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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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### **Focal point:**

Mr P. Ward  
Secretary to the Executive Board  
Executive Board Secretariat Division  
email: [philip.ward@wfp.org](mailto:philip.ward@wfp.org)

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## **Report of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP (3 June 2022)**

### **An integrated approach towards sustainable investment in people and planet: leaving no one behind as a principle for climate action to ensure a transformative path for the most vulnerable**

1. The President of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS opened the joint meeting welcoming all participants of the Executive Boards of UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP, as well as the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. She stressed that the joint meeting was timely for the challenges facing the world were complex, urgent and interlinked and demanded an integrated approach toward sustainable investments for people and planet that superseded individual agency mandates and the capabilities of any single Government. She drew attention to how the interconnected triple Cs – COVID-19, conflict and climate change – were impeding progress toward achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, as evidenced in growing inequality, poverty, a global food security crisis, unprecedented biodiversity loss, energy insecurity, and large numbers of refugees and internally displaced. Systemic solutions and transformative results were needed to tackle the multidimensional vulnerabilities and risks faced by the most marginalized and furthest left behind, building on each organization's comparative advantages and tight interagency collaboration at all levels and in all areas. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, she stressed, was a shared responsibility. Working jointly and coherently among the Executive Boards was now more than ever a matter of urgent necessity to make the United Nations development system, through continued reform, fit for purpose to deliver where it mattered most – on the ground, at country-level, in communities and in people's lives across the globe.

2. In her opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General said the joint meeting of the Executive Boards was an increasingly important platform to address issues that required coherent action across the United Nations development system. She drew attention to the galvanizing force of key transitions to green economies, in parallel with human capital investments, for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda at the country level to leave no one behind. The United Nations development system possessed unparalleled capacities – working coherently – to channel its collective assets and comparative advantages to rally partners and drive the key transitions at scale and deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. She commended the Boards for working to make the United Nations development system fit for purpose to meet the challenges and called on them to step up their pace on remaining reform elements and deepen acceleration of the 2030 Agenda – taking into account the setbacks due to COVID-19, conflict and climate change. She highlighted three areas where the guidance of the Boards was crucial: (a) orienting the organizations on how to support countries' self-defined priorities to achieve the Goals and accelerate climate action; (b) ensuring the organizations' strategic documents and business models make full use of reform efforts to support the Goals, especially climate action; and (c) ensuring the organizations were adequately supported financially through sustainable, predictable, flexible funding and within the Boards to progressively shift to more integrated policy advice and options for system-wide collaboration. She expressed deep concern at recent cuts in funding from Member States. She called for tailored discussions by the Boards as part of the structured funding dialogues, including on integrated programming and pooled funding arrangements, and for their close engagement in upcoming efforts to develop a checklist on implementing the reform agenda and deliver on its promise.

### **Panel discussion: integrated approach towards sustainable investment in people and planet**

3. The Executive Director, UN-Women, while reinforcing the need for collective action, underscored the urgent need for more gender-responsive and child-sensitive strategies to achieve the 2030 Agenda and ensure sustainable investments in people and planet. Women and girls, and children, especially in conflict and humanitarian settings and in rural areas, those belonging to minority or indigenous groups, and migrants and refugees, were disproportionately affected. Their unequal access to justice, resources and opportunities often pushed women and girls to the margins. To reverse that situation, women and girls needed an equal voice in policymaking. To build resilience against crises, sustainable investments were needed to prepare for future shocks and to develop more sustainable responses. Closing the inequality and fragility gaps, which COVID-19, conflict and climate have exacerbated, were key to building resilience and delivering on the 2030 Agenda. Pursuing transformative solutions and pragmatic ideas, the United Nations system had to leverage the potential of multilateralism and international cooperation to support national efforts tailored to national priorities, building and strengthening its partnerships across the humanitarian-development-peace continuum.

4. The moderator of the session addressed the following questions to the heads of the six United Nations organizations whose Boards were represented at the joint meeting.

*Question 1: How does climate action contribute to an inclusive, green recovery, including a just transition?*

5. The Administrator, UNDP, stressed that the combined socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, climate change and conflict, especially on the most vulnerable in least developed countries and small island developing States, were provoking an unprecedented food, energy and financial crisis across the globe. The active and collective engagement of the United Nations was needed more than ever to bolster integrated solutions and partnerships, guided by the One-UN principles embodied in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system 2020 (General Assembly resolution 75/233). Committed to that effort, UNDP was working to accelerate development solutions to lift millions out of multidimensional poverty, provide access to clean, affordable energy, and build resilience to climate change. Together with partners, UNDP was focused on three broad areas: (a) integrating social protection measures and policies into countries' socioeconomic fabric; (b) supporting countries through the UNDP Climate Promise to enhance and implement nationally determined contributions and raise adaptation ambitions through a gender-responsive lens; and (c) strengthening policy incentives and deploying innovative financial instruments to catalyse public-private finance at scale aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals. Such collective efforts were designed to propel a historic and just transformation towards a more inclusive, green economy grounded in smart climate-responsive strategies for equitable, inclusive development.

*Question 2: Building on the leaving-no-one-behind principle, how is UNICEF working with other organizations to ensure that children are not left behind in climate action?*

6. The Executive Director, UNICEF, said that the climate crisis was a children's crisis. The UNICEF children's climate risk index showed that nearly half the world's children lived in extremely high risk countries and were exposed to the most severe hazards, shocks and stressors. The severe impact of drought on children across the Horn of Africa highlighted how interrelated climate shocks and crises had become and led to multiple crises in health, nutrition and education. Integrated United Nations action was needed more than ever to reinforce food systems and services and reduce the vulnerability of children at the household and community levels. Together with other United Nations organizations, UNICEF worked to integrate climate priorities into national budgets and drive change by leveraging public and private resources in new ways, in close collaboration with youth partners, for greater accountability on climate change. The United Nations had to advocate and ensure a place at the table for youth and children in climate discussions. She called on countries to put children at the heart of the climate response by increasing the resilience of systems children depended on, preparing every child to adapt and participate in creating a more sustainable future, and prioritizing the needs of every child in funding and resources for adaptation and resilience.

*Question 3: What should the United Nations system do to support gender-responsive climate action that benefitted women and girls?*

7. The Executive Director, UN-Women, said that UN-Women always worked at the heart of and through the United Nations system, including in joint climate action. There was the urgent need for combined efforts to address the triple interlinked crises of COVID-19, climate change and protracted conflicts that were disproportionately affecting women and girls, exacerbating inequalities, threatening jobs and livelihoods, increasing poverty – and hindering achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and leaving no one behind. Climate action and finance had to accompany long-term development policies and strategies to ensure adequate social protection for women and girls through integrated approaches in support of countries' needs and priorities. She highlighted that, at its 66<sup>th</sup> session, the Commission on the Status of Women provided a clear normative basis on which to strengthen gender-responsive climate action through a coordinated, coherent United Nations system at the country level that prioritized: (a) women's leadership and participation and integrated women's and girls' perspectives in climate action so they benefit from the sustainable energy transition; (b) gender-responsive just transitions that include investments in expanded gender-responsive public services, universal social protection, health care systems, sustainable support and infrastructure, and provision of new decent employment opportunities for women in green and blue jobs; (c) public investments in the care economy, a key pillar of gender-responsive climate action; and (d) improving and investing in gender statistics and disaggregated data to equip all stakeholders with data that informed policy and programme decisions.

*Question 4: What is the role of infrastructure in climate change and in ensuring no one is left behind?*

8. The Acting Executive Director, UNOPS, said it was important to take a broad perspective on infrastructure that included its traditional, energy and digital components as well as its mitigation and adaptation aspects. Maintaining a balance between these infrastructure perspectives made it possible to keep the focus on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. Infrastructure was central to achieving the Goals overall as it impacted most targets directly or indirectly, with one infrastructure intervention having potential multiple and multidimensional benefits. Beyond its green benefits, for example, infrastructure – when considered broadly

– determined how people lived and improved accessibility and inclusion. The architectural concept ‘universal design’ about creating buildings accessible for persons with disabilities could from a broader perspective demonstrate how infrastructure and inclusion worked together to address diversity of needs. It was important for the United Nations system to address infrastructure needs throughout countries, in line with national priorities, not just in urban cities, through broad partnerships. The reinvigorated resident coordinator system was a primary tool to implement the United Nations climate ambition at the country level where infrastructure’s impact was most important.

*Question 5: How does its focus on women and girls inform UNFPA actions on climate change, and why is it important to bring women’s and girls’ perspectives to action in leaving no one behind and climate change?*

9. The Deputy Executive Director (Programme), UNFPA, shared examples of how climate change and climate-related disasters were having a disproportionate impact on women and girls as evidenced across the globe in increased gender-based violence, trafficking, unwanted pregnancies, inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, among others. UNFPA was working closely with other United Nations organizations to ensure women and girls in climate-affected areas had access to sexual and reproductive and maternal health, mobile health teams, basic services, livelihood assistance, as well as psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence. UNFPA, together with other United Nations entities and by supporting South-South cooperation, worked at the policy level with national stakeholders and in communities with women and youth-led organizations to find solutions and build climate resilience. UNFPA supported alternative service delivery facilities for maternal health in emergencies that helped to ensure safe deliveries, cash for health payments, and preoperative blood transfusion kits for neonatal care. UNFPA leveraged its expertise in data and evidence gathering, using population risk and geospatial data systems, to inform the building of resilient health and protection systems. Under the leadership of the resident coordinator, and jointly with other United Nations organizations, UNFPA was working to regain the lost ground due to COVID-19 and put the world back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and leave no one behind.

*Question 6: How are United Nations entities collaborating to adequately adapt and build resilience to climate shocks to protect food systems and ensure no one is left behind?*

10. The Deputy Executive Director, WFP, said the climate crisis was a daily reality whose most pronounced impacts were taking place in the most vulnerable communities along the fault lines of conflict, climate extremes, food price inflation, and socioeconomic inequalities. It was crucial to acknowledge that the international aid and development system, and its financial instruments, had a major challenge in addressing this situation owing to underinvestment in contexts of fragility, poor social cohesion and conflict. It was therefore key for the United Nations system to work together. The most effective way to reduce vulnerabilities to climate and other crises was through an integrated approach that built on a wide range of actors across the United Nations system and its partnerships. This system-wide collaboration had to take place across the humanitarian-development-peace continuum to be effective and sustainable. United Nations development organizations had a central role as key agents in building resilience through their close engagement with the most vulnerable groups and through their work with Governments to integrate climate protection, resilience-building, and social protection in national development planning. That included addressing the root causes of vulnerability and supporting fragile countries and communities to build resilience and leave no one behind.

#### *Takeaways from the panel discussion*

11. The moderator of the discussion pointed to three main takeaways: (a) leaving no one behind was a central transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda that went hand in hand with the need to reach those furthest behind, and required investments in disaggregated data and empirical evidence to inform policy design and address intersecting inequalities; (b) it was crucial to invest in preventing future climate-related shocks and build resilience against crises through synergetic action, stronger social protection systems, and coordinated delivery by identifying and targeting the most vulnerable and applying a gender-responsive lens; and (c) an urgent bold and global response was needed, commensurate with the scale and gravity of the crisis, that prioritized technology and accessible financing for climate action built on strong interagency coordination and partnerships across the humanitarian-development-peace continuum.

#### **Interactive segment: voices from the field**

##### *Government representatives*

12. The Vice-Minister of Environment, Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition, Ecuador, said Ecuador was collaborating with United Nations organizations to address the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals which sought to promote

equality, generate economic opportunities and eradicate poverty. Ecuador was a pioneer in addressing climate change through a gender lens, having integrated gender in its management of climate change through a comprehensive strategy and enabling environment that fostered equality and non-discrimination in climate change policies. As a result, the country's ecosystems and biodiversity had improved and responsible production and consumption were being promoted through a gender lens. Ecuador was working with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNDP, and WFP, through the Green Climate Fund, on climate-focused programmes in the Amazon to promote forest preservation and sustainable deforestation aimed at integrating a broad range of stakeholders, including indigenous communities. The programme included capacity strengthening to stimulate a sustainable source of income, with the aim of reducing inequalities and closing the gender gap.

13. The Minister of Gender, Family and Social Services, the Maldives, said the Government had introduced health services, shelters, emergency funds, and agricultural grants and injected income to support climate-affected households to mitigate the worst climate change effects on women and girls. To ensure full implementation of its gender-responsive climate policy, the Maldives had prioritized the mainstreaming of gender through its strategic action plan and had made tremendous progress. The Government enacted a series of legislation upholding the principles of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, and the increase in the number of women in political leadership roles had given women a more powerful voice in formulating climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction efforts at the local level. The Government had signed the United Nations Sustainable Cooperation Framework that promoted greater participation of women in social, economic, political and public life, and the Government recently approved its national gender equality action plan, 2022-2026, with UNDP support, that used innovative solutions to complex development challenges. The plan introduced gender-responsive budgeting and audits with UNFPA support that included climate change costing and disaster risk reduction planning. The Maldives was also working with UNICEF to introduce environmental sustainability and climate action within its enabling policies while mobilizing youth as agents of change.

#### *Youth representative*

14. The youth representative, Zimbabwe, said climate change was a children's crisis. It was crucial to give young people and children a voice in climate action decisions so they could play their part in shaping the future. He drew attention to the UNICEF climate mapping programme in Zimbabwe that gave voice to youth and helped them to advocate for climate action at the local level and hold leaders accountable. The programme also allowed youth to participate in the debates at the 26<sup>th</sup> United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties and other international climate change fora.

#### *Interactive discussion between the presidents of the Executive Boards*

15. The presidents of the four Executive Boards, the heads of the six United Nations organizations and members of the Executive Boards provided several comments in response to the six questions raised during the panel discussions on the United Nations development system's role in leaving no one behind as a principle for climate action to ensure a transformative path for the most vulnerable. They highlighted the following points:

- the joint meeting of the Executive Boards was an important platform for knowledge-sharing across the Boards to help accelerate system-wide action towards the 2030 Agenda under the leadership of the resident coordinators in the repositioned United Nations development system;
- the Executive Boards had to continue to play their oversight and guidance roles to ensure compliance with agreed organizational mandates and the strengthening and realization of United Nations entities' potential and capacities;
- the climate crisis disproportionately affected the most vulnerable, especially women and girls, youth, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, and debt-burdened developing countries;
- transformative, collective action grounded in global solidarity was needed to support national efforts to build resilience against future shocks;
- the trend of major cuts in core resources for development was a major concern and would impede the United Nations system from fully supporting developing countries' efforts to achieve the Goals;
- food systems had to be more sustainable and resilient, and agroecological and innovative approaches accelerated, to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, and adaptation mitigation in food systems were essential for transformative change and ensuring no one is left behind;
- social protection systems were needed to help populations respond to and prepare for climate-related crises;
- rationalizing international agricultural trade could correct distortions in the global market and help farmers in developing countries compete;

- flexibility and speed were needed to ensure timely provision of emergency concessional financing focused on positive resource transfers to countries in social and economic distress;
- the international community should aim to channel at least \$250 billion (of the \$650 billion in special drawing rights) to address the liquidity crisis in developing countries, and developed countries should fulfil their commitments to provide \$100 billion per year toward climate finance and allocate 0.7 per cent of gross national income;
- women were indispensable players in achieving peaceful, just, and inclusive societies and in promoting economic and sustainable growth;
- climate-related challenges and crises required joint United Nations development system efforts and beyond to succeed;
- the strategic plans of the United Nations organizations were blueprints for a stronger, more impactful United Nations development system, in line with reform, that mainstreamed gender and climate change and put partnerships at their core;
- United Nations organizations had to strengthen their efforts through joint planning, implementation, resource mobilization, reporting and monitoring processes – leveraging their comparative advantages and cooperation within the humanitarian-development-peace continuum – based on climate and gender-responsive analysis in the common country analysis, in full commitment to the reform agenda and transparency, coherence, due diligence and accountability;
- the proposal to establish a (non-process driven) checklist to monitor implementation of United Nations development system reform was welcomed and viewed as a useful tool to track collective and individual organization's progress.

16. In summing up the interactive discussions, the President of the Executive Board of WFP said the climate crisis, compounded by conflict and economic inequality, had made it difficult to achieve zero hunger as set out in the 2030 Agenda. While collaboration among United Nations organizations had increased, there was the need for even greater partnerships to effectively respond to the climate crisis and its impacts. The interrelated challenges of climate change, conflict and food insecurity could not be solved by one organization alone. Integrated programmes were needed that drew on the strengths of each organization and augmented the impact of their collaborative efforts. United Nations reform had therefore to focus not on processes but on improving the lives of people, particularly the most vulnerable.

### **Closing remarks**

17. In closing, the President of the Executive Board of UNICEF thanked delegations and the six United Nations organizations for their participation in the joint meeting. He stressed the importance of close collaboration across the United Nations development system to address the triple challenge of COVID-19, conflict and climate change. Joint action was crucial, building on the examples of integrated approaches highlighted during the meeting and capitalizing on each organization's comparative advantages, to continue progress against the Sustainable Development Goals. There was clear evidence that when working together and when focused on the most vulnerable and leaving non one behind, the United Nations system was able to transform systems that built resilience and protected the lives of people and the planet.