



United Nations Eritrea

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Dear Sally,

Progress in UN Reform and UN Coordination in Eritrea (2007)

Major developments in 2007

The peace process between Eritrea and Ethiopia remained stalled and the military situation along their common border tense throughout the year. On the other hand the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC) after hearing the views of both countries at the meeting held in the Hague in September 2007 concluded that no further progress could be made towards the erection of the pillars. As a result, by the end of November 2007, the EEBC by virtually demarcating the common border on the map declared its mandate fulfilled and closed its office. Eritrea has accepted the demarcation of the border by coordinates while Ethiopia has rejected it. This means that the two countries still remain far apart in their positions; hence prospects towards economic normalisation and long-term economic growth will remain illusive in the foreseeable future unless some solution is found in the short term.

Despite the opening of the border between Eritrea and Sudan, the contribution of exports to GDP has been nominal due to strict controls on foreign currencies and trade. The Government has begun on a limited basis to export fish and sea cucumbers from the Red Sea to markets in Europe and Asia. A newly constructed airport in Massawa, capable of handling jets, could facilitate the export of high-value perishable seafood.

The economic situation is affected as well by the poor state of relations between the Government and the major donors. This has become an increasingly serious issue particularly for mobilising much needed grant funding for development.

The relationship with the Bretton Woods Institutions is also low. The World Bank's engagement in 2007 was limited to addressing basic human needs by refocusing the existing grant portfolio to reducing risks of the most vulnerable groups. Eritrea doesn't have a programme with the IMF despite steep deteriorations in the trend of most macroeconomic indicators. Close collaboration between the Bank and the IMF remains fundamental in order to design a macroeconomic stabilization programme that is agreeable to both sides.

Notwithstanding the above challenges, the Government continued its endeavours in the area of food security through construction of dams, soil and water management, afforestation, construction of roads; harvesting marine resources to a limited scale and investing in the area of mining. Several of the earlier soil and water conservation schemes are beginning to pay off through higher crop yields.

The transfer of the international cooperation functions from the Ministry of National Development to the Ministry of Finance delayed the pace of coordination of the UNDAF as the UNCT could engage the Government only since November 2007. However, a new pace of working with the new Ministry appears to be in place. The Government has agreed to an annual review of the UNDAF on 19 February. This will set the mechanisms for cooperation for the rest of 2008.

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Despite the fact that the United States has threatened to list Eritrea as a terrorist country, Eritrea continues to be active in regional peace brokering. It has been actively participating in normalising the edgy relations between Chad and Sudan and in the peace process between the Government of the Sudan and Darfur rebels. In addition, Eritrea has been an interlocutor for representatives of international organisations and the EU on the crises in Darfur and Somalia.

Eritrea has been seeking to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties with China and certain countries in the Arab world. To this end, two documents on strengthening economic cooperation between the Governments of Eritrea and China were signed in July 2007 while Chinese mining companies have been given licence for mining exploration in Eritrea. Economic dialogue with Arab countries (UAE, Qatar, Libya and others) in the areas of air transport, energy and media is picking up, but there is no indication so far of results.

During 2007, Mr. Kjell Magne Bondevik, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs in the Horn of Africa and Mr. Lynn Pascoe, UN Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs visited Eritrea. The former visited the country to engage the Government in its quest for food security while the latter on the peace process in the Horn of Africa. Similarly, Dr. Luis G. Sambo, Regional Director of WHO for Africa Region visited Eritrea and discussed with the Government on areas of cooperation in the health sector. The UNCT continued to provide its expertise and assistance to the National Task Force on Avian Flu, in combating and containing the emergence of cholera and meningitis in 2007 and in the management of malaria.

One of the biggest challenges for the UNCT in Eritrea is resource mobilisation. Eritrea has very few major donor partners and most of those in the country have slowed down and/or suspended their aid programmes, largely for political reasons. The UNCT has been trying to make a case that there are remaining humanitarian needs which require donor attention, but the Government's position is that there is no humanitarian problem in the country, but also for political reasons. Hence, it will be a challenge to raise resources for the remaining 12,000 internally displaced persons who have to be resettled as well as for those recently back to their villages but still need assistance to restore their livelihoods.

Highlights on progress in UN Reform

The Eritrea UNDAF (2007-2011) is being implemented against the backdrop of the stalemate over the peace process and the shrinking development assistance from bilateral and multilateral partners. In 2007 humanitarian reforms were as important as the overall UN reforms.

The IASC resumed regular meetings in 2007 and the cluster leadership approach was implemented. Overall coordination among humanitarian actors improved and partnerships were enhanced in 2007. A number of challenges remain, including the lack of a critical mass of humanitarian actors, and absence of strategic engagement between the humanitarian community and the Government on humanitarian issues. Nonetheless, the UNCT prepared a response ready Common Humanitarian Action Plan and consolidated contingency planning in 2007. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) implemented different programmes in 2007 aiming at supporting the return of the IDPs and assistance to refugees; providing access to water and sanitation to the population of the coastal, drought and flood-affected areas of Eritrea; reducing the malnutrition among under-five children and; mainstreaming cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender and environment into programming. Partners worked closely with the Government to ensure progress in the above areas.

A total of US\$ 24.5 million (49% of the total requirement for 2007) was received from different sources/donors for humanitarian activities, of which US\$ 3 million was advanced by the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

The ex-com agencies (UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA) have started implementing the Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfer (HACT) to transfer funds to implementing partners during the third quarter of 2007. Following micro-assessment of implementing partners, training on the usage of Fund Authorisation and Certification of Expenditure (FACE) has been conducted at national and regional levels.

The UNCT and the Government agreed on 13 joint programmes representing more than 60 per cent of the total UNDAF resources. Much time was spent on planning and mobilising resources together for eight of the 13 joint programmes in 2007. The UNCT and the Government jointly reviewed the joint programmes, on quarterly basis.

In 2007, the UNCT collective support to national efforts and priorities towards achieving the MDGs also increased. To further raise the awareness of the public about the MDGs, a publicity forum was organised jointly with the Diabetic Association of Eritrea which was well covered by both the print, radio and television media.

The Joint UN Team on AIDS finalised the Joint Programme on the support on AIDS aimed at increasing the effectiveness, harmonization and unity of purpose in line with the UNDAF objectives, MDGs and in support of the National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS. The 2007 annual work plan consisting 27 key results provided guidance to the implementation of 129 activities. The annual review on the programme showed that 56 percent of the original plan was carried out in the areas of prevention, treatment, care and support and on the establishment of the "Three ONES" costing US \$ 1.3 million (48% of the total resources committed). The coordination mechanisms set in place spearheaded by the National AIDS and TB Control Department (NATCoD) of the Ministry of Health and UNAIDS coordinating the Joint UN Team on AIDS is functioning well.

The UN continues to support the Government both in the development and humanitarian programmes. However, there is clear lack of dialogue on broader strategic directions of support. For example, the Government is not present in the Development Partners Forum and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee meetings. But this has not deterred the humanitarian organisations to improve coordination among themselves. Likewise, on issues of follow up to the Paris Declaration, the Government has still to show interest. Nonetheless, the development partners in Eritrea (bilateral and multilateral donors, UN system and NGOs) have formed a Development Partners Forum co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator and the World Bank Country Manager to follow up on the implementation on the Paris Declaration. We realise that these are interim arrangements until the time when the Government will take over the leadership. In the meantime it appears that the Government prefers to deal with each partner on a bilateral basis.

Highlights on progress towards UNDAF outcomes

Under the UNDAF outcome on Basic Social Services, an estimated 80% of children under the age of one were fully immunized in 2007 at the national level, an increase from 70% in 2006. Vitamin A supplementation to children 6-59 months, administered twice a year, had a coverage rate of 95% in both rounds. To reduce the unacceptably high rate of malnutrition (Global Acute Malnutrition Rate ranged between 11% and 21% among children under five in 2005, and the prevalence of underweight children was 40% in 2006), a total of 32,592 moderately malnourished children were covered with Supplementary Feeding Programme in 2007. 4,370 severely malnourished children were admitted into 53 therapeutic feeding centres from January to October 2007, with a recovery rate of 90%, death rate of 5% and defaulter rate of 4%.

A draft national child survival strategy has been developed based on a scale up plan towards achieving the health related MDGs. During January-September 2007, only 8,485 malaria cases were reported compared to 10,000 cases reported in 2006 (January-September data), and malaria is no longer among the top ten causes of in-patient mortality in the country.

Elementary school enrolment has increased by 0.7% nationally for the 2006/07 school year, and the number of girls planned to be reached exceed by 13%. Sub-regional level action plans for increasing girls' enrolment were developed. Around 66,000 people have been provided with access to improved water,

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including in drought and flood-affected communities and efforts to enhance the low level of sanitation was made. Life Skills education is fully integrated in school curriculum for grade six and students accessed the information and skills related to HIV & AIDS. Moreover Organizational Health Safety (OHS) and community capacity manual were produced and 4,200 vulnerable children, especially girls at high-risk enrolled into formal and non-labour intensive income generating activities. Nonetheless, access to safe water and adequate sanitation, particularly in the rural areas is still a problem despite the fact at the national level, the access to clean drinking water increased to 65 % in 2007 from 59 % in 2006.

UNHCR continues to support the protection and assistance needs of 4,700 Somali and 150 Sudanese refugees and 1,500 Ethiopian asylum seekers in Eritrea.

The capacity building outcome has been aligned to respond to the broader social, political and economic aspects including the need to strengthening human resources. To this effect, a joint programme document to strengthen the capacity of the National Statistics Office has been drafted. In addition, a joint programme document for strengthening national and regional capacities to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate projects is under preparation.

The limited availability and access to information related to household food security/vulnerability remains a major constraint in understanding the food security situation in the country. Thus, the household food security situation in the country remains unclear despite the limited effort by WFP in collecting pertinent information from the field. The Government is in process of preparing its food security road map. Meanwhile, according to the Ministry of Agriculture the 2007/8 crop production is estimated to cover about 80% of the 650,000Mt national annual food needs. The Governor of Gash Barka disclosed through the mass media that about 300,000 Mt of mixed food commodities were harvested in Gash Barka alone. Gash Barka is known as the breadbasket of the country.

Under emergency and recovery UNDAF outcome, the UN has supported the return and resettlement of 20,000 IDPs in the Debub and Gash Barka regions in May and June 2007 respectively. All camps which hosted internally displaced persons in Gash Barka have since been closed. There are still 12,000 IDPs remaining in camps in the Debub region. The IDPs in camps and those recently resettled in both regions still require humanitarian assistance.

As part of the UNDAF outcome on gender equality and the advancement of Eritrean women, the establishment of a Gender Research Centre and the empowerment of women through mainstreaming of gender responsive planning and skills within the major national sectors of development were partially implemented. In addition, a gender-training manual in one of the two local working languages was prepared. To enhance gender sensitivity in the national planning and decision making processes, sensitisation workshops covering gender concepts and mainstreaming have been conducted for regional and middle level administration representatives. As part of advocacy and communication strategy of the UNDAF, sensitization and training workshop on gender, reproductive health and financial management were also conducted to enhance women's role in decision making in two regions (Northern and Southern Red Sea) of the country. To a limited extent training was provided to enhance the opportunities of women self-employment. The Government issued a proclamation banning female circumcision in March 2007. This will provide the required legal framework for the implementation of the joint programme on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Good Practices and Lessons Learned

Joint programming (JP) as a strategic approach has enabled agencies to work together as a team and has given agencies the opportunity to harmonise and integrate programmes thereby fostering effectiveness and efficiency. It has provided room for engaging the Government as it prefers to deal with the managing agency.

The implementation of HIV/AIDS programmes through the Joint UN Team on AIDS through its Joint UN Programme of support on AIDS has increased effectiveness, harmonization and unity of purpose among agencies and avoided overlap of projects.

In the absence of national forums where the Government and the partners sit together and discuss, the Inter Agency Standing Committee and the Eritrea Development Partners Forum have provided the space to exchange information and views on humanitarian and development issues of the country. These forums have contributed considerably in mobilising resources particularly for mitigating urgent needs for humanitarian and social vulnerability. However, resource mobilisation remains one of the major constraints in implementing the UNDAF. The UNCT will explore mechanisms to boost resource mobilisation in 2008.

The stalemate in the peace process continues to aggravate people's vulnerability as significant human and financial resources are committed to defence. The Government strongly believes if it is given the peace, it can do much on its own to the development of the country without falling into the trap of aid dependency.

Highlights of the proposed 2008 work plan

Work plan for 2008

The UNCT will continue to build and strengthen its teamwork, and in 2008 it will focus on the following major action plans:

Key Result Area 1: Coordination for Results;

1. Aid coordination and management: (i) Paris Declaration; (ii) strengthening the Eritrean Development Partners Forum; (iii) Harmonization and alignment (HACT implementation and Follow up); and (iv) Strengthening Joint-programming.
2. UNDAF Annual Review.
3. Human Rights (translation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into the local language)
4. Security for all UN staff.

Key Result Area 2: UN Advocacy and Resource Mobilisation:

5. Advocacy on MDGs (i). Advocacy and communications for the MDGs; (ii) Second MDGR and other advocacy events;
6. UNCT Joint resource mobilization: (i) scaling up maternal and neonatal care, (ii) support resettling/rehabilitating Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and (iii) support in realizing Food Security.

Key Result Area 3: Non-resident UN Agencies:

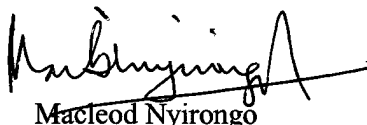
7. (i) Use of expertise knowledge of non- resident UN agencies; and ii) consultations through video conferencing.

Key Result Area 4: Coordination capacity of the UNCT

8. Strengthen the UNCO and the M & E task force to support agencies in their:
 - ◇ planning,
 - ◇ monitoring and evaluation , and,
 - ◇ preparing development cooperation data.

Many thanks and warmest regards.

Yours sincerely,



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Resident / Humanitarian Coordinator