.

We are also now operating in a resource-constrained environment.

To make the most of existing or additional financing, we will each need to move more outside our silos to embrace joint programming where clusters of us can bring relevant skills and expertise to the table.

For example, MDG5 is that towards which there has been least progress so far. My own agency, UNDP, is not a specialized agency in the area of maternal health. Yet, its convening and co-ordinating role must be fully leveraged to support those agencies which do have that specific mandate.

Achievement of the maternal health goals and targets links closely to our ability to achieve the MDGs for children's health and education, and for poverty and hunger reduction, on an ongoing basis.

More generally, where the goals are struggling at present is often related to the low priority accorded to meeting women's needs. I believe that the MDG review process must apply a gender analysis to the progress made to date, to help us pinpoint accurately where extra support needs to be given.

In this regard, the General Assembly decision to create a composite entity on gender provides an opportunity for the UN to improve its effectiveness in supporting developing countries to achieve MDG 3, as well as all the other MDGs.

I hope that the UNDG senior-level MDG taskforce can advance our work in support of the MDGs. I look forward to receiving the first update of its work.

We also need to be flexible to respond to new and emerging challenges.

The economic crisis continues to have a heavy impact on the poorest and most vulnerable. Our priority in the UNDG must be to support those who are already poor and vulnerable, while also safeguarding the investments and efforts made towards poverty reduction and achieving the MDGs and longer term development.

In the letter I sent to all resident co-ordinators on 3 September, I asked them to adjust their ongoing programmes; draw on support from the nine UN system joint crisis initiatives; and apply those initiatives with a strategic, long-term approach.

We must pull out all the stops, together with national governments and other development partners, to ensure that countries are supported through the crisis, and that any signs of recovery are nurtured. It is critical also that we work particularly closely with the International Financial Institutions, given the vital role they can play and the substantial resources they command.

We also need to do a better job at linking our work on poverty reduction with that on climate change and the environment. This work needs to be well integrated within one 21st century environment paradigm. We cannot be effective if we work in separate thematic and agency silos.

Those who are bearing the brunt of the effects of climate change are the poor and vulnerable, who have done the least, if anything at all, to cause the problem. If they are not supported with adaptation and building greater resilience, then the chances of achieving the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals diminish.

By some estimates, forty per cent of development investment from ODA and concessional lending is sensitive to climate risk. Going forward, resilience and adaptation to climate risk and other disasters must be hardwired into national development strategies, with proper attention paid to the needs of more vulnerable groups, including women and indigenous people.

The widespread disasters which struck Asia and the Pacific these last few weeks bear sad testament to the importance of this.

The UNDG has already moved to scale up its work on climate and environmental issues. Earlier this year it approved the integration of disaster risk reduction into programming. Today, the plan for mainstreaming environmental sustainability into the programming process is here for approval. By the end of the year, we will have new guidance on mainstreaming climate change. These are all steps in the right direction.

A number of our agencies are working hard to raise awareness of the issues at stake in the climate negotiations, and of the threat which climate change poses to development. Some of us can assist with the development of low carbon growth, energy access, and adaptation strategies – and with placing them at the centre of national development strategies. We can support the building and development of capacity to implement these strategies - and to access carbon finance, now and in the future.

Opportunities to improve further how we work

Clearly the challenges faced by developing countries at this time are significant. This is not time for business as usual approaches to development. To date, the 21st century has been characterized by a series of largely unforeseen global shocks. Building greater resilience to those for developed and developing countries alike is in the interests of us all.

The good news is that there is a number of opportunities to strengthen the UNDG's co-ordination in support of programme countries to achieve the MDGs. We must capitalize on these opportunities to ensure that the UN's development system remains a highly relevant and effective development partner.

Between 2010 and 2013, some ninety countries will establish new UN Development Assistance Frameworks. This is a huge opening to position our efforts strategically and coherently in support of the MDGs and sustainable development.

It is essential for resident co-ordinators and country teams to improve the quality of the next generation of UNDAFs; to keep ongoing UNDAFs under review; and to re-position programmes as necessary to meet new and emerging challenges.

I understand that we were originally scheduled today to take decisions on the simplified UNDAF guidelines, the One Results Report, and the enhanced UNDAF roll-out support package. Dedicated interagency teams have been working intensively over the past months to develop these products. They will spend the coming month refining the products for our endorsement at the next UNDG meeting.

These will be key instruments for countries preparing new UNDAFs next year, and I expect a new package to be agreed to soon, reflecting the concerns of all.

At the same time, the most strategic UNDAF imaginable will still be a lost effort if we do not have the right capacities lined up in our Country Teams to deliver on its goals. Our partner countries increasingly expect us to provide them with world-class policy advice and capacity development assistance tailored to local circumstances. The 2008 synthesis report on the annual resident co-ordinators reports makes that clear, as does the summary of findings from the capacity assessments in the "Delivering as One" pilot countries which is before you today.

In light of this, and in light of the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review call to us to strengthen national capacity, we will have to adapt to meet and ideally exceed these new expectations.

Our country teams will need to review their current capacity mix, match it with their UNDAF, and make changes where needed. We are currently too heavy on programme management and too light on our capacity for policy advice, technical assistance, and advocacy. This will have to change if we are to be effective in our support to programme countries.

Making such changes, in my view, is critical if we are to assist programme countries in bringing about the transformational change they seek, and to support a new development paradigm in which growth, poverty reduction, and ecosystem protection are compatible and mutually supportive goals.

I know that in all these areas impressive work is already underway, and that there are experiences and best practices we must build on.

Strengthening the resident co-ordinator system

I referred just now to the synthesis reports prepared by DOCO of the annual reports from the resident co-ordinators. It gives a comprehensive overview of what country teams are achieving; where they are facing challenges; and how we can better assist them.

The latest report shows, in my view, that there is far more co-ordination going on in the UN Country Teams than they are generally given credit for. These efforts are obvious far beyond the eight “Delivering as One” pilots.

Of course, many useful lessons are emerging from the pilot countries, notably the increasing demand for the UN system to increase its focus on technical support and policy advice. The pilots are also driving the UN system to confront persistent challenges in areas such as funding, reporting, efficiency, and business practices. It is urgent that more progress be made on harmonization in these areas.

Overall, it is very clear to me that real development gains can be made if we are better co-ordinated in our partnerships with programme countries - and indeed with bilateral and other donors on the ground.

I am very pleased that the General Assembly resolution on system-wide coherence, passed on 14 September, calls on the Secretary-General to undertake urgently arrangements for an independent evaluation of the lessons learned from the “Delivering as One” pilots. Should the independent evaluation of the whole initiative be positive, as I am sure it will be, this will give enormous momentum to co-ordination in the UN development system.

Already, as the synthesis report outlines, many country teams are effectively using the UNDAF as their main strategic instrument for joint programming; they are strengthening their joint communications and outreach; they are responding to new and emerging global challenges such as the food and fuel crises; and they are endeavouring to harmonize business practices.

On this last point, I am pleased that the meeting today has before it for decision the guidelines for harmonized procurement at the country level.

I am also pleased that you will be discussing progress on the expanded Delivering as One Funding Window, given how important it is to ensure the availability of predictable and flexible resources to support those countries actively working in a more integrated and coherent manner. In my view, we will see more donor funding in the future dedicated to joint programming – and that will be positive.

In post-crisis settings in particular, the latest synthesis report indicates that inter-agency co-ordination has witnessed significant progress.

The UNDG in June approved a proposal to increase support for the resident co-ordinator function in some 20 countries in transition from crisis. DOCO has committed to raise resources to increase its existing \$5 million transition fund to \$23 million.

It goes without saying that each of our agencies needs to do its bit to make the resident co-ordinator system work effectively and efficiently.

That includes living up to our respective commitments in the Management and Accountability System, and its Implementation Plan approved in January. These set out the framework for the resident co-ordinator system, and its responsibilities and mutual accountabilities.

It also includes ensuring that we have resident co-ordinators who are well qualified for the job in the specific countries to which they are appointed.

System-wide coherence resolution

I referred earlier to the latest system-wide coherence resolution which Annika Söder will be briefing you in more detail shortly.

The Deputy Secretary-General is leading the process of developing a roadmap and timeline to response to the resolution. There will be a role for UNDG to play as this develops.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to encourage you to think about how we can optimize our UNDG meetings and make them as strategic as possible. We need a good balance between that and approving process documents.

Across the UNDG, we can no longer afford to apply old development paradigms to meeting new development challenges. They will not work.

Similarly, we will need to step up our capacity to “deliver as one” to maintain the UN development system as a relevant and substantial contributor to development. We have a unique contribution to make – and we must make it effectively.

I wish you well for your deliberations, and leave you now in the capable hands of Annika Söder.