



Report of the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of
UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP
2 February 2015

1. In partnership with others: lessons learned on scaling up innovation to reach people in need

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

The Secretary-General began the meeting with a few remarks in which he stressed the increasingly important role of regional bodies and the need to strengthen skill sets and support to Member States at the international level. He underlined four main points, stating that:

- Innovation was not an end in itself;
- Partnerships were vital to maximizing knowledge, skills, best practices and resources;
- Innovation required the right enabling environment; and
- United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies had to be able to expand space for innovation and at times allow for failure.

The heads and deputies of the six United Nations organizations discussed the opportunities and challenges they faced in developing and scaling up innovative ideas, processes and products. It was the first time the six had discussed the issues of innovation, risk-taking and management, partnerships and financing with their respective executive boards.

The discussion was organized into a number of segments, including a 'fail faire' – an exercise in which participants learn from failure – and a question and answer session with Member States. The six organizations shared their experiences in innovating and highlighted the value innovation provided to programming. Furthermore, a number of ideas were presented on how innovation could improve in the future, including through closer links to outcomes, knowledge sharing, and better communication with stakeholders. The need to bridge different aspects of United Nations operations, particularly humanitarian assistance and development, was highlighted.

Member States actively engaged throughout the session and provided a number of comments, notably stating that:

- Innovation was an area in which governments had to invest;
- Links between innovation and results needed improvement;
- Innovation could contribute more effective measurements of development; and
- The post-2015 development agenda promised to be an area where United Nations organizations could develop a more harmonized approach.

Furthermore, a number of Member States expressed their vision of the way forward, stating that the United Nations:

- Should encourage data-sharing among all United Nations organizations in order to better utilize big data and strategic foresight methodologies;

- Leverage the expertise of a diverse set of actors because diversity was a critical component of innovation; and
- Test, prototype and pilot new ideas along with rigorous monitoring and measuring in order to predict failures and successes.

In conclusion, the leaders of the six United Nations organizations stressed the importance of creating the right enabling environment for innovation that could: cultivate greater, more inclusive impact; establish partnerships; and strengthen cooperation and sharing within the United Nations development system. They agreed that they needed to build innovation into their organizational cultures and that management should allow for possible failure in innovation.

In closing, the President of the Executive Board of UNICEF thanked delegations and the six United Nations organizations for their participation and commended them for taking an innovative approach to the joint meeting during the morning session.

2. Innovative approaches to programme design and implementation to support the operationalization of the post-2015 development agenda

The President of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS welcomed the representatives of the six United Nations organizations and the guest speakers.

The Administrator, UNDP, highlighted that the United Nations system was in the process of reviewing how it worked in order to guarantee its best support to Member States in delivering on the post-2015 development agenda. This review process involved organizations' concerted efforts to become fit for purpose and included strengthening a range of innovative approaches to development practices that they increasingly use. She noted that new technologies allowed the United Nations system to reach ever wider audiences, while engaging end-users in identifying challenges and creating solutions could greatly contribute to successful implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. Finally, the standard operating procedures for delivering-as-one represented a step change in streamlining and coordinating United Nations system work at country level.

The former United Nations Resident Coordinator in Montenegro presented some innovative approaches tried by the United Nations there. For example, a United Nations country team-led initiative had engaged youth in defining challenges and co-creating solutions on youth unemployment in Montenegro. A key lesson learned was that innovation required time and implied trial and failure.

The Director, United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office, and former Resident Coordinator in Zambia, highlighted key lessons learned in Zambia. She underscored that the entire country team should become collectively engaged, particularly at the policy level. Enhanced public engagement was another critical factor. She also cited the importance of simplifying procedures and processes at the local level, noting the implementation of the standard operating procedures, stressed that the United Nations should jointly endeavour to strengthen and support national capacities. Such innovations would drive the new round of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks with the participation of all stakeholders at the design and delivery stages, covering its main areas: data acquisition and analysis; citizen

engagement; sustainable development planning; and business operations. In their comments, delegations stated that:

- Innovation was necessary to address significant and emerging multidimensional challenges such as poverty eradication and climate change;
- Member States would require adequate resources and assistance for the successful realization of the sustainable development goals, while programme countries must seek to mobilize both public and private resources at the national level;
- The post-2015 development agenda was about service delivery, which required funding. Cost savings should therefore be further explored in the context of the current system of governance;
- The fit-for-purpose discussion should not lead to further expansion of bureaucracy;
- It was necessary to revisit the alleged fragmentation around the issue of climate change/environmental sustainability within the United Nations system; and
- Repositioning the United Nations system should aim at strengthening its comparative advantages, for example, in the areas of statistics and data, while building on already existing systems and approaches.

The response from the panel included the following points:

- Major challenges moving forward would arise in relation to the transformative, larger, more complex and urgent post-2015 agenda, as compared to the previous Millennium Development Goals; and
- The United Nations development system would need to be more cost effective and collaborative, utilizing policy expertise for sustainable results.

In summarizing discussions, the Executive Director, UNOPS, noted that harnessing the power of technology to gauge opinions across the world provided an inclusive basis to guide decision makers. People-centred development, she stressed, should not be a one-off exercise. The United Nations should remain on its path forward and continue to adapt, learn to anticipate, and be ready to innovate.

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 rich discussion.
