

BRIEF III. ECOSOC Guiding and promoting a coherent and coordinated UN system

This brief is part of a series aimed to provide background information on ECOSOC strengthening. Briefs include (i) ECOSOC mandates and evolution of functions; (ii) policy dialogue and guidance; (iii) guiding and promoting a coherent and coordinated UN system; (iv) subsidiary bodies; (v) relationship with the General Assembly, Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council; (vi) countries in special situations; and (vii) addressing emergency issues.

Why coordinate?

The UN Charter mandated ECOSOC to coordinate the work of the UN system. ECOSOC is the platform where, through coordination, coherence of the UN system is to be achieved. The purpose of coordination is to avoid duplication, minimize redundancies and overlaps – and ensure synergies and co-benefits in the work of the system, particularly in policies and operations. This will be even more important for ECOSOC's contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the upcoming Decade for Action.

The Council is the preeminent UN mechanism for the coordination of the UN system and the range of work of UN system entities, including not only operational activities but also policy and normative work. The work of the UN system is highly decentralized, covering a wide range of different issues with entities having their own intergovernmental processes, own constituency and agendas. While UN funds and programmes are established by a resolution of the

UN General Assembly with a focused mandate and are coordinated by ECOSOC, the specialized agencies are international organizations working with the UN through agreements with the Economic and Social Council, pursuant to the terms of Article 57 of the Charter. Article 63 of the UN Charter stipulates that the Council may coordinate the activities of the specialized agencies through consultation with, and recommendations to, the agencies and through recommendations to the General Assembly and Members States.

«1946 - 1960s»

- ◆ In the early years, ECOSOC exercised its coordination role of the specialized agencies and the IAEA by examining reports from these organizations and making recommendations to avoid overlap and duplication in their programme activities. As its agenda increased in volume and became more complex, ECOSOC created an ad hoc Working Group on Coordination (resolution 798 (XXX)) in 1960, which was replaced by the creation of the Committee on Programme and Coordination (CPC) in 1962 to identify issues and problems of coordination. Inputs to the discussions of the Council were derived from the report of the Secretary General on the work of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), now known as the Chief Executives Board (CEB), the report of the CPC and the outcomes of the joint meetings of both the ACC and the CPC.
- ◆ The Committee on Development Planning (CDP), now renamed the Committee on Development Policy, created in 1964, was also originally requested to help the Council in its coordination function by reviewing and evaluating the development programmes and activities of the UN and the specialized agencies.

«1990s and 2000s»

- ◆ With 45/264 of 1991, a Coordination Segment was created alongside the High-level Segment and the Operational Activities Segment. Its objective was to review the work of the specialized agencies and bodies of the UN system in selected areas, in accordance with Articles 63 and 64 of the Charter. Soon after the Segment was also asked to address coordination matters arising from subsidiary bodies (48/162).
- ◆ The Coordination Segment functioned as a space for looking at the policy guidance/recommendations of the various agencies, funds and programmes in different sectors to ensure that they are consistent and mutually supportive in addressing global development challenges as defined by Member States. The Council could thus:
 - help to improve the capacity of the UN system to provide more integrated solutions and enhance their effectiveness;
 - provide guidance on the range of activities of specialized agencies, including normative and policy aspects.
 - consider the implementation of the ministerial declaration adopted by ECOSOC the previous year by the UN system;
 - provide an opportunity to review the follow-up and implementation of the outcomes of specific conferences and summits based on cross-cutting themes.

«2010s»

- ◆ In its resolution 68/1, the GA decided that the dedicated coordination and management meetings would be held regularly to perform the functions of the coordination and general segments, which was later renamed as the

Management Segment (A/RES/72/305). The Management Meetings however did not deliver the responsibilities of the Coordination Segment. ECOSOC is also entrusted with coordinating the follow-up to the outcomes of the Least Developed Countries and Habitat conferences, report of the UN System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN); guide UNAIDS and UNHCR, as well as the inter-agency task force on non-communicable diseases, review gender mainstreaming in the UN system. Their consideration during the Management Segment, however, does not allow for in-depth discussion to provide guidance for coordination and coherence.

- ◆ The ECOSOC Integration Segment has now been mandated to “coordinate the policies and activities of the specialized agencies relating to the SDGs and other internationally agreed development goals”, to discuss integrated policies based on the inputs of subsidiary bodies and prepare the HLPF thematic reviews. The report of the CEB, which highlights the work done by the UN system together, is also presented during the Integration Segment. Due to lack of time, the Council was not able to discuss the coordination challenges in the activities of the specialized agencies, funds and programmes at the normative level nor its subsidiary bodies, nor provide guidance without an outcome.

«ECOSOC and International trade and finance institutions»

- ◆ ECOSOC has also endeavored to promote coherence and cooperation with the international trade and finance institutions on issues of common concern. ECOSOC’s regular engagement with the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) began with its high-level policy dialogue during its High-level Segment in the 1990s. ECOSOC also initiated, in 1998, a tradition of meeting each spring with finance ministers heading key committees of the Bretton Woods institutions. The collaboration with the BWIs increased during the preparations of the 2002 Monterrey Consensus and its follow-up. The economic and financial crisis of 2008 demonstrated 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. With the adoption of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Council’s engagement with the BWIs has been strengthened by shifting these specialized discussions to the ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum.

«Coordination of the UN development system operational activities»

- ◆ The Council is the preeminent UN mechanism for the oversight and coordination of the UN development system operational activities at its operational activities segment. Governing boards of UN funds and programmes manage their operations and they report to ECOSOC.
- ◆ In resolution 72/305, the General Assembly decided to strengthen the Operational Activities Segment to “serve as a platform to ensure accountability for, and acceleration of system-wide performance and results in relation to the 2030 Agenda and provide guidance to and overall coordination of the United Nations development system supporting General Assembly policies including the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the QCPR , including oversight of the implementation of the resolution on repositioning of the United Nations development system”. The Council was also requested to reinforce linkages between policy and operational functions with the aim to strengthen results and impact. It was asked to provide improved system-wide coordination and guidance on operational activities for development to the governing bodies of the United Nations development system.

«Coordination of UN humanitarian assistance»

- ◆ Through its humanitarian affairs segment, the Council continues to contribute to strengthening the coordination and effectiveness of the UN humanitarian assistance and support and complement international efforts aimed at addressing humanitarian emergencies, including natural disasters (A/RES/68/1). Resolution 72/305 acknowledges the necessary linkages and synergies between humanitarian action and development assistance and respective Segments.
- ◆ The Humanitarian Affairs Segment is preceded by an informal transition event that links discussions between the ECOSOC operational activities for development segment and the humanitarian affairs segment. Its current underlying understanding is a linear transition from relief to development. Operational realities on the ground, where humanitarian crises are increasingly complex and protracted, require coherent humanitarian and development collaboration.