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SYSTEM-WIDE COHERENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Increased efficiency and improved cooperation between departments are challenges for any major organization, and the United Nations is by no means different. Since the foundation of the UN in 1945, new areas of operations have been added on a yearly basis, and today the Organization encompasses a myriad of agencies, funds and programmes. While some are working well together, others are operating independent of each other, often wasting valuable resources in uncoordinated efforts. And Member States – with their specific agendas – further hamper the implementation of agreed goals.

As a consequence, world leaders decided to put the question of “system-wide coherence of the UN’s operational activities” on the agenda at the 2005 World Summit. But since the Summit, debates on the issue have revealed deep political fault lines running through the United Nations. Although most agree that the question is basically about improving the overall efficiency of the system, opinions often differ on how, where, and on what to spend the limited resources available. Traditionally, these issues have split the membership into two opposing blocs; developing countries of the South and the developed countries of the North.¹ Since the 2005 World Summit, however, the debate has proven decidedly more nuanced, with several competing sub-factions developing within the two blocs; some holding more pragmatic views of reform, while others are in favor of general positions.

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This chapter explores the ongoing discussions of improving the system-wide coherence of the UN’s operational activities. It presents a detailed-oriented and chronological examination of the debates that have taken place since 2005 and onwards. Its purpose is to contribute to a deeper understanding of Member States’ positions and motivations by illuminating what the membership has discussed so far.

SYSTEM-WIDE COHERENCE BEFORE 2005

According to a 2005 report of the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit, coherence reform of the UN’s development activities can be roughly divided into three distinct phases:²

1945 – 1966:

The founders of the UN initially paid little attention to long-term development activities, largely leaving them to specialized agencies and voluntary contributions. However, as the need for assistance

and aid grew, efforts were launched to improve cooperation across sectors, leading to the creation of several joint programs: the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA) in 1949, the Special Fund in 1958, the World Food Programme (WFP) in 1961, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964 and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1965, which merged EPTA and the Special Fund. The end of this period marks the beginning of a debate between centralists and decentralists and the role of the newly created independent agencies within the United Nations system. This period also marks the birth of the third world as an independent force at the UN.

1966 – 1997

The period is characterized by an increase in UN development assistance, and a subsequent rise in reform attempts and proposals to promote efficiency and effectiveness of development cooperation. In 1969, a British UN official, Robert Jackson, published his report *A Study of the Capacity of the UN Development System*, making sweeping recommendations to rationalize the UN system's development activities, including the UNDP and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Some recommendations were acted upon, such as the establishment of a UNDP Resident Coordinator at the country level as well as of a Director-General for operational activities. Other reports include the Pearson-Commission (1969) and the Brandt-Report (1979).

1997 – 2005

This period deals primarily with the efforts made by Secretary-General Kofi Annan. His report from 1997; *Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform* (A/51/950), recommended extensive reforms of operational activities, aiming at establishing new management and leadership structures for the UN. Other reform attempts include the revitalization of ECOSOC, the establishment of the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the UN System (TCPRI) as well as various outcome documents of major conference (UN as well as non-UN), such as the Millennium Declaration (A/55/2) in 2000, the Monterrey Consensus (A/CONF.198/11) in 2002, the Rome Declaration on Harmonization in 2003 and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in early 2005.

THE 2005 WORLD SUMMIT

In the run-up to the 2005 World Summit – aimed at reaffirming the Millennium Declaration of 2000 – Member States, especially the G77 & NAM and the European Union (EU), embarked on intensive negotiations regarding the exact object of the debate. The United States, according to one observer,

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did not take a vested interest in the issue since they usually tend to focus on earmarked or bilateral aid.

Overall, a vital point in the developing world's general reform agenda was, and still is, to make sure that resources are applied across the board equitably and to prevent any attempts to divert regular budget funds from development towards other purposes, such as peace and security. Moreover, both the G77 & NAM have vigorously objected to proposals that could be interpreted as imposing conditionality on aid, for instance in the areas of gender or human rights, which in their view

represents a double standard by the donor countries. "This is a somewhat valid point," said one UN official, "as it sometimes seems that the developed states pursue these goals more vigorously in the developing world than at home."

On the other hand, the developed world and especially members of the European Union flatly deny accusations of attempted 'power-grabs,' and diversion of, or conditionality on, funds. Instead, they

have argued that development is covered by voluntary funding. Developing countries are in fact the main recipients of large amounts of funding, through voluntary contributions, which in the last few years have largely surpassed the UN regular budget. Overall, Member States of the EU provide more than half of global Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the number is increasing.³ However, voluntary contributions are generally seen by developing states as funds that are spent more in accordance with the donors' priorities than with those set by the recipient country.

According to some European Union delegates, donor priorities are not, however, the main issue. Efficiency and accountability are, and more emphasis on results is a means to ensure accountability to their home constituents. As developmental aid has risen, so too has the need to ensure that "the taxpayer's money" is spent according to national priorities. For instance, the Scandinavian countries have long had a history of concentrating on human and especially women's rights, arguing that improvements within these issues often lead to enhanced development, so those governments want to ensure that their funds are used accordingly. As one European diplomat said, "it is utterly unrealistic of the developing countries to think that the donors would simply put all their money in one big UN fund and then let everyone collectively decide what to do with it. We want to give out money, but we also need to respond to the priorities set by the voters at home." For many donor-countries the process is crucial to continuing to provide their development assistance through the United Nations. A European ambassador remarked that if the process fails, the donors would have to rethink their priorities, and perhaps take their money to other organizations that could afford them with the efficiency and accountability they seek, which would mean that the UN could lose out to the Bretton Woods institutions. Some diplomats have already noted with concern the UN's current "lack of funds" compared to the Bretton Woods institutions.

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Differences also exist among the membership of the G77 & NAM. While some larger countries seek a broader UN development agenda based on centralizing decision-making on development in the General Assembly (GA); others, mainly smaller or medium-sized states, want to actively engage in attempts to improve and streamline the often cumbersome United Nations' services at the country level. Smaller aid-recipient countries frequently complain about the draining procedures involved in liaising with as many as 30 or 40 different UN entities. While some larger countries depend little on aid or have the resources to make the best of the fragmented UN system, smaller and medium-sized states often struggle.

In spite of these different perspectives, Member States signed the *World Summit Outcome Document* (A/RES/60/1) in September 2005. The document was aimed at strengthening the overall efforts of the UN, although the paragraphs dealing with System-wide Coherence seemed fairly brief considering the interests at stake. The membership had apparently sidestepped the more thorny issues, and chosen to continue with more substantial discussions on the issue after the Summit.

In paragraphs 168 and 169, the membership suggested four general areas which, if strengthened, could improve the overall coherence of the UN's development-related activities. The four fields identified for concentrated efforts were: "policy," "operational activities," "humanitarian assistance" and "environmental activities."

Within the first field of "policy," it was agreed to strengthen the linkages between normative and operational activities, improve coordination between different governing bodies of the various development and humanitarian agencies and ensure that policy themes, such as sustainable development, gender and human rights are continuously taken into account in decision-making throughout the system.

Secondly, within “operational activities,” efforts were to be directed toward implementing current reforms aimed at making the UN’s “on the ground-presence” more effective, efficient, coherent, coordinated and better performing. It was also decided to strengthen the role of the leading resident official, the Resident Coordinator (RC). Moreover, the document invited the Secretary-General to “launch work to further strengthen the management and coordination of United Nations operational activities.”

Thirdly, on “humanitarian assistance,” it was decided to strengthen the capacities of Member States, especially developing countries, to handle and respond to natural disasters. It was also agreed to strengthen the UN system’s response to humanitarian crises, by improving the system’s standby emergency capacities as well as the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (later known as the Central Emergency Response Fund or CERF).⁴

Fourthly and finally, the document recognized the need to implement a more effective system to deal with “environmental activities,” and to explore the possibility of creating a more coherent institutional framework than already in place.

It is important to note that many of the reforms suggested in the paragraphs had already been launched in other fora. This is particularly true of efforts to strengthen environmental activities as well as operational activities at the country-level. For instance, the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR) was created by the General Assembly in the late 1990s as an instrument to offer guidance on how to improve the UN operational activities, and to monitor, evaluate and assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations development system’s support given to assist the national efforts of developing countries. Some UN sources have convincingly argued that the *World Summit Outcome Document* of 2005 served mainly to infuse some momentum in the process while giving additional clout to already agreed-upon changes. In this regard, the TCPRs already contain large elements of the initiatives of the High-level Panel report, which is mentioned in the following pages. The TCPR of December 2007 (A/RES/62/208) reviewed, among others, the full implementation of General Assembly resolution A/RES/59/250 of December 2004, and plays a crucial part in establishing key new policy goals that will be significant in guiding the work of the funds and programmes during the next three years.⁵

FROM THE WORLD SUMMIT TO THE HIGH-LEVEL PANEL

The signing of the *World Summit Outcome Document* resulted in a request from the General Assembly to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for practical proposals to realize goals described in the document. In response, in February 2006, Annan announced the appointment of a *High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment*⁶

The Panel was directed to prepare an in-depth report, examining how best to strengthen the coordination of United Nations’ operational activities worldwide and to lay out the groundwork for implementing a fundamental restructuring of the Organization. The Panel was Co-Chaired by Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz of Pakistan, Prime Minister Luís Dias Diogo of Mozambique and Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of Norway. Other Panel members included Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom, Mohamed T. El-Ashry of Egypt, Robert Greenhill of Canada, Ruth Jacoby of Sweden, Ricardo Lagos Escobar of Chile, Louis Michel of Belgium, Benjamin W. Mkapa of Tanzania, Jean-Michel Severino of France, Josette S. Shiner of the United States, Keizo Takemi of Japan, and ex-officio members, Kemal Derviş of Turkey and Lennart Båge of Sweden.

By appointing prime ministers as Co-Chairs, Annan sent a strong signal that he intended to make the coherence issue a top priority. Not only would their appointments give the Panel some additional authority and prestige, they could also help keep national governments invested in the process.⁶

The Panel was given a very short deadline to complete its study. The Secretary-General wanted to receive it by November 2006, so that the General Assembly could discuss the recommendations before the end of the year and possibly take action on them before he left office on 31 December 2006. Some commentators have noted that the Secretary-General urgently wanted to leave a legacy of operational reform behind for his successor. An adopted reform package, or at least an outline of its principles and main features, it was thought, would force the new Secretary-General, slated to take over 1 January 2007, to carry on with the process and the implementation of any recommended reforms.

However, even before the Panel could begin its work, both the developing and developed worlds scrambled to influence the Panel with their views. The latter seemed especially well-prepared. Only a few days after the appointment of the Panel, a group of 13 major donor countries sent a letter to the Norwegian Co-Chair, Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg.⁷ The group called themselves the G13 and consisted of Canada and twelve European countries - Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The letter included an annex listing eight key issues that the G13 felt would strengthen the UN operational system:

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1. *The core role of the UN's operational system:* What are the main normative and operational roles of the UN? What are the comparative advantages of the UN? What tasks could be left to other actors, and what are the complementary roles of the UN, the global funds, bilateral donors and multilateral development banks?
2. *The structure of the UN's operational system:* The current fragmented structure hinders achievement of results at the country level. How can the system be better organized at headquarters and field levels to achieve synergies, avoid overlaps and rationalize its work? Should normative and operational roles within the system be more integrated or separated?
3. *Governance of the UN's operational system:* How to streamline governance functions, eliminate duplication and clarify roles of the existing governance structure of operational activities (including the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the boards of funds and programmes, governing bodies of specialized agencies, and the inter-agency mechanisms)?
4. *Deepening and accelerating country level reform:* What needs to be done in order for the UN to maximize its contribution to the achievement of international development goals? The Panel should assess ongoing reform efforts and propose ways to strengthen them.
5. *Funding of the UN's operational activities:* What funding mechanisms can better respond to challenges and broaden the donor circle, including private financing? The UN funds and programmes have urged for adequate, predictable and multi-year funding to the regular budgets, as present arrangements to mobilize resources are inadequate to respond to shortcomings.
6. *Mainstreaming cross-cutting issues:* The UN has a comparative advantage working with mainstreaming cross-cutting issues (such as human rights, environment and gender). Its role should be strengthened, for instance, to improve the fragmented gender architecture of the UN.
7. *Managing change and human resources in a new operational environment:* What corporate culture and key skills are needed in the UN system, since a large share of UN staff will retire in 5 to 10 years?

8. *UN contribution to improving aid effectiveness:* The Panel could assess the implementation by the UN Development Group (UNDG) of the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness.

In the following weeks and months, some members of the G13 continued to voice their opinion on the outcome of the Panel report. For instance, several informal papers were tabled for discussion at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC). Belgium produced a paper on a "redesign of the UN development architecture;" the UK floated a discussion paper on "system-wide coherence, a vision for the UN;" and the Netherlands prepared a non-paper on "a UN operational system for development fit to face the challenges of reaching the MDGs."⁸

The Netherlands was especially vocal in regard to the G13-project. During a speech in Yemen in late February, the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, Agnes van Ardenne, said "It makes no sense to carve up development problems and divide them among no fewer than 38 UN organisations. The result is too little efficiency and too much overlap, too little action and too much talk. As part of a massive overhaul, at least a third of the UN organisations should be shut down and the remainder reorganised into three strong pillars, three strong operational agencies, dealing with development, humanitarian affairs and the environment." According to some diplomats familiar with the context of the speech, it was more an attempt to get discussions started than actual official Dutch policy, however, the speech highlighted the importance that some of the larger donor countries clearly attached to the process.

Basically, the developed world supported four general ideas on how they saw a more coherent UN system: 1. Merge the UN into three main operational organizations devoted to development, humanitarian affairs and the environment. Integrate the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) into either the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the UN Development Programme (UNDP); 2. Upgrade the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) with a renewed mandate and improved funding; 3. Group the UN agencies working at country level into a single UN team under the leadership of a Resident Coordinator; 4. Limit UN development work to mainly technical assistance, global environmental protection and "niche" areas such as conflict prevention, domestic governance, post-conflict reconstruction and gender, while making other substantial matters the responsibility of the World Trade Organization and the Bretton Woods institutions.⁹

The developing world, on the other hand, took a very different view of the development component of the process. In several statements the G77 & NAM expressed fierce opposition to any attempt to undermine or dilute UN entities providing development services. Stressing the United Nations system's central role as the premier international organization for development and environment, they cautioned that the reform process should avoid eroding the mandate and resources of its different components under the regular budget of the UN. In other words it would be wrong to confine the UN's role to "niche," while leaving issues such as development strategies, trade, finance and macro-economic policy to the likes of the Bretton Woods institutions. The developing countries felt that leaving development strategies to non-UN organizations could offer developed countries a convenient pretext to reduce development funding. Instead the UN should assert leadership over such organizations, providing policy directions and guidance.

The developing world also expressed a wish to keep UNCTAD as the focal point in the UN system for the integrated treatment of development (including trade, finance, technology and macro-economic issues), and they underscored that a total or immediate restructuring of UN activities should not constitute a goal in itself, nor should it be a cost-cutting exercise. Instead the principles of cost recovery should be harmonized, and its proceeds retained and spent on development programs.¹⁰

In addition, they stressed that there should be room for variety, as diverse structures often offered a wider margin of choice. Monolithic structures, on the other hand, are often more prone to bureaucracy, with their centralization and increased need for coordination, and could actually hamper access to the best services. Although the developing world admitted the need to establish more effective and comprehensive accountability and monitoring mechanisms, they added that the process should focus on areas where better coordination was really needed, while also focusing on the major causes hindering the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals. In general, it was agreed by the developing world that “the fundamental characteristics of the operational activities for development of the United Nations system must be, inter alia, their universal, voluntary and grant nature, their neutrality and their multilateralism, as well as their ability to respond to the development needs of recipient countries in a flexible manner.”¹¹

During the summer of 2006, the High-level Panel continued to hold meetings and consultations with representatives from the UN, governments as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For instance, on 2 July 2006, the Panel held a day-long consultation with over 50 civil society representatives from around the world in Geneva, Switzerland. The consultations focused on cross-cutting themes including gender equality, human rights, sustainable development and the environment.

HIGH-LEVEL PANEL COMPLETES REPORT ON SYSTEM-WIDE COHERENCE

In November 2006, the Panel finally submitted its report to the Secretary-General after seven months of work. Entitled “*Delivering as One*,” (A/61/583) it included extensive recommendations on “...a framework for a unified and coherent UN structure at the country level [...] matched by more coherent governance, funding and management arrangements at the centre,” but it avoided concrete proposals related to the merging of different agencies, much to the satisfaction of the G77 & NAM. Furthermore, the report acknowledged the need for the UN to work more closely together with the Bretton Woods institutions. In general, the report developed a set of recommendations based on five strategic directions:¹²

“... a framework for a unified and coherent UN structure at the country level ... matched by more coherent governance, funding and management arrangements at the centre.”

1. “Ensure coherence and consolidation of UN activities, in line with the principle of country ownership, at all levels (country, regional, headquarters).”
2. Establish appropriate governance, managerial and funding mechanisms to empower and support consolidation, and link the performance and results of UN organizations to funding.
3. Overhaul business practices of the United Nations system to ensure a focus on outcomes, responsiveness to needs and delivery of results by the United Nations system, as measured in advancing the Millennium Development Goals.
4. Ensure significant further opportunities for consolidation and effective delivery of ‘One United Nations’ [One-UN] through an in-depth review.
5. Undertake implementation urgently but not in an ill-planned and hasty manner that could compromise permanent and effective change.”

Building on these directions, the report centered its recommendations on eight specific clusters:

1. *Delivering as one at country level:* Consolidate the UN’s country-level activities under a “One-UN” project. Empower a Resident Coordinator to lead “one programme, one budget, and, where appropriate, one office.” Pilot-test the “One-UN” project in five countries (later eight countries).
2. *Governance and institutional reform:* Create a “Sustainable Development Board,” reporting to ECOSOC, to oversee the “One-UN” project. At headquarters level, the Panel

- recommended that; the Secretary-General appoint a UN Development Coordinator, to be drawn from the UNDP and report to the Sustainable Development Board, which would be responsible for the performance of UN development activities; that a Global Leaders' Forum (L27) be created within ECOSOC to upgrade that body's policy coordination role, building on the reforms established in the November 2006 General Assembly resolution on strengthening ECOSOC; and finally, that the President of the World Bank, the Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund and the Secretary-General of the United Nations should set up a process to review their respective roles at global and country levels.
3. *Humanitarian issues and recovery:* The UN, national governments, the Red Cross and NGOs should review their relationship in order to avoid fragmentation and strengthen their partnerships. A Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) should be fully funded to better facilitate more effective flows of funds in response to disasters. Humanitarian agencies of the UN should clarify their individual mandates in regards to internally displaced persons (IDP). The UN Development Programme (UNDP) should become the United Nations leader on early recovery. The Rome-based agencies; World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), should review their individual mandates to build better food security.
 4. *Environment:* International environmental governance should be enhanced by giving the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) real authority as the environment pillar of the United Nations system. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) should be strengthened as the major financial mechanism for the global environment and a stronger partnership should be constructed between UNEP (normative) and UNDP (operational) to build on their complementarities.
 5. *Gender:* The gender architecture of the UN system should be streamlined by consolidating the three existing gender institutions - Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women (OSAGI), Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), and UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) - into a gender equality and women's empowerment program.
 6. *Human Rights:* The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should provide support to the Resident Coordinator system.
 7. *Funding:* Funding for the "One-UN" project should be predictable and multi-year, reform should be driven by channeling reform savings back into the system through an empowerment fund, and a benchmark for the principles of good multilateral donorship should be established during 2008.
 8. *Business practices:* The Chief Executives Board (CEB), a body composed of the executive heads of the different organizations of the UN system under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General - to further cooperation - should review its functions; it should foster improvements in management efficiency, transparency and accountability of the United Nations system. Business practices of the UN should be harmonized, and evaluation mechanism established. Human resources policies should be updated, executives selected according to clear criteria and the Secretary-General should form a "senior change management team."

Disappointed that the report was not immediately taken up for formal consideration by the General Assembly as he had expected, Kofi Annan decided to move forward on his own. He proposed to proceed individually with the "gender" aspect of the report, in order to enable this particular cluster to progress, however, this was nixed by the G77 & NAM. Instead, the "One-UN" project was launched independently of the wider process. The project involved five volunteer countries, which subsequently grew to eight (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay, and Vietnam). During 2007, they experimented with several different models of cooperation "on the ground," including elements such as "one programme," "one budgetary

framework,” “one leader” and “one office.” Annan also requested that the CEB undertake a study to evaluate its business practices since 2001.

No other action was taken on the High-level Panel’s recommendations until Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued his own official response to the Panel. In a six-page report (A/61/836), released on 3 April 2007, he gave “broad support” to the recommendations set forth by the Panel, and he reiterated the Panel’s focus on improving the UN system by “overcoming fragmentation and bringing together the system’s many assets.”

The Secretary-General furthermore endorsed the “One-UN” project and underscored the importance of results-based performance at all levels, of the central concept of national ownership, the authority and accountability of the Resident Coordinator, and of the overall coordinating role of the UNDP. He also endorsed the idea of the establishment of a Sustainable Development Board “as an inclusive strategic overview and governance framework for the implementation of the “One United Nations.” In regard to the section of the report on governance of the UN, and thus, management of the Secretariat, Ban noted that it “requires further deliberation and discussion.”

Regarding the “environment,” the Secretary-General recommended that the current system of international environmental governance undergo an independent assessment, although he did not specify how this process would interact with the General Assembly’s ongoing consultative process.

Kofi Annan decided to move forward on his own, launching the “One-UN” project independently of the wider process of consultations with Member States.

On “business practices,” Ban reaffirmed his commitment to improving accountability, transparency, efficiency and human resources development. On “humanitarian assistance,” he asked Member States to consider strengthening the overall ability of the Organization, and especially the Rome-based agencies (FAO, IFAD, WFP) as a coordinator in terms of enhancing its capacities to deal with the transition from relief to development, as well as in risk reduction and early warning in the area of natural disasters. He said that the Panel’s recommendations in these areas should be further considered.

Ban also asked the membership to consider the Panel’s recommendation on the gender architecture of the UN system, and noted that a special Under-Secretary-General for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women could lead to a strengthened Organization. Finally, he was in full agreement with the Panel’s recommendation that the issue of “human rights” should be an integral part of UN activities.

One issue not addressed by Ban was the proposal for an independent task force that would carry out further consolidation, building on the Panel’s work.

GA DISCUSSIONS ON THE HIGH-LEVEL PANEL’S RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of April 2007, the General Assembly finally met to consider the proposals of the Secretary-General’s response to the High-level Panel’s recommendations (A/61/PV.94 - 95). The debate was chaired by the President of the General Assembly, Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, who was now guiding the process.

In her opening remarks, she stressed the importance of the “One-UN” project as “an essential element for the intergovernmental consultations on the operational effectiveness of the UN.” She further noted that she had identified several commonalities among the positions of Member States, including views that the UN should remain at the heart of the multilateral development system and that there is a need for national ownership in the coherence process.

The following debate on all of the recommendations did not, however, reveal much harmony between the different factions of Member States. Consequently, the General Assembly President appointed Ambassadors Christopher Hackett of Barbados and Jean-Marc Hoscheit of Luxembourg as Co-Chairs to help her facilitate the upcoming consultations. On their initiative, the process was subsequently carved up into eight tracks, each specifically dealing with the eight different recommendations identified above, instead of one continuous debate on all of them. This exercise, however, was purely meant to facilitate discussions, to hear the views of Member States, to demonstrate the complexities of the issues at hand to them, and to demonstrate that the process was underway. The G77/NAM had made it clear that the process should not be used as a way to take independent decisions on any of the clusters.

Accordingly, during the summer of 2007 the membership got together on eight occasions to discuss the different clusters; “Delivering as one at country level,” “governance and institutional reform,” “humanitarian issues and recovery,” “environment,” “gender,” “human rights,” “funding” and “business practices.”

The first meeting took place under the headline of “humanitarian issues and recovery.” System-wide coordination of the humanitarian field, internally displaced persons (IDP), transition from relief to development, the Peacebuilding Fund, long-term food security and disaster risk reduction were among the issues discussed. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes, also briefed Member States on the progress made to date in improving system-wide delivery of humanitarian assistance. In addition, he noted that an evaluation of the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is under way, and is expected to be issued later in 2008.

The EU and the United States agreed that a stronger partnership between the UN, NGOs and national governments should ultimately lie at the heart of the ongoing reform efforts. For instance, the EU spoke in support of the actions of humanitarian coordinators “on the ground” to strengthen the Resident Coordinator system. The US confirmed its support for the role of the interagency standing committee on humanitarian affairs, and for the global platform initiatives to reduce the impact of national disaster hazards. In fostering better coordinated humanitarian efforts, the United States favored leadership roles for UNDP, the World Bank and the World Food Programme (WFP).

With regards to the issue of internally displaced persons (IDP), which also fell under the above recommendation, the EU, the US and Japan recognized that the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should take an inclusive approach as a coordinator of shared responsibilities amongst all UN and non-UN key partners. They also welcomed the role envisaged for UNDP and its Crisis Prevention and Recovery (CPR) unit as a coordinator for early recovery efforts. The efforts of the Rome-based agencies in guaranteeing long-term food security were also encouraged.

The Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC), under the leadership of G77 chairs; Pakistan and Cuba, and speaking on behalf of the G77 & NAM, stated that it would prefer to focus on the subjects of development, environment and humanitarian assistance, as these were the mandates set by the *World Summit Outcome Document*. Also, the Joint Coordinating Committee underlined that it did not consider the consultations as a premise for arriving at any decisions, but simply as an opportunity to exchange views.

The JCC expressed its concern that the recommendations on “humanitarian assistance and recovery” included in the Panel’s efforts did not take into account the outcomes and divergent views that had emerged during the negotiations in the humanitarian segment of ECOSOC; and recommendations

on human rights; gender and sustainable development lacked clarity and specificity and could be misused to impose conditions on international development assistance.

The issue of internally displaced persons (IDP) also proved to be a contentious issue for the JCC. Expressing concerns about the stronger mandate recommended for UNHCR, it stated that, in its view, IDPs differ fundamentally from cross-border refugees and IDPs should therefore remain under the sole purview, responsibility and sovereignty of the affected state. Members of the group also observed, with reference to the recommendation, that agencies clarify their mandate on IDPs, that it is for Member States to decide on agencies' mandates and not for the agencies to expand their mandates on their own initiative.

As to the issue of early recovery and the involvement of UNDP, together with a suggested increased role for UN agencies, funds and programmes in humanitarian assistance, the JCC expressed concerns that it could negatively influence the performance of agencies in delivering development assistance, which remains its primary goal. It was noted that early recovery exceeds the mandate of UNDP, thus its work in this cluster should be discussed further.

Finally, increased partnership between governments and NGOs was also considered a contentious issue by the JCC as ownership and leadership of humanitarian assistance and recovery programs, in its view, should remain with individual governments.

“Gender” was the focus of the second meeting. Deputy Secretary-General Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, who was already closely involved in the entire System-wide Coherence process, opened the debate with a comment on the need for structural changes within the UN regarding gender issues and called for assistance to Member States who request help in reforming their own gender structures. On that note, she mentioned the necessity for providing sufficient and effective resources and recommended the establishment of an intergovernmental gender task force that could work to unite the resources of the three existing organizations that currently focus on gender issues at the UN: UNIFEM, OSAGI and DAW, and by eliminating duplication, achieve better results.

The participating states all voiced satisfaction with the process and a continued commitment to the project. Not only had the UN avoided duplication and fragmentation, they felt, the agencies involved had been able to make a greater overall impact on national development since the start of the process.

The gender issue was largely promoted by the Scandinavian countries, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (CANZ) and the President of the General Assembly, Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, but was mainly written off by the G77 & NAM as a western concern, which in their view could not be seen as an isolated question. Instead, developing countries viewed gender issues from a development rather than a human rights perspective, which, they felt, was already included in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

India, a prominent member of both G77 & NAM, suggested that “some fragmentation ... is necessary to confront an issue whose footprints can be found in such multiple areas.” In its view, a single entity could not possibly handle the need for “action on multiple fronts.” The delegation also recommended identifying the root causes for lack of follow-up to previous commitments on gender, before undertaking a new round of reform. The United States supported India’s position and added that there was no need for a new Under-Secretary-General for gender issues. Instead, the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General should take the lead on gender issues.

“Delivering as one at country level” was the subject of the third meeting. Member States seemed quite satisfied with the project as a whole. Briefings were given at the meeting by representatives from the participating pilot-states as well as from the representative of the UN in Rwanda. While

stressing the importance of national ownership, the participating states all voiced satisfaction with the process and a continued commitment to the project. Not only had the UN avoided duplication and fragmentation, they felt, the agencies involved had been able to make a greater overall impact on national development since the start of the process.

In Tanzania for instance, 17 different UN agencies had previously been occupied within various aspects of the development process, and their coming together under one leadership had not only reduced unnecessary costs, but had also helped streamline communications between the government and the UN as a whole and improved the UN's normative and analytic expertise, operational capabilities and advocacy role.

In Rwanda, the project had also played a part in strengthening government leadership in the overall development process. Having one partner and a common set of priorities had enabled the government to assume ownership of the process, and get a better understanding of the goals of individual projects. As an added bonus, the project also seemed to have fostered a spirit of commonality across the different UN agencies.

In spite of all these positive developments, a few challenges remain. The representative of the United Nations in Rwanda was wondering how best to capture the normative aspect, as well as how to create a suitable framework for accountability.

In general, all pilot-states appeared equally concerned with the overall problem of evaluating the "One-UN" project, and although several states stressed the danger of a "one size fits all" approach, several also emphasized the need for well-established criteria for success.

In the ensuing comments from the floor, the membership, especially smaller and medium-sized developing countries, expressed satisfaction over the project. For many, the burden of dealing with numerous agencies on the ground had often been overwhelming. But they too stressed that the initiative must not be seen as "one-size-fits-all." Some larger countries also cautioned that consolidating UN programs in their countries into a single voice might undermine countries' sovereignty and impinge upon their freedom to work with the partner they choose.

Germany, speaking on behalf of the EU, observed that the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of the UN's operational activities should continue as a UN focal point for development.

Germany, speaking on behalf of the European Union, observed that the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of the UN's operational activities (TCPR) should continue as a UN focal point for development. Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the G77 & NAM, warned that great care is needed when introducing human rights as well as gender rights at the country level.

"Governance and Institutional Reform" was the fourth meeting to take place. The different statements of the membership reflected a largely negative attitude towards the Panel's recommendations on governance, especially towards the suggested establishment of two new bodies under ECOSOC; the Sustainable Development Board and the Global Leaders Forum (L27).

Although a few countries maintained that the latter could be useful as a focal point for countries participating in the "One-UN" project, the majority of Member States were critical towards the establishment of such bodies, which in their view would further weaken ECOSOC. Moreover, several states stressed that where and how these new bodies would fit into the current ECOSOC structure appeared uncertain.

The “Environment,” which was the focal point for the fifth meeting, evoked some controversy. Some regional groups felt that the process was already underway in other fora, thus making the meeting superfluous, while other groups insisted on dealing with the issue within the context of System-wide Coherence.¹³ In regard to the specific recommendation to strengthen UNEP with a renewed mandate, improved funding and more authority, some Member States, most notably Mexico, Switzerland, France and the countries of the European Union, backed the idea of creating a new and stronger “United Nations Environment Organization,” while others, especially Russia, felt that reform should take place within the existing UN architecture.

“Human Rights,” discussed at the sixth meeting, also evoked some disagreement. Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, launched the discussion by noting that the mainstreaming of human rights into the entire UN system, including development, was already being implemented in some ways by her office. Although all Member States confirmed the linkage between human rights and development, some developing countries expressed concern that the recommendations could be used as a way to impose conditionalities on development assistance.

Furthermore, the JCC noted that human rights are universal and not just limited to developing countries; therefore to ensure that the recommendations on human rights contained in the Panel's report would not produce biased results, Member States must make sure that compliance with the recommendations are not monitored only in developing countries.

“Funding” was the issue at the seventh meeting. The membership agreed that implementation of many of the Panel's proposals in this cluster could play a central role in overcoming the current fragmentation of the UN system, especially in regard to the question of “delivering as one at country level,” as well as to improving the business practices of the UN System. Many Member States, especially developing countries, indicated that the System-wide Coherence process should not be a cost-cutting exercise. They emphasized that any reform savings should be reinvested in development. Moreover, several states felt that some aspects of the “Funding” cluster should be discussed within the framework of existing UN mechanisms, in particular during the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR) discussions to be held later during the 62nd General Assembly session.

In essence, the debate revealed the following issues to be of central importance and concern: the quality, quantity and predictability of funding; improving the balance between non-core and core funding; how to reinvest reform savings; resource mobilization; and the need to review the UN's funding mechanisms and practices, including the alignment of budget cycles and the establishment of a budgetary framework for the “One-UN” pilots.

Discussions within the context of System-wide Coherence should not interfere with negotiations and decisions taken by the Fifth Committee.

“Business Practices,” a topic that had entered the debate at the seventh meeting, was also the focus of the eighth and last meeting. Jayantilal Karia, the Director of the UN Accounts Division, briefed the membership on the status of the work of the Chief Executives Board (CEB). During the ensuing debate, Member States expressed fundamentally divergent views on the recommendations offered by the Panel. While the EU, the US, Japan, Canada, New Zealand and Australia fully supported the recommendations contained in the Panel's report, Russia remarked that the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly is and should remain the only forum for discussions and decisions on issues included in the business practices cluster.

The EU recalled that harmonization of business practices was taken up in the TCPR resolution approved in 2004 (A/RES/59/250) concerning UN operational activities. It called for regular updates on the progress made by the UN Development Group (UNDG) and the CEB in the TCPR harmonization process.¹⁴

The EU also encouraged the Secretary-General to include procurement reform in the list of issues to be examined by the CEB. Japan noted that the issue of the harmonization of business practices covers a wide range of UN activities and should be pursued system-wide. It was suggested that a comprehensive progress report from the CEB on the simplification of business practices might be helpful.

The Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC) of the G77 & NAM expressed the view that the business cluster of issues, due to their budgetary and administrative nature, could only be discussed by the Fifth Committee. It pointed out that the Fifth Committee had already taken many decisions within this cluster, and more negotiations are on the agenda for the resumed session in 2008 pending the reports from the Secretary-General on various issues. Discussions within the context of System-wide Coherence should not interfere with negotiations and decisions taken by the Fifth Committee. In regards to human resources management, a substantial reform is currently being discussed and several measures have already been agreed upon. The JCC stressed that geographical representation must remain an important criterion for appointment, especially at the senior management level.

Finally, the JCC did not see the necessity for the transformation of the CEB into a policy making body. Instead, it stressed the importance of letting the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) of the CEB decide matters relating to monitoring and evaluation.

CONSULTATIONS END AND THE 62ND GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION BEGINS

By August 2007, all meetings on the clusters had taken place. In their status report to the General Assembly, Ambassadors Hoscheit and Hackett noted that “substantial differences remain on procedural and substantive grounds over the further consideration of the HLP [High-Level Panel] report,” and they outlined three recommendations for the future process: Firstly, the GA should receive an overall view of the multiple activities covered by the Panel report and the subsequent report of the Secretary-General. Secondly, the GA needs to exercise leadership on the issue, and thirdly, consultations should be continued as required.¹⁵

Although the meetings had failed to produce any concrete results, they did “serve to clearly illuminate all the problems,” as one ambassador noted. Statements delivered during the 61st General Assembly session revealed that the discussions - to some degree - continued along the fault lines of the North/South divide. On the one hand, the large donors; the European Union, Canada, New

Some new developments could result in a realignment of positions and move the debate away from an entrenched dispute pitting donor countries against the G77 & NAM.

Zealand, Australia and Norway worked tirelessly to move many of the Panel recommendations forward, emphasizing efficiency and accountability, while prioritizing security, human rights and gender issues.

The G77 & NAM, on the other hand, largely resisted imposing stronger conditions and stricter accountability standards on UN entities. They also insisted on retaining power in the General Assembly, especially in the Fifth Committee, and continuously stated that the centerpiece of the discussions should be economic and social development, with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as the overarching framework. The groups’ priorities included funding, development and governance, as well as strengthening global partnerships, demand-driven development cooperation based on national programs and support for reforms that would improve organizational effectiveness with any savings redirected to development projects.

Several diplomats interviewed for this chapter expressed concerns that these opposing views could potentially stall the future process, especially if the G77 & NAM chose to adopt “a holistic

development agenda,” which in UN jargon is often understood as an all-or-nothing approach. Such an agenda could be adopted to counter the developed countries, if, for instance, they decide to press further on human rights or gender - seen by many developing countries as just a way to impose more conditionalities on funds, or if some of the larger and more vocal members of the G77 & NAM choose to pursue other agendas within the current process, such as a reform of the Security Council.

Another source for concern seems to be the frequent misinterpretations of positions taken. Though often a result of a genuine lack of understanding of their counterpart’s perspectives, some diplomats on either side frequently wonder if some of the misunderstandings are intentional and aimed at frustrating the process. However, some new developments could result in a realignment of positions, and move the debate away from an entrenched dispute pitting donor countries against the G77 & NAM.

The question of “delivering as one UN,” in particular, has been undergoing an interesting development that could move the overall process. Reportedly, the project seems to be growing in popularity from the bottom of the hierarchy of the G77 & NAM and up, with some 30 small and medium-sized states currently interested in joining the project as pilot-countries. This has apparently created a vocal group within the G77 & NAM, aligned with the European Union, advocating for progress within this cluster.

This development was further underlined on 8 February 2008 as Member States met for the first meeting of the 62nd General Assembly session on the issue. The President of the General Assembly, Sgrjan Kerim, and his two Co-Chairs, Ambassadors Augustine Mahiga of Tanzania and Paul Kavanagh of Ireland, announced that progress from now on would be pursued on especially two fronts; on “delivering as one” and in the Chiefs Executives Board (CEB), which would include the clusters of “business practices” and “funding.” Within the CEB, the focus would be on continuing the move towards harmonizing business practices, thereby “eliminating internal administrative and related blockages to greater coherence.” On the “One-UN” project, they noted that they would strive to reach an agreement by June 2008 on the modalities for implementing greater coherence across the development activities system. Furthermore, they added that a definitive evaluation of the pilot-projects would be finalized by 2009, and finally stressed that local ownership of the process should remain key.¹⁶

“We don’t need an agreement, because the process is already moving quietly along, and we would not want to provoke a showdown with the ‘big ones’ [of the G77].”

The meeting revealed that forthcoming sessions will largely focus on the “One-UN” project. Many diplomats from donor and pilot countries expressed delight over this development. In their view, positive developments at the country level could even come to guide the process in New York, in what some called a “bottom-up” approach. For instance, work within “gender” and “environment” is currently more likely to advance at the country level than in New York.

Moreover, such a slow-moving “bottom-up” process could eventually develop into a fait accompli without forcing the overall membership to resort to resolutions or major arrangements. As one European insider noted, “we don’t need an agreement, because the process is already moving quietly along, and we would not want to provoke a showdown with the ‘big ones’ [of the G77].”

The appointment of the two ambassadors - representing the European Union and a prominent pilot-country - sent a clear signal to the membership in general and the G77 & NAM in particular, that the main focus will be on the further implementation of the “One-UN.” Many are quietly hoping that Ambassador Mahiga can use his status within the G77 & NAM to create a positive environment for further progress on the project.

On the other clusters, expectations among diplomats are decidedly more modest. It appears that discussions within the context of the System-wide Coherence debate in New York on “gender,” “environment”¹⁷ and “governance and institutional reform” are currently moving very slowly, and are not likely to be further discussed during the 62nd session. The cluster, “Humanitarian issues and recovery,” is already being discussed in a more detailed-oriented fashion in Geneva and is not likely to be further pursued in New York either.

In conclusion, few currently anticipate that progress can be made simultaneously in New York within all of the eight clusters. The meetings last year once again highlighted the fault lines running through the membership, and exposed the continued divisiveness of some of the issues; especially in regards to human rights, gender and refugees. However, the meetings also revealed that a large number of Member States across the board have vested interests in improved coherence of the UN system at the country level, and momentum seems to be building, despite some criticism of the project’s incoherent funding structure and some initial resistance from UN staff. With this in mind, it seems that future progress will depend on developments at the country level.

¹ The developing world’s economic interests at the UN are most often represented by the Group of 77 & China (G77), a coalition of 130 developing countries. Their political interests have been handled by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a coalition of 118 developing countries. On the cross-cutting issue of System-wide Coherence the two organizations have often cooperated and will therefore be referred to as G77 & NAM. To avoid tedious repetition the term “the developing world” will also be used. This paper will refer to the developed world as the European Union (EU), Norway and CANZ (Canada, Australia and New Zealand). The US will be mentioned separately as they have not been very actively engaged in the current discussions on System-wide Coherence.

² On 25 January 2005 the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit published a two-part report, including a historical review, concerning the overall performance of the UN system at the country level (A/60/125 – E/2005/85, A/60/125/Add.1 – E/2005/85/Add.1). Following the report, the Secretary-General and the Chief Executives Board (CEB) published their comments and recommendations on how to improve the performance at country level (A/60/125/Add.2 – E/2005/85/Add.2).

³ Commission of the European Communities: Communication from the Commission to the Council, *The European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Keeping Europe's promises on Financing for Development*, Brussels, 2007 or see http://www.oecd.org/document/51/0,3343,en_2649_34603_38904435_1_1_1_1,00.html

⁴ CERF is a loan mechanism established in 1992 to provide urgent and effective humanitarian aid to regions threatened by, or experiencing, a humanitarian crisis. The General Assembly formally established the Central Emergency Response Fund in December 2005. Designed as an upgrade to the “revolving loan” mechanism established by the GA, the CERF initiative was launched by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan on 9 March 2006 and was considered by some to be the first concrete accomplishment of post-2005 UN reform efforts.

⁵ More information on the TCPR is available at <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/tcpr.htm> or in the reports of the Secretary-General (A/62/253) and by the UN Second Committee (A/62/424).

⁶ Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg’s statement to the General Assembly on 26 September 2007 (A/62/PV.7) is a good example of the continued Norwegian involvement in the process.

⁷ The letter is available at <http://www.centerforunreform.org/node/33>.

⁸ Victor-Yves Ghebali and Manuela Tortora, *In the Quest for UN System-Wide Coherence: The Conundrum of Multilateral Development Cooperation*, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 2007.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Statement adopted by the special ministerial meeting of the Group of 77, Putrajaya, Malaysia 29 May 2006. Available as an appendix or in full at <http://www.g77.org/doc/putrajaya.htm>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Partially available as an appendix.

¹³ Ambassadors Claude Heller of Mexico and Peter Maurer of Switzerland chair the informal negotiations on strengthening international environmental governance, a separate process that came out of the 2005 World Summit. See www.centerforunreform.org/node/160

¹⁴ During 2007, the CEB took a decision to integrate the UNDG as the third pillar of the board, focusing on UN system country operations. The other pillars of the CEB are the high-level committees on programmes (HLCP) and on management (HLCM).

¹⁵ The report of 4 Oct 2007 is available at <http://www.un.org/ga/president/61/follow-up/system-wide-coherence.shtml>

¹⁶ Please see <http://www.centerforunreform.org/node/301> for a full account of the meeting.

¹⁷ Please see note 13.

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