

## A Joint Board of NYC-based funds and programmes

### – Explanatory note –

#### 1. Current status

The New York-based funds and programmes are currently governed by three separate Executive Boards: the joint UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS board established in 1993, the UNICEF board established in 1946, and the board of UN-Women which was established when the entity was created in 2010. They are all organized around two regular sessions and one annual session. In 2017, the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS board met for 18 days in formal sessions; the UNICEF board for 11 days; and the UN-Women board for 5 days – for a total of 34 days. In addition, the three Executive Boards met at least a total of some 50 days in informal sessions during the year. Each board adopts an annual work plan at its first regular session, as well as a common chapter valid for all entities' strategic plans.

The common chapter is the result of calls for more accountability to Member States on a system-wide approach towards support in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In recent years, as the coherence agenda advanced on the ground, system-wide issues tended to become primarily the domain of internal inter-agency mechanisms. Reporting to governing boards remained focused on entity-specific activities and results, with limited ability by principal organs such as ECOSOC to hold individual entities accountable for implementation of system-wide mandates.

#### 2. Secretary-General' proposal

A UN development system that provides efficient, effective and coherent support to countries for 2030 Agenda implementation requires strengthened executive guidance and oversight, particularly at system-wide level.

To strengthen system-wide governance and oversight of United Nations development system, the Secretary-General proposes to progressively integrate the Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN Women to ensure more strategic, cohesive and efficient guidance to UNDS entities and to foster a system-wide approach, while guaranteeing single entity guidance and oversight.

A Joint Board would address both single entities' mandates and their collective action. The merger would thus focus on the horizontal governance of the system, stressing joint strategy, planning and results to better deliver on the 2030 Agenda, while preserving entities' accountability on their specific mandates.

The Joint Board would be supported by one, stand-alone secretariat. There would therefore not be any doubling of management structures, rather a reduction in them (and costs associated with each one). One secretariat support would also avoid duplicative work, in addition to deepening understanding across individual agencies' work.

#### 3. Rationale

Currently, the norm for Executive Boards is to report on entity-specific mandates, despite efforts to increase system-wide governance and accountability. This often results in mandates that contradict provisions by principal organs for a more cohesive and common approach towards the implementation of the SDGs. The proposal for a Joint Board advanced by the Secretary-General is founded on the need to ensure a more coherent, effective and efficient approach in guiding the UN development system – individually and collectively - to ensure that the system-wide accountability for results that Member States call for is matched by governing arrangements that don't contradict themselves.

The proposal for a Joint Board is also based on the acknowledgement that a Joint Board would ensure more efficiency in the way the UN development system is governed. The integration of the Boards would eliminate the need for multiple meetings, simplify reporting and enable more interactive discussions on collective action. Potential savings could originate from efficiencies on meeting preparation, implementation and follow-up, secretariat support, travel, documentation and other organizational and logistical aspects. These would be realized by:

✓ *Minimizing travel of delegations coming from capitals*

Rather than traveling multiple times a year for different sessions of different governing boards, Member States could travel to participate in the sessions of only one board, yet covering all issues of the different NY-based entities. Travel, planning and time costs would be reduced.

This would not mean reduced participation. To the contrary, participation from capital would be more likely and high-level for one executive board than for three. It would also be more effective thanks to the likely participation of different line ministries and departments, which would foster cross-sectoral synergies and further steps towards an integrated understanding in aligning UNDS entities to the 2030 Agenda and whole-of-government approach in the implementation of the SDGs.

✓ *Reducing costs, in terms of funding, capacities and time invested in governing boards' meetings*

The resources required to hold one board session rather than three over the course of the year would be less and better used. Last year, not only the Boards of UNDP/UNOPS/UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women formally met on separate tracks for a total of 34 days (and informally for at least 50 days), but they also discussed yet again at each governing board session the common chapter of the entities strategic plans. A Joint Board that addresses at the same time single entities' mandates and their collective action would significantly reduce the time and resources dedicated to this oversight function.

In addition, establishing one stand-alone secretariat would also minimize duplicative efforts and save resources currently devoted to supporting a secretariat for each existing governing board. A single, stand-alone executive board secretariat would also contribute to deeper understanding across individual agencies' work and minimize duplicative effort

✓ *Simplifying reporting and decreasing the volume of the documentation and their costs*

Reporting could be simplified through joint documents on system-wide implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while maintaining dedicated reporting on single entity mandates. Joint documents would decrease the volume of the documentation. This would not mean less information to Member States, rather better quality of the documentation for informed decision-making. Less and better documentation would facilitate sharper discussions. It would also facilitate smaller delegations with limited capacities, who would benefit from more strategic information.

#### 4. Implementing the Secretary-General's proposals

##### *Balance between entity-specific and joint sessions*

To ensure better coherence and coordination while preserving entity-specific oversight and accountability, the Joint Board could be built on specific segments focusing on entity-specific priorities, and a common segment dedicated to joint action and joint reporting on issues that concern all five entities. As such, a Joint Board would not dilute entity-specific accountability and oversight, as the attention for each entity mandate would continue to be guaranteed by dedicated segments. No entity mandate would be superseded by the Board. For those entities that also operate on

humanitarian mandates, the humanitarian component would continue to be governed according to its principles.

#### *Composition of the Joint Board*

The membership composition of the Joint Board is a decision of Member States. There are several potential models of mixed UN regional groupings and constituency-based approaches that could be considered for the Joint Board to ensure representation by the five UN regional groupings, UN programme countries, and donor countries. Models can benefit from the experience of existing governing boards and their lessons learned.

#### *Coordination with entities outside of New York*

The establishment of a Joint Board of NY-based entities would improve the interface with governing boards outside of New York, as well as coordination with the boards of specialized agencies.

Moving to a Joint Board would be done progressively, under the guidance and leadership of Member States. Consideration could be given to integrating governing boards in other locations based on the experience and lessons learned from the merger of the funds and programmes based in NY, to which the merger would first apply.

#### *Alternatives*

In exploring the best way to ensure strategic, coherent and system-wide governance, the Secretary-General has heard all insights and explored all possible options. For better coordination, he has suggested, for example, ensuring that priority agenda items are covered at the same session and harmonizing the approach taken to agenda items by the various entities. Back to back meetings of the existing governing boards would also be recommended. He has also suggested to grant legislative authority to the existing joint meeting of the Executive Boards, in order to give it decision-making power over collective support in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. These are however quick fixes that would not achieve the coherence, efficiency and ultimately the integrated collective approach that the 2030 Agenda demands, and that a Joint Board would bring.

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The proposal for a Joint Board aims to increase accountability and transparency through a single entity in charge of guiding UN development system entities individually and collectively, while also ensuring a number of significant efficiency gains. The set-up of the Joint Board according to different segments dedicated to specific mandates and one system-wide discussion, is an option to ensure better coherence and coordination while preserving entity-specific oversight and accountability. While a Joint Board will ensure in fact more transparency and accountability, Member States will continue to retain their prerogative to engage with single entities as they deem appropriate, to obtain additional information and reporting needed.

The proposal for a Joint Board rests in the hands of Member States. While a merger may seem daunting, the ambition demonstrated with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the creation of UN Women and the agreement on Delivering as One, are just some of the examples of the normative and institutional results that, as ambitious and difficult as they seemed, are also a testament of what is indeed possible.