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Regional Review of the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review (AMR)

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Charter entrusted the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), one of its six principal organs, with responsibility for coordinating the economic and social-related activities of the five United Nations Regional commissions¹, the 14 UN specialized agencies and the functional commissions. The Council also serves as a major arena for debating global economic and social challenges, and for devising and articulating the international community's – including the UN system – response to them.

The 2005 World Summit reaffirmed the need to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of the work of ECOSOC in view of the many challenges – new and old - facing the international community. In particular, along with calling for the strengthening of ECOSOC's current functions, paragraphs 155 and 156 of the World Summit Outcome Document urged Member States to assign the Council two new functions. The first is to convene an Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) to review progress in the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs), including the MDGs, and thus to support national and international efforts to realize these goals. The second is to organize a biennial Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) to review thoroughly the status and developments in international development cooperation, namely: strategies, policies and financing, encourage greater coherence among the development activities of different development partners, and promote closer linkages between the normative and operational work of the United Nations. The resolutions also tasked ECOSOC to urge UN Regional Commissions to contribute, within their mandates, to these two events.

Subsequently, the General Assembly, in resolution 61/16, endorsed these two proposals, thus setting the stage for the establishment of the two platforms: the AMR and the DCF. As a complement to the General Assembly resolution, ECOSOC adopted decision E/2006/274, which outlines its role in the process.

ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW (AMR)

Resolution 61/16 of the General Assembly stipulates that the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) should be convened during ECOSOC high-level segment meeting – usually in July – and focus on progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields, including the MDGs and other IADGs. The AMR consists of three major events: a global review of the United Nations development agenda; a thematic review; and a series of voluntary national presentations by countries on their national development strategies.

Voluntary national presentations provide an opportunity for countries to share their experiences in implementing policies geared towards achieving international agreed development goals (IADGs), including MDGs. More specifically, countries report on policies, initiatives, successes, which need to be sustained and expanded or/and could be emulated by other countries and regions. In addition, the national presentations also provide a platform to raise concerns and to highlight challenges that countries are facing in their efforts to achieve the MDGs and more broadly the IADGs.

¹ The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic and Social Commission for South West Asia (ESCWA), and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Resolution 61/16 also provides strategic guidance on the nature and scope of the involvement of regional commissions in the preparation of the AMR. To this effect, the General Assembly called on ECOSOC to urge the UN regional commissions to provide, within their mandates, a support to the process of assessing the progress achieved in the implementation and to the follow up to the outcomes of the UN conferences and summits in the economic and social and related areas. The same resolution urged Regional Commissions to contribute to the discussions in compliance with the rules of procedure of the Council.

2007 Annual Ministerial Review

The first AMR was convened from 3-4 July 2007 in Geneva within the context of a newly strengthened Economic and Social Council. The theme of the review was “Strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development”. Six countries² among which three African countries, namely Cape Verde, Ethiopia and Ghana, voluntarily presented their national development programmes for review. Two of the three countries, Ethiopia and Ghana, were supported by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) both during the preparatory activities leading to the national reports and during the voluntary presentations made at the ECOSOC high-level segment. ECA support included analytical work, ensuring consistency of the national reports with the approved format for the AMR. ECA shared its innovative analytical instrument, the MDG Mapper, to assist the two countries assess progress towards the MDGs at the sub-national level, thus capturing within country geographical imbalances in progress towards the MDGs. Finally, ECA also assisted the countries during their presentations to the AMR.

Besides supporting the national presentations, ECA also participated actively in the AMR, especially the Innovation Fair where the MDG-Mapper and the Enhanced Knowledge Sharing Network of the African Learning Group on Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millennium Development Goals (PRS/MDGs-LG) were displayed. The Commission also participated in the other activities of the High Level Segment, including making presentations at the Side event of the Regional Commissions on the MDG Road Map and a discussion on development cooperation.

The national voluntary presentations were complemented by two high-level roundtables, which took place on 4 July 2007. The first roundtable dealt with “Ending the cycle of food crises: cultivating a homegrown Green Revolution in Africa”, while the second focused on “Poverty Eradication-making it happen”. UNECA was deeply involved in those two events, particularly in the first roundtable, in which the Executive Secretary of ECA was one of the panellists.

2008 Annual Ministerial Review

The preparatory activities to the 2008 AMR are already underway. The theme of the 2008 review is “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development”. Eight countries³, including one African country, which is the United Republic of Tanzania, have volunteered for the national reviews. Consistent with the format adopted last year, the 2008 AMR will take the form of a two-day ministerial-level meeting held during the ECOSOC high-level segment, scheduled for July 2008. The review will include three main events. First is the

² Bangladesh, Barbados, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Ethiopia and Ghana.

³ Belgium, Chile, Finland, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the United Kingdom, and the United Republic of Tanzania.

global review of the United Nations Development Agenda (UNDA), with focus on the progress made in the implementation of the agenda. The second event involves a *thematic review* of the UNDA's subset that is identified and agreed upon by the Council. The third event is the national voluntary presentations. Both the structure of the presentations and the preparatory process leading up to the national reports, which serve as basis for the presentations, remain roughly the same as those of last year.

As underlined in the Concept Note of the 2008 AMR, the presentations generally cover five board themes:

(a) Key features of the national development strategy and its relationship with the IADGs, including the MDGs;

(b) Progress made in the implementation of the national development strategy, including analyses of policies employed;

(c) Key strategic successes, challenges and lessons-learned from the scale-up of initiatives to implement the national development strategy, including IADGs/MDGs, and projects and programmes which have not only been successful in the country but have been or could be replicated elsewhere;

(d) Assessment of the financing needed to achieve the internationally agreed development goals at the county-level, and covering funding gaps through increased domestic resource mobilization; and

(e) Support of the international community for the national development strategy, improving aid effectiveness, and predictability of other types of support to country's effort.

The preparatory process leading to the 2008 review involves many stages, as was the case during the 2007 review. It starts with a global *AMR preparatory event*, which is scheduled in New York in March. Prior to this event, an AMR e-discussion was launched, and its rationale is to get the views of experts, practitioners and policy-makers from various regions on specific areas of the 2008 AMR theme. The online discussion is organized into two parts between 4 February and 14 March 2008. Countries that volunteered for the reviews are expected to convene *national consultative meetings* with the main domestic actors, including the private sector and the civil society, on the implementation of their national development strategies. Such meetings are scheduled between March and May. In addition to the national consultative meetings, three regional *consultations* are to be organized between February and April. Finally, concomitantly to the AMR in July, an *Innovation Fair* displaying innovative programmes and projects will take place as well. The aim of this fair is to encourage the exchange of practical and successful initiatives.

THE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FORUM (DCF)

The Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) is the second platform established within the context of the newly reformed ECOSOC. It was mandated by the 2005 World Summit as a tool for firming up global dialogue on development cooperation issues and was fully operationalized by General Assembly resolution 61/6.

More precisely, conceived as one the events of the ECOSOC high-level segment, the DCF is tasked with:

(a) Assessing international development cooperation, and providing policy guidance and recommendations to promote more effective international development cooperation;

(b) Identifying shortcomings and constraints so as to suggest recommendations on practical measures and policy options to strengthen coherence and to promote development cooperation for the realization of the IADGs, including the MDGs;

(c) Enhancing the linkages between the normative and the operational work of the United Nations; and

(d) Providing an inclusive platform, open to all stakeholders, including UN organizations, international financial and trade institutions, regional organizations, civil society and private sector representatives.

The DCF is to be held biennially, starting in 2008. The Forum was launched in Geneva in July 2007, and that event was followed by high-level symposium, which was convened in Cairo from 19-20 January 2008.

Official Launch of the DCF

The DCF was officially launched during the 2007 ECOSOC high-level segment. UNECA was involved in the launch, which included a plenary session followed by two roundtables. The first roundtable focused on “promoting greater coherence among development activities of different development partners: the role of national aid coordination and management”, and the second on “Review of trends in international development cooperation: South-South and triangular cooperation”.

The Executive Secretary of UNECA moderated the first roundtable. Discussions centred on how a country-driven development process may strengthen the coherence of development activities at the country level. It was largely agreed that national ownership and government ownership are essential to securing a sustained development process and that success in this area is only possible if the structure of aid is aligned to in a manner that is consistent with the development priorities of recipient countries and if aid delivery mechanisms are simplified. Although parliamentary oversight and public perception in donor countries are respected as effective tools to securing domestic accountability, it was nonetheless recognised that these also pose some challenges to improving the effectiveness of aid.

Another shared concern was the challenge posed by the growing number of donors, especially the vertical funds. There was consensus that, in addition to a more harmonised approach by donors at the country level, donors should tap into existing development frameworks and national capacities. It was noted that there is a potential conflict between the emphasis on short-term results and the imperative of long-term sustainability of national capacities. Promoting decentralization was suggested as an appropriate mechanism to build capacities at lower levels which could ensure a lower-cost delivery of services close to the preferences of the users.

DCF High-Level Symposium

In preparation to the DCF, scheduled for July 2008, and as a follow up to the launch of the Forum, which took place in July 2007, a high-level symposium was convened in Cairo from 19-20 January 2008. The aim of the high-level symposium was to ensure an effective consultative process leading to the first DCF. The deliberations of the symposium served as rigorous substantive and technical inputs to the DCF, and more particularly the report of the meeting will be used as a background document for the Southern Leaders' Roundtable that is planned during the first DCF. The Cairo meeting mainly discussed how to promote results-oriented development cooperation that is consistent with national priorities.

Organized in cooperation with the government of Egypt, the symposium was attended by the Deputy Secretary-General. The Executive Secretary of ECA also attended the meeting and moderated the session on "Results-oriented cooperation-Experiences with Conditionality". In addition, as a member of the Advisory Group⁴ to the DCF, he participated in the Group meeting.

Several key points were made during the session on "Results-oriented cooperation". Many speakers admitted the complexity of aid conditionality and called for further investigation of its potential effects, including pitfalls. Participants expressed the hope that the newly established DCF will contribute to bring up these pitfalls and to work out appropriate solutions so as to improve the effectiveness of aid.

The productive discussions during the session demonstrated the potential of the Development Cooperation Forum in terms of bringing about new ideas and building consensus around what need to be done to improve the effectiveness of global partnerships.

The DCF Advisory Group meeting focused on three questions⁵:

(a) How can the DCF inform policy-making in the key inter-governmental process such as Doha Review Conference on Financing for Development and the Accra meeting on aid effectiveness most effectively?

(b) What substantive focus of the 2008 DCF would generate the greatest interest and participation from all stakeholders concerned? and

(c) What should be the strategy for securing high-level participation in July 2008?

Some recommendations on the meeting include: intensification of global partnerships in an era marked by rising oil and food prices; and an enhanced role for UN Regional Commissions and regional institutions in the DCF process. It was also suggested that the DCF should adopt a format that is conducive to an exchange of ideas rather than favoring country-report presentations.

⁴The role of the Advisory Group is to encourage active involvement of influential stakeholders, experts, think tanks and networks in different regions in the preparations for the DCF. Several African high-level officials are members of the Advisory Group as well.

⁵Mission Report -Cairo High-Level Symposium "Trends in development cooperation-South-South and triangular cooperation and Aid effectiveness". 19-20 January 2008

WAY FORWARD

The newly enhanced ECOSOC is equipped with two new functions. The Council is mandated to convene a biennial high-level Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) and hold Annual Ministerial Review (AMR). Given the broader membership of the Council, such two functions provide an appropriate platform for African countries to share experiences in the implementation of their national development strategies, raise concerns about existing mechanisms underlying global partnerships for development, thus contributing to the effective implementation of the region development agenda.

Reaping the potential benefits of these two new instruments would require a stronger involvement of African countries. In this regard, bold strategies and measures are needed to ensure a more visible and active presence in these two fora. Equally important, a clear articulation of the region's position on key issues, be they emerging or current, will be essential if the African voice is to be heard.

ECA will scale up its support to effective African participation in the AMR and the DCF process by drawing from its significant in-house expertise. In particular the ECA African Learning Group on PRS and MDGs (PRS/MDGs-LG), the MDG-Mapper, and the ongoing work on mutual accountability with the OECD/DAC will be expanded to respond to the imperative of effective African participation at these fora.