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**Assessment of
UN System Support to NEPAD
Rethinking the Collective Approach**

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I. Introduction

1. The activities of the UN in Africa have witnessed a significant expansion in recent years as international attention became focused on the grave economic and social crises facing the continent. The depth and diversity of that involvement is reflected in the fact that over 40 percent of the current portfolio of the UN work is estimated to be in Africa. In coordinating its activities in Africa, the UN as a system launched a succession of system-wide initiatives among which are: United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD, 1986-1990), the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa (UN-NADAF, 1991-2000); and the UN System-wide Special Initiative on Africa (UNSIDA, 1996- 2005).

2. A review of the implementation track record of these initiatives shows that although their goals and objectives were defined at the regional level, the practical mechanisms to integrate these goals and objectives in the programmes of the various UN agencies and at the country level were often not sufficiently articulated. The initiatives suffered from a lack of consultation among stakeholders, both within the UN system and in the African countries themselves, resulting in a feeling of lack of ownership.

3. As the number of UN organizations working in Africa increases, enhanced coordination and collaboration becomes key to achieving greater effectiveness and increasing the impact of the organization's work in the region. It is in this context that the Regional Consultations must be seen.

4. Building on the experience with past initiatives, the UN has adopted NEPAD as the framework within which it would coordinate its work in support of Africa. In this connection, five thematic clusters, corresponding to the NEPAD priority areas were established by the 2002 Regional Consultations to organize UN system support for NEPAD, working closely with the African Union, the NEPAD Secretariat and the RECs.

5. The consolidated cluster activity report prepared for this meeting highlights the wide range of activities that were undertaken over the past two years towards advancing the objectives and priorities of NEPAD and outlines the key challenges and lessons learnt thus far.

6. It is evident from the above report that much progress, albeit uneven, has been made by the UN system since the establishment of the clusters. A critical assessment of the regional consultation mechanism reveals, however, that much more needs to be done to exploit the collaborative potentials that it provides for UN agencies working at the regional level. Beyond serving as a forum for sharing information and identifying issues of common concern, the regional consultations have not, however, fully realized their objective as an instrument for joint action and strategic coordination.

II. Challenges, Lessons Learnt and Prospects

7. The last regional meeting in May 2003 and recent consultations between ECA and a number of agencies¹ during the period of March and May 2004 have identified several challenges that have impeded coordination efforts at the regional level. To enhance the credibility of the consultation mechanism in support of the priorities of NEPAD, these challenges would need to be addressed and a course of action that clearly demonstrates the commitment of the United Nations system to work together to achieve more coherence in its work in Africa adopted. Key among the challenges identified were the following:

1. Understanding an evolving NEPAD

8. As the NEPAD initiative continues to evolve, more challenges and constraints continue to hamper the efforts of the UN coordination as well as of major stakeholders. Participating agencies are not at the same level of understanding of NEPAD processes and strategic direction. Furthermore, the implications of the foreseeable changes in the relationship between the NEPAD Secretariat and the AU Commission are not fully understood by all the participating agencies. Finally, the coming into play of the APRM Secretariat, on which very little is known by most agencies, compounds this already confusing situation.

9. Effort made by some of the clusters to collaborate and coordinate their activities with the NEPAD Secretariat, and to some extent, the AU Commission is on the rise. This effort has taken different forms, including co-convening cluster meetings; fostering relationships with NEPAD sectoral focal points; and undertaking consultations with a view to strengthening programmatic collaboration and coordination of their activities with the NEPAD Secretariat. While some agencies have been successful, on bilateral basis, in engaging the NEPAD Secretariat and the AU Commission on some of the areas calling for immediate action in the NEPAD Short-Term Action Plan, others are still working on ensuring that NEPAD accords due attention to their line of activities. It should, however, be noted that the capacity gap observed at the level of NEPAD had not made it possible for its Secretariat to always attend to the numerous requests for consultative meetings. Building the capacities of the NEPAD Secretariat remains a major challenge to be addressed by the Regional Consultations as this situation makes it difficult for the UN to involve the Secretariat in a systematic manner.

10. For most agencies, there is need to clarify the specific role of NEPAD in the context of the work of governments and UN agencies. This role should not focus on implementation, but instead on advocacy and developing political will of key ministries such as that of finance for budgetary purposes and parliamentarians so as to develop strategies for speeding up implementation at the national level. It is the view of many agencies that the AU has a unique role to play with respect to NEPAD. This role should be identified, and actual implementation left to the RECs, ECA, AfDB, UN specialized agencies.

¹ In addition to consultations between ECA and the Addis Ababa-accredited UN agencies, ECA's mission to the headquarters of a number of agencies covered the following: the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA); the Regional Commissions New York Office; UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa; UNFPA Africa Bureau; UNICEF Director of Programme Division; WIPO; WHO; UNCTAD; ILO; UNHCR; WTO; ITU; and UNESCO,

11. ECA should intensify its coordination effort to ensure that information on NEPAD is adequately disseminated and understood within the UN system. The setting up of an additional cluster on Advocacy and Outreach will present an opportunity for the UN system and African stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of NEPAD and share experiences. It is also hoped that the just concluded AU Summit, which many UN agencies attended, has contributed to clarifying the role of the AU and expectations from the NEPAD.

2. *Enhancing the effectiveness of the cluster arrangements*

12. Because of the crosscutting nature of the activities of some agencies, the current clustering and/or organization of the Regional Consultations does not make it possible for them to contribute meaningfully to the coordination process. As a result, these agencies either pursue individually the implementation of their programme of work or approach the NEPAD structures on a bilateral basis “flying their own flags”. ***ECA and the clusters conveners should look into those cases with a view to translating the activities of the concerned agencies into development instruments so that they could be mainstreamed across the clusters or build into specific clusters’ activities.***

13. Further, at the cluster level there is little or no indication of harnessing cross-sectoral synergies to facilitate a more integrated approach to planning, implementation and monitoring the overall cluster activities. Also lacking is the much-needed mainstreaming of crosscutting issues such as gender, HIV/AIDS, and human rights in cluster activities. Mindful of the multi-dimensional and complex nature of Africa’s development challenges, a collaborative approach to our work is the only effective way forward.

14. On the current cluster arrangements, concerns were raised as to the whole approach for effective support of UN agencies to NEPAD. The 2002 clustering was viewed as a mere reaction of the UN system to the adoption of NEPAD as the sole framework for channeling UN support to Africa’s development. Without the full understanding of NEPAD processes, these arrangements could only be made on broader terms. They lacked the specificity required to translate the ensuing collaborative arrangements into business plans. As a result, the assignment of tasks were not detailed enough and the clustering lacked the much needed sense of accountability and ownership. Clusters were made up of collaborating agencies in intent and not necessarily in action.

15. It should be recalled that the guiding principle for constituting clusters was that UN agencies would identify synergies in their individual work programmes for cooperation, taking into account their respective mandates, comparative advantages, and resource base. However, lessons learnt indicate that commendable progress had been achieved were a small number of committed agencies pooled their resources around selected joint projects/programmes that respond to the needs of NEPAD and not to individual programme of work. Clusters may need to reconsider their collaborative arrangements, plan together on the basis of comparative advantages and perhaps implement separately.

16. Furthermore, the noted increase in number of clusters and sub-clusters since the last regional consultations could be an indication of the need to review and redynamise the current arrangements, especially in view of recent developments at the level of the AU and NEPAD. More inter-cluster and intra-cluster information sharing, including the use of virtual means, would be required for enhanced coordination and collaboration. Efforts should be made by leading agencies to ensure that planned meetings are held so as to avoid giving the impression

that UN coordination is secondary to the implementation of regular programmes of work. It is through continuous consultations at the cluster or sub-cluster levels on the activities and implementation plans that complementarity of efforts can be assured and greater coherence achieved.

3. *Moving from planning to implementation*

17. Initial steps have been taken to develop a number of initiatives around the priority sectors of NEPAD. Many agencies are now of the view that enough time had been spent on coordination and developing strategies for joint plans of action. There is need to focus on activities that can show results. In this regard, a great number of agencies would like to see ECA fulfill its coordinating role in moving the process from rhetoric to effective implementation of actions that had been already agreed upon as “quick-wins or deliverables”.

18. In addressing this issue, clusters must take a critical look at the objectives set out two years ago with a view to establishing clearly a methodology that reflects the assignment of tasks among participating agencies, adequate resource requirements and inclusion of related activities in the regular work programme of each. In turn, ECA should strengthen its capacity to monitor and report on progress in the implementation of UN support to NEPAD. The assistance proposed by UNDP and UNFPA should be pursued further.

19. In order for UN coordination to meet its intended goals, implementation of the cluster business plans should be envisioned at three levels, i.e., at the global, regional and country levels and their resource bases clearly established. Below are some proposals in that vein.

A. *Coherence and coordination*

20. ***Coordination at the global level*** - There will be a need to clarify the respective roles of ECA and OSAA. OSAA, ECA and perhaps UNDP/RBA should meet and discuss their complementarities. This meeting should also consider the issue of reporting by the various agencies with different mandates and accountable to different bodies.

21. ***Coordination at the regional and sub-regional levels*** - The links between the RECs and the UN system remain weak and their involvement with the UN system marginal. The challenge is to support the RECs in capacity building and partnering with the AU to expedite programme and project implementation. The thematic clusters’ direct engagement with the secretariats of the RECs and with the development finance institutions will strengthen the links, and thus facilitate implementation of NEPAD at the sub-regional level. Experiences gained through the collaborative arrangements between major RECs and ECA’s Offices in the sub-regions and the successful undertakings under the UN Resident Coordinator system such as the CCA or UNDAF could also present new opportunities.

22. ***Coordination at the national level***- *Despite the presence of UN country teams at the national level, the activities of the clusters do not seem to reach the countries. In this regard, initial actions should include building consensus on modalities for linking UN coordination at the sub-regional level to inter-agency processes at the national level.*

B. Action Plan

23. Moving from continued discussions on coordination to implementation will require that within each cluster or sub-cluster, participating agencies develop a concrete business plan around key objectives attainable within the coming year. In this regard each cluster should identify a maximum of two key activities and develop this business plan which clearly indicate the allocation of responsibilities, resource implications and benchmarks for delivery.

C. Resources

24. While the primary responsibility to mobilize resources for implementing the NEPAD agenda lies with the African countries themselves, as noted earlier, the UN system has taken steps to align their respective activities with the priorities of NEPAD as requested in the General Assembly resolution 57/7 of 4 November 2002. This effort is reflected in both the financial outlay to NEPAD-related activities and priorities and in support of the development of plans in specific priority sectors of NEPAD. The programmes and activities presented by the UN agencies working in Africa to their respective governing bodies, as well as those prepared for extra-budgetary funding, should reflect their planned individual and collective activities at the country, sub-regional and regional levels in support of NEPAD.

III. Conclusion

25. Further efforts to forge greater collaboration at the regional and subregional levels are dependent to a large extent on the readiness and willingness of all UN organizations to work together in a collaborative framework and recognize the respective role of each agency in accordance with their various legislative mandates. There is also need to enhance communication among the agencies operating at the regional, sub-regional and the global levels. Better synchronization of work programme cycles and priorities, and access to additional resources to undertake joint activities would contribute to improved coordination.