

The New ECOSOC – Overview of functions and working methods

General Assembly resolution 68/1 contains the most far-reaching reform of the Economic and Social Council in over a decade. It mandates the Council to: provide substantive leadership to the United Nations system through adoption of an annual theme; play a key role in monitoring and promoting the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in the work of the ECOSOC system, including by convening an integration segment; spread the segments of the Council throughout a new annual cycle, beginning in July. Through the adoption of the resolution, Member States requested the Council to exercise new leadership in the global development agenda.

The Council's role has been enhanced as:

- **A leadership forum for policy dialogue and recommendations;**
- **The lead entity to address new and emerging challenges;**
- **A forum for the balanced integration of sustainable development;**
- **An accountability platform for universal commitments, monitoring and reporting on progress at all levels.**

How can this be achieved? Listed below are some key elements of the new functions and working methods of the Economic and Social Council. Through all of these new elements, the Council **will aim to provide system-wide, forward-looking guidance to its subsidiary bodies, and thus provide leadership to the United Nations development agenda at large in an integrated manner.**

1. **A new High-Level Political Forum:** As an immediate outcome of the 2012 Rio Conference on Sustainable Development, a high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) will be convened under the auspices of ECOSOC. The Forum will meet for five days in late June and for three days at the Ministerial level in July, during the High-level segment.

The Rio+20 Summit requested the Council and the forum to pursue the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. The deliberations of the Forum will be fully complementary to the work of the Council.

2. **An annual theme:** The Council will lead the United Nations system through an issues-based approach to guide its subsidiary bodies in policy setting and coordination. This includes the adoption of an annual theme, early in the programming cycle, to be addressed by all subsidiary bodies, including the functional commissions, regional commissions, expert bodies, as well as the Executive Boards of United Nations funds and programmes, within their respective mandates, expertise and responsibilities.

For 2014, the agreed theme of the Annual Ministerial Review “Addressing on-going and emerging challenges for meeting the MDGs in 2015 and for sustaining development gains in the future” will be treated as far as possible as the annual theme. Substantive consultations will be held with subsidiary bodies, UN system entities and Member States on proposals for the themes for 2015 and 2016. Thereafter, the selection of themes will be

done on an annual basis, in advance of each new programme cycle.

3. **A new integration segment:** The Council will organize an annual integration segment, which will make full use of its multidisciplinary network of specialized bodies. The 2014 integration segment, from 27 to 29 May, will focus on **sustainable urbanization**. The segment will monitor and promote the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in the work of the ECOSOC system.
4. **New reporting processes:** The Council will focus attention on issues that require a prioritized and coordinated substantive response from the United Nations system as a whole. To do so, the Council will conduct action-oriented reviews of the activities, reports and recommendations of the Council's subsidiary bodies and focus attention on issues that require a prioritized and coordinated response from the United Nations system. The subsidiary bodies of the Council are expected to include in their reports an executive summary of their deliberations, identifying clearly those issues that require attention or action by the Council. In addition, the Council has opened new avenues for its subsidiary bodies to make substantive contributions to its deliberations. On any relevant topic, the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies can send their contributions to the President of ECOSOC.
5. **Increased visibility:** The new ECOSOC will aim to increase its visibility and impact of its work through broader outreach. It will seek to improve its public profile, including by effectively communicating its role, work and achievements to the public in a compelling manner. The past expansion of the Council's outreach activities and social media presence will continue.
6. **More efficient oversight:** Annual reports of the subsidiary bodies will be considered at one of the four new Coordination and Management Meetings (CMMs) to be held throughout the year, at the discretion of the Council. This will allow the Council to concentrate its work on policy guidance and coordination for the United Nations system during the dedicated segments dealing with developmental, operational and humanitarian affairs.
7. **The changing development cooperation landscape:** Development assistance is profoundly changing in the 21st century. Non-state actors, such as civil society, philanthropies, and the private sector are taking an increasing share in international cooperation. These developments take place amidst calls for greater accountability of both donors and recipients of aid. These challenges are currently addressed in ECOSOC's biennial Development Cooperation Forum.
8. **Seeking increased focus on Accountability:** The Council and the HLPF, under its auspices, will serve as platform for accountability in the post 2015 era. The format of the current NVPs is to be reconsidered when the MDG agenda is completed in 2015. National reviews of implementation will take the place of the

NVPs, taking into full consideration the mutual responsibilities of all development actors and seeking a shared framework for annual reporting on an inclusive, universal post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

9. Greater responsiveness to non-state actors: Since the establishment of the United Nations, the Council has had a key mandate in managing the relationship of the United Nations with non-governmental organizations. Article 71 of the Charter provides the Council the sole authority to engage non-state actors. The Council will continue to provide guidance on participation through its existing arrangements under resolution 1996/31. However, the working methods of the high-level political forum on sustainable development carry a long tradition of full participation of major groups and other stakeholders. The Council is expected to respond to those more open methods of collaboration. In addition, the ECOSOC Youth Forum and ECOSOC Partnership Forum will be continued and strengthened to reach larger constituencies and intensify their involvement in the policy-making work of the Council.

10. A redesigned calendar for the Council: Key to the reform efforts of the Council are ways to reorganize and streamline its various functions in a more flexible calendar of meetings that responds to new mandates.

- The high-level segment (HLS) of the Council will, for 2014 and 2015, continue to include an annual ministerial review (AMR), including national voluntary presentations (NVPs), reviewing progress of the MDGs and IADGs by member States. The Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) will continue to be held biennially, including in 2014. Beginning in 2014, ministerial-level meetings of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development will be incorporated into the high-level segment.
- The integration segment, a new element of the meeting structure of the Council, will consolidate all the inputs of Member States, the subsidiary bodies of the Council, the

United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders and promote the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. The integration segment will bring together the key messages from the Council system on the main theme and develop action-oriented recommendations for follow-up.

- The operational activities for development segment will be held immediately following the first regular sessions of the executive boards of the funds and programmes of the United Nations system. Through this segment, the Council will provide overall coordination and guidance for United Nations funds and programmes on a system-wide basis. The segment will also oversee follow up to the QCPR recommendations and alignment with the work of the specialized agencies.
- The humanitarian affairs segment will be held in June, through which the Council would continue to contribute to strengthening the coordination and effectiveness of United Nations humanitarian assistance and support and complement international efforts aimed at addressing humanitarian emergencies, including natural disasters, in order to promote an improved, coordinated response by the United Nations. The joint event on relief to development will be convened immediately prior to the start of the segment.
- The coordination segment, as well as the general segment, will cease to exist. These segments are replaced by Coordination and Management Meetings (CMM), to be held regularly to perform the oversight functions of the Council embedded in the coordination and general segments. The Council will review the reports of its subsidiary bodies (functional commissions, regional commissions and committees of experts) and consider specific thematic issues for which the Council is expected to play a coordinating role, such as gender mainstreaming. The Council will also interact with the Secretariat of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) during the CMM.

The graphic below represents some of the changes in the meeting structure of the Council.

