



## Concept Note

### Expert Group Meeting on the themes for the 2015 and 2016 ECOSOC cycles

#### I. Background

General Assembly resolutions 67/290 and 68/1 have pronounced on the role of the Council in promoting integrated and coordinated follow-up to the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields and in achieving a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. They have provided for a new institutional structure around ECOSOC, HLPF and GA to address the sustainable development challenges of a post-2015 world and guide the transition from an MDGs-based to an SDGs-based development agenda.

In resolution 68/1 on the strengthening of ECOSOC, in particular, the General Assembly decided that the annual programme of work of the ECOSOC system shall be based on a main theme to be determined at the beginning of its cycle in consultations with its subsidiary bodies and Member States. This provision was intended to promote greater coherence, coordination and complementarity in the work of the ECOSOC system in addressing emerging sustainable development challenges. In the same resolution, the GA also decided that the themes for the 2015 and 2016 ECOSOC cycles, which mark the transition from an MDG-based to an SDG-based development agenda, should be decided together in order to give ample time to the whole ECOSOC system and Member States to make the necessary adjustments to their agendas in support of the new development framework.

The 2015 and 2016 ECOSOC cycles will be critical to effectively aligning the work of the entire ECOSOC system with the new institutional structure defined by the GA, and in this way enable the Council to provide substantive leadership to guide the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs. With this in mind, at the organizational session of the 2015 ECOSOC, held in New York on 21-22 July 2014, the Council adopted the 2015 provisional agenda and decided that the 2015 theme will focus on *“Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): What will it take”*; and the 2016 theme on *“Implementing the post-2015 development agenda: moving from commitments to results”* (see ECOSOC decision E/2014/L.14). The Council is also expected to focus its 2015 thematic discussion on *“Strengthening and building institutions for policy*

*integration in the post-2015 era*”, which will examine the institutional dimension of transitioning to and implementing the new agenda.

Over the next couple of years, the Council would have the key task to unpack policy and institutional implications underpinning the transition to a new, universal and inclusive agenda, while providing policy guidance and operational support to its implementation. Central to this effort would be to expand the current discussion on integrated policy approaches, primarily focused on the water, energy and food security nexus, to include all key dimensions of sustainable development in addressing current challenges. Such effort would require the expertise of the whole ECOSOC system working in a coherent, coordinated and complementary manner to identify practical and sustainable solutions. Lessons learned from the ECOSOC 2014 session in this regard- with the convening of the first High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) under the Council's auspices, and the first ever Integration Segment bringing together the contributions of the ECOSOC system –should guide the preparation of the new next two ECOOSC cycles.

OESC/DESA, under the guidance of the ECOSOC President, will convene an expert group meeting to explore the various facets of the preparation for these cycles. The discussions will contribute ideas on how the system will rally around the 2015 and 2016 themes and make substantive contributions on the work towards the transition to a sustainable development agenda and its implementation.

## **II. Objectives**

The main objectives of the EGM are to:

- 1) Increase understanding of the issues involved in the transition to and implementation of a universal, SDG-based development agenda;
- 2) Increase understanding of what needs to change in the way policy is made, results are monitored and accountability is carried out in the development field, and;
- 3) Identify how the ECOSOC system can work more effectively to provide substantive leadership to support the transition to and implementation of the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda.

More specifically, the EGM will aim to:

- Take stock of and build on the current debate, including existing studies and reports, on the implications of transitioning from a development cooperation agenda to a broader, universal, and inclusive development agenda to determine what kind of changes – policy, institutional, financial, and otherwise - should take place for a successful transition.
- Define new ways for the Council and the HLPF under its auspices, to address sustainable development issues and challenges that account for more complex inter-

linkages between different policy areas, promote synergies, and effectively guide policy trade-offs. New approaches should tap into the breath of work and knowledge of the entire ECOSOC system to support the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda.

### **III. Scope of the discussion**

The EGM will take a broad view of the themes for the 2015 and 2016 ECOSOC annual cycles, including the theme for the 2015 thematic discussion and HLPF. It will reflect on how ECOSOC as a system and the HLPF under the ECOOSC auspices will gear up and coordinate their work most effectively to provide substantive leadership and facilitate the transition to and implementation of the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda.

The discussion will explore challenges inherent to the transition from and MDG-based to a universal, SDG-based development agenda. Building on the lessons learned from the MDGs, it would consider what changes are necessary in policymaking approaches, at the global, regional and national levels to transform the new commitments into practical realities. Particular attention will be paid to the institutional implications of addressing and managing the complexity of the new development framework.

The outcome of the discussions will contribute to the preparation of the Secretary-General's reports on the 2015 ECOSOC theme and on the theme of the 2015 Thematic Debate. The discussions will also contribute to the preparations for the next two cycles of ECOSOC. As the Secretary-General's synthesis report might be available by the time of this meeting, together with other reports analysing progress and challenges related to the transition to the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda, the EGM would aim to build on these efforts and provide a long-term perspective in dealing with these issues.

The discussions will focus on the following:

#### **1. Transitioning towards a New Development Framework: Changing Mindsets**

The transition from an MDG-based development agenda to a broader, more integrated, development framework based on the SDGs requires envisioning a development model universal in scope. In the current debate there is insufficient clarity on the implications and application of such a model, particularly in its avoidance of a one-size-fits-all approach. Proposals to "unpack" universality have included: (i) as a form of global solidarity, whereby actions by all countries are reinforced and supported by each other; (ii) as "zero goals" to ensure no one is left behind anywhere; (iii) as a shared commitment to globally-relevant challenges, although policy needs may differ in each national context (e.g. tackling hunger versus overconsumption); and (iv) as a collective commitment to deliver on a global enabling framework that supports sustainable and equitable development trajectories for all countries (e.g. action on climate change, other global public goods and trade).

How universality would ultimately be defined in the post-2015 negotiations will have important and practical implications on indicators, data, policies, institutions, and resource requirements to manage the transition to and implementation of the new agenda. Deepening the understanding of this concept and what it would take to realize it would thus be critical to generate consensus around a manageable and implementable universal development agenda.

Key questions for this discussion would be:

- How do we configure an SDG framework that is applicable to all countries while respecting local realities and different levels of development?
- What modes of production and consumption would be required to ensure ecological transition in the North and sustainable development in the South?
- What are the practical implications of leaving no one behind?

## 2. Institutional Structures and Behaviours for Transformation

An inclusive, universal agenda where no country or individual is left behind should be relevant and applicable to all countries, regardless of their developmental stage, to all local realities and to all social groups. It should include all three pillars of sustainable development, underpinned by equity, human rights, good governance and rule of law, access to technology and know-how. Realizing this vision entails a new way of doing business to find sustainable solutions beyond the current capacities of individual countries, institutions, and actors. It implies mobilizing a broad range of actors around a broader range of issues at the intersection of poverty and sustainable development, and at different levels of action, from global to local, to create new modes of production and consumption that can provide decent lives for 9 billion human beings while preserving our planet.

Such new model needs to be enabled by and reflected in institutional, policy and participatory approaches that: a) recognize the complexity of the current developmental reality; b) address challenges beyond the traditional North-South divide; c) manage difficult trade-offs between different policy areas and between global, regional and national levels, and; c) identify potential synergies and complementarities. No individual institution alone can deliver on such a broad agenda. The reflection on the institutions and capacities needed to support such vision should thus focus on issues of institutional coherence and coordination at all levels and should be closely linked to reflection on the appropriate policy framework underpinning this vision.

Key questions to further examine this issue would be:

- To what extent are existing global institutions and policy frameworks successful in adopting a more integrated/coherent approach to development?

- How would such frameworks and institutions be able to guide integration in policy areas underpinning the SDGs?
- What adjustments may be needed to ensure that governments, the UN system and other partners respond to the universal and unified agenda and deliver results to global citizens?

### 3. Building the Policy framework

One of the key lessons from the MDGs was that a goal-driven agenda alone is not sufficient to promote change. This requires appropriate policies and actions at various levels. The credibility of the new agenda would ultimately depend on its ability to deliver. The formulation of an SDG-based agenda should thus extract from this lesson and ensure that appropriate policy frameworks accompany the goals. Policy frameworks founded on the SDGs should encompass a broader range of issues than those addressed by the MDGs and account for more complex inter-linkages, spills-over and trade-offs at different policy levels. Managing all these aspects will require a highly integrated approach to policymaking that accounts for complex policy nexuses – such as the food-water-energy nexus – and their connections with other development concerns – such as gender equality, economic growth and employment – and promotes synergies and complementarities. Such an approach should also cut across different policy levels to account for potential spill-over effects between global, regional and national policies and ensure that each level is mutually reinforcing. Data collection and availability would be an important part of such a framework to ensure evidence-based decision-making.

Key questions to advance this discussion would be:

- What are the current examples of an integrated approach to policy-making and what is their degree of success?
- What are the existing tools and approaches for operationalizing a nexus integrated approach at different scales and what are the main obstacles to its implementation?
- How does a "successful" nexus approach look like in practice and how can it be achieved and evaluated?

### 4. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for delivering on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

The transition to and delivery of an ambitious, integrated and inclusive post-2015 development agenda based on the SDGs requires global mobilization of a broad variety of development actors. Understanding and defining the specific roles, responsibilities, and levels of action of different actors in different development contexts will be critical to build effective multi-stakeholder, multi-level partnerships that go beyond traditional resources and funding modalities and include climate financing, technology, trade, etc. The discussion on this issue will build on the ongoing debate on the global partnership for development,

and the emerging distinction between global partnership and multi-stakeholder partnerships. It will explore how the interplay of existing partnership mechanisms and structures, including global partnership networks, particularly those related to the development and environmental agendas can be built upon to ensure robust partnership arrangements for the implementation of an integrated sustainable development agenda. The discussion will also explore how the ECOSOC system could contribute to this refection; and how it can do so most effectively through existing processes, such as the follow-up to the financing for development conference, the Development Cooperation Forum, and the operational activities segment.

Key issues for further discussion would be:

- What would be the obstacles in establishing an integrated sustainable development partnership framework that effectively supports a sustainable development agenda?
- What should be the key features of a global partnership framework and mechanism that effectively bridge multi-lateral norms and local action by drawing on diverse networks of actors in civil society, government and business?
- How can it effectively guide multi-stakeholder partnerships at different levels of action?

#### 5. Monitoring and Accounting for Development Results

A universal and inclusive agenda that leaves no one behind requires the engagement and accountability of a broad range of development actors, with varying degrees and levels of responsibility for its implementation. Agreement on the specific responsibilities of each actor (*who should be responsible and accountable for what*) would be critical to define their most effective level of accountability - whether national, regional or global – vis-à-vis specific goals and targets. This in turn would help design accountability frameworks appropriate for different levels of analysis, as well as identify targets, indicators and data sets required at each level, without compromising the principles of universality and flexibility. Understanding these implications is critical to overcome the monitoring and accountability gaps that characterized the MDGs.

Key questions to advance this discussion would be:

- What would be the key features of an accountability framework that goes beyond monitoring and reporting and hold development actors accountable for both short and long term results?
- What accountability principles (*e.g. rule of law, human rights record, capacity to deliver, financial transparency, etc.*) and incentives would be needed to ensure that a broad range of actors adhere to non-binding accountability mechanisms?

#### **IV. Format and expected outcome**

##### **Expected Outcome**

The EGM is expected to provide concrete recommendations on:

- How to navigate the transition from an MDG-based to an SDG-based global development framework and the support systems required for effective implementation;
- How to strengthen the Council's substantive leadership by coalescing the inputs of all subsidiary bodies in addressing emerging challenges and promoting an integrated and balanced approach to sustainable development beyond monitoring progress towards the SDGs;
- The contents of the Secretary-General's reports on the 2015 ECOSOC theme and the theme of the 2015 Thematic Discussion, as inputs to ongoing discussions on the transition to the post-2015 agenda.

OESC/DESA will prepare a summary of the two-day event divided in two parts. The first part will provide a synthesis of the discussion on the substantive areas identified by the provisional programme, including key messages for the Secretary-General's reports on the 2015 ECOSOC theme and on the 2015 thematic discussion, respectively. The second part will provide a synthesis of potential gaps, good practices and key recommendations for the role and functioning of the ECOSOC system within the architecture established by the General Assembly. It will also identify possible new approaches and practices to guide policymaking at the global, regional and national levels, to address sustainable development challenges in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

##### **Format**

The EGM will be structured around a substantive discussion of changes required by a transition to the post-2015 development agenda. It will be a two-day event organized as follows:

- Part I (Day 1) - Overview of institutional architecture, at the local, national, regional and global levels, including that established by the General Assembly, to address the transition to and implementation of the post-2015 development agenda; potential gaps and opportunities in policymaking; roles, responsibilities and working methods for policy formulation and implementation.
- Part II (Day 2) –Analysis of the various dimensions of the new agenda that will require new approaches to implementation; review of partnership approaches and

arrangements, and; review of methods for assessing outcomes and accounting for results.

Each session will consist of independent and institutional expert presentations of 5-10 minutes, each followed by a moderated discussion. A selected number of resource persons will be invited to share their expertise and knowledge on the topic of each session. Facilitators will help guide discussions throughout.

### **Participants**

A group of 40-45 participants including ECOSOC bureau members, policy-makers, independent experts, DESA staff, UN system partners and other stakeholders (including panellists) will be invited to participate in the EGM. Experts from among UN staff, national governments and other stakeholders on various issues addressed by the two-day programme will be invited to share their expertise with EGM participants. Presenters will be drawn from UN staff, government officials and other partners such as academia, “think-tanks” and NGOs.