

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

**REMARKS TO THE JOINT MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF
UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-WOMEN AND WFP**

Your Excellency Mr. Masood Khan, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations and President of the Executive Board of UNICEF,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Heads of Delegations and Executive Board Members,
Distinguished Executive Heads of UN Funds, Programmes and Agencies,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to join you today. This is the first time that I am addressing this joint meeting, and I am grateful to the Presidents of the Executive Boards for this opportunity.

Together, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS, UN-Women and WFP deliver \$15 billion per year in development and humanitarian assistance. The guidance and oversight of the Executive Boards play a crucial role in the substantive results that these six entities have achieved over the years.

We gather now at the beginning of a crucial year in which Member States will take three crucial steps towards building a better future for all:

- the adoption of an inspiring new sustainable development agenda,
- agreement on a meaningful action to tackle climate change, and
- concrete steps to provide the necessary financing and other resources.

I continue to press Member States to keep ambition high as we gather in Addis Ababa, New York and Paris to take these decisions.

I also continue to stress to everyone sitting alongside me on this podium – and to UN staff across the world – that this year’s decisions will have major implications for almost every aspect of our work.

Achieving progress at the country-level will require all of us to strive for greater coherence and effectiveness, including through the standard operating procedures for delivering as one.

The transition to sustainable development will mean huge transformations affecting economies, energy systems and infrastructure. National education systems will have to adapt. Regional bodies will play an increasing important role. And we at the international level will have to strengthen our skill sets and the support we provide to Member States.

Today’s discussion on innovation is thus very timely.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A United Nations that is properly serving the world's people is one that is always reflecting on its work, learning from the realities on the ground, and finding improved ways to respond to the world's needs and opportunities. Such an approach is the essence of being ever more "fit for purpose", whether we are talking about peace, development, human rights or humanitarian action.

In that spirit, I wish to make four points that I hope you will bear in mind during your discussions.

First, innovation is not an end in itself. Everything we do aims to achieve greater impact for the people we serve. Innovative approaches should be integrated throughout our organizations in order to improve our programmes, policies and technical capacities.

Second, partnerships are vital. Partnerships are instrumental to maximizing knowledge, skills, best practices and resources. We have to ensure that innovation is providing value and receiving the funding it deserves.

Third, innovation needs an enabling environment. We need to be more dynamic in researching, testing and nurturing new ideas, taking successful solutions to scale and then rigorously monitoring and measuring our efforts. This type of cyclical process, often used in the private sector, can help to ensure that as many ideas as possible translate into significant results.

Fourth, UN funds and programmes need to be able to expand the space for innovation – and, at times, to fail. Like all opportunities, innovation carries risks. But as Albert Einstein once said "A ship is always safe at the shore – but that is not what it is built for."

Ideally, projects should be "quick to fail or quick to scale." We should be able to tolerate project failure so long as the lessons guide us on the path to better results. This is, in some ways, one of the most challenging of innovations. It requires that those of us invested in an initiative should be ready to let it go when it becomes clear that it has served its purpose.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The entire process of designing the next development agenda has itself been an innovation for the United Nations system. High and low-tech solutions have been employed, from e-discussions and surveys to community focus groups. These approaches have solicited a wealth of views on the future agenda of this organization. Millions of people from different backgrounds have been involved. This mobilization marks a new era of the way we do business – and we should make sure this new approach transfers over to the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

The United Nations is far more innovative than we are usually given credit for – but we are still not innovative enough. With a new era of work soon to be upon us, now is the time to take innovation to the next level.

Thank you for your commitment and support. I wish you all an engaging and, indeed, innovative discussion.