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The contribution of ECOSOC to the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda as a principal body for policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on issues of economic and social development and for the follow-up to the MDGs

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is mandated by the Economic and Social Council as a basis for discussions on the Council's role in shaping the post-2015 development agenda. The report, drawing from ECOSOC's accumulated experience, identifies the contributions that the Council can make in that regard. It presents substantive issues in development that have emerged in the course of ECOSOC's review of the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The analysis is positioned in the context of significant global concerns about existing, new and emerging development challenges and how they relate to the efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. The context is also defined by the on-going discussions in the follow-up to United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

Contents	Page
I. Introduction.....	3
II. Shaping the post-2015 development framework.....	3
A. The MDGs and beyond.....	3
B. The Rio outcomes and the evolution of the SDGs.....	4
C. The contours of the post-2015 development framework.....	5
III. Identifying Development Priorities: ECOSOC's contribution.....	6
IV. Institutional framework for integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development.....	11
A. A balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.....	11
B. Monitoring and accountability.....	14
C. Coordination and coherence, expert and technical support.....	16
D. Emergencies and humanitarian crises.....	17
V. Engaging Partners.....	18
VI. Conclusions.....	19

I. Introduction

1. The theme of the Thematic Debate of the 2013 ECOSOC substantive session is: *“The contribution of ECOSOC to the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda as a principal body for policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on issues of economic and social development and for the follow-up to the MDGs.”*¹
2. The thematic debate will take place against the backdrop of a number of related processes in the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), namely the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), consultations on the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum (HLPF), discussions on financing for sustainable development, as well as the various United Nations work streams on the elaboration of the post-2015 development framework.
3. It is also unfolding at a time when the Council is itself engaged in efforts to redefine its role to better respond to increasingly complex global development challenges. Additionally, the determination of the international community to secure a better wellbeing for both present and future generations is squarely at the center of the issues addressed.
4. There are expectations that the thematic debate should:
 - i) Make a substantive contribution to the elaboration of the post-2015 development framework.
 - ii) Define the potential of the Council, building on its accumulated experience, to monitor and review the implementation of a post-2015 development framework, and coordinate and oversee its subsidiary bodies.
 - iii) Discuss possible approaches by the Council to integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development.

II. Shaping the post-2015 development framework

A. The MDGs and beyond

5. The MDGs have been universally accepted since their introduction in 2000 as a clear set of goals, targets and indicators that could be monitored and around which policy makers could organize their fight against poverty and other development challenges. The goals have helped improve advocacy, policy implementation, monitoring and accountability. They have also offered governments the opportunity to better organize follow-up and implementation and to build capacity to achieve development objectives. Thus, the Goals were instrumental in promoting action that was often comparable across countries and fairly easy to monitor at the global level. Monitoring and accountability at the central level enhanced coordination and development cooperation and provided an important framework for reviewing global commitments.

¹ E/2012/263.

6. Despite these successes, the MDGs were also perceived by some as silos that lacked systemic interlinkages that rendered them inadequate to address more complex and other emerging development challenges. Moreover, the goals came to be seen by some States as biased to the specific concerns of particular groups of countries and not able to capture adequately the entire spectrum of the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs).

7. In terms of review, monitoring and accountability, the framework was viewed as imprecise and with selective targets. For example, a major criticism is the lack of specificity on targets related to MDG 8 on global partnership for development. In cases where the targets and indicators were more precise, criticisms relate to their inflexibility, one-size-fit-all approach and inability to disaggregate by the level of development of countries.

8. Regarding their utility as a development framework, another often cited view is that the goals diverted attention from a more holistic approach to development. For example, MDG 8 has focused more on financial resource gaps and aid flows, and less on institution building and structural transformation, which are also key instruments for promoting development cooperation based on the principles of genuine partnership and sustainability.

9. There is unanimity that the MDGs have made a big impact in the lives of billions of people and should be the point of departure for a post-2015 development framework. Many also believe, however, that this can only be the case within a broader approach that captures the concept of sustainable development has more universal applicability and forms a stronger basis for an overarching global partnership along the lines agreed in Rio+20.

B. The Rio+20 outcomes and the evolution of the SDGs

10. The implementation of the MDGs and work on the elaboration of the SDGs confirm views that international goals, targets and indicators can galvanize political will and action toward a core set of development priorities. The MDGs have served as a rallying point for disparate actors to bring action to bear in combating poverty. Their simplicity and brevity contributed to their acceptability and success.

11. Achieving sustainable development, however, will require a far-reaching transformation of economies and societies, including fundamental changes in development strategies and in production and consumption patterns. An inclusive green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development can also contribute to this transformation.

12. The outcome document of Rio+20 renewed global commitment to “sustainable development and to ensuring the promotion of economically, socially and an environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations”.² These must be pursued within an integrated and coherent framework.

² A/RES/66/288.

13. Thus the framing of the SDGs will necessarily build on and be broader than the MDGs. The predominantly social dimensions approach of the MDGs – the eradication of poverty and the promotion of health, education and gender equality and empowerment of women – retain their importance and already feature prominently in the list of priority issues mentioned by Member States in the Initial Input of the Secretary-General to the Open Working Group on SDGs. However, alongside the imperative of bringing all humankind to a minimum threshold of well-being or development, the SDGs must also integrate in a more balanced way the three dimensions of sustainable development.

14. There is growing understanding that a single, balanced, and comprehensive set of goals should be at the core of the post-2015 UN development agenda. As stated in the Rio+20 outcome document, the process of elaborating the SDGs should be coordinated and coherent with the post-2015 development agenda process.

C. The contours of the post-2015 development framework

15. There are clear principles emerging in the preparations launched by the Secretary-General for the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda that many believe can be regarded as elements around which future discussions and outcomes will revolve, including:

- building on the strengths of the MDGs, while addressing their shortcomings;
- the core principles of sustainable development that will be distilled into the SDGs;
- better interlinkages among the objectives, providing a more holistic and universal approach to development and development cooperation;
- flexibility in the setting of goals, targets and indicators so that countries can adapt them to their own specific situations;
- an improved system of review, monitoring and accountability;
- the need to reflect a global agreement among Governments that recognize contemporary and future development challenges in all their complexity and to offer realistic and yet ambitious options for addressing them in a global partnership for development;
- the need to clearly define the means of implementation, based on the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities; and
- the question of expanding the agenda to address other development challenges, including conflict and the rule of law.

16. The report of the UN System Task Team on the post-2015 UN development agenda, “Realizing the Future We Want for All”³, states that business as usual cannot be an option for the post-2015 development agenda and transformative change is needed. Accordingly, that report recommends: a vision for the future that rests on the core values of human rights, equality and sustainability; an agenda format based on concrete end-goals and targets; a high degree of policy coherence at the global,

³ http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/untt_report.pdf

regional, national and sub-national levels; and, an agenda conceived as truly global with shared responsibilities for all countries.

17. ECOSOC can make a significant contribution to this historical dialogue and to the follow-up to, and the implementation of, the post-2015 development agenda. The interrelated challenges of sustainable development and poverty eradication are at the heart of the Council's mandate. An issue-oriented ECOSOC can leverage the expertise and experience of the UN system to better analyze key development issues from a more holistic and cross-cutting perspective. The potential of a strengthened ECOSOC to enhance engagement with multiple stakeholders beyond the UN system, promote knowledge sharing and joint programming for poverty eradication and sustainable development is a solid asset in this regard.

III. Identifying development priorities: ECOSOC's contribution

18. Since the mid-1990s, ECOSOC has promoted the integrated follow-up to major UN conferences and summits by advancing a holistic approach to economic, social and environmental issues that takes into account the interrelatedness of their different goals and targets. The Council has identified global development priorities initially through the themes selected by Member States to be addressed by its Annual Ministerial Reviews (AMRs), followed by a more specific identification of priorities within each theme at the national, regional and global levels, culminating in the global level AMR ministerial declaration. The reviews have assessed progress, identified gaps in implementation and recommended priority follow-up actions.

19. The cross-cutting and multidimensional scope of its themes allowed the Council to bring out the interlinkages between agreed goals and other related development concerns. As many of the issues addressed were not explicitly covered by an agreed goal, the Council played an important role in identifying and filling substantive analytical and policy gaps. This approach ensures that development is pursued in a holistic manner that reflects contemporary and emerging concerns, such as equity and sustainable development. This potential of the Council holds much promise for the follow-up to major commitments in integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda.

20. ECOSOC regional consultations represent the regional dimension of the AMRs. The meetings are held in the lead-up to the global, High-level Segment of ECOSOC and involve all countries in the region, focusing on the specific priorities for each region pertaining to the theme under review. The regional meetings have highlighted key regional challenges and provided policy options and recommendations to address development gaps, with their outcomes informing the Council's high-level policy discussions.

21. There have been challenges in integrating the regional dimension into the AMR. Improved synchronization of work programmes between the Council, the regional and functional commissions and UN specialized agencies will serve to better

integrate the regional dimension into the AMR.⁴ The ‘missing dimension’ of regional cooperation with regard to the current MDG agenda could become a more prominent dimension of post-2015 development efforts, with the regional commissions and regional intergovernmental bodies assuming important roles.

22. At the national level, Member States volunteer for National Voluntary Presentations (NVPs) during the AMR. These presentations highlight individual country progress toward the IADGs, including the MDGs, and are based on their respective experiences in the implementation of their national development strategies (NDS). More specifically, the NVPs focus on the main successes and most urgent challenges and priorities faced by presenting countries with a view to generating solutions.

23. Since their beginning in 2007, the AMRs have addressed six themes: poverty and hunger; sustainable development; global public health; gender equality and empowerment of women; education; and productive capacity, employment and decent work. A seventh theme, the role of science, technology, innovation and the potential of culture in promoting sustainable development and achieving the MDGs, will be addressed by the ECOSOC AMR in July 2013.

24. The AMR Ministerial Declarations, regional preparatory meetings and NVPs have highlighted and addressed several key themes and challenges on which ECOSOC has made contributions. The number of NVPs is particularly significant: by the end of the 2013 High Level Segment there will have been seven years of AMRs with 59 National Voluntary Presentations by 52 different countries, with over 300 different national policies presented and discussed. Approximately three quarters of the presentations thus far have been from developing countries and one quarter from developed countries.

25. There are several recurring priorities that have emerged from the global, regional and national levels of the AMR that could contribute towards the shaping of the post-2015 development agenda.

Poverty and sustainability

26. Poverty eradication will continue to be a key UN development priority and, together with sustainable development, will be at the core of the post-2015 development agenda. The Council’s global level discussions, such as during the 2007 AMR, have emphasized the need for a multi-dimensional approach to poverty eradication that integrates considerations of economic growth, a sound policy environment at all levels, the rule of law and the importance of dealing with the systemic issues in globalization, trade, investment, finance, and technology, among others.

27. Regional level discussions have focused on solutions to development concerns that have cross-border implications, as well as the importance of regional approaches, including South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation. At the national level,

⁴ The focus of the themes and work programmes of the regional meetings is defined by the particular priorities of each region.

the focus has been on ensuring that poverty eradication and sustainable development are clearly captured in National Development Strategies and priorities. The NVPs provided examples of strategies to address poverty including Brazil's "Family Grant" and "Brazil without Extreme Poverty" programmes and Chile's social protection floor policies. Focus has also been given to ensuring that specific challenges, such as hunger and nutrition, food security, energy, water, education, gender inequality, and the interlinkages between them, are afforded due attention. The holistic approach advocated by the Council will be pivotal in the search for more effective ways of addressing poverty and sustainability and in integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Equality and inclusion

28. Equality and inclusion have been recurring themes in the AMR, particularly with respect to global public health; education, equality and empowerment of women; education; and employment. These themes assumed particular importance and emphasis in 2010, when the Ministerial Declaration reaffirmed that gender equality and empowerment of women are essential to economic and social development. The Declaration also recognized that implementation gaps persist and stressed the importance of implementing strategies in 19 different areas, including promoting and protecting women's equal access to adequate housing, property and land; facilitating access by women to affordable microfinance; and ensuring women's access to social protection. Similarly, equal access to opportunities for employment, education and training for the disabled, women, youth and other marginalized groups was stressed by ECOSOC in 2012.

29. The 2010 Africa regional preparatory meeting identified health as a major development priority relating to gender equality and empowerment of women in Africa. Other regional meetings have also addressed equality and inclusion in the context of other AMR themes. With respect to the national level, Moldova identified the need to increase the participation of women in political processes and of gender mainstreaming into social protection, health, and education; the Netherlands stressed the necessity to foster gender balance in the private sector and universities; and the Republic of Korea highlighted the importance of the Act on Gender Equality in Employment and Support for Work-family Reconciliation in addressing gender inequality in the workplace.

Employment

30. Employment has been a cross-cutting issue in AMR in its relation to poverty eradication, empowerment of women, education and science, technology and innovation. ECOSOC addressed the issue most directly, however, in the context of the 2012 AMR on productive capacity, employment and decent work. In particular, the 2012 Ministerial Declaration emphasized the need to place full employment and job creation as a central objective of macroeconomic policy objectives.

31. In 2012, the Africa AMR regional meeting highlighted the need to foster the development of small and medium enterprises in promoting job-rich growth. Latin America and the Caribbean proposed the creation of a regional High-Level Panel on

Youth Employment; and the Asia and Pacific region identified challenges derived from inequality, job-poor growth, and gender disparities in the labour market.

32. Examples at the national level presented during the NVPs included Kenya earmarking unemployment and underemployment as its most difficult and persistent problem; Ecuador prioritizing job security for the poorest and the extension of social security coverage to the underemployed and unemployed; and Algeria seeking to sustain its successes in economic and human development over the long-term through the diversification of sources of economic growth and job creation.

Education, health, and food security and nutrition

33. Reducing education and health gaps is central to the MDGs and will continue to be a priority in the post-2015 development agenda. The 2011 AMR Ministerial Declaration recognized that education is essential for human development and sustainable development. At the regional level, Member States highlighted progress in the attainment of internationally agreed education goals and pointed out gaps. For example, both Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean highlighted the need to address education quality, while Asia and the Pacific highlighted the challenges derived from late entry into school, early drop out, and gender inequality in education, as critical development priorities.

34. At the national level, some Member States identified additional national educational priorities. For example, Bangladesh noted the need to address vulnerability in school participation, particularly of children from poor families, derived from macroeconomic volatility and uncertainty. Germany underscored their support to fostering education outcomes through capacity building assistance programmes in Africa.

35. In the Ministerial Declaration of 2009, Member States recognized the interlinkages between health and poverty and that achieving the health-related goals is also central to sustainable development. The global discussion emphasized the linkages between health, poverty and sustainable development and also brought out the social determinants of health outcomes. The regional reviews pronounced the importance of addressing non-communicable diseases, developing strategies to confront the challenges presented by HIV, articulating financing strategies for health care, and promoting health literacy. Additional national health-related priorities included China, which underscored the importance of controlling infectious diseases and Sri Lanka, which noted the need to improve housing, sanitation, and water supply.

36. The Council has highlighted food security and nutrition as one of the most urgent challenges the world faces. As rising incomes and a growing population exert pressures for more and more nutritious food, climate change and natural disasters continue to threaten food production. The Council has underscored the need to mitigate food related risks for the most vulnerable communities, including by improving land governance. Related problems, including child malnutrition, agricultural productivity, environmental sustainability, food waste, global food price volatility, and regional access to food markets, have been also brought to the fore by the Council.

Urbanization and infrastructure

37. Urbanization and infrastructure are also themes that have been brought out by the AMR. At the global level, Member States stressed the need to strengthen productive capacity in developing countries, including to address their infrastructure deficits. They reaffirmed that improved infrastructure is a determinant of sustained economic growth. In 2008, Western Asia identified promotion of sustainable urbanization as a critical development priority. Policies proposed to foster sustainable urbanization included adopting a common green rating tool for urban developments and the strengthening of public-private partnerships for development. Effective urban transport and policies to facilitate telecommuting were addressed in the context of the Interessional meeting of the Commission on Science, Technology and Development (CSTD) in 2013. These were regarded as a means to improve labour productivity and health indicators and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

38. Examples from the NVPs included: Lao PDR identifying the importance of investing in infrastructure for reducing poverty and improving health and education outcomes; Algeria prioritizing development of public infrastructure in its development strategies; Brazil identifying investment and infrastructure as one of their development priorities; and Tanzania highlighting the rising challenges of urban poverty.

Science, technology and innovation

39. STI and culture are important drivers of social and economic transformation and critical to progress in the MDGs and sustainable development. In the context of integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development and in the post-2015 development agenda, STI will be crucial enablers for success and important means of empowering people. Promoting inclusive access to the benefits of STI, particularly information technology, will ensure that governments and all stakeholders have the means to deliver on their commitments to poverty eradication and sustainable development.

40. The value of STI depends on the extent to which they are integrated into national development strategies and action plans for sustainable development, and are linked to economic, industrial and education policies, in particular. In the Arab region, key development priorities revolve around the role of education as the backbone to effective access to science and technology.

41. The 2013 African regional review, concluded that enhanced innovation throughout Africa would be the surest means of overcoming the technological, social, economic and environmental challenges associated with achieving the MDGs. The transition to sustainable development will be highly dependent on the use of innovative technologies. STI would also be an effective instrument for ensuring the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and should form an integral part of the post-2015 development framework.

Environmental sustainability

42. As a subsidiary organ of ECOSOC, CSD considered various approaches to natural resource use and management and their interlinkages with sustainable production and consumption, poverty eradication and environmental sustainability. For its part, the AMR has called for individual and collective action by Governments and other stakeholders, to stem the impacts of the risks of environmental degradation and climate change on the global economy and to ensure that the interdependent goals of poverty eradication and sustainable development are met. Related concerns regarding the loss of biological diversity and effects of drought and desertification were also highlighted as deserving critical attention. For example, during the NVPs Belgium described its efforts in pursuing sustainable development; Finland identified as a priority the need to develop sustainable development indicators; and Kazakhstan underlined their ecological destabilization risks stemming from such factors as depletion of resources and desertification.

43. ECOSOC has promoted agreement that ensuring the achievement of sustainable development in all countries requires the balanced integration of economic growth, social development and environmental protection by making such goals the central objective of national development strategies, supported by regional and global commitments on the basis of common but differentiated responsibilities. The challenge ahead is to ensure that these dimensions are captured in the development goals under consideration, together with relevant indicators to monitor their implementation.

IV. Institutional framework for integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development

A. A balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development

44. The Rio+20 outcomes recognized ECOSOC's key role in achieving the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. This mandate gave a new impetus to the work that ECOSOC has undertaken regarding the integrated and coordinated implementation of, and follow-up to, the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits. Some work on integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development was already being undertaken by national governments and a number of partners, including in the UN system. However, such efforts fell short of the vision of Agenda 21, and hence brought about the need to identify a more robust approach.

45. The implementation of the Rio+20 outcomes is the primary responsibility of Member States. The first stage in the integration process is to ensure that national governments have the right tools to integrate sustainable development and poverty eradication in their development strategies and priorities. Programming and operational tools supporting national development efforts, including the common country assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), are already in use in many developing countries and could be utilized as the first step in ensuring integration.

46. A key test to integration at the national level will be the extent to which national development strategies take into account international commitments on

sustainable development. Well designed national, regional and global review processes offer a good system for mobilization, review, accountability and voluntary exchange of lessons learned and good practices in the implementation of commitments to sustainable development. As such, the NVPs are important implementation and policy review forums.

47. In “*The Future We Want*,” Member States also underscored the importance of regional cooperation in integration. Many development challenges are often of a regional and transboundary scope and therefore cannot be addressed fully by countries acting alone.

48. Regional planning for sustainable development requires an integrated policy approach that involves the participation of all relevant regional stakeholders. The AMR regional preparatory meetings present an opportunity for regional actors to gather and discuss regional development challenges. The participatory nature of the meetings provides a forum in which social, economic, and environmental issues can be discussed and integrated into regional development approaches.

49. The UN regional commissions, UN agencies working at the regional level and other sub-regional entities also play a critical intermediary role in bringing together national policymakers from the same region to compare development experiences. They can also advise on relevant policy and financing modalities to achieve progress at the national level towards the post-2015 development goals.

50. ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies, including the regional commissions, can further develop these regional approaches and thus strengthen the role of the regional commissions as institutional conduits between the global, regional and national levels. They can also help identify practical modalities for the balanced integration of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions into a robust post-2015 development agenda that takes into consideration the regional dimension. The Regional Implementation Mechanisms (RIMs) established in the follow-up to the 1992 Rio conference could be merged with the AMR regional meetings to facilitate a review of prioritization and integration progress.

51. The implementation of sustainable development commitments enjoins the international community in accordance with the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities. Thus, there will need to be continual communications and exchanges in the follow-up and implementation process between the national, regional and global levels bound together by policy coordination and coherence, shared technical and expert knowledge and political commitment.

52. The mobilization of financial resources from all sources for financing development is critical to the success of the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals. The many financial and economic crises that have plagued the global economy have made it clear that such crises have serious repercussions for all economies, but particularly for developing countries highly dependent on ODA flows and other external resources. Development financing should, therefore, be included in the dialogue of poverty eradication, sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda.

53. In financing for development, concerted efforts are needed to strengthen the follow-up on the thematic areas of the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha Declaration, including the areas of domestic resource mobilization, foreign direct investment, international trade, finance and other innovative sources of funding. The contribution that ECOSOC has made in this area, through the special spring meeting between ECOSOC with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and through the High-level policy dialogue with the international financial and trade institutions at the High-level Segment, could be strengthened considerably.

54. Clear institutional innovations are needed at all levels to ensure effective review and monitoring so that gaps and implementation challenges can be identified and remedied on a continuous basis. It will also be necessary to put together a set of tools that offer practical guidance on how the actual work of integrating the three dimensions can be undertaken by all stakeholders while taking into account different national and regional realities. The institutional review that is required for effective response has already started in the General Assembly.

55. The follow up and implementation of the three dimensions of sustainable development form part of the mandates and work programmes of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, as well as the funds and programmes, specialized agencies, and other entities of the UN development system. The current challenge is to reorganize and re-energize the UN system to be able to undertake this effectively.

56. A mapping of all the UN bodies and entities involved is required, so that gaps can be identified and redressed. A broad overview would include, as mentioned above, the special spring meeting of the BWIs, WTO and UNCTAD and the High-level policy dialogue with the international financial and trade institutions on current developments in the global economy. The work of the funds and programmes, the specialized agencies, and other UN entities in the economic area also need to be strengthened. These should become central to the economic dimension of sustainable development.

57. In the social area, the work of the Commission on Social Development, the Commission on Population and Development and the Commission on the Status of Women, for example, provide a solid foundation on which to strengthen the social dimension. In the environmental area, the United Nations Environmental Programme and the related conventions on climate change, biological diversity and on desertification are good starting points.

58. The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council have already been mandated to undertake implementation and follow up to Rio+20 although the institutional architecture for this task, such as the high-level political forum, and a restructured ECOSOC, remain to be finalized. In addition, the UN system needs to mobilize technical support through the promotion of a science-policy interface to facilitate policy coherence in eradicating poverty and fostering sustainable development.

59. Other measures that are under consideration include better linkages to the General Assembly process on the follow-up to the Rio mandates and the establishment of the high-level political forum; staggered sessions of the Council throughout the year to sharpen their focus on issues and improve their placement with respect to related meetings thus attracting high level participation; and a clearer definition of the space and mechanisms for the discharge of the functions related to the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. The needs of countries in special situations such as the Least Developed Countries, the Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States will also need to be taken into consideration.

B. Monitoring and accountability

60. The Council also plays an important monitoring and accountability role in ensuring that commitments are honoured. Where implementation is lagging, new impetus is generated, thus providing a strong and necessary linkage between the technical and policy making processes.

The NVPs and Voluntary Mutual Reviews

61. The NVPs have in the last seven years been important accountability tools in the follow-up to the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. Based on this, the NVPs could play an important role in the shaping and follow-up of Rio+20 and the post-2015 development agenda.

62. The successes of the NVPs notwithstanding, there have been suggestions that they should be improved further. For instance, there are continuing concerns that more efforts are needed to codify the lessons and the good practices gathered from the process. There is, in fact, no clear mechanism for follow-up on the outcomes of the NVPs. In order also to encourage more Member States to volunteer, there may be the need to build in appropriate incentives for participation. There are suggestions that the participation of all Member States would make the reviews more credible.

63. Transforming the NVPs into Voluntary Mutual Reviews (VMRs) would address these gaps.⁵ While the reviews would remain voluntary, the VMRs would adopt a more rigorous approach to the mutual reviews, including developing a standardized analytical and reporting framework; developing follow-up and report back mechanisms; incorporating available national statistical data; and incorporating renewed participatory approaches into the VMR process. In this regard, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is implementing a Development Account project that supports participation of Member States in the NVPs and incorporates mechanisms for reviewing and fostering the integration of ECOSOC policy recommendations into national development strategies.

64. A fully fledged global mutual accountability mechanism with universal membership and multistakeholder participation has yet to emerge. Global and

⁵ As proposed in Secretary General Report on the “Implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council” (A/67/736).

regional initiatives can also play a supportive role in promoting debate among development partners, as well as encouraging experience sharing and capacity building for programme countries and other stakeholders.

The Development Cooperation Forum

65. The establishment by the 2005 World Summit of the biennial Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) as a key new function of ECOSOC marked an important step in strengthening mutual accountability. During its first five years, the DCF provided an effective and inclusive multi-stakeholder forum with considerable influence on global development cooperation and mutual accountability discussions. The DCF has played a key role in fostering dialogue and knowledge-sharing both through its analytical work and by the holding of global and regional expert group meetings on mutual accountability.

66. Two broad-based surveys conducted by DESA and Social Affairs and UNDP in 105 countries in preparation for the 2010 and 2012 DCF showed that much work remains to be done to strengthen national mutual accountability systems. Key pillars of national mutual accountability are rarely in place. A maximum of 26 countries have made some progress on national-level mutual accountability, and 20 currently have initiatives under way to improve the quality of their mutual accountability. However, only three developing countries have aid policies with individual development partners with targets that are monitored regularly. Lack of political leadership and capacity constraints were also identified as major obstacles to stronger mutual accountability.

67. The Report of the Secretary-General on the “Further strengthening of the Economic and Social Council”⁶ suggests that the DCF could further expand its role as a driver for greater national and global accountability in development cooperation by promoting mutual accountability as an overarching principle in the post-2015 development agenda, with a view to enhancing reporting on agreed commitments and adapting development cooperation to emerging challenges.

68. The post-2015 global development agenda should be supported by robust mutual accountability mechanisms at all levels. At the global level such a mechanism can serve as an important vehicle to disseminate the results and lessons learned of the global assessments of efforts to strengthen national level accountability systems to a wider audience. The emergence of new actors and informal networks has made it even more urgent to develop balanced and inclusive monitoring and accountability frameworks where development partners can work together on an equal footing. Parliaments, local governments, civil society, women’s organizations, trade unions and the private sector should all have a strong role to play.

69. With its multistakeholder approach, the DCF is particularly well placed to undertake the tasks of an inclusive and balanced mutual accountability mechanism. The DCF preparations include country-led high-level symposiums that focus on key development issues aimed at fostering an open, informed and frank dialogue among development actors and in this way the events help in developing ideas for future

⁶ A/67/736.

action. The DCF can also serve as a forum to systematically distil the lessons learned from other global, regional and country-level assessments.

C. Coordination and coherence, expert and technical support

70. The subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC, including the functional and regional commissions and expert bodies, constitute the technical and knowledge assets of the ECOSOC system and have been mandated to carry out specific tasks related to the follow-up and implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. In many cases their mandates are more holistic and broader than addressing specific development goals. In the on-going discussions on the UN system response to Rio+20 and the elaboration of a post-2015 development agenda, there is a clear recognition of the importance of these intergovernmental and expert bodies, and in the technical support that they provide to the Council in their respective areas of competence. Their technical and knowledge assets would be also critical in supporting the Council in its response to crises and emergencies.

71. The subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC should be leveraged in new ways to respond to new challenges and issues in poverty eradication and sustainable development. Examples of this in recent years include the Council's work with: the Commission on the Status of Women, on empowerment of women; the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, on science, technology and innovation; and with the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, on the impact of illicit drug activities on development. The engagements contribute to the development of important norms and standards and provide critical policy guidance in response to the analysis of new trends and their impact on development.

72. The Council has also received valuable advice in preparation of its annual sessions from the Committee for Development Policy and the Committee on NGOs. The regional commissions have supported the mandates of the Council principally by focusing on the regional dimensions of development challenges. However, they have also: participated in National Workshops held in preparation for NVPs; engaged in the substantive and logistical planning of regional consultations; and provided inputs to the reports of the Secretary-General for the AMR and the thematic debate.

73. The on-going discussions on the review of General Assembly resolution 61/16 have reemphasized the role of the subsidiary machinery of ECOSOC. The new mandates that have been assigned to the Council require fashioning its technical and expert responses to generate ideas and policies that will overcome the constraints that have been encountered in the implementation of the IADGs, including the MDGs. There is a long tradition of integrative work that must be reinvigorated and made more focused on topical development issues.

74. In order to improve coherence, a unified vision and agenda with clearer reporting lines should guide the work of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies. Selecting a main theme each year for the entire ECOSOC system would increase coherence, while the Council should also engage in more substantive dialogue on the reports and recommendations of the subsidiary bodies, including the functional commissions, for a better two-way engagement. The periodic meetings between the

Bureau of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies also need to be strengthened and utilized to ensure that work programmes are complementary and mutually supportive.

75. There should also be a review of the coordination and guidance offered through the quadrennial comprehensive policy review process for the operational activities of the UN system, with the aim of improving operational, normative and programmatic linkages, as well as linkages at the national, regional and global levels.

76. With respect to technical support, there will also be a need to carefully review the resources to the ECOSOC secretariat.

D. Emergencies and humanitarian crises

77. Addressing issues of special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance will remain a high priority for the international community.

78. The complexity of issues and the imperative to act promptly and with as much information as necessary have always demanded coordinated and coherent responses. Resilience-building activities, such as disaster risk reduction, early warning and risk monitoring, disaster preparedness and early recovery, contribute to safeguarding development gains by mitigating the human and economic losses caused by natural and man-made disasters.

79. While many countries have made significant progress towards achieving the MDGs, according to the World Development Report 2011, no low-income country in a state of fragility and affected by conflict has achieved a single MDG.⁷ Projections indicate that by 2030, the vast majority of the world's poorest will live in countries affected by chronic violence and political instability, with a heavy concentration in Africa. In this regard, closer coherence and coordination between humanitarian and development actors is very important. This approach is increasingly critical as often failure to reduce and manage the risk of crises can compromise all efforts toward the achievement of poverty and sustainable development goals.

80. The discussions on the transition from relief to development in ECOSOC enable interfacing and collaboration between the humanitarian and development communities. In 2012, for instance, the humanitarian segment discussed the requirement and importance of building resilience in the Sahel, highlighting the need to address the root causes of crises and strengthen resilience in tandem with the immediate humanitarian response. It also proposed ways to better coordinate development and humanitarian action. The discussion reflected the increasing focus among humanitarian actors on proactively managing and reducing disaster risks as an effective and cost-efficient alternative to traditional natural disasters responses. There also has been focus on the need to promote the sharing of data for more effective evidence-based decisions.

81. ECOSOC's and the UN system's capacity to respond quickly to global emergencies and humanitarian crises can be improved. The Council needs to be able

⁷ World Bank Annual Report 2011, p. 10.

to convene the support of all the relevant parts of the UN system quickly, bringing to emergencies and humanitarian crises all the analytical and other resources necessary to make quick decisions and act effectively. It is equally important to build in risk assessment and the capacity to anticipate crises so that development gains in the aftermath of crises can be consolidated and strengthened.

V. Engaging partners

82. In the 2000 Millennium Declaration, the international community resolved to give greater opportunities and develop strong partnerships with external actors to contribute to solving global development challenges. This commitment to partnership has since been repeated at every major UN summit.

83. The implementation of all the mandates and goals set by the United Nations can best be achieved by leveraging catalytic partnerships with NGOs, civil society, the private sector, philanthropic organizations, and academic and scientific institutions. Partnership is a key enabler for meeting global challenges and leading in the initiation of transformation. These can have a catalytic impact on the full range of UN activities from poverty eradication, sustained economic growth and sustainable development, to peace and security, humanitarian action and human rights.

84. To this end, the Secretary General launched a partnerships initiative in 2012 that will be implemented through a proposed UN Partnerships Facility. The core task of the mechanism will be to capture the potential of partnerships to support the delivery to scale of the full spectrum of UN mandates, goals, and values.

85. In its resolution 66/223 “Towards Global Partnerships,” the General Assembly defined two broad categories of partnerships involving the UN system that require nurturing. The first relates to voluntary relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve common objectives, such as those defined by the IADGs. The second relates to continuing efforts to find innovative and additional ways to achieve lasting impact by identifying and replicating successful partnership models and pursuing new forms of collaboration with both public and non-public actors. These can include regional and sub-regional organizations of both developing and developed countries that have come together around given issues in the context of South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation.

86. Partnerships with the private sector, philanthropic foundations, civil society and non-governmental organizations have increasingly become an integral part of the work of many United Nations organizations. These partnerships have not only complemented the efforts of the United Nations system to achieve its objectives but also contribute to its renewal by introducing new methods of work. While these partnerships cannot substitute for governmental responsibilities and commitments, they are instrumental in the implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations conferences and summits, including the MDGs.

87. The partnership engagements undertaken so far have supported on-going work related to preparations for the AMRs on the basis of themes agreed by Member States.

This can be strengthened further by examining in detail how partnerships can be structured around clear thematic areas and contribute to poverty eradication and sustainable development.

88. ECOSOC has demonstrated its ability to bring stakeholders together and nurture ideas for partnerships. ECOSOC's Partnerships Forum and Youth Forum are good examples of the potential of partnerships. The discussions that were undertaken this year on science, technology and innovations and on philanthropy underscored the need to enrich the intergovernmental dialogue with new ideas from all stakeholders. It is now necessary to come up with ways to ensure that the wealth of ideas, knowledge and solutions discussed are used effectively to enrich programmes and development outcomes.

89. ECOSOC is uniquely situated to provide systematic, strategic and in-depth discussion of joint initiatives between Member States, the UN system and their non-governmental partners. This will be critical given the clear understanding that the work on the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda can only succeed with the active and effective involvement of all stakeholders.

VI. Conclusions

90. **The major UN conferences and summits, including the Millennium Summit, were extremely useful in focusing the attention of the international community around key development challenges. The role of the Council in the integrated and coordinated implementation of, and follow-up to, the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits needs to be strengthened.**

91. **In this regard, the post-2015 development agenda should be based on more holistic, sustainable pathways. There is value in elaborating one coherent global post-2015 development agenda, with sustainable development at its core and one set of goals encompassing all its interconnected dimensions, based on the fundamental principles of human rights, equality and sustainability. Accountability, mutual responsibilities and a clear understanding of different capabilities in responding to this new framework will be essential to its successful implementation.**

92. **ECOSOC has made substantive contributions to the review of the implementation of the outcomes of the major international conferences and summits and has identified a number of development priorities. Through this work many recurrent development themes have been addressed and examined in detail, including the areas of: poverty and sustainable development; inequality and exclusion; gender equality and empowerment of women; decent work and employment; education, health, and food security and nutrition; infrastructure and urbanization; science technology and innovation; and environmental sustainability. The wealth of ideas, knowledge and lessons learned, as well as the solutions recommended in the discussions should be built upon in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda.**

93. The role of the ECOSOC system in the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and in the coordinated and integrated follow-up to the outcomes of major international conferences and summits will be crucial in facilitating sustainable development policy coherence and coordination. The proposals that are currently being discussed in the review of the implementation of the General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of ECOSOC should aim for a more coordinated and coherent issues-based work programme that will further enhance ECOSOC's effectiveness and contributions to advancing development.

94. The AMR has performed important functions in reviewing and monitoring progress in the implementation of the IADGs, including the MDGs, at the national, regional and global levels. The DCF has played an equally important role in promoting global dialogue and partnerships on development cooperation, as well as in reviewing and monitoring global development commitments. The parameters of effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels are just emerging. Undoubtedly, the functions that ECOSOC has undertaken since 2005 enjoy solid support and have much potential for the implementation of the mandates of Rio+20 and of the post-2015 development agenda.

95. The Council's work with its subsidiary machinery has demonstrated its potential as a key platform for promoting coordination and coherence and for leveraging the full technical and knowledge assets of the UN system, including in response to rapidly emerging and new development challenges. This coordination and coherence potential should be further developed and fully utilized in executing the new mandates of the Council as well as in the implementation of and the follow-up to the post-2015 development framework.

96. ECOSOC has an important role in engaging a wide range of development actors. The partnership engagements undertaken so far have supported on-going efforts of the Council in all areas on the basis of themes and priorities agreed by Member States. This engagement can be strengthened further by examining in detail how partnerships can be structured around clear thematic areas and thus contribute more systematically to the post-2015 development framework, including the sustainable development goals. The work of the ECOSOC Partnerships Forum and Youth Forum has clearly demonstrated the potential contribution of multiple partners to new and innovative development thinking and solutions.