

Annex

Report of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP (3 June 2016)

A. Working in fragile contexts, inclusive of middle income countries

1. The President of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS opened the joint meeting by welcoming all participants of the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN-Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP). He also welcomed the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.

2. In his opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General described the setting of joint United Nations engagements against the backdrop of recent major global agreements such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He highlighted areas where the United Nations development system needed to collaborate more intensely to construct peaceful societies. Those included: approaching conflict prevention and disaster risk reduction through joint planning and programming, collective leadership and predictable funding; mainstreaming a focus on societies' most vulnerable and marginalized, especially youth, in all programmes; building national statistical systems and scaling up the use of big data; working vertically within governments and the United Nations system to join forces; expanding the global and regional use of standard operating procedures, such as that for Delivering-as-One; and reforming the overarching aid architecture.

3. The Administrator, UNDP, and the Executive Director, UNICEF, presented the successes and challenges their organizations faced when working in fragile contexts, including in middle-income countries. The Administrator, UNDP, stressed that conflict and fragility were the main obstacles to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which was why together the United Nations system needed to address root causes and prioritize resilience-building. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support (MAPS) approach, she noted, was the right tool to galvanize system-wide efforts. The Executive Director, UNICEF, stressed that, while it was important to focus on fragile states, people had to be at the centre of development and humanitarian work. Better data (disaggregated and innovative), universality (no one left behind) and closer integration of the development-humanitarian nexus (combining poverty, conflict, climate, resource scarcity, etc.) would lead to tangible results on the ground. Those challenges were all inseparable, and so had to be the response.

4. The United Nations Resident Coordinator, Albania, discussed how financing peacebuilding could help to lift least developed countries out of fragility. He drew attention to an emerging consensus on how to tackle crises and build peaceful societies, which included: (a) addressing root causes; (b) practicing conflict prevention in development; (c) driving the principles of sustainable peace throughout the United Nations system; (d) expanding the notion of human rights; (e) bolstering transborder relations; and (f) ensuring predictable funding. In turn, the Syria Regional Facility Development Coordinator discussed the topic of fragility in a protracted crisis context, focused on building resilience in middle-income countries. He highlighted that field evidence demonstrated how shocks could destabilize middle-income countries, setting back hard-won development gains across a region. The inability of current aid architecture to address crises adequately only compounded the situation. The UNDG resilience-based development response, however, combining development and humanitarian in a single platform, was a major advance, in particular for the Syrian Arab Republic crisis. The evidence pointed to the need for: (a) new kinds of crisis response; (b) knowledge and technology; (c) predictable and quality funding; and (d) combining responses on all fronts.

5. The presidents of the four Executive Boards, the heads of the six United Nations organizations and members of the Executive Board discussed the opportunities and challenges of working in fragile states, inclusive of middle-income countries. Member States were actively engaged throughout the session and provided a number of comments, most notably that:

- Fragility in fragile states and in middle-income countries demanded multidimensional, integrated, joint responses, assessments and evaluations to better focus assistance;
- Peacebuilding and resilience required the integration of humanitarian and development efforts;
- Reforming current aid architecture should be a priority of the United Nations;
- ‘Fragility’ as a concept needed a clearer definition to focus on ‘people’ in every society, including middle-income countries, and not on states;
- Financial and institutional strengthening were key to building resilience in fragile contexts; and
- Women and girls played a central role in building resilience in fragile contexts.

6. In conclusion, the Executive Director, UNOPS, highlighted that in addressing fragility United Nations assistance had to focus on people, not states, in building resilience before a crisis occurred. Innovative forms of financing were needed along with innovative systems for measuring vulnerability in order to allocate funding and support. In that context, the United Nations had a role to play in attracting private sector investment in fragile high-risk contexts.

7. The President of the Executive Board of UNICEF underlined the importance of United Nations system joint efforts in addressing a broader fragility that affected all societies, through a people-focused lens, and in halting its spread. In moving from fragility to resilience, the United Nations system needed to prioritize populations at risk, the marginalized and the vulnerable, and tackle root causes by eradicating poverty and reducing disparities and inequalities.

8. In closing, the President of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS thanked delegations and the six United Nations organizations for their participation in the morning segment of the joint meeting.

B. Big data and the Sustainable Development Goals

9. The President of the Executive Board of WFP welcomed members of the four Executive Boards, the representatives of the six United Nations organizations and the session's guest speaker to the discussion on big data and the Sustainable Development Goals.

10. In opening remarks, the Executive Director, UNFPA, drew attention to the potential of big data – large data sets that may be analysed to reveal patterns, trends and associations – to provide real-time information, especially during crises. Big data, he noted, also had an impact on people’s political and social participation, awareness-raising of key issues, and population mapping, among others. Tapping into the potential of big data, however, required building not only the capacities of national systems and personnel but also those of the United Nations, a move that demanded changing attitudes towards data so that people understood it as evidence.

11. The Executive Director, UN-Women, stressed data’s power to provide different social and economic perspectives on issues, in particular with regard to the well-being of women and girls, and to help to inform planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes. Lack of knowledge, she noted, restricted the international community’s ability to respond and act to crises. It was therefore necessary to improve national statistical data and to use big data to complement traditional data. Given its potential, knowing how to use and deploy data had to be a paramount objective for governments and the United Nations. She emphasized, however, that big data did not replace the responsibility to know and act.

12. The Jerry Hultin Global Network Professor at New York University's Tandon School of Engineering and Director of the GovLab, the guest speaker, provided a presentation on *how to solve public problems with data*. She highlighted that the revolution in current thinking about data entailed a shift in emphasis from government to transparency of outputs and a policy of open data, which created not only a data economy but also a 'data morality'. While practitioners had accepted the evidence-based premise, she noted, how to use data to inform policy remained a challenge. But even when that was achieved, conversation, engagement and partnerships needed to revolve around the data-policy nexus. She drew attention to the role 'data collaboratives', such as Twitter or Intel, played in helping to generate new solutions to problems. Phone data, for example, gave a better picture of human movements in Africa than public data, while in New York City data was allowing small business owners to pinpoint where to invest. Data alone, however, was not enough – it needed to be cleaned and analysed to be useful. Collaboration and partnerships also helped to ensure untapped talent was being utilized. Privacy and data access issues, however, meant that it was necessary to build 'data responsibility' into aid actions. She highlighted that the United Nations was beginning to explore how best to achieve that through collaboration between the GovLab, the United Nations Global Pulse and various United Nations organizations. In conclusion, she emphasized that the importance of sharing data – not keeping it to oneself – was key to solving development and humanitarian problems.

13. In their response, two Member States intervened and made a number of points, notably that: (a) there was data inequality, wherein some countries and regions had data and the capacity to use it while others did not; (b) cultural attitudes affected data collection and interpretation and could as a result make it unreliable; (c) because the experience of using big data for development and humanitarian activities was still in its early stages, its actual potential remained unclear; (d) ownership and control of databases was problematic, especially when it resided with the private sector, because of its ethical and regulatory implications; (e) people had to be at the centre of big data and be involved in its applications; (f) big data had to serve in building the capacity of national statistical offices to produce data, not overshadow them; and (g) the importance of continuing discussions on big data within the 2030 Agenda.

14. In turn, on the main theme of big data and the Sustainable Development Goals, WFP presented findings from a mobile phone survey that helped to support decision-making at country level, and UNFPA explained how satellite imagery was being used to produce population estimates in Afghanistan. Two Member States highlighted that: while disaggregated data was crucial, many countries lacked the capacity to produce it; and United Nations inter-agency data-sharing was good but too fragmented. They also wished to know the outcome and future of the Chief Executives Board data innovation labs, and if there was an equivalent approach to the data privacy initiative of the Office of Humanitarian Affairs in the funds, programmes and specialized agencies.

15. On the second theme – data collection and methods – UNDP provided a presentation on (a) how new data sources helped to measure changes in poverty in Sudan, using satellite images to determine income levels based on electricity consumption and mobile phone usage; and (b) measuring progress against Goal 16 in Tunisia, using social media data to collect perceptions of corruption. In turn, UNICEF described how it used mobile phones to identify 'risk spots' and possible interventions, for example, in response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa. Member States highlighted their national data collection experiences through social media in helping to identify and address issues, and welcomed related efforts by the United Nations. They stressed the importance of building data collection and disaggregation capacity at country level, especially for the least developed countries. They drew attention to the North-South technology gap and stressed the United Nations role in leading efforts to determine how big data could serve all people, while respecting the privacy of individuals. They sought details on when and how the United Nations would invest in building big data capacity or a plan to address it. The Administrator, UNDP, and Chair, UNDG, highlighted the importance of continuous collaboration between United Nations organizations, and pointed to the catalytic role of the United Nations Global Pulse and its collaboration on most big data initiatives presented by United Nations organizations.

16. In summarizing the discussion, the President of the Executive Board of WFP noted the timeliness of the discussion, given the data revolution and the 2030 Agenda, and the growing importance of evidence-based programming and monitoring and evaluation for results. He stressed, however, the challenges of building capacity for big data, which many countries still lacked. The potential of the rapidly expanding and diversification of communication technology was huge and the United Nations had to harness that power. It was therefore necessary to strengthen national capacity for big data while at the same time establishing a regulatory framework to protect privacy. The United Nations, he suggested, could also serve as a convenor for data collaboratives in the future.

17. In closing remarks, the President of the Executive Board of UN-Women highlighted the need to: apply a gender lens throughout United Nations work on big data; close the digital gender gap; and protect privacy. She also stressed that while big data did not replace government work to collect data it could complement it.

18. The President of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS closed the meeting by thanking delegations and the six United Nations organizations for their active participation and fruitful discussion.
