

Discussion Note

**Strengthening governance of operational
activities for development of the United
Nations system for enhanced system-wide
coherence**

United Nations Secretariat
New York

15 April 2009

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List of acronyms

ACC	Administrative Committee on Coordination
AMR	Annual Ministerial Review
BWIs	Bretton Woods Institutions
CCA	Common Country Assessment
CEB	Chief Executives Board (for Coordination)
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCF	Development Cooperation Forum
DaO	Delivering-as-One
DOCO	Development Operations Coordination Office
ECESA	Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs
ECHA	Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ECPS	Executive Committee on Peace and Security
EMG	Environment Management Group
EPTA	Expanded Programme for Technical Assistance
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
GA	General Assembly
HLCM	High-level Committee on Management
HLCF	High-level Committee on Programmes
HLS	High-level Segment
IADGs	Internationally agreed development goals
IASC	Inter-agency Standing Committee
ICGFI	International Consultative Group on Food Irradiation
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NRA	Non-resident agency
OAS	Operational Activities Segment
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCM	Regional Coordination Mechanism
RDT	Regional Directors Team
SF	Special Fund
SG	Secretary-General
TCPR	Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High-Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UPOV	International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants
UPU	Universal Postal Union
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

A. Introduction

1. The current note has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 62/277 on System-wide Coherence, adopted by consensus on 15 September 2008, which requested the Secretary-General "drawing on the resources and expertise of the United Nations system and building on the outcome of [the] triennial comprehensive policy review, to provide to Member States substantive papers on the issues of funding and governance, as these issues arise in the context of system-wide coherence, with a view to facilitating substantive action by the General Assembly". The present note focuses on the issue of governance.¹

2. Member States have engaged in extensive informal consultations on United Nations (UN) system-wide coherence during the 61st and 62nd sessions of the General Assembly (GA). There has been broad consensus that further strengthening of governance of UN operational activities for development should be guided by the following principles:

- ❖ Governance at the global-level should be fully supportive of nationally-owned development strategies at the country-level;
- ❖ The comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development is an effective legislative framework within which the GA establishes key system-wide policy orientations for the development cooperation and country-level modalities of the UN system;
- ❖ Changes to governance structures should focus on strengthening existing intergovernmental bodies such as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the governing bodies of UN entities;
- ❖ Governance structures should more fully contribute to greater efficiency in the delivery of operational activities for development of the UN system at the country-level;
- ❖ Intergovernmental oversight should promote enhanced development effectiveness at the country-level and full access of programme countries to UN resources, including those of specialized and non-resident agencies and regional-level entities;
- ❖ Strengthening governance of operational activities for development of the UN system should advance collaboration and coordination between the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) and the rest of the UN system;
- ❖ Strengthening the effectiveness of the governance system is inseparably linked to the funding of UN operational activities for development.

3. This consensus has guided the formulation of the recommendations presented later on ways to further strengthen governance of UN operational activities for development for enhanced system-wide coherence.

¹ This note should be read in conjunction with a separate paper on funding, which is closely related.

B. Background

Functional approach applied to the design of the UN system

4. Many of the "coherence" problems which have arisen can be traced back to the founding of the organization. A functional approach, rather than a federalist one, was seen as more responsive to the needs of Member States in different thematic or sectoral areas. Consequently, the UN system came to be organized around independent specialized agencies, whose relationship with ECOSOC was established by set of formal agreements. The relationship came to be contractual rather than hierarchical with new organizations, each with a distinct identity and not fitting a preconceived model, created as needs arose.²

5. In the early years, however, the UN system rarely engaged in operational activities for development. Neither did the predecessors of several of the current specialized agencies, which were established prior to the creation of the UN.³ UNICEF was created in December 1946 by the GA to provide food, clothing and health care to children. It was in 1948 that the GA, in resolution 200 (III), "authorized technical assistance to be carried out by the Secretary-General of the UN, in addition to the programme already undertaken by the Specialized Agencies." In response to this resolution, the Expanded Programme for Technical Assistance (EPTA) and the Special Fund (SF) were established in 1949 and 1958 respectively, both financed through annually pledged voluntary contributions. An Advisory Committee on Coordination (ACC) consisting of the Secretary-General of the UN as Chair and the Executive Heads of the specialized agencies was created in 1946. With the growth of the funds and programmes of the UN and the creation of new organizational entities, the scope of the work of the ACC expanded beyond the initial emphasis on the implementation of the relationship agreements between the UN and the specialized agencies, to encompass whole range of substantive and management issues facing the UN system, including operational activities.

Coordination deficits emerge during the 1960s and 1970s ...

6. The creation of many new UN entities during the 1960s, including the World Food Programme (WFP) (1961), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (1964) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (1967),⁴ added further complexity to the coordination of UN operational activities for development. By end of the 1960s, a wide range of UN bodies such as specialized agencies, regional commissions and other Secretariat entities were engaged in operational activities for development. This rapid expansion of engagement in operational work led to calls for the creation of a new structure of system-wide nature that could promote greater synergy and coordination in operations and funding. In 1965, the GA, decided to establish the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a new body charged with coordinating the funding of technical assistance provided by the

² The term "specialized agencies" refers in this document to those agencies mentioned in article 57 of the UN Charter that have been brought into relationship with the UN under agreements approved by the GA. They are commonly grouped together with a few autonomous bodies who are not de jure specialized agencies, but who work in close cooperation with a UN organization (e.g. International Trade Centre (ITC), International Consultative Group on Food Irradiation (ICGFI), International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) and World Trade Organization (WTO).

³ The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) was established in 1865; the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in 1873; and the Universal Postal Union (UPL) in 1874.

⁴ UNIDO was established as a UN programme in 1967 with headquarters in Vienna, Austria, and became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1985.

UN system. According to the new arrangement, development projects were generally executed by a UN entity, other than UNDP. The normative and specialized entities of the UN system therefore looked to UNDP to fund projects that allowed them to implement programme priorities established by the respective governing body.

7. The 1970s witnessed continued expansion of UN operational activities for development. To address the coordination deficit that had emerged, the GA, in resolution 32/197, decided to authorize the Secretary-General to appoint a Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation. An important task assigned to the new Director-General was to ensure the provision of effective leadership to the various components of the UN system in the field of development and international economic cooperation in order to ensure a multi-disciplinary approach to the problems of development on a system-wide basis. The post, however, was not provided with the kind of support structures that would establish a powerful new locus for policy coordination within the system. The function was abolished in 1992.

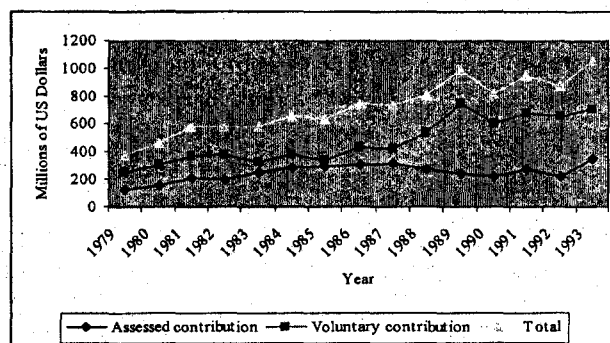
... with coordination arrangements coming under growing pressure in the 1980s

8. In the 1980s, funding for UN operational activities for development became increasingly earmarked for specific purposes, as donors attempted to exercise greater control over the direction and activities of the UN system. At the same time, in the context of the Cold War, the UN system went through a major crisis of funding as some donors withheld contributions. This period also witnessed a growing sentiment questioning the ability of the UN system to deliver development support to programme countries in an efficient, effective and coherent manner. Moreover, the system of execution by UN agencies came under further pressure in the late 1980s and early 1990s as programme countries opted for government and later national execution as the preferred modality for delivering UN technical assistance.

9. The centralized approach to funding was gradually abandoned in the early 1990s, culminating in a major systemic change in 1995, when UNDP transformed itself from a central fund to being primarily a substantive organization. The shift towards national execution of projects and programmes, instead of the previous modality of execution by UN agencies, also meant that the specialized agencies could rely much less on UNDP for funding for

operational activities for development and became increasingly reliant on direct resources mobilization from donors. This, coupled with gradual erosion in core funding, led to significant growth in the share of extra-budgetary resources of overall contributions to specialized agencies from 1987 onwards (see Graph 1). This agency-specific resources mobilization approach was a significant factor in accelerating fragmentation of the UN development system.

Graph 1 – Contributions to operational activities of specialized agencies 1979-1993



Shift towards programmatic cooperation and common approaches as means to enhanced coordination in the 1990s

10. The latter half of the 1990s marked a step change in the approach pursued by Member States to promote enhanced coordination and coherence within the UN system. The institutional reform undertaken during the 1960s to 1970s had not resulted in marked improvement in coordination within the rapidly expanding UN system. The main reason was that these measures had not been complemented by initiatives to strengthen programmatic cooperation among UN entities. Furthering enhanced programmatic cooperation and common approaches was therefore at the centre of the 1997 reorganization, which, inter alia, led to the creation of the UN Development Group (UNDG), chaired by the Administrator of UNDP; the merging of three Secretariat departments into the new Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA); the creation of common UN houses at the country-level to facilitate enhanced cooperation and coherence; the introduction of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and Common Country Assessment (CCA) as key instruments for joint programming and development analysis within the UN system; the creation of the post of Deputy-Secretary-General to help the Secretary-General in ensuring coherence and to support the incumbent in raising the profile and leadership of the UN in the economic and social fields; and the establishment of the joint meetings of the Executive Boards of funds and programmes. In addition, a series of UN conferences and summits held during the 1990s and early part of the new century defined a set of objectives for the UN system and led to enhanced interagency cooperation in key areas.

11. Subsequent efforts to strengthen coordination within the UN system have largely been consistent with the general thrust of the 1997 reorganization. Since 2002, for example, there has been continued focus on improving field-level coordination of operational activities for development; further strengthening of both interagency cooperation through UNDG, whose membership was expanded to include virtually all UN organizations with a development mandate, and of the Resident Coordinator System; greater emphasis on measuring field-level results; and the acceleration of the establishment of common UN houses in programme countries.

12. The new pilot "Delivering-as-One" initiative is among the latest in this series of measures aimed at promoting enhanced UN-wide coordination through strengthened programmatic cooperation and common approaches. A stock-taking exercise conducted by UNDG/CEB in late 2007 suggests that progress has been made in implementing the one programme, one budget, one leader and one office in the 8 pilot countries. Through the one programme, national partners now have full overview of the range of UN activities and financial resources, as well as information on funding gaps. This has resulted in the UN system more fully aligning its programming with national development plans, under national leadership.

13. It is probably accurate to say that the past five-to-ten years have resulted in more far-reaching change to UN operational activities for development than in the preceding several decades.

C. Overview of intergovernmental governance and institutional arrangements

Intergovernmental governance

14. The General Assembly, Economic and Social Council and governing bodies of UN entities, in accordance with their respective mandates, constitute interrelated intergovernmental policy-making and oversight mechanisms of the work of the UN system for development.

General Assembly

15. The GA, through the *comprehensive policy review* of operational activities, establishes key system-wide policy orientations for the development cooperation and country-level modalities of the UN system. The comprehensive policy review evaluates the impact of the work of the UN system for development on programme countries and provides guidance for enhancing the capacity of those countries to pursue poverty reduction, sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

16. The GA, last December, decided to conduct the comprehensive policy review every four years and called for the aligning of the strategic planning cycles of funds and programmes with the timing of the review and encouraged specialized agencies to undertake such alignment as well.⁵ Such alignment would enable the strategic plans of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies to be guided by the outcome of the GA comprehensive policy review, which could be a significant step towards enhanced coherence of UN operational activities for development.

17. The GA also develops policy guidance in a range of substantive areas, from macroeconomic and financing for development issues to social development and the advancement of women, including follow-up to the outcomes of major UN conferences and summits. This legislation contains implications for the operational activities for development of the UN system.

Economic and Social Council

18. ECOSOC is mandated to provide *coordination and guidance* to the UN system including for implementing the policy guidance of the GA established in the comprehensive policy review. As specified in the UN Charter "it may coordinate the activities of the specialized agencies through consultation with and recommendations to such agencies and through recommendations to the General Assembly and to Member States of the United Nations". Several aspects of the work of ECOSOC are relevant to the discharge of its mandate in the area of operational activities for development of the UN system, in particular the Operational Activities Segment and the Coordination Segment, but also the new functions of the Council in the High-level Segment, the Annual Ministerial Review and the biennial High-level Development Cooperation Forum. The main mandates of these mechanisms are briefly described here below.

⁵ A/RES/63/232

19. The role of ECOSOC in coordinating and monitoring the implementation of policy guidance established by the GA is largely discharged through its *Operational Activities Segment* (OAS). The key functions of the OAS are the following⁶:

- ❖ Provide the UN system with cross-sectoral coordination and overall guidance on a system-wide basis, including objectives, priorities and strategies, in the implementation of the policies formulated by the GA in the field of operational activities for development;
- ❖ Monitor the division of labour between and cooperation within the bodies of the UN system, in particular the development funds and programmes, to include the conduct of field-level coordination, and make appropriate recommendations to the GA, as well as to provide guidance, where appropriate, to the system;
- ❖ Review and evaluate the reports on the work of the development funds and programmes, including the assessment of their overall impact, with a view of enhancing the operational activities of the UN on a system-wide basis;
- ❖ Undertake preparatory work for the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities by the GA;⁷
- ❖ Review the operationally relevant recommendations of the subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC and other relevant bodies in the light of policies established by the GA, in order to incorporate them, as appropriate, into the operational activities of the UN;
- ❖ Provide orientations and recommendations to the relevant inter-agency coordination mechanisms and to support and enhance their role.

20. According to GA resolution 45/264, the *Coordination Segment* will be of four to five days' duration devoted, inter alia, to the coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies, organs, organizations and bodies of the UN system in the economic and social and related fields, in accordance with Articles 63 and 64 of the Charter. The heads of concerned specialized agencies, organs, organizations and bodies of the UN system, including multilateral financial and trade institutions, are invited to participate actively, making contributions to the policy dialogue reflecting a global perspective on the agreed upon theme or themes, as well as their activities in the chosen themes. ECOSOC has decided to focus its Coordination Segment on the follow-up by the UN system to the ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration of the previous year, as well as review reports prepared by the Secretary-General on the integrated and coordinated follow-up to major UN conferences and summits.

21. The *Annual Ministerial Review* (AMR), during the Council's High-level Segment, assesses progress and impact in the implementation of goals and targets agreed at the major UN conferences and summits⁸. The AMR consists of three elements, a global review of status in realizing the UN development agenda, a thematic review, and national voluntary presentations on

⁶ A/RES/48/162

⁷ See paragraph 5. The comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the UN system will from now on be conducted every four years, instead of triennially, with the next one taking place in 2012.

⁸ See UNDESA publication "*The United Nations Development Agenda: Development for All*" for more information on the global development agenda.

progress at the country-level⁹. A multi-year programme of work has been established for the AMR. In 2009, the AMR and the Ministerial Declaration of the High-level Segment of ECOSOC will focus on public health, in 2010 on gender equality and empowerment, and in 2011 on education.

22. The 2005 World Summit Outcome mandated the biennial High-level *Development Cooperation Forum* (DCF) to review trends in international development cooperation, including strategies, policies and financing, promote greater coherence among the development activities of different development partners and strengthen the normative and operational link in the work of the United Nations. The General Assembly in resolution 61/16 more specifically, decided that the DCF will:

- ❖ review trends and progress in international development cooperation;
- ❖ identify gaps and obstacles with a view to make recommendations on practical measures and policy options to enhance coherence and effectiveness and to promote development cooperation for the realization of the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs), including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- ❖ provide a platform for Member States to exchange lessons learned and share experiences; and
- ❖ in accordance with the Rules of Procedure, be open to participation by all stakeholders.

23. The Doha Review Conference on Financing for Development, held from 29 November – 2 December 2008, re-emphasized the importance of the Development Cooperation Forum of ECOSOC as the focal point within the UN system for holistic consideration of issues of international development cooperation, with participation by all relevant stakeholders. The Conference also pointed out the growing need for more systematic and universal ways to follow quantity, quality and effectiveness of aid flows, giving due regard to existing schemes and mechanisms and invited the Secretary-General, with relevant UN system agencies, in close cooperation with the World Bank, the regional and sub-regional development banks, OECD/DAC and other relevant stakeholders, to address this issue and to provide a report for consideration by the DCF.

Governing bodies/boards of UN system organizations/entities

24. Executive Boards of funds and programmes are responsible, inter alia, for providing intergovernmental *oversight* of the respective entities in accordance with the overall policy guidance of the GA and ECOSOC, and for ensuring that they are responsive to the needs and priorities of recipient countries¹⁰. The executive heads of funds and programmes are appointed by the Secretary-General, following consultation with the respective Executive Board, and confirmed by the General Assembly. The Executive Boards are subject to the authority of ECOSOC and expected to bring to the Council's attention issues requiring its guidance¹¹. Since 1998, the

⁹ A/RES/60/1 and A/RES/61/16

¹⁰ A/RES/48/162

¹¹ A/RES/50/227

Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP have convened a joint informal meeting once a year to discuss selected priority issues of common concern.

25. The UN system's specialized agencies are separate, legally autonomous organizations with their own policy-making and executive organs, secretariats and budgets. The executive heads of specialized agencies are elected by the membership of the respective entity. The detailed functioning of the relationship of specialized agencies with the UN is defined by the terms of special agreements established with ECOSOC and subsequently approved by the GA.

26. Article 63 of the UN Charter stipulates that the Council may coordinate the activities of the specialized agencies through consultation with and recommendations to such agencies and through recommendations to the GA and to Members of the UN. In Article 64, ECOSOC is authorized to take appropriate action to obtain regular reports from the specialized agencies. It may also make arrangements with the Members of the UN and with the specialized agencies to obtain reports on the steps taken to give effect to its own recommendations and to recommendations falling within its competence made by the GA.

Institutional and interagency arrangements

Below is a brief review of key institutional and interagency arrangements for managing and coordinating the work of the UN system for development at national, regional and global levels.

National

27. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) is the collective, coherent and integrated programming and monitoring framework linking the normative and operational work of the UN system at the country-level. The UNDAF emerges from national analysis, possibly including a Common Country Assessment (CCA) of the national development situation. As per GA resolution 62/208, the UN Resident Coordinator, supported by the UN Country Team, should report to national authorities on progress made against results in the UNDAF.¹² The UN Resident Coordinator also reports to the Secretary-General through the UNDP Administrator, as Chair of UNDG.

28. As of early 2007, 164 CCAs and 146 UNDAFs had been prepared by the UN system and guided by the principle of national ownership and leadership. The programming cycles of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP, have also been harmonized in 110 countries, and to the largest possible extent, synchronized with national programming cycles, including poverty reduction strategies. A key component of the UNDAF process is the formulation of the Results Matrix, introduced in 2003, which forms the business plan of the UN system at the country-level. The UNDG website contains information on nearly 350 joint programmes at the country-level, understood as a set of activities reflected in a common workplan with a budget implemented and funded by at least two UN entities.¹³

¹² A/RES/62/208, paragraph 96.

¹³ See Secretary-General's report on the comprehensive policy review of operational activities of the UN development system (A/62/73 – E/2007/52, 11 May 2007).

29. A pilot initiative launched in 2007 in eight countries, at their request, has helped to identify ways in which the UN family can deliver in a more coordinated manner at the country level. The creation of this pilot initiative was recommended by the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence and builds on the existing reform agenda established by Member States through the comprehensive policy review process. The Governments of eight countries - Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam - volunteered to become "Delivering-as-One" pilots. The pilot initiative will be subject to an independent evaluation.

30. The Resident Coordinator (RC) system encompasses all organizations of the UN system dealing with operational activities for development regardless of formal presence in the country. The RC, supported by the UNCT, has a central role in coordination of UN system operational activities for development at the country level. UNDG recently adopted a management and accountability system (M&A system) for the UN development and RC system. According to the new M&A system, the RC is accountable to the national government on behalf of and with the support of the UNCT, responsible for achieving and reporting on agreed RC results drawn from the UNCT workplan, and implementing the RC/UNCT "code of conduct". The RC system is managed by UNDP with guidance provided by an UNDG/Advisory Group, composed of members from 13 UN system organizations at Principal or Assistant-Secretary-General/Assistant-Director-General level.

Regional

31. All funds and programmes now have regional and/or sub-regional offices, as do most specialized agencies. For some entities such as ILO, WHO, FAO and UNESCO, the existence of such offices has been a long-standing tradition. Much headway was made in 2005 and 2006 in enhancing the role of regional directors across agencies. Regional alignment in terms of location of offices and coverage among all UN entities has also increased.

32. Two key structures play an important coordination role, first, Regional Coordination Mechanisms,¹⁴ established by ECOSOC resolution 1998/46 and led by the Regional Commissions, which serve to improve coordination among work programmes of the organizations of the UN, and, secondly, Regional Director Teams (RDTs), composed of Regional Directors and relevant senior managers with direct supervisory responsibilities for agency engagement at country-level. In accordance with the recently adopted M&A system for the UN development and RC system, mentioned earlier, the RDTs have been tasked with providing coherent technical support to RCs and UNCTs; performance management of RCs and UNCTs; and quality assurance of UNDAFs/UN programmes. The RDT membership is being expanded to include all concerned agencies. The relationship between RCMs and RDTs currently varies across regions, but has

¹⁴ Meetings of the RCMs have been convened by the Regional Commissions since 1999, focusing on policy and programming issues of regional nature and guided by regional priorities. The experience of the RCMs varies across regions, but have generally benefited from renewed momentum since 2007 under the sponsorship of the Deputy-Secretary-General. Currently, RCMs are regularly held in four regions with an executive tier discussing broader or emerging policy issues, and a thematic tier addressing specific programmatic issues of regional concern.

recently been clarified by the Chair of the UNDG.¹⁵ There is clear need for regular linkage between the RCMs and the RDTs to discuss and maximize synergies in their respective workplans.¹⁶

Global

33. The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), under the leadership of the Secretary-General, furthers coordination and cooperation on a whole range of substantive and management issues facing UN system organizations. The CEB brings together on a regular basis the executive heads of the organizations of the UN system, under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General of the UN. In addition to its regular reviews of contemporary issues and major concerns facing the UN system, on the basis of recommendations from bodies reporting to it, CEB approves system-wide guidelines and recommendations, and may issue policy statements. CEB is supported by three high-level committees, the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP), the High-level Committee on Management (HLCM) and the UN Development Group (UNDG) which was recently incorporated in the CEB subsidiary machinery. This integration of UNDG/CEB as third pillar of CEB aims to increase coherence between the policy, programme and operational aspects of the work of the UN system.

34. UNDG, with support of the Development Operations Coordination Office (DOCO), prepares system-wide guidelines for enhanced coordination, harmonization and alignment of UN development activities at the country-level with the outcomes of major UN conferences and summits, as well as the guidance provided by the GA, ECOSOC and governing bodies of UN system entities. UNDG has a key role to play in translating GA and ECOSOC guidance into actionable guidelines for UN country teams.

35. The High-level Committee on Programmes of CEB (HLCP/CEB) has two main functions, first, system-wide follow-up of intergovernmental decisions, and, secondly, scanning and identification of emerging programme issues requiring a system-wide approach. These responsibilities include fostering and supporting integrated and coordinated follow-up to major UN conferences and summits, and elaborating common strategies, policies, methodologies and tools, in response to emerging issues and challenges facing the UN system. For example, as a follow-up to the outcome of the 2005 World Summit and the Ministerial Declaration of the High-level Segment of ECOSOC in 2006, the CEB/HLCP, under the leadership of ILO, developed a toolkit on mainstreaming employment and decent work in the work of the UN system. Similarly, in 2008, the HLCP/CEB, under the leadership of UNIDO, developed an interagency resource guide on trade capacity-building. The BWIs are members of the CEB, including the HLCP/CEB, and the World Bank participates as observer in the UNDG/CEB.

36. The High-level Committee on Management of CEB (HLCM/CEB) is responsible for ensuring coordination in administrative and management areas across the UN system. In response

¹⁵ In the context of the CEB in 2008 and consequently by the agreement on the RDT functions in the M&A System referred to earlier.

¹⁶ In 2006, the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence called for UN entities at the regional-level to be reconfigured and for the UN regional-setting to be reorganized around two inter-related sets of functions: one focusing on the analytical and normative work as well as activities of trans-boundary nature, for which the Regional Commissions would act as catalyst using, inter alia, their convening power at both intergovernmental and secretariat levels; and another focusing on coordinating the servicing of UNCTs, for which UNDP, as manager of the Resident Coordinator System, would be the catalyst.

to the outcome of the 2007 GA comprehensive policy review of operational activities, the Executive Heads of UN system organizations in CEB have endorsed a Plan of Action for the Harmonization of Business Practices, developed through an inter-agency process led by HLCM/CEB and its functional networks. The Plan of Action addresses the harmonization of all major management functions of UN system organizations.

37. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), provides substantive support to the GA and ECOSOC in delivering coherent and effective policy guidance to the operational activities of the UN system at the country level.

38. Besides CEB, other thematic internal coordination bodies and networks within the UN system include the Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs (ECESA), the Executive Committee on Peace and Security (ECPS), the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA), and the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG). Other coordination groups include the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which involves key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners, and the Environment Management Group (EMG).

D. Gaps and weaknesses in governance

39. The informal consultations on system-wide coherence held during the 61st and 62nd session of the General Assembly suggest that the effectiveness of UN operational activities for development is being hampered by several gaps and weaknesses in governance at the intergovernmental and UN system-level. These gaps and weaknesses in governance have contributed to weak prioritization, overlap of functions, policy inconsistencies across the UN system, coordination deficits, and great difficulty in assessing system-wide performance. Further strengthening of the governance system for enhanced system-wide coherence should particularly focus on improving strategic overview, policy coherence, coordination, funding and accountability, of the work of the UN system for development.

40. **Strategic overview** – the UN system is a major actor in international development cooperation, receiving \$19 billion in overall contributions for operational activities for development in 2007 (current US\$). The ability of GA and ECOSOC to provide effective guidance, coordination and monitoring of this work, requires these legislative bodies to have access to comprehensive, high-quality and adequately disaggregated information on (a) the work of the UN system for development, (b) all sources of funding and (c) breakdown of expenditures. The complexity and decentralized modus operandi of the UN system, coupled with undeveloped information systems at the central-level, however, has meant that neither the GA nor ECOSOC has been able to attain such strategic overview of the work of the UN development system. This “information asymmetry” between intergovernmental bodies at the central-level and individual UN entities has weakened the ability of Member States to guide, coordinate and monitor the work of the UN development system. In addition, programme country governments and UN Resident Coordinators often lack similar strategic overview of the work of the UN system for development at the country-level.

41. Policy coherence – improved system-wide coherence of UN operational activities for development requires further strengthening of the policy guidance role of the GA and ECOSOC. In particular, there is need to enhance the effectiveness of the comprehensive policy review legislation of the GA that establishes system-wide policy orientations for the development cooperation and country-level modalities of the UN system. This legislation needs to provide strategic guidance to the work of the UN system for development at the country-level. The growing scale, scope and complexity of UN development cooperation, calls for a more focused approach to the legislative process, with clearer distinction between strategic, policy and operational guidance. Policy coherence has also been weakened by the absence of instruments to promote effective normative-operational linkages in the work of the UN system for development. Another factor undermining policy coherence of UN operational activities for development is the lack of policy consistency in decision-making across the intergovernmental governance system.

42. Coordination – system-wide coherence requires effective mechanisms for coordination across the UN system. There are five main areas where coordination could be further improved. First, at the country-level, system-wide coordination can be strengthened through the promotion of nationally-owned common country programming processes, involving all relevant entities of the UN system. Secondly, at the regional-level, there is need to further harmonize the support of Regional Coordination Mechanisms and Regional Director Teams to common country programming processes. Thirdly, at the global-level, linkages between HLCP/CEB and UNDG/CEB could be strengthened, particularly in providing coherent policy guidance, developing joint policy initiatives and rolling out tools for country programming and operations. Fourthly, there is significant scope for improvements in coordination between the UN system and the BWIs at all levels. And, fifthly, at the intergovernmental-level, ECOSOC could play a more strategic role in system-wide coordination, particularly through the Operational Activities Segment.

43. Funding - the present funding system is a major source of fragmentation of UN operational activities for development at global, regional and national levels. The fragmented nature of the funding architecture of UN operational activities for development undermines the ability of the UN system to pursue coordinated implementation of national, regional and global development goals, including the achievement of development results. The funding of UN operational activities for development is further discussed in a separate note of the Secretary-General.

44. Accountability - the accountability of the UN system to Member States for the delivery of development outcomes needs to be strengthened. A major weakness of the current accountability system is lack of independent system-wide performance evaluation. The absence of this function makes it difficult for ECOSOC to evaluate the development effectiveness of the work of the UN system for development. There is also need to further strengthen the development of common evaluation methodologies across the UN system under the auspices of UNEG and to enhance the independence of evaluation offices of UN entities.

E. Possible options for way forward

45. The analysis conducted in the previous section of the paper suggests that further strengthening of the governance system of UN operational activities for development should contribute to the following:

- ❖ Strong national ownership and leadership of UN programming at all levels;
- ❖ Improved quality of information on UN operational activities for development to facilitate informed decision-making at the intergovernmental-level;
- ❖ Well-defined roles and responsibilities of different actors such as GA, ECOSOC and governing bodies of UN entities, in the intergovernmental governance system;
- ❖ Strengthened capacity of GA and ECOSOC to provide guidance to the UN development system;
- ❖ Enhanced coherence and coordination across operational activities for development of the UN system, including with BWIs;
- ❖ Full participation of specialized and non-resident agencies in system-wide planning and programming processes at the country-level;
- ❖ Greater quality and relevance of reporting;
- ❖ Enhanced follow-up to the guidance of ECOSOC through decision-making in Executive Boards of funds and programmes, as well as improved linkages between the Council's guidance and governing boards of specialized agencies;
- ❖ Strengthened performance assessment of the work of the UN system for development.

46. Based on the gaps and weaknesses identified in the previous section as well as the above objectives, a number of recommendations are provided for improving the effectiveness of the governance system of UN operational activities for development for enhanced system-wide coherence. These proposed priority areas for strengthening the governance system are discussed below:

Strategic overview

Recommendation 1: Creating a central repository of information on UN operational activities for development

47. It is recommended that a central repository of information be established to facilitate improved strategic overview of the work of the UN system for development. The primary objective of the repository would be to publish annually comprehensive, high-quality and sufficiently disaggregated information on (a) the work of the UN system for development, (b) all funding sources and (c) breakdown of expenditures.¹⁷ The establishment of the central repository would be

¹⁷ In this context, it is worth mentioning that the GA, in resolution 63/232, requested UNDP and UNDESA, making use of existing capacities within the Secretariat and, if necessary, voluntary contributions, to take the necessary steps to integrate by 2010 information from the report on the UN system technical cooperation expenditures and its statistical addendum into the report on the comprehensive

expected to further strengthen the coordination, monitoring and evaluation role of ECOSOC. This mechanism could potentially be housed in UNDESA, CEB Secretariat or UNDG/CEB. It is also recommended that a similar facility be designated or established at the country-level to provide the national system and the Resident Coordinator with a full overview of the activities of the UN system.

Policy coherence

Recommendation 2: Reforming policy guidance process

48. Enhanced system-wide coherence will require further strengthening of the legislative framework guiding UN operational activities for development. It is recommended that the GA comprehensive policy review has distinct terms of reference to provide guidance on strategic, policy and operational issues. Improving the effectiveness of the legislative process would also involve further clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the GA and ECOSOC in providing guidance to the UN system. The GA resolution could provide strategic and policy guidance to UN operational activities for development. Within this overarching perspective, the Council could provide operational guidance to the UN system. In other words, the Council could transform the GA policy guidance into specific operational guidance, using available instruments. The GA resolution, for example, could be expected to focus more strongly on strategic and policy issues to promote normative-operational linkages, positioning of the UN system, partnerships, funding, coherence, results and accountability, with subsequent ECOSOC legislation providing guidance in implementing the established policy through operational matters such as frameworks and instruments, business practices and processes, coordination, monitoring and evaluation. The primary objective would be to further enhance the effectiveness of the intergovernmental policy guidance process as an instrument for fostering system-wide coherence of UN operational activities for development. This reform of the policy guidance process would constitute strengthening of the legislative role of ECOSOC.

49. The policy guidance process could also be improved if the funds and programmes systematically prepared action plans to implement the outcome of the GA comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development (as e.g. UNICEF did in follow-up to 2007 TCPR). The reports of funds and programmes to ECOSOC could subsequently include qualitative assessment of progress and challenges in realizing the GA guidance together with recommendations to further improve the implementation of the review.

50. In addition, the GA also develops policy guidance in a range of substantive areas, including relating to the follow-up to the outcomes of major UN conferences and summits. ECOSOC could systematically transform relevant aspects of this legislation into actionable guidelines for the operational activities of funds and programmes.

statistical analysis of operational activities for development of the UN system, to provide appropriate online access to this information and to report to ECOSOC in 2009 on progress in this regard.

Recommendation 3: Furthering normative-operational linkages in work of UN system

51. At the global-level, the role of ECOSOC in coordinating and monitoring UN system development objectives and priorities could be further enhanced by the development of UN-wide framework for integrated and coordinated follow-up to major UN conferences and summits. The building blocs of such UN-wide framework would be nationally-owned UNDAFs and common country programmes, but also commitments made by Member States at the global, regional and sub-regional levels, including in the area of norms and standards. The objective would be to enable ECOSOC to have an improved strategic overview of the work of the UN system for development, including normative-operational linkages. The UN-wide framework could be developed in partnership of the HLCP/CEB and UNDG/CEB, with technical support provided by UNDESA.

Recommendation 4: Fostering coherent intergovernmental decision-making

52. It is recommended that special efforts be made to improve coherence in decision-making across the intergovernmental governance system. Enhanced policy coherence in different parts of the governance system should begin in the capitals of Member States, as recommendations on strengthened coordination at the level of the GA and ECOSOC can be undermined by contradictory policies pursued by representatives in the governing bodies of individual UN organizations/entities.

53. There is also special role for the national focal points for UN development cooperation at the country-level, firstly, in enriching the policy discussions at the global-level, and, secondly, in bringing a nationally coherent picture in the various governance structures. Similarly, the ministries of development cooperation need to help promote a coherent donor perspective.

Coordination

Recommendation 5: Furthering nationally-owned common country programming

54. The past five to ten years have seen far-reaching changes to UN operational activities for development (see background section). Strengthened coordination and coherence of the work of the UN system for development has largely been brought about by deepened programmatic cooperation and the adoption of common approaches among UN organizations. It is recommended that Member States endorse further strengthening of nationally-owned and coordinated programming processes at the country-level.

55. Over the next three years, 90 countries will roll out UNDAFs. This constitutes an important opportunity for governments in programme countries to voluntarily adopt a common approach to the programming of the work of the UN system for development at the country-level. The adoption of such approach would anchor enhanced system-wide coherence in national ownership and leadership of UN operational activities for development at the country-level.

56. National governments have the lead role in coordinating all types of external development assistance and assuring that it is aligned with their national goals and strategies. This broader

coherence, involving all relevant development cooperation actors, is an important complement to enhanced UN-wide coordination at the country-level. There continues to be dire need for enhanced support to governments in effectively exercising these coordination responsibilities, not only vis-à-vis the UN system, but also across the donor community. The 2007 TCPR recommended that the UN system provide such support.

57. ECOSOC could add value to the common country programming process by providing guidance on major issues, as well as serving as venue for review of global trends and country-level experiences. This role would fit well with the Council's new functions, the biennial DCF and AMR. In addition, ECOSOC could provide valuable support to nationally-owned common country programming processes by undertaking periodic global analysis of the UNDAF experience.

Recommendation 6: Revitalizing coordination role of Operational Activities Segment

58. Earlier it was recommended that the guidance role of ECOSOC of UN operational activities for development be strengthened through reform of the legislative process, including sharper clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the GA and the Council.

59. It is also recommended that the Council consider the possibility of merging the Operational Activities Segment and the Coordination Segment. It is furthermore recommended that the joint meetings of the Executive Boards of UN funds and programmes be held during the Operational Activities Segment. Brought together, these measures would be expected to contribute to significant strengthening of the coordination role of ECOSOC.

60. The participation of national focal points for UN development cooperation from both donor and programme countries is also critical for the effectiveness of the Operational Activities Segment. Their participation would enrich the quality of discussions in the segment.

61. The implementation of the above recommendations would imply a longer Operational Activities Segment. However, there would be no legislative change required as current provisions allow for a four-to-five day Operational Activities Segment, as against the current practice of limiting the duration of the segment to three days.

62. It is also recommended for consideration of Member States that technical preparations for the Operational Activities Segment be stepped-up by creating an advisory group composed of national focal points from ECOSOC member countries and responsible for UN operational activities for development at the country-level. An important objective by the establishment of such a group would be to imbue deliberations in the Council with the perspectives of national focal points dealing with UN development cooperation at the country-level.

63. Key tasks of the proposed advisory group could include the following:

- ❖ Help in the preparation of ECOSOC follow-up legislation to the GA resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of UN operational activities for development

with a view to facilitating informed deliberations and negotiations among Member States during the Operational Activities Segment;

- ❖ Review Secretariat reports, including policy recommendations, prepared for the Operational Activities Segment, with a view to helping the Council make decisions relevant at the country-level;
- ❖ Review reports by governing bodies of funds, programmes and specialized agencies to ECOSOC on progress in implementing GA policy guidance;¹⁸
- ❖ Assist the Council in annual monitoring of GA and ECOSOC guidance;
- ❖ Advise ECOSOC on strategic issues to enhance system-wide efficiency, effectiveness and coherence of UN operational activities for development;
- ❖ Provide policy advice to ECOSOC, upon request, based on findings of strategic reviews and evaluation reports.

64. ECOSOC would decide on the terms of reference, composition, working methods and reporting of the proposed group. For illustrative purposes, it could be envisaged that the advisory group be composed of approximately 15 members of ECOSOC selected on the basis of the principle of equitable geographic representation, nominated by governments, particularly officials in charge, or serving as focal points for UN operational activities for development at the country-level. Consideration could be given to creating linkages with civil society and the private sector in the work of the group. It is envisaged that the advisory group would meet shortly after the adoption of the GA legislation on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review with a view of preparing a draft ECOSOC follow-up legislation on relevant operational aspects to facilitate negotiations among Member States during the Operational Activities Segment. In other years, the advisory group could meet for one week just prior to the start of the Operational Activities Segment in July, with some of the preparatory work undertaken in advance electronically.

65. The work of group would enable the Council to build on the substantive work of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies. It should not add new administrative burden on those entities. The primary role of the group would be to further enhance the effectiveness and impact of decision-making in the Operational Activities Segment. Crucial to the success of the group would be the nominations by Member States of national focal points for UN development cooperation at the country-level to ensure that intergovernmental decision-making is informed by the best available knowledge and expertise.

¹⁸ In this connection, it must be recalled that the relationship of ECOSOC with the Executive Boards of the funds and programmes is more established with the reports of these bodies formally considered by the Council, while the relationship of ECOSOC with the governing bodies of the specialized agencies is one step removed for reasons discussed earlier in this report.

Recommendation 7: Advancing coordinated implementation of global development agenda

66. It is recommended that Member States adopt a more strategic and integrated approach to the programming of the substantive session of ECOSOC. This approach could also include further simplification and/or streamlining of the way in which ECOSOC conducts its business.

67. The High-level Segment of ECOSOC should be further strengthened by focusing the outcome in order to attract high-level national policy-makers. The outcome of the HLS, for example, should exert influence in terms of setting priorities for intergovernmental cooperation and in shaping the direction of the work of the UN system for development. In addition, the outcome of the HLS should lead to concrete follow-up action by the UN system.

68. The Coordination Segment and the Operational Activities Segment have not yet been effective in providing operational guidance to the UN system on an annual basis. In addition, the agenda of the General Segment has over time become overloaded due to large number of reports of subsidiary bodies submitted to the Council for review. These deficits in the functioning of three key segments of the substantive session of ECOSOC have weakened the coordination and monitoring role of the Council.

69. As a way of addressing this, it is proposed that Member States consider streamlining the agenda of the substantive session of ECOSOC, particularly in the General Segment, combined with merging the Operational Activities Segment and the Coordination Segment. A more integrated and focused approach to the planning and programming of the two segments could facilitate enhanced coordination and monitoring by the Council of the implementation of the global development agenda, including the MDGs. Another objective would be to improve the quality of deliberations and decision-making in ECOSOC, and raise the level of participation, in the different segments of the substantive session.

70. The subsidiary machinery of ECOSOC adopts operationally relevant recommendations which need to be incorporated more systematically in operational activities of the UN system for development (48/162). A dedicated report to ECOSOC could bring together such decisions to the Council, as part of efforts to enhance system-wide coherence. In addition, the functional and regional commissions need to contribute more strongly to the theme of the AMR. Thus enhanced dialogue both at the regional-level and with the functional commissions could greatly contribute to improved coherence.

71. There is also potential for significant synergy in the planning and programming of the Operational Activities Segment, Coordination Segment, AMR and DCF. Harnessing this synergy could further buttress the coordination and monitoring role of ECOSOC of the implementation of the global development agenda. The Council's work on operational activities could draw from the findings of the AMR as forum for global and thematic review of progress in the implementation of the UN development agenda; the current role of the Coordination Segment in promoting integrated and coordinated follow-up within the UN system to the outcomes of major UN conferences and summits could be significantly enhanced; the DCF could provide analysis of the

normative-operational linkages in the work of the UN system; and the Operational Activities Segment could thoroughly review the coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of UN operational activities for development.

72. The proposed strategic and integrated approach to the programming of the substantive session should be underpinned by cutting-edge analysis of trends and progress in realizing the IADGs, including the MDGs. In this process, ECOSOC should establish enhanced cooperation with specialized agencies of the UN system in full conformity with Article 63 of the Charter. Special efforts should be made to ensure that adequate mechanisms and capacities are set in place to ensure that the preparations of substantive segments and meetings, such as those of the AMR and the DCF, are undertaken in full consultation with concerned specialized agencies, funds and programmes, and the Regional Commissions, with the aim of providing the best and most up-to-date analysis and advice to ECOSOC members, while respecting the mandates and governance of these organizations.

73. Brought together, this coordinated approach could help transform the Council into a dynamic forum for strategic and focused policy discussions on major UN operational issues, with the participation of both national policy-makers and Chief Executives of UN entities. An integrated approach could also facilitate dialogue with a wider range of development actors, including BWIs, civil society, private sector etc. The proposed approach would be expected to contribute to the following objectives:

- ❖ Promote greater focus on normative-operational linkages in the work of the UN system for development, inter alia, through more in-depth review of the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration of the High-level Segment of the previous year;
- ❖ Foster dialogue on regional support to normative functions and operations at country-level, involving Regional Commissions and Regional Director Teams;
- ❖ Facilitate dialogue with UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies on country experiences, particularly joint operational activities;
- ❖ Enhance dialogue with functional commissions and other relevant development partners with respect to the theme of the AMR and the Ministerial Declaration.

Recommendation 8: Harmonizing support of regional coordination mechanisms to common country programming

74. It is recommended that renewed efforts be made within the UN system to enhance complementarity between the policy and programming support of Regional Coordination Mechanisms, led by Regional Commissions, and the operational support of Regional Directors' Teams (RDTs), to nationally-owned and coordinated common policy and programming processes at the country-level.

Recommendation 9: Improving coordination with the BWIs

75. The 2007 comprehensive policy review of the GA invited the UN system and the BWIs to explore further ways to enhance cooperation, collaboration and coordination, including through greater harmonization of strategic frameworks, instruments, modalities and partnership arrangements, while encouraging these institutions to improve coordination with regard to the transition from relief to development in order to deliver more effective support and lower transaction costs for such countries. The 2006 High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence also recommended that as a matter of urgency, the UN Secretary-General, the President of the World Bank and the Managing Director of the IMF should set-up a process to review, update and conclude formal agreements on their respective roles and relations at the global and national-level. The High-level Panel, furthermore, recommended that such reviews be periodically updated as well as assessed.

76. The existing relationship agreements between the UN and the BWIs are not fully implemented and the guidance of the GA and ECOSOC has so far had limited impact on the work of the BWIs, although some advances have been made in policy dialogue between these institutions in the follow-up to the 2002 Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development and through special initiatives such as the High-level Task Force on Food Security and the MDG Africa Steering Group. It is recommended that the UN system and the BWIs at the highest-level agree on ways to significantly enhance coordination between the two institutions at all levels.

Accountability

Recommendation 10: Strengthening system-wide performance review and evaluation

77. As a follow-up to the 2007 GA comprehensive policy review, HLCM/CEB and HLCP/CEB have considered a proposal from UNEG to create an independent system-wide evaluation unit that would complement the efforts of UNEG to harmonize and systematize evaluation norms, standards, policies and approaches within the UN system and enhance the quality of the evaluation function in UN organizations/entities. The objective of the proposed independent evaluation unit would be to promote transparency, accountability and learning within the UN system as a whole, with an emphasis on system-wide effectiveness in promoting the implementation of the IADGs, including the MDGs, and provide relevant reporting to intergovernmental bodies on UN performance. It is recommended that Member States establish such independent system-wide performance evaluation mechanism of UN operational activities for development. Furthermore, the GA may wish to make greater use of existing oversight structures such as the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), in supporting the comprehensive policy review process. In addition, it is recommended that the GA consider further strengthening of the evaluation function across the UN system.

78. There is also need to improve accountability of the UN system to Member States through more strategic use of reporting, with a view of facilitating evidence-based decision-making by intergovernmental bodies. ECOSOC, through periodic review, could, for example, help ensure that reporting of UN operational activities for development is complementary rather than duplicative

and focused on the kind of issues that provides value to the intergovernmental debate. The Council could also draw the attention of relevant bodies and actors to information in certain reports – information that is of global and strategic relevance for intergovernmental decision-making.

F. Conclusion

79. The identification of gaps and weaknesses in the current governance structure and the start of an iterative process to address these is the key to forging consensus on a long-term solution to enhance system-wide coherence of UN operational activities for development. The ten recommendations suggested above along with the related proposals to strengthen the funding architecture of UN operational activities for development, represent significant measures to further improve the coherence of the work of the UN system for development. An important objective of these proposals is to contribute to more informed decision-making at the intergovernmental-level through the provision of better and more timely data and information, enriched by the participation of key actors at the country-level in deliberations on operational activities. The key measure of success will be defined by the impact of these measures in making operational activities truly demand-driven and resulting in visible and tangible changes in development outcomes.