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Further Details on Institutional Options for Strengthening the Institutional Arrangements for Support to Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

I. Introduction

1. On 15 September 2008, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on System-wide Coherence (A/RES/62/277) following a series of informal consultations held in 2007 and 2008 on the recommendations of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence contained in the Panel's report (A/61/583). Recommendations included strengthening the coherence and impact of the United Nations institutional gender equality architecture by streamlining and combining existing gender institutions into a consolidated United Nations gender equality and women's empowerment entity.

2. To facilitate the informal consultations of the General Assembly, and in response to its requests, the Deputy Secretary-General submitted three papers. The first¹ set forth the vision and purpose for a new gender equality and women's empowerment architecture. The second paper² analyzed the gaps and challenges faced by the United Nations in supporting Member States to implement globally agreed mandates and their own national commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment. The third

¹ Concept Note on a Strengthened Architecture for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, 1 August 2007

² Note on the United Nations Support to Member States on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, 5 June 2008

paper,³ taking into account the views of Member States and the previously identified gaps and challenges, suggested two approaches to institutional options: (i) maintain the system as it currently is, and (ii) strengthen the existing institutional arrangements through consolidation of the four gender-specific entities, namely: the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women (OSAGI), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). The second approach to institutional options would entail pursuing one of three possible institutional options for consideration by Member States: a Fund/Programme, a Department of the Secretariat, and/or a Composite entity.

3. The General Assembly, in paragraph 5 of its resolution 62/277, requested the Secretary-General to “provide a further detailed modalities paper in respect of the options, to cover funding, governance structure, staffing, specific functions and relationship with the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and other relevant bodies and, having regard to the totality of views expressed by Member States in informal plenary consultations on 8 September 2008, focusing in particular on the ‘Composite’ entity option with a view to facilitating substantive action by the General Assembly during the sixty-third session”. The present paper responds to this request.

³ Institutional Options to Strengthen United Nations Work on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 23 July 2008

II. Background

4. Gender equality and women's empowerment are goals in their own right. They are also crucial to the achievement of the United Nations objectives in development, peace, security and human rights. Yet gender inequality exists in all societies around the world, albeit to differing extents. The devastating effects of poverty, discrimination, violence and lack of opportunity affect women in multiple ways, from their economic standing to their social wellbeing, as well as their prospects for better political participation. No country in the world can claim to have eliminated discrimination against women and violations of their rights.

5. Member States have reconfirmed that gender equality and women's empowerment are central to achieving peace and security, development, and human rights as set forth in the Beijing Platform for Action, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), as well as internationally agreed development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to which Member States are parties also addresses gender equality and women's empowerment. Despite these policy and normative achievements a large gap remains between commitments to women and gender equality and their implementation.

6. The informal consultations of the General Assembly facilitated by Co-Chairs Ambassador Paul Kavanagh of Ireland and Ambassador Augustin Mahiga of Tanzania, elicited a significant convergence of views among Member States on the gaps and

challenges to be addressed, and the corresponding aims and functions that a consolidated entity should encompass. Regarding institutional options to overcome the gaps and meet the challenges, in his summation during the 8 September 2008 informal consultations, Ambassador Mahiga stated “the burden of arguments we have heard is for an organization which is comprehensive and capable of seamless effectiveness both in the field and at Headquarters, that is, both at operational level and at the normative level, which would not rely solely on either assessed or voluntary contributions, and whose Head would operate with direct responsibilities to the Secretary-General but also have membership of the Chief Executives Board.” While noting that the Composite entity option appeared to carry the most promise of meeting all the priorities expressed by Member States, the Co-Chairs observed that the Composite entity was the least explained. Accordingly, the Assembly decided to seek further information on the modalities of the options.

III. Further Detailed Modalities of the Institutional Options

7. In view of the importance attached to gender equality and the empowerment of women, all organizations of the UN system, including Departments and Offices of the Secretariat, Funds, Programmes and Specialized Agencies, are mandated to support the achievement of gender equality. They are required to address the gender perspectives of their distinctive substantive programmes and activities, and they have delivered tangible results in this regard. Throughout the UN system, including in the Secretariat, there are gender units, gender advisers and departmental focal points. At the regional level, the

Regional Commissions support Member States in addressing gender equality issues from the regional and sub-regional perspectives. At the country level, Gender Theme Groups contribute to and monitor gender mainstreaming in the work of the United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs). Furthermore, an inter-agency mechanism for coordination, the Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), works to promote dialogue and collaboration in the UN system on gender equality and empowerment of women.

8. The main aim of a strengthened gender equality architecture was envisioned as providing coherent, timely support to Member States, consistent with the principle of national ownership, in their efforts to enhance their capacity to achieve gender equality, in line with national priorities and internationally-agreed norms and policies. A strengthened UN system would thus serve to address the gaps and challenges identified in the 5 June 2008 paper of the Deputy Secretary-General, namely: coordination and coherence; authority and positioning; accountability; resources; country-level support; and emphasis on country-driven demands and ownership.

9. A new gender equality and women's empowerment entity would undertake the following functions as previously outlined by the Deputy Secretary-General's papers of 1 August 2007 and 23 July 2008:

- (a) lead innovative and catalytic country-driven programming, gender mainstreaming and capacity-building, and provide targeted technical cooperation and capacity-building in line with national strategies;

- (b) provide substantive support to United Nations bodies (CSW, the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly and the Security Council) where commitments, norms and policy recommendations on gender equality and gender mainstreaming are discussed and agreed upon;
- (c) build on the comparative advantage of United Nations actors, lead and coordinate the systems' strategies, policies and actions on gender equality and women's empowerment, and promote effective system-wide gender mainstreaming;
- (d) ensure accountability of the United Nations system, including through oversight, monitoring and reporting of system-wide performance;
- (e) undertake global, regional and national advocacy efforts on issues critical to gender equality and women's empowerment to ensure that emerging, under-recognized and under-resourced issues receive national, regional and global attention;
- (f) undertake new and consolidate existing research and analytical work, to support overall objectives, including acting as a clearing house for knowledge and experience on gender equality and empowerment of women from all parts of the United Nations system;
- (g) monitor the implementation of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Outcome Document of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly, and Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008); and

- (h) monitor and report on system-wide compliances with intergovernmental mandates on gender balance including at senior/decision-making levels.

10. The new entity would also maintain and strengthen collaboration between Member States, the UN system and civil society in pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment.

11. Keeping in mind the above-mentioned functions together with the gaps and challenges, the following provides further detailed modalities of the institutional options.

A Status Quo

12. With respect to the request by the General Assembly in paragraph 5 of resolution 62/277, it is noted that the Status Quo option had been analyzed in previous papers of the Deputy Secretary-General on UN system support to Member States on gender equality and women's empowerment. Notably, the main functions performed by OSAGI, DAW, UNIFEM and INSTRAW were outlined by the Deputy Secretary-General in her paper of 23 July 2008.

13. Current analysis has confirmed the findings in the Deputy Secretary-General's Note of 5 June 2008, which showed that the Status Quo option would be the least effective in eliminating fragmentation or providing a single driver and voice for the UN

system on gender equality, even with increased resources and more effective internal collaboration. Further informal consultations with Member States, civil society and UN entities in preparing the present paper confirmed that specific steps could be taken to improve the current situation – such as joint planning and effective practices instituted by other UN organizations with complementary mandates – but compared to other options the Status Quo provides the most limited opportunities to strengthen the gender equality and women’s empowerment work of the United Nations.

B. Fund/Programme

14. This option would involve the establishment of a Fund/Programme by the General Assembly that would be separately administered and funded. It would partially consolidate the four gender-focused entities with the exception of those staff resources that provide substantive support to intergovernmental bodies.

15. Funds and Programmes, mainly UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA were reviewed in order to provide further details on the modalities of this option.

1. Governance structure and relationship to CSW and other relevant bodies

16. It is envisaged that the Fund/Programme would report to an Executive Board. The Executive Board would be responsible for providing intergovernmental oversight for the Fund/Programme in accordance with the overall policy guidance of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, and for ensuring that it is responsive to

the needs and priorities of recipient countries. The Executive Board would be expected to bring to the attention of the Economic and Social Council issues requiring its guidance.

17. The Executive Head of the Fund/Programme, as is the case for other Funds and Programmes, would be a full member of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).

2. Specific functions

18. Responsibility for substantive servicing and support to the normative and policy work of the United Nations intergovernmental bodies would remain within the United Nations Secretariat. Accordingly, with regard to the functions outlined in paragraph 9 above, the Fund/Programme would not undertake functions (b) and (g) as these are functions typically carried out by the United Nations Secretariat, nor would it undertake function (h) as this is also a Secretariat function. These constraints would not preclude the Fund/Programme from making contributions to the work of intergovernmental bodies as is common with Funds and Programmes at present.

3. Staffing

19. Under this option, staff resources of UNIFEM and INSTRAW would be deployed to the new entity. Staff resources of OSAGI and DAW responsible for substantive servicing of intergovernmental bodies would remain in the Secretariat. While it is important to maintain support to the normative and policy framework, the consolidation

could involve a significant shift of resources from Headquarters to country and regional levels, and provision of integrated programmatic and technical support. The Fund/Programme would aim to have universal coverage to deal with all gender equality issues world-wide and strategic presence.

20. The Executive Head would be appointed by the Secretary-General at the Under-Secretary-General level, and would be assisted by two Assistant Secretaries-General to provide overall leadership, vision and strategic direction.

21. The Fund/Programme's regional directors would be members of the United Nations Regional Directors Teams (RDTs) located at the United Nations regional hubs where most of the other regional offices of UN entities operating at the country level are based. The tasks of the Fund/Programme's regional directors would include strategic positioning and collaboration with United Nations actors, such as the Regional Commissions and other regional and sub-regional bodies as well as with civil society organizations. They would engage in performance management and coordination of operational activities of UNCTs in their respective regions. Policy dialogue and advocacy with the above-mentioned regional/sub-regional institutions and bodies, as well as oversight of and facilitation of coordinated inter-agency support to UNCTs activities, would be key functions of the Fund/Programme's regional offices, especially within the context of the ongoing United Nations reform at the country level.

22. At the country level, the Fund/Programme's senior representative would be a full member of the UNCT. She/he would provide coherent and timely evidence-based policy advice and programming on gender equality and women's empowerment and support to members of the UNCT. She/he would also chair the inter-agency Gender Theme Group and be responsible for developing and maintaining partnerships with key stakeholders at the country level including NGOs and community groups.

23. One of the key roles of the Fund/Programme's representative, in close collaboration with the Resident Coordinator (RC), would be not only to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment were fully integrated in United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), but also to promote joint programming in specific areas of UNDAF and lead and coordinate efforts for resource mobilization for the implementation of agreed joint programme activities.

4. Funding

24. The Fund/Programme would be solely financed from and dependent on voluntary contributions. Joint funding of projects with other entities in the UN system would be promoted. The Fund/Programme would be fully accountable for the management of its resources and for the outputs of the Executive Board-approved programmes at country, regional and global levels. It would also be accountable for monitoring and reporting on