CEB High-Level Committee on Programmes

High Level Committee on Programmes
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Issues Paper by the Vice-Chair

1. At its last retreat in October 2012, the HLCP held an in-depth discussion of the issues surrounding the post-2015 development agenda and the elaboration of sustainable development goals. It was agreed that the HLCP's contribution should be to provide thought leadership and critical analysis for further reflection by CEB, as the UN system examined the paradigm shifts that would be necessary for a post-2015 development agenda, relevant to all countries and peoples, with sustainable development at its core. CEB, at its first regular session of 2013, requested HLCP to prepare an issues paper on the challenges and opportunities faced by the UN system in defining its own role and contribution within a changed development policy environment, for consideration by CEB at its 2013 second regular session.

2. This paper represents an informal "think piece", setting out some salient aspects to be considered by the UN, as a system, to ensure its ability to effectively and optimally support Members States in the implementation of a transformative development post-2015 agenda. Member States have declared, at the Rio+20 conference and most recently at the inaugural meeting of the High-Level Political Forum, that they are seeking to define a post-2015 framework that embodies a coherent approach to integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, and also promotes peace and security, democratic governance, the rule of law, gender equality and human rights for all. The paper addresses some of the institutional and policy implications thereof, and highlights questions that would need to be addressed to ensure the UN system's "fitness for purpose" in contributing to an integrated approach to the post-2015 development agenda.

3. The first part of the paper raises some key concerns that the UN system must consider in helping to define the conceptual framework for the post-2015 agenda. While the UN system should avoid prescribing to member states the specific content of the post-2015 agenda, the system should and must advocate for couching the post-2015 agenda firmly within the normative framework set out by Member States in the core mandates of the UN. For the most part, these issues will pertain to the relationship between the UN agencies, funds and programmes, and the member states, but the rising importance of other institutions, actors and

stakeholder groups that influence policy decisions at the national level must be taken into account. The second part of the paper raises some questions that pertain to what is needed, given the UN's current institutional and operational set up, to meet the needs and expectations of the post-2015 agenda, including how the different parts of the system need to coordinate their mandates towards the achievement of common goals, and the ability of the system to materialize the integrated approach in its own operations and policies, and by extension in its support to the member states.

I - The Conceptual Framework

Re-establishing the core mandates of the UN

4.   The world has changed dramatically over the past two decades—in terms of the geo-political constellations; the shifting center of gravity in the global economy; the progress made in addressing absolute poverty as well as the changes in its incidence and distribution, both nationally and globally; and the deeper understanding of the multi-faceted links between sustainable development, poverty reduction, and transformational change.

5.   The post-2015 agenda must reflect these changes, but it must also be framed by the core mandates of the UN, peace and security, development, and human rights. These are, or should be, the motivating principles of the post-2015 framework and the foundation of its objectives. This aspect was neglected in the design of the MDG framework and underplayed in the subsequent focus on the practicalities of achieving the MDGs over the past 13 years.

6.   The cornerstone of the UN's various mandates is human rights in all their dimensions. As such, the progressive realization of human rights should be the fundamental objective of the post-2015 framework at the global level. The realization of human rights should also serve as the guiding principle for member states' efforts to achieve inclusive economic development, social justice and environmental sustainability at the national level, as well improved governance and peace and security. Progress toward this materialization of rights should be an essential element of the assessment of progress toward the global goals and national targets within the post-2015 framework.

Normative work on systemic issues

7.   The norms set by Member States in the UN in all of the pertinent areas should inform the choice of global goals and the assessment of the compatibility of national strategies and objectives with these global objectives. These norms also set a frame of reference for the UN system's support to member states in two aspects that are critical to the achievement of sustainable development: supporting the strengthening of institutions and governance; and promoting the coherence of policy.

8.   The UN system should direct particular attention to several key cross-cutting areas that require a multi-dimensional normative approach and coherent policy making. These are areas where the situations and views of member states are likely to differ, but which nonetheless form the underpinnings of sustainable development. Such areas would include: issues of inequality in all its various dimensions; climate change; gender empowerment and equality;

social protection; science , innovation, and technology transfer, including in the critical matter of ICTs and the science-policy interface; global food and nutrition security; resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production patterns; and finally, the human-rights-based approach.

9.   More engaged participation by, and effective partnerships with, the full spectrum of relevant stakeholders is also necessary to the post-2015 framework. UN system-wide engagement to foster greater transparency and accountability, facilitate and deepen dialogue among diverse stakeholder groups, share good practice and lessons learned, and support capacity development among governmental and non-governmental all stakeholder groups, can enable such partnerships.

10.   The UN should also encourage member states to improve the access of stakeholders to necessary information, knowledge, and decision-making processes, and to strengthen monitoring, evaluation and accountability systems. This would include the collection, analysis and use of data as the evidence base for policy making and policy adjustments.

11.   Policy coherence is essential for effective sustainable development. The normative role of the UN system in this area would be to encourage and facilitate the integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of policies at their formulation. The system could provide effective support for whole of government approaches by building national capacity for effective coordination of policies for sustainable development, and help to ensure that national policies serve to realize human rights, maintain peace and security, and promote the rule of law.

Poverty eradication and the sustainable development agenda

12.   All agree that the unfinished business of the MDG agenda must be pursued to completion. The eradication of poverty is not a parallel or separate track from the broader sustainable development agenda but an integral part of that agenda. The UN system must work to reinforce that message, by emphasizing inclusion and building resilience (of individuals, as well as groups and countries) as fundamental aims of sustainable development, and thus facilitate the understanding that there is no disconnect between the poverty eradication agenda and the sustainable development agenda.

13.   The sustainable development agenda aims to enable the transformative shifts that are needed in all countries [not just developing ones] to ensure that all benefit from growth and globalization in ways that are consistent with planetary limits/tipping points. The UN system can play a signal role in facilitating this transformation by refining and helping to operationalize the concept of "universality", and by shifting attention and dialogue from the concept of "leaving no one behind" to the goal of "bringing everyone forward". Succeeding in this effort will require building political and social support for the sustainability agenda by linking both the agenda itself, and the set of goals to be derived from it, to the challenges of the present and to resilience needs of the future in ways that effectively engage and motivate all relevant stakeholders, including those with more immediate or limited concerns.

14.   This can be achieved by demonstrating that progress toward the broader sustainable development agenda also addresses some of the pressing current challenges, for example:

reducing the stress on natural resources through the transition toward the green economy and sustainable patterns of consumption and production; enhancing food and nutrition security and rural incomes and livelihoods through the shift to sustainable agriculture; or addressing the global jobs crisis and fostering stronger human capital development through more inclusive and sustainable patterns of growth and effective social protection. Progress in these areas will facilitate agreement among member states on central shared policy priorities, and thus motivate policy action on the national level.

Translating the global agenda into national self-interest

15.   Global goals can only be achieved through the policies and actions of individual countries. In the absence of global governance mechanisms with the power effectively to enforce compliance with agreed global goals and norms, the only real guarantee that countries will act in a manner consistent with global goals is if they see their own national interest in such action. In some cases, this perception is relatively easy to achieve. For example, countries can more readily see the advantages of attaining global goals in education, health, water and sanitation. It is more difficult to motivate action where nation-states may perceive a trade-off between their national development objectives and the global goals.

16.   The UN system can help to address this challenge in several ways. It can flesh out the modalities of cooperation within the new global partnership for sustainable development, and ensure that the concerns and preoccupations of member states in different circumstances are appropriately reflected in the global discussions (e.g. by promoting acceptance of the need for flexibility in setting appropriate national targets that remain consistent with the global goals). It can also work to mitigate polarization that might impede reaching agreement on global goals and objectives. This is particularly important in the context of discussions of the means of implementation, where a more balanced discussion of the mix between internal and external elements is long overdue.

17.   Achieving sustainable development in a highly interconnected world also requires the provision of key global public goods within the context of a global governance system that cannot effectively guarantee such provision. The UN can, however, contribute to strengthening global governance arrangements through constructive inputs to deliberations by member states; the "demonstration effect" that would result from reforms and enhancements of the way the governing bodies of UN entities function; and through its normative and policy-based work to strengthen arrangements in areas such as the international financial system, global health, and innovation and technology transfer.

II - Rendering the UN "Fit for Purpose"

18.   Over the past two decades, an increasing number of countries have made significant progress in accelerating their economic growth and overall prosperity. This has changed the relationships among and between countries and international institutions. Many countries are now much less in need of the type of support and services that multilateral and regional organizations provided in the past. Moreover, the types of challenges for which countries would seek the support or advice of multilateral institutions have also changed--for the most part, developing countries now need much less guidance and implementation assistance in the

day-to-day management of their affairs. By contrast, they see value in the analysis of lessons learned from other countries' experience for policy, and in a multilateral approach to the provision of global public goods, the framing of international trade and finance, and (increasingly of late) in matters of environmental sustainability and social protection.

19. For the UN system, this rapidly evolving global context poses major challenges.The UN must assert its role and importance in a landscape where other institutions, regional and other member state groupings (such as the G20), and other players and stakeholders have growing influence over policies at the national level, and are sometimes better resourced than many UN entities. Those UN entities whose function is primarily normative must strive to reaffirm the continued relevance of those norms to an increasingly heterogeneous community of nations and an ever broader group of actively engaged stakeholders, many of which are focused on a single issue. Those entities that provide policy advice and technical or programmatic support must be flexible enough to adapt their offerings to the rapidly changing needs of a client base that is increasingly able to seek these services elsewhere. And those bodies charged with the governance of the international system must find ways to modernize outdated structures and ensure a more effective representation of the diverse interests of the global community.

20. The unique roles and functions of many of the UN agencies, funds and programmes should not be overlooked, for therein lies a potential source of strength. The "specialisation" inherent in the individual mandates of the entities could be an essential component of effective collaboration among them—a large part of that agenda will remain in place and be the evident responsibility of the respective agency—for example, the UN-WTO will always be about tourism. But there will be space in a part of that mandate for effective collaboration, and the effectiveness of the collaboration depends in part in finding ways to combine the credible expertise that the individual entities have built up within their respective fields. A corollary of this concept is that specialization must be disciplined, and entities must strive to avoid the type of "mission creep" that too much reliance on generalists and generalities has allowed over the past few years.

   ☒ *Specialization vs. Integration: How do UN entities address the challenge of ensuring the coherence of the sustainable development narrative, while preserving the importance of our own mandates within that broader context?*

   ☒ *What changes in our structures and UN coordination mechanisms are required to effectively contribute to the implementation of a set of integrated goals?*

   ☒ *Policy coherence for sustainable development requires a specific cross-sectoral and integrated skill set – what is needed to build that staff capacity to service an integrated post-2015 agenda (at the national and HQ levels)?*

Governance arrangements and accountability

21. Current international governance arrangements in virtually all areas are characterized by structures that tend to operate in policy silos, reflecting the experience at the national policy level and the global institutional architecture. With a few notable exceptions, most global

governance arrangements lack effective compliance mechanisms, raising issues of accountability; and many such arrangements, particularly within the intergovernmental context, find it difficult to reach decisions rapidly and then to implement those decisions effectively.

22.   Such governance arrangements impose serious constraints on the United Nations system. The governing bodies of most UN entities operate largely independently of other governing bodies, while in most cases remaining subject to the overall authority of the General Assembly, including as regards their core budgets. The functioning of the system is not naturally conducive to policy integration across institutional lines—for example, the decisions and policies of entities active in one area may not be known to, or seen as important for, entities active in another. There is relatively little joint decision-or policy making, notwithstanding the activities of numerous coordinating bodies and mechanisms. As a result, while to practitioners in a given area "their agency" may be seen as valuable, the same perception does not extend to the UN system as a whole. These factors point to the urgent need to reposition the system, and to redouble our efforts to enhance system-wide coherence and to address public perceptions of the ability of the United Nations to meet global challenges.

☒   *How can UN entities bring into the deliberations of their governing bodies, and ultimately into the General Assembly, the consideration of issues beyond their respective specific mandates, which would be essential for the effective integration of policy for sustainable development?*

☒   *How can compliance and accountability be strengthened within each entity and within their governing bodies? Is incremental change feasible, or must there be a wholesale recasting of the governance arrangements themselves, to enable the necessary changes?*

☒   *Can inter-agency collaboration be effectively deepened and intensified within the existing governance arrangements? Does effective collaboration necessarily require entities to move away from their existing mandates?*

Funding arrangements

23.   The current funding architecture and future funding trends, including the dependence of most agencies on non-core donor-provided funding for a large share of their staffing and operational activities has considerable implications for the operational autonomy and the availability of policy space of UN entities. These factors combine to "require" UN entities to "position" themselves as favorably as possible in the eyes of the donors by emphasizing the uniqueness of "their" agendas and mandates, and the effectiveness and efficiency of their operational activities (the perennial issue of "attribution"), even at the expense of a broader and more efficient inter-agency collaboration.

24.   The implicit dependence on donor resources provided through earmarked funds, for example, could limit the flexibility of the entities to adapt their policies and programmes to the changing environment, and also raises questions as to the lines of accountability. Similarly,

funds raised through the efforts of individual agencies are often 'tied" to some specific aspect of the agencies' work--it is difficult to raise funding for use through pooling arrangements with other agencies, and it is even more difficult to report back to donors on how well their funds have been used when entities have directed those funds toward the financing of joint efforts.

25.   At the same time, financing from traditional donors faces increasingly tight limits. Continued dependence on these donors as the major source of finding for the UN's operational activities would make the UN much less relevant as a source of financial support to countries striving toward sustainable development. This implies the need to redefine its role and to refocus the support it provides to member states. If it manages to do so successfully, the UN system could help frame the discussion among member states of the means of implementation for sustainable development in a way that would avoid an excessive focus on the transfer of external resources.

☒   *How can UN entities, in their advocacy and fundraising work, make clear the implications of the present funding arrangements for their ability to deliver on their respective mandates and to cooperate effectively across institutional boundaries?*

☒   *How would donor reporting requirements have to change to enable earmarked, non-core resources to be used for collaborative undertakings with other UN agencies, or with partners outside the UN?*

☒   *Accountability, monitoring and attribution: With the need to report to individual governing bodies on implementing (largely) sectoral mandates, how can we best measure our interventions and contributions to 'integrated' goals, indicators and targets?*

☒   *Can the UN system envisage successfully diversifying its sources of financing, and how would it define its comparative advantage and value added in order to do so? Is the system presently equipped to deal effectively with non-donor sources of financing, particularly private investment flows?*

Relevance of what the UN has to offer

26.   It will not be sufficient to rely on the UN's "moral authority" and the acceptance of its normative and convening role to ensure its "place at the table"—the UN system must be perceived to provide effective and value-adding support to the efforts of each of its member states to achieve sustainable development. The needs of member states in this area differ, across countries and over time, as their situations and relationships with each other evolve. The first and most important challenge facing the UN system is therefore to create and preserve the flexibility to evolve along with the members, offering services and support that the members themselves perceive as useful.

27.   This is a tremendous challenge in the current architecture of the international system, where most UN entities have relatively tightly focused mandates, with corresponding individual governance arrangements; competence in well-defined but rather specific areas; and limited

resources to materialize these mandates. None of this is naturally conducive to providing effective support to the type of "whole of government" policy making that the integrated approach presumes, which It requires that UN entities find and effectively exploit all available opportunities to work together. They must recognize the policy areas that they have in common, respecting their relative areas of comparative advantage and accept that effectiveness is not always synonymous with being perceived to be "in the lead".

28.   Even in the domain of the UN's normative work, its weight and effectiveness in these matters will depend in part on its ability to be a constructive partner in the policy dialogue with member states, and to make a valuable contribution to efforts to integrate policy and achieve sustainable development. This can take the form of policy advice tailored to the members' specific circumstances or support for institutional capacity development.

29.   It is important to realize here that in most of the countries of the world, including those that until recently were the "regular clients" of the multilateral institutions, the UN and other multilateral institutions no longer have the monopoly in this role. On present trends, that client base is rapidly evolving away from the dependence on multilateral assistance, leaving only the much smaller number of fragile and post-conflict states as a "captive" clientele. This development has major implications for the UN system, and particularly those agencies whose primary activity has traditionally been supporting "development" in the narrow sense.

30.   Yet the UN will only be able to positively influence member states' efforts to achieve sustainable development if it can create a "brand" that has resonance also in countries that have not recently been its clients--in particular, the advanced economies and upper-middle-income countries. And what it offers to these member states will have to be very different indeed from the services and support provided to typical client states over the past three decades. If the post-2015 framework is indeed accepted by all as a universal framework, the UN's role therein will depend on that "brand" and the trust it inspires. The redefinition of the UN's strategic relevance could be built on where, within the overall development process, it focuses its efforts. That focus must vary to suit the circumstances of each member country. Obviously, considerable policy and programmatic flexibility would be required for this approach to succeed. In some country circumstances, it could be argued that the UN's real value added lies in the focus on global public goods—facilitating a shared approach to policy making and supporting national level implementation—since, by their nature, these issues tend to require a multilateral approach.

> *How can the UN system generate the needed flexibility to evolve with the changing needs of the member states, and is this flexibility at all possible in the absence of substantial changes in governance and financing arrangements?*

> *Given the degree of specialization inherent in most agencies' respective mandates by comparison to the multidimensional nature of the problems most member states are facing, would it be at all possible to provide valuable and needed services to an "evolving" membership without an interagency effort?*

☒ *Where should the UN focus its efforts in countries that do not "need" its help—in policy advice, broader advisory services, providing an analysis of the overall global context for national policy making in the various area?*

☒ *Could the UN continue to be perceived as a trusted and impartial partner if it remains dependent on a handful of traditional donors?*

Data and Monitoring/Evaluation

31. All UN entities collect data in some form, and in some cases, those data are the most comprehensive and complete available. Many entities use these data in both normative and operational work as the evidence base for informed policymaking.

32. The UN system should use its collective expertise in this area to support the needed data revolution. It could in this way contribute to the definition of effective and measurable indicators and accountability systems for tracking progress toward the eventual sustainable development goals, and support the necessary disaggregation of data to monitor progress at all relevant levels and among all relevant groups.

33. The UN should pay particular attention to two critical aspects of the data revolution. In collaboration with other agencies, such as the OECD, it can help to drive the necessary extension of the measurement of progress beyond the typical indicators, such as GDP or per capita consumption, toward broader measures of progress and prosperity. These would take into explicit account the social, environmental, and human rights dimensions of that progress. And secondly, through direct collaboration among agencies active in a range of different areas, it can lead the way in developing "composite" indicators of the kind needed to measure progress toward sustainable development across the three pillars.

☒ *How much effort should UN agencies expend in defining indicators that can be used to measure progress toward the SDGs, or do the existing data bases already provide all the necessary information? If so, how can the UN entities make better collective use of the existing data systems and encourage their use as the evidence base for policy making at the national level?*

☒ *Can "composite" indicators be developed by adapting existing indicators, or do they require an entirely new definition? If so, how can UN entities most effectively collaborate in this effort?*

☒ *How can the UN encourage countries to measure progress in delivering human rights in all their dimensions, as part of the overall effort of measuring progress toward the SDGs.*

Effective support for policy integration and coherence at the national level

34. The UN's effectiveness in delivering the post-2015 agenda depends on how well it provides support to national governments in integrating and ensuring the coherence of their policies. On the one hand, this will take the form of supporting those structures within national governments that are charged with achieving that coherence—it may involve assisting

governments in building the specific capacity for policy integration. More generally, there will be a need for the UN system to foster the development of the capacity to formulate sustainable development policies, implying a degree of multi-dimensional policy-making that few governments presently practice.

35.   The UN system faces an additional challenge. Much of the change necessary for sustainable development will have to take place in the private sector. One the one hand, this requires governments to establish the right incentives and regulatory/legislative frameworks, and on the other, necessitates the building of effective partnerships between the official and the private sectors. The UN system is traditionally focused on its relationships with its member states, although there has been a considerable amount of attention paid to other stakeholder groups, including the private business sector, but by and large, its operational modalities are focused on its official partners, the member states. The UN itself will have to initiate changes in its approaches and methods of work to enable a more constructive engagement with non-official actors, particularly those that will make the investment decisions that will mobilize the private sources of financing for sustainable development.

☒   *Is the UN system properly equipped to provide this kind of assistance to member states in a credible and acceptable manner? Would the acceptance by the member states of this role for the UN system depend in part on its own track record in integrating the policies and programs of its entities?*

☒   *What must the UN system do differently to create access to policymakers in advanced and upper-middle-income countries to enable it to play this role?*

☒   *How can the UN equip itself for the type of constructive dialogue with the business and private financial community that will be needed in the context of sustainable development?*

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