

GOVERNANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

1. This paper is an independent expert input to the 2015 ECOSOC Dialogue process. Its purpose is to inform Member State deliberations around the question of governance of the United Nations Development System (UNDS).
2. As both a guiding principle and a primary constraint, this paper draws on the century-old observation that “it is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, ... that form ever follows function.”¹
3. At the United Nations Summit in September, Member States will lay out a common vision for sustainable development over the next 15 years. Shortly thereafter, they will determine what role they envision for the UNDS in supporting their efforts. Once made, these determinations cannot be second-guessed and the best governance structure will be that which most effectively helps the United Nations to take on the tasks articulated by Member States – one where form follows function.
4. Nonetheless, in ongoing discussions around the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), Member States have detailed the need to review the composition, role, and working methods of the UNDS’s governance structures.² They have also stressed the need to ground any reforms in country and regional experiences, to reflect funding realities, and to avoid a governance architecture that carries heavy transaction costs.
5. Against the background of these bold Member State requests, this paper seeks to identify lessons from the complex history of UNDS governance. It then examines drivers of change emerging from the post-2015 process, as well as from broader shifts in the world. Based on these, it raises a number of questions for Member State consideration.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNDS GOVERNANCE

6. The comprehensive history of the governance of the UNDS cannot be captured in this short paper – it would require a book or two. Instead, this paper provides a narrative summarizing key developments, dividing this history into three phases, and trying to identify the key implications of each phase for the

governance structures. By necessity it elides a series of politically complicated decisions, and complex divergences of opinions among Member States as to the role of development as a whole, and of the United Nations in development.

7. Phase I – 1945-50s: The initial design of the UN system was driven by ideas of functionalism, where each organization would be supported by its own constituency, i.e. those countries engaged in the area of its work. The governance structures, mirroring this, were therefore also functionalist and decentralized.³ At the core of this concept was preserving the organizational autonomy of individual agencies – particularly those that predated the establishment of the United Nations – while avoiding overarching ‘political’ considerations of management and direction.⁴
8. This approach led to a system characterized by:
 - a. A proliferation of independent governance entities;⁵
 - b. A centralized coordination system that relied on consultations and moral persuasion to influence independent governing bodies.⁶
9. It has been said that the complex architecture that arose from this compartmentalization and fragmentation of the constituent elements “are the two main legacies that beleaguer the UNDS today.”⁷ Indeed the first independent progress report on the United Nations, written in 1947, worried that: “[t]he rapid spawning of international organizations...and the like...has produced a perfect “rash” of meetings; and there is not enough experienced high-level personnel, either governmental or staff, to go around.” This report went on to depict the United Nations family as a “largely unsystematic sprouting of machinery, multi-level and highly complicated as to structure,”⁸ a description that resonates to this day.
10. Phase II – 1960s-80s: This period saw a significant shift in the UN development agenda from a vision of international leadership to one of service to Member States. In 1965, the Expanded Programme on Technical Assistance and the Special Fund were consolidated to create the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which was cast as the “main financing, coordinating, and controlling body for the UN’s operational development tasks.”⁹ The UNDP reported to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) twice a year via its 37-member Governing Council, responsible for considering and approving projects, allocating funds, and offering general policy guidance. Member States in this period began to articulate their own development priorities – with the UNDP, in particular, playing an advisory

role in helping Member States to identify priorities – and development agencies responded to those needs.¹⁰

11. The theory was for ECOSOC to become a central forum for global priority-setting on economic questions. However, as specialized agencies, funds, and programmes proliferated in response to Member States channeling specific projects through the UN, there was little interest in centralization.¹¹ The growth in demand for services from the UNDS led to the UNDP Governing Council commissioning a major review of the UNDS and the future of the UNDP in 1969. The resulting *Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System* has maintained a reputation for its accuracy and forthright language to this day. It observed that the “headquarters”-level of the UNDS lacked a “headpiece” that exercised effective control. It went on to suggest that “governments do not [control the system], and also that the machine is incapable of intelligently controlling itself....It is becoming slower and more unwieldy, like some prehistoric monster.”¹²
12. Responding to the critiques of the Capacity Review and other studies, the UNDS embraced a process of devolution, delegating control of programmes and funds to field offices. Recipient countries took on progressively more responsibility in program planning and execution. By 1981, the Governing Council requested that the UNDP Administrator “give full consideration... to implementation of UN Development Programme assistance by the host Governments.”¹³ The Governing Council formally retained sole authority to approve projects, but delegated that power to the Administrator for three years, specifying that he or she in turn delegate to resident representatives “to the maximum extent feasible.”¹⁴ The General Assembly (GA) also enlarged the UNDP Governing Council from 37 to 48 members in 1971, with 27 seats allocated to developing countries.¹⁵
13. In essence, this period could be characterized by:
 - a. Continued weak coordination through ECOSOC;
 - b. Early evidence of tangled lines of control and accountability, and overlapping tasks and mandates;
 - c. Increased concern over Member State representation as opposed to constituency-based governance;
 - d. The beginning of a move to field-driven governance, and delegation of greater authority to management.

14. Phase III – 1990s through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): A 1991 review of the UNDS as a whole echoed the findings of 1947 and 1969, observing that, *“at the highest level....there is no body to give effective high-level guidance and cohesion to the executive organs of the UN’s operational activities [with] these functions ... delegated to an array of councils and boards that deal separately with each organization under their authority.”*¹⁶

15. In December 1993, the GA resolved to transform the governing bodies of UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF (and later WFP) into Executive Boards of 36 members each. These were to be elected by ECOSOC, with executive heads of each programme appointed by the Secretary-General following consultation with the Boards and confirmation by the General Assembly.¹⁷ The Executive Boards were established, in part, from recognition of the need for distinct governance of operational activities, as opposed to a more normative role for the GA. The composition of these Boards reflected the funding architecture of the UNDS at this time – with the dominance of Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors. This had a significant effect on ECOSOC’s ability to steer the system, and arguably “further diluted the ability of ECOSOC to exercise any real authority.”¹⁸

16. Over time, these boards began to meet informally to enhance communication and coordination. In 1997, a General Assembly resolution (A/RES/51/12) formally requested that ECOSOC consider arrangements for closer integration of the governance of oversight over UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF, with consecutive and/or joint informal meetings of the Executive Boards.¹⁹ This effort has since been extended to meetings of UNOPS, WFP, and to the recently established UN-Women.²⁰ However, the physical dispersion of the Executive Boards, with seats of different entities in 15 different countries, has made even this level of informal coordination harder.²¹

17. The shift towards devolution, decentralization, and national execution accelerated, changing the relationship between UNDP and the sector-based specialized agencies, which in the late 1980s had executed 80% of UNDP's programme resources.²² By 1997, that number decreased to 6%, reducing UNDP’s coordinating leverage at both the country and global levels, and thus reducing the influence of ECOSOC on policy coordination.

18. Meanwhile, a series of global conferences throughout the 1990s resulted in the emergence of a new common development agenda. The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, the 1995 UN World Summit for Social Development, and the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995,

among others, inserted other elements of social and human development into the agenda, and began to explore the links to the environment, building on the Brundtland Report.²³ By the 2000 Millennium Summit, a trend could be observed: these conferences represented significant attempts to clearly define global goals and objectives, a radical departure from the previous paradigm that had dominated thinking about development cooperation.²⁴

19. At the same time, the nature of UNDP's financing changed. The share of voluntary contributions shifted from 86% of UNDP's total income in 1987 to 48% in 1997,²⁵ and the corresponding increase of trust-funds and cost-sharing projects "undermined a unified, strategic vision", further limiting the scope for HQ-based governance.²⁶ Continued declines in core funding contributed to further institutional reform: the five-year programming period shortened to a three-year cycle by 1997. Headquarters staffing shrank significantly, with staff moved to regional or country assignments. UNDP also assumed a more prominent role in public policy and management – moving the work "upstream."²⁷ In 1997, in partial response to these shifts, the Secretary-General established the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), chaired by the UNDP Administrator, as an internal development consortium – as a management tool, with no formal relationship to the governing bodies.

20. The formulation of the MDGs on the basis of commitments made at the Millennium Summit gave new life to the UNDS and the UNDG Chair spearheaded a campaign focused on "national goal-setting and building capacity for monitoring, reporting, and advocacy" of the MDGs.²⁸ It has since been argued that the very nature of the MDGs as the development paradigm has contributed to the incoherence of the UNDS as it "seems to have encouraged a pick-and-choose approach among the eight goals," leading donors to earmark funds. That is, the MDGs continued to follow the "'functionalist' logic of compartmentalizing development challenges in different functional sectors and associated target groups."²⁹

21. The UNDS responded to this fragmentation by strengthening coordination at the country-level and developing common programming frameworks under greater national leadership.³⁰ The 2005 World Summit raised concerns about management and coordination of UN country presences, leading to the creation of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence and its report, 'Delivering as One,' in 2006. The concept of One United Nations at country-level was explicitly focused on improving performance at the country-level – and did not significantly focus on global coherence.³¹

22. Another evolution in this phase was the emergence of vertical or multi-stakeholder trust funds, such as the Global Fund and the Vaccine Alliance (GAVI). These bodies, while multi-lateral in their nature, reside outside the UN system, though they are key partners for the UNDS in many countries. These parallel, problem-oriented solutions raise questions for the UNDS: how will it manage its relationships to these entities? Is there a different layer of role that is neither norm-setting, nor operational, but about nudging and influencing? What is the appropriate governance relationship to these functions? They also, in part, represent a return to the original, constituency-based vision of the UNDS.

23. This phase of governance was marked by six key factors:

- a. The continued dilution of ECOSOC's coordinating role, and the shift towards informally linked Executive Boards;
- b. The continuing decentralization of development activities, and the focus on field capacities for management, as they aligned in support of national governments and priorities;
- c. An increased policy/normative role for the UNDS, particularly in supporting global goals and objectives, coupled with some tension within the governance system as to its role in monitoring progress towards goals vs. monitoring operational activities;
- d. The relative decline of core funding to project funding;
- e. Continued concern over Member State representation issues;
- f. The emergence of the UNDG as an internal attempt to strengthen coordination.³²

UNDS GOVERNANCE TODAY: KEY LESSONS

24. A detailed description of the current governance structure of the UNDS would exceed the scope of this paper – which in itself is telling.³³ The key elements are captured in Box 1. The governance architecture itself reflects the history summarized above, and three key principles that run through this history:

- a. Representation as a proxy for legitimacy: The pathway for governance of the elements of the UNDS has been towards ever-greater Member State representation on governing authorities. This is also reflected by continuing calls by Member States for greater representation – often at the expense of other reforms, and certainly at the expense of a constituency-based model.
- b. Devolution as a natural evolution: As the role of the UN in development began to align more closely with support to national structures, more actual decisions (but not necessarily formal decision-making authority) have devolved to the field. This has been mirrored by the shift in

financing towards project-funding – essentially meaning that the money also flows through country-level structures.

- c. Tacit acceptance of the limitations of system-wide governance: The story of the last 70 years is a story of various structures being created to respond to system-wide challenges, and, eventually, recognizing their limitations and being re-tooled. There is no particular evidence that the system, although on its face rational, actually provides system-wide governance.

Illustrations of this include the following:

- i. The Commission for Sustainable Development saw its role to serve as the UN hub for coordination on sustainable development undermined by being “ineffective, buried in delegation chains within the UN bureaucracy, and lacking implementation prerogatives or a financing mechanism” and has since been replaced by the High-level Political Forum (HLPF).³⁴
- ii. No governing body of any UN development entity formally assesses programmes against QCPR implementation.
- iii. Coordination features in the system are essentially voluntary and often struggle to be adequately resourced for them to be effective. The UNDG is neither a legal nor formally accountable entity. Most of these bodies operate on the basis of consensus, resulting in a lowest common denominator approach, rather than effective prioritization.³⁵

BOX 1: KEY ELEMENTS OF THE CURRENT UNDS GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

System-wide elements:

- ❖ The General Assembly through the QCPR establishes system-wide policy orientations;
- ❖ The HLPF, a new and so far largely untested body which replaced the Commission on Sustainable Development in 2013, is in theory a one-stop shop for overseeing sustainable development;¹
- ❖ ECOSOC provides coordination and guidance to the UNDS, including monitoring the implementation of the QCPR, primarily through its Operational Activities segment. Its integration segment is also supposed to play a role in providing coherence to sustainable development.

Agency-specific elements:

- ❖ Executive Boards of funds and programmes provide inter-governmental oversight, including ensuring that activities are consistent with GA and ECOSOC policy guidance, and Charter responsibilities;
- ❖ Specialized Agencies maintain their own governing boards.

Country-level:

- ❖ The UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) establishes priorities for UN support to governments; these are formally approved by Executive Boards for the funds and programmes, though rarely for the specialized agencies.

25. Of course, in many ways the fragmentation and coherence deficit in the governance of the UN system reflects a coherence deficit within and among Member State governments, which are represented in different governance bodies through representatives of different national ministries (e.g. environment, development, health, and foreign affairs) pursuing different, and sometimes difficult to reconcile, agendas.
26. The fragmented nature of the governance architecture, and of the UNDS itself, makes assessing performance an impossible task. A recent investigation of UNDS performance in fragile states – one key area of work and spending – observed that a “weak culture of self-evaluation in the UN development agencies combines with utter incoherence in donor-led evaluation work to result in a scattershot of episodic, non-comparable project level evaluations that provide no basis for broader assessment of agency performance or country-by-country performance.”³⁶ If this is the case in one particular area, it is unclear how governance can begin to assess the performance of the system as a whole.
27. If the performance of the system that is being governed cannot be assessed, the performance of governance structures cannot be assessed either – except by identifying elements where better performance would be an indicator of improved governance. Three areas stand out, where opportunities exist to improve the effectiveness of governance, and thereby improve the system itself:
- a. Improved accountability: One of the first tasks of any governance structure is to ensure that it has both adequate information to assess performance, and adequate capacities to understand the information. As noted above, there is a lack of useful information on system-wide performance that would enable Member States to hold the UNDS to account.
 - i. *Expertise*: It is noteworthy in this regard that the type of expertise on the key development issues required for such accountability is rarely a priority for the careers of foreign ministry staff who populate the UNDS’s governance structures. The prevalence of “generalists” reduces the likelihood of merit-based discussion of substantive issues. This contrasts with the Bretton Woods institutions, which prioritize the importance of specialist capacities to enable oversight. Indeed, a recent review of the IMF governance structure suggested that “A two-year election term for an Executive Director is probably too short to master the complexities of policies (and decision making).”³⁷ This is with full-time executive directors dedicated to governance – a luxury unavailable to UN

Executive Boards. The complexity of the emerging post-2015 framework is only likely to demand a deeper understanding from individuals in the governance structures.

- ii. *Mechanisms*: A traditional board might remove a non-performing Chief Executive Officer. While this type of mechanism might not be appropriate for the UNDS, strengthened mechanisms for accountability would help Member States hold the system accountable and help the UNDS understand the parameters for assessing its performance.
- b. Clarity on roles and responsibilities: The governance structure of the UNDS could benefit from clear and consistent statements of roles, responsibilities, and accountability, across all levels of purpose and functions.³⁸ This includes clarity on the differing roles of national-level structures (e.g. the Resident Coordinator System) and the functions of review and allocation of resources. It should also be driven by an impartial assessment of effectiveness. While there are many reasons for clarity, three drivers stand out:
- i. *Identifying what works and what does not*: It remains an open question as to whether weak implementation of system-wide mandates derives from the organizational structure, the governance mechanisms, or a lack of Member States or UNDS will to ensure implementation. Given the size and complexity of the UNDS, absolute clarity of process is a pre-requisite to identifying where problems occur. An example of this is risk-management. The UNDS should be able to manage both financial and mission risk. The evidence from both the financial crisis and the struggle to respond to Ebola suggests that such risks are not adequately planned for or managed. Clarity would help Member States to understand both the obligations and opportunities for governance structures to drive better risk management.
 - ii. *Making governance more efficient*: Definitions of roles would help to identify areas of duplication. This should ideally ensure that careful cost/benefit analysis is undertaken. For example, the value-add of the informal meetings of the Executive Boards is not clear; articulating the desired results would help Member States to assess whether these meetings are worthwhile. This is also linked to the overall question of cost-effectiveness. Unfortunately, there is no formal mechanism to break out the costs of servicing the governance structures of the UNDS. Recent estimates suggest that the cost of servicing the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women, and WFP runs between \$30-35 million per year; extrapolations suggest that the total governance cost may reach \$100 million per year.³⁹

- iii. *Managing the global/local tension:* Member States have articulated a desire for stronger resident coordinators, more able to cohere the system at the country level. At the same time, Member States are calling for greater global oversight. While these two principles are often placed in opposition, they can be reconciled. Clarity on where allocation decisions are made, and what strategic directions mean at the country level is necessary; again here, the principle of form following function will be critical and the right division of labour should be driven by the functions required of the UNDS.
- c. Integrity: The governance structure bears significant responsibility for ensuring the ethical performance of the organization – again, a special responsibility for the United Nations. It has been said that the culture of an organization is determined by the worst behavior that is tolerated by the governance structure. Given this, the “revolving door” relationship between senior Member State officials, particularly in New York, and senior appointments, may be seen as questionable.

28. Taking advantage of these opportunities might help to improve the performance of the UNDS against the demands placed on it today. But the reason for this discussion is that the terrain in which the UNDS is operating has changed rapidly. Two particular factors are already present and drive the need for change in UNDS governance structures:

- a. The significant increase in the number of Member States, and the changes in global economic and power distributions that affect the legitimacy of representation.
- b. The proliferation of non-UN actors working in development, including the private sector, foundations, actors from newly industrialized and industrializing countries, and the global explosion of civil society actors.

29. These are not changes that we see emerging; rather, they have already happened. However, their effects and depth are steadily increased and the governance architecture of the UNDS has not yet adapted to reflect these. Yet perhaps the most profound need for change will be to reflect the post-2015 framework.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE: IMPLICATIONS OF THE POST-2015 AGENDA

30. It is certain that the post-2015 development agenda will change the UNDS, but the question is how. It is already clear that addressing sustainability represents a different order of task for the UNDS. Indeed,

as one of the few papers to analyze the question of governance in the post-2015 context has argued: “the SDG agenda demands an evaluation of the acceptable bounds of natural, human and human-produced capital...SDG governance architecture is not simply a realm of harmonizing interests in pursuit of coordination. It is also going to require a serious engagement with politics and power.”⁴⁰

31. The difficulty of such an engagement is reflected in earlier failures to incorporate sustainability into the UN’s structures, particularly around the 2007 Panel on System-wide Coherence. At the time, it was noted that, “no appetite is detectable among Member States to pursue the Environment in the inter-governmental consultations on System-wide Coherence which we currently chair.”⁴¹ And while Rio+20 and the outputs of the Open Working Group (OWG) represent a recognition of the importance of sustainability as a concept, it is not clear what role Member States foresee for the UNDS. There are a number of tensions that are likely to challenge the governance structures, whatever the final vision of Member States may be:

- a. The tension between the global and the local: This is already a challenge as Member States call for both greater field-level decision-making and greater scrutiny. Yet, as a recent network analysis of the Open Working Group (OWG) goals identified, the most “networked” or linked targets are those around ensuring sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12) and reducing inequality (Goal 10).⁴² Addressing these issues will require concerted efforts at the country level as well as robust global frameworks and agreements. How will the UNDS governance structure respond?
- b. A new role/new norms: Related to the global/local tension, the increasing role of new actors, and the emergence of new institutional forms, such as vertical funds, the governance architecture will have to identify what its role is in setting norms, and in propagating standards and goals to other bodies. In particular, it will have to reflect on how, in areas where the UN has limited direct influence, it should (or should not) play a role.
- c. Managing new, universal models of engagement: The role of the UNDS will have to vary widely within different contexts if the post-2015 agenda is to be truly universal. A particular challenge will be identifying an appropriate role in middle-income countries, and finding a governance mechanism that can support this engagement. Cross-border work, from regional approaches, to South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation will all demand appropriate regimes of governance.

32. Here again, decisions should be based on the principle of form following function: Member States must define the functions, and then build a governance structure that enables the UNDS to perform those functions.

33. Two other key factors are emerging from the post-2015 debate:

- a. The easy wins have already been won: The call for no one to be left behind stems from the recognition that people have been left behind by the tremendous development gains of the last few decades. Yet serious analytical work by The Brookings Institution has identified that the countries with elevated poverty rates and poor records of progress on poverty reduction – countries that host the majority of the world’s remaining poor – *“face one or more structural challenges to inclusive growth: they are small or land-locked, have bad neighbors, are disaster- or disease- prone or have a record of bad governance or conflict.”*⁴³ The authors, who include the research director for the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, identify that “getting to zero poverty by 2030 requires that each of these countries defies its circumstances and, in some cases, match or better the fastest recorded poverty reduction trajectories from history.”

For the UNDS to deliver against these circumstances will require an effective, skilled, and well-governed system. It will also require the system to manage the tension between championing both global best practices and locally appropriate solutions, while operating at a convincing scale. This will require the governance architecture to resolve the tensions between the global and the local, and to find a way to support the system to manage challenges – such as the effects of climate change – that have tremendous local impacts, but require global solutions.

- b. The declining role of the UN in development: The elephant in the room is that the UN simply matters less than it used to in development. This is a function of scale – the relative amounts of resources available through ODA are simply a small fraction of other resource flows – whether through FDI, remittances, or even portfolio equity flows.⁴⁴ The percentage of ODA flowing through the UN system, once humanitarian assistance is removed, is also declining in absolute terms and declining relative to the international financial institutions, Regional Development Banks, and non-UN (or UN-controlled) bodies, including emerging ones such as the new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. At the same time, the role of the UN as a whole and the UNDS

appears to be concentrating in a particular set of contexts – in the face of fragility and conflict – where the role of the UNDS may be more important than ever.

This raises serious governance questions. If the UNDS, for the majority of countries, is to move from a role of programming to a role of partnerships and leveraging private flows, it will require a mechanism for relations with new actors – the private sector, foundations, capital flows, and even individuals. The struggle over the partnerships facility in New York highlights the absence of Member State consensus on how to address this issue. Yet there will also be a need for a different model of governance operating in states where the UNDS plays a significant operational role.

34. The implications of all of the above are impossible to diagnose in a single paper. There are clearly multiple models for the roles that the UNDS may play, and based on each model, the most effective governance structure might require organization around themes, around regions, or by a typology of intervention context. It might be possible to envisage a separate governance structure for the UNDS's work in fragile states (perhaps even through the Peacebuilding Commission), as opposed to its role in knowledge and policy work, and supporting South-South cooperation in middle-income countries. It may even transpire that the idea of a single UN Development System is not particularly useful.
35. Several ideas have been floating around New York, including a supra-agency system, the evolution of the Chief Executives Board (CEB), stronger regional coordination mechanisms, and others. One, a combination, or all of these ideas may represent a better structure. The right answer will probably need system-wide elements, agency-specific elements, and country-specific elements. It must provide greater clarity on what governments are accountable for, and what the management of the UNDS should be measured against. But there is no question that there is a need for a better answer than is provided by the system in place today – an answer that helps the United Nations to best support the people that it serves, and is carefully constructed based on a shared understanding of functions, roles and responsibilities.

DISCUSSION

36. To arrive at this destination from the current architecture, Member States will need to address both the opportunities and the challenges identified above. A robust process will need to investigate a number of governance models. Any such investigation could benefit from clear statements of:

- a. The expected outputs of a governance regime, clearly differentiated by levels and entities (e.g. what should happen as a result of governance decisions);
- b. For any given level of a governance structure, the advantage of a particular model of governance. This includes explicit considerations of the differences between decisions made by inter-governmental bodies; decisions made by multi-stakeholder groupings, which may operate at the global, regional, or local level, and include non-state actors such as foundations and the private sector; and, decisions made by national governments working with their development partners. This should also include careful consideration of the criteria for membership of each level – who should be at the table for the most effective outcomes?

37. There are a wide variety of possible entry points into these discussions. Many of the actions of the UNDS take place on a series of continua – from the technical to the policy; from the national to the global; from the operational to the normative – and Member States could try and determine where along these continua governance interventions could best improve performance. Another model might be to try and determine, for each area of the SDGs, whether there is a natural grouping of UNDS actors that could form a distinct structure for response.

38. But the principal argument of this paper is that the governance architecture is more a function of its own peculiar history than it is a response to the tasks of the system it governs. This suggests that Member State discussions may, painfully, need to begin at first principles – with a clear understanding of the functions of the UNDS and the desired functions of its governance architecture. And from there, a useful model might be built. The scope of the challenge posed by the post-2015 agenda suggests that this will be a significant departure from where we are today.

39. In order to begin these discussions, Member States may wish to consider the following questions:

- ❖ *What are the new functions that the SDGs will require of the governance of the UNDS? Can these functions be performed through incremental changes to the system, or is a fundamental re-think required?*
- ❖ *Do Member States envisage an increasing or decreasing operational role for the UNDS? Is this different from the normative role they desire for the UNDS? What is the impact of this on governance? How will the governance architecture reconcile its role in norm setting at the global level with the continued need for highly localized programming?*

- ❖ *How does the governance architecture manage partnerships? How do Member States foresee its role in ‘leveraging’ – where the UNDS is working with external sources of financing, but trying to achieve common goals?*
- ❖ *What is the role of the UNDS governance structure in evidence-based policy making? What are the capacities that the system requires to effectively fulfill such functions if desired?*
- ❖ *What are Member States willing to pay for governance? How much should it cost?*
- ❖ *How does an effective governance system ensure adequate oversight and accountability without getting overly involved in management? What should the inter-governmental process never do, and what should never happen without inter-governmental approval?*
- ❖ *Given the answers to these questions, what is the right basis for representation? Is there a tension between representation and effectiveness? Given the response to this, does the UNDS system derive more legitimacy in this new era from greater representation, or from greater effectiveness?*

40. Member States, in their January 2015 discussions on this issue, have begun to recognize the extent of the challenge and the need for change in governance, but also emphasized that such changes should be pursued through a common vision and consensus. Arriving at consensus will be difficult. But accord amongst the Member States is an absolute necessity. Without a common vision, implementing necessary reforms and addressing the urgent challenge of sustainable development will remain simply rhetoric.

ENDNOTES

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⁹ Klingebiel, Stephan, "Effectiveness and Reform of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)." Frank Cass, London/Portland, Oregon, 1999, p. 3.

¹⁰ Jenks and Jones, 2013, p. 5.

¹¹ Messner, Dirk et al., "Governance Reform of the Bretton Woods Institutions and the UN Development System." *Dialogue on Globalization, Occasional Papers No. 18*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, May 2005, p. 23.

¹² United Nations, "A Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System." Geneva, 1969, commonly referred to as the "Jackson Report."

¹³ Decision 81/21, para. 1a available at:

<http://web.undp.org/execbrd/archives/gcdecisions/UNDP%20GC%20Decisions%2028th%20Session%20TEXT%20Jun%2081.pdf>

¹⁴ E/4884/ Rev.1, Annex, para. 20

¹⁵ A/RES/2813 [XXVI]

¹⁶ Nordic Project, 1991,

¹⁷ A/RES/48/162

¹⁸ Jenks & Jones, 2013, p. 120

¹⁹ A/RES/52/12, para. 12.

²⁰ Helgason, Kristinn Sv. & Mahn, Timo, "Governance of United Nations Development: Recharging multilateral cooperation for the post-2015 era." 2014, p. 9

²¹ Browne, Stephen and Weiss, Thomas G., "Making change happen: enhancing the UN's contribution to development." World Federation of United Nations Associations/Ralph Bunche Institute, 2012, p. 5. The list of countries and locations is: Austria (UNODC, UNIDO, IAEA, Commission for Narcotic Drugs, Commission for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice), Canada (ICAO), Chile (ECLAC), Denmark (UNOPS), Ethiopia (ECA), France (UNESCO), Italy (WFP, FAO, IFAD), Japan (UNU), Kenya (UNEP, UN-HABITAT), Lebanon (ESCWA), Spain (UNWTO), Switzerland

(UNCTAD, ITC, UNAIDS, ECE, ILO, WHO, ITU, WMO, WIPO, UNITAR, UNICRI, UNIDIR, UNRISD, Commission for Science and Technology for Development, UPU), Thailand (ESCAP), UK (IMO), United States (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN-Women, UNDESA, Sustainable Development Commission, Status of Women, Population and Development, Social Development, Statistics, UN Forum on Forests).

²² UNDP Evaluation Office Report, 2013, Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Poverty Reduction, p. 19, 20

²³ “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future.”

<http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>.

²⁴ Jenks and Jones, 2013, p. 27.

²⁵ Stokke, Olav, “The UN and Development: From Aid to Cooperation.” United Nations Intellectual History Project Series, Indiana University Press, 2009, p. 373.

²⁶ Murphy, Craig N., “The United Nations Development Programme: A Better Way?” Cambridge, 2006, p. 295.

²⁷ Coleman, David, and Jones, Phillip W., “The United Nations and Education: Multilateralism, Development and Globalisation.” Routledge, 2004, p. 209.

²⁸ Stokke 2009, p. 461.

²⁹ Wennubst and Mahn, 2013, p. 18

³⁰ Wennubst and Mahn, 2013, p. 19; Jenks and Jones, 2013, p. 35.

³¹ Jenks and Jones, 2013, p. 28.

³² Stokke, 2009, p. 403

³³ For a more exhaustive description, please see Helgason 2014, op. cit., pp. 7-14.

³⁴ Dasandi, Nibeer et al., “Post-2105 Development Agenda Setting in Focus: Governance and Institutions” forthcoming in J. Waaage & C. Yap, *Thinking Beyond Sectors for Sustainable Development* (London: Ubiquity Press, forthcoming 2015).

³⁵ Again, for a more in-depth discussion across these points, please see Helgason 2014; Jenks and Jones, 2013; and Dasandi et al., 2015.

³⁶ Jones, Bruce and Tortolani, Benjamin “Deep dive on fragile states.” Center on International Cooperation, New York, NY 2012.

³⁷ Governance of the IMF: Decision Making, Institutional Oversight, Transparency, and Accountability, Leo van Houtven 2002, IMF Pamphlet No 53, Washington, DC. 2002. P.16

³⁸ This problem made writing this paper a significant challenge. To assess governance performance, within the constraints already identified, this paper drew on the draft framework propagated by the International Federation of Accountants and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, “Good Governance in the Public Sector— Consultation Draft for an International Framework accessed at

<http://www.ifac.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Good-Governance-in-the-Public-Sector.pdf>

³⁹ Helgason 2014, p. 50.

⁴⁰ Dasandi et al., p. 10

⁴¹ Wilkins, Hugh. “The Integration of the Pillars of Sustainable Development: A Work in Progress” accessed at https://www.mcgill.ca/jsdlp/files/jsdlp/4_2_3_wilkins_2.pdf

⁴² LeBlanc, David. “Towards integration at last? The sustainable development goals as a network of targets” DESA Working Paper No. 141; ST/ESA/2015/DWP/141.

⁴³ <http://www.usaid.gov/frontiers/2014/publication/section-1-last-mile-ending-extreme-poverty>. For more information on the Last Mile project, please see <http://www.brookings.edu/research/books/2014/the-last-mile-in-ending-extreme-poverty>

⁴⁴ Jenks and Jones 2013, p. 14.