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**Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 61/16 on the Strengthening of the  
Economic and Social Council**

**Report of the Secretary-General**

**SUMMARY**

*The Future We Want* commits to strengthen ECOSOC and recognises “its key role in achieving a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.” Council resolution 2012/30 refers to this commitment and requests the Secretary-General to submit proposals for strengthening ECOSOC, including its working methods, and giving special attention to the integrated and coordinated implementation of, and follow-up to, the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields. The report includes specific recommendations aimed at transforming ECOSOC into an issue-oriented, knowledge-based, stakeholder-friendly intergovernmental body. It also addresses the need to bring greater coherence to the work of the ECOSOC system by, among others, refocusing its agenda; streamlining its work programme; and restructuring the calendar of its sessions.

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## Acronyms

AMR	Annual Ministerial Review
BWI	Bretton Woods Institution
CDP	Committee for Development Policy
CEB	United Nations Chief Executives Board
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DCF	Development Cooperation Forum
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DGACM	Department for General Assembly and Conference Management
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GA	General Assembly
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
LDC	Least Developed Country
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NVP	National Voluntary Presentation
OPGA	Office of the President of the General Assembly
PGA	President of the General Assembly
PBC	Peacebuilding Commission
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
UN	United Nations
UN-OAD	United Nations Operational Activities for Development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
VMR	Voluntary Mutual Reviews
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

## Background

1. In *The Future We Want* world leaders envision an enhanced multilateral system to better address the global challenges of sustainable development. Their commitment to strengthen ECOSOC was recalled by the Council in its resolution 2012/30, which requested the Secretary-General to submit, within the framework of the review of the implementation of Assembly resolution 61/16, proposals for strengthening ECOSOC and its working methods, with special attention to the integrated and coordinated implementation of, and follow-up to, the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields.

2. In the immediate follow-up to the Rio+20 Conference, at the ECOSOC Special Ministerial meeting (September 2012), Member States expressed support for a major system-wide reconsideration or ‘rethink’ of ECOSOC’s agenda setting, working methods and multi-stakeholder engagement. The Second Committee of the sixty-seventh General Assembly also reaffirmed ECOSOC’s role in its resolution A/RES/67/203. These mandates are the focus of this report. At the same time, in the Assembly resolution 61/16 review, ECOSOC needs to ensure its relevance to contemporary challenges, in line with Article 63 of the UN Charter. The report does not address the larger issue of global economic governance, which is being considered in the General Assembly (Res. 66/256). It generally addresses the broad issues under the purview of the General Assembly, not the specific steps that are under the purview of the Council.

3. The report benefited from inputs received from Member States, functional and regional commissions, and other subsidiary bodies of the Council. Inputs were also received from the UN system and an independent consultant.<sup>1</sup> The report suggests ways by which the Council can leverage its assets within the United Nations system and with external actors, to play fully its expected role in the wake of the Rio outcome and the upcoming post 2015 development agenda.

## I. Introduction

4. Improving the quality of life of a growing population in a sustainable manner remains the most urgent development priority for the international community. But pursuing poverty eradication and sustainable development together is a formidable challenge both for national governments and for the multilateral system. No single sector or nation can tackle it alone, and policy coordination at all levels has become even more essential. The expected emphasis of the post 2015 agenda on sustainable development, which will be universally applied, will have a significant bearing on how the global partnership for development should be reoriented. Ensuring that an agreed post 2015 agenda is followed by effective action will require that international institutions adapt to

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<sup>1</sup> The inputs may be viewed at <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/strengtheningofecosoc.shtml>

the increasingly global, multidimensional and interconnected nature of development challenges.

5. The Economic and Social Council has not quite fulfilled the role set for it by the Charter of the United Nations. This is reflective of longer-term trends, of the increased complexity of issues, the growth of multilateral arrangements and the change of economic landscape. The Council's core purpose remains valid but its impact, relevance and visibility have been questioned. It is necessary to acknowledge this at the outset, if the current exercise to strengthen ECOSOC is to succeed when past efforts have not.

6. A strengthening of ECOSOC will require significant transformation, and an overhaul of its methods of work. Remedial actions should build upon the Council's latent comparative advantages. Its subsidiary and expert bodies comprise a vast knowledge reservoir on economic, social and environmental matters that, if appropriately tapped, can transform ECOSOC into a global "thought leader". In addition, the Council's legitimacy and convening power can attract key stakeholders from government, private sector and civil society to enrich its deliberations and engage them in meaningful follow up in their respective spheres of activity. This would also require that ECOSOC take up development crises and emergencies as these occur so that its deliberations are seen as contributing to the shaping of an effective and timely global response. In so doing, the Council would exercise leadership in its unique role to coordinate the operational activities of the UN system. A strengthening of ECOSOC in such manner can be initiated with structural measures detailed below in the report; however, the transformation will take time to bring about and it will require political will.

## **II. A Strengthened ECOSOC**

7. The world is changing rapidly, confronted by economic, social and environmental challenges that cannot be addressed effectively without enhanced international cooperation. As recognized by world leaders at Rio, there is need for effective multilateralism and efficient intergovernmental arrangements, including a strengthened ECOSOC.

### ***A. Building on ECOSOC's Comparative Advantages***

8. ECOSOC has shown its adaptability through several realignments of its functioning and working methods. The earliest changes focused on expanding membership. After 1973, initiatives attempted to increase ECOSOC's impact, with several proposals put forward from the 1970s through the 1990s, though many were not implemented.<sup>2</sup> Since 1990, ECOSOC assumed the tasks of ensuring the integrated and coordinated implementation of, and follow-up to, major conferences and summits. Major milestones for ECOSOC include the 2002 Monterrey Consensus, which established its role on

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion and analysis of these initiatives, see Rosenthal, Gert. "The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations: An Issues Paper", Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, February 2005.

financing for development, and the 2005 World Summit, which charged ECOSOC as the principal body for the review of implementation of the international development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Most recently, at Rio+20, The Future We Want recognised the Council's "key role in achieving a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development."

9. ECOSOC has several comparative advantages:

- a. It has *political legitimacy*, both as a UN Charter body and as an inclusive multilateral development forum.
- b. It has significant *convening power*, enabling it to attract a broad range of stakeholders, from ministers, parliamentarians and development partners, to businesses, foundations, academics and NGOs.
- c. The ECOSOC system, with its subsidiary and expert bodies, has *accumulated substantive expertise* in economic, social and environmental matters.
- d. The Council's Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) and Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) have further enhanced ECOSOC's role as a *multi-stakeholder forum* for sharing best practices and lessons learned, and mutual accountability.
- e. ECOSOC has shown its *ability to promote consensus* on global development priorities, from information and communications technologies (ICT) to employment, global public health and education.

10. Notwithstanding these advantages, ECOSOC is seen as having low visibility and impact, and is criticised for being weak on agenda setting. It is viewed by some as lacking in relevance and impact on real issues, and its working methods subject to fragmentation and a lack of coherence. At times, its best work has not been fully recognised, owing to its limited visibility and profile among Member States and the global public. Many functions of the Council have been too often performed in isolation and not guided by a common vision or strategy. The Council has also been seen as being overly process-driven, without being sufficiently focused on issues or results.

### ***B. Agenda setting: Promoting an Issues based approach***

11. A first step towards strengthening ECOSOC would involve simplification and rationalization of the Council's agenda. This is a matter of good housekeeping. Given the breadth and complexity of global challenges, and the number of existing commitments whose implementation needs to be reviewed, it is desirable that the Council sets clearer priorities and brings the full breadth and strength of the UN system to bear on selected global, multi-dimensional and interconnected development challenges. It should use more effectively its ability to make strategic use of the UN entities and specialized agencies

and fulfil its mandate to increase system-wide coherence and coordination. An issues-oriented agenda would allow for a more focused consideration of complex matters and would simplify the task of promoting coherence in the work of the system. Accordingly, **the Council may consider shifting to a more issues based approach, which would involve taking up, each session, a main theme to be addressed by all relevant parts of the entire UN system, according to their areas of specialisation.**<sup>3</sup>

12. The annual theme format has served well for the AMR, and could be extended to the full ECOSOC agenda, which would bring to the discussion perspectives from all three dimensions of sustainable development. For predictability, the Council would need to decide the theme in advance, such as through a two-year programme of work. This would be vital for engaging stakeholders within and beyond the UN system. While the themes would be selected in advance, there should be sufficient flexibility to take up additional themes under emerging challenges, which could replace the thematic debate. This would allow the Council to address emerging issues as and when needed.

13. The subsidiary bodies would provide inputs on the annual theme around the three dimensions and cross cutting issues, such as gender, financing, science and technology. Each subsidiary body could focus on one or more dimensions, but it is desirable that their inputs be targeted, with clear recommendations and technical guidance on how ECOSOC should integrate their inputs with others into the broader picture of sustainable development.

13. An issues-based approach would promote greater thematic coherence in the work of ECOSOC and its functional and regional commissions and other subsidiary bodies. It would strengthen the links between the Council and its subsidiary bodies, and add value to policymaking.

### ***C. Bridging the Knowledge Gap: Using ECOSOC for “thought leadership”***

14. A greater focus on issues would allow ECOSOC to expand its role as a ‘thought leader,’ leveraging its accumulated knowledge and expertise to guide programme orientation and policy direction.

15. A large volume of ‘knowledge products’ and ‘knowledge resources’ are generated annually by the United Nations. ECOSOC accounts for a significant proportion of that knowledge output, directly or indirectly, by virtue of its oversight responsibility for much of the UN system. This knowledge should be shared across the UN system in a more integrated way, allowing the Council to identify areas for further work, develop new analysis and perspectives, and feed these into policy debate at the highest levels.

16. ECOSOC needs to actively invest in knowledge to be relevant and effective in today’s rapidly changing world, where nearly all countries are undergoing significant

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<sup>3</sup> Some Commissions have already responded to this call by contributing to the AMR theme but it needs to be made more systematic.

social and economic change. ECOSOC has the potential to bring together its subsidiary and expert bodies, along with specialized agencies, to conduct integrated analysis of emerging global development challenges, considering economic, social and environmental dimensions, and creating a shared understanding across entities with different mandates and areas of expertise. This will enable ECOSOC to provide a developmental perspective to crises and emergencies.

17. Investment in knowledge is also important for ECOSOC to exercise an authoritative monitoring of implementation and follow up of the outcomes of UN conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields.

18. With a view to strengthening its capacity for ‘thought leadership’, **the Council may consider developing a knowledge sharing system to support and enhance its work.** The aims of such an approach would be to: 1) enhance the inter-organizational management of knowledge produced by its subsidiary bodies, functional commissions, funds, programmes and agencies; 2) better channel available knowledge to Governments in addressing specific issues and concerns; 3) ensure decisions within the Council are taken on the basis of sound evidence; and 4) bolster coherence of actions by ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies.

19. Several reports have highlighted the need to promote knowledge sharing within UN organizations and the UN system as a whole. As knowledge management has been implemented in many specialized agencies, funds and programmes, and its subsidiary bodies, ECOSOC is well positioned to tap the existing system-wide knowledge on key aspects of the sustainable development agenda for its thought leadership.

20. To fully benefit from this potential, **ECOSOC could elaborate a knowledge sharing strategy.** This would comprise: a) an interactive knowledge network with a focus on the management of both explicit and tacit knowledge; b) communities of practice set up across the ECOSOC entities; c) mapping of products and skills available through the ECOSOC system secretariats;

21. In *The Future We Want* world leaders recognised that inter- and intra-disciplinary sharing of knowledge is essential to create the individual and organizational knowledge necessary for achieving an integrated approach to sustainable development. A holistic knowledge leveraging strategy for the ECOSOC system should meet this mandate. **Further research and a feasibility study would need to be undertaken to explore the costs and benefits of the undertaking and its possible spill over effects.**

22. In order to play its role as a ‘thought leader’ most effectively, the Council should be able to draw on the best available knowledge and expertise, both within and outside the UN system. **The CDP, and other bodies could be strengthened as platforms for the Council to connect with academia, experts and scientists. The Council could also consider appointing time bound advisory groups of scientists and experts on topical themes.** In this way, the CDP and advisory groups can act as a think-tank for ECOSOC,

serve as an incubator of ideas for areas of future thematic focus for the main themes each year and enable the Council to better address the science-policy interface.

#### *D. ECOSOC for monitoring and mutual accountability*

23. The 2005 World Summit made the Council a platform for review of implementation of the UN development agenda through the Annual Ministerial Reviews and the Development Cooperation Forum.

24. With its focus on an annual theme and the connection between national and global reviews, the AMR has been a useful tool to monitor progress towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, and share lessons learned and best practices. **A strengthened ministerial review could become a central venue for monitoring the implementation of the post 2015 development agenda, supported by the entire ECOSOC system. (See Chapter IV).**

25. During its first five years, the DCF has built its reputation as an effective and inclusive multi-stakeholder forum that can influence global development cooperation discussions. It also emerged as a mutual accountability platform. **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 promoting enhanced reporting on agreed commitments and adapting development cooperation to emerging challenges.**

#### *E. A Responsive ECOSOC*

26. The changing global context has brought with it the need for swift and intensified coordination of actions, particularly in a time of crisis. In addition to considering an issues-based approach and using ECOSOC as a knowledge and accountability platform, Member States may wish to consider how ECOSOC can be enabled to respond promptly to crises and emergencies that affect the realisation of development goals and the well-being of people.

27. **The Council should consider convening on an ad hoc basis to address global development emergencies, to raise awareness and to serve as a high level policy platform for coordination of actors working on specific emergency situations. This mandate, established in resolution 61/16, should be used more effectively.** The timelines and flexibility required to respond in such situations would mean that **the Council should convene special sessions within days of a major crisis, drawing attention to the particular situation and rallying stakeholders for action.** The Council has periodically convened such meetings, including on the avian flu in 2005 and the global food crisis in 2008. To date, however, lack of sufficient analytical capacity to provide substantive input and recommendations to the Council at short notice, as well as

of secretariat support including conference services, have prevented this mandate from being fully implemented. However, more effective knowledge management and strengthened institutional mechanisms will enable ECOSOC to be more responsive in the future.

28. In addition to reacting to the consequences of emergencies and crises, **the Council should also focus on forward-looking discussions, especially for problems that are more structural in nature.**

#### ***F. Engaging Multiple Stakeholders***

29. In the current globalized and interconnected international context, broader and deeper engagement with a wider range of actors from academia, civil society, parliamentarians, local authorities, the private sector and social groups, is desirable. This would mobilise support on specific issues and promote better policymaking, targeting and delivery of services. Partnerships are increasingly recognised as important to leverage knowledge and funding in most development sectors.

30. Multi-stakeholder engagement can make an important contribution to the new focus on issues, while also increasing ECOSOC's thought leadership. **The Council should serve as a platform for high-level engagement between Member States, the private sector, foundations and NGOs** to enlist greater involvement and accelerate progress towards implementation of the UN development agenda, including the MDGs.

31. Since 2008, the Council has held a special annual event on partnerships as part of its preparations for the AMR, to broaden its range of stakeholders and promote concrete initiatives. A wide range of partnership initiatives occurred in support of the MDGs and in support of sustainable development as part of the Rio+20 Conference. **The Partnerships Forum could be upgraded**, becoming a space for in-depth discussion on the future role of partnerships, for the development of new partnerships in priority policy areas, and for mobilising action at operational level.

32. While all stakeholders have an important role in the delivery of the UN development agenda, it is especially important that young people are more actively engaged as they hold the key to the realisation of *the Future We Want*. **The Council could consider exploring mechanisms for deepening its dialogue with young people.** This would extend the dialogue established within the new Youth Forum towards a more inclusive process that will allow young people to influence policy development and decision-making.<sup>4</sup> A more direct engagement with youth at the intergovernmental level would align with the priority established by the Secretary General to further strengthen the United Nations' youth focus. Enhancing the Council's use of social media will greatly facilitate its outreach with young people.

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<sup>4</sup> The first Youth ECOSOC (half-day event) was held on 4 May 2012 and a second (a full day event) in the series is being planned for 27 March 2013.

### *G. Improving ECOSOC's public profile*

33. The task of communicating to the public the role, views and achievements of the Council in a compelling manner, within a maze of information overload, is a difficult challenge and a crowded field of development actors. The attention of media is to be earned, and is largely a residual windfall as the strengthening efforts of the type mentioned above bear fruit.

34. The public profile of ECOSOC will ideally evolve to that of a preferred platform for debate and dialogue, as the Council begins to respond more quickly as an intellectual leader on a range of cutting edge and emerging issues – and be a place where innovative ideas and solutions to sustainable development challenges are previewed and disseminated. **To ease this makeover, the use of innovative formats for facilitating discussions around ECOSOC's work has proven effective and should be expanded. Greater visibility for its President (discussed below), more effective dissemination of knowledge, and an enhanced role during crises and emergencies will all build the profile of the Council and the broader United Nations, both among the general public and opinion-formers.**

35. ECOSOC's institutional architecture represents an enormous - if largely untapped - communications asset. This includes the Regional Commissions and various field entities, all of which could do more to help the Council promote monitoring and national implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations conferences. **The Council's Bureau may consider utilizing innovative modes of communications with the public at large, such as web-based platforms and social media, with user-generated content and direct engagement and feedback.** While the Council has been a leader in the use of social media compared to the other Charter Bodies, it needs to integrate its use routinely in its work. Reaching the more than 10 million followers of the United Nations through regular social media campaigns offers untold potential to engage, inspire, and mobilise.

### **III. Strengthening ECOSOC's Relations with other relevant bodies**

36. Over the years, the work of the Council has necessarily expanded in many areas in response to emerging issues and global crises, and increasingly complex and entrenched development problems affecting particular countries and vulnerable groups. ECOSOC today is really an ECOSOC system, comprising subsidiary bodies of Functional and Regional Commissions, interaction with UN entities and specialized agencies and interface with other Charter Organs, particularly the General Assembly and Security Council and their subsidiary bodies. Managing these relationships can be time-consuming, cumbersome and procedural. Harnessing the collective strengths of the ECOSOC system and the potential synergy requires effective relations between the Council and the other intergovernmental bodies and related organizations of this extended family.

## ***A. Streamlining Relations of the Council with Other Intergovernmental Bodies***

### *The General Assembly*

37. The UN intergovernmental process on economic and social issues is marked by the dual competence, originated in the Charter, of the General Assembly, particularly its Second and Third Committees, and the Economic and Social Council. By creating Functional Commissions and other subsidiary bodies, ECOSOC has increased its involvement in specific areas of work while the same or related topics remain on the agenda of the General Assembly.

38. Discussions are often more inclusive of multi-stakeholders at the Council and its Functional Commissions, due to the significant involvement of a wide range of experts and civil society representatives during segments of the Council and sessions of the Commissions. On the other hand, the respective negotiation processes of resolutions in both bodies are similar. As a result, the Second or Third Committees of the Assembly and an ECOSOC Functional Commission or the Council itself have adopted similar texts within short intervals. In addition, little attention appears to be given to the programmes of work of other bodies when selecting themes for future sessions of a given Commission or Committee. Similarly, the Assembly usually maintains its periodicity of resolutions on specific topics independently from the timing of the consideration of the same topics by ECOSOC bodies. This state of affairs has led to overlap and repetition in the UN intergovernmental process.

39. Both the Assembly and the Council are enabled by the Charter and by their internal rules of procedures to adopt resolutions on issues on their agenda. However, with a view to ensuring coherence and complementarity in their respective activities, both bodies could consider adopting in practice guiding principles and specific modalities of work. This is not a simple, mechanical task as political considerations often govern the consideration of particular issues in specific bodies. Nevertheless, a degree of rationalization would contribute to the strengthening of ECOSOC.

**40. The Presidents of the General Assembly and ECOSOC could spearhead convening of an annual meeting of the Bureaux of the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly, with the Bureaux of the Council and relevant Functional Commissions, with a view to promoting coherence and synergies in the work of these bodies.** The definition of a main theme each year for the Council, as proposed earlier in this report, should facilitate the process. During the annual meeting a session could be devoted to knowledge sharing among the committees and expert bodies.

### *Security Council*

41. Effective collaboration between ECOSOC and the Security Council is important. Conflict and violence are serious impediments to development. At least one fifth of humanity lives in countries experiencing significant violence, political conflict, insecurity

and societal fragility.<sup>5</sup> No country affected by violence or fragility has achieved a single MDG target.<sup>6</sup> Areas of collaboration between ECOSOC and the Security Council include the relationship between conflict prevention and development, as well as the continuum from post-conflict relief to development. The importance of interactions in this area is likely to continue to grow, given the need to tackle poverty and hunger in conflict-affected or conflict prone countries.

42. There are also other global issues that require joint work by both Councils. For example, the President of the Security Council participated in the special event on the global food crisis hosted by ECOSOC in 2008. The President of ECOSOC also contributed to debates of the Security Council twice in 2007, while earlier efforts included collaboration that led to the creation by ECOSOC of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti in 1998, which was the forerunner of and model for the Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on African countries emerging from conflict in 2002.<sup>7</sup> There is a heightened awareness of the two-way relationship between sustainable development on the one hand, and peace and security on the other, making it essential that the Security and Economic and Social Councils work together effectively pursuant to Article 65 of the UN Charter.

43. In the future, **opportunities could be explored for making the interaction between ECOSOC and the Security Council more structured and better defined rather than based on ad hoc arrangements.**

#### *Peacebuilding Commission*

44. Many Member States support a strong link between ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in recognition of the role played by the Council in filling the institutional gap in the United Nations on peacebuilding with the creation of the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on Guinea-Bissau (2002-2006) and Burundi (2003-2008). These two Groups were aimed at promoting coherent support to those countries in their respective post-conflict contexts. The Council and the PBC can and should play complimentary roles in post-conflict response.

45. The focus of PBC is on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict, with its attention on security-sector reform, rule of law, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, mediation support, electoral assistance and basic peace dividends in the form of basic social services and livelihoods support. ECOSOC, on the other hand, has a broad remit on long-term sustainable development, and the review of UN operational activities system wide.

46. Several attempts have been made since 2006 to define the scope and content of the interaction between the Council and the Commission and to strengthen their institutional

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<sup>5</sup> Geneva Declaration Secretariat, *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011: Lethal Encounters* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> World Bank, *World Development Report 2011* (Washington, D.C.)

<sup>7</sup> The ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on African Countries Emerging from Conflict were created in response to a request from the General Assembly (A/RES/55/217).

linkages. Thus far, the relationship remains informal with a general practice, since 2009, of holding an annual joint meeting of the ECOSOC Bureau and the PBC Chairs Group, an informal briefing by the Chair of the PBC on its work during the substantive session of ECOSOC, and an annual special joint event on issues of common concern such as the impact of the food and economic crises on countries emerging from conflict, the MDGs in countries emerging from conflict and on Sudan and South Sudan. However, **the Council and the Commission could consider deepening their cooperation by elaborating a joint programme of work on issues of common concern, especially with regard to long-term development aspects of countries under consideration by the Commission.**

#### *The High-level Political Forum*

47. Institutional coherence depends to a large degree on the quality of interaction among intergovernmental bodies. The activities of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) established by the Rio+20 Conference should complement the work ECOSOC and the Forum should benefit from the strengths of the ECOSOC system as decided in paragraph 84 of Rio, which states that HPLF “should avoid overlap with existing structures, bodies and entities in a cost effective manner.” There should be coherence between the themes addressed by ECOSOC and those addressed by the HLPF.

48. Given the different views submitted by Member States for the preparation of this report, the relations between the Forum and the Council can only be considered in detail once an intergovernmental agreement is reached on the Forum itself. Nonetheless, **it is important for the two bodies to be in close relationship with each other to maximise the potential of each body.** This is an historic opportunity for designing the intergovernmental bodies to govern as one, in order to ensure that the sustainable development challenges are effectively addressed.

#### ***B. The Regional Commissions, Specialized Agencies and Bretton Woods institutions***

##### *Regional Commissions*

49. Since the 2005 World Summit, collaboration between ECOSOC and the regional commissions has increased significantly. In particular, almost all AMR regional preparatory meetings are organized in collaboration with the regional commissions, which have helped to bring regional perspectives to the AMR. Links have been made between the AMR and the Regional Coordination Mechanisms. Regional commissions are also collaborating on strengthening regional knowledge networks to promote the effective implementation of the United Nations development agenda and to assess progress. In some instances, the commissions have also assisted countries in the preparation of their National Voluntary Presentations.

50. While this engagement has expanded the scope of cooperation between the Council and Regional Commissions, the recent mandate given by Rio+20 on integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development will require even more intensive and broader collaboration. **The regional commissions could bring regional perspectives to the Council. They could also contribute to strengthening the monitoring and implementation functions of ECOSOC with respect to follow up of the outcomes of UN conferences and Summits in the economic, social and environmental fields. A strengthening of information and communication flows between ECOSOC and the Regional Commissions would extend the reach of their respective work and enhance their collective impact.**

*The specialized agencies*

51. Since the 2005 World Summit outcome, engagement by the specialized agencies in the work of ECOSOC has intensified, particularly with respect to the AMR. At the substantive level, the specialized agencies have increasingly contributed to the preparation of reports of the Secretary-General on the theme of the AMR and have participated extensively in the AMR process.

52. This increased engagement is a welcome trend that needs to continue and be further reinforced, in order for the Council to take full advantage of each individual organization's expertise and strength. **There is also a need for an increase in the flow of information from the specialized agencies to ECOSOC. This could be pursued through regular exchanges between the heads of their governing bodies with the President of ECOSOC pursuant to articles 63 and 64 of the UN Charter.**

*The Bretton Woods institutions*

53. ECOSOC has pursued a closer collaboration with the BWIs for some time. The Council engages regularly with the BWIs in its High-level Segment, during the High-level policy dialogue with the international finance and trade institutions. Collaboration between ECOSOC and the BWIs increased greatly during the preparations for the 2002 Monterrey Consensus and its follow-up. Since Monterrey, the main focus of the collaboration has been in the context of the financing for development process, during the Special high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and UNCTAD, held in the spring of every year.

54. The recent economic and financial crisis has underscored the importance of strengthening the multilateral system with respect to global economic and financial issues and the critical role of global economic coordination and coherence. In this regard, **the Council could explore, with the BWIs, modalities for further enhancing their collaboration in order to achieve better global macro-economic coordination and coherence, as well as implementation of the UN development agenda. The working group recently established by the 2012 ECOSOC President could be used to this end.**

**Such coordination and coherence could also be complemented through engagement between the United Nations and informal groupings such as the Group of 20, thus making ECOSOC a platform for global policy coherence.**

### *C. Reorienting ECOSOC's Relations with its Subsidiary Machinery*

55. Since its establishment, the Council has created a number of subsidiary bodies. These functional and regional commissions and expert bodies report to the Council on their work on an annual basis. They constitute the 'technical arm' of the intergovernmental machinery, providing policy options, proposing indicators and carrying out detailed analyses of economic, social and environmental concerns.

56. While strengthening the substantive role of the UN, and enhancing the engagement with stakeholders and key constituencies, this multiplication of bodies, with their own membership and working methods, has made the institutional landscape more diverse and fragmented. Following an invitation by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/16 to the subsidiary bodies, some have made contributions to the current AMR, while others have added a specific agenda item on ECOSOC. Some functional commissions have also contributed to the discussions of the Council when the theme was directly related to their work, such as the contribution of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to the AMR theme on gender equality, and of the Commission on Social Development to employment.

57. However, there are significant areas for improving coherence. A unified vision and agenda with clearer reporting lines should guide the work of subsidiary bodies, while providing a robust platform for them to enhance their visibility and increase impact in their area of expertise. As proposed in Section II, a main theme each year would increase coherence, while the Council should engage in more substantive dialogue on the reports and recommendations of the functional commissions. **Other modalities for interaction between the Commissions and the Council should also be clearly defined to ensure increased interaction and to enhance the impact of their respective work. The periodic meetings between the Bureaus of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies should be utilized for this purpose.**

## **IV. Reorganising the Way ECOSOC Works**

58. Consistent with strengthening ECOSOC through an increased emphasis on an issues-based approach, Member States may also consider realigning the Council's scheduling and methods of work to better enable it to carry out this focus in a way that integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development. Greater coherence is also needed at normative, programmatic and operational levels, streamlining the relationship between ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies, translating normative guidance into more coherent programming, and improving oversight of the UN's operational activities for

development. The Council's institutional mechanisms also need to be strengthened if it is to deliver its increasingly demanding remit in full.

#### ***A. ECOSOC and evolving methods of work***

59. The Council's current structure and working methods have been shaped through a number of actions taken since 1990. To have one session, the Council merged its two annual regular sessions – one in New York on social issues, and one in Geneva on economic issues – into one annual month-long Substantive Session in July. This session alternates between New York and Geneva, and is split into five distinct segments. The Council also holds other various short sessions and events during the year.

60. The 2005 World Summit highlighted and significantly strengthened the role of the Council in driving and monitoring implementation of the global development agenda, especially in creating the Annual Ministerial Review and the Development Cooperation Forum. This entailed a major reform of the High-level Segment, with implications for the work of the Council and its subsidiary bodies throughout the year (Resolution 61/16).

61. This current organization, while strengthening the Council's role vis-à-vis the development agenda, has also resulted in several challenges for the Council, particularly with respect to focus, visibility, timing and engagement. The back-to-back placement of the five segments has tended to dilute the Council's focus during the session and created competition for engagement and attention by relevant policy-makers. As a result, individual segments do not stand out and distinguish themselves sufficiently.

62. The overall length of the substantive session does not facilitate engagement, as most high-level officials are unable to attend a month-long session. It is also not conducive to the participation of high-level officials from different ministries that deal with the wide range of issues considered in the Substantive Session. Governments are not inclined to send two or three different officials to the same meeting. It can also be a challenge for many Member States, particularly those with smaller Missions, to prepare and follow each segment during the four-week period. The timing of some of the segments also proves unfavourable for better participation.

63. Moreover, maintaining a consistent focus on the follow up to conferences and summits remains difficult. For instance, the limited period of time devoted to the work of its subsidiary bodies during the General Segment has meant that the Council usually confines itself to guidance on process and does not engage sufficiently on the substantive outcomes of the commissions' sessions. The Council tends to routinely adopt resolutions submitted to it by the functional commissions and/or takes note of the reports of their sessions. The format of these reports is determined by this process rather than by the substantive consideration of the policy recommendations contained in the documents, and therefore guidance to the intergovernmental machinery has been minimal. In addition, connecting the UN's normative and operational work has been difficult under the current structure.

64. An alternative approach would spread the ECOSOC programme into shorter sessions devoted to specific issues. Shorter sessions would mean that there would not be one high-level segment, but rather several sessions/meetings that could attract high-level and multi-stakeholder participation. For example, a session on development cooperation and operational activities would facilitate the engagement of senior government officials and other stakeholders in these areas. Shorter sessions and meetings would not increase the number of days that ECOSOC meets: rather, the same four weeks would be spread throughout the year. These four weeks would exclude, however, meetings that the Council would convene to deal with emergency issues, as these would be arranged on an *ad hoc* basis. If the Council were to address a particular theme in any year, then the shorter sessions/meetings would focus in different ways on the main theme. **The Council may wish to consider conducting its work in shorter sessions/meetings focused on specific issues throughout the calendar year.**

65. An overview of the “shorter, focused sessions” format, and working methods, is set out below, supplemented by Diagram 1.

- *Session I: Consideration of the three dimensions and cross-cutting issues*

66. During the period of January through May, the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and other UN system entities would undertake consideration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions and of crosscutting issues pertaining to the main theme. This would be in line with their respective work programmes during their sessions held in that period.<sup>8</sup>

67. Integration of the main theme could also take place, to the extent possible, across the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and other UN bodies so as to develop horizontal linkages. Thus, their agendas and work programmes could address the theme in three ways: (i) treating the issue of the main theme within their area of competence, clustered around the three dimensions of sustainable development consistent with the annual theme; (ii) addressing the main theme with a view to the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development; and (iii) considering how their treatment of the main theme can take into account, inter-relate with, and impact on the work of other bodies.

68. Other United Nations entities addressing the economic and social dimensions of the theme would include the expanded UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the three Rio Conventions, and, as relevant, other funds and programmes and specialized agencies. As of now, UNEP reports to the General Assembly through ECOSOC and the Conventions report to the Second Committee. To strengthen coherence for the environmental dimension, it is important that these bodies contribute to ECOSOC discussions.

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<sup>8</sup> Some subsidiary bodies may need to adjust their timings to be able to contribute to the Annual Session in June.

- *Session II: Development Cooperation and Operational Activities*

69. The ECOSOC cycle would begin in February in New York with the Development Cooperation and Operational Activities Session. The session would include the biennial Development Cooperation Forum and would also address operational activities for development, which are currently considered in the Operational Activities Segment. The Session would be held back-to-back with the meetings of the Executive Boards of the Funds and Programmes, which would be of particular benefit to the operational activities function of the Session. This session would also host the joint event on transition from relief to development, providing an important link between humanitarian affairs and operational activities for development.

70. The DCF, in particular, would benefit from the increased visibility it could gain from being in a distinct, focused session, with a view towards increasing engagement and impact with governments, bringing about a more meaningful engagement with development partners, and further reinforcing its comparative advantage in attracting and interacting with non-state actors, such as private foundations and the private sector. Through the DCF, the Council has evolved as a hub for reviewing development cooperation and the changing global partnership for development.

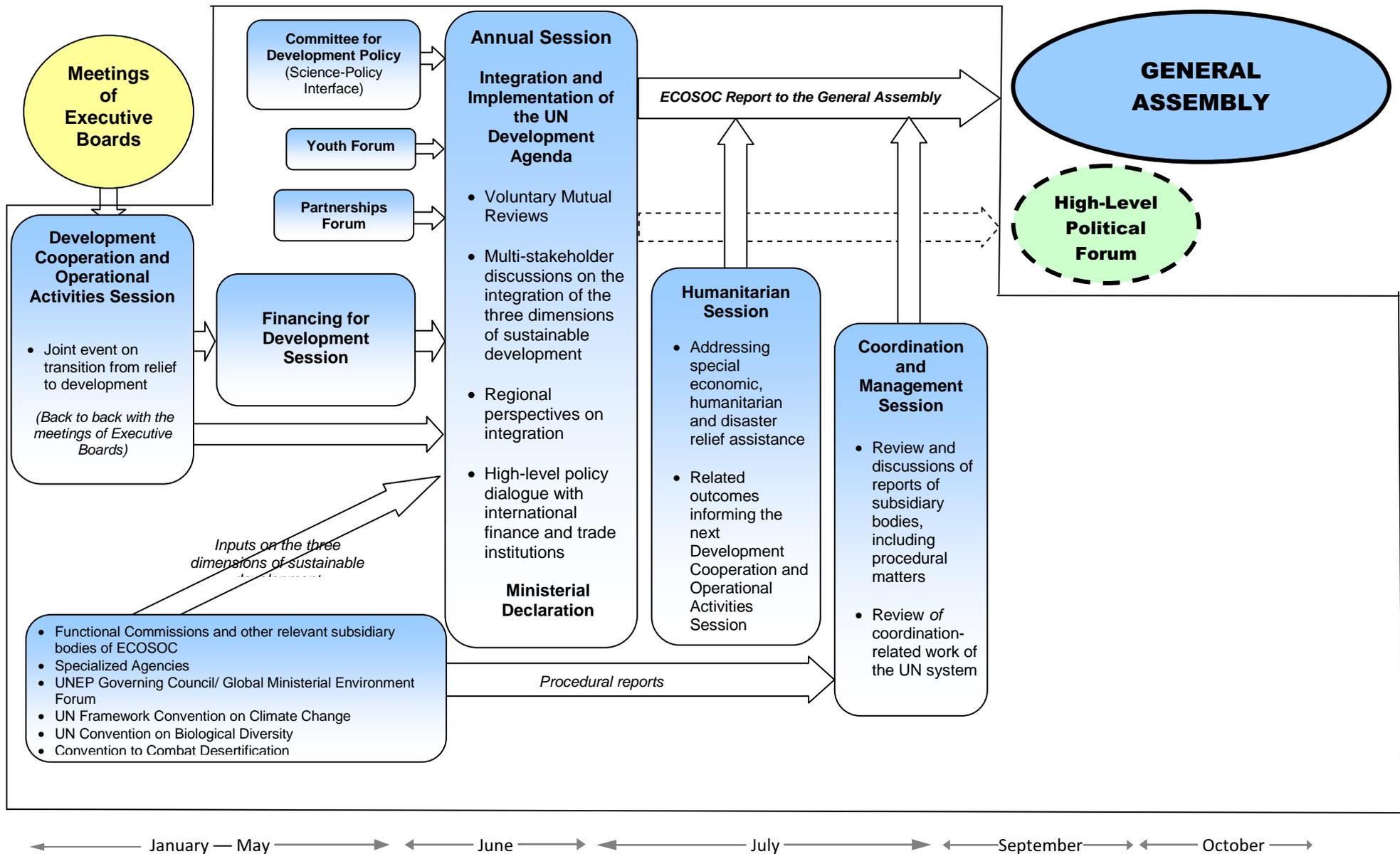
71. The increased visibility could assist the DCF to fulfil its potential to become the main global forum for dialogue on international development cooperation, thus fulfilling a critical role in the post-2015 development framework.

- *Session III: Financing for Development*

72. A Financing for Development Session would be held in New York in March or April. It would address the follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development and would include the annual spring Special high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and UNCTAD. The session would also provide input to the discussions on integration during the Annual Session in June. A number of proposals for strengthening this process have been presented in the Secretary-General's report A/67/353, including ensuring coordination and coherence of the financing for development process with the intergovernmental process on sustainable development financing.

73. The scope of the Session could also be adjusted to cover a review of trends in international macroeconomics, trade and finance, as they relate to the ECOSOC main theme. This would give the Council an opportunity to be a forum at which collective discussion takes place on the various prognoses from the BWIs, WTO, UNCTAD, as well as from the UN Secretariat.

# Diagram 1. Proposed Working Methods for ECOSOC



- *Session IV: Annual Meeting of ECOSOC*

74. The ECOSOC annual session would be held in June in New York, focusing on a theme of the UN Development Agenda from an integration and implementation perspective. The session would perform the following functions:

(i) *Voluntary Mutual Reviews (VMRs)*, which would replace the current National Voluntary Presentations (NVPs). The VMRs would be based on a common platform and a robust analytical framework and would also include formal follow-up.

(ii) *Multi-stakeholder discussions on the theme from an integrated perspective*. The objective of these discussions would be to achieve an integrated discussion of the main theme. The discussions would consider, synthesise and integrate the inputs received on the main theme, clustered around the three dimensions of sustainable development, from the Council's preceding sessions/meetings that year, plus inputs from ECOSOC's subsidiary bodies and other UN system entities. The discussions would be enhanced by participation of key partners and stakeholders, and of leading experts with state of the art analysis that would brand ECOSOC's thought leadership on the theme.

(iii) *Regional perspectives on the theme from an integrated perspective*. The Regional Commissions provide important fora for articulating regional perspectives on global issues and for contributing to the integration of the three dimensions at the regional level. They would be given the opportunity to bring their regional perspectives on the theme by contributing to the integrated discussions and to engage more visibly.

(iv) *High-level policy dialogue with international finance and trade institutions*. This would bring the executive heads of these institutions to the Council to have a discussion with Member States on the current global economic situation.

- *Session V: Humanitarian*

75. A Humanitarian Session could be held in July, addressing issues of special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. Convening such a stand-alone session in July would further increase the profile of this important annual humanitarian platform. This session might be held in Geneva or New York. Relevant outcomes from this session would inform the next Development Cooperation and Operational Activities Session in the following February.

- *Session VI: Coordination and Management*

76. A Coordination and Management Session would also be held in July in New York. In general, the coordination function of ECOSOC should be mainstreamed to the extent possible, ensuring that all sessions promote system-wide coherence. The main purpose of this session, however, would be to address coordination and procedural issues: the session would undertake reviews and discussions of the reports of subsidiary bodies and address the procedural aspects of the oversight function of the ECOSOC subsidiary

bodies that are currently hosted in the General Segment. In particular, procedural reports of the functional and regional commissions should be presented for the Council's review at this session.

77. The session would also address some aspects of coordination and review coordination work of the UN system. This can be used to streamline agenda of the coordination and general segments. The session would also address any other procedural or administrative issues and questions on the Council's agenda. As such, this session would not require high-level engagement.

### ***B. Enhancing ECOSOC's Coordination Role at the Programmatic Level***

78. In its resolution 45/264, the General Assembly specified that the Council's coordination segment would be entrusted to ensure "coordination of the activities of the specialized agencies, organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in the economic, social and related fields, in accordance with Articles 63 and 64 of the Charter."

79. Beginning with ECOSOC decision 2007/261, however, the main focus of the Coordination Segment has been on the programmatic aspects of the AMR theme, namely how the United Nations system, as a whole, translates the normative work contained in the previous year's Ministerial Declaration into specific and coordinated activities. The Secretary-General is requested to prepare a report on measures taken to implement the Ministerial Declaration, but the timeframe between the adoption of the Declaration and the preparation of the report is too short to assess recommendations in a meaningful way. Moreover, reporting on a large number of new activities, added to what had already been presented in the report submitted to the AMR of the previous year becomes challenging.

80. Despite several GA resolutions inviting the UN system to contribute to the Coordination Segment,<sup>9</sup> discussions on programmatic issues have not mobilised high-level participation from the system. Since 2005, however, there have been improvements in terms of engagement and coordination of the UN system around the themes of the AMR and the DCF.

81. **These improvements have clearly established that coordination should be built around specific issues throughout the work of ECOSOC. The Council could better fulfil its Charter mandate through this approach.** At the same time, some issues may be addressed in the Coordination and Management Session if the Council decides to do so.

82. With a view to promoting coherence among UN bodies and encouraging effective interagency partnerships, it may be desirable to institute **regular interaction of the Bureau of ECOSOC with the Chairpersons of the governing bodies of the Funds,**

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<sup>9</sup> A/RES/45/264, A/RES/57/270 B, A/RES/50/227

**Programmes and Specialized Agencies, particularly with respect to the ECOSOC main theme.**

***C. Improving Oversight of UN Operational Activities for Development***

83. The governance system for the United Nations operational activities for development (UN-OAD) is constituted by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Executive Boards of the Funds and Programmes and the governing bodies of the specialized agencies, with each having specific roles and responsibilities.

84. This has resulted in a fragmented system, with a general sentiment that ECOSOC, despite its mandate, has not been effective in providing system-wide oversight of a UN development system dominated by each entity's executive board or governing body. ECOSOC's decisions are often viewed as too vague and based on insufficiently integrated analysis in order to provide useful guidance. Many functions of ECOSOC are also performed in isolation and are not guided by a common vision and strategy.

85. There are several suggestions to address these shortcomings. One is for ECOSOC to establish, as proposed above, a separate, stand-alone session on development cooperation and operational activities, which should serve as a forum to discuss and take decisions on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and other system-wide policies and programming. This Session could also be the forum for discussions on programmatic coherence at the country level and on Common Country Programmes, as well as for linking ECOSOC's normative and operational work through the integration of sustainable development into operational activities.

86. The agenda of the operational activities segment of ECOSOC could focus primarily on four areas: UNDAF, the RC system, common business practices, and inter-agency coordination (UNDG). These system-wide issues are not addressed at the level of any of the Executive Boards, but are critical for the overall effectiveness and impact of the UN development system. The Operational Activities Segment of ECOSOC should not review individual UNDAFs in programme countries but rather discuss and approve overall principles and guidelines for this system-wide instrument. The OAS should evolve into a genuine oversight, accountability and policy guidance body that attracts the participation of national policy-makers from Member States.

87. The development cooperation and operational activities session could also discuss issues relating to operational interoperability across UN entities, such as implementation of measures to simplify and harmonise business practices, and institute a decision-making process on system-wide interoperability of management issues that fall beyond the purview of individual governing bodies. In this way, **ECOSOC could enhance its relevance to the work of the Funds and Programmes and specialized agencies through an increased sensitivity to the dynamics and implications of a UN development system based almost exclusively on voluntary funding.**

88. **The Council may also wish to establish an effective system to monitor the implementation of its decisions, including designing an evidence-based monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance and follow up with QCPR mandates.**

#### *D. Strengthening Institutional Mechanisms*

89. The transformative change occurring in economy and society and the multitude of crises confronting the international community requires the Council to step up to its Charter responsibilities to “promote the conditions for stability and well-being.” One mechanism for this is to enhance the advocacy role of the Presidency of ECOSOC. Accordingly, **the Council could consider making the Presidency a full-time role, with the appropriate human and financial resources to support its functions.**

90. At the same time, the Secretariat support ECOSOC should also be strengthened to deliver key reforms such as the issues-based functioning of the Council, its position as a thought leader, the preparation and follow up to the proposed voluntary mutual reviews, as well as the mechanism to promptly address social, economic and environmental emergencies in an integrated manner. **Augmenting the quality of support to ECOSOC should be done through better integrating the rich knowledge and experience of the whole UN system into the work of the Secretariat. Increased cooperation between the Secretariat and other UN entities would have the positive side-effect of increasing intra- and inter-organisational knowledge transfers and thus assist in the overall coherence of UN activities for development.**

91. The involvement of the UN system should also be increased with respect to assisting Member States in the preparation and follow-up to the voluntary mutual reviews and to foster the quality of this process.

#### **V. Conclusion**

92. The combination of multiple economic, social, and environmental pressures suggests that the world will see continued turbulence in coming years. ECOSOC can be a bystander or an active intergovernmental body that engages member States and other stakeholders to deliberate and contribute to an effective and timely multilateral response addressing immediate demands and longer-term development needs.

93. The Council has a potentially pivotal role to play in the UN. The upcoming 2015 stocktaking of development goals needs informed deliberation. The Rio+20 vision of an integrated approach to sustainable development and poverty eradication needs to be elaborated and mainstreamed within the UN system. The political commitments renewed at Rio need to be followed up with increased international cooperation. The implementation of the outcomes of all of the relevant UN conferences and Summits need substantive monitoring at national, regional and global levels. ECOSOC is at a crossroad: it can handle these tasks procedurally or advance understanding of the issues and promote consensus on appropriate actions.

94. The strengthening of ECOSOC, as discussed in the report, would require a fundamental reorientation in the focus and methods of work of the Council. However, the actions involved build on its existing comparative advantages.

95. The interrelated challenges of sustainable development and poverty eradication are at the heart of the Council's mandate. An issue-oriented ECOSOC can help leverage the vast reservoir of expertise and experience in the UN system to better delineate core issues; the crosscutting dimensions and holistic features; and strategic priorities at all levels. A strengthened ECOSOC can also engage stakeholders beyond the UN system through involvement of the academic and scientific community, private sector, civil society and public authorities at all levels, in knowledge sharing and programme partnering, in a collective mainstreaming of sustainable development. These challenges demand that the Council and its subsidiary bodies play a more vigorous role in promoting an integrated follow up to the outcomes of United Nations conferences.