



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

EXECUTIVE BOARD
103rd Session
Provisional agenda item 8

EB103/29
25 November 1998

United Nations system reform

Report by the Secretariat

Submitted to the Executive Board for information

1. In January 1998, the Executive Board at its 101st session considered the subject of United Nations reform and its implications for WHO.¹ The purpose of this report is to provide up-to-date information on five aspects identified by the Executive Board as having direct implications for WHO, and to respond to the request for a report on the outcome of the pilot phase of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).²

ASPECTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS REFORM PROCESS WITH DIRECT IMPLICATIONS FOR WHO

2. The United Nations Development Group³ (UNDG) was established to facilitate joint policy-making and decision-making. WHO is not a member of the Group, neither is any other specialized agency, except IFAD. This concern was addressed at the second regular session of ACC in October 1998 and suggestions were proposed for improved communications to and from UNDG.

3. As a result of structural and institutional reform, all socioeconomic issues are now concentrated in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). WHO is ensuring a close working relationship with this Department, particularly through the newly established Office for Inter-Agency Affairs which services ACC and promotes continuous exchange of information and consultation throughout the United Nations system.

¹ Documents EB101/5 and EB101/17.

² Decision EB101(6).

³ Originally this group consisted of UNICEF, UNDP, WFP and UNFPA. The present membership has been extended to include the following: UNIFEM, UNOPS, UNAIDS, United Nations Commission on Human Settlements, UNDCP, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, High Commissioner for Human Rights, IFAD, UNCTAD, Regional Commissions, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict. The following are members with observer status: United Nations International Partnership Trust Fund, Spokesman for the Secretary-General and Director, Office of the Deputy Secretary-General.

4. An Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator has been established. Although WHO does not participate in the work of this Office, coordination on humanitarian affairs is assured through the Organization's participation in the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

5. The proposal made in the reform package to establish a special commission at ministerial level to examine the United Nations Charter and the treaties establishing specialized agencies is of prime importance to WHO. However, the United Nations General Assembly has agreed to postpone consideration of this proposal until the Millennium Assembly, by which time it is anticipated that ACC will have made considerable progress in collaboration among its members, with improved recognition of the complementary and the interdependent nature of the respective mandates.

6. The designation of the Resident Coordinator as the Secretary-General's Representative and United Nations Team Leader at country level has always been a source of misunderstanding among organizations of the United Nations system represented at country level. UNDAF is one of the instruments set up to achieve a unified United Nations system. The reform message of the United Nations Secretary-General is to have a **unified**, not a **unitary** United Nations system at country level. WHO has encouraged the WHO Representatives to participate in UNDAF, commencing in 18 pilot countries.

WHO'S PARTICIPATION IN THE UNDAF EXERCISE IN 18 PILOT COUNTRIES

7. In accordance with decision EB101(6), requesting, *inter alia*, the Director-General to report to the Executive Board at its 103rd session on the outcome of the pilot phase of UNDAF, the following paragraphs summarize the involvement of WHO and the lessons learned from the exercise.

8. On 14 July 1997, the United Nations Secretary-General announced under Action 10 of his report to the United Nations General Assembly that:

In order to achieve goal-oriented collaboration, programmatic coherence and mutual reinforcement, the United Nations programme of assistance will be formulated and presented as part of a single United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) with common objectives and time-frame. Programme funds managed by each of the programmes and funds would be included in the document, but remain clearly identifiable. Preparation would entail collaborative programming and close consultation with Governments, including compatibility with country strategy notes wherever they exist.¹

9. Following discussions in ACC, the specialized agencies, including WHO, which had not been associated with the formulation of the initial UNDAF guidelines, proposed to make available their technical expertise for the UNDAF exercise. Accordingly, the WHO Representatives were advised, through the regional offices, to cooperate in the UNDAF exercise within the framework of the Resident Coordinator System.

10. Since mid-1997 UNDG has worked to establish UNDAF in 18 pilot countries (10 in Africa, three in Asia, one in the Arab States, two in Latin America and two in Europe).

¹ Document A/51/950.

11. A workshop (Princeton, New Jersey, September 1998) assessed the UNDAF experience in the 18 pilot countries. The results of this assessment¹ was reviewed in October 1998 by an interagency group which noted that UNDAF represents a strategic programme framework which enables the United Nations system to act with a common perspective, purpose and approach, in response to a country's development priorities. The group also agreed that the UNDAF guidelines needed to be revised and that the UNDAF exercise must be introduced in a phased and pragmatic manner. The UNDAF exercise must attempt to bring together governments, the United Nations funds and programmes, the specialized agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions, multi- and bilateral donors and civil society, including nongovernmental organizations. There must also be a link between UNDAF and the Country Strategy Notes, where they exist. In developing the Common Country Assessment, which assesses and analyses a country's development situation, the government and the entire United Nations team must be fully involved.

12. UNDAF offers an opportunity for the organizations of the United Nations system to respond in a coherent manner to the priority needs identified by, and with the countries themselves, and to the plans of action endorsed by the various global conferences and summits. Up to now, the UNDAF process has been basically managed by UNDG with specialized agencies, including WHO, participating through ACC. In order to achieve maximum impact of the UNDAF process, there is a need to ensure, through ACC, the participation of all organizations of the United Nations system on an equal footing, on the basis of well-defined roles and responsibilities. There is likewise a need to ensure the involvement of counterpart ministries at national level from the start of the UNDAF exercise. On the whole, WHO's experience in the UNDAF exercise, which was carried out in 18 pilot countries, has been positive.

= = =

¹ A report of the assessment workshop organized by UNDG is available upon request.