Executive Summary

This report has been prepared in response to the report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations. It offers comments on some of the Panel’s recommendations from the perspective of the UN Secretariat and, in some cases, includes specific suggestions regarding their implementation, which the General Assembly may wish to take into account.

The Secretary-General commends the report of the Panel to the attention of the General Assembly. Expanding and deepening the relationship with NGOs will further strengthen both the United Nations and the intergovernmental debates on issues of global importance. The Panel makes a compelling case for the UN to become a more outward-looking organization. Another important theme is the need for the UN to “connect the global with the local”. Building on the Panel’s proposals, this report makes a number of concrete suggestions and actions in connection with increasing the participation of NGOs in intergovernmental bodies, the accreditation process, improving involvement of NGOs from developing countries and strengthening of the UN’s own institutional capacity for NGO engagement.
Introduction

1. My report of two years ago, “Strengthening the United Nations: An Agenda for Further Change”\(^1\) reflected on the growing importance of non-governmental organizations to the work of the United Nations. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)\(^2\) “embrace virtually every level of organization, from the village community to global summits, and almost every sector of public life, from the provision of microcredit and the delivery of emergency relief supplies, to environmental and human rights activism.”

2. As I pointed out in that report, the relationship between the UN and NGOs is as old as the Charter itself. Yet the system for facilitating this interaction needs to be strengthened. This is why I appointed in February 2003 a panel of eminent persons, chaired by the former President of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. The Panel worked diligently over the last year - taking stock of existing practice, consulting widely with interested parties and proposing better ways of managing the UN-civil society relations. The Panel’s report\(^3\) was launched on 21 June 2004 and contains 30 specific proposals for reform and improvement.

3. At the outset, it is important to stress that the United Nations is and will remain an intergovernmental organization where decisions are taken by its Member States. The Panel’s valuable suggestions can be taken in the context of the ongoing process of modernization and institutional change that this Organization has undergone in the last decade. Expanding and deepening the relationship with NGOs will further strengthen both the institution and the intergovernmental debate. This is an opportunity for the United Nations to enhance its impact in a world that is remarkably different from the one in which it was founded nearly sixty years ago.

4. The very first proposal of the Panel argues convincingly that the UN should become a more outward-looking organization, making more of its role as a global convener of diverse constituencies relevant to an issue. I fully agree that expanding the UN’s consultations with different constituencies and facilitating their input into relevant debates of global significance can only enhance the quality and depth of policy analysis and actionable outcomes, including in the form of partnerships. Multistakeholder partnerships can help the UN devise innovative solutions to critical questions. In the same way, the deliberations of UN meetings can become richer, more diverse, yet grounded in reality. More effective engagement with NGOs also increases the likelihood that United Nations decisions will be better understood and supported by a broad and diverse public.

5. Another important theme of the Panel’s report, which I welcome, is the need for the UN to “connect the global with the local”. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been instrumental in bringing cohesion to the functioning of the UN system at the country-level and in aligning its operations with the development agenda emerging from the major UN conferences and summits. Achievement of the MDGs will depend on a collaborative approach made possible through partnerships with governments and NGOs on the ground. Focusing attention on the

\(^1\) A/57/387 and Corr.1
\(^2\) For the purposes of this document, the term “Non-Governmental Organization” will be used in accordance with traditional United Nations parlance, consistent with the reference in Article 71 of the UN Charter.
\(^3\) A/58/817 and Corr.1
MDGs also provides an opportunity for local country-level realities to impact on global deliberations.

6. I commend the report of the Panel to the attention of the General Assembly and hope its recommendations will receive the careful and positive consideration that they deserve. The present report offers comments on some of the Panel’s recommendations from the perspective of the UN Secretariat and, in some cases, includes specific suggestions regarding their implementation, which the General Assembly may wish to take into account. The report is structured around the following seven headings:

- Increasing the participation of NGOs in intergovernmental bodies;
- Establishing a trust fund to increase the participation of representatives of NGOs from developing countries;
- Improving accreditation;
- Improving the UN Secretariat’s dialogue with NGOs;
- Enhancing country-level engagement with NGOs;
- Exploring the enlargement of the Partnerships Office; and
- Managing the change process.

1. Increasing the participation of NGOs in intergovernmental bodies

7. Participation of NGOs in intergovernmental bodies has dramatically increased in recent years, particularly as a result of and during the major international conferences and their 5- and 10-year reviews. NGOs are now commonly present at the intergovernmental deliberations of many of the organizations of the UN system and participate in a broad range of advisory mechanisms and partnerships. A variety of modalities for NGO participation have been developed over the past fifteen years.

8. The extent to which NGOs are able to organize themselves around broad networks focusing on specific issues will have a bearing on the form and impact of their involvement in the work of the Organization. There have been many examples in the past of such successful networks, the existence of which greatly facilitated the consultative process. I welcome Proposal 23 of the Panel’s report, which stresses that the main constituencies of NGOs should themselves take steps to form groupings or broad networks for participation in UN activities. Such groupings would make it much easier to conduct the issue-based, multi-constituency processes which the Panel recommends in Proposal 5.

a. General Assembly

9. The General Assembly and its main committees have increasingly involved NGOs in their deliberations, both informally, through round-tables and panel discussions, and formally, through invitations to the Special Sessions and conferences convened under its auspices and, more recently, through the biennial high-level dialogue. Thus, the Assembly is already moving to some extent in the direction described in Proposal 6.
10. I share the view expressed by the Panel, however, that the Organization would benefit from extending and standardizing these practices, so that they become a regular component of the General Assembly’s work. For example, prior to major events, the Assembly could institute the practice of holding interactive hearings between Member States and NGO representatives that have the necessary expertise on the issues on the agenda. In the coming year, such a hearing could be “piloted” before the high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, which is to be held on 2 June 2005. Views could be shared on the progress made in implementing the Declaration of the Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

11. The General Assembly could also agree to convene a two-day, informal, interactive hearing with NGOs prior to the opening of the General Assembly each year, around an agenda to be determined in consultation between the President of the General Assembly, the Bureau of the General Assembly and NGO representatives. This practice could be initiated for the 60th session on a trial basis and evaluated after five years, to coincide with the 10-year review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.

12. Questions regarding accreditation and the rights and responsibilities of NGO participation in the General Assembly are discussed in Section 3 of this report.

b. Security Council

13. The Panel encouraged the Security Council to increase its contact with NGOs in Proposal 12. The Council has, in fact, taken a number of steps in that direction in recent years. There has been more frequent recourse to the Arria formula for consultations with NGOs. This year alone, the Council has invited NGO representatives and the business sector to participate in two open debates: one on the role of business in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding and the other on the role of civil society in post-conflict peacebuilding. Also, Security Council members, in their recent mission to West Africa, interacted widely with key NGO constituencies throughout the mission.

14. I encourage the Security Council to find ways to strengthen further its relationship with civil society. Additional funding could be made available from either the trust fund referred to in Section 2 of this report or from UN Country Teams to increase the participation of NGO actors from the field in Council meetings. I have also noted the Panel’s recommendation that commissions of inquiry be established after Council-mandated operations. I believe such a formal mechanism could be reserved for special cases. The Council may wish, however, to adopt the practice of conducting some form of assessment, with input from selected NGOs, following the completion of each peace mission.

c. ECOSOC

15. In recent years, ECOSOC and its functional commissions have significantly intensified the involvement of civil society, including accredited NGOs, foundations, parliamentarians and local authorities, as well as with the private sector. This has enriched the proceedings of the Council and its subsidiary bodies. ECOSOC has launched several successful multistakeholder initiatives, including the UN Information and Communications Technologies Task Force.
Likewise, the Commission on Sustainable Development engaged civil society representatives throughout its review session this year. This practice could be emulated in other subsidiary bodies and by the Council itself.

d. Parliamentarians

16. The engagement of parliamentarians in the work of the UN has taken many forms over the years. Their participation in national delegations and through various parliamentary organizations has helped bring the Organization closer to the citizens and their elected representatives. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has played a particularly active role in fostering a more sustained interaction between the UN and parliamentarians, a role which was recognized by the General Assembly when it granted the IPU the status of Observer.

17. I agree that more should be done to strengthen the Organization’s links to parliaments and parliamentarians. Proposals 13 to 16 identify a number of steps, which I commend to the attention of the Assembly. As an initial step, it may also wish to organize or support meetings of parliamentarians, in 2005, to discuss the issues before the high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, which is to be held on 2 June 2005. In addition, the General Assembly may, wish to recommend, organize or support meetings of parliamentarians at national, regional or global level in early 2006, to provide input to the meeting to review the Declaration of the Commitment on HIV/AIDS, scheduled for later in 2006. With experience, such meetings could evolve into the global public policy forums contained in Proposal 15.

e. Local authorities

18. The United Nations has always interacted with local authorities as key partners especially on development and humanitarian work at the local level. For most of the world’s population, it is their local authority that has most direct influence on their lives in areas such as water and sanitation, education and health services. In the last decade, global networks of local authorities have been created, most notably the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), greatly facilitating the dialogue of organized local authorities with the United Nations and other international forums. Moreover, the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA) was established in 2000 to strengthen the international dialogue with local authorities on development issues, especially in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

19. Direct participation of local authorities in the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT has also been broadened. This is a welcome trend and I encourage member states to continue facilitating the participation of local authorities and their associations in intergovernmental bodies. Again, if the General Assembly decides to hold a hearing before the high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, it may wish to invite local authorities and their associations. The UN will continue to explore opportunities to strengthen engagement with local authorities, especially through the work of UN-HABITAT, and also through the UN country teams and other parts of the broader UN system.
2. Establishing a trust fund to increase the participation of representatives of NGOs from developing countries

20. As the Panel’s Report highlights, the increase in participation of NGOs in intergovernmental bodies is rather unbalanced - NGOs from developing countries being under-represented. This is partly a result of the lack of resources of NGOs from developing countries to cover travel and accommodation costs. At the same time, I am encouraged to note that the number of developing country NGOs having consultative status with ECOSOC has increased in the last decade. For example, African-based NGOs now make up 11 per cent of the total – up from 4 per cent in 1996. Overall, 30 per cent of those NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC have their headquarters in the developing world, partly as a result of the Secretariat’s efforts.

21. Participation from developing country representatives in the recent global conferences has been assisted by generous support from a series of conference-specific trust funds. Such a fund does not exist, however, to fund participation in ECOSOC, its subsidiary bodies, and other intergovernmental meetings. Consequently, attendance of NGO representatives from developing countries in standing UN meetings is low.

22. I will create a single trust fund that will provide financial support for travel and accommodation of representatives from accredited NGOs from developing countries to attend intergovernmental meetings, in accordance with Proposal 27 of the Panel. Existing trust funds which support participation in specific intergovernmental processes would be subsumed into the new fund. A detailed cost plan, criteria for support and procedures for administering the fund will be developed in consultation with stakeholders. I encourage Member States to contribute generously to this fund.

3. Improving accreditation

23. The Panel makes a number of recommendations regarding NGO accreditation. To summarize, the report proposes that:

a. NGOs be accredited to participate in the work of the General Assembly;
b. A single accreditation process be established for all UN forums;
c. A committee of the General Assembly be given the responsibility to review all NGO applications for accreditation;
d. The process of accreditation be streamlined; and
e. The rights and responsibilities of participation be reviewed and harmonized.

24. I would like to offer the following comments and suggestions under each of these headings.

a. Granting NGO accreditation to the General Assembly

25. Article 71 of the UN Charter provides that “the Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with NGOs which are concerned with matters within its
competence.” There is nothing in Article 71 that would preclude the General Assembly from inviting NGOs to participate in its sessions and its work. There is considerable merit in opening the regular work of the General Assembly to increased participation by accredited NGOs. This is already taking place informally through panels, round-tables, NGO involvement in the preparatory work of the international conferences, the Special Sessions and high-level dialogue of the Assembly. One possible option could be to start with accreditation to the Main Committees, leaving for consideration at a later stage whether accreditation to the plenary should be considered. If the Assembly decides in favour of accrediting NGOs to the General Assembly’s Main Committees, rights and responsibilities of participation would then need to be defined.

b. Establishing a single system of accreditation

26. A single system of NGO accreditation for all UN intergovernmental bodies, including the General Assembly, ECOSOC and conferences, based on one set of agreed-upon criteria, would have the benefit of simplicity, consistency and efficiency, as is well argued in the Panel’s report. It would also facilitate the involvement of NGOs in the consideration of complex issues whose ramifications span many intergovernmental organs.

27. Concerning the Panel’s proposal to consolidate the ECOSOC and DPI processes, closer examination reveals that there is an important distinction to be made between the accreditation process, governing the relationship between NGOs and intergovernmental bodies, and the association process, which grants NGOs the right to access UN documents, UN facilities and communications materials. One is clearly an intergovernmental process while the other is not. There does not seem to be much merit in attempting to consolidate either the processes or the internal UN structures that handle them.

c. Having a committee of the General Assembly assume responsibility for all accreditation

28. While Article 71 allows the ECOSOC to make suitable arrangements for consultation with NGOs, the Charter does not designate a specific mechanism or body for the accreditation of NGOs. Moreover, while pursuant to ECOSOC resolution 3(II) of 21 June 1946, the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations is currently the intergovernmental organ designated to consider applications for ECOSOC consultative status, the Assembly, if it so decides, could adopt and assume responsibility for a single accreditation system. An existing committee of the General Assembly, perhaps the General Committee, could be designated for this purpose.

d. Streamlining the accreditation process

29. Whether or not Member States decide to accept the three changes outlined above, a number of procedural changes could be made which would significantly improve the efficiency of the accreditation process.

30. The Panel indicates that the current process is slow, costly and subject to the “happenstance of workloads”, with the Committee on NGOs, currently made up of 19 Member
States, making recommendations on a case-by-case basis for accreditation to ECOSOC. The considerable backlog of applications is overwhelming an already overloaded process.

31. Some efforts have been made to improve the process. For example, an electronic meeting management and documentation system (a “paperless committee”) was recently introduced and criteria and requirements for accreditation now appear on the UN website. The ECOSOC Committee on NGOs itself has done commendable work in improving its own working methods – streamlining the NGO questionnaire, issuing guidance to NGOs on reporting and monitoring and restructuring the meeting schedule for greater effectiveness. Similar improvements have been brought to the accreditation process for large global conferences. A number of funds and programmes and specialized agencies have also established new practices for accrediting NGOs.

32. There is nevertheless considerable scope for further simplification. I welcome the suggestions of the Panel, which, if implemented, would go a long way in simplifying the process of accreditation. In essence, paragraph 131 of the Panel’s report lays out two key improvements. It proposes that:

(i) the UN Secretariat be tasked with conducting a thorough pre-screening of NGO applications for accreditation, according to clear criteria, determined by an intergovernmental body; and
(ii) Member States be provided with consolidated lists of applications for consideration.

e. Rights and responsibilities of participation

33. Proposals 22 and 23 of the Panel’s report relate to the different categories of NGO status (general, special and roster) and the differences in rights of participation for each. These categories have been in existence for several decades, notwithstanding some minor changes introduced in 1996. There would be merit in reviewing the categories and the privileges associated with them – particularly in the light of informal practices which have evolved in recent years. The General Assembly may also wish to consider establishing a uniform regime of rights and responsibilities for the participation of NGOs in global conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly.

34. At the same time, the question of responsibilities and accountability of the NGOs arises. For example, there are currently large numbers of NGOs with consultative status to the UN that are not complying with the requirement to submit quadrennial reports on their activities and how they relate to the overall goals and objectives of the global community. Member States may wish to explore the possibility of a code of conduct, mentioned in Proposal 23 of the Panel’s report, as one instrument to ensure that NGOs commit themselves to the aims of the Charter and act in a manner that reflects the intergovernmental character of the Organization.

4. Improving the UN Secretariat’s dialogue with NGOs

35. The Panel suggests many ways in which the Secretariat can intensify its own dialogue with the NGO community. It suggests, in particular, a global Internet agora to survey public
opinion and raise awareness on emerging issues (Proposal 3), as well as public hearings to review progress in meeting globally agreed commitments (Proposal 5). The UN Secretariat and other UN organizations already interact with NGOs in a variety of ways. I intend to review these experiences and the Panel’s proposals in consultation with NGOs with a view to determining how best to intensify our dialogue with them.

36. The Panel also makes useful suggestions on how to promote and explain the work of the UN to a wide set of constituencies. The Department of Public Information (DPI) currently maintains contacts with a vast network to which it disseminates information about the work of the Organization – most notably at the traditional DPI/NGO Conference that it organizes each year. Taking into consideration the proposed enhancements to NGO participation in intergovernmental debates, I am asking DPI to see how its work with NGOs could be better linked to the priorities of the inter-governmental organs so as to enhance its relevance and impact. It will also be important to ensure that DPI’s outreach activities complement and support those of the substantive departments, funds and programmes.

37. There are several other internal measures that will be taken to improve the Secretariat’s dialogue with NGOs. These include, among other things, establishing a central database of NGOs and developing a body of best practices of NGO involvement in UN activities so that they can be replicated throughout the broader UN system. In addition, access to official documentation will be greatly facilitated by provision of free access to the Official Documents System by the end of 2004.

5. Enhancing country-level engagement with NGOs

38. I welcome the emphasis the Panel’s report places on all branches of the United Nations system engaging with civil society at the country level. This is a relationship that has evolved considerably over the past three decades. NGOs now act as full-fledged partners in programme design and implementation and, increasingly provide policy advice, analysis and advocacy. In crisis and post-conflict countries, in particular, national and international NGOs are vital implementing partners, without whom United Nations humanitarian assistance could not be delivered. They are also key participants in peace building, reconciliation, and transition to civilian administrations. Of course, Governments remain the main interlocutors for country-level engagement with the United Nations.

39. Civil society participation in developing national policy processes is critical to ensuring national ownership and relevance. The United Nations Development Group has been facilitating broad consultation and participation of NGOs and other stakeholders in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process – achieving, in a number of cases, pro-poor outcomes with genuine engagement in a fully consultative process.

40. Greater system-wide focus on implementation of the Millennium Development Goals has further strengthened relations with civil society. The United Nations Country Teams are supporting Governments and civil society organizations in developing and revising the MDG Reports in about 60 countries. Additionally, the Regional Commissions are addressing issues of data comparability and policy coherence, where NGOs have another important contribution to
make. In a growing number of countries, civil society groups are spearheading advocacy campaigns for the MDGs, both individually and in partnership with the Country Teams. NGOs are also key actors in making progress on the ground, for example, towards the MDGs.

41. The UN system is also encouraging engagement of NGOs in the preparation of the Common Country Assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. However, the nature and extent of their participation is uneven, reflecting a need to develop additional capacity in conducting policy dialogue and analysis and programme implementation. Where capacity is devoted to multistakeholder processes, the payoffs have been significant. Resources and leadership will be needed, however, to ensure that today’s best practices become the standard practice for the future.

   a. Enhancing the capacity of NGOs at the country level

42. There are a number of promising measures already underway to enhance the capacity of NGOs at the country level. I intend to strengthen and replicate these initiatives in other locations. The MDGs and PRSP processes are key opportunities for the United Nations Development Group to ensure that the rhetoric is put into practice – allowing adequate space for all constituencies, including parliamentarians and local authorities, to contribute to the goals of the Governments as agreed at the United Nations. UN Country Teams should continue to facilitate participation by NGOs in campaigning for and monitoring of the MDGs and using the goals as benchmarks for national PRS/PRSP processes. In almost all countries, different parts of the UN system periodically fund workshops and learning exchanges with NGOs – with particular emphasis on PRSP processes and MDG reporting and advocacy. The UN has also supported the formation of “umbrella groups” of NGOs in many sectors, particularly in primary health care. A NGO Champions Initiative for Resident Coordinators and Resident Representatives has been launched in October 2003 by UNDP, with 32 countries already participating.

43. The UN is also making real progress in its efforts to disseminate information about the work of the United Nations to all partners and constituencies. Use of easily accessible websites, such as the national database in Tanzania, and ensuring the participation of NGOs in knowledge networks and discussion groups are encouraging first steps.

   b. Enhancing the capacity of the United Nations Resident Coordinator system to engage with civil society

44. The Panel recognized the pivotal role played by the Resident Coordinator System in bringing together key United Nations system partners and civil society organizations in pursuance of national goals. I fully endorse the Panel’s recommendations on the need for greater capacity among Resident Coordinators to identify, convene and broker key partnerships (Proposals 10 and 11).

45. I have asked all Resident Coordinators to identify a qualified professional with relevant development experience to serve as a civil society focal point for UNDG, who would coordinate civil society engagement by UN agencies in each country, with an additional dedicated staff member to be appointed to the Resident Coordinator’s Office as soon as resources allow
(Proposal 11 and 25). Equally, Resident Coordinators will be asked to conduct orientation courses, where required, with a view to developing or enhancing partnerships with multiple constituencies (Proposals 7 and 28).

46. I am encouraged by the Panel’s recognition that the creation of NGOs advisory groups at the country level to guide implementation of UN strategies would be beneficial (Proposal 11). UNDP has already launched a pilot committee in Botswana in 2003. I have asked that more Resident Coordinators constitute similar committees - bringing together development experts from NGOs, academia, the media, and local authorities - in a forum for policy advice and participation. I believe this can be an effective means by which we systematically support Government by engaging NGOs and bridging the gulf between the deliberative and implementation aspects of our work.

47. I will establish a trust fund, inviting support from bilateral donors and foundations, to enhance the capacity of NGOs at the country level and to finance additional capacity in the office of the Resident Coordinator. A UNDG working group, chaired by UNDP as administrator of the fund, will guide the use of the fund (providing, for example, seed money for country teams that propose innovative initiatives), and develop strategies to promote further enhanced engagement with NGOs. UNDG will work closely with the expanded Partnerships Office in the Secretariat, which should be a member of the UNDG working group.

6. Exploring the enlargement of the Partnerships Office

48. As part of my second reform package from 2002, I decided to establish a Partnerships Office to bring the UN Fund for International Partnerships and the Global Compact Office under the same institutional umbrella. The Office is in the process of being established and an Assistant Secretary-General position was recently authorized by Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for the purpose of providing it with high-level leadership. The Panel’s proposal to broaden the scope of the Partnerships Office to include other constituencies merits consideration. An expanded Partnerships Office could include a small unit to develop organizational policy with respect to NGOs, the existing Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) as well as an Accreditation Unit and an Elected Representatives Liaison Unit.

49. NGLS currently provides information and outreach about the work of the UN. The Panel points out that this Service is highly respected throughout the NGO community and is perceived as an objective and very useful source of expertise, guidance to the UN system focal points and the Country Teams and support to NGOs that engage with UN meetings and events. However, it is now subject to the vagaries of voluntary funding and faces increasing difficulty in financing its budget from existing funding sources. Incorporating it into the Partnership office would give it greater institutional standing and funding stability. However, this would be dependent on an agreement from the 17 existing sponsors and related decisions on funding arrangements.

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4 The Panel proposes the establishment of an Office for Constituency Engagement and Partnerships. For simplicity purposes and given that the Secretary-General has recently established a Partnerships Office, the latter term will be used.
50. In addition, separate units for accreditation and liaison with elected representatives could be created to complement and support initiatives mentioned in sections 1 and 3 of this report. This would be consistent with Proposals 16 and 20 of the Panel.

51. Evidently, organizational units dealing with NGOs, elected representatives and the private sector each have their unique identity and purpose, which would continue to dictate the policies and approaches that are best suited to their particular needs. It is, however, desirable to have an institutional anchor, greater coherence of approaches and stronger direction provided to the currently dispersed units dealing with various facets of the Organization’s interface with non-state partners. This Office could be a central hub in a decentralized system and provide a single, more visible, entry point for NGOs, while substantive Departments, Funds and Programmes keep their own outreach and collaborative arrangements. The Office could also better foster the exchange of experiences and collective learning.

52. I do not agree with the Panel’s proposal to incorporate the secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues into this structure (see Proposal 24). From a substantive perspective, it would be difficult to argue in favour of this particular thematic area over others. The secretariat of the Forum provides substantive and conference-servicing support to the Forum, which has a clear and direct reporting line to ECOSOC. This makes the secretariat’s current location in DESA logical and institutionally consistent.

7. Managing the Change Process

53. Changes foreseen in this report require careful management and oversight to ensure that genuine improvements to the relationship between the UN and NGOs are achieved. To this end, improvements are needed in four particular areas.

54. First, there is a need for a more organized and sustained dialogue with the NGO community, particularly as regards the implementation of this report but also on the broad range of issues to which NGOs have an important contribution to make. While the Partnership Office could assume an important coordination role, it is the responsibility of departments, funds and programmes to ensure that the constituencies interested in their area are systematically consulted.

55. Second, constituency engagement and partnership concerns must be incorporated into the Organization’s human resources processes, including recruitment, promotion and annual appraisal (Proposal 28). Staff at all levels will be offered training to improve their skills in dealing with broader constituencies and factor in NGO considerations into their work, using, in particular, the UN Staff College for this purpose.

56. Third, the implementation of these measures will require modest yet essential resources. As far as possible, I intend to build on existing capacities and make better use of existing resources for enhancing UN-NGO engagement. However, enlargement of the Partnerships Office would have some modest budgetary implications in the context of the 2006/7 budget. I also appeal to Member States to make generous voluntary contributions to the trust funds, which will be established for the specific purposes outlined in sections 2 and 5 of this report.
57. Finally, I wish to stress that I am committed to providing the leadership necessary for these changes to take effect and I will be stressing their importance upon my senior managers and the heads of UN agencies, in my capacity as head of the Chief Executives Board (Proposal 29).

58. I will report to the General Assembly periodically on the implementation of the various reforms contained in this report.