



2013 ECOSOC Presidential Retreat and Expert Meeting

“The ECOSOC We Want: Renewing commitment, confronting new challenges”

Summary by the President of ECOSOC

Introduction

In 2013, the General Assembly (GA) engaged in an extensive exercise to review implementation of GA resolution 61/16. The review resulted in a series of actions contained in A/RES/68/1 to strengthen the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Furthermore, the review took place amidst the follow up to the Rio+20 Conference outcome and the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda, with important implications for the future work of ECOSOC, which is envisioned as the main intergovernmental platform for the promotion of sustainable development.

In the Rio+20 outcome document “The Future We Want” Member States: recognized the key role ECOSOC should play in integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development; established the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development; follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments; and requested the elaboration of sustainable development goals (SDGs) that will converge into a unified post-2015 agenda.

With this in view, the President of ECOSOC convened a Retreat and Expert Meeting of members of the Bureau, former ECOSOC Presidents, representatives of Member States, senior UN officials and other experts on 15 - 16 November 2013, at the Greentree Foundation, Manhasset, New York. The purpose of the Meeting was to consider how to raise the level of ECOSOC deliberations, engagement, visibility and effectiveness in responding to existing, new and emerging global challenges in the aftermath of GA resolution 68/1. More specifically, it sought recommendations on ways to: (a) enhance ECOSOC’s intellectual leadership and bring about greater impact of its normative and operational work; (b) promote sustainable development through the integration of its three dimensions, expanded partnerships and sharing of knowledge and experiences, and; (c) strengthen oversight, coherence and accountability in development.

The following main messages emerged from the dynamic discussions:

- Reaching external partners and audiences is key to enhancing ECOSOC’s relevance. This includes deepening relationships with the World Bank, IMF,

- regional organizations, private sector, scientific community, Finance Ministers and other relevant stakeholders;
- Increasing the use of real-time data and “big data” in ECOSOC’s annual reviews will provide an evidence-based approach to assessing the progress made towards development goals;
 - Monitoring and reviewing development progress could be done through a peer-review process to promote accountability. Parliaments should be engaged to play a crucial role at the national level;
 - An objective accountability and reporting system should be established by ECOSOC, with Governments as the main actors, followed by other stakeholders (including the private sector);
 - Using rigorous scientific research and enhancing a science-policy interface would help to map and inform the progress made in development;
 - Organizing “knowledge communities” of relevant stakeholders around particular development goals or topics would allow for more focused and frequent exchanges of information and lessons learned; and
 - Selecting ECOSOC’s issue-oriented theme should provide an appropriate scope for discussions without the need for prolonged deliberations. The Council should be more innovative in its normative and operational processes.

Summary

Sessions

The Meeting commenced with welcome remarks followed by a keynote addresses on “*Identifying new and emerging development challenges*”, given by Mr. Jan Eliasson, UN Deputy Secretary-General, and Mr. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute, Columbia University. Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, Columbia University, served as respondent.

In the session “*ECOSOC: A vision for the future*”, presentations were made by the two Co-facilitators for the ECOSOC strengthening process, H.E. Bénédicte Frankinet, Permanent Representative of Belgium and H.E. George Talbot, Permanent Representative of Guyana.

The session, “*Promoting accountability, Renewing global partnerships for development*”, featured presentations by Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General, and Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Participants also divided into four different working groups for discussion on specific topics. The outcomes from the groups were presented and discussed in plenary.

Informal dialogues

The informal dialogues focused on how to build on the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 67/290 and 68/1 and reposition ECOSOC to coherently bring together Member States, the UN system, and all relevant stakeholders around a unified and universal agenda built around sustainable development and poverty eradication. Participants focused their attention on enhancing actions to:

- accelerate the achievement of the MDGs;
- promote sustainable development;
- broaden and deepen engagement of relevant stakeholders; and
- promote collective action to surmount global development constraints.

Taken together, the presentations and discussions highlighted that:

- The responsibilities and commitments are clear. Accelerating achievement of the MDGs requires collective efforts. No single government or entity acting alone can address the global situations, but everybody acting together have a chance to find viable solutions;
- The specifics are also known, regarding climate change, poverty, inequality, health, migration, urbanization, or peace and security. There are untapped knowledge, scientific and technological assets, that, if mobilized and harnessed effectively, offer real opportunities to address the specific issues;
- Insightful analysis can open ways for integrating all dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced manner, leading to optimal solutions; and
- The commitment to action requires a change of mindset to one where international solutions and national interest ultimately converge.

There was agreement that the new institutional architecture for this vision builds on the Council, the GA and the HLPF, all acting in unison. To take full advantage of this historical opportunity, the Council should focus on action and implementation. It should guide the UN system, as necessary, to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and effective.

Setting the right agenda for the Council's work will be critical. It's major preoccupations in the next two years and beyond should be: delivering on the MDGs; formulating the next set of principles for organizing its work around poverty eradication and sustainable development and; shaping a unified and universal agenda beyond 2015.

The selection of an ECOSOC annual theme offers an unprecedented opportunity to unite the ECOSOC system and the entire UN development system to focus on specific

development issues in a holistic and comprehensive way. This could also include designing a common template for reporting on the theme by the UN development system. The choice of a theme will also enable the Council to engage other relevant development partners and stakeholders.

The Council's work should be continuously supported by evidence-based analysis. The different strands of analysis, knowledge and good practices will be brought together to facilitate the Council's policy recommendations. This will also be a necessary step in evaluating trade-offs and considering options for the pursuit of the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

ECOSOC's new segment structure, with its segments spread out throughout the year, provides for more focused discussions. As part of the new segment structure, there will be stand-alone segments, such as: operational activities for development; the meeting on financing for development, with the Bretton Woods institutions, WTO and UNCTAD; and; humanitarian affairs. The Council should attract relevant policy makers and experts to contribute to the outcomes of each segment.

United by a common annual theme, the segments should create synergies and build upon each other's work and the work of the ECOSOC and UN development system. ECOSOC should promote similar synergies with the work of the General Assembly and the Peacebuilding Commission and other pertinent intergovernmental processes.

The recently created Integration Segment of the Council will need to effectively draw upon the outcomes from the other segments, the work of the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and the UN system. It will bring together Member States and relevant development actors and stakeholders for a broad, in-depth policy discussion on integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development and will need to provide effective policy recommendations and guidance to that effect. It will play a crucial role in taking stock of how the integration of sustainable development is being pursued by the entire system.

The years 2014-2015 will be transition years for ECOSOC, as it adapts to its new structure and as the High-level Political Forum begins its work, both of which are part of the institutional preparations in support of the post-2015 development agenda.

With the growing recognition among Member States of the need to further enhance the coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the UN development system as a whole, the monitoring role of ECOSOC will need to also grow in importance.

The annual monitoring role by ECOSOC of QCPR implementation could provide the impetus for enhanced system-wide governance. Strengthening normative-operational coherence in the work of the UN system will require close coordination and cooperation at the technical level among the secretariats of ECOSOC, the Executive Boards of the

Funds and Programmes and other subsidiary bodies of the Council, particularly in the areas of agenda setting and reporting framework.

ECOSOC has taken important steps with the AMR to review implementation of the UN development agenda, including MDGs at global, regional and country levels. The HLPF ministerial meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC, will focus on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives. It will also review the means of implementation, such as finance, capacity building and technology transfer. In this regard, the Council must ensure that the HLPF delivers this specific function, particularly in continuing to monitor and track progress of a unified global development agenda after 2015.

The Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) has reviewed trends in international development cooperation, covering a significant part of MDG-8 and aspects of the Monterrey Consensus. The DCF can be further strengthened to support the post-2015 development agenda.

In this regard, the DCF could play a role in the following areas:

- Developing a robust monitoring and accountability mechanism for the successful implementation of a post-2015 development agenda.
- Designing an accountability framework that can be applied to government as well as other stakeholders i.e., a multiple accountability system.
- Building accountability frameworks that are people-centred, transparent and that tap into the potential of technology and the data and information revolution.
- Promoting role of parliaments in translating internal commitments into national legislation, policies, programmes and budgets, as well as in promoting related accountability, should be an integral part of the new development agenda beyond 2015.

Overall, the Council's work should be supported by technology and innovations that would allow it to benefit from relevant data and information. This will enable it to better understand complex global situations and offer policy guidance and solutions. Technology could also serve to expand the reach of the Council's partnerships, and in marshalling the vast knowledge resources of the ECOSOC system.

Working Group Outcomes

Working Group I: Improving the impact of the Council's work through deeper engagement with national stakeholders

Objectives:

1. Offer practical recommendations on ways for ECOSOC to deepen the impact and public profile of its work;
2. Identify the scope and content of a review and reporting mechanism; and
3. Propose guidance on ways to maximize the knowledge base of the ECOSOC system to better support development policies and norms.

Key Messages:

- An organized global system of silos exists, with no single place where policies can come together. ECOSOC must play that role, which requires closer coordination with the entire UN system, ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and national stakeholders.
- ECOSOC themes should be selected that are relevant and attractive to pertinent stakeholders. ECOSOC can serve as a “thought leader” and prepare the analytical framework to guide discussions substantively; however, ECOSOC must have a more robust knowledge base.
- ECOSOC should give itself a more professional communication effort which could pay a great dividend towards enhancing its relevance and visibility.
- Regional Commissions remain an underutilized resource. The Council must involve the Regional Commissions and other sub-regional organizations as much as possible in areas of undisputed relevance in ECOSOC processes.
- Identifying the value-added and comparative advantages of working with, in and through ECOSOC will enhance its public profile. Topics concerning the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and SDGs can only appropriately be addressed and coordinated by ECOSOC.
- ECOSOC should be opened further to national stakeholders to promote the ownership of and commitment to development goals. National stakeholders such as the private sector, the scientific community, parliamentarians and civil society need to be able to contribute to the substantive debate throughout the policy processes. The objective of this exercise will be to provide a voice to diverse non-state actors.

Working Group II: Enhancing the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, including through the new Integration Segment

Objectives:

1. Offer practical recommendations on the possible format and content of the Integration Segment;
2. Identify the substantive scope of responsibility in integrating sustainable development, between the ECOSOC Integration Segment and the HLPF; and
3. Propose guidance for avoiding overlaps and duplication and maximizing complementarities.

Key Messages:

- It is necessary to have a clear definition of integration. Integration should not just take place during the integration segment and should be applied to the entire ECOSOC cycle.
- In an integrated approach, the role of all stakeholders, including ECOSOC's subsidiary bodies should be augmented. The timing of the ECOSOC cycle and its segments should be such that the inputs from the ECOSOC system would be adequately reflected in the Integration Segment. It would also be important for the functional commissions to align themselves with the new ECOSOC calendar.
- The SDGs are being currently formulated in a way that integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development, so that after 2015, the Integration Segment could function as a space where the coordinated implementation of the SDGs takes place.
- The important inputs from the ECOSOC system and civil society, as well as from Member States, would be better captured in a President's summary of the Integration Segment.
- The Integration Segment should bring together the consolidated and substantive inputs of the entire ECOSOC system on a given cross-cutting theme as a contribution to the HLPF, under the auspices of ECOSOC.
- The work of both ECOSOC and the HLPF must be reviewed in an integrated way, emphasizing coordination and not competition.
- The two transition years of 2014-2015 represent an opportunity to gather experience that will be relevant for the post-2015 architecture and implementation. This may require that the role of ECOSOC be redefined at that point to address monitoring and evaluation.

- There need to be greater efforts by the UN system to work with an integrated approach, instead of each agency/program/fund insisting on stand-alone agendas and development goals (SDGs) for the post 2015 agenda.

Working Group III: Strengthening the links between ECOSOC's normative and operational activities

Objectives:

1. Offer practical recommendations on ways to harmonize the roles of ECOSOC and the GA in operational activities for development;
2. Identify the role of operational activities in the follow-up to the efforts to promote the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.
3. Discuss whether Delivering as One (DaO) has demonstrated that programmes can be delivered more efficiently and effectively.

Key Messages:

- The Operational Activities Segment (OAS) is one of the more effective and useful spaces in ECOSOC. This space must be maintained to deal with the traditional issues, and also strengthened to respond to the new/emerging issues and the demands of a future development agenda.
- The operational activities role of ECOSOC goes beyond monitoring the QCPR and oversight over the funds and programmes. For instance, there is the dialogue on issues of system-wide concerns relating to such aspects as the responsiveness of the UNDAFs, national ownership, effective utilization of funds and the functioning of the RC system.
- It is important that there are no multiple layers of review and approval, and duplicative and repetitive resolutions between ECOSOC, the GA and the Second Committee. In this sense, the OAS could be the space to develop issues on which action is then taken in the General Assembly under the QCPR.
- The strength and relevance of ECOSOC depends on streamlining of the work of the Second Committee of the GA to focus on its own comparative advantage, inter alia by reducing the frequency of resolutions and avoiding legislation on issues which are more in line with the remit of ECOSOC.

- Delivering as One (DaO) is an important way to bring the UN system together at the country level when Member States and the UN system want to move in that direction voluntarily. However, there are also other ways of promoting coherence in the non-DaO countries. There were still few areas where improvements could be made, for instance in reconciling the tensions between vertical accountability and horizontal attribution in DaO, and in having the system evolve from a “siloed” architecture.
- The scope of the dialogue in the Operational Activities Segment could be widened beyond the operational aspects of the UN system to include the inputs of the specialized agencies, which mainly bring to the table the normative and policy aspects of programming that are equally relevant to UN delivery at the country level.
- ECOSOC is relevant in providing space for dialogue on overall guidance and thus offering voice to Member States that have difficulty in effectively influencing discussion at the governing body level, and/or in regional groups.
- The joint meeting of the Executive Boards can provide space for issues that go beyond the remit of individual governing bodies, for instance the recent discussion on the standard operating procedures (SOP) for DaO, and also past discussions on capacity development, partnerships and other similar issues.

Working Group IV: Enhancing the Council’s monitoring capacity to promote greater accountability

Objectives:

1. Offer practical recommendations on ways that ECOSOC and the HLPF can build upon the AMR experience;
2. Identify the scope and mechanisms of a monitoring and review process for a post-2015 development agenda; and
3. Propose guidance on new monitoring instruments that could be used within a post-2015 framework.

Key Messages:

- Monitoring and accountability for the post-2015 should be built into the design of the new UN development agenda. It should engage a wide range of stakeholders, especially parliaments, in order to link global to national accountability.

- Accountability might have a different meaning for different stakeholders and levels of monitoring. At the national level, the role of parliamentarians is critical to ensure that global commitments are reflected in national budgets and related policies.
- When discussing global and national accountability it is critical to define the scope of such accountability. Participation of a broad range of stakeholders in accountability mechanisms helps shape/define this scope. Multiple frameworks of accountability may be needed.
- ECOSOC accountability mechanism should focus on universal goals, clear indicators and a compliance system. It should transition from review/monitoring to accountability on the basis of a robust mechanism to ensure compliance towards:
 - Rights of citizens for a balanced approach to sustainable development
 - Respect of Public goods and global commons
 - Respect of national policy space
- Such a mechanism should be an integral part of the broader “picture” beyond the Ministerial and global level. It should build on existing national review instruments and mechanisms and extended to a broad range of stakeholders and constituencies, from parliaments to civil society.
- Accountability should be based on national review processes, which should be voluntary, government-driven, participatory and based on the national budget.
- National reviews should be carried out in the medium and long term to allow sufficient time to measure and monitor implementation.
- The role of the UN system and UN country teams should be rethought to better support national accountability and reviews.