

# *ECOSOC*

## *Dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UN Development system*

### *The United Nations and its functions*

**John Burley and Khalid Malik  
Geneva and New York**

**13 April 2015**

This paper expresses solely the views of the authors.

# Contents

## Introduction

### **I. Transitions and tipping points: evolution in operational activities for development**

*Development as transformation*

*The UN System as a system?*

*Changing norms and setting standards*

*Shifting lines*

*Lessons learnt*

### **II. The post-2015 era: the SDGs and the likely implications for functions**

*The changing context*

*SDGs and their implications*

### **III. Purposes and Functions**

*Global policy coherence, or the need for “coherent pluralism”*

*Co-ordination within the UN system, or “strategic consolidation”*

*Bringing norms and operations together*

*Universality*

### **IV. Making the UN ‘fit for purpose’**

### **V. Conclusion and Summary**

## Introduction

This paper on “functions” is one of several designed to contribute to the ECOSOC dialogue on the “longer-term positioning” of the United Nations system in light of the proposed post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Other papers refer to governance, funding, and organisational arrangements. It merits underlining that these issues are all inter-connected. For coherence sake, this paper highlights as well some of these links.

More importantly, when we use the phrase ‘making the UN fit for purpose’, there is need for a deeper examination of the strategic reasons and purposes that drive functions. Purposes and functions hang together. There has been much evolution of the UN development system over the past decades and consequently functions have had to adjust. Institutions need a purpose and their functions, both as form and content, have to align to the larger purpose. Taking a technical approach by listing functions is unlikely to be helpful in the larger debate that is needed in the repositioning of the UNDS. Often, functions themselves may remain the same, but how they are exercised and why may differ substantially when needs change. This paper examines how the larger purpose of the UN Development System is likely to be influenced by the changing global context and the nature and comprehensiveness of the SDGs. Just focusing on the narrower remit of functions is likely to miss out on the important debate about purposes.

We state here certain assumptions on which the paper is based:

- We use the word “development” to encompass the three pillars or components of sustainable development, namely the economic, environmental and social dimensions.
- The expression “functions” is taken to mean the set of activities proper to the United Nations and its agencies and programmes that contribute to the larger purpose set out in the Preamble to the Charter. Functions are simply what institutions ‘do’. The DESA Background Note defines functions as ‘the specific tasks, responsibilities, actions and activities’. But functions can also cover broader aspects of looking at inter-relationships and integration, in order to promote effectiveness and greater impact. The latter applies well to the UNDS, given the role the UN is expected to play in setting norms, promoting coherence and bringing stakeholders together around specific purposes. We have erred on the side of a broader interpretation.
- There is a presumption for better alignment or inter-linkages among functions, funding practices, governance structures, partnerships and organisational arrangements. This paper touches on those latter aspects but only to the extent that they are relevant to a consideration of functions.
- We assume that the operational activities of the United Nations system will continue to consist, as at a present, of a mixture of capacity-building; policy and technical advice; direct support; facilitating access to knowledge and information; promoting the transfer of technology; and training. These functions may continue, but how they are deployed may differ substantially. The content and relative proportions of such activities will

naturally differ from country to country, depending on the level of development, national circumstances and policy orientations and availability of other sources of external support and assistance. An argument can also be made that traditional TA itself may be on its way out as people get more educated and the world becomes more global. But arguably the need for advice and innovation may intensify as issues get more complex, and more connected across countries.

- The paper takes as given current terminology regarding the ‘United Nations development system (UNDS)’, and ‘the UN system’s operational activities for development’, terms which are sometimes used interchangeably and synonymously and which are not always clear in their meanings. Given the implications of the SDGs for future functions, and in particular the universality of the new UN development agenda, the time may have come to rethink the definition and usage of these terms<sup>1</sup>. For instance, how humanitarian assistance is to be thought about may need to be re-visited as vulnerability and violence are increasingly being considered as part of the development challenge in most countries (2014 HDR).

The paper begins, in section 1, with a necessarily brief historical review of how UN operational activities for development have evolved over the seven decades of the Organisation. This section also considers the “why” of change, in response to the times, to the needs and to the evolution in development thinking. Section 2 looks at the changing global context before assessing the significance of the SDGs and in particular their implications for the functions of the “UNDS”. Section 3 discuss what needs to be done to make the UN “fit for purposes”, including the consequences of “universalisation”. In the light of this analysis, Section 4 draws attention to the essential functions (in terms of both scope and content) that the UNDS must perform in order to remain relevant and be able to meet the challenges posed by the SDGs. Section 5 provides a Conclusion and Summary.

---

<sup>1</sup> One approach defines the UNDS as those entities that receive voluntary contributions for operational activities, namely the UN funds and programmes and the specialised agencies, plus the UN research and training institutions. Data on humanitarian assistance is included in “operational activities for development” yet the purposes are different.

## I. Transitions and tipping points: evolution in operational activities for development

Seventy years ago in San Francisco, 50 governments agreed to promote international economic and financial cooperation so as to ensure a post-war system of open markets and free trade. The focus then was very largely on the centre of the world economy. The particular requirements and needs of the periphery were largely ignored: “development” was not a subject for discussion. What a contrast with today, when development is now one of the principal purposes of the 193 member United Nations, with direct inter-linkages to the other main purposes, namely the maintenance of peace and security, the promotion of human rights and the preservation of the planet.

While this section is necessarily brief, we hope to trace how the UN development functions have changed and evolved. We will look at how change occurred, and why, in response to both the changing perceptions of development and to the many economic, financial, social and environmental crises experienced over the past seven decades. We conclude with a series of bullet points designed to illustrate the “lessons learnt”.

### *Development as transformation*

Development thinking in the immediate post-war period was in its infancy. It took the first UN expert group report on the matter, authored by Arthur Lewis in 1951<sup>2</sup>, to emphasise that economic development – a term the experts left undefined as being self-evident – was largely a function of capital accumulation in the industrial sector absorbing surplus labour from the agricultural sector. From then on, development was understood to be the particular concern of only a part of the membership of the United Nations, with other members contributing advice, resources and knowledge to that process. The experts also acknowledged the need for “institution-building” as a “pre-condition” for economic progress. They implied that international action would consist of both capital lending from the World Bank, and technical assistance to remedy skill shortages in the “under-developed countries”. This latter concept underpinned the development of the initial UN operational programmes, namely the expanded programme of technical assistance (EPTA) from 1949 onwards.

The end of the colonial period and the consequential expansion of membership brought the United Nations in the 1960’s and 1970’s to highlight the importance of international action to remove the external constraints to development. There was emphasis on financing the domestic savings gap through aid and capital flows and on a “new trade policy for development” to offset the alleged declining terms of trade for commodity producers. The work of Prebisch and ECLAC was instrumental in leading to the establishment of UNCTAD<sup>3</sup> in 1964, following a political initiative of the non-aligned countries. The UN sponsored international development strategies for the 1960’s and the 1970’s managed to marry both domestic and international measures for development in a balanced manner. These decades also saw the beginnings of the

---

<sup>2</sup> *Measures for the Economic Development of Under-developed Countries*, UN, New York, 1951

<sup>3</sup> And, as a direct by-product, the Group of 77.

transition from the concept of the “rich” offering aid to the “poor” to the concept of cooperation or partnership between the global north and the global south in favour of the latter. However, the drive for a “new international economic order” collapsed in the economic crisis of the late 1970’s.

Together with a number of other factors, this failure in turn led to significant changes in the concept of development. The key role of market forces was emphasised, leading to a significantly reduced role for the state. The mix of policies, captured in the phrase “the Washington consensus” can be summed as liberalisation, de-regulation and privatisation. Interdependence among countries increased through growing production and trade linkages reinforced by growing financial dominance of the real economy. The United Nations responded in three new and important directions: first by articulating a central concern for the human being as the object of development through the pioneering efforts of UNICEF (Adjustment with a Human Face) and UNDP (Human Development Reports). Second, the 1992 Rio Conference on environment and development placed environment in centre stage of the development agenda. And third, also in the 1990’s, the UN promoted the concept of “global partnership for development”<sup>4</sup>.

These trends have accentuated in the last two decades. From an early technical focus on capital and labour and their interactions, the United Nations is now propagating the concept of human development in all its manifestations and development as the transformation of society. Development is no longer a question solely for one particular group of countries in partnership with another group. The world is now recognising the full implications of “interdependence” whereby the development of all countries is dependent on the development of each country. Development is now “universal”.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a remarkable statement of transformative development with the human being at the centre. The goals incorporate growth, poverty eradication, equity, structural change, employment, environmental sustainability, financial stability, food security and social inclusiveness. Their achievement will require major changes in national and international development strategies.

#### *The UN Development System as a system?*

Ever since the beginnings, there has been a constant refrain that the efficiency and effectiveness of the UN’s development-related operations have been undermined by lack of coordination among the constituent parts, by duplication and by a lack of focus or “prioritisation”. Every report on UN reform addresses these issues, but their recommendations are often still-born. Thus we ask ourselves two questions: have the core challenges of coordination and clarity of purpose within the “UN development system” changed at all over the decades? And why has it proven so difficult to improve things?

In the very early days, technical assistance was the instrument to facilitate transfer of knowledge and skills to developing countries. Subsequently, funding through the UN Special Fund for pre-

---

<sup>4</sup> Used for example at UNCTAD IX in South Africa, May 1995.

investment feasibility studies was added. EPTA and the UNSF were merged in 1965 to form UNDP which by the end of the 1960's doubted its ability to administer significantly increased ODA without major reform. Thus in this earlier and perhaps simpler age, the Capacity Study of 1969 dealt essentially with the relations between UNDP and its "participating and executing agencies" that then formed the "UN Development System". It recommended, for example, tighter coordination and greater authority for the UNDP Resident Representatives, an issue that still remains albeit now in the guise of the role and responsibilities of the UN Resident Coordinators. Experience has shown convincingly that that subject cannot be fully resolved without addressing issues of governance. The reforms of the late 1990's/early 2000's were major steps forward, culminating in the UNDG guidelines on "delivering as one" and the "standard operating procedures". But the "silos" remain and some observers say that without further surgery the integrated and inter-related ambitious SDGs are unachievable.

So, whilst our answer to the first question is "no", we now have to explain why. Answers based on "member states are responsible" or "secretariats jealously protect their interests" or "donor selectivity through non-core funding" or "bureaucracies" are partly true but only partly. We think we have to look at the history of the United Nations system. Perhaps because of the influence of the theories of "functionalism", the system was deliberately established on the basis of autonomous "functional" agencies that would focus on a specific issue and that would cooperate in a decentralised manner without any central direction. The UN funds and programmes, established under Article 22 of the Charter, and likewise designed to address a single function, have also operated autonomously. The trouble with this approach, of course, is that "development" is precisely not a single function: development demands an integration of "inputs" in a coherent framework of policies and operations.

### *Changing norms, setting standards*

The evolution in thinking about development has been both cause and consequence of the expansion of the UN's normative and standard setting function. Particularly since the end of the Cold War, the world has been significantly expanding the rules and expectations of state and local behaviour. Such normative rules and regulations<sup>5</sup> address the promotion and protection of human rights, core labour standards, the status of women, agreements on trade, health standards and the like. And much of this has come about because of the impact of the series of UN conferences on such subjects as the environment, women, population and social development. The annual debates in UN organisations on economic and social policy, and the series of major UN reports on the economy and society, have all added to the UN's normative functions. We return to this matter in section 3 below.

### *Shifting lines*

We cannot leave this very brief review without mentioning how operational activities are constantly evolving in several ways. In addition to the growing relationship between normative and operational roles, there are three other examples:

---

<sup>5</sup> Defined by the UN Evaluation Group as 'support to the development of norms and standards in conventions, declarations, regulatory frameworks, agreements, guidelines, codes of practice and other standard setting instruments, at global, regional and national level'.

- The relationship between an emphasis on national programmes and activities in direct support for national development, the support for regional cooperation, and the need to address global problems requiring collective action. Whilst the former is naturally in the interest of individual member states and should be maintained in function of the level of development, the latter is perhaps a unique function of the United Nations which no other collectivity, national or international, can address.

- The relationship between the United Nations and the international financial institutions. Whilst the World Bank and the IMF are formally part of the United Nations system – and cooperate in a wide range of programmes and activities – there remains a clear separation between New York and Washington on both national and international economic and development policy issues. The UN tends to take the lead on social and environmental issues, but the gap between the institutions constitutes inefficiency and not effectiveness, and given the focus on ‘development as transformation’, economic policies have to be integrated and harmonised with social policies.

- The relationship between the UN humanitarian programmes and development programmes. Most regrettably, the UN’s humanitarian programmes in response to both natural and man-made disasters are growing and bringing in their train the issue of how best to deal with crisis situations and promote resilience of communities and countries. It is becoming increasingly clear that earlier notions of securing transitions from relief to development following humanitarian interventions may well be a too narrow take on the experience of crisis situations. Instead, reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience requires ‘across the board measures’, ranging from equitable access to social services to the creation of jobs. Reducing vulnerability is another essential part of the task of development (2014 HDR). This calls for even stronger synergy among the UN system and its executive boards, and between the UN and the broader multilateral system.

### Lessons learnt

We conclude with the following five “bullet points”:

- There has been an exceptionally significant evolution in the UN’s thinking on development over the past 70 years, to one which is now centred on the human being and encompasses environmental sustainability and the transformation of society. As a result, the UN system adapted to new roles and activities. But the process was inevitably slow and the alignment between changing functions and funding and governance was not always well-articulated. On that latter score, the situation now is increasingly “unaligned”, complex and heavy.

- The quantity of ODA channelled through the UN system is neither the sole nor necessarily the single most important factor in judging relevance or effectiveness (see Annex 1). ODA plays an important catalytic function, nonetheless. That ODA has been able to leverage UN’s very important non-pecuniary attributes, among which we would number universality and legitimacy, an historical ability to stay ahead of the curve on development thinking, a world-wide network of country presence, continuity, responsiveness to individual country needs and flexibility.

- Nevertheless, the system has been, and continues to be, criticised for its lack of focus (trying to do too many things without the necessary critical mass); inefficiencies (mainly excessive administrative costs in relation to programme results and impact); a less than outstanding level of quality (when member states have the right and expectation to demand the best); and a lack of coherence (a seeming inability to work together or to coalesce around an agreed system of priorities). The latter is particularly observable at the country level where even the best efforts at reform and the strengthening of the resident coordinator system have not always produced the desired impact.

- Thus, we have to ask ourselves: “why is change, or reform, so difficult and not always successful?” We start from the premise that reform is genuinely desired by member states, secretariats and civil society alike and that most recommendations for reform are well-thought out and credible. On the basis of the long view, we would summarise the major problems as twofold:

- ✓ Coherent support of development requires a multidisciplinary approach that strengthens inter-relationships and promotes the integration of “inputs”. Such an approach is at variance with a system constructed of “silos” where each agency – in light of the functional approach to inter-governmental organisations – is focussed on its particular problem or issue or sector requiring its undivided attention; and

- ✓ This lack of coordination and coherence may be adversely affected by problems of funding (donor preference for targeted non-core contributions). It is certainly the consequence of separate governing bodies and the inevitable difficulties faced by member states in ensuring their permanently consistent position across the system as a whole. But this situation is very largely inherent, given the decentralised nature of the system created 70 years in San Francisco.

- The world is facing increasing global challenges. We list just the most commonly cited ones: climate change; financial instability; humanitarian disasters; rapid transmission of diseases; cyber insecurity; competition for resources (e.g. water). Most parts of the world are many times better off than they were seven decades ago. But the intensity, and inter-dependence of the challenges are growing, and at an increasing rate. The post 2015 development agenda is pregnant with promise and expectations: such a transformative agenda cannot leave the United Nations untransformed. In the face of the world’s problems and the challenge of the SDGs, “business as usual” cannot be an option. So what is to be done?

## **II. The post-2015 era: the SDGs and the likely implications for functions**

*‘Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable’, Martin Luther King, Jr.*

### *The changing context*

The dramatic rise of the South is leading to a more diverse set of production and consumption relations among countries. In 1990, trade between China and Africa stood at \$2 billion, by 2014 this had exceeded \$200 billion. China has become the lead trading partner of countries as varied as India and Chile. The share of south-south trade in world commerce is now the same (about 30

percent) as north-south trade. Even more striking, south-south foreign direct investment now accounts for 30-60 percent of all outside investment in least developed countries (HDR, 2013).

This unprecedented change in relative power and economy is likely to continue into the future. China is expected in the next years to emerge as the largest economy in the world. The story of the rising South goes beyond the BRICs. Seven of the ten fastest growing economies are in Africa. As the 2013 Human Development Report highlights, some forty developing countries have done better than expected in the last decade. By 2030, the projections are that two thirds of the world's middle class will be residing in Asia.

And all this is happening as the world gets more connected, on a scale not imaginable before. More than 2 billion people use the Internet and every year a billion people travel internationally. The Internet and social media are powerful 'low-cost aggregators' of public opinion, which amplify people's voices.

At the people level, there appears much dissatisfaction with the status quo in both the North and the South. People everywhere, the young in particular, seek jobs and expect to be treated with dignity. This puts pressure on governance systems as governments are challenged to do better, with high expectations for greater accountability and more opportunities to influence decision-making. Of the 20 countries with the largest increase in mean years of schooling, 8 were in the Arab region. In most of these countries, job creation failed to keep pace with educational attainment, contributing to dissatisfaction and civil unrest.

The rise of the South has profound implications for development cooperation. There is innovation in bundling together technical assistance, concessional finance and investment, and there are new ideas to deliver regional public goods. Globally, this has contributed as well to the creation of new 'coordination' arrangements such as the G-20. Brazil, China and India have emerged as important providers of development assistance, which is substantial for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Between 2001 and 2008, a remarkable 47 percent of official infrastructure financing for Sub-Saharan Africa came from other southern countries. These trends are likely to intensify in the future, as highlighted by the recent proposal by China to create the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), now joined by 30 countries, including more recently the UK, France and Germany.

This growing diversity and the resulting pluralism is challenging existing institutions and processes in the traditional domains of multilateralism - development, trade, investment and health - sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly through alternative regional and sub-regional mechanisms and arrangements. Equally, there are signs of a more diverse global civil society and growing assertiveness of 'people movements' on norm setting and the boundaries of acceptable individual and state behaviour.

It is well accepted that poverty reduction and addressing vulnerability requires a comprehensive approach and dedicated national and global effort. Globalization, for instance, as practiced is not benefiting enough people, and in some case integration is producing new vulnerabilities.

The goal of a people centred, sustainable growth and development requires a positive vision of the global and national public domain and the recognition that ‘the world we want’ depends on the successful provision of natural and human-made public goods (Kaul, Conceicao). Markets alone cannot provide adequate social and environmental protection on their own.

The under-provision of these goods, for instance in communicable disease, or in adequate global market regulations, can slow down progress and contribute to vulnerability. Their under-provision permits shocks in part of the world to reach countries and communities around the globe. After all, the still continuing Great Recession was triggered by a bank failure in New York in 2007. Multilateral efforts facilitate cooperation that provide many of these goods, but they are weak and inadequate in relation to the scope of the challenges. And they are weak in relation to the momentum of markets, the pace of commodification and the power of private interests.

Progress is possible. Financial systems can be better regulated, trade talks can be unblocked, and markets subjected to improved codes and standards. But for that to happen, the international system, and especially the United Nations, has to become more effective. Global collective action is clearly feasible, as has been demonstrated in the past with the eradication of smallpox and other international efforts. The task now is to extend this kind of collective defence to other transnational risks and challenges.

Often global regimes, such as those for global intellectual property rights, benefit elites disproportionately. In many respects, it can be argued that the shortcomings in addressing vulnerability stem from deep asymmetries of power, voice and influence. Interests of least developed countries and the people most vulnerable are often not high on the global agenda. The SDGs require renewed, determined political effort to overcome these seemingly insurmountable challenges. Global governance has to break the link between globalization and vulnerability.

One aspect of these considerations refers to the status of fragile states and ODA levels in general. There is some worry that humanitarian needs are overwhelming the modest ODA budgets (see annex 1). It almost seems like a contradiction that we see that much progress is taking place at the same time as growing uncertainty and deeper and more frequent shocks - manmade or otherwise. The global system as currently organized currently does not appear to add much to the resilience of people or countries. The New Deal for Fragile States, a joint initiative of the 19 fragile countries and the donor community, is an important platform. But for it to be successful it has to go beyond ODA issues, be more directly connected to the SDGs and for the UN’s role to be better defined.

### *SDGs and their implications*

While global goal setting as represented by the MDGs and the SDGs have been viewed as norm setting, they can also be usefully considered as ‘global merit goods’, goods that are essential for social and environmental stability, and continuing progress (Ocampo, 2013). The MDGs have been a remarkable success as a globally agreed framework for action, and as the reference for development activities and aid providers around the world. Indeed in *UN Ideas that Changed the*

*World*, authors Jolly, Emmerij, and Weiss (2009) identify global goals, specifically the MDGs, as a signal contribution of the United Nations.

Tracking country progress in relation to the agreed goals (and targets) creates significant incentives for countries to do better. Target setting encourages healthy competition among countries, since countries are motivated to improve their reputation measured by global standards.

Both the MDGs and the visionary Millennium Declaration built on the development priorities arising from the UN Conferences held during the 1990s on diverse topics (and the consolidation of that work by DAC). The UN conference declarations had a common theme—inclusive globalization that emphasized human-centred, equitable and sustainable development —broadly referred to as the UN Development Agenda. They also emphasized the participatory nature of international development, one that brings together not only governments and donors but civil society as well (United Nations 2007). They emphasized the essential human ends of development, and promoted social and economic policy alternatives for human progress.

Like the MDGs, the SDGs refer to ‘what’ needs to be done. There is merit in discussing as well ‘how’ to achieve them. This was in some ways the missing piece of the MDGs, and it is important to learn from that experience. The ‘how’ inevitably leads one to talk about development policy content, who benefits from growth, the balance between state and markets, and the appropriate measurement of progress.

The SDGs represents an ambitious effort not only to eliminate poverty and protect the environment, but also recognizes that this can only happen if measures are put in place to transform the global economy, re-organize economic activity itself and deepen partnerships.

There is criticism that 17 Goals and 187 targets are just too many for any coherent global effort to respond to the challenges. Part of the reason for this is the complexity of the interconnected systems. It is difficult to consider water issues without looking at energy, or climate change, or economic growth approaches. A warming and unpredictable climate has a direct impact on people’s livelihoods and security.

The SDGs or the ‘post-2015 UN Agenda’ have been described as ‘transformative change towards inclusive, people-centred, sustainable development’. Equity considerations represent the thread that goes through all the goals, with the argument that special and additional measures are required to help those in particular need. These issues are now an integral part of global negotiations. For instance in the climate change negotiations, since poor nations and poor communities are likely to bear the brunt of climate change.

Another perspective refers to the issues linked to ‘financing for development’. Take the case of investment flows. In order to deliver on the SDGs, the 2015 UNCTAD Investment Report underlines that investment flows have to be dramatically scaled up and reorganized. In contrast to the MDGs which focused on financial resources, particularly ODA, for specific development initiatives, the SDGs will likely require a dramatic escalation in investment in broad-based

economic transformation, ranging from basic infrastructure, clean water and sanitation and renewable energy.

### **III. Purposes and Functions**

We began in section I by recalling, very briefly, some key features of the history of the UN's development work. We then reviewed, in Section II, the essence of the SDGs in light of current global challenges. Here, we present a four-point agenda of how the SDGs will affect the longer-term functions of the UN "development system". There is certain logic to our approach: we start, first, with the need of, and the new opportunity for, global policy coherence, or "coherent pluralism", which underscores the need for a coherent global framework when diverse institutions and approaches are at work. Second, we then look at how the UN itself can contribute to such coherence, through "strategic consolidation". Some functions and some institutions are ripe for consolidation and merger. More of the same will not work. Third, as a new feature of such UN (internal) coordination, we emphasise the need to align norms and operations. And finally, consistent with such re-alignment, the universalisation of the new development agenda provides the international community with a new start.

#### *Global policy coherence or the need for coherent pluralism*

In December 2014, the UN Secretary General presented his synthesis report on the post-2015 development agenda titled 'The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet'. This report makes clear that progress on the SDGs is intimately connected to national actions and progress in the ongoing global negotiations on topics as varied as climate change, trade, and financing for development.

In all of this, the United Nations has to critically examine the role it plays or can play in furthering this global agenda, in providing critical support to national and international agreements, and in monitoring global, regional and country progress. But it is not only the United Nations that needs to be made "fit for purpose". The multilateral system as a whole needs a major boost and be made 'fit for purpose'.

Global collective action is clearly feasible: the task now is to reconfigure global systems to continue to provide connectivity and efficiency, to support those marginalized by markets and to extend collective defence (e.g. against the spread of disease) to other transnational risks.

Global agreements cannot be easily divorced from human progress at the country level. Apart from the standards they present for country interaction, national measures are more easily enacted when global commitments are in place and global support available. The social protection floors 2009 debate for instance, encouraged and led by the CEB, was an important input into the overall discussion of the SDGs. In turn national efforts have to be closely aligned with global commitments.

There may well be future debate about what universality implies, but as the UN Charter explicitly recognizes, the principle of universality has to be fundamentally about people themselves. The

SDGs is all about improving their lives and the habitat they live in, from the provision of social services, access to health care, social protections, jobs and environmental protection. Public norms, particularly in the social and economic areas, have so far been heavily influenced by entrenched beliefs in the efficiency of markets and the power of privatization. There is much debate (and policy action) that is needed to secure an appropriate balance between state action, people and markets.

Collective action inevitably is based on the two meanings of interdependence, namely that of the mutual dependency among countries because of the ways in which their economic performance affect each other, and that of the relationships among the issue areas. If anything, the latter aspect of interdependence will become even more acute as the result of the SDGs. Already, for example, the world has suffered significantly from the inconsistencies among macro-economic, financial, trade and development policies (UNCTAD, 2012). The possibility of achieving the SDGs goals on climate change, or environmental sustainability (#s13 & 15) will be directly impacted by the realisation or otherwise of the SDG economic goals (especially #8 on growth and full employment). The new goals on equalities and sustainable production and consumption patterns (#s 10 & 12) are central to each of the three pillars of sustainable development.

Solving any problem at the global level requires recognizing some of the systemic barriers to collective action. The problems requiring transnational problems are more extensive now than when the United Nations was created. From the 51 countries that formed the United Nations in 1945, there are now 193 countries with diverse interests and needs. This diversity while not a barrier in itself raises considerable challenge in securing agreement and collective action around specific global problems.

Many of the current international institutions and structures were designed for a post-Second World War order, and the limited reforms to date have not reflected the changing power relations.

Lack of coherence is one such challenge. It occurs at the topical level. There is a deep interdependence in the problems that humanity faces. But the failure of integrating policies and implementation across related sectors has bedeviled strategies for sustainable development. Whether it is the climate, land, energy and water “nexus”<sup>6</sup>, or trade and food security, or financial systems, global discussions tend to be organized in silos, with separate institutions dealing with trade, climate, development, and finance. This makes it very difficult to take on a systems perspective on global issues, or to identify spill over and contradictions in the action of states and international bodies.

Thus the SDGs present a major new challenge to the United Nations, namely that of promoting positive synergies among the different issue areas. The need is clear, and the SDGs provide the opportunity. But ECOSOC and the General Assembly will be required to exercise their

---

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, 2014b, *Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report*, Division for Sustainable Development, New York, June, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1454Prototype%20Global%20SD%20Report.pdf>.

responsibilities within the framework of the architecture of the United Nations system put in place seventy years ago. As perhaps the foremost historian of the Charter put it, way back in 1958: “*the basic decision made at Dumbarton Oaks and confirmed at San Francisco, was that the relationship between the specialised agencies and the world Organisation would be one of co-ordination and co-operation rather than one of centralisation and direction*”<sup>7</sup>.

Even this limited function has proven difficult to realize in practice. The lack of international coordination has hampered progress in meeting global and regional challenges, as evidenced for example by the failure to make much progress on MDG8. The expansion of the G-7/8 into G-20 is welcome as recognition of the changing world. Over the years there have been several proposals to strengthen global coordination. The 2009 Stiglitz Commission proposed the Global Economic Coordination Council. Other calls have been made to create a Global Leaders Forum and to transform ECOSOC as equivalent in political weight to the Security Council.

The principle of “*coherent pluralism*” is necessary to govern the relationships among the issue areas – namely the search for synergies and positive feedbacks and the identification of measure necessary to offset negative reactions - and among the existing institutions. Despite much rhetoric, it is a false choice to reflect unduly on the tension between globalism and regionalism, or between older structures led by the traditional powers of the North and newer arrangements responding to the needs of the developing world. Rather it is integrating, coordinating and in some cases reforming these institutions so that they can work together more effectively. Indeed, charting such coherence can emerge as a major new function of the United Nations. A complex world demands diversity and flexibility. But this cannot substitute for the global pursuit of solutions to problems.

This may require a two-pronged approach. First, the United Nations itself, armed with a renewed mandate in this regard, will require both stronger central analytical capacity in each of the three pillars of sustainable development and deeper inter-agency collaboration.

And second, it will also require a renewed attempt by member states individually to harmonise their policies on such matters among their different ministries responsible for the different fields covered by the multilateral institutions – foreign affairs, development, finance, trade, environment, health, labour and so on.

#### *Clarity and co-ordination within the United Nations system, or “strategic consolidation”*

Many of the above consideration are also applicable to internal UNDS coordination. So our second principle refers to “*strategic consolidation*”. Governments have to assess the roles that the UN should and must play in future to create a more equitable, sustainable world. Without that basic conversation, it is difficult to see what functions the UNDS must perform to deliver on the promise of the SDGs. This paper makes the argument that there is need for a structural re-fit of the UN’s purpose. At a minimum the UN has to become the lead institution in setting and

---

<sup>7</sup> Ruth B. Russell and Jeanette E. Muther, *A History of the United Nations Charter* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 1958), 797.

refining the global framework, and helping to make that work at the national level. This is a different approach from the one that asserts that the UN should focus on its ‘comparative advantage’ by moving away from service delivery. Rather, it represents an attempt to define the essential role of the United Nations, and makes the case that appropriate investments in capacity and funding to make the UN ‘fit for that purpose’ These roles cover the full gamut of UN functions as convener, standard-setter, advocate and expert (which in some cases may require operational work as well).

However, there is much institutional fragmentation in the current arrangements of the UNDS with its complex mix of 34 United Nations funds and programmes, and the UN Specialized Agencies. A hard look at the multiple and at times overlapping architectural issues is now necessary.

The SG’s response to 2006 Report of the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence noted that ‘the Organization urgently needs more coherence and synergy so that it can perform as one and be more than the sum of its parts’. It further noted that ‘it should respond to the diverse needs of countries and perform as one at the country level, and have the governance, management and funding practices in place to support those efforts’.

In a crowded, unclear global system, there is much desire, even nostalgia, for a simpler United Nations. One influential view, as brought out by papers produced for the Utstein group of donors, feel that the UN should focus on setting norms and standards, data collection, and for its operational role to be confined to areas where it can demonstrate a real difference. They accept the important convening role of the UN, and feel that the UN should move away from providing stand alone services and move towards policy advice. This position after all has long standing intellectual pedigree stemming from the 1969 Capacity Report.

The 2006 High Level Panel focused on what they thought was a doable proposition for the UN system to be coherent at the country level. Since 2008, there has been some movement in the ‘UN delivering as one’ at the country level: a growing number of countries now have single resident UN offices. But, as noted by the 2011 UNEG Evaluation Report, progress has been limited and uneven on the Four Ones: One Programme, One Leader, One Budgetary Framework and One Office. There remains a structural issue: how to have a coherent UN at the country level without a certain level of consolidation (and possible merger) at the headquarters level.

An approach to the kind of strategic consolidation we have in mind would need to be based on a set of agreed functions. But more than that as well. Similar functions are now spread across several institutions. The companion Background Note from DESA to this paper identified “seven potential key functions of the UN development system in response to the post-2015 development agenda”<sup>8</sup>. This reasonably comprehensive list could be drawn upon as a framework for ensuring greater coherence of action by UN organisations.

---

<sup>8</sup> Background Note, Workshop I – Functions, 8 April 2015, pp 8-10.

For example, functions A, B, C and E (support to countries to meet: “national development challenges”; selective “normative and technical” requirement; “global challenges”; and enhance “south-south cooperation”, respectively) in the DESA Note spell out the range of different types of possible UN interventions in countries at differing levels of development. On the basis of the SDGs relevant to these functions, member states and executive heads could identify those explicit areas where mutual collaboration among the UN organisations needs to be strengthened. With inspired foresight, they could then agree upon the necessary measures to bring about such strengthening<sup>9</sup>.

### *Bringing norms and operations together*

The good news is that one major step in enhancing the effectiveness of the UNDS can be achieved without much structural change, namely finding ways and means of synergising two long-standing UN functions, norms and operations.

Historically, norms and operations have been conceived globally<sup>10</sup> as two separate aspects of the work of the United Nations. This separation has gone on for too long. The SDGs create a new opportunity, in as much as both functions are essential to help achieve the SDGs. The SDGs are in effect the new global norms for development. These norms provide the policy framework for UN operations. And such operations have to be more robustly connected to norms, in keeping with the well-established principles of the UNDS, namely neutrality and non-conditionality.

We noted in section 1 above that the normative and standard setting functions of different UN organisations cover a wide range of economic and social policies. Such universal normative rules and standards intended to influence the perception and behaviour of actors at different levels and in different contexts can only be developed in a universal organisation. Adherence and implementation, in contrast, has to be sought at the regional, national and local level.

The implementation of universally agreed norms is the responsibility of each Member across all regions and all levels of development. Experience confirms that adherence by individual member states to norms and standards is a factor heavily dependent on national circumstances and policies and which inevitably change over time. Above all, adherence to standards and norms, through in particular national legislation, is a process largely independent of the level of development of the country concerned.

In earlier sessions of the present dialogue, member states agreed that their organisation, in its longer-term positioning, should do more to facilitate such implementation. The question thus arises is the more practical one of what useful action could be taken by organisations individually

---

<sup>9</sup> It was essentially this approach that underpinned the establishment in the 1990’s of the UNAIDS programme as a jointly sponsored inter-agency effort with its special and innovative approach to governance. Similar institutional imagination should be exercised now, in light of the SDGs, for “strategic consolidation” of effort among UN organisations.

<sup>10</sup> In individual entities, such as ILO, which have both normative and operational functions, the relationship is naturally much closer.

and collectively to further translate global normative frameworks into adaptive national programmes.

It might be useful to illustrate the issues involved by reference to two prominent examples of normative and standard-setting: human rights and the ILO labour standards. The recent past has seen a major effort to “mainstream” human rights into all areas of the work of the United Nations. The SDGs (and related targets) show important advances (compared to the MDGs) in integrating a human rights based approach to development. These gains and the continuing work of The Human Rights Council, including Universal Periodic Review process and of the Treaty-based Bodies will offer the human rights machinery of the United Nations an increasingly important position in the post-2015 development agenda.

ILO has been in the business of promoting labour standards for almost a century now. And they are even more important now: “in today’s globalised economy, international labour standards are an essential component in the international framework for ensuring that the growth of the global economy provides benefits to all”<sup>11</sup>. Again, SDGs show a major advance over the MDGs in as much as Goal 8 calls for full employment and decent work for all<sup>12</sup>. The standards have grown into a “comprehensive system of instruments on work and social policy, backed by a supervisory system designed to address all sorts of problems in their application at the national level”<sup>13</sup>.

Bringing norms and operations closer together is essentially something that needs to be addressed in specific situations in specific countries. The task of bringing norms and operations together is not a deep structural issue as others in requiring global consideration and action. But it does require committed leadership and appropriate guidelines that would encompass, for example, capacity-building support to those countries which so request assistance in modifying national legislation to reflect the international norms, technical advice in resolving national problems in the application of standards and training as appropriate. Given the importance attached to the issue by member states, the UNDS should thus include, amongst its functions, the above cited support, advice and training.

### Universality

Having a universal development agenda already constitutes a hugely significant change in the UN’s way of doing business. Universality is a global common good: it means a “shared responsibility for a shared future”. Universality does not imply a ‘one size fits all’ approach, since different countries have different starting points with different capacities and resources. Some differentiation is therefore necessary even if there is the sentiment that there are minimum global norms that all countries must meet. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities<sup>14</sup> is particularly applicable in the context of a universal agenda, with an accent on progressive realisation of global commitments.

---

<sup>11</sup> ILO: <http://ilo.org/global/standards/introduction-to-international-labour-standards/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the UN Charter, in Article 55, stated that the UN “shall promote ...full employment”

<sup>13</sup> Op.cit, ILO

<sup>14</sup> Principal 7 of the Rio+20Declaration, United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 2012.

The SDGs aim to eliminate extreme poverty globally, but also address patterns of consumption and production in the developed world and the same time ensure environmental sustainability. The SDGs differ from the MDGs in several significant ways. First and foremost they are universal in character. This is a substantial and welcome step. Second, whereas the MDGs focused on the ‘basic needs’ of people, i.e. reducing poverty and on improving their health and education status, the SDGs are wide ranging and interrelated, covering social, economic and environmental areas (Rio+20, 2012).

A key challenge is how the issues of ‘universality’ will be applied in practice. Universality is a global norm. From resources allocation to data sources, countries themselves would have to critically examine the implementation challenges of SDGs and how and where they seek support from the UN and other development partners. The Specialised Agencies and several UN entities have always been “universal” in their mandates and in the nature of much of their work, for example as regards norms and standard-setting. OHCHR and UNEP are the most evident examples. UNFPA and UNAIDS have several “universal” features. UNICEF has started a conversation on it’s potential role as a global institution.

The SG’s Synthesis Report on the SDGs (2014) eloquently states *“universality implies that all countries will need to change, each with their own approach, but each with a sense of the global common good. Universality is the core attribute of human rights and intergenerational justice. It compels us to think of shared responsibilities for a shared future. It demands policy coherence. Universality embodies a new global partnership for sustainable development in the spirit of the UN Charter”*.

The rationale for universality rests on the basic notion that all people are of equal worth. It derives from Immanuel Kant’s far sighted work, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), and is powerfully enshrined in the UN Charter. Development then is about promoting equal life chances for all people. But more than that, as Amartya Sen and others underscore (2013, JHDC, 2014 HDR), equal consideration for all demands unequal treatment in favour of the disadvantaged. The UNDP Human Development Reports go further by adding a perceptual aspect to development, about having the freedom to live a life that one values (Sen, Haq).

Universality is about shared responsibility for specific development outcomes. If development policy is about ‘putting people first’, then all public policies have to be seen as means to an end, not as end in themselves. Policymakers have to ask some basic questions: are policies improving the lives of people? Are some people being left behind? And if so, why? It raises issues of policy coherence for development at the national level and by different countries, for instance it raises the prospects of specific actions by the North, which may benefit the South, i.e. by reducing agricultural subsidies.

It raises also issues of accountability and metrics. The SDGs constitute a shared global agenda for people and the planet that are likely to impact all areas of government policy of all countries-economic, environment and social. All governments would need to be held accountable (or hold themselves accountable) for meeting these commitments. This universal perspective is critically important as it transforms the notion of development away from a traditional division between

donors and recipients or between developed vs developing countries, rather as countries meeting their agreed upon obligations both individually and collectively.

Universality does not imply a ‘one size fits all’ approach, since different countries have different starting points with different capacities and resources. Some differentiation is therefore necessary even if there is the sentiment that there are minimum global norms that all countries must meet. A principle that may be relevant here is one of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ arising from Rio+20, with an accent on progressive realization of the global commitments.

Universality has other implications as well: monitoring progress may require a universal review approach that enhances national ownership and collective sharing of lessons learning. National progress in the end is the responsibility of national leaders and national institutions. National governments would then need to take the leadership for assessing their progress. How can these national experiences be brought together and at which forum are necessary questions that need to be raised and debated upon. An assessment of the MDG experience in this regard would be valuable, and ECOSOC could play a role here as the global forum where lessons can be shared.

Universality will also sharpen the importance of inclusive monitoring of targets using agreed upon, technically sound and credible statistical data and indicators. There is much that can be learnt from the experience in this regard of monitoring the MDG indicators, especially the “necessity of having well-defined, objectively measurable indicators that can be used to track progress across countries and be aggregated to represent regional and global trends.... Investment in country capacities for data collection and reporting will also be extremely important”<sup>15</sup>.

Global progress in the end is the aggregation of national performances. There are some useful lessons to draw upon from the MDG experience. Take the case of Thailand where in a MDG plus framework, specific targets were set for women doubling their share in parliament, and in the civil service by 2006. Or, in a broader context, the challenges posed by a country like China in securing a low carbon development pathway. China has met almost all of the MDGs goals, some many years ahead of the 2015 MDG deadline. Yet out of this unprecedented progress, significant new challenges have emerged: in particular how to balance economic progress with environmental sustainability and how to respond to the threat of climate change. In each of the four interrelated fronts - people, cities, technology and markets - action is needed to decouple economic growth from greenhouse and other polluting emissions. There is much to learn from global experience, and in each area there is scope for knowledge and operational partnerships (China Human Development Report, 2009/10). Can the UNDS be retooled to help in addressing these challenges?

A final but necessary implication is one of adaptation. Global cooperation for a sustainable world has to connect with national needs and aspirations. Global goals and targets therefore have to be adapted to national circumstances and policy options if they are to have much operational

---

<sup>15</sup> Statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda, United Nations, New York, July 2013.

meaning. This was difficult to achieve under the MDGs, since the MDGs were not reflective of national planning processes. Governments would have to reflect on this to determine how best SDG goals can get connected to national policies. Equally, this applies to the need for disaggregated data, to assess SDG impact, in particular for policies eliminating extreme poverty and promoting overall equity in its different dimensions. Thus, the universal monitoring of global progress may need to be buttressed by an approach that enables national governments to take the leadership for assessing their national progress, under the purview of a global body such as ECOSOC, in a manner that promotes both national ownership and the collective sharing of lessons learnt.

#### **IV. Making the UN fit for purpose-the essential functions**

So what could be the main functions of a revamped UN development system in the post-2015 era? We group them around five main themes: overall strategic coherence; integrated country support; dealing with global development opportunities and challenges; monitoring and review, based on enhanced (statistical) data requirements; and, *pour memoire*, the functions of the overview bodies.

##### *Strategic coherence*

The previous sections have emphasised the integrated nature of the SDGs: this represents a major departure from the MDGs. The inter-relationships among the economic, environmental and social factors underpinning sustainable development, with the focus on human security as the ultimate goal of development, presents a striking new challenge to the international community as a whole and to the UN system in particular.

We have earlier suggested that “strategic coherence” will need to be sought at the level of the international system as a whole, whereby the SDGs provide the overall framework for all development-related work for the ensuing period. This in turn will place a renewed emphasis on the capacity of the United Nations, as the custodian of the process and as the sole universal organisation, to review and monitor the achievement of the goals. We have also suggested that the UN support for such coherence will be immeasurably facilitated if its own house is to be seen to be well-designed, efficiently run and effective in obtaining results.

This will require fresh ways at looking at reviewing and monitoring achievement of the goals and very possibly changes in organisational arrangements and in governance that are the subject of separate papers.

##### *Going universal: global development opportunities and challenges*

The universality of the United Nations provides the basis for another important function of the UNDS, namely support for common development opportunities and as a means for addressing global problems requiring a collective response (contributing to global public goods). As argued earlier, this is emerging as an essential function to ensure a more stable global economy and social order. Such collective action is now needed on a much larger scale to ensure that globalization

and its many processes work to improve people's lives, and contagion risks are better managed to reduce vulnerabilities across countries.

As an example of the former (as a new opportunity), we would emphasise support for south-south cooperation. Not only is there renewed need for such cooperation, given the rapidly changing world, it is also emerging as a significant platform for common action. But, so far, actions in this regard have been ad-hoc in nature. The UN can play a large role in furthering and regularising this opportunity. Section II above highlights the significance of recent trends in this regard. The UN system will need to position itself to both adapt itself to changing modalities for development cooperation and to contribute even more effectively to south-south cooperation possibilities.

There is a further dimension as well. The SDGs argue for universal approaches. Many UN Funds and Programmes are constituted to help developing countries. In the foregoing we have tried to argue that the SDGs imply that traditional divisions among countries like developed or developing have less and less significance. Rather, they call for a new effort to define more precisely the specific development challenges faced by different groups of countries, ie LDCs, and to see what measures and support are required for their advancement. As indicated earlier, funds like UNICEF have begun to debate what 'going universal' means for them.

The post-2015 development agenda will be directly affected by the manner in which the international community manages to deal with pressing global challenges, especially the question of climate change. Here again, the UNDS could be called upon to support national and collective responses to such challenges.

#### *Integrated support for countries*

The SDGs are global goals that provide a framework for action at the country level. First and foremost and widely agreed by all is the need to eradicate poverty: this constitutes the overarching objective of the post-2105 development agenda. In addition and as also noted in the December 2014 informal dialogue<sup>16</sup> special focus will need to be given to the requirements of LDCs and the need for a differentiated approach for tackling inequalities in rights and opportunities in middle-income countries.

A further function, also discussed earlier, is the need to assist countries at their request, in the implementation of normative frameworks negotiated globally. Here the more vigorous linking of norms and operations will provide much appreciated value-added to the work of the United Nations at the country level. More generally, upstream policy advocacy is likely to be continually sought by countries in search of neutral advice on sensitive issues from the world Organisation that can draw upon historical and global experiences.

---

<sup>16</sup> Summary note on the ECOSOC Dialogue "The longer-term positioning of the United Nations development system", 15 December 2014

Support for national capacity-building will no doubt continue in the post-2015 era, it being understood of course that the requirements for, and the nature of such support is a direct function of the development circumstances of each country.

Support for the transfer of technology will continue to be sought by a number of countries, particularly those that are not yet fully integrated into global systems of production and other value chains.

Returning to our earlier theme, the challenge for the UNDS will be to render effective synergies among the issue areas so as to provide individual countries with as fully integrated support as possible.

Integration of UNDS service and capacity support raises much need for debate about ‘consolidation’ of functions and institutions. This paper has tried to make an argument that the multifaceted, connected nature of the SDGs ‘demand’ such consolidation. The earlier rounds of UN consolidation were very much driven by the desire for a coherent, more efficient system. The SDGs now provide a compelling substantive reason for this as well.

#### *Data requirements and needs*

A number of observers have commented that the SDGs will entail a minor revolution in the collection and analysis of data in support of both national development policy-making and in the process of review and monitoring. At the same time, some concern has been expressed in ensuring that data needs implicit in the monitoring of SDGs do not outstrip national statistical capacities. As the December Dialogue commented, another function for the UNDS will be the support to strengthening the national statistical capacities. Equally, at the global level, the work of the UN Statistical Commission will need to be increasingly coordinated with other parts of the UNDS. And perhaps with other less official data providers which are already tracking social trends across the world.

#### *The role of the oversight bodies*

Whilst this is a subject for the companion paper on “governance”, we felt it necessary to make a few remarks, from the perspective of “functions” on the role of ECOSOC and the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in carrying their responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the achievement of progress towards the SDGs. We say this because the universal nature of the SDGs provides a fresh challenge to spelling out the functions of the HLPF. It was found necessary to put in place new arrangements for the monitoring and review of the MDGs. This experience can be built upon for the SDGs, albeit with additional measures given the transformative nature of the SDGs, their inter-relationships and their universality.

As part of its oversight responsibilities, ECOSOC and the HLPF will need not only to consider how to integrate the goals but also how to resolve any inconsistencies or conflicts among the goals. These functions are fraught with considerable technical, institutional and political

overtones. We have sought to show how the SDGs constitute a transformative agenda that require for their achievement new national and international development strategies. It is by no means evident that each SDG is achievable without commensurate progress on related SDGs. Slow progress on some will retard others, and vice-versa. Action taken to promote the inter-relationship among the goals and to eliminate obstacles is likely to form an important part of the work of the HLPF.

## V. Conclusions and Summary

The main points in this paper can be summarized thus:

- Since San Francisco 70 years ago, the United Nations has made development one of its major purposes, with considerable achievements in its operational activities and in thinking about the process of development itself. Ideas, standard setting and operations have all contributed, but not always in a thoroughly mutually reinforcing set of synergies.
- The world is facing a combination of challenges that threaten the foundations of the multilateral system: a weak international economic environment, continued financial instabilities, unprecedented movements of peoples and refugees, growing political tensions .... It more than ever needs a legitimate, effective and strong universal organisation.
- There is promise. Based on Rio + 20 and in light of experience with the earlier MDGs, member states have agreed upon a transformative new development agenda based on “inclusive, people-centred sustainable development”. Growth, equity, structural change, full employment, environmental sustainability, financial stability, food security, social inclusiveness, sustainable production and consumption: they are all present in the SDGs. And the agenda and the goals are to be universal, the first time in the United Nations that all members are accepting a shared but differentiated responsibility for the development of all peoples and all countries.
- There is thus both a tremendous need for, and an unchallenged opportunity to bring about, a UN “fit for purpose”.
- So what is to be done? The SDGs will affect the longer-term functions of the UN and development in several ways, namely overall strategic coherence; integrated country support; dealing with global development opportunities and challenges; monitoring and review, based on enhanced (statistical) data requirements; and the responsibilities of the overview bodies.
  - ✓ The SDGs are inter-related and mutually dependent. The achievement of some will affect the achievement of others. The multilateral system – the UN, its agencies, the BWIs, WTO and others are constituted on the basis of a functional approach to global governance based on institutional distinctiveness. The SDGs call for much tighter global policy coherence, or “*coherent pluralism*”.
  - ✓ The UN and its system of agencies, funds and programmes have themselves to ensure that they fully contribute to such coherence through integrated country support. This probably requires a selective “*strategic consolidation*” of functions,

based around the following key objectives: the eradication of poverty; the requirements of LDCs; the mitigation of inequalities; the support for national capacity-building, for the transfer of technologies and for south-south cooperation.

✓ The SDGs are the new global norms for development: they are the new policy framework for UN operations. And more generally, operations have to be more robustly connected and based on UN promulgated norms and standards.

✓ Universality – a global common good – is based on a “shared responsibility for a shared future” in which all members accept to be held accountable for meeting their mutually agreed obligations both individually and collectively. Universalisation will also facilitate ways and means of solving global problems requiring collective action.

✓ Based on the experience of monitoring the MDG targets, the SDGs will require special arrangements to ensure the timely availability of inclusive, technically sound and credible statistical data and indicators to measure progress. Country capacities will require commensurate strengthening.

PLEASE INSERT HERE ANNEX I

## **Bibliography**

United Nations: Human Development Reports, various years, but especially 2013 and 2014, UNDP, New York.

United Nations: Measures for the Economic Development of Under-developed Countries, UN, New York, 1951  
United Nations: Report of the High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence, A/61/583, 20 November 2006.

United Nations: The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet, Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda, UN, New York, December 2014.

United Nations: Statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda, United Nations, New York, July 2013.

United Nations: Trade and Development Report, 1981-2011: Three Decades of Thinking Development, UNCTAD, Geneva and New York, 2012.

Bruce Jenks and Bruce Jones: UN Development at a Crossroads, New York University, August 2013.

Stephen Browne and Thomas G Weiss (eds): Post 2015 UN Development: Making change happen? Routledge, 2014.

John Burley and Stephen Brown: The United Nations and Development: From the origins to current challenges, in *Wartime Origins and the Future United Nations*, Dan Plesch and Thomas G Weiss (eds), Routledge, 2015.

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, *The UN development strategy for transformative change beyond 2015*, ECOSOC, 2013.

Mahbub-ul-Haq *Reflections on Human Development*, OUP, 1995.

Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij and Thomas G Weiss: *UN Ideas that Changed the World*, UNIHP, 2009.

Amartya Sen: *Development as Freedom*, 1999.

Amartya Sen: *The Ends and Means of Sustainability*, *Journal of HD and Capabilities*, Vol 14, 2013.