



Chief Executives Board for Coordination

Distr.: General
17 May 2021

English only

Report of the High-level Committee on Programmes on its forty-first session

(Virtual meetings, 29 and 30 March 2021)

I. Introduction

1. The High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) held its forty-first session in a virtual format on 29 and 30 March 2021. The agenda of the session and the list of participants are contained in annexes I and II, respectively, to the present report. The session was focused on two substantive items, namely, the operating modalities and future areas of work of HLCP and biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development.

2. At the meeting on 29 March, the Chair of the Committee, Director General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Guy Ryder, opened the session by welcoming Committee members and thanking them for their participation through virtual means, as necessitated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. He then provided brief updates on matters relating to workstreams that were not on the agenda of the session.

3. The Chair informed the Committee that its inter-agency working group on artificial intelligence, led jointly by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), had met for the first time on 5 March 2021 to finalize its terms of reference and discuss priorities and joint activities for 2021.

4. In addition, on 25 February 2021, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had convened the Committee's inequalities task team with a view to determining the priorities of the task team for 2021. A subgroup of task team members had begun work on organizing a high-level event to be held in July, in conjunction with the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. Progress was also being made on a variety of other analysis, advocacy, coordination and knowledge-sharing activities, as set out in its workplan, which had been reviewed by the Committee last year.

5. The Chair highlighted that the inter-agency, inter-pillar predictive analytics pilot exercise, initiated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with the engagement of 22 United Nations system entities,



would transition to the Sahel under the leadership of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel. That step would be instrumental in reinforcing linkages with regional stakeholders and ensuring alignment with the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

6. The Chair alerted the Committee that the HLCP Foresight Network, led by UNESCO, was planning to meet virtually on 16 April 2021 in order to familiarize Network members with the broad framework for futures literacy, encompassing strategic planning and helping to enable a capability approach to development. The meeting would also provide an opportunity for Network members to share updates, experiences and insights from recent activities in that area and to jointly create a process for achieving the Network's objectives for the period 2021–2022.

II. Scoping discussion on the operating modalities and future areas of work of the High-level Committee on Programmes

7. Stressing the importance of taking stock in order to avoid inertia and improve, the Chair highlighted that it was a timely and needed discussion that could be informed by the outcomes of the review of the working arrangements of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, which was very relevant in the context of the Committee's operating modalities. Similarly, the discussion on the future areas of work of HLCP would benefit from both the policy responses for recovering better from the COVID-19 pandemic and the preparatory process for the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General on our common agenda, to be submitted to the General Assembly later in 2021.

8. The Chair welcomed in particular the participation of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Achim Steiner, in the scoping discussion and underscored that Mr. Steiner's experience, as former HLCP Chair and current Vice-Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and Chair of its core group, would be valuable to the Committee's deliberations.

9. Referring to the paper prepared by the HLCP secretariat, the Chair thanked Committee members for their contributions to the underlying consultative process and expressed the hope that they had found the paper useful in preparing for the discussion. The Chair encouraged members to share their views, suggestions and ideas for ensuring that the Committee operated in such a way as to optimally benefit the United Nations system, CEB and all members. To frame the discussion, he invited the HLCP Secretary, Maaïke Jansen, to present the main outcomes and conclusions that had emerged from the analysis of the surveys and interviews conducted by the CEB secretariat.

A. Operating modalities

10. In opening the discussion on the item, the Secretary recalled that the current process had built on the discussion on communicating and leveraging the work of HLCP held at the Committee's thirty-seventh session and the strategic planning workshop held at the thirty-eighth session. The secretariat approached the consultative process, consisting of an online survey and a series of interviews with a selection of HLCP members, present and former HLCP workstream leads and partners, under the principles of openness, ownership and trust. On the basis of the analysis, and bearing in mind the context of the wider United Nations system, the secretariat had formulated 12 recommended conclusions on enhancing key aspects of the functions, practices and impact of HLCP and refreshing the Committee's strategic purpose and future direction, for members' consideration, as outlined in the discussion paper.

11. In the context of the consultative process, members had voiced their overall support for the functions and operating modalities of HLCP. They had expressed strong appreciation for the think tank and policy coherence functions of HLCP and had considered the diversity of its functions and products to be an asset. Members had also remarked on the need for HLCP to balance its think tank function with tangible outputs. On its link with CEB, the Secretary noted that, as a subsidiary mechanism, HLCP maintained a strategic relationship with the Board that benefitted both, with CEB endorsing HLCP products and HLCP informing and inspiring principals on key system-wide issues. With respect to how members saw their roles as HLCP representatives, the survey had revealed a focus on their function at HLCP sessions, but members had also stressed the importance of going beyond their individual entities' interests and thinking from a system-wide perspective. There had also been recognition that HLCP representatives should engage their best technical experts and promote the uptake and visibility of HLCP work within their entities.

12. On the development and implementation of HLCP products, the survey had clearly affirmed that they should be demand driven. With regard to the preparatory process, a majority of members had indicated that a topic's relevance to their entities was very likely to have supported their engagement. Furthermore, members had identified strong leads, the use of time-bound workstreams and existing inter-agency mechanisms and the inherent value of the preparatory process in advancing common understanding, promoting new thinking and connecting initiatives, as factors affecting member engagement. Illustrating the points with a number of examples, the Secretary noted that strong leads and member engagement, a continued high-profile push to marshal support and the use of established inter-agency mechanisms were conditions conducive to product implementation. The Secretary also highlighted the importance that had been accorded to accountability and mentioned creating opportunities to report back on implementation gaps and exploring innovative ways to share progress reports, noting that delineating responsibilities upfront for the product supported accountability.

13. With regard to HLCP within the system of United Nations inter-agency mechanisms, the Secretary underscored the mutual benefits of strengthened coordination for maximizing impact and efficiency, avoiding duplication and making the best use of each mechanism's role. On the relationship between HLCP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, the survey had revealed that members strongly agreed that it was an opportune moment to strengthen collaboration and that that could be achieved at the Committee group, member and secretariat levels.

14. The Secretary remarked that the recommended conclusions reflected the agreement among members on the strengths of HLCP, and opportunities for improvement, and she pointed to the request for the secretariat to update the terms of reference of HLCP to codify the common understanding of its functions and operating modalities.

15. With a view to supporting the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the articulation of a common agenda and the new working arrangements of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, the Secretary stressed that the time was right for those deliberations. Looking ahead to possible future areas of work, she highlighted that the consultative process had confirmed that the policy issues that had been deemed most appropriate for HLCP were those that were relevant across the United Nations system, demand-driven, forward-looking, not duplicative and responsive to feedback from the United Nations system, including from the field. The secretariat had gathered rich and diverse proposals for possible topics and grouped them into the four thematic clusters that would be discussed in the subsequent breakout sessions.

1. General discussion of the Committee's operating modalities and development, implementation, impact and accountability with regard to its products

16. In the general discussion that followed the introductory remarks by the Secretary, Committee members showed their overall support for the analysis in the discussion paper on the strengths and weaknesses of HLCP and the recommended conclusions on its operating modalities. They echoed the view of the Chair on the timely nature of the discussion and expressed their appreciation for the inclusiveness of the consultative process and the high quality of the resulting discussion paper.

17. Committee members stressed the importance of demand-driven product development, with a view to addressing policy gaps, priorities and requests on the ground. In that regard, it was noted that there was a need to reinforce the feedback loop between HLCP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group by engaging resident coordinators and United Nations country teams. To that effect, members emphasized the need for HLCP products to be effective at every level and that the distribution and visibility of HLCP products must be reviewed in order to strengthen their implementation. They expressed their support for stronger follow-up mechanisms, periodic reviews and regular updates on product implementation.

18. Regarding the ownership of products, it was noted that, while there was a need for designated leadership and the clear distribution of responsibilities during and after the product development cycle, every member should have a sense of ownership of, and be committed to supporting, implementation. Committee members expressed their appreciation for the crucial work performed by the secretariat and pointed to the need for HLCP to be properly supported by all members in order to fulfil its mandate. In that regard, it was noted that the responsibility for implementing joint products rested with members. Members called upon the secretariat and lead entities to find ways to maintain the discussion in between HLCP sessions, in order for members to remain engaged and contribute.

19. Regarding the relationship between HLCP and CEB, members echoed the suggestions set out in the discussion paper for strengthened two-way communication, especially on issues relevant for system-wide coordination. Members stressed that there was a need for better integrating HLCP conclusions and products into CEB meetings, to give CEB endorsements of HLCP products more weight, to elevate the respective issues for CEB members and to support their further understanding and follow-up. In that context, it was observed that the CEB principals had an important role to play in ensuring that policies were integrated, and HLCP products were appropriately embedded, into their organizations' programmes of work. Committee members stressed the importance of maintaining relationships between HLCP and other inter-agency mechanisms, in order to avoid duplication of work and support greater coherence throughout the United Nations system.

20. The Chair underscored the need for increased connectivity between the Committee and its member organizations in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of a product, how it permeated through each entity and how to realize its full potential. The Secretary recognized the desire to increase the visibility of HLCP products with Executive Heads, pointing to the recommended conclusion on allotting time at CEB meetings for highlighting products developed through HLCP and flagging up policy issues that could benefit from their attention. Regarding the links with other mechanisms, the Secretary noted the differences in membership, and, with regard to work planning, she stressed that members had expressed the importance of the Committee maintaining its agility to consider or address new and forward-looking issues. The Chair noted the consensus reached on the adoption of the recommended conclusions on the functions and operating modalities of HLCP, on the development, implementation, impact and accountability of HLCP products and on updating the HLCP terms of reference.

Conclusions

21. The Committee agreed to preserve its character, as well as good practices related to its operating methods.

22. The Committee agreed that, in carrying out its work and delivering thought leadership, it should seek to achieve a balance between: (a) directed think tank discussions in support of CEB; and (b) creating tangible products that responded to demands for strengthened system-wide policy coherence and coordination. Accordingly, the HLCP membership looked to the Chair, who was also a CEB member, for guidance on striking that balance in the context of the Committee's future strategic purpose and priorities.

23. The Committee recognized the importance of reinforcing two-way communication between CEB and HLCP and requested the Chair and the HLCP secretariat to explore options for achieving that goal, including by: (a) allotting time at CEB meetings for highlighting products developed through HLCP and flagging up policy issues that could benefit from the attention of the Executive Heads; and (b) identifying opportunities for HLCP to inform CEB deliberations.

24. Acknowledging their individual and collective responsibility to contribute to the Committee's effective operation, HLCP members committed to maintaining a strong system-wide perspective when engaging in HLCP and stepping up efforts to: (a) facilitate the engagement of technical experts in HLCP workstreams; and (b) promoting the uptake and visibility of HLCP products within their entities.

25. Members acknowledged the specific responsibilities associated with leading an HLCP workstream. They recommitted to supporting processes for which they had accepted a lead role, throughout their life cycles, including by guiding and shepherding implementation by the United Nations system after the conclusion of the HLCP process, where applicable. Leads and members committed to marshalling, individually and collectively, adequate support, including capacity and resources, to ensure their success.

26. The Committee reiterated its expectation for lead entities and members contributing to HLCP workstreams to conduct inclusive and effective preparatory processes, integrating features that increased the likelihood of implementation and the impact of the final products, including by delineating responsibilities among entities when feasible. In that context, the Committee requested the HLCP secretariat to help to guide each individual process, as appropriate, in accordance with the product's unique purpose and nature.

27. The Committee recognized the value of receiving periodic updates on, and reviewing the status of implementation of, products developed under its auspices, by focusing primarily on solutions to unblock bottlenecks in order to minimize the burden on HLCP and lead entities. The Committee requested the HLCP secretariat to explore possible ways to facilitate such light follow-up processes, where relevant.

28. The Committee requested the HLCP secretariat to update the HLCP terms of reference of 2008, including by developing an annex on the Committee's operating modalities, to reflect its current common understanding on the functions and operating modalities of HLCP, based on the survey findings and the scoping discussion, for the Committee's consideration and approval.

2. Coordination between the Committee and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group

29. The Chair invited the Committee to consider the matter of coordination between the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and HLCP. He welcomed the participation of the UNDP Administrator, in his capacity as Vice-Chair of the United

Nations Sustainable Development Group and Chair of its core group, highlighting its importance. Recalling that the interaction between HLCP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group had frequently been raised in previous HLCP discussions, especially with regard to the implementation of HLCP products at the country and regional levels, the Chair expressed his appreciation for the convergence of views between the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and HLCP on the need to strengthen coordination between the mechanisms, while making the best use of the policy coherence mandate of HLCP and the operational mandate of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Although the latter was not the only mechanism through which HLCP products could be operationalized, it was, nonetheless, an extremely important vehicle for turning strategic policy into impact.

30. The UNDP Administrator credited HLCP with being a thoughtful and functional committee that maintained high standards and drove the United Nations system's policy agenda forward. Observing that, even when things were working well, it was worth reflecting on what was next and how to work better, he welcomed the effort by HLCP to review its operating modalities and future areas of work. HLCP had the dual objective to catalyze United Nations system entities to work together and to influence leadership thinking. He was of the view that, on the former, HLCP had generated a lot of value, but, on the latter, there was room for more to be done. In that context, he emphasized that the interface between HLCP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group presented another opportunity to reach the principals.

31. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group also served as an important bridge to United Nations country teams – a capillary structure reaching across the world whereby CEB-endorsed policy guidance could be translated into operations and help to trigger change. The UNDP Administrator observed that the way in which country teams were connected to HLCP outputs was currently not utilized to its full potential. However, he advised that not all HLCP products should be pursued for operationalization with equal intensity; rather, one or two that were particularly suitable to engaging the operational structure could be selected each year. Pragmatically, the Vice-Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, the HLCP Chair and the Chair of the CEB High-level Committee on Management (HLCM) could consider picking up particular items from each body's agenda, with the help of their respective secretariats. He also suggested that the HLCP Chair, who is also a member of the core group of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, could address the Group periodically on HLCP-related issues.

32. With the United Nations development system reform largely complete, the UNDP Administrator noted that the United Nations Sustainable Development Group would be principally focused on making a collective contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for example, by mobilizing cross-pillar support in line with the Secretary-General's priorities. That presented an opportunity for the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and HLCP to better align their programmes of work and for the former to play a complementary role to other United Nations system coordination mechanisms. The UNDP Administrator confirmed that recommendations emanating from the recent review conducted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group of its working arrangements indicated that it would draw on policy products developed internally in the United Nations system, including through CEB and its subsidiary mechanisms, HLCM and HLCP, to ensure operationalization where those products were relevant for the United Nations development system, its resident coordinators and United Nations country teams and to promote implementation at the regional and country levels. CEB and Executive Committee discussions would be well informed by the realities of, and priorities for, operational activities for development. The linkage between HLCP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group was

therefore a critical enabler of more system-wide coherence and coordinated alignment. He appreciated the opportunity to address HLCP, taking it as a positive signal that HLCP was similarly committed to improving coordination. He reiterated his willingness, and that of the Deputy Secretary-General as Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, to take the next step forward.

33. The Chair thanked the UNDP Administrator for the invitation to improve cooperation between the bodies and underscored his willingness to work with him.

34. In the ensuing discussion, Committee members expressed their support for the recommended conclusions on coordination between HLCP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, as set out in the discussion paper. Members were of the view that increased communication between the Chairs and the secretariats was important for achieving better synergies and that more coordination between the CEB mechanisms and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group would be useful. In view of the decision that the United Nations Sustainable Development Group should take a more results-oriented approach to delivery through the core group, rather than maintaining standing task teams, many members were of the view that focusing on a few items with input from HLCP was a pragmatic approach. In that context, members cautioned against overburdening resident coordinators and country teams with too many policies for implementation.

35. Members reiterated that, in addition to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, there were other paths for disseminating HLCP work that were important to continue to pursue so as to achieve maximum impact on the ground, for example, relevant outputs should be shared through the Development Coordination Office to resident coordinators directly and agencies should continue to operationalize HLCP products through their internal channels. The representative of the Development Coordination Office affirmed that the Office was fully committed to further strengthening the linkages with the HLCP and CEB secretariats and was looking forward to finding more practical ways to take up HLCP products and ensure operationalization at the country and regional levels.

36. Members stressed that, in its resolution [75/233](#), on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the General Assembly had placed an emphasis on supporting the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which had increased the need to for cooperation between the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and HLCP. Suggestions for topics that might warrant coordination included the following: leaving no one behind; social protection; education; productive capacity; financing for sustainable development; and science, technology and innovation. Furthermore, with reference to the same resolution, a Committee member stressed the need for reinforcing relations between the United Nations and international financial institutions, to provide balanced support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In that context, HLCP policy outcomes would be useful to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, given that they had the support of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund, as members of HLCP and CEB.

37. Recalling that the Committee's remit was not limited to development, members emphasized that it was important to seek synergies more broadly across coordination mechanisms, including the Senior Management Group and other initiatives of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, including on data, innovation and strategic planning. Strengthened engagement with HLCP by the peace and security and humanitarian entities, including the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Peacebuilding Support Office, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNHCR, and the inter-agency mechanisms, especially the Inter-agency Standing Committee, was seen by many as desirable as a complement to the efforts of

the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and the Standing Committee to address the development-humanitarian-peace nexus. It was stressed that the outputs of HLCP were of global relevance and that it was therefore important to think beyond the United Nations Sustainable Development Group in terms of the application of the Committee's products across developing and developed countries. The need to connect the policy thinking of HLCP to implementation at the regional level, including through the new regional collaborative platform, was also underscored.

38. The United Nations system-wide action plan on gender equality and the empowerment of women¹ was highlighted as a product that had successfully been taken to the entity level and moved through the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to the country level to achieve wide participation. That was possible because HLCP and leadership of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group drove the alignment. The latter's guidance on leaving no one behind was cited as another example of its effective translation of a CEB product, namely, the 2016 United Nations system shared framework for action on equality and non-discrimination,² into operation. However, it was noted that that was achieved through engagement among interested members; a means of moving HLCP outputs more formally into the Group's work programme for operationalization would be helpful.

39. In the course of the discussion, members recalled that HLCP had produced a wealth of products and suggested that it was worth revisiting them to assess their relevance to upcoming priorities for the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Committee members named the 2017 analytical framework on risk and resilience³ and the 2016 statement of commitment on bringing the United Nations system together to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding within the broader 2030 Agenda⁴ as two such examples.

40. Referring to the earlier discussion on operating modalities, Committee members suggested that periodic follow-up on the implementation of products, similar to that done for the inequalities framework, could be considered. Moreover, some members reiterated that it would be beneficial to devise a means, within the CEB working methods, for the HLCP and HLCM Chairs to provide updates to the Executive Heads or to have the Board periodically draw attention to one or two issues brought to it by HLCP or HLCM, in order to increase coherence and reinvigorate the policy influence that the Committees could have. Members were of the view that revisiting the "principal plus one" modality in CEB meetings would support follow-up and feedback.

41. Responding to various points raised, the UNDP Administrator agreed that, given the emphasis placed by the General Assembly on system-wide strategies and the linking of the normative and operational, in Assembly resolution 75/233, that should guide not only the priorities of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, but also those of HLCP and CEB. With the limited resources available, it would be necessary to determine what issues to prioritize, given the many inter-agency platforms that have linkages to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. He acknowledged the lessons learned on the importance of alignment between policy-operational systems and allowed for the possibility that operationalization might be hampered where there was not a clear path from HLCP to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group.

42. The UNDP Administrator noted that from policy to practice was a long distance. The United Nations country team delivery dimension was a significant multiplier and accelerator for HLCP products. While vertical agency-by-agency approaches were

¹ See <https://unsceb.org/un-system-wide-action-plan-gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-swap>.

² See <https://unsceb.org/un-system-framework-action-equality>.

³ CEB/2017/6, annex III.

⁴ CEB/2016/4, annex VIII.

important, he emphasized that it was possible to reinforce and accelerate implementation by empowering people on the ground to move faster, with good policy framing and direction-setting guidance provided through the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. He indicated that there was a great deal to build on to strengthen the interface between HLCP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and reiterated his commitment and that of the Deputy Secretary-General to do so.

43. The Chair confirmed the agreement of the Committee on the relevant conclusions outlined in the discussion paper and reiterated the need for the Chairs, secretariats and members to work together to make progress in the areas highlighted in the discussion.

Conclusions

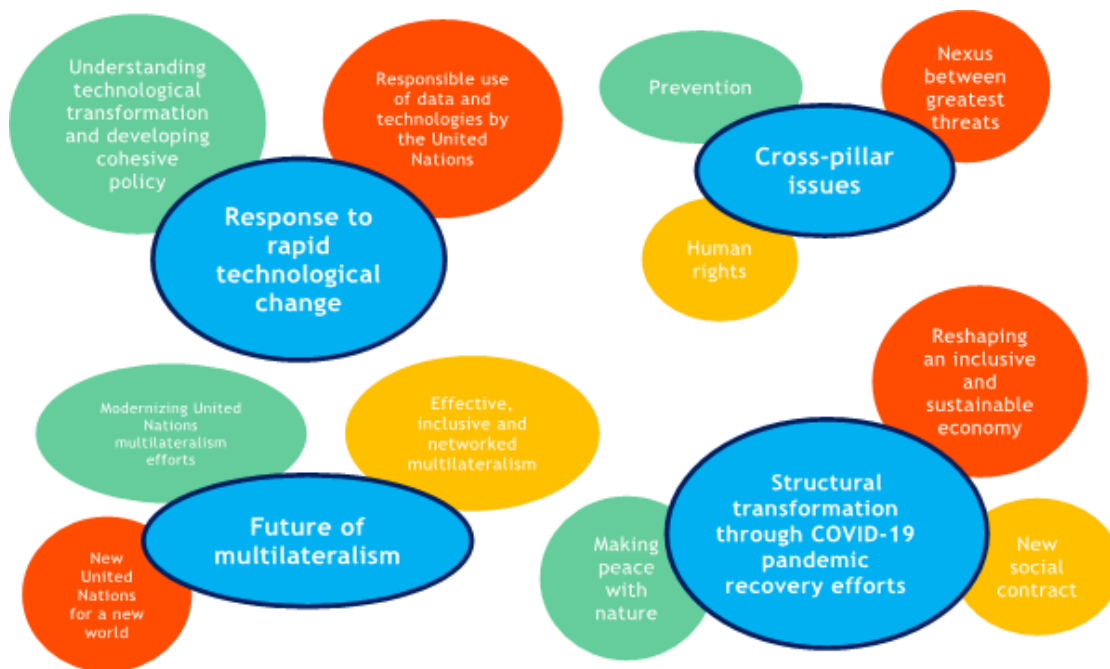
44. **The Committee agreed to undertake to work with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to further strengthen coordination between the two mechanisms, in line with their respective mandates. HLCP welcomed engagement by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to systematically support the implementation of CEB-endorsed products, as appropriate, and underscored the benefits of receiving feedback about policy gaps and priorities from the operational level.**

45. **The Committee requested the HLCP secretariat to strive to enhance collaboration with the Development Coordination Office so as to: (a) further strengthen coordination between HLCP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group; (b) pursue concrete ways to enhance the visibility and promote the implementation of relevant aspects of CEB-endorsed products at the country and regional levels; and (c) facilitate the exchanges between HLCP and resident coordinators and United Nations country teams.**

B. Future areas of work

46. The Chair informed Committee members that the consideration of the future areas of work of HLCP would feature two rounds of breakout group discussions to simulate a more interactive retreat-style format, to be followed by plenary deliberations. He asked members to think broadly and strategically and to share opportunities for sharpening the strategic purpose of the Committee. The Chair noted the four thematic areas to be discussed: (a) response to rapid technological change; (b) structural transformation to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in context of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; (c) cross-pillar issues; and (d) the future of multilateralism (see figure 1). The Secretary echoed the Chair's encouragement that members have an open discussion in the virtual breakout rooms on the future areas of work of HLCP based on the many ideas put forward in the context of the consultative process, focusing on feasible strategic entry points and topics that were ripe for HLCP to address.

Figure I
Breakout session themes by cluster



47. In the breakout groups discussing response to rapid technological change, there was broad agreement on the importance of addressing the digital divide and technological inequalities, including by expanding capacity development support and sharing knowledge with Member States, workers, students and small- and medium-sized enterprises, as well as United Nations system entities. Multiple members emphasized the importance of developing shared normative standards, such as on ethics and human rights, and common positions on technologies that were rapidly advancing and converging, and of facilitating agile mechanisms that could lessen the lag time between the speed of technological change and the development of governance policies or tackle risks of technologies which were common across multiple technologies. The issues of addressing misinformation, disinformation and “deepfakes” and the use of technology in the context of peace and security were also raised as topics that the Committee could address. In sharing those points with the plenary, the rapporteur emphasized the role of HLCP as a think tank to address issues arising from new technologies, including neurotechnologies, the 5G network standard and technologies, and quantum computing, and to further build on the existing work related to data and artificial intelligence.

48. The breakout groups considering structural transformation to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, deliberated on expanding the concept of structural transformation beyond the metric of gross domestic product (GDP) towards a new social contract that was sustainable and inclusive. There was consensus that the COVID-19 pandemic recovery was an opportunity for a green transition towards living within sustainable planetary boundaries and for addressing inequalities and economic insecurity to ensure that no one was left behind, including the issue of financing for sustainable development. The rapporteur indicated to the plenary opportunities identified for HLCP to address issues such as metrics beyond GDP, the circular economy and vertical inequalities, such as income and wealth inequality, and horizontal inequalities, including racial and gender-based discrimination, and echoed the

recommendations to develop governance policies for new technologies and to address the digital divide.

49. The context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its recovery provided the backdrop for discussions in the breakout groups focusing on cross-pillar issues. Managing risks and preventing future crises were themes that arose multiple times in the discussions, including the need for more integrated or whole-of-government approaches to preparedness and risk management, especially in addressing systemic risk and future pandemics. A shared or common analysis of risk, as well as a risk registry, were proposed as tools that would enable the analysis or results of strategic planning, predictive analytics and risk scanning to be made more accessible across the United Nations system. The rapporteur encouraged the plenary to consider the added value that HLCP provided in addressing cross-pillar issues and enhancing joint efforts across United Nations system entities. He conveyed the need for risk management approaches that reflected increasingly multidimensional and systemic risks and for an enhanced focus on preparedness and prevention vis-à-vis crisis management. The rapporteur echoed the need to ensure inclusion, especially the inclusion of marginalized groups, as a priority of United Nations system organizations' efforts.

50. In the breakout groups discussing the future of multilateralism, members supported effective, inclusive and networked multilateralism. The issue of engagement with Member States and other intergovernmental organizations, including international financial institutions, was raised as being key to the future of multilateralism. Several members also raised the importance of engaging a broad range of stakeholders, such as civil society, youth and the private sector, as well as reaching groups not traditionally engaged, such as subnational entities and the judiciary. Sharing lessons learned across the United Nations system and strengthening the work of the intergovernmental bodies throughout the United Nations system, including by leveraging existing multi-stakeholder processes and the workings of respective entities' governing bodies, was suggested for further exploration. The rapporteur conveyed to the plenary the need to further reflect on objectives in considering the future of multilateralism, to be more results oriented and adaptive to changing national circumstances and to communicate more effectively with outside stakeholders and individuals.

51. The Chair subsequently led a discussion in plenary to consider the ideas that had emerged from the breakout groups. In his introductory remarks, the Chair expressed his appreciation for the dynamic participation and substantive contributions of members in the breakout groups and noted that no definitive decisions on future topics were to be taken at that time; rather, in a progressive approach, HLCP would return to the subject at its next session to consider what it could most usefully contribute in support of what the Secretary-General envisioned for a common agenda and of the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals. He stressed that the Committee indeed needed to be responsive to the broader contextual circumstances within which it was operating, pointing to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic recovery, the Secretary-General's efforts to envision the future of multilateralism and the collective responsibility of the United Nations system organizations to help to realize the 2030 Agenda. Echoing members' desire to set levels of ambition high, the Chair invited members to continue to develop a sharper understanding of where HLCP could contribute, aggregating and integrating the Committee's efforts towards a strategic narrative. In that regard, he indicated his readiness to convey to the Secretary-General, as Chair of CEB, salient points from the scoping discussion on the strategic purpose of HLCP and its priorities for the coming years, so as to inform ongoing efforts to outline a common agenda.

52. The Chair provided a broad overview of themes emerging from the discussions, including the wish of members to anticipate risks and future crises, whether in biological, environmental, technological, economic, political or other fields, continue

to focus on inequalities, examine the circular economy and, more broadly, address technological inequalities and accountability, for example, with regard to the impact of social media and misinformation. The Chair acknowledged that HLCP was a consumer as well as a producer of knowledge and expertise, as part of a supply chain of information within the United Nations system. He stressed the need to more effectively tap into knowledge residing within the system and link embedded expertise to bring together insights on those future-oriented issues, which would allow HLCP to act in a more agile manner, especially to establish common positions or common messages on issues that were rapidly evolving.

53. Before opening the discussion, the Chair invited the HLCM Secretary, Remo Lalli, to provide the Committee with an overview of the recently concluded discussion on the role of HLCM in supporting the articulation of a common agenda, held at the forty-first session of HLCM. First recalling the longstanding spirit of coordination and collaboration between the two Committees on topics such as data and risk, the HLCM Secretary provided a briefing on the highlights of the two-hour discussion on how its work fit within the Secretary-General's plan and the related management policy priorities envisaged for the coming years. To provide context for the HLCM discussion, the Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination had provided a briefing to HLCM members on ongoing efforts to elaborate elements for the Secretary-General's forthcoming report on a common agenda. He had enumerated five cross-cutting capabilities that would facilitate the envisioned transformation to a next-generation United Nations, namely: (a) innovation and digital transformation; (b) work culture and behavioural science; (c) data analysis and communications; (d) performance and results orientation; and (e) strategic planning. The Assistant Secretary-General had expressed the view that HLCM was an important vehicle to support that transformation and had welcomed the collective investment in supporting the key enablers of the common agenda. The HLCM Secretary described ongoing initiatives to build a future United Nations system workforce that could deliver on what was envisioned to be the new multilateralism and be fit to meet emerging challenges in the coming decades. That included a model policy on modern work arrangements, new contractual modalities to complement existing ones and the adoption of five critical senior leadership commitments to steer the transition of their organizations and workforce towards the future of work.

54. In the ensuing discussion, HLCP members expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to contemplate the future areas of work for the Committee at a broad and strategic level and especially supported the think-tank role of the Committee, voicing strong support for the Committee examining structural issues. It was the view of Committee members that inequalities should remain a focus of its work, however, the level of analysis should be elevated towards structural barriers and factors. The perspective that structural factors were limiting progress in implementation of the 2030 Agenda was widely shared, and there was therefore a need to understand the kind of structural transformation that would be necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Members suggested that the Committee could explore the role of political economy in structural transformation, including the opportunity to leverage changes in political economy through the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic towards a new social contract and a greener, fairer economy. They also suggested that policy analysis on social protection and addressing past and current injustices, such as racial and gender-based discrimination, could inform the development of a new social contract.

55. Committee members proposed strengthening governance and normative standards in connection with efforts on structural transformation. The need to strengthen inclusive, effective and accountable governance was widely shared among members. The role of governance was viewed as key not only to enabling structural

transformation, but also to supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In the context of networked multilateralism, it was acknowledged that democratic participation, including that of civil society movements, youth and subnational entities, was an important element of governance. Several members supported further elucidating the normative elements of governance, such as human rights, the rule of law, transparency and anti-corruption measures, to strengthen governance, in a context of rising conflicts and political polarization.

56. Supporting a sustainable economic recovery and expanding productive capacities were also broadly supported by members as areas for further work. One proposal for the short term was producing integrated policy guidance on effective measures for COVID-19 pandemic recovery, in response to Member States' actions in that area. Longer-term sustainable recovery was also of keen interest to members, in particular the need to expand the productive capacities of Member States and diversify their economies, especially for least developed countries. It was also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic recovery must ensure livelihoods, given the large numbers of jobs lost, which had disproportionately affected women and young people. Members also stressed the importance of a greener recovery, moving towards sustainable consumption and production, including but not limited to circularity, and addressing not only productive capacities, but also sustainable value chains. The outcomes should contribute to demonstrating new and/or innovative concepts that provided opportunities to leapfrog barriers towards sustainability. Efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems was also suggested as an area for further consideration.

57. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with a view to being prepared for future pandemics, multiple members encouraged the Committee to further leverage strategic planning and to continue its work in risk prevention and preparedness for future crises. Members acknowledged the linkages between structural issues and systemic risk, with the analytical framework on risk and resilience cited as one product that could be followed up on. Members noted that understanding current and future risks was an important area of work for the Committee, including to further risk-informed development. Science and technology, as well as strategic planning, were put forward as tools that could be used in that regard. Strategic planning was noted to be useful not only for understanding risks, but also for envisioning responses and a better future in the light of risks.

58. One area of current and future risk, as well as opportunity, that members repeatedly raised was technology and digital transformation. Closing the digital divide and promoting digital inclusion were topics raised by members that intersected with both broader themes of addressing inequalities and expanding productive capacity, given the increasing effects of digital inequalities highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The new era of digitalization was also connected with the need for the governance of new technologies and the data that underpinned them. Governing technologies was understood by members as being both a tool to reduce risks and inequalities associated with technologies and a way to leverage technology and data as platforms for enhanced effectiveness of the United Nations system.

59. Another topic that multiple members proposed was demographic change, in particular the issue of population ageing. Ageing was a topic that touched on multiple dimensions, from the human rights of older persons to digital inequalities in the context of older persons to the impact of demographic change on productive capacities. Mobility and migration were also suggested topics, including specifically examining the nexus between health and mobility. Another proposal that was shared was to approach issues and policies from the perspective of the individual, especially as individuals became less embedded in social structures.

60. The Chair concluded the discussion by thanking the members for the valuable ideas put forward. They had succeeded in identifying an overarching architecture within which to frame the future work of HLCP in a way that was ambitious and supportive to the broader needs of the system. He expressed his appreciation for the strong current of common perspectives and purpose demonstrated by members. The Chair recalled the transformational nature of the 2030 Agenda and the linkages to the structural actions required to realize it. He noted the importance of prevention and taking an approach that not only prevented future harms, but also addressed existing and ongoing harms. He also noted the importance of examining large conceptual issues, such as inequality, political economy, democratic accountability and a new social contract. He reiterated the intention to further examine those issues at the forty-second session of the Committee, after which the conceptual issues would be unpacked into constituent parts and the Committee could consider ways to pursue them as future areas of work.

Conclusions

61. The Committee requested the Chair, with the support of the HLCP secretariat, to convey to the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of CEB, the salient points from the scoping discussion on the strategic purpose of HLCP and its priorities for the coming years, so as to inform ongoing efforts on outlining a common agenda for presentation by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session.

62. The Committee looked forward to the Chair presenting the vision for the strategic purpose and priorities of HLCP, as informed by the consultative process and the scoping discussion and oriented within the outcome of Member States' deliberations on the common agenda, at the Committee's forty-second session, to be held in October 2021, for approval by the membership.

III. Biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development

63. The Chair opened consideration of biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development by recalling that, in May 2020, CEB had endorsed the call for a stronger focus on nature across the United Nations system and had tasked HLCP with the development of a common approach to integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into United Nations policy and programme planning and delivery.

64. Since then, HLCP had established a time-bound task team, chaired jointly by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UNDP, to collaborate on the delivery of a common approach and collective action across the system. The common approach to integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions into United Nations policy and programme planning and delivery was elaborated through an inclusive and participatory process, which included the participation of 27 United Nations system entities and was enriched with feedback from, and collaboration with, other relevant inter-agency processes and mechanisms outside the CEB machinery. Reflecting on the scoping discussion on HLCP working modalities, the Chair observed that, in many ways, that effort was a model of a successful process: efficient, inclusive, with meaningful engagement and technical input and strong leadership.

65. The UNEP lead of the task team, Corli Pretorius, introduced the common approach, framing it as a commitment to mainstreaming biodiversity and catalysing the action required to halt the loss of biodiversity and to restore it, by going beyond the conservation of species to address the drivers of biodiversity loss and ultimately making peace with nature, as called for by the Secretary-General. The common

approach was based on the underlying narrative of preventing further loss of biodiversity and restoring nature, to increase social and economic resilience.

66. The common approach provided a results-based structure within which to organize collective action and joint delivery to mainstream biodiversity and nature-based solutions (see figure II). It elaborated 15 medium-term objectives, or expected accomplishments, that would contribute to the realization of living in harmony with nature by 2050. They set the overall strategic intent of the common approach, and each objective contributed to at least one of the three impact areas: (i) human rights, peaceful societies and planetary stability; (ii) a green and inclusive economic recovery; and (iii) strengthened institutions, accountability and justice (see figure III).

Figure II
Structure of the common approach

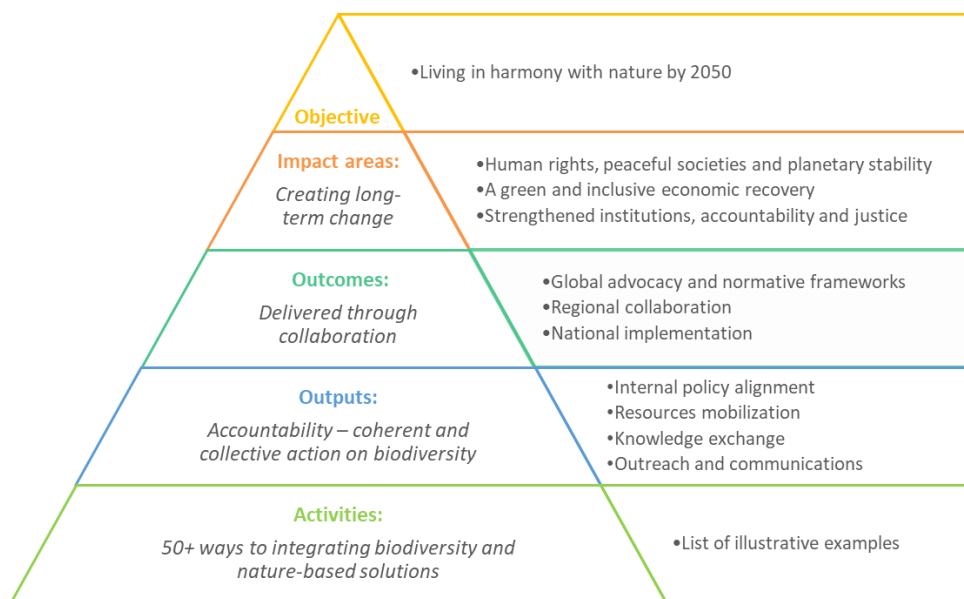
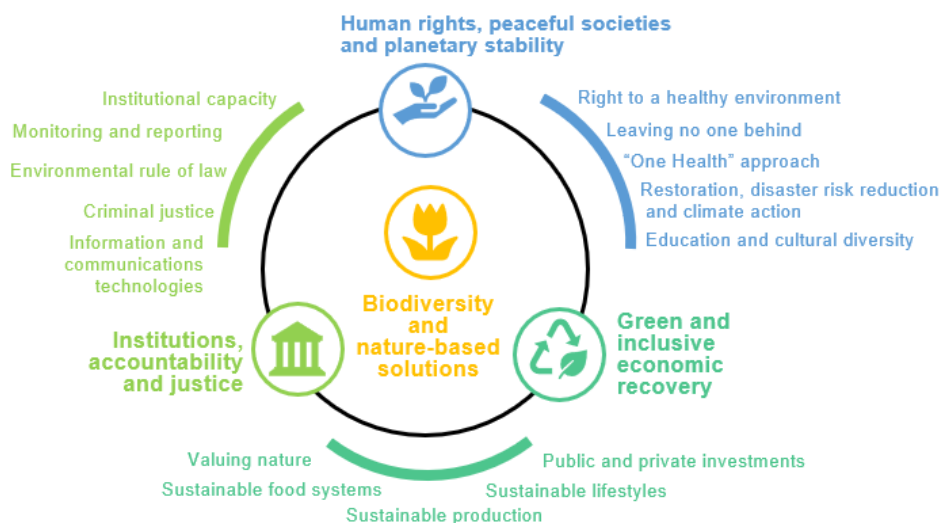


Figure III
Impact areas and medium-term objectives of the common approach



67. The UNEP lead of the task team explained that the common approach proposed a set of outcomes that could be achieved by the United Nations system, in partnership with relevant stakeholders, at the global, national and regional levels, through internal policy alignment, resource mobilization, knowledge exchange, outreach and communications. Building on existing mechanisms, it also set up an accountability framework for coherent and collective outputs on biodiversity.

68. The implementation of the common approach was envisioned to be enhanced through various inter-agency mechanisms. A midterm review of the common approach was expected to be conducted in 2024, in line with the anticipated review cycles for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the Sustainable Development Goals.

69. In the ensuing discussion, Committee members welcomed the common approach and expressed their full support for, and commitment to, its implementation, praising the inclusivity and efficiency of the process and thanking the leads for the exemplary way in which they had led and facilitated its development.

70. Committee members noted how the common approach was well aligned with issues raised by Member States at the Summit on Biodiversity in 2020 and in the context of General Assembly resolution [75/233](#), while serving as an excellent example for integrating HLCP outputs into operationalization through the United Nations Sustainable Development Group.

71. Members agreed upon the timely nature of the common approach, with 2021 being considered the “super year for nature”, marked by the convening of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Food Systems Summit and the launch of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, and serving as an important opportunity to further highlight the nexus between biodiversity, oceans, the climate and forests.

72. Committee members commended the explicit centrality of the human rights-based approach taken in the document, recognizing the intergenerational right to a healthy environment, vulnerability, inclusion, the rule of law and environmental justice and the protection of environmental human rights defenders, all of which contributed to the implementation of the Secretary-General’s call to action on human rights.

73. Committee members stressed that the concept of “natural capital” should be used cautiously and that the careful qualification of the term in the document, with use of non-market-based language, was welcomed, because commodifying nature would have a potentially destructive outcome for people and the planet. Members also underlined the critical importance of engaging with indigenous peoples⁵ and communities in implementing the common approach, including through the system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples.⁶ Suggestions were made to integrate references to smart, sustainable cities and urban ecology in the common approach and to add humanitarian action towards biodiversity conservation and restoration to the annex to the document containing the common approach.

74. Reflecting on the positive feedback received, the UNEP lead of the task team welcomed the comments and invited members to provide promptly any final input for inclusion in the revised document before its transmission to CEB. In summarizing the discussion, the Chair thanked the task team and the leads for delivering a high-quality

⁵ See www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2017/04/system-wide-action-plan-swap-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.

⁶ See <https://unsceb.org/building-inclusive-sustainable-and-resilient-future-indigenous-peoples-call-action>.

product responding to the CEB mandate within the year and under challenging circumstances, responding to the Secretary-General's call for urgency.

Conclusion

75. The Committee approved the common approach to integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into United Nations policy and programme planning and delivery, for onward transmission to CEB for endorsement.

IV. Dates and location of the forty-second session of the Committee

76. The Chair proposed the dates of 5 and 6 October 2021 for the forty-second session of the Committee. The decision to hold a physical or a virtual meeting would be taken in the coming months on the basis of the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, with utmost consideration to be given to the health and well-being of Committee members.

Conclusion

77. The Committee approved the dates of its forty-second session, 5 and 6 October 2021, with the format, location and host to be determined.

Annex I

Agenda

1. Scoping discussion on the operating modalities and future areas of work of the High-level Committee on Programmes:
 - (a) Operating modalities;
 - (b) Future areas of work.
2. Biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development.
3. Dates and location of the forty-second session of the Committee.

Annex II

List of participants

Chair: Guy Ryder (International Labour Organization)

Secretary: Maaïke Jansen (secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination)

United Nations

Executive Office of the Secretary General	Michelle Gyles-McDonnough Ayaka Suzuki Lara Blanco Rothe Julie Morizet
Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs	Teresa Whitfield Renato Mariani
Peacebuilding Support Office	Henk-Jan Brinkman
Department of Economic and Social Affairs	Marion Barthelemy Leslie Wade Xenia von Lilien
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	Hansjoerg Strohmeyer
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	Craig Mokhiber
Global Pulse	Robert Kirkpatrick Josiane Toundzi
Office for Outer Space Affairs	Simonetta Di Pippo Veronica Cesco
Development Coordination Office	Christopher Stokes
International Labour Organization	Sukti Dasgupta Margaret Mottaz-Shilliday
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Beth Crawford Lucas Tavares
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Firmin Matoko Shamila Nair-Bedouelle Eliot Minchenberg Jean-Yves Le Saux Clare Stark
International Civil Aviation Organization	Thilly De Bodt Chrystelle Damar
World Health Organization	Werner H. Obermeyer
World Bank Group	Farhad Peikar

International Monetary Fund	Robert Powell Valerie Guillamo
Universal Postal Union	Abdellatif Meskine
International Telecommunication Union	Ursula Wynhoven Preetam Maloor Cristina Bueti
World Meteorological Organization	Laura Paterson
International Maritime Organization	Azara al-Hassan Prempeh Beatriz Good
World Intellectual Property Organization	Edward Kwakwa Ola Zahran
International Fund for Agricultural Development	Joanna Veltri
United Nations Industrial Development Organization	Ayumi Fujino Tsung-Ping Chung
World Tourism Organization	Zoritsa Urosevic
International Atomic Energy Agency	Camila Polo Florez Vivian Okeke
World Trade Organization	Said El Hachimi
International Organization for Migration	Ashraf El Nour Kieran Gorman-Best
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	Paul Akiwumi
United Nations Development Programme	Haoliang Xu George Gray Tim Scott Umberto Labate
United Nations Environment Programme	Mara Murillo Corli Pretorius
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	Raouf Mazou Annika Sandlund
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	Sam Rose
United Nations Children's Fund	Sanjay Wijesekera David Matern
United Nations Population Fund	Diene Keita Soohyun Kim Nkeiruka Didigu

World Food Programme	Valerie Guarnieri Dominik Heinrich Gernot Laganda
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime	Bo Mathiasen Angela Me
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)	Christopher Williams
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)	Aparna Mehrotra Sharon Taylor
United Nations University	David Passarelli
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS	Shannon Hader Nertila Tavanxhi
Regional economic communities	Amr Nour Yera Ortiz De Urbina
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	Daniele Violetti
United Nations System Staff College	Patrick van Weerelt Svenja Korth
United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Recovery	Paola Albrito
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization	Patrick Grenard
International Trade Centre	Riefqah Jappie Ana Patricia Batalhone
Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination	Simona Petrova Remo Lalli Cheryl Stafford Li Zhou Marije van den Berg Marta Lorenzo Fernandez Marine Collignon Anna Rickert
