



Report of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP held on 1 June 2018

I. MORNING SESSION (topic 1)

Joint efforts to strengthen coherence, collaboration and efficiency in the field – effective ways to deliver results together to successfully address programme country priorities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

1. The President of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS opened the joint meeting of the Executive Boards on 1 June 2018 with a warm welcome to the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and the participants of the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP.
2. In her opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General underscored the timeliness of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards following the adoption the previous day (on 31 May 2018) of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system. The repositioning required a system-wide change management process in which the Executive Boards had a key role in holding the United Nations development system accountable; creating an enabling environment to drive the reforms through a new resident coordinator system; and driving cohesive action, including through a system-wide strategic document to accelerate alignment of the 2030 Agenda. She encouraged Member States to be bold in reviewing the functions and legislative roles of the joint meeting of the Boards. The case study on Sudan offered a useful lens through which to view United Nations coherence at country level. The immensity of global challenges demanded the collective action embodied in the delivering-as-one approach to address all three dimensions (social, economic and environmental) identified in the Sustainable Development Goals. Tackling inequalities required generation and sharing of disaggregated data and evidence to address the multiple forms of inequality.
3. The Deputy Secretary-General stressed that the United Nations development system must: (a) intensify international support to joint efforts in overcoming rising inequalities; (b) strengthen collaboration and coherence of the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus; (c) increase investments in sustainable and resilient infrastructure; (d) reach out to and engage young people, girls in particular; and (e) take partnerships to a new level, including with civil society, the private sector, and international financial institutions.

4. In his remarks, the Administrator of UNDP characterized the joint meeting of the Boards, following the adoption of resolution 72/279, as a litmus test for the operationalization of a reformed United Nations development system. The meeting marked the beginning of a new era that required a different collective approach, as reflected in the 2030 Agenda.

5. A concerted United Nations development system had to: (a) help countries reset their approach to sustainable development and translate the Sustainable Development Goals into national development agendas; and (b) set up transformational steps to manage the evolution of the United Nations development system to meet the promise of the 2030 Agenda. Such repositioning emerged both from resolution 72/279 and from the experience to date with the delivering-as-one approach.

6. The Goals, focusing on the multidimensional aspects of poverty and inequality, demanded that United Nations organizations think in terms of systemic, multifaceted solutions that embraced social, economic and environmental considerations. UNDP had a vital role to play as a member of the United Nations system, as embodied in frameworks such as the common chapter of the strategic plans of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women.

7. The Executive Director of UNICEF also noted that the United Nations had entered a new era with resolution 72/279. Each organization had to operationalize reform in a way best suited to programme countries, focused on new ways to work together. That included expanding beyond accepted ways of collaborating, building on initiatives to explore innovative partnerships and use block chain and satellite imaging tools to plan and monitor field work.

8. A major collective challenge was how to plant the seeds of development in humanitarian planning and operations to address root causes and mitigate crisis impact, an area where the United Nations development system had begun identifying and financing collective, multi-year outcomes. That included jointly coordinating needs assessments; increasing investments in analysis and evaluations; and structuring innovative, predictable, flexible financing for collective outcomes.

9. The common chapter of the strategic plans gave the four organizations a platform to drive United Nations reform collectively in six thematic areas. Complementing those efforts were new initiatives in which two or more of the four organizations were collaborating in one or more of the six thematic areas at regional and country levels, especially for accelerator initiatives. The organizations had also set up complaint mechanisms to address sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian situations, consolidated their premises at the zonal office level, pooled agency guest houses, and expanded globally shared service centres.

Case study of Sudan

10. The former United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan (and current Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq), who participated via video link, stressed that humanitarian, development and peace activities were taking place simultaneously in Sudan. The country team pursued achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals through the new way of working.

11. As part of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process, a mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support (MAPS) team mission identified accelerators for the Goals, which the Government integrated into its national development plans. Likewise, the country team imbedded the MAPS accelerators into the UNDAF and the humanitarian response plan.

12. In implementing the humanitarian-development-peace network, the country team developed the two plans together; the humanitarian response plan was expanded to a multi-year plan and aligned with the UNDAF. The aim was to establish an organic connection between the two planning frameworks for a more coherent approach, and ensure a smooth transition from crisis through recovery to development. The country team fielded a second MAPS mission in October 2017 to identify collective objectives to hold the international community and the Government mutually accountable for the Goals. With the support of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the country team set up financing frameworks and an improved United Nations coordination platform.

13. The UNICEF Resident Representative in Sudan (and Acting Resident Coordinator ad interim), who also participated via video link, underscored that the United Nations development system sought to use the deliver-as-one approach in Sudan to address its complex challenges. The country had lost much of its wealth when South Sudan seceded and had been suffering economically, facing significant debt problems, compounded by mounting social deficiencies, an inflation crisis, lack of fuel and an influx of some 200,000 refugees from South Sudan.

14. Because it was impossible to tackle those challenges only through a humanitarian response, UNICEF focused on long-term development investments, for example, in water and school systems. The funds and programmes realized early on that their close collaboration, for example, in delivering life-saving health interventions, had longer-term sustainable results. The delivering-as-one approach the country team took in Sudan very much anticipated the adoption of resolution 72/279, and was proof that a collaborative United Nations development system was far more impactful. For maximum impact, donors, likewise, had to work together and invest more in development than in humanitarian response.

15. The UNFPA Regional Director for the Arab States highlighted that the United Nations development system had begun harmonizing the work of the Regional Coordination

Mechanism and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). A review of regional support to country teams by the Sustainable Development Goals task force had led to the establishment of the country support team for the Goals that used the MAPS approach, and provided monitoring, evaluation and reporting backstopping.

16. The team worked with the League of Arab States to set up a regional coordination infrastructure to guide roll-out and integration of the Goals in national and regional development frameworks. That process followed three steps: (a) countries took stock of their capacity and support needs, after which two MAPS missions were fielded; (b) a data working group sought to make data available to all United Nations organizations; and (c) a task force focused on the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) agenda used population data and indicators to ensure a people-centred approach. Similarly, the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development served as a regional coordination mechanism in which all United Nations organizations participated.

17. The Deputy Permanent Representative of Sudan to the United Nations drew attention to the country's main challenges: (a) the loss of over 90 per cent of its hard currency resources, more than 60 per cent of government earnings, and almost 30 per cent of geographical area, owing to the secession of South Sudan; (b) its status as a heavily indebted poor country; (c) its economic burden in hosting two million refugees; (d) the economic and social impact of two decades of sanctions (1998-2017); and (e) the difficulty in attracting adequate development assistance and foreign investment.

18. Sudan had, nevertheless, partnered with the United Nations, and signed in 2014 a tripartite agreement with WFP for humanitarian assistance for refugees from South Sudan, which helped to divert a hunger crisis. Sudan was also working closely with the international community to address regional human trafficking. Sudan hoped resolution 72/279 would lead to a more impactful coordinated United Nations peace, security and development response that would make the country a model for peacebuilding in Africa.

19. The presidents of the four Executive Boards, the heads of the six United Nations organizations and members of the Executive Boards were actively engaged throughout the session and provided a number of comments on the joint efforts of the United Nations development system to strengthen coherence, collaboration and efficiency in the field:

(a) General Assembly resolution 72/279 called for a different approach that would make the United Nations development system efficient, effective, transparent and accountable at all levels and especially in the field;

(b) United Nations development system organizations had to pursue unified delivery based on a common framework and reconsider their individual roles within a revamped resident coordinator system;

(c) The Executive Boards needed to improve their working methods and the efficiency and transparency of their governance structures to drive the reform forward;

- (d) The joint meeting of the Board could serve as the central forum for the organizations to report on their collective work to implement provisions of the common chapter;
- (e) The organizations had to drive forward a coherent, integrated approach to the implementation of the Goals and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus;
- (f) Member States' guidance to and collaboration with the United Nations development system had to be grounded in a multi-stakeholder approach, including civil society and the private sector, to ensure delivery of the Goals and drive United Nations reform;
- (g) The United Nations needed a stronger institutional incentive for organizations to focus on prevention, and not on a reactive humanitarian approach, as it was more costly;
- (h) A smooth transition toward a UNDP-delinked resident coordinator system was important so as not to disrupt the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- (i) Multi-year donor funding compacts were the surest way to ensure consistent, sustained delivery of the United Nations development assistance to drive the Goals;
- (j) The common chapter in the new strategic plans of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women was an excellent tool to drive reform at the field level, ensure less duplication and joint back office services, and serve as the litmus test for coordination on the ground;
- (k) Technology and innovation were key for the achievement of the Goals; this meant it was imperative to address the technology gap between developed and developing countries when delivering assistance;
- (l) Monitoring, evaluation and reporting needed to play a central role, not only in gauging delivery against the Goals, but also in measuring United Nations system-wide coherence;
- (m) Using the stocktaking and MAPS experience within a coordinated United Nations context in the Sudan case study can serve as a model for accountability and lessons learned for other countries;
- (n) Development assistance had to be grounded in national priorities and adaptive to the country context, in line with the principle of national ownership and the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

20. In response, the former United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan noted that conditions for implementing the new way of working depended on local contexts. It was important that assistance was adaptive and flexible to reflect the fluidity of humanitarian-development structures, and that multi-year funding ensured the greatest impact. While country teams, as in Sudan, had the necessary capacity to carry out their work, the phasing out of funding after an emergency was often debilitating. Flexibility between humanitarian and development was therefore key. Using the UNDAF as the sole programming tool was workable as long as the framework was detailed, it included an accountability framework, and adequate funds were allocated.

21. The Administrator of UNDP stressed that the revamped resident coordinator system would have a central role in determining systemic success of the reform agenda. The new generation of UNDAFs and the common chapter offered the principal tools to measure,

monitor, evaluate and report on results. Similarly, MAPS was a tool that brought the United Nations system together. However, incentives had to be aligned in terms of governance, funding and activities through a compact between programme country and donor Governments and the United Nations built on mutual accountability. While measurement of success – for example, of the common chapter – was critical, it was important to measure outcomes and not numbers, satisfaction of clients and not quality of reports. He appealed to Member States to work collectively with the United Nations organizations to determine how to measure results that actually made a difference. Funding, key in that endeavour, depended less on quantitative amounts than on how the development system was funded.

22. The Executive Director of UNICEF echoed the importance of flexible, multi-year funding and the readiness of the United Nations development system to demonstrate through results how that funding model was more impactful. The organizations aligned their country programme documents (CPDs) to the UNDAF; as such, Board guidance on how to improve the CPDs would be welcome. While the common chapter was an excellent coordinating tool, its success depended on how UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women coordinated with other United Nations organizations. It was important to manage and coordinate the skills divide between humanitarian and development actors to ensure the right capacities were in the right place, including for targeted services.

23. The Executive Director of UNFPA characterized the humanitarian-development-peace nexus as a key component to harmonizing all 17 Goals to reinforce areas of progress and to ensure the integration of the concerns of young people. The United Nations youth strategies built on data and the readiness of Governments to take advantage of the demographic dividend and the compact for young people in humanitarian action; it served as a primary vector to ensure that young people were not left behind. Flexible, multi-year funding was key to achieving the Goals and measuring their impact. Success demanded clarity and leadership at all levels, especially to drive reform and to establish the revamped resident coordinator system.

24. The Deputy Executive Director of WFP noted that Sudan offered an excellent testing ground for the humanitarian-development-peace nexus but that obtaining funding remained a huge challenge. Development funding put in the right place would obviate the need for future peacekeeping and humanitarian programmes. The humanitarian-development-peace nexus was therefore as much a donor challenge as it was a delivery issue because such partners needed to work together to find a solution. While not party to the common chapter, WFP was compliant with its spirit on the ground. While they might eventually lead to replacing the CPDs of the individual organizations, the current generation of UNDAFs did not yet make that possible.

25. The Executive Director of UN-Women highlighted the preparations by UN-Women to engage with other United Nations organizations at country level in setting up common premises and common back-office services, and in programming activities focused on ending

violence against women. UN-Women worked collaboratively through the Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Spotlight Initiative. The organization was engaged with the Government of Sudan in implementing Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and in developing the national action plan, the implementation of which depended on system-wide and partner coordination.

26. The Executive Director of UNOPS, summarizing the main points of discussion, underscored that successfully delivering and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals required incentives that rewarded United Nations development system organizations for working together. There was the need to find new ways of working at the field level with the private sector, civil society and the United Nations under the umbrella of national government leadership and ownership. Reform called for leadership and for organizations to leave their comfort zones, but the results would be beneficial to all.

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

II. LUNCHTIME SESSION (topic 2)

Reflecting on the working methods of the Executive Boards

28. With the adoption of quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations System, the General Assembly underlined the need to enhance system-wide coherence and efficiency, reduce duplication and build synergies across the governing bodies of the entities of United Nations development system. In this regard, it gave a clear mandate to the Bureaux of the Executive Boards to initiate discussions on improving the working methods of the joint meetings of the Executive Boards, so that they offer a platform for exchange on issues with cross-cutting impact while improving the quality, efficiency and transparency of the governing bodies to enable the timely implementation of the QCPR.

29. While a number of steps have already been taken to streamline the working methods of the Executive Boards – increasing informal briefings and consultations, including more joint briefing by the entities; informal discussions between the management of the United Nations development system entities and the Member States; more frequent meetings of the Bureaux; and a common chapter in the new strategic plans of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women for 2018-2021¹ – there is still scope for further improvements.

30. In response to the QCPR, the Presidents of the Executive Boards of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP in 2017 started discussions on the working methods of the Executive Boards. This resulted in a non-paper from the Presidents, released in December 2017, entitled “Discussion Note on Executive Board Working Methods”, which was shared with the membership of all four Executive Boards. This non-paper formed the basis of the discussions on the subject during the lunchtime session (topic 2) at the joint meeting of the Executive Boards (JMB).

31. The discussion at the JMB aimed at addressing issues of direct relevance to the working methods of the Executive Boards, including the following:

- (a) Bureaux of the Executive Boards – election of members; terms of officers; transition from vice-presidency to presidency;
- (b) Interaction between the Presidents of the four Executive Boards;
- (c) Sessions of the Executive Boards;
- (d) Engagement between United Nations development agencies and Member States;
- (e) Streamlining of field visits (terms of reference, number and frequency of visits, choice of countries, level of participation);
- (f) Inter-agency coordination (including joint meetings of the Executive Boards).

¹ UNOPS and WFP do not have a common chapter in their latest strategic plan, due to the varying time frames in the preparation of the strategic plans.

32. As a way of guiding the discussions, four breakout groups were constituted from among the delegates representing approximately 40 Member States. Each group was then requested to discuss and identify potential areas for improving the working methods of the Executive Board concentrating on six broad aspects drawn from the 2017 non-paper from the Presidents: bureaux; sessions; conduct of business; participation; field visits; and inter agency cooperation (including the JMB).

33. The President of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, chairing the session, invited the moderators of the four groups to present the conclusions of their discussions on the working methods of the Executive Boards. The four groups then presented the outcome of their discussions from which the conclusions below were drawn.

OUTCOME OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Group 1 – Moderator: United Kingdom

34. Group 1 focused on process, and proposed a roadmap for actions the different Executive Boards could take over their next three sessions. These were as follows:

35. *At the annual session 2018*, the four Executive Boards could make reference to the need to improve working methods through a common formal decision (to be adopted at each of the respective Boards), asking the secretariats of the four Executive Boards to jointly provide the membership of all four Boards with a response to the Presidents' paper developed at the end of 2017. This would continue and advance the conversation between the Boards members and the Board secretariats on the working methods of the Executive Boards.

36. *At the second regular session 2018*, once briefed by the Board secretariats' joint response to the Presidents' non-paper, the different Executive Boards could nominate facilitators to represent the Bureaux of the Boards to take forward Member States' considerations in a next phase of discussion, based on the Board secretariats' joint response to the Presidents' paper.

37. *At the first regular session 2019*, once this facilitation process was set up, the Boards could engage in further discussion to develop and agree on a common formal decision on improving working methods. The content of the common decision would require in depth discussion, but would focus on common issues the different Boards could address together, while the proposed roadmap would address key common systemic issues. However, it would not stop individual Boards from making adjustments vertically, and discussing them with the Bureaux of the Boards and their secretariats.

38. On the joint meeting of the Executive Boards, the group moderator noted there were differing views on whether it should be a decision-making body, but group members agreed that, substantively, the joint meeting could be improved by having it address key cross-cutting issues, such sexual exploitation and abuse, and cost recovery.

Group 2 – Moderator: Republic of Korea

39. Group 2 focused its discussions on three issues: (a) succession planning and size of the Bureau; (b) inclusiveness; and (c) number of yearly field visits.

40. *Succession planning.* They suggested: (a) early selection of Bureau members for each Executive Board, which would allow two or three meetings to take place between outgoing and incoming bureaux; and (b) having vice-chairs become chairs of the subsequent year's bureau. The group did not agree with the proposal to have the Bureaux be composed of two members from each regional group, with one member rotating on an annual basis, which would be impractical for smaller government missions.

41. *Inclusiveness.* The group suggested: (a) identifying and promoting measures aimed at increasing participation of Board members and inclusivity of observers in joint meetings of the Boards; (b) expanding the scope and frequency of informal briefings and consultations before Board sessions on key topics; and (c) identifying ways of promoting the participation of non-governmental and civil society organizations and private-sector actors in joint sessions of the Boards.

42. *Field visits.* While useful for learning about United Nations assistance at country level, field visits were time-consuming to prepare, costly and, given the ease of use of information and communication technology, impractical to undertake more than necessary. The large delegations in joint field visits could also be intrusive; the Boards should ensure they travel in a responsible manner. They suggested dividing field visit delegations into subgroups so they could learn about different aspects of country conditions and United Nations assistance. The visits should be limited to one joint field visit and one individual visit by each Bureau yearly. They cautioned against using field visits to stage agency successes, noting that Board members needed to see challenges so the Boards could address them. They suggested making field visit programmes Bureau-driven (not agency driven), and balancing high-level and expert-level participation, so both political and the technical aspects could be related to the Boards.

Group 3 – Moderator: Mauritius

43. Group 3 addressed issues related to: bureaux; sessions; participation; field visits; and the joint meeting of the Boards.

44. *Bureaux.* They suggested: (a) improving the transparency of the Bureaux' proceedings, noting that Bureau discussions were not adequately passed on to the members of the regional groups; (b) harmonizing procedures of the different Bureaux, especially in organizational terms, so they would meet and report in a similar way; (c) discussing the possibility of having longer terms for Bureaux members with regional groups so they could discuss within their own Boards; and (d) improving communication between the different Bureaux, making maximum use of information and communications technology.

45. *Sessions.* The group suggested: (a) ensuring timely circulation of documents, addressing systematically any bottlenecks; (b) indicating on Board secretariat websites which documents had been freshly uploaded; (c) including observers on mailing lists; (d) spacing out the time between the annual sessions and the second regular sessions; and (e) holding informal meetings primarily at United Nations Headquarters to facilitate the participation of government missions.

46. *Participation.* The group highlighted the low attendance of Member States at joint meetings of the Boards and suggested exploring ways to make them more appealing and substantive, as a means of promoting greater participation.

47. *Field visits.* The group: (a) cautioned against using field visits to stage agency successes, noting that Board members needed to also appreciate the challenges faced by the UN system on the ground, to enable the Boards to have a more holistic appreciation of the work of the UN, and address any underlying or structural deficiencies impeding the effectiveness and efficiency of the work of the UN system on the ground; (b) suggested making field visit programmes Bureau-driven (rather than agency driven), and giving the Bureaux more time to discuss issues addressed in the field visits; (c) proposed limiting visits to one individual Executive Board field visit and one joint field visit per year; and (d) suggested balancing high-level and expert-level participation, as a means of better blending both political and technical aspects of the work.

48. *Joint meeting of the Executive Boards.* The group highlighted the following common issues could be discussed at joint meetings of the Boards going forward: (a) audit; (b) ethics; (c) cost recovery; and (d) topics related to the common chapter in the strategic plans of the agencies. It further suggested having the agencies submit an annual report on the status of implementation of the common chapter at the joint meeting of the Boards. The group felt that while transforming the joint meeting of the Boards into a decision-making body was seen as optimal on a number of issues, it was agreed that this proposal would need to be examined in greater detail, and required wider inclusive and participative discussions on procedures and other aspects, prior to any decision. However, it was felt that, in the meantime, the Boards should be encouraged to have more frequent joint briefings, informal meetings and discussions, all requiring inter-agency and inter-secretariat cooperation.

Group 4 – Moderator: Norway

49. Group 4 concurred with the views expressed by Group 3 and made the following additional comments:

50. *Bureaux.* The group stated that: (a) the Bureaux needed to be more relevant and impactful, with more Bureau-driven initiatives, while the secretariats should not be involved in political and substantive discussions; (b) Member States had a responsibility to represent

their regional groups so Bureaux-level information could be passed on to regional groups to insure greater inclusivity.

51. *Sessions.* The group: (a) recommended that Executive Boards should limit the number and length of official statements by focusing national statements at the annual session (using the WFP Board as a model, in particular its use of roundtables and their physical setup, as a means of facilitating interaction); (b) noting that presentations of country programme documents (CPDs) took too much time and that follow-up should be at national level, the group suggested that CPDs be posted online in advance, and that approvals be made on a no-objection basis; and (c) raised the possibility of having a CPD session on the margins of the second regular session, or perhaps invite agencies and countries to attend a separate special session where CPD would be discussed and approved, which would allow for quality discussions on substantive issues.

52. *Field visits.* The group noted the value and usefulness of field visits, but expressed the view that there were too many and that the Boards should seek ways to make them more effective and relevant. The large delegations could also be intrusive at times, and there was a need to make sure that the visits be undertaken in a context appropriate manner. It also suggested institutionalizing the practice of dividing field visit delegations into subgroups, so that they are in a better position to learn about different aspects of the host country conditions and the support provided by the United Nations.

53. *Joint meeting of the Boards.* The group suggested more joint reporting and substantive discussions, and to give the joint meeting of the Boards legislative authority to adopt decisions on joint processes, joint evaluations, joint audit reports, and joint follow-up to cross-cutting issues, such as sexual exploitation and abuse.

WFP perspective – presented by the President of the WFP Executive Board

54. The WFP Board President appreciated the issuance of the Presidents' non-paper, noting that it had been shared with the governing bodies of the other two Rome-based agencies, FAO and IFAD, which were considering its use as an input to benchmark against their own respective working methods. He highlighted that, in many areas of the working methods, WFP was already advanced in putting them into practice. The WFP Executive Board views the joint meetings of the Boards as an excellent opportunity to discuss common areas of interest among the governing bodies of the United Nations agencies, but these joint meetings should not have decision-making authority; the joint meeting of the Boards should not become another governing body. He underlined that from an institutional perspective, the dual reporting lines to ECOSOC and FAO would require approval of both legislative bodies for any substantive revisions of the rules and regulations governing the WFP Executive Board in the context of giving the JMB decision-making powers.

55. The WFP President also noted that:

- (a) Having more frequent joint board meetings and briefings could be a good idea but that WFP Executive Board members faced difficulties to attend due to geographic distance; therefore, it was important for the WFP Executive Board to receive detailed summaries of those joint meetings;
- (b) WFP would continue to undertake its current agreed practice of one joint field visit and one individual field visit per year; this was, therefore, not an issue for WFP;
- (c) Similarly, the Bureau of the WFP Executive Board already has a handover process in place between the outgoing and incoming Bureaux; therefore, this was also not an issue for WFP;
- (d) Limiting the length of documents presented and limiting the speaking roles of the Principals of the United Nations agencies at the JMB would ensure greater effectiveness and efficiency;
- (e) Sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment could be a good example of a cross-cutting issue to compare and share information in future joint meetings;
- (f) The ideas of anticipation of election of Bureau members and extending their terms of office required further discussions and careful assessment of all expected implications;
- (g) WFP Executive Board members shared the objective of an improved gender and geographic balance, both within the Executive Board and the Bureau, but considered this difficult to achieve.

Conclusion – A converging of views

56. The President of the Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, presiding over the lunchtime session, summarized the areas where there was a clear convergence in the discussions between each of the four working groups, constituting a core of common issues regarding the working methods of the Executive Boards.

57. Convergence of views were noted in the following areas:

- (a) *Bureaux*. Making documentation related to each Board and each Bureau available to a wider readership, as a means of fostering greater transparency regarding the work of the Board;
- (b) *Sessions*. Fostering a greater degree of transparency in Bureau and Board meetings, and identifying new and novel ways for members of regional groups to be briefed on Bureau proceedings;
- (c) *Participation*. Encouraging the participation of non-governmental and civil society organizations and the private sector in future joint board meetings;
- (d) *Field visits*. Limiting the number of field visits: one joint field visit and one individual Board visit; promoting a higher level of participation in field visits; and striking a better balance between high-level and expert-level participation.

(e) *Joint meeting of the Executive Boards.* Utilizing the joint meeting of the Executive Boards as an opportunity to discuss issues of common interest to all the Boards, including, *inter alia*, reports on (i) the status of implementation of the common chapter of the respective strategic plans; (ii) audit, ethics evaluation; (iii) gender strategy; and (iv) sexual exploitation and abuse and on sexual harassment.

58. In closing, the Chair noted that these converging issues could potentially form the basis for a roadmap in taking forward recommendations aimed at improving the working methods of the Executive Boards. A summary of the JMB discussions on Executive Board working methods would be circulated to all the Executive Boards and the respective secretariats, to coordinate further discussions, with a view to further the implementation of the QCPR mandate on the working methods of the Executive Boards. He closed the meeting by thanking delegations for their active participation and rich discussion.

III. AFTERNOON SESSION (topic 3)

Overcoming inequalities among and within countries, including gender inequality, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals – reaching the poorest and most vulnerable first

59. The President of the Executive Board of WFP, chairing the afternoon session, welcomed the other presidents of the Executive Boards, the principals of the six United Nations organizations, the guest speakers, and the members of the Executive Boards to the interactive discussion on opportunities and challenges in addressing inequalities to achieve the Goals and identify critical steps required to tackle them.

60. The Executive Director of UNFPA stressed that inequalities shaped societies and shut people out of opportunities, stopped the exercising of rights, and held back social and economic progress. Despite advances, wealth and income inequalities persisted within and between countries, and global wealth was increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. While the overall share of people living in extreme poverty had fallen, it had not declined in the poorest countries due in large part to population growth, with too many people having not benefitted from global developments. Marginalized groups, especially women and girls, including adolescents, were the hardest hit by inequalities. The ICPD programme of action and the 2030 Agenda dovetailed in their approach to the intersectional, multidimensional nature of inequality, which, in order to be tackled effectively, required the coordinated efforts of the entire United Nations system. It was crucial to learn about the most marginalized and vulnerable and to ensure they were not left behind. Better population data helped to disaggregate need and inequality and provided the public a means to hold leaders accountable. It also meant addressing the various negative (social, cultural, policy and legal) barriers that resulted in entrenchment of inequality and perpetuation of unequal power dynamics.

61. The Executive Director of UN-Women echoed that assessment, noting that inequalities intersected and were pervasive within and between countries, held people back socially, affected communities economically and environmentally, distorted democratic systems, fuelled conflict and created a barrier to realizing human rights. Girls from poorer households were more vulnerable than girls from wealthier households. However, such inequalities were neither inevitable nor irreversible. UN-Women collaborated closely with all stakeholders, including the United Nations development system organizations, to bring about changes in institutions, policies and practices to make a difference. UN-Women had devised a system of metrics to determine the situation of marginalized women, including in refugee populations, to address trauma and shock, provide sexual and reproductive health services and health care, and receive protection support and legal aid. Part of those endeavours included mobilizing men and boys to become active participants in addressing these challenges.

62. The Chief, Population and Development Branch, UNFPA, moderated the interactive discussion with three guest speakers, focusing on the following topics regarding the interaction of different types of inequality: (a) macroeconomic inequalities between countries; (b) discriminatory social norms; and (c) United Nations work in Latin America to address these inequalities. She directed three rounds of questions to the three guest speakers, focusing on the following topics:

(a) How inequalities hamper the achievement of human rights; the role of the United Nations; and the impact on gender inequality;

(b) How addressing discriminatory social norms reduced inequalities; how accountability accelerated the reduction of inequalities and the realization of the 2030 Agenda; and what successful examples went beyond equity and service delivery to combat inequalities;

(c) The main challenges to promoting equality in Latin America; and how the United Nations could change the status quo, including in the light of the middle-income status of many countries in the region.

63. In response to the first round of questions, the Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University and faculty director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership stressed that assessing global macroeconomic policy through a human rights lens demonstrated that instead of being 'left' behind people were being 'pushed' behind. Because financial resources were key to the fulfilment of human rights, it was important to have international coordination around economic policies, an area in which the United Nations needed to play an active role.

64. Political and economic power allowed countries to make global economic decisions without regard for others, which meant power relations played a key role. Using human rights as a filter would bring the latent inequalities of the global economic system into light and make it possible to design a more equitable economic model. Similarly, because macroeconomic policies were male-biased – observable, for example, in how such policies viewed unpaid care traditionally provided by women – these policies perpetuated gender inequality. The focus of Goal 10 to regulate financial institutions gave the United Nations the mandate and a tool to address the regulatory framework for finance and address these root causes of inequality.

65. In response to the second round of questions, the Visiting Professor of Law at Georgetown University Law Center and Senior Advisor on Global Health and Human Rights spoke of how marginalized persons, such as poor women and adolescent girls, suffered disproportionately due to inequalities in health and legal coverage. The conventional approach was to tackle that issue under the Sustainable Development Goals related to sexual and reproductive health and family planning.

66. However, practical experience showed that approach consistently fell short. The first lesson to learn was that there were serious unintended consequences to people's rights when assistance looked solely at service coverage indicators, or tried to not leave the poorest out

by targeting them with services, as opposed to building systems that protected equality and rights. The second was that all individuals harboured within themselves a multitude of personal narratives; these multiple identities needed to be considered when prescribing remedial action. The third was that the Goals focused primarily on ‘survive’, secondly on ‘thrive’, but should instead focus on ‘transforming’ those conditions that systematically produced inequalities.

67. Accountability in such circumstances had to be about building constructive relationships around entitlement for rights holders and obligation for duty bearers. Nevertheless, ensuring accountability through the approach used for the Goals – gauging allocated funding against outputs and outcomes – was difficult. To be useful, accountability had to go beyond to focus on what data was not being gathered and identifying the things could not be quantified, which were important for structural transformation. Remedial actions should take all those aspects into consideration.

68. In response to the third round of questions, the United Nations Resident Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative and UNFPA Resident Representative in Ecuador noted that despite progress Latin America remained the world’s most unequal region, affecting four groups in particular: (a) indigenous peoples; (b) Afro-descendant populations; (c) rural women; and (d) people with disabilities. The first challenge was finding ways to reduce inequality sustainably. The second was that tackling inequalities was a political issue that demanded political will. The third challenge – centred on the region’s economic structures, grounded in extractive industries and the use of low skilled labour – embodied two paradoxes: (a) the resources the industry generated were used to achieve the 2030 Agenda; and (b) indigenous economies were actually models for sustainable development, in opposition to the dominant economic structures.

69. He stressed that the United Nations impact on the region’s development often went unnoticed because it built on a trusted relationship with the Government through the provision of policy advice, with national Governments naturally taking credit for positive results. The United Nations made its most visible contribution through policy interventions, data collection and knowledge generation, and by responding to misperceptions in response to human rights abuses. The United Nations had a responsibility to be a voice for those who were not being heard and to pursue greater inclusivity, including among its own staff.

70. The Presidents of the four Executive Boards, the Principals of the six United Nations organizations and the members of the Executive Boards were actively engaged in discussion throughout the session and provided a number of comments on how the United Nations development system should work jointly to overcome inequalities to achieve the Goals, notably the need to:

- (a) Bridge the gap between countries so that no single country, especially the least development countries, was left behind;

- (b) Pursue partnerships and multidimensional approaches built on disaggregated data and information to target the most marginalized;
- (c) Expand programmes that dealt with destruction of the informal sector, on which many marginalized people depended for the livelihoods;
- (d) Explore public-private partnership to address gender inequality and break down gender-blind structures in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and family planning;
- (e) Use data disaggregation to expose the crisis of asset ownership (whereby a small number of people own most of the world's assets) and establish a more equitable economic system;
- (f) Ensure gender-responsive financing, budgeting and economic policy, and revamp social structures to tackle the issue of women's unpaid work;
- (g) Pursue comprehensive sexuality education to include men and adolescent boys as part of the solution to gender inequality and sexual exploitation and abuse;
- (h) Focus on youth, and early childhood development, especially in Africa, through disaggregated data, technology, and personal narratives to reach the most marginalized;
- (i) Recognize that the consumption patterns of industrialized countries was unsustainable and could not serve as the model for sustainable development.

71. In conclusion, the Deputy Executive Director of WFP noted that the examples given during the session clearly illustrated that the United Nations had its greatest impact when the organizations worked together.

72. The President of the Executive Board of UN-Women thanked delegations and the six United Nations organizations for their participation in the joint meeting of the Boards. Summarizing the main points, she highlighted the need to: (a) address the multidimensional nature of inequalities, which intersected within and between countries; (b) pursue multidimensional solutions to address intersecting inequalities; (c) take a people-centred approach; (d) address root causes of poverty and inequality; (d) engage in strategic partnerships with different stakeholders; (e) ensure accountability among all stakeholders and inclusivity; and (f) pursue greater resource mobilization. She underlined that in the 2030 Agenda Member States had committed to addressing inequalities, which required a coordinated United Nations development system in the field to break down gender-blind structures and policies. United Nations reform would only be meaningful if it made a difference in people's lives, especially the poor and most marginalized.
