CPR Open-ended Contact Group Meeting on the Preparation of the Strategic Plan for 2014-2019
30 May, 2012, 09.30, Conference Room 10

Questions by CPR Members and Secretariat Responses


Spain

- The paragraph on youth should be moved so that it follows the paragraph on gender (pages 6 and 7). This will improve presentation. [The Secretariat agrees with this suggestion.]
- Explain “project acquisition policy”. What does this encompass? [This encompasses the project approach to increasing income; the setting up of the Internal Development Fund and the Emergency Fund, and how these will operate; and the development and approval of projects documents etc.]
- Are the revolving funds referred to in the document similar to ERSO, and is this in order, given that the Governing Council had directed that UN-Habitat should focus on normative aspects of lending for pro-poor housing and infrastructure and stop direct lending? [The revolving funds mentioned are internal revolving funds meant to provide a limited amount of money to explore opportunities for starting new projects. The money given is expected to be returned into the funds when the projects developed take off. So these funds are not at all like ERSO.]
- The resource mobilization strategy should also include how to expand the base of voluntary non-earmarked contributions to UN-Habitat. [The Secretariat agrees with this suggestion and undertakes to make this clearer in the draft strategic plan.]

Finland

- Finland is generally happy with the direction of the strategic plan.
- Is the trend shown in the income chart realistic? [The Secretariat believes that it can achieve this target, in light of its track record in field projects. However, the Secretariat also recognizes how this target may appear unrealistic, especially in light of the current global economic climate. There will be a further discussion with the ED to see whether or not this target can be adjusted to a more modest level.]
- Explain the principle of having projects larger than US$300,000. What typical normative projects would be larger than this amount? [The threshold of US$300,000 is meant to reduce administrative costs of projects. However, it is expected that there will projects smaller than US$300,000, and a policy on such projects is being formulated. Examples of normative projects above US$300,000 are the projects on UN-Habitat’s two flagship reports, the Global Report on Human Settlements and the State of the World’s Cities, as well as the World Urban Forum.]
Austria

- The draft strategic plan presupposes that things will stay the same, but there might be some governance changes. How will this affect the plan? [Any changes in the governance of UN-Habitat will be reflected in the adjustments of the plan to be made after the mid-term evaluation in mid-2016. These adjustments will also be based on the outcome of Habitat III, also to be held in 2016.]
- Page 3: The catalytic role of UN-Habitat mentioned on page 3 is very much supported, as are the ideas in the plan on gender and youth.
- On page 7, under Risk Management, consideration could be given to the cumbersome process of work programme preparation, including the power of the UN Secretariat in New York to amend a work programme document negotiated with Member States. [The Secretariat will think about this suggestion. It is true that the implementation of the strategic plan may be affected by changes to the biennial work programmes made by the UN Secretariat in New York, i.e. the Office of Programme Planning and Budget.]
- UN-Habitat has to be thanked for being honest about risk management, on page 8, in the second paragraph.
- On page 10, explain the reason for reporting focus area strategic result indicators every two years. Yearly reporting might be more appropriate. [Reporting on UN-Habitat’s strategic result indicators requires global surveys, which are very costly and time-consuming. This cannot be done too often, hence the proposal of doing this only twice during the life of the strategic plan. The first reporting on these topmost indicators will also coincide with the global review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which will be carried out in preparation for Habitat III and will use the same urban indicator set.]
- The target of doubling income over the life of the strategic plan is unrealistic. Also, staff increase might be necessary, given the high income target. [The Secretariat has already responded to the issue of doubling of income, but agrees that there might be a need to increase core staff moderately in order to enhance the agency’s capacity to manage a doubled portfolio of projects. This will be reflected in the draft strategic plan, but the overall thrust will be to use staff more efficiently, through the flex-team and time accounting approaches, as well as to recruit project staff as and when justified by new projects.]

USA

- Is UN-Habitat considering establishing partnerships with non-traditional partners? For example, in the area of Urban Planning and Design, as there many other actors that could be partners. [Yes, the Secretariat is open to non-conventional partnerships and will welcome suggestions from CPR members.]
- Finalization of the evaluation strategy should be done now, rather than during Phase 1 of the implementation of the strategic plan. [The Secretariat agrees with this proposal and will amend the draft strategic plan accordingly.]
• On page 11, indicate what data will be collected. [The data to be collected will be specified in the biennial work programmes through performance measures, and also in the baseline document for the strategic plan which will be prepared in 2013.]

• The document does not describe the linkage between income/portfolio growth and the implementation of Part II of the Plan. It may be better to treat funding considerations under each thematic/focus area, showing how each aspect of the strategy will be affected by the level of funding? [The Secretariat agrees that there is a need to establish funding strategies specific to each focus area. This will be done in the resource mobilization strategy.]

• The discussion of projected income in Part III of the plan is not sufficiently linked to the content of Part II. Perhaps the discussion of projected income should not be as specific as has been done in the present draft of Part III. [The Secretariat will reflect on this, also in light of further consultations with the ED on this matter.]

• With regard to cross-cutting issues (on page 6), reference should be made to physical and mental disability. [The Secretariat agrees with this and will amend the relevant text accordingly.]

• The text on youth as a cross-cutting issue is too specific, compared to the others, and should reflect the agreed strategic result of Focus Area 3 (Urban Economy). The USA will suggest language to bring the text closer to the agreed Focus Area strategic result. [The Secretariat takes note of this observation and awaits suggested text form the USA.]

Norway

• Continuity of indicators is necessary and should be ensured, although there may be need for minor adjustments over time. [The Secretariat agrees. The set of expected accomplishments and indicators in the strategic plan, elaborated in the strategic framework for 2014-2019, will be used over the six-year period of the strategic plan, with only minor adjustments as and when necessary.]

• The proposed Strategic Plan Steering Committee should also have the responsibility of assessing the results of the implementation of the plan and of making suggestions for plan adjustments. [The Secretariat is in total agreement and will ensure this position is clearly reflected in the draft strategic plan.]

• What is the function of the policy papers mentioned on page 2? Will these be internal documents only or will they also be accessible to outsiders? [The policy paper for each focus area will describe the rationale of the focus area, the substantive content of the work of the focus area, the implementation approach of the focus area, and expected results of the focus area. The papers will be accessible to UN-Habitat staff, Governments and other Habitat Agenda Partners.]

• It should be ensured that the mid-term evaluation of the strategic plan will be ready by the time of Habitat III. [The Secretariat agrees with this. In fact, the global assessment of progress in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which is required as an input to Habitat III, will also assist in the mid-term evaluation of the strategic plan, since it will include in its wide range of indicators the set of urban indicators specified in the strategic plan.]
• What will be reported and when is not very clear. [The Secretariat will look again at the text and improve its clarity. The proposal is that data and information will be entered continuously into the UN-Habitat PAAS, so that the data and information required for any report (scheduled or ad-hoc) can be generated at any time. The indicators of the expected accomplishments under each focus area will be reported annually. The indicators of the focus area strategic results will be reported at the end of every two years. The indicators of UN-Habitat’s strategic result, i.e. the topmost indicators, will be reported every three years, i.e. only twice during the life of the strategic plan.]

• Evaluations results should be discussed by the CPR. The strategic plan should indicate this. [The Secretariat agrees with this proposal and will reflect it in the draft strategic plan.]

• The strategic plan should make it clear that reporting will be on outcomes, not outputs. [The Secretariat agrees with this and will ensure this is reflected in the draft strategic plan.]

• The new text on gender is appreciated.

• Under risk management, consideration could be given to the difficulties involved in managing flex-teams, especially if teams include members that are widely spread geographically. [The Secretariat will look again at the text in the Risk Management section, with a view to ensuring that this is reflected.]

• Norway is a bit skeptical about the project approach and its potential for increasing income. Has there been an assessment of projects performance in the current biennium? [There has been an assessment of project performance in the current biennium, and the Secretariat’s conclusion is the same: projects hold the highest potential of increasing income, especially under the current global economic conditions. There are considerable amounts of money and need for UN-Habitat’s expertise at the country and city levels. UN-Habitat intends to tap into this, but without neglecting the additional amount of work that needs to be done to ensure increased non-earmarked voluntary contributions by Governments.]

• The overall direction likely to result from the project approach is further imbalance between ear-marked and non-earmarked income, and dilution of the normative functions of UN-Habitat. [The Secretariat intends to ensure that there is no dilution of the normative functions of UN-Habitat by integrating normative work into country and city level projects. At the same time, Regular Budget income and whatever non-earmarked income is received will continue supporting key normative work, such as global monitoring of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and relevant MDG targets. In addition, a significant proportion of the earmarked income from UN-Habitat’s main development partners is for normative work.]

• UN-Habitat Delivering as One is an important approach that needs to be strengthened. [The Secretariat agrees, and will ensure this is emphasized in the draft strategic plan.]

• The project portfolio of UN-Habitat has tended to be thinly spread, geographically. How will this be addressed? [The Secretariat will look again at its experience with the Enhanced Normative and Operational Framework, ENOF, to see if the idea of selecting 20 to 30 countries in which to concentrate effort in order to achieve maximum impact could be carried forward to the 2014-2019 period. One problem with this approach is that many of the operational projects of UN-
Habitat are in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts, and the geographical incidence of such projects cannot be determined through planning.]

Mexico

- There are more reasons for the decline of non-earmarked income than those given in the plan. These additional reasons should be mentioned as well. [The Secretariat agrees and welcomes inputs from Governments on this issue. The text will be reviewed to see what can be added in this respect.]
- On page 11, it is clear that resources for monitoring have been limited. How will this problem be addressed? Will alternative methods be considered if there is a shortage of funding for the surveys needed for monitoring purposes? [The Secretariat agrees with this observation. A lot of resource mobilization effort will be made to ensure availability of sufficient resources for establishment of baselines and for the surveys required for effective monitoring. One major development partner has already earmarked funding for baselines during the current biennium.]
- Human resource implications of the projected growth of income should be indicated. [The Secretariat will reflect on this and will add the necessary text to the draft strategic plan.]
- Explain the project acquisition strategy, and how this relates to the difficulties experienced by UN-Habitat in procurement. [As explained earlier, the project acquisition strategy encompasses the project approach to increasing income; the setting up of the Internal Development Fund and the Emergency Fund, and how these will operate; and the development and approval of project documents etc. The difficulties of procurement are being addressed from a different angle, following the recent review of the relationship of UNON with UNEP and UN-Habitat. The review report makes a recommendation on delegation of procurement to UNEP and UN-Habitat, up to a given threshold and for offices away from headquarters in Nairobi.]
- Was the creation of internal revolving funds without further consultation with the CPR regular? Is the money for the revolving funds from the Regular Budget or from Extra-Budgetary earmarked and non-earmarked income? More information is needed. [The ED has full authority to create such internal revolving funds. These funds are an internal financial management mechanism designed to ensure full transparency and proper accountability in the use of resources. The money from the two revolving funds will be from non-earmarked income.]
- How will a balance between ear-marked and non-earmarked income be achieved, in light of the resource mobilization strategy outlined in the draft strategic plan? [It is likely to continue to be difficult to achieve a balance between earmarked and non-earmarked income, especially in the context of the current difficult global financial circumstances. However, as explained earlier, UN-Habitat will renew its efforts in mobilizing non-earmarked contributions by Governments, including from form previous donors and non-traditional donors.]
- Should the organizational chart in Annex 1 not show the distribution of staff? [The Secretariat believes that the organizational chart in Annex 1 should not show staff distribution, given the strategic nature of this document and the likelihood of changes in staff numbers and distribution during the six year period of the plan. However, the organizational charts that will
Regional offices are important, and the strategic plan says they will be strengthened, but the regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean is still headed by a P-5 rather than a D-1. [The Secretariat takes note of this observation. The D-1 post of Director of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean is likely to be advertised soon.]

Instead of “BRICS”, use “middle-income countries”. This is a broader category of countries that could contribute to UN-Habitat’s income. [The Secretariat agrees with this, and will amend the text accordingly.]

Indonesia

On page 11, explain in more detail what systematic monitoring means. [In this context, systematic monitoring essentially means specifying which level of indicators will be reported upon when, as shown in Figure 2. It also means establishment of all necessary baselines at the beginning of the implementation of the strategic plan.]

The draft strategic plan mentioned “culture change”. Explain what this will involve. [This will involve learning how to manage UN-Habitat’s activities through the project approach, how to orient all activities towards the attainment of results rather than just outputs, how to work in flex-teams, and how to account for staff time and financial resources through the UN-Habitat PAAS system. All of these will require organizational culture change.]

What does “clear baselines” mean – specify in more detail. [Clear baselines means specifying the exact performance measure (unit of measurement) for each indicator of achievement, and indicating the level at which measurement starts. This has to be done for all indicators at all levels.]

Reporting on the topmost indicators only twice during the life of the strategic plan may not be sufficient. Consideration should be given to increasing the frequency of reporting. [As already explained in response to a similar question by Austria, reporting on UN-Habitat’s strategic result indicators requires global surveys, which are very costly and time-consuming, hence the proposal of doing this only twice during the life of the strategic plan.]

The project portfolio and income targets are too high. [As already explained, the Secretariat believes that the target is achievable, in light of its track record in field projects. However, the Secretariat also recognizes that the target may appear to be overly ambitious, especially in light of the current global economic climate. As already promised, there will be a further discussion with the ED to see whether or not this target can be adjusted.]

The draft strategic plan should place more emphasis on regional offices and activities. [The Secretariat agrees with this observation, and the relevant text in the draft strategic plan will be amended accordingly, especially to reflect the new representation and resources mobilization functions of regional offices, regional urban strategies, and the role of regional ministerial conferences.]
Turkey

- How effective will the “Emergency Fund” be, given the procurement challenges which have been identified in the governance review process? Will there be changes in the procurement system? [The Emergency Fund is expected to ensure UN-Habitat’s ability to respond to emergencies within 48 hours. The process for approving funding will be rapid, requiring a minimum of signatures. Current procurement challenges will not affect the operation of the Emergency Fund, as no procurement is required in the very early days of response to emergencies, but will continue affecting later stages of emergency response during which full scale projects will be developed and implemented. However, as indicated earlier, procurement challenges are being addressed through a different process, following the review of the relationship between UNON and UN-Habitat and UNEP.]

- In the organizational chart, are branches still “virtual”? This is how the ED has described them in previous presentations. [The branches are still virtual, in the sense that some branch staff members are located away from Nairobi, for example in the liaison offices in Geneva and New York. For now, all Branch Coordinators are located at headquarters in Nairobi, but this can change if the best person is found to be away from headquarters.]

Item 3. Any Other Business

Finland

- Do not print agenda, if it contains only one substantive item. This will save paper. [The Chair agrees with this suggestion. The Secretariat also agrees.]

Mexico

- What progress has been made with the recruitment of the Governance Review consultant? [Processing of applicants is complete and the most suitable candidate has been identified. The applicants review results have been submitted to the Chair of the Contact Group, Ambassador Paulsen, from whom a response is currently awaited.]

Indonesia

- Can the Secretariat provide a report containing the questions asked during this meeting? [The Secretariat will do this.]

Norway

- What is the date of the next meeting of this Open-ended Contact Group? [It was decided that the next meeting will be on 13 June, just after the meeting on WUF6, and possibly continuing into the afternoon.]