



Chief Executives Board for Coordination

3 August 2006

Summary report of the High-Level Committee on Programmes at its intersessional meeting (Geneva, 6 July 2006)

I. Introduction

1. The Intersessional Meeting of the High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) was held in Geneva on 6 July 2006 in conjunction with the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. In his introductory remarks, the Chairman noted that in the light of his role as ex officio member of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence, the purpose of the meeting was to exchange views on such issues. The Committee would also review its forward work programme. The agenda of the meeting and the list of participants are contained in annexes I and II, respectively.

2. The Chairman recognized that this was the first Committee meeting at which Qazi Shaukat Fareed, former Director of the CEB secretariat, who had retired at the end of May, was not present. He praised Mr. Fareed for his dedication and commitment, and for his humour and light touch, which only truly serious people bring to their work. The Committee would miss him and should send him a message.

3. The Chairman welcomed Adnan Amin, currently serving as Executive Director of the High-level Panel, who had been selected as the new Director of the CEB secretariat. Mr. Amin came to his new position with long experience and knowledge of inter-agency affairs.

II. System-wide coherence

4. The Panel had been very active since its meeting with CEB at the Board's retreat in April 2006, holding two meetings and a number of regional and thematic consultations. At this stage, the Chairman wished to share some reflections on the issues currently under discussion in the Panel and receive the comments of Committee members.

5. In the context of the Panel's deliberations, the Chairman noted the paradox that while there had never been a greater awareness of the need to find joint solutions to global problems, there existed at the same time a high level of mistrust among nations and cultures. He referred to the recent exhortation by Jan Eliasson,



President of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, for Member States to engender more trust, more dialogue and solutions. The Panel was deeply committed to strengthening the United Nations and multilateral action; the opportunity it offered would be the best chance for a long time to come to modernize the United Nations system and make its work more relevant to the world of today.

6. Thus far, the Panel had not finalized its recommendations and was still engaged in analysis, with a particular focus on the country level. Among the issues it was examining at that level were the four “ones” — one programme, one leader, one team/office and one budget. The notion of an empowered resident coordinator system with a strong, authoritative resident coordinator and mutual accountability with respect to the country team raised the question of the link between the resident coordinator and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Either the link should be broken or UNDP would need to evolve. De-linking the resident coordinator from UNDP would result in significant cost implications and an uncertain management structure, and was thus the option less likely to be chosen. Alternatively, UNDP could withdraw from operations and policy work in areas where other United Nations organizations have competencies and programmes; there would thus no longer be a real or perceived conflict of interest. UNDP would focus on managing the resident coordinator system and on work on the Millennium Development Goals, and would provide support for governance, disaster prevention and mitigation, and post-conflict early recovery. It would also continue to be operational in environmental areas until or unless another entity was given that responsibility.

7. The financing of the resident coordinator system would be undertaken jointly by the United Nations system as a whole, not only by UNDP, and would also involve joint accountability. The resident coordinators themselves would be selected from among organizations of the whole system. The United Nations country budget would include some form of pooled funding or a single budget, with multisourcing, to partially finance the agreed country United Nations Development Assistance Framework, which itself would become a more strategic document. The problem of “orphan countries” and “orphan themes” remained to be addressed.

8. As for funding the United Nations system, there was consensus that the present system was fragmented, focused on the short term and, with the proliferation of earmarked funding, was not supportive of good governance. There is strong support for enhanced, predictable financing for the United Nations system, with a better balance between core and non-core resources. New approaches should be developed that discourage excessive competition in fund-raising by organizations, which leads to fragmentation, duplication and loss of efficiency in the system. Ideas along those lines are still being developed, ranging from a fund for operational activities of the United Nations system to more effective use of multi-year financing, with different models for replenishment.

9. There has been considerable progress in United Nations/multilateral arrangements in the humanitarian field. Examples include the coordinated approach led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the new cluster arrangements in emergency relief. There remains a serious gap, however, in quick responses to urgent needs. Panel members were considering strengthening the capacity of the Central Emergency Response Fund. No effective funding source or

coordinating mechanism was yet in place to manage the transition from early recovery to reconstruction and development.

10. The Panel considered that sustainable development had not been pursued effectively. With respect to the environment, there was a need for more effective governance of the more than 500 international agreements and treaties, many of which have their own secretariats. It was felt that they should be consolidated on a thematic basis. The Global Ministerial Environment Forum should be strengthened; the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) itself would concentrate on science, policy analysis and advocacy. The Panel was looking seriously at the issue of climate change, recognizing the need for a new institutional framework to promote a coherent response addressing the many competencies required.

11. There was a sense in the Panel that gender mainstreaming was not delivering well in a programmatic sense, and that there was a need to streamline the existing United Nations gender architecture. To that end, a proposal was made to consolidate the functions of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, and set up a new entity. That entity would have to be supplied with a budget that would make it coherent and strong.

12. On the issue of regional structures, the Panel observed that the world had undergone tremendous changes since the creation of the regional commissions. There was thus a need to rethink their role in order to develop entities that focus more clearly on key regional issues and trends and have a capacity for analysis and policy advice. The point had been made that the regional structures of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes should be reviewed and aligned, with the aim of co-location and/or common geographic coverage of the various regional offices. Strong linkages would need to be developed among such United Nations regional offices and the new-style regional commissions. In particular, the regional offices of UNDP could be linked more closely and effectively with the regional commissions.

13. The Panel had also focused on business practices, and considered that much could be achieved in furthering coherence in that area. It felt that there was an urgent need to overhaul human resources management. The Panel was also looking at training, results-based budgeting and management to foster comparability, as well as best practices, peer reviews, knowledge management and sharing, system-wide evaluation and joint accountability.

14. At the Chairman's request, Mr. Amin also briefed the Committee on the work of the Panel. He echoed the observation of the Chairman that there was a need to improve the ability of the United Nations system to better communicate its achievements. The Panel was considering how best to make a break with the past and put the United Nations on a new trajectory; it had little patience for long and drawn-out processes that yield few results. There was a real risk that, failing real reform, there would be a decrease in funding and a subsequent marginalization of the Organization's development work.

15. Mr. Amin referred to a disconnect between what was being said at Headquarters and at the country level. Staff in the field were much more open to collaboration and a consistent approach, but felt that this was being frustrated at the Headquarters level. He added that, in addition to the consultations already held in

Maputo, Cairo and Islamabad, regional consultations would shortly be organized in Eastern Europe and Latin America.

16. The Panel was on track to deliver its report in September 2006; however, many issues were still under discussion and positions needed to be reconciled. Mr. Amin said that once the hectic period in the work of the Panel had concluded, he looked forward to the opportunity to talk to Committee members about improving the dialogue within the CEB context and to share his own approach regarding the CEB structures.

17. The Secretary of CEB was pleased to welcome Mr. Amin — “one of us” — as the incoming Director of the Board’s secretariat. Regarding the work of the Panel, he recalled that at the CEB meeting with the Panel in April 2006, two issues had been emphasized: (a) the links between normative, analytical and operational work — also referred to in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1); and (b) funding arrangements. On the former issue, the most telling criticism of simplistic solutions advanced by those who sought a clear-cut distinction between normative and operational organizations had been voiced by the Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), who had questioned the point of the agencies being knowledge organizations if that knowledge could not be shared with countries. On the latter issue, he hoped that the Panel would go beyond simply calling for predictable and sustainable financing. This had been done for years in the General Assembly, in the triennial comprehensive policy review discussions and in Economic and Social Council, with little concrete progress. At the same time, it was difficult to imagine what concrete solutions could be worked out across the board given how widely funding arrangements vary from organization to organization.

18. During the ensuing session, the following issues were raised:

- Discussions on coherence too often focus on issues of process, dwarfing the substance. While it was important, for instance, to reduce transaction costs and streamline procedures, the goal was to make a difference to the countries. Agencies were advocating not for their institutions, but rather for the internationally agreed agendas which they are mandated to advance.
- The Panel should avoid a slogan approach that could be open to wide interpretation by different countries. The purpose of reform should be to enable the United Nations system to adjust to the changes taking place in the world and position itself at the vanguard.
- The competitive, piecemeal, unpredictable system of funding that prevails at the moment does not permit the system to succeed in pulling together as one. Also, only 10 per cent of official development assistance is channelled through the United Nations. In order to have a real impact on the effectiveness of development cooperation, the effort towards greater coherence will have to go beyond the United Nations system and encompass all sources of development assistance.
- The problem of coherence within countries — with different ministries issuing different sets of instructions — has an impact on coherence at the intergovernmental level.

- The fundamental contribution of the United Nations system is the value system on which its work is based. Linkages between its normative and analytical work and operational activities were necessary to reinforce that value system. The focus should be not just on the country level; there was a need to be flexible in the light of changing needs. The international dimension and the approach to the management of global goods were key. In addition, while improving results at the country level, it is also important to keep in mind the subregional and regional aspects, particularly for issues that cross borders.
- It was observed that, in the Asia and the Pacific region, the least developed countries were overwhelmed by the demands of United Nations organizations and were confused by conflicting messages. Aside from the architectural issues regarding linkages between the normative and analytical work of the regional commissions and the operational work of the United Nations, has the Panel looked at ways to promote synergy between the regional commissions and the rest of the United Nations system?
- It was important that the knowledge being gathered by the Panel be made available to inform the reform processes being undertaken within individual organizations. When the Panel submits its report, it might consider issuing a compendium of all the background documents. At the same time, resources available within the United Nations system, such as the United Nations system Staff College, could be used to increase knowledge about the system, including through joint orientation and training.
- The Panel was encouraged to look at inter-agency coordination mechanisms and address the overlaps, such as between the United Nations Development Group and HLC/CEB. It was observed that specialized agencies were now also being asked to provide input directly to the United Nations Policy Committee. Clarification regarding the coverage of that body's mandate would be useful.
- Coherence should be built on the principle of subsidiarity, based on the specific skills of organizations, and oriented to tasks.
- In the case of at least one organization, the field staff had expressed concern that actions might be taken in the name of reform that would actually hamper work on the ground. The staff expressed some enthusiasm for joint evaluation and monitoring, but were otherwise leery of decisions that might be taken by Headquarters without due regard for actual field conditions.
- How would the Panel address the nagging suspicion on the part of the Group of 77 that pre-agreed conclusions had been formulated and ensure that the process was truly inclusive and would allow for buy-in from those who would be most affected at the country level?
- Regarding the next steps, the view was expressed that the Panel might benefit from sharing its report with CEB, either before it is submitted formally to the Secretary-General or before it is sent on to the General Assembly. Such a move would give the system a sense of ownership and also allow for the identification of any possible gaps in coverage.

19. In response to the points made and the questions raised, the Chairman stressed the need to take the Panel process very seriously. Donors were deeply committed to real reform. He had witnessed frustration at all levels over the lack of meaningful progress thus far. HLCP had developed the report entitled “One United Nations — Catalyst for Progress and Change”, which was an important contribution in identifying the challenges and the way forward.

20. The Panel had had good discussions on normative operational links; to be effective at normative work, agencies need to gain experience at the field level. The question was where the line should be drawn and what the balance should be in the role of specialized agencies. He added that organizations could do far better in terms of horizontal linkages and referred to the effort under way among the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations towards better sharing their analytical and policy capacities.

21. The Chairman added that it was, however, fully understood that country ownership was a crucial point. The United Nations, however, was not a consultancy service. It stood for values and mandates and the collective expression of Member States codified in treaties and norms which the system must implement and for which it must advocate. One example was gender equality — which was often not adequately advanced.

22. The Panel needed to understand more clearly the national, regional and global dimensions of the system’s work and the need for synergy among them. He expected that one synergy that the Panel could bring forth was in the area of management and joint accountability. The Panel had also gained a deeper appreciation of the problems associated with funding and was seeking solutions. No decision has as yet been taken on the follow-on processes once the Panel’s report is formally submitted to the Secretary-General. It was clear that there would be a need to ensure that the system takes the proposals on board in a constructive way.

23. Mr. Amin thanked the Committee for sharing its views, adding that it was important to bear in mind the terms of reference for the Panel and the thinking behind the selection of the Panel members. He recalled that the provisions of the 2005 World Summit Outcome that had given rise to the establishment of the Panel had a clear focus on operational work. The terms of reference of the Panel had broadened somewhat the scope of the exercise, recognizing that operational activities cannot be looked at in isolation from the unique value system that United Nations organizations represent. The members of the Panel were all decision makers; while they may not know the details of what happens at the microlevel in the field, they do know how institutions work and what is effective or ineffective. The job of the Panel secretariat has been to inform the Panel on how the United Nations system works and to include expertise from within the system in substantive dialogue with Panel members.

24. From the very start, the difficulty was that data were not readily available on the mission, governing structure, staffing, and funding levels of each organization. The Panel secretariat had to consolidate this information, which has been tremendously useful.

25. It is difficult to ask for additional resources without demonstrating the effective use of current funds and results. There is a strong feeling, especially among the European donors, that quick decisions need to be made about the allocation of additional official development assistance coming on stream. Donors are looking to see whether or not the system can be a vehicle for those resources. The options are either that there will be a new proliferation of global funds with no clear connection to the United Nations and unclear governance structures and the risk that the United Nations will increasingly become a niche player, or that the Organization demonstrates that it is going to become a much more effective system.

26. With respect to the intergovernmental dimension, the general assessment is that the Economic and Social Council does not function as it was envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations. There is a sense, not universally shared, that there is a need to bring the Council back to its Charter role and empower it to be a stronger player. This, among other things, will have implications for the Bretton Woods institutions. The debate on this issue was still ongoing.

27. The whole area of business practices has emerged as central in the Panel's work, given how disruptive the current business model is to United Nations operations. In virtually every field-level consultation, there were bitter complaints about the differences in administrative structures and rules which posed impediments, for instance, to inter-agency mobility, an area that has long been under discussion.

28. Three broad recommendations had emerged from discussions on business practices. First, there was a need for clear standards to drive improvements. There was a general consensus on the need to adopt the international public sector standards. Second, a major overhaul of human resources management was necessary. In that connection, it seemed likely that there would be a recommendation for an independent external review of the functioning of the International Civil Service Commission. Finally, there was a proposal to charge CEB with the overall responsibility for monitoring and managing change with regard to such issues as accountability, transparency, effectiveness and results. Mr. Amin expressed appreciation to the Chair and Vice Chair of the High-level Committee on Management (HLCM) for their assistance in informing the consultation on business practices.

29. Regarding comments made about prospective reform at the country level, Mr. Amin stressed that the approach by the Panel was not at all mechanistic. It was clear that countries were burdened by fragmentation of the system. Furthermore, Panel members were struck by what they had learned at the CEB retreat in Segovia, Spain, as to how much time and effort executive heads were expending on fund-raising. With reference to extrabudgetary resources, the concept of pooled resources at the country level was both to free the country teams from the responsibility of having to search for money and also to address the issue of incoherence that results from competition for resources.

30. There is a proposal on the table for a global fund, but this has a number of implications which have to be sorted out. One of the difficulties with a centralized fund would lie in the area of governance. These and other concerns were still under discussion.

31. With respect to the regional dimension of the work of the United Nations system, there was a clear sense in the Panel that the Organization's structures have not kept pace with the changes that have taken place at the regional level. Panel members stressed the need for added value, which would not be found in technical assistance as such but rather in terms of regional perspectives, best practices and shared experiences. As an example, Mr. Amin cited the usefulness of an analysis of the impact of rising oil prices on the regional economy and the implications for regional trade as an example of the type of services needed by Member States. In addition, Panel members were struck by the fact that different organizations defined regions in different ways, and that among the various offices there was little communication, let alone the ability to provide "critical mass".

32. The issue of global public goods was figuring large in the Panel's discussions. At present, it was looking at ways to strengthen the role of the United Nations system, building upon the links among the normative, analytical and operational aspects.

33. In response to a request, Mr. Amin agreed that the Panel secretariat would release as much material as possible for posting on the HLCP website. Regarding the timeline, the Panel had every intention of meeting the deadline of September 2006. Still under discussion were the format and the presentation — for example, whether the Secretary-General would send the report to the General Assembly with a transmittal note or under cover of his own report. The Panel was also considering how to dovetail the next steps with the process of selection of the next Secretary-General, so that appropriate interaction could be established.

34. The Panel had also discussed to some extent the coordination mechanisms of the United Nations system. They were impressed with the exchange with CEB at the retreat in Segovia, Spain, but felt that the potential of the Board was not being fully leveraged. Should a strong signal emerge that CEB should be empowered to be more oriented towards decisions and results, Panel members themselves would need to think about how they would meet that challenge.

35. The Secretary of CEB clarified that the Policy Committee was not an inter-agency mechanism but a United Nations management tool to advise the Secretary-General on policies and initiatives within the Organization. To the extent that the issues under discussion also involved the work of the specialized agencies, they were consulted in the elaboration of recommendations for consideration by the Committee and informed of conclusions of relevance to them. This should be seen as an opportunity rather than as a problem. As for the Economic and Social Council, its structures and modus operandi, unlike those of the General Assembly, were extremely easy to reform. The new functions entrusted to the Council by the High-level Plenary Meeting of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly were extremely promising. The key issue to the reform of the Council was to muster the necessary political will. The Panel could be very instrumental in that respect.

36. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman stressed that Panel members had come to their work with an open mind and that conclusions had not been pre-cooked in capitals. They were all looking to the world of the future, 10 to 20 years hence, and to the place of the United Nations system in that regard.

III. Work programme

37. Upon the request of the Chairman, the Secretary of HLCP introduced a matrix containing the programme of work for the Committee in the period ahead. She noted that while Committee members were deeply engaged in the ongoing processes on system-wide coherence, at the same time there remained a number of other issues in train. The matrix was divided into several categories: current issues, such as employment and migration; pending issues, such as peacebuilding; the work of the task forces, inter-agency matters and joint HLCP and HLCM issues. She reminded the Committee that the column marked “responsibilities” referred to the entity that had volunteered to lead the consultative process. Going forward, she welcomed the establishment of a small group of interested organizations that may wish to collaborate on developing a long-range work programme that is both pragmatic and proactive. She encouraged members to make use of the HLCP website at <https://hlcp.unsystemceb.org>.

38. The representative of ILO briefed the Committee on the discussions in the Economic and Social Council on the issue of employment, which had been identified as a priority area for the engagement of HLCP. The draft ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council gave strong encouragement to the development by the Committee of a toolkit to promote decent work. She thanked members for their collaboration in the lead-up to the Economic and Social Council. ILO would now begin to consult the organizations on the way they envisage how their policies and programmes, strategies and activities can help countries in accomplishing their objectives in terms of full and productive employment and decent work for all. She expected to have a draft report ready for submission to HLCP at its next session, in the second half of 2006. The report would be finalized at the HLCP session in the first half of 2007, prior to the CEB meetings that will be hosted by ILO in April 2007.

39. The representative of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) introduced a note on proposed new arrangements for pursuing the work of the Task Force on Economic Development, with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development continuing as issue-leader for science and technology and UNEP for the environment in the context of the Committee’s work programme, and UNIDO for market efficiency and integration. The issue-leaders will report on the progress of their work to HLCP. It was suggested that gender issues be mainstreamed in the work of the Task Force.

40. The Committee took note of the proposed new arrangements and of the UNIDO plan to organize an inter-agency meeting of experts from interested organizations prior to the HLCP session to be held in late 2006 to develop a joint work programme for advancing coherence and coordination on the issue of market efficiency and integration focusing on trade capacity-building. HLCP also took note of the suggestion for the Committee to develop a programme of work on the issue of urbanization with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme as lead agency.

41. The representative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) referred to the issue of climate change and the convening of the Third World Climate Conference in Geneva in late 2008 or in 2009. HLCP took note of the suggestion

that the Committee should develop a programme of work on climate change, with WMO as lead agency.

42. Regarding the Board's session in the second half of 2006, the CEB Secretary said that there were two unknowns: the exact timing and how the Panel would end its work; and since it would be the last session to be chaired by Kofi Annan, whether there would be an issue of special interest to him, such as HIV/AIDS or youth employment, that he would wish to highlight. Nevertheless, he could visualize an agenda, similar to that of the last session, containing one broad theme to be addressed at the regular session and then further pursued at the retreat, as well as issues arising from the work of HLCP and HLCM. The broad theme was bound to be linked with the work of the Panel and the reform processes that are under way. Subject to the timing of the Panel's work, one could foresee an interaction at the CEB retreat with the co-chairs and some members of the Panel on implications for the system and follow-up. As far as issues arising from HLCP, the two programme items that might be highlighted for CEB would be migration and gender mainstreaming. In addition, there would be a need to report to CEB, through HLCP, on the midterm review of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

IV. Date and venue of the next session of the High-Level Committee on Programmes

43. The Committee agreed to hold its next session in Rome, from 28 to 30 September 2006. It proposed to invite Mr. Fareed to attend the session in order to personally express to him its appreciation for his service with the CEB secretariat.

Annex I

Agenda

1. System-wide coherence.
2. Work programme.

Annex II

List of participants

Chairman: Lennart Båge (International Fund for Agricultural Development)
 Vice-Chairman: Mats Karlsson (World Bank)
 Secretary: Phyllis Lee (Chief Executives Board for Coordination secretariat)

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Representatives</i>
United Nations	Patrizio Civili Adnan Amin Kathleen Abdalla
Regional commissions	
Economic Commission for Europe	Patrice Robineau
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	Nanda Krairiksh
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	Marta Mauras
Economic Commission for Africa	Robert Okello
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	Christian De Clerq
International Labour Organization	Maria Ducci Christophe Perrin
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Wendy Mann
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Ingeborg Breines
World Health Organization	Denis Aitken Peter Mertens
World Bank	Oscar Avalor
International Monetary Fund	Reinhard Munzberg Lynge Nielsen
Universal Postal Union	Olivier Boussard
International Telecommunications Union	Arthur Levin
World Meteorological Organization	Elena Manaenkova Zamba Batjargal
World Intellectual Property Organization	Orobola Fasehun Carlos Mazal

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Representatives</i>
International Fund for Agricultural Development	Uday Abhyankar Xenia von Lilien
United Nations Industrial Development Organization	Agerico Lacanlale Richard Kennedy
World Trade Organization	Said El Hachimi
World Tourism Organization	Taleb Rifai
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	Raja Khalidi Santiago Fernández de Córdoba
United Nations Development Programme	Alison Drayton
United Nations Environment Programme	Werner Obermeyer
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	Christina Linnér Bryan Deschamp
United Nations Children's Fund	Ado Vaher
United Nations Population Fund	Mari Simonen Jana Simonova
World Food Programme	Allan Jury Peggy Nelson
United Nations International Drug Control Programme	Sandeep Chawla
United Nations Human Settlements Programme	Axumite Gebre-Egziabher
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS	Helen Frary Eamonn Murphy
