



World Food Programme
Programme Alimentaire Mondial
Programa Mundial de Alimentos
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

Executive Board
Second regular session
Rome, 13–16 November 2023

Distribution: General

Agenda item 10

Date: 4 October 2023

WFP/EB.2/2023/10-C

Original: English

Other business

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Report of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP

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Report of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)/the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

2 June 2023

1. The President of the Executive Board of UNICEF welcomed the joint meeting of the Boards (JMB) and provided introductory remarks around the topic for discussion: “The importance of joint development solutions and quality financing in the face of multiple crises”. She noted that, while the global health emergency related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) had ended, the pandemic had caused disruptions and exacerbated vulnerabilities, particularly among the poorest populations. These challenges were compounded by ongoing crises, including the climate, food and nutrition crises, and had contributed to a reversal in the progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Noting that the gap on development financing has increased, she underscored that the JMB provided an opportunity to explore solutions to set the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development back on track, and to identify ways to secure quality financing, maximize resources to ensure that the United Nations development system delivers as one, and encourage Member States to abide by their commitments to the Funding Compact, including to finance climate adaptation.
2. In his introductory remarks, the President of the Executive Board of UN-Women noted that conflicts continued to emerge and that climate-related shocks were more intense and frequent. He highlighted the importance of contributing to the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus, particularly to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable populations while addressing the root causes of vulnerability, including gender inequality and discrimination, poverty and a lack of accountability systems. He underlined that women and girls were disproportionately affected by emergencies and suffered from unequal economic participation and sexual and gender-based violence. Implementing a nexus approach presented a substantial opportunity to enhance gender justice and ensure that women’s rights were integral to immediate responses and long-term outcomes. The President underscored that this would require building consensus and new partnerships, using a systems-based approach and fostering open dialogue and co-creation. He noted that investment was needed to develop joint tools and analysis and to ensure that the views of people, including women and girls affected by crisis, were integrated at every step. He concluded by underlining the importance of working together and using the nexus approach to achieve effective and sustainable impact.
3. Delivering opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General commended the active engagement of governing bodies to galvanize action on joint development solutions and stable quality finance. She stressed that implementing the integrated agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals required coordination and capacities, including surge capacities, from United Nations entities. She highlighted that governing bodies played essential roles in ensuring a flexible United Nations footprint with the right skillset to respond to countries’ evolving needs. She noted that this required more conducive policies and tools for integrated policy advice; a sharper focus to accelerate transitions in key areas; and agencies pooling their resources together. She stressed the importance of supporting the development and implementation of good-quality and evidence-based United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) in countries, in alignment with national priorities. Furthermore, she underscored the convening role of the United Nations development system in supporting acceleration towards the Sustainable Development Goals and their financing, particularly through Integrated National

Financing Frameworks (INFFs). She emphasized the criticality of increasing core funding to the United Nations development system to enable integrated programming, including through the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, which had contributed to joint programmes that supported the implementation of INFFs, mobilized additional resources and seed funding, increased access to social services and addressed cross-border development issues such as climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction. She noted that the United Nations development system reform check list had been shared with all governing bodies as they consider the transformations needed in each United Nations entity. She concluded by expressing confidence that working together would lead to finding solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

4. Echoing the importance of coordination and joint solutions, the President of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS introduced the topic, underscoring that taking stock of the progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals allowed to openly discuss existing challenges. He said that acceleration towards the Goals by 2030 required more joint solutions. He noted that many countries were still dealing with the financial and development impacts of the pandemic, while simultaneously being affected by extreme weather patterns, crises and geopolitical confrontations that impact trade systems. He said that many countries had adopted stimulus packages to respond to crises at a time when economic growth challenges were limiting their abilities to generate revenue. This had led them to turn to solutions in the public debt market that involved high interest rates, further affecting their financial abilities to ensure basic social services. He stressed that concerted and integrated solutions by United Nations entities were crucial to achieving development goals, and that the respective Executive Boards should ensure that the entities were fit for purpose and had the required systems and capacities to design and implement joint solutions. He concluded by urging Member States to determine what support they could provide to agencies to ensure that they were ready to implement joint solutions, including through innovation and technology.
5. The Director of Social Policy and Social Protection at UNICEF moderated a panel discussion on joint development solutions and quality financing, including in humanitarian contexts. The Administrator of UNDP discussed the role of finance in poly-crisis contexts, noting that the United Nations was focusing on supporting countries in coping with shocks while assisting them in developing strategies to manage uncertainties. He noted that INFFs enabled the United Nations to support countries in quickly responding to short-term shocks while investing in sustainable development: 17 United Nations agencies had worked together and with other organizations and institutions, including under the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, to support 86 countries, demonstrating the capacity to develop joint responses and to mobilize resources and competencies across the system. The Administrator highlighted that the INFF Facility was developed to provide capacities to implement country-led INFFs. He stressed the importance of engaging with the private sector to integrate considerations on inequality and inequality-related financial disclosures, and of working together to inform transition finance discussions. He concluded by saying that joint solutions must always start from a country's request.
6. The Executive Director of UN-Women underscored the importance of advancing gender equality as a prerequisite and a catalyst to accelerating progress towards all Sustainable Development goals. She said that gender equality must be put at the heart of joint solutions and that these solutions must be centred on national priorities. She stressed the need for more joint programmes that were ambitious, had clear and measurable goals, and convened key stakeholders working in harmony to generate impact. An example of such efforts was the work supported by UN-Women and ILO on promoting decent employment for women, particularly in the care economy. She highlighted that approximately one third of the programming expenditure at UN-Women was dedicated to joint programmes. She also noted that real resources must back up commitments to advance gender equality and that gender markers, bonds and gender-responsive budgeting tools were important and had to be strengthened. She said that 28 out of 68 entities within the United Nations system used gender-responsive financial tracking and she encouraged others to join.

7. Noting that 92 percent of Sustainable Development Goal targets depended on infrastructure, the Executive Director of UNOPS spoke of the importance of joint action to support infrastructure and public procurement to respond to global compounding crises. Highlighting the multidimensional aspect of crises, he stressed the need for systems thinking and policy coherence to address gaps in existing capacities for implementation. He said that procurement, which can represent up to 22 percent of a country's gross domestic product, is a powerful force for change, particularly with regard to jobs, gender equality and climate action. He noted that UNOPS supported projects and programmes of other agencies and Governments, focusing on expanding capacities for implementation, aligning priorities and influencing the demand side of financing.
8. Against a backdrop of rising needs and increasingly protracted and complex crises, the Executive Director of WFP spoke of the challenge of reaching a growing number of hungry people (up to 828 million people globally) while financing had been declining. She noted three solutions in response to this dual challenge: (a) strengthening collaboration across the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus, capitalizing on comparative advantages to build resilience among Governments and societies to withstand the impacts of food security shocks and to increase investments in strengthening anticipatory action, preparedness and early warning systems; (b) further mobilizing every potential source of financing, increasing flexible and predictable multi-year financing and expanding engagement with financial institutions and the private sector; and (c) supporting national Government-led efforts to end humanitarian crises and to promote sustainable development. She also urged Member States to strengthen their financial commitments to help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through contributions to their own national development budgets or to official development assistance.
9. Speaking about the impact of crises on the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights, the Deputy Executive Director (Programme) of UNFPA underscored that overall progress on reducing maternal mortality had stagnated. She noted that the situation was related to unavailable and poor-quality health-care services and was exacerbated by humanitarian situations. She said that investing in sexual and reproductive health was essential for sustainable development and that joint solutions were key, because improving health outcomes depended on other factors such as social protection, road infrastructure, education and gender equality. Noting that investing in sexual and reproductive health and rights saved lives and generated economic gains, she urged countries to mobilize domestic resources, invest in generating evidence and data, and integrate sexual and reproductive health into development frameworks and national strategies to prevent maternal mortality and promote social norms that enable women and girls to develop to their full potential.
10. The Deputy Executive Director a.i. (Partnerships) of UNICEF highlighted the importance of social protection as a means of lifting the most vulnerable populations out of poverty. She underscored that this was particularly needed given the unprecedented increase in child poverty and multidimensional poverty, including in low-, middle- and high-income countries. She noted that, in many countries, revenues had decreased during the pandemic and governmental spending on social services was often inadequate, inequitable and ineffective. She urged Governments and donors to invest in social protection and in social services that were resilient to climate change and to other shocks. She said that the international community, including the United Nations, international financial institutions (IFIs), the private sector and development partners, had an essential role to play in improving access to financing in low-income and fragile contexts, and that this would allow countries to increase spending on social services. She noted that collaborative efforts of the INFF Facility could be leveraged to help to finance human capital development and green transformation, and she urged to rally under the Global Accelerator Initiative. She concluded by saying that improving the lives of children was transforming the planet's future.
11. The moderator noted that the panel discussion had allowed to showcase the breadth of United Nations collaboration while acknowledging that there was still much work to be done to scale up innovative solutions and quality financing. She highlighted the key elements that had been discussed by the panel of speakers. She emphasized the importance of strengthening social spending and social protection and of focusing on the most vulnerable populations, including children living in poverty. She underscored the need to align different strands of financing,

- including the financing of development, humanitarian and climate action, to support integrated solutions while upholding national leadership, and she emphasized the key role of INFFs in supporting this alignment. She noted the potential of the United Nations to support comprehensive approaches that engage the Governments, the public sector, the private sector, civil society, community workers and society. Finally, she stressed the importance of investing in preparedness, working across the nexus, and of strengthening implementation capacities at country level to effectively translate policies into actions that lead to real impact at the local and community levels.
12. The Senior Managing Director at the World Bank noted the need for strengthening partnerships and joint efforts to address multiple and overlapping crises and to ensure long-term development. He said that the World Bank had initiated an evolution road map to revamp its operations model and it was seeking to optimize financing for developing countries and to become more effective in its partnership with the United Nations, countries and other entities to increase the impact of available resources. He noted positive examples of collaboration between the Bank and United Nations entities in the field and globally, including to address food security, education, safety nets, gender equality and the pandemic response. He stressed the importance of collaboration to build long-term resilience. He concluded by stating that more could be done, including to increase joint advocacy for development, expand progress to reach vulnerable populations and strengthen complementarity across organizations to achieve long-term development.
 13. As part of a series of statements representing voices from the field, the First Undersecretary at the Ministry of Finance and Planning of South Sudan thanked the United Nations country team for supporting humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. He said that joint development solutions and quality financing were important, especially given that the Government's ability to deliver on development objectives had been affected by multiple crises. He said that the United Nations provided support through the implementation of the UNSDCF, which was aligned with and contributed to national objectives, and through other joint financing and peacebuilding initiatives, which had demonstrated positive results. He spoke about the implementation of joint programmes that brought coordinated and coherent responses to challenges, including in the areas of health, population estimations, education, gender-based violence, food security and climate change. He said that a joint financing strategy was also being developed. He called on the United Nations and development partners to provide unearmarked long-term funding to enable responses and to strengthen systems, and reiterated the Government's commitment to strengthen partnerships to deliver on the development objectives.
 14. The United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth noted that the just transition agenda was a key priority for young people around the world and that the fear or risk of unemployment was one of their greatest concerns. She highlighted that just transitions could lead to the creation of an additional 8.4 million jobs for young people by 2030 through the implementation of "green" and "blue" economic policy measures. She said that young people had called for the adoption of ethical and rights-respecting technologies that integrate an environmental perspective, and for the creation of social support systems to promote "green" jobs. A key concern for young people was to ensure that just transitions do not harm the most vulnerable communities, particularly young people in developing countries. She emphasized the importance of supporting, investing and scaling up youth-led actions and initiatives towards just transitions. She concluded by highlighting joint inter-agency initiatives and partnerships, including the Green Jobs for Youth Pact, and called on Member States to further support the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy.
 15. Noting that excluded communities suffer disproportionately during crises, the Executive Director of the International Budget Partnership underscored that tracking budgets, enhancing their transparency and implementation credibility, was a powerful tool to convene actors around solutions and to ensure that excluded communities' needs are met. She noted that diverse coalitions that bring together non-traditional actors with financial institutions, the United Nations and policy makers can generate innovative change. Lastly, she stressed the importance of changing the narrative about the role of civil society and enabling its active participation,

including in generating data, and its prominent role in designing programmes of the United Nations and financial institutions.

16. The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Türkiye said that United Nations reforms had led to achievements in strengthening joint work, particularly under the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund. He urged Executive Boards to call on their agencies to further enhance work on joint programmes. He noted that some challenges that hampered joint work were beyond the control of United Nations entities: this included donors having different funding envelopes and procedures for humanitarian versus development work, which undermined the capacity to work effectively across the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus. He also spoke of the need to expand deliberate collaboration and engagement with the private sector, guided by national priorities, given that it was a major source of funding, employment and potential green growth.
17. During an interactive discussion between Member States and the principals of the United Nations entities, delegations raised the following points:
 - There is a need for: (a) a stronger focus on effective delivery at the country level, particularly in countries affected by crises; (b) excellent leadership of United Nations efforts by resident coordinators and agency representatives; and (c) a renewed commitment to cost-saving measures, avoiding competition. A delegation noted that national Governments must be the drivers of change and were responsible for their citizens' wellbeing, ensuring inclusive and transparent political institutions and economic development. The delegation pleaded with the United Nations to continue playing a key role in pushing the normative agenda to protect human rights, strengthen governance and promote sincere development efforts.
 - While United Nations agencies had made positive contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, efforts had to be strengthened to improve the living conditions of people, using a long-term development approach. A delegation called for adequate, predictable and stable financing for agencies, and for greater commitment by developed countries to assist developing countries, including middle-income countries, particularly in the transfer of technology and in infrastructure development. They stressed that the work of the United Nations must be aligned with national policies and guidelines and avoid fragmentation and overlap between agencies.
 - As countries struggled to address the impacts of interlinked crises and shocks that tested their resilience, global cooperation had to be scaled up to support social safety net programmes, revisit the global economic order and mobilize and provide the scale of finance needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Noting that poor countries with low credit ratings were unable to access private funds at low cost, a delegation stressed the importance of delivering on commitments regarding official development assistance and climate funding, while also enabling financing on a concessional basis and ensuring access by developing countries to funds, especially during emergencies. They underscored that all lending instruments should include disaster clauses and that debt relief should be considered rather than debt restructuring.
 - Institutions needed to be structured in a way that enables tangible solutions to meet existing challenges, reconciling human rights and development through creativity and innovation to tackle vulnerabilities, particularly in the face of multiple crises. A delegation underscored the importance of debt swaps for climate action and the proper allocation of available resources to support initiatives that ensure human rights to those who are left behind. They stressed that solutions must be informed by the views of communities who are most affected by the challenges.
 - To strengthen access to financing and more inclusive development cooperation, spending patterns must change and investments must be channelled to reach the most vulnerable populations. A delegation emphasized the importance of investing in risk-informed social protection systems to tackle multidimensional poverty and of investing in women and girls and in just transitions. They also urged the United Nations to act as one to maximize impacts,

but cautioned that financing deficit represented a significant risk to the implementation of priorities. In response, it was noted that innovation can help to reduce costs.

- As progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals lagged behind, there was hope that the Sustainable Development Goals Summit would inject some new impetus to accelerate progress. A delegation said that development agencies should take measures to improve efficiency, particularly in: (1) fostering conditions to enable development and inclusion, coordinating efforts to focus on developing countries; (2) considering the views of countries when working on capacity development; (3) promoting the reform of the global financial governance to ensure that it better reflects the demands of developing countries and that developed countries meet their development and climate financing commitments; and (4) strengthening partnerships to support initiatives and actions led by Member States, including through strengthening support to South–South and triangular cooperation.
 - The focus should be on implementation, especially of the road maps towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and particularly to enhance development financing and strengthen partnerships. A delegation expressed support for the reform of the IFIs and the Stimulus Package proposed by the Secretary-General. They noted that all actions taken by the United Nations should be in line with a country’s UNSDCF. They said that regional cooperation should be further harnessed and they enquired whether the newly created Executive Board of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme would be invited to participation in future JMBs.
 - Several delegations mentioned that unearmarked and flexible resources were important to help the United Nations to support countries to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. A delegation called on Member States to commit to the Funding Compact and stressed the need to improve feasibility and demonstrate results with core funding, while expanding the donor base, identifying new sources of financing and continuing innovative cooperation, including with non-traditional partners.
 - United Nations entities must better incorporate gender equality considerations in their work, strengthen synergies to protect the rights of women and girls, and promote the empowerment of women to enable their full, equal and meaningful participation in political, economic, social and cultural life. A delegation stressed the need for a greater allocation of predictable financial resources to promote gender equality, saying that gender equality, and particularly as it relates to health, was a cross-cutting priority that contributed to building long-term resilience.
 - Promoting the implementation of human-centred and comprehensive strategies is key. A delegation said that the actions of the United Nations development system were pivotal to addressing the impact of interrelated crises. They appealed for greater capacity building to promote the mobilization of domestic resources and for the strengthening of mechanisms to promote transparency and combat corruption. They sought greater details on the strategies that were planned to implement initiatives with resources from the Stimulus Package and on the implementation and coordination of INFFs.
 - Resilience building permeated the mandate of various United Nations entities, as it was essential to ensure the effectiveness and continuity of results in development and humanitarian settings. A delegation noted that the promotion of resilience in an integrated manner had been hampered by the segmentation of resources between these two areas. Taking the example of financing resilience efforts within the WFP, they stressed the need for greater financing of resilience-building programmes for the medium and long term.
18. In response, the Administrator of UNDP underscored that, while United Nations agencies support countries in implementing global priorities, the departing point for agencies’ work had to be the countries themselves and their priorities. He believed that the United Nations could not ignore human rights violations but nor could it act as a principal lecture podium. He said that the Resident Coordinator system had become more independent and empowered. He stressed that coordination, particularly with the IFIs and among United Nations entities, happened through

several different channels. He encouraged delegations to assess whether inefficiencies within the United Nations, while existent, were any greater than those that may exist within each government. The Executive Director of UN-Women underscored the need to find a balance between what was needed and what could be achieved. She noted that UN-Women supported initiatives that linked women's empowerment, climate action and technology. Highlighting that the normative agenda was key for UN-Women, she stressed the importance of investing in women and girls, advocating for them to remain at the centre of Sustainable Development Goals, and strengthening core funding to allow agile and effective action. She also reiterated the importance of partnerships to achieve results. The Executive Director of UNOPS noted that the results framework of UNOPS had been expanded to ensure greater accountability towards the Sustainable Development Goals. He reiterated the commitment of UNOPS to work across the nexus and to contribute to coordinated efforts and to the United Nations Common Country Analysis, particularly regarding infrastructure and procurement. He noted that the energy sector was a concrete example of an area where delivering as one will be crucial. The Assistant Executive Director of WFP underscored that, while crisis response is crucial, response efforts alone were not enough and that United Nations entities must work together to anticipate crises and reduce needs. She emphasized the importance of investing in nutrition, supporting national safety nets – including through school meal programmes – strengthening social protection and building resilience to recurring shocks. She also noted that innovation was key to increasing cost-effectiveness and she endorsed calls from Member States on debt relief, the mobilization of domestic resources and strengthened partnerships. The Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA added that capacity building was key, particularly to reach those most left behind. She underscored the importance of working jointly to build on and learn from other entities' innovations and she underlined the importance of South–South and triangular cooperation. The Deputy Executive Director a.i. (Partnerships) of UNICEF underscored the importance of teamwork, collaboration and perseverance, particularly to strengthen effective governance, transparency and justice, with the normative agenda at its centre. Noting that debt servicing can at times amount to more than countries' combined investments in education, health and social protection, she stated that UNICEF and other United Nations agencies do not encourage Governments to reach unsustainable levels of debt by working with IFIs, but rather help them, if requested, to mobilize, sequence and make more effective use of a wide variety of financing sources. She said that innovative finance was another option for accessing financing, and that several mechanisms exist to facilitate this.

19. The President of the Executive Board of WFP concluded the meeting by noting the importance of collaboration for joint development solutions and for quality financing in the face of poly-crises. He underlined some of the key solutions that had been discussed during the JMB, including the need for strengthened social protection, integrated programming across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and increased system preparedness and readiness to respond to emergencies. He noted that implementing these solutions would require increasing public quality financing and unlocking new sources of financing, including innovative finance. It would also require strengthening broad-based collaboration, including between United Nations entities, Governments, the private sector, civil society and international development partners, to eliminate siloed approaches and duplications and to help countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. He emphasized that national Governments were leading efforts to achieve these goals and that the United Nations system must continue to strengthen its support to national objectives, including by investing in local solutions and strengthening national capacities. He concluded by underscoring the need to put the discussed ideas into action and to pool solutions and efforts.