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Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)
Executive Board**

**United Nations Children's Fund
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**World Food Programme
Executive Board**

Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS
Second regular session 2017
5-11 September 2017, New York

Executive Board of UN-Women
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29-30 August 2017, New York

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**Report of the joint field visit to Nepal by members of the
Executive Boards of United Nations Development
Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United
Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations
Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender
Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and
the World Food Programme, 17-21 April 2017**

I. Background

1. The joint field visit to Nepal of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP) took place from 17 to 21 April 2017. The delegation of 20 Board members was led by H.E. Mr. Walton Alfonso Webson,

Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations and President of the Executive Board of the UNICEF. The objective of the visit was to help the Board members to understand the ways in which and to what extent the organizations contribute to the achievement of national development plans and the goals of global United Nations programmes. The visit was expected to demonstrate the role of the Resident Coordinator system in ensuring the coordination and coherence of the United Nations system according to the objective of “delivering as one”; the harmonization and coordination among the United Nations funds and programmes; the national ownership of the programmes being implemented by the United Nations organizations; and the relevance of the thematic issues that they address as well as that of their goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. The impact of natural disasters on disaster-prone countries and their people cannot be overstated. Target 5 of Sustainable Development Goal 11 specifically calls for significantly reducing the number of deaths and the number of people affected by disasters and to substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters by 2030, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations. In this regard, the delegation would like to thank the secretariats of the Executive Boards for the choice of Nepal, which is among the 20 most-vulnerable countries of the world in terms of natural disasters, for the joint field visit. The delegation would also like to thank the United Nations country team (UNCT) for the elaborate programme, which was aimed at giving the delegation a wide overview of the activities of the different United Nations organizations operating in Nepal.

3. Nepal is a landlocked, least developed country (LDC) of 28 million people in South Asia that is committed to democratic, socioeconomic reforms, building social cohesion and graduating from LDC status by 2022. It has achieved most of the Millennium Development Goals. Absolute poverty decreased from 42 per cent in 1995 to just under 22 per cent in 2015, while its human development index rating increased from 0.279 in 1980 to 0.558 in 2016. The new Constitution of Nepal mandates a shift to a federal system, with greater human development and inclusion rights. Nepal continues, however, to struggle with protracted political transition, decades of slow economic growth, of 3 to 5 per cent, uneven levels of human development, weak governance and social exclusion, including unregistered citizenship and harmful traditional practices affecting women and girls. Poverty and vulnerability correlate with gender, geography, caste and ethnicity,¹ exacerbated by environmental and climate- and disaster-related risks.

4. Nepal is highly prone to disasters caused by a combination of natural and climate-induced hazards. The country sits in a seismically active zone, rendering almost the entire country prone to earthquakes. Nepal ranks fourth globally in terms of relative vulnerability; tenth for landslides; twelfth for floods; and thirty-second for earthquakes. According to the Global Climate Risk Index, Nepal was ranked as the twenty-fourth most-risky country in the world during the period 1996-2015.

5. A comprehensive peace agreement was signed in 2006 after a decade-long conflict (1996-2006), and elections for the Constituent Assembly were held in 2008. The new Assembly voted in May 2008 to end the 240-year-old monarchy of Nepal, and declared the country a secular and federal democratic republic. The two-year deadline for the drafting of the new Constitution and the holding of new elections could not be met and was continuously extended. Elections were finally held in November 2013, and while the Government promised a new constitution by 22 January 2015, and local elections within six months,

¹ Government of Nepal National Planning Commission and the United Nations Development Programme, *Nepal Human Development Report 2014: Beyond Geography, Unlocking Human Potential*.

powerful earthquakes struck the country on 25 April and 12 May 2015, causing extensive destruction. The new Constitution of Nepal was finally promulgated on 20 September 2015.

6. The Madhesi people and political parties from the Terai area, in the south of Nepal, were unsatisfied with certain clauses of the Constitution and started protests along the border with India. This caused an obstruction of the border and resulted in a scarcity of fuel and essential commodities, including medications, not just in the earthquake-affected areas, but all over the country. The obstruction of the supply of goods and fuel persisted for five months until the border opened again for the movement of goods in February 2016.

7. At the time of the JFV, Nepal had had nine Prime Ministers since the abolition of the monarchy in 2008. Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the then Prime Minister, assumed office on 4 August 2016. The country was expecting to hold local elections on 14 May 2017, the first such elections in two decades. However, the elections could only be held in three provinces on 14 May and in three more provinces on 28 June. Elections in the last remaining province are slated for 18 September 2017.

II. Overview of the joint field visit

8. The delegation had the opportunity to see the funds and programmes in action in different parts of Nepal and appreciate the work that the UNCT has accomplished in the field, in spite of the challenges presented by the terrain, which were exacerbated by the earthquakes of 2015. While the delegation's observations might not be representative of the situation of LDCs and disaster-prone countries worldwide, it is hoped that they will prove useful in the context of the preparation of the strategic plans of the different organizations and their implementation over the coming four-year period.

9. The programme included a briefing by the UNCT and meetings with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, along with the Electoral Commission, the National Planning Commission, the National Reconstruction Authority and representatives of the local authorities. The delegation also had discussions with development partners present in Nepal as well as representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs).

10. The delegation visited different parts of Nepal in four separate groups: Group 1 visited Kailali, Baitadi and Bajhang districts in the plains and mountains of the Far-Western Region (programmes: UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN-Women, WFP). Group 2 visited Rupandehi, Kapilvastu, Dang and Banke districts in the plains of the Western and Mid-Western regions (programmes: UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS, WFP). Group 3 visited Nuwakot district in the hills of Central region, which was affected by the earthquakes (programmes: UNDP, UNICEF, UN-Women, WFP). Group 4 visited Sindhuli and Kavrepalanchowk districts in the hills of the Central region (programmes: UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women, WFP).

III. Coordination between United Nations agencies, the Government and other stakeholders

A. United Nations agencies and the Government

11. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2013-2017 for Nepal is coming to an end and, incorporating the lessons learned, the UNCT is developing the UNDAF 2018-2022. The UNDAF 2013-2017 had 10 outcomes, which made inter-agency coordination and monitoring and evaluation difficult. While the large number of outcomes

also resulted in high ambition with regard to funding, the UNDAF was approximately 70 per cent funded by January 2017, with one year left in the cycle. Therefore, the UNCT concentrated on fewer outcomes for the new UNDAF, which are focused on only four areas.

12. United Nations organizations are also fully engaged, along with development partners, in several sectoral support strategies led by different ministries, including those of health, education, water and sanitation. The proposed UNDAF 2018-2022 outcome areas are: (a) inclusive economic growth; (b) social development; (c) resilience, including to climate change, and disaster risk reduction; and (d) inclusive governance and the rule of law. The UNDAF has been developed in close collaboration with the Government of Nepal under the leadership of the National Planning Commission, and in consultation with the National Reconstruction Authority and various line ministries. There were also consultations outside the capital. The UNCT established a joint UNDAF steering committee, co-chaired by the Vice-Chair of the National Planning Commission and the Resident Coordinator. This is the principal committee that provides overall guidance and strategic direction to the design and implementation of the UNDAF. The committee will also lead the UNDAF annual reviews. Four joint technical working groups have been formed to work on each UNDAF outcome area, including the results matrix and the monitoring and evaluation framework. These groups, are co-chaired by the Head of a United Nations agency and a Joint Secretary of the relevant ministry, will continue to coordinate the work in a particular outcome area throughout the term of the UNDAF.

13. The integration of action by the United Nations organizations and Government was demonstrated by food security-related projects, which had been implemented according to the Food Security Monitoring System, a joint project of the Government of Nepal and WFP, which indicates the food-insecure regions that require the most urgent attention. The promotion of entrepreneurship and small-scale production and the initiatives of the United Nations organizations to integrate informal production into the formal sector also demonstrated the alignment between the action of the UNCT on the ground and the Government's plans. The United Nations organizations were also fully engaged, along with development partners, in several sectoral support strategies led by different ministries, including those of health, education, water and sanitation. The delegation also noted the interaction of United Nations organizations with local authorities in addition to their interactions with institutions of the central Government.

14. While the interaction between the UNCT and the Government was apparent, so were the challenges. The local elections and transition to a federal system, whereby more decision-making power would be transferred to subnational authorities, and the uncertainty around how this new political structure would operate, signify further challenges for the implementation of the upcoming UNDAF.

B. United Nations organizations and civil society

15. It was evident from the visit that there was extensive interaction of the UNCT with CSOs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). The implementation of several of the projects in the field involved NGOs and INGOs. The delegation also observed that the aspirations and needs of local communities were relayed to the UNCT by NGOs and INGOs, which also helped in identifying leaders within the target populations to act as the drivers of projects.

16. Some of the NGOs and INGOs also acted as service providers for the implementation of the projects. The NGOs and INGOs were diverse in their focus, which ranged from gender equality and gender-based violence and exclusion on the basis of caste to food security and economic development.

17. The NGOs, in conjunction with their network of field offices and contacts in local government, are the major vehicles for helping the UNCT gather grass-roots data about the needs of the different regions and the people of Nepal. This working relationship has been reinforced by cooperation in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquakes and the emergency response. During the visits to the different parts of the country, the delegation witnessed the presence of thematic NGOs on various projects and was able to hear about their involvement in the implementation process. The NGOs expect more support in capacity-building, livelihood recovery and gender empowerment from the United Nations organizations.

18. The UNCT has a very good working relationship with the CSOs. During the exchange with representatives of some of those organizations, the delegation observed that they were mostly led by women.

C. Partnership among United Nations organizations

19. The Nepal UNCT comprises 23 United Nations entities, 18 of which are resident organizations, including the six funds and programmes, as well as three international financial institutions. It is led by a Resident Coordinator. The UNCT meets twice monthly for coordination purposes. The delegation noted the excellent working relationship between the different organizations in the capital as well as in the field in the implementation of projects and programmes. The involvement of often more than two organizations and the apparent success of the projects conveyed the synergy between the organizations and the drive to work collaboratively towards the achievement of project goals.

20. The delegation visited several projects whose implementation involved more than one United Nations organization. In some instances, there was some duplication and apparent overlap of mandates. However, given that Nepal is just recovering from a major catastrophe and an extreme humanitarian situation, the delegations felt that such overlapping was inevitable, because of the need to reach the most-remote and affected areas as quickly as possible. It was later also explained that some projects funded by the International Development Partners Group were implemented by organizations that had the comparative advantage in the field, and while a project might seem to point to the competency of one organization, the thrust and outcome of the project could be within the mandate of a different one. In one instance, WFP was implementing a Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation, in which infrastructure and resilient livelihood support was delivered through Food for Assets and Cash for Assets projects, providing either food assistance or cash transfers. The planned project activities included repairing community infrastructure, including rural roads and trails, to enable connectivity to major routes and to re-establish access in high-altitude mountainous areas, and promoting resilient livelihoods while addressing post-earthquake food and nutrition needs. However, rather than a case of duplication, this project was taking advantage of the presence of WFP in the area for the provision of food security, while also dealing with primary infrastructure. This collaboration reflects the type of synergy that can be established between organizations. In the absence of a clear formulation of the reasons for such occurrences, however, such projects could easily be seen as duplicative.

21. The delegation also felt that the formulation of the UNDAF 2018-2022 around four streamlined outcome areas, with clear Sustainable Development Goal mapping correlated with the Sustainable Development Goal implementation plan of the Government, presented an excellent opportunity for the UNCT to formulate an elaborate collaboration and cooperation strategy among the organizations. Such a strategy would be in line with the proposal for a common chapter in the strategic plans of the United Nations funds and programmes currently being discussed by the Executive Boards. Developing a coherent strategy for

cooperation would allow for better management of the core budget and result in increased efficiencies.

D. United Nations partnership and coordination with other development partners

22. In Kathmandu, the delegation met with representatives of the International Development Partners Group, which comprises the Department for International Development, the European Union and the United States Agency for International Development, among others. The delegation was given to understand that there was good synergy between the development partners and the UNCT, which held regular meetings together. The International Development Partners Group was taking advantage of the service capabilities and comparative advantages of the United Nations organizations to implement projects supported by earmarked funds.

23. The development partners expressed the view that their relationship with the United Nations organizations should not be competitive, but rather synergistic and complementary. The organizations should focus on core areas, such as human rights, food security and nutrition and education and gender issues, while development partners addressed infrastructure and logistics.

24. The development partners agreed that it was necessary for United Nations organizations to undertake some programme work to assist the United Nations in its role as a convening body and a guarantor of international norms, values, treaties and obligations on the basis of a clear division of labour between the various organizations. Programme work enables the United Nations organizations to build networks, credibility and social and political capital and to gain direct experience and a seat at the table. But the United Nations organizations that received core funding should not be conceptualized as an NGO, using their limited human resources to write proposals and compete for donor money.

25. Members of the delegation raised the issue of decreased core funding, which was becoming a challenge for the United Nations funds and programmes, and called upon development partners to continue to support the United Nations and its agencies through robust core funding, which would allow the agencies to focus their work on the core issues mentioned by the partners.

IV. Observations on thematic issues addressed by the United Nations country team

26. The delegation visited Nepal at a very interesting juncture, when one UNDAF was on the verge of ending and preparations for the next UNDAF were nearing completion. The UNCT explained that the lessons learned from the previous UNDAF were incorporated into the forthcoming one. The streamlining of the number of outcomes from 10 to 4 was understandable, given the difficulties faced in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the numerous outcomes of the current UNDAF. The delegation also greatly appreciated the streamlined incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals into the outcomes.

27. The delegation noted that there had been a move from emergency response to recovery and resilience-building in the action of the United Nations organizations, even while it was evident that, two years after the earthquakes, reconstruction was still at a nascent point. This could be attributed to a number of causes, including the extent of the damage, the

geographical isolation of the most-affected sites and the difficult terrain, which limited access from those sites to services critical for the reconstruction process.

28. The site visits covered a number of thematic issues that were in line with government priorities and indicated that there was indeed coordination between the UNCT and the Government. The observations around the actions of the UNCT on the thematic issues described below are presented in no particular order of priority.

A. Disaster recovery and resilience-building, including economic resilience

29. Recovery from the earthquakes of 2015, which were a major setback for Nepal, is critical for the country to undertake its ambitious plan to streamline the Sustainable Development Goals into its national development. The fourteenth three-year development plan of Nepal has been formulated by the Government to implement its vision of the Goals. There are numerous challenges, and the cooperation of the United Nations organizations will be instrumental in helping Nepal to achieve its development priorities.

30. The joint field visit commenced on Monday, 17 April 2017, with Groups 1 and 2 leaving early in the morning for the Far-Western and Mid-Western regions of Nepal, while Groups 3 and 4 started with a tour of the humanitarian staging area constructed by WFP in 2015 at Tribhuvan International Airport. The staging area proved to be invaluable for the post-earthquake emergency response. It was constructed with the support and partnership of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Department for International Development and inaugurated just one month before the first 2015 earthquake. It was instrumental in mitigating bottlenecks, enabling the faster processing of incoming relief goods and increasing the speed of the response and, as a result, saving lives. Functioning as the main logistics hub, the staging area enabled over 60 humanitarian partners, including the World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNFPA and Oxfam, to store relief items and transport them to affected districts through the Logistics Cluster, led by the Ministry of Home Affairs and WFP. The delegation saw this as a clear example of synergy among United Nations organizations, the Government and development partners. On the other hand, the question remained as to when the staging area would become self-sustaining and fully transferred to the Government of Nepal. A cost-recovery programme was expected to be implemented in May 2017 with the aim of immediately accomplishing those goals.

31. The four groups visited several projects relating to disaster recovery and resilience-building. One of the projects was the Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Programme, implemented by UNDP, which was coordinated with a government initiative to promote the reconstruction of houses by the provision of mobile technical support to the municipalities to facilitate the building-permit process. This would also foster skills among members of the community and raise awareness about safe construction. Homeowners and communities also benefit from the provision of government grants for housing reconstruction of up to \$3,000 per affected household (provided in three instalments at the different stages of construction) identified by the National Reconstruction Authority.

32. The delegation observed the delivery of advice by engineers on building earthquake-resistant housing, with the provision of basic designs and awareness-building and training in construction methods. Although the earthquakes devastated many buildings that had to be demolished, the majority remained standing and were in need of retrofitting. Some members of the delegation also visited sites where households with partly demolished houses had benefitted from retrofitting technology to recover from the damage and obtain resilient housing. In this second type of project, UNOPS worked with the Department for International Development to train masons in retrofitting techniques. UNOPS has been working with INGOs and the local authorities on the application of retrofitting using innovative sustainable

building methods as well as traditional ones, while UNDP has supported the Government in the development of retrofitting guidelines.

33. About a decade ago, Nepal adopted a national building code formulated to ensure the structural safety of construction, but only a few municipalities across the country have had sufficient capacity to implement it. Since the earthquakes, UNDP has been working closely with the Government of Japan to provide support to three earthquake-affected municipalities in the Kavrepalanchowk and Sindhupalchowk districts to implement the building code and to ensure safer construction. The support includes strengthening the municipalities' capacity to establish a functional code-compliant building-permit system, conduct field monitoring of construction sites and provide training and guidance to homeowners and construction workers on safer building construction technologies.

34. The work on the promotion of safer housing construction and the retrofitting of damaged houses provided an overview of the collaboration between the United Nations organizations and the International Development Partners Group in assisting Nepal in increasing its resilience to earthquakes.

35. In order for the Nepalese people to pull themselves out of poverty and enable the country to graduate from LDC status, according to the aspirations of the Government, they must increase their economic resilience in parallel with their resilience to natural disasters. In this context, the delegation visited projects related to the building and consolidation of economic resilience. Through the provision of technical capacity-building and access to finance to encourage entrepreneurship and facilitate the development of micro- and small enterprises, United Nations organizations on the ground are working towards the integration of the country's substantial informal sector with its formal sector.

36. The delegation visited projects related to the Micro Enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP), run by UNDP in collaboration with Australian Aid. Aimed at reducing poverty, with a focus on excluded castes, women and the poor, the programme has been thoroughly integrated by the Government into its policies and programmes and is being scaled up to cover the entire country. UN-Women is implementing a women's economic empowerment programme, supported by Finland, that combines enhanced economic capacity of excluded women's networks with their leadership capacity, participation and representation in local decision-making forums. The Board members interacted with local women leaders trained under this initiative in the Kavrepalanchowk district.

37. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in many of the geographically isolated areas of Nepal. UNDP, WFP and UN-Women have been assisting rural communities, particularly women farmers, in food and nutrition security and income generation. Vegetable-collection centres, community-based agriculture extension centres and small-scale community assets have been established to provide farmers with a means to sell their produce and to access agricultural services, even when they produce only small quantities. This support has helped to provide better access to markets, resulting in a considerable rise in revenue. Many of the collection centres are run by cooperatives operated by women. The delegation visited an agriculture extension centre managed by women in the Sindhuli district as well as a cooperative collection centre in the Nuwakot district, supported by UNDP with funding from the Government of Mauritius. The facility organized the collection of vegetables from over 350 households, which had resulted in an increase of monthly revenue for the members from Nepalese Rupee (Nr) 1,000 to Nr 6,000. The cooperative was currently collecting around 1,200 kg of vegetables per month and planned to reach 3,000 kg per month in the coming 12 months.

38. The delegation noted that some community-level interventions in the social sector (for example, gender-based violence prevention and response) introduced as part of the earthquake response, had allowed communities to organize their own sustainable mechanisms to continue their work. The high degree of need for support services for women proved instrumental for the advocacy of CSOs with the Government to allocate more funding for such services, to complement the United Nations programmes.

B. Food security, nutrition and health and water, sanitation and hygiene

39. Food security is a basic requirement for any country to develop its potential. In Nepal, the 2015 earthquakes resulted in a big setback in this area and in the related area of nutrition. The lack of food has led to an increase in malnutrition, which has been particularly acute in children and mothers. Although agriculture is the mainstay of the local economy, the principal crops are rice, corn and millet, which do not provide the necessary nutritional diversity in the diet. To compound this effect, the earthquakes also caused the massive destruction of health facilities.

40. The delegation learned about the Nepal Food Security Monitoring System, a nationwide, comprehensive system for collecting, analysing and presenting information on household food security, agriculture and markets. The monitoring system is implemented by the Ministry of Agricultural Development, with strategic guidance from the National Planning Commission and technical assistance from the WFP vulnerability analysis and mapping unit. The monitoring system, which has been used to determine where to locate the food-security enhancing projects of the Government, United Nations organizations and other development partners, is a clear example of the national ownership of the assistance programmes, given the involvement of the central and local institutions of Nepal.

41. WFP, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF have been working closely with the central Government and local authorities at the district level to address health and malnutrition and the related issue of food security. While WFP, in collaboration with UNDP and development partners, has been working to restore food and nutrition security and build resilient livelihoods in earthquake-affected areas, UNICEF and UNFPA have been involved in the restoration of basic health facilities, the development of transitional infrastructure and the establishment of reproductive health and nutrition programmes for pregnant women, adolescents and children under the age of five in an attempt to curb stunted growth, particularly in isolated regions, where the outmigration of men to India and the Gulf countries for jobs is high and child marriage is still very prevalent. WFP has supported meal programmes for schools which, in addition to curbing malnutrition, have also improved enrolment rates and the retention of children in school. UNOPS was involved in setting up the infrastructure for the school meals programme.

42. Members of the delegation visited some of the nutrition-related projects being implemented with support from UNICEF and observed that considerable progress had been achieved in treating severe and acute cases of malnutrition and that the programmes were progressively being shifted to the Government. The Nepalese authorities were seeking the continued engagement of the United Nations organizations with regard to food security, nutrition and health. The delegation also visited malnutrition treatment centres. Information on the results of the nutrition-related projects showed improvement in nutrition and indicated that the assistance phase was coming to an end. Once this phase was completed, the project would be handed over to the local authorities in the Nuwakot district. The delegation observed that the organizations needed a clear plan for when to hand over the projects.

43. Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is also a very important aspect of the engagement of the United Nations organizations in Nepal, especially in the aftermath of the

earthquakes. The delegation visited several WASH-related projects. In the districts of Nuwakot, Sindhuli and Bajhang members of the delegation learned about the rehabilitation of the drinking water supply system and observed the WASH improvements in transitional learning centres, including the incorporation of the water supply, separate toilets for girls and boys and the supply of hand-washing and cleaning materials. They also learned about the distribution and use of sanitation and hygiene packs for setting up toilets to eliminate open defecation. The work of UNICEF and UNDP in relation to WASH was commendable.

Education, youth, gender-based violence and child protection and governance

44. Nepal has the potential to tap into its demographic dividend, with more than 51 per cent of the population under the age of 24 years. While this youthful population provides opportunities for economic development, the current rate of unemployment and underemployment is high, at 19 per cent. However, the delegation noted that there was considerable seasonal outmigration of youth, especially men, to the Gulf countries and India, with which Nepal has an open border, to seek employment. This creates a substantial exodus of men of working age, and during site visits, the delegation noted the overwhelming presence of women and the low level of involvement of men in community life.

45. The current youth bulge offers significant potential for benefit to Nepal, provided that adequate investments are made in education, health and employment opportunities. Time is of the essence, as the demographic transition in Nepal is accelerating, and by 2028, the majority of the population will be over the age of 50. While the current large youth population can be positive in terms of the labour pool, it also makes it necessary to address the issue of child labour.

46. Gender-based violence was common to all the districts visited, and there was even a report of the abuse of women based on allegations of witchcraft. The delegation also observed that gender-based violence was often what brought women together in cooperatives and associations to mutually support one another and even to support non-members experiencing such violence. The groups acted as mediators and even pressure groups on law enforcement if mediation did not resolve the occurrences of gender-based violence in households. Survivors of such violence, with the help of UN-Women, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNDP, and through the action of NGOs, have regrouped into cooperatives that provide referral services, safe houses, psychosocial support and involvement in micro-enterprises, such as crop production units and animal rearing projects, developed with the help of microfinancing and revolving funds supported by partners, including the Department for International Development and Norway and Switzerland.

47. The rate of child marriage, which is rooted in traditional beliefs in Nepal, is very high. UNFPA and UNICEF have been acting jointly on a number of fronts to end the practice by: (a) making efforts to enhance policies and legal frameworks; (b) promoting quality health care and education for adolescent girls; (c) engaging religious and traditional community leaders; and (d) raising awareness in communities. The core of the project is the empowerment of adolescent girls through the provision of life-skills classes. UNFPA and UNICEF have partnered with the National Inter-Religious Network-Nepal to engage with religious leaders to end child marriage and harmful traditional practices, including chhaupadi and deuki. The programme has also helped vulnerable girls to gain more self-confidence, and political and community leaders are becoming more sensitized to their issues. As a result, community-support mechanisms, such as Ward Citizens' Forums, Citizens' Awareness Centres, women's cooperatives, gender-based violence watch groups, adolescent girls' circles, youth networks and child clubs, have been mobilized to support the campaign to control gender-based violence and to fight against child marriage and its natural consequence of adolescent pregnancy. The delegation felt that this work of the United Nations

organizations was commendable and recognized that, while some of them were in the driver's seat, others provided support to ensure the success of the programmes.

48. Education is another important pillar in the fight against gender-based violence and child marriage, but it is also a major driver of the process that will enable Nepal to meet its Sustainable Development Goal ambitions. The 2015 earthquakes destroyed a great deal of school infrastructure, seriously handicapping the education of children. In the wake of the disaster, many temporary buildings were erected to get children into school quickly. UNICEF and UNDP, with the help of other organizations, have overseen the creation of transitional learning centres to ensure the provision of education to children. They have also made efforts to render schools disability-friendly, to provide computers and, as mentioned earlier, to support the WFP-led school meals programme. The transitional learning centres will fill the infrastructure void pending the construction of permanent schools by the Government. Education is one of the most important fields in which the United Nations system must remain strongly engaged in Nepal throughout its reconstruction.

49. The issue of governance is very important, given the political changes that have occurred in Nepal in the past decade. It is also the reason that the Local Governance and Community Development Programme, jointly run by the Government and as many as 14 development partners, including the United Nations Capital Development Fund, United Nations Volunteers, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women, was renewed for its second phase in 2013, and is still being implemented. Its overarching goal is to support the strengthening of local governance, with the aim of reducing poverty and improving service delivery and encouraging local community development and citizen empowerment. The programme promotes the engagement of citizens in local planning and development across the country. Ward Citizens' Forums and Citizens' Awareness Centres are the mechanisms by which to engage citizens in an inclusive and participatory manner and channel their voices so that they can be heard by the Government. Through Citizens' Awareness Centres, people are widely engaged in creating awareness around civic rights and duties; informing people about government services and facilities; resolving social problems; engaging in income-generating activities, community infrastructure-building and environmental protection; and increasing social harmony. The delegation witnessed the engagement of Ward Citizens' Forums during the visit to several project sites, and the positive inclusion of women and members across castes. The delegation also found highly commendable the child-friendly local governance component of the Local Governance and Community Development Programme, which is supported by UNICEF and is aimed at mainstreaming child rights in the policies, structures and processes of local governance and promoting and facilitating the prioritization of child rights in planning and budgeting. Its positive effect on immunization, child marriage, hygiene and sanitation in schools and the active participation of children in activities related to their well-being is essential for consolidating children's rights.

50. Nepal was expected to organize long-awaited local elections following the adoption of the federal system of government, with the decentralization of government decision-making and its transfer to the district, municipal and community levels. The delegation met with the Electoral Commission during the visit. The elections were to be held on 14 May 2017 and, at the time of the visit, the ballots had been printed. The presentation by the Commission and the delegation's interaction with local authorities did not clarify how the new decentralized system would be implemented. The delegation felt that the continued engagement of the UNCT in this particular area was highly desirable and that cooperation with the Government on this subject should be a priority.

V. General observations, comments and recommendations

51. The devastation wrought by the 2015 earthquakes is still very apparent in Nepal today, even two years after the start of the emergency response. The country has moved into the recovery phase, but given the difficult topography of the country and the damage to the basic infrastructure, especially the roads, the recovery process will be lengthy. The engagement of the United Nations system is critical for Nepal to emerge from the trauma of the earthquakes and the upheaval of its own political development as a nation.

52. As expressed during the meeting of the delegation with CSOs, inequality persists and must be addressed so that the country does not fall back into turmoil. One of the major causes of the long conflict in Nepal was inequality and the sense of exclusion of many, with power concentrated in one section of the population. The ongoing call of the Madhesis for an overhaul of the centralized system and the continued push for positive action towards the inclusion of marginalized groups testified to the need for continued action in the fight against discrimination and exclusion.

53. The proclamation of local elections after the adoption of the federal system is a welcome development. At the same time, it highlights the challenges that the new system will bring to both the national authorities and the UNCT. The delegation observed that there is a high level of uncertainty among local authorities as to how the new system will operate, and it is clear that this will create numerous challenges for the implementation of the UNDAF. The UNCT must remain engaged proactively with the national authorities to respond appropriately to the change. It should be granted the freedom to adapt its programmes and projects to the evolving context, while striking a balance between efficient delivery and the need for continued capacity-building to enable government systems to deliver services in the new environment. A key element will be the continued engagement of women and youth in the new political structures. The Prime Minister noted in his meeting with the delegation that proportional representation was a strength of the new Constitution and that the election was about inclusiveness.

54. The joint field visit generally provided a very positive outlook on the engagement of the United Nations development system in Nepal through the work of the UNCT, particularly with regard to both the response to the earthquakes and to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The projects visited showed integration with the priorities of the Government and the people of the country. The involvement of civil society and local communities in the designation of priorities was impressive and demonstrated the national ownership of the projects. The work of the Government-led female community health volunteers, who are also supported by UNICEF and UNFPA, was equally impressive, more so given the difficulties, in terms of facilities, infrastructure and geographical isolation.

55. The issue of migration, especially of youth and, in particular, men, was highlighted during the visit. Most of the remittances from migrants went into consumption and was often obvious through the modern housing erected even in the most remote parts of Nepal. One of the issues that the UNCT could look into is how to help Nepal capitalize on the remittances for long-term projects.

56. The joint field visit also gave rise to pertinent questions from the members of the delegation:

(a) There is an apparent overlap in the work of certain organizations with the mandates of others. Should this be considered duplication or is the overlap deliberate and based upon the comparative advantage presented by one agency in a certain region?

(b) Are the United Nations organizations collaborating or competing in the implementation of projects?

(c) What is the effect on the core programme implementation of the United Nations organizations of their acting as service providers for development partner-funded programme implementation?

(d) To what extent does the implementation of programmes supported by earmarked funding create overlapping or duplication?

(e) What is the exit strategy for the various projects, specifically the ones directly related to the earthquake devastation?

(f) How is the United Nations working with other partners that can provide the infrastructure that the Government of Nepal is requesting?

(g) How does the UNCT propose to respond to the adoption of the federal system of governance, in terms of the implementation of projects?

57. While the visit demonstrated collaboration among the United Nations organizations and coordination under the guidance of the Resident Coordinator, the briefings on individual projects failed to demonstrate how the collaborative action was achieved in the context of a well-defined and deliberate strategy. The delegation observed that many of the projects funded by development partners showed overlapping or duplication with the work of United Nations organizations. The delegation felt that there was room for improvement of regarding coordination and collaboration in the UNCT.

58. The delegation felt that the UNCT should further strengthen its good work in institutional capacity-building and strengthening to enable the Government to take over from the United Nations organizations the projects in the fields of health, education and livelihood recovery and the development of food security, once they have been completed.

59. The delegation felt that the work of the UNCT on women's empowerment and gender equality, gender legal reform and policy formulation, gender-based violence and access to justice and multisector emergency services, child protection and issues related to adolescents and youth as well as the fight against exclusion based on caste was crucial to the development of Nepal and its graduation from LDC status. This highlighted the need for the Sustainable Development Goals to be at the centre of all actions undertaken and for continuous engagement with the Government of Nepal in its efforts to achieve the Goals.

60. Further development of inclusive governance at all levels will surely help to bring more political stability to the country. In addition, the participation of the population in the development of policies and programmes, such as that witnessed at the local level, needs to be further strengthened and propagated. The participation of the people will assist in fighting caste-based exclusion.

61. While there was evidence of many women-centred programmes, there was also a need for more engagement with men in order to ensure the sustainability of the progress achieved in the empowerment of women. The programmes aimed at sensitizing men on the issues of gender-based violence, child marriage, harmful practices, child protection and other aspects of the social structure need to be strengthened.

62. The issue of refugees is still alive in Nepal, with the presence of both Bhutanese and Tibetan refugees. While many refugees have been successfully moved to host countries, the remaining relatively small population of Bhutanese refugees still faces problems related to uncertainty about their future. There are also problems related to identification and

registration, which render them outcasts, unable to access assistance. The delegation felt that the UNCT needed to remain engaged on this issue in the context of leaving no one behind.

VI. Conclusion

63. The visit was successful, to the extent that it gave the Executive Board members a detailed overview of the work of the United Nations organizations in Nepal. It also demonstrated the ways in which the United Nations development system was contributing towards the development of an LDC harshly hit by natural-disaster vulnerability. It showed the efforts of the United Nations system to assist Nepal in addressing its challenges in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

64. A proper feedback mechanism is needed to relay information to the Executive Boards regarding the implementation of the UNDAF, in terms of its alignment with the strategic plans of the various United Nations organizations and the objectives of the United Nations development system in general. This will enable discussion about the successes, challenges, innovations, collaborative mechanisms and relevant inputs, enabling them to be considered in decisions taken by the Boards.

65. The inherent vulnerabilities of Nepal, the upcoming challenges of a changing and evolving political system and the ongoing recovery from the earthquakes demonstrate the need for a continued positive engagement from all stakeholders, including the Government, the development partners, the UNCT, CSOs and the private sector, so that Nepal is able to successfully implement its development plan. Nepal will have the opportunity to showcase its experience and the challenges it faces in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the forthcoming high-level political forum on sustainable development in the context of its voluntary national review.

66. The delegation observed the resilience of the Nepalese people in the face of catastrophe and challenges, and their determination to reconstruct. The delegation was also very impressed by the sense of community in the most-affected areas and the interest in the programmes that the United Nations organizations were piloting in the fields of reconstruction, livelihood recovery and food security. The delegation would like to wish the Nepalese people and the Government of Nepal all the best in their endeavour to recover from the natural disaster they faced and in the implementation of their plan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

67. In conclusion, the delegation would like to express its deepest appreciation to the Government of Nepal for facilitating the field visit and to the Resident Coordinator and the UNCT for all the efforts made to give a wide overview of the work of the organizations in Nepal and for being a wonderful host for the joint field visit to Nepal.
