

Delivering Coherence:
Next Steps for a Unified
United Nations System

38th United Nations Issues
Conference

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Executive Summary

The mandate for the High-Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence traces back to the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, which called for improved coherence to address often overlapping and uncoordinated on-the-ground programs around the world. The objective of this system-wide coherence initiative is clear: an improved implementation of programs that maximizes the impact of the United Nations' resources on the ground. Taking a cue from the panel's *Delivering as One* report, the Stanley Foundation conference focused not only on overall issues of economic development but particularly on issues of promoting gender equality and protecting the environment.

Though conference participants agreed that greater coherence was urgently needed, there was significant discussion on which aspects of “delivering as one” should take priority. Similarly, there are issues of how to coordinate and assign authority to the various actors involved—governments and UN agencies, programs, and funds—each of which have their own budgets, priorities, and lines of authority. Indeed, there was skepticism whether structural, as opposed to operational or programmatic, changes can be achieved in today's political climate and fragmented UN system.

The specialized agencies, funds, and programs of the United Nations were created with much more modest mandates than today's sprawling global operations. Despite calls by member states for greater efficiency, those same member states often micro-manage the United Nations and block many efficiency reforms. Participants pointed out that the United Nations was not designed to function as a single cohesive organization. Instead, each agency was set up to accomplish its specific objectives. To the extent that the concept of “One UN” implies the merger of these entities into a unified whole, it may create a misimpression. The aim of coherence is to create synergy by having the UN agencies focus on shared objectives and mutually reinforcing approaches.

Similarly, conference participants expressed concerns about the possible unintended perceptions associated with the high-level panel's motto of “delivering as one,” particularly in developing countries. The inefficiencies and unfocused efforts associated with incoherence ultimately undercut development in the host country, a participant pointed out. Even so, at the level of perceptions, developing country governments might worry that coherence could result in decreased benefits; after all, the motto sounds as if many activities are being collapsed into just “one.”

Recipient governments are especially sensitive to how donor-driven is the aid that comes through bilateral and international financial institution channels. Meanwhile, donor governments are facing increased scrutiny from their parliaments and publics over funding duplicative and overlapping programs—particularly through a United Nations widely perceived as inefficient. Developing countries continue to favor funding that comes through the UN. Aid recipients feel that working with the United Nations gives them more opportunity to define development priorities and less pressure to abide by donor-government wishes. The special legitimacy of the United Nations as a servant of all governments, participants highlighted, provides a context in which the sovereignty of developing nations is given greater respect.

The centerpiece of the coherence initiative is an effort to harmonize UN development activities being carried out within a given country—“One UN in Country.” A pilot program is getting under way that includes Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay, and Vietnam. The aim is to have all stakeholders in the country working within a shared framework, management, and budget.

The early momentum of One UN in Country highlights the relative ease of achieving coherence in the field, compared with central headquarters structures. Indeed, conference participants saw a “remarkable split” between what they have heard about the country level versus what they hear from ambassadors in

New York. The skepticism among diplomats in New York stands in contrast to the enthusiasm of pilot country governments and the additional member states that have volunteered to be part of future rounds of expansion.

Of course, the heart of coherence is a shared set of development objectives and priorities, with a strong sense of ownership for all stakeholders. This was also the purpose of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), but participants noted that, in reality, the frameworks were simply stitched-together patchworks of preexisting programs—perpetuating incoherence rather than correcting it. In addition, the national poverty-reduction strategies on which the UNDAFs were based were usually strongly World Bank-driven, with little or no host-government ownership.

Participants were hesitant in general to proceed with changes in the governance structures through which member states oversee the specialized agencies. They viewed it as more productive to enhance coordination between governments and UN programs, clarify development priorities, and increase accountability in the UN system. Several participants pointed out that the real challenge is to boost the delivery of development assistance rather than create “board upon board, committee upon committee.” They proposed to let such changes emerge from experience with One UN in Country. In the meantime, it was suggested that the existing boards of the various agencies work jointly to assess the pilot program and that member states should support the strengthened leadership role of the resident coordinators.

Gender Equality

Promotion of gender equality is widely recognized as a powerful lever on economic development and poverty reduction. Empirical research indicates that for every year of elementary education a girl receives, there is a significant improvement in the future standard of living of her and her family. The high-level panel was asked to address gender as part of its terms of reference, and indeed the panel received thousands of letters and other communications as input on the subject.

Compared with reactions to some of the report’s other proposals, conference participants supported early implementation of the panel’s recommendations on gender equality. The panel proposed to consolidate the three existing UN gender entities into an enhanced and independent under-secretary-general for gender issues, with strong normative and advocacy roles and the sufficient funding. Participants agreed with the panel that this architecture would help strengthen voices for gender equality within the United Nations. Consistent with the panel’s overall vision, participants said, the gender-related architecture should be designed with a view toward improving development outcomes, for instance by ensuring gender equality is a component of all in-country programs. As an immediate practical matter, the creation of a new under-secretary-general post would ensure that there is an advocate for gender issues in the room at senior-level meetings.

Environmental Protection

Participants viewed the current growing public awareness of climate change as an opportunity and also as a call to action. There was general agreement on increasing the capacity-building ability of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to help developing countries transition to environmentally sound policies and that the next UNEP budget should support such an effort. Making the relevant budgets more strategic and predictable is important, as is greater cohesion between the United Nations’ scattered environmental facilities.

That aggregate global climate change is occurring was undisputed, though participants discussed whether the existing knowledge base gives a clear basis for the direction of policy. Overall, there appeared to be wide consensus that the world needs a better strategy for action on the environment, which, in turn, could drive further discussions on appropriate UN structures.

The One UN at the country level program enjoyed the most support and enthusiasm among conference participants. Many suggested that the pilot programs will be the foundation for any progress on

this agenda, but they also noted the importance of member-state backing (resources and help in breaking down bureaucratic barriers) to give the effort the best chances of success.

Many participants saw the mistrust between developed and developing countries as the root of the problem. It was suggested that reforms might have to wait until the political climate at the United Nations changes. One step suggested to avert a deadlock in the General Assembly would be to hold the debate in a wide variety of fora to keep it from being captive of the General Assembly's political groupings. There was also concern about expecting too much of the secretary-general so early in his term or judging him too harshly on his response to a report issued prior to his tenure.

A number of participants urged more discussions on the issues raised by the panel's report, particularly conducted across regional lines and involving in-country staff. One participant gave an optimistic view that demonstrable improvement in coherence could significantly boost confidence in and support for development cooperation.

Opening Remarks

by Richard H. Stanley

Welcome to the Stanley Foundation's 38th United Nations Issues Conference. The foundation convenes this conference annually to provide an informal nonattribution opportunity to discuss timely items on the agenda of the United Nations. We select topics that have a strong connection to issues that are under active discussion within the United Nations. We seek issues that are "ripe" for constructive progress—ones whose resolution will move us toward a world that is more secure, peaceful, free, and just.

This year's conference subject, "Delivering Coherence: Next Steps for a Unified United Nations System," certainly meets those criteria. On November 9, 2006, the 15-member High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence, appointed by then Secretary-General Kofi Annan, submitted its report. The report, *Delivering as One*, presents the panel's thinking and proposals to strengthen the management and coordination of United Nations' operational activities. It includes proposals for more tightly managed entities in the fields of development, humanitarian assistance, and the environment. Within the next month, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is expected to present his reactions and recommendations regarding the report. At that point, consideration of and action on the report will move to the General Assembly. We will have an unusual opportunity to strengthen the effectiveness of the United Nations in its work on development, humanitarian assistance, and the environment.

Why is this important? Why does this merit our time and energy this weekend and in the weeks and months to come? As a starting point, let us recall that the United Nations Charter begins with the words "We the peoples." This phrase serves as a reminder that the Charter promises to improve the lives of ordinary people around the world. As former Secretary-General Kofi Annan put it, "Beneath the surface of states and nations, ideas and language, lies the fate of individual human beings in need."



Richard H. Stanley
President, The Stanley Foundation

This conference focuses on parts of the United Nations' mission that are relatively uncontroversial—the United Nations' operations that promote sustainable development on the ground. The activities of the specialized agencies, funds, and programs are where the rubber hits the road—and where millions of people around the world directly encounter the United Nations. These are the UN System's good works; they enjoy near universal support, and everyone would like to see them perform at peak effectiveness. At our United Nations Issues Conference a year ago, there was a concern from some that the push for management reform was really an effort to cut UN budgets and programs. Conference participants agreed that the goal should be “a United Nations that delivers better, not less.” I hope our discussions can be conducted in that same spirit.

The panel's report reminds us that the development agenda is undergirded by a remarkable degree of consensus. The Millennium Development Goals set concrete objectives to raise the living standards of the world's poorest and improve the ability of nations and households to take part in the local and

global economy. The Monterrey Consensus affirmed that the leaders of developed and developing countries fully share responsibility for policies and actions toward these goals. But agreement on principles has not produced meaningful progress toward meeting the goals.

Two years ago, the UN Millennium Project led by Jeffrey Sachs gave a sobering assessment of just how far short—how far behind—we are falling. The report described large populations, hundreds of millions of people, stuck in “poverty traps,” with little or no access to basic medicine, elementary education, minimal nutrition, or sustainable livelihoods. These are the realities we should bear in mind in our discussions. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon observed that “the true measure of success for the United Nations is not how much we promise, but how much we deliver for those who need it most.”

What, then, is the problem? Why are we falling short in progress toward meeting the well articulated and quantitatively defined Millennium Development Goals? Why are good intentions not producing the desired results? In the words of its cochairs, the High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence sought to “overcome the fragmentation of the United Nations so that the system can deliver as one, in true partnership and serving the needs of all countries” in pursuit of economic development. The themes of “delivering as one” and “One UN” are consistent strains in the panel's report. It stresses the importance of pulling together all of the various elements working on behalf of the United Nations and peoples of the world so that their efforts are fully integrated and focused.

Here, the high-level panel has clearly identified a major root problem. Dealing with it is central to improving UN effectiveness in development, humanitarian assistance, and the environment. This difficulty is classic and all too common in large and complex organizations. And certainly the United Nations fits that definition. It has numerous governing bodies for its many funds, programs, and agencies. These funds, programs, and agencies have

different funding mechanisms. And the situation becomes even more challenging when one considers the various bilateral assistance programs, the work of nongovernmental organizations, and the operations of transnational enterprises.

When one is dealing with complex services and activities like advancing sustainable development, two conditions must be simultaneously present. First, the varied sectoral and discipline capabilities involved in the effort must be highly competent. Second, these capabilities must be effectively integrated and coordinated. The organization structures that produce sectoral and discipline competence are not the same as those that produce interdisciplinary integration.

The United Nations is, of course, built on the nation-state system. The various member states appoint their representatives to United Nations' governing bodies, both within the central United Nations and in the many specialized agencies. At the policy level, coordination within the United Nations rests heavily upon cooperation among the member states. Improved coordination and integration will depend on national governments investing effort to find and reinforce common understandings, directions, and priorities. At the same time, individual member states must harmonize their national policies and priorities internally so that their representatives to the various deliberative bodies, agencies, and funds are on the same page.

In selecting *Delivering as One* as the title of its report, the high-level panel clearly emphasized the need for coordination and integration of the services of UN agencies, programs, and funds as its highest priority. From my experience in the private sector, I can vouch for the importance of such integration and coordination—as well as how difficult it can be. The high-level panel articulated a clear set of recommendations to overcome systemic fragmentation and achieve “delivering as one.” These merit careful consideration and implementation.

First, they recommended establishing One UN for development at the country level, with one leader,

one program, one budget and, where appropriate, one office. In each country, the One Country Programme would be led by an empowered resident coordinator. The resident coordinator would integrate and coordinate all UN program activities at the country level, making sure that the program is developed and owned by the country in line with its own national priorities. Country pilot programs would be established to test and guide implementation of this concept, and steps in this direction have already begun.

Second, they recommended establishing One UN for development at the headquarters level. This would include forming a UN Sustainable Development Board to oversee the One UN Country Programmes. They recommended that the secretary-general appoint the UNDP administrator as the UN Development coordinator; an overhaul of business practices of the UN system to ensure focus on outcomes; and establishment of results-based funding, performance, and accountability. The effect of these and similar moves would be to drive coordination and joint planning between all funds, programs, and agencies as well as to focus and push them toward support of the One UN Country Programmes.

In addition, the high-level panel dealt with humanitarian assistance and the transition from relief to development, strengthening international environmental governance, gender equality and women's empowerment, sustainable development, and human rights. They offered substantive recommendations dealing with governance, funding, and management. The report is rich and meritorious.

Our conference agenda is built around the content of the high-level panel's report. First, we will explore the One UN at the country level concept. This is the “point of delivery” for UN development activities. A pilot program in several countries is under way, and we will hear a brief update on this. It is important for us to understand and support this initiative, since it will constitute the new operational context for many of the other coherence issues. How will plans and priorities be set for country teams on the ground? To what degree will operations be integrated and unified,

with shared budgets and infrastructure? How will headquarters level ownership and support be generated and maintained?

Next, we will discuss coherence at the top of the system, where member states are confronted not only with policy and administrative decisions but also decisions about oversight and political consultations. What actions are needed to shift the strategic and operational focus of the United Nations and its members to support the One UN concept?

We will also focus on two major thematic areas identified by the high-level panel—gender and the environment—as both critical to sustainable development and in need of stronger organizational focus throughout the United Nations. The major question on the environment for this weekend is whether UN environmental efforts are sufficient for the magnitude of the problem.

We are delighted that you have chosen to join us for this conference. This is an exceptional group of participants. Our intent for this conference is that it will permit you to explore ideas and exchange thinking on what should be done to overcome fragmentation and to strengthen the management and coordination of United Nations' work on development, humanitarian assistance, and the environment. Our goal is to build political will for expeditious and positive consideration of the report of the high-level panel. We will press you to find and articulate areas of consensus. We will encourage you to define differences more precisely and bridge them where possible. We will ask you for policy recommendations that will advance the United Nations toward coherence and “delivering as one.”

We thank you for joining in this opportunity to facilitate and advance consideration of the Coherence Report and to enable the United Nations System to deliver as one.

I look forward to our discussion.

Conference Report

In his acceptance speech as the eighth United Nations secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon noted that “the true measure of the success for the United Nations is not how much we promise, but how much we deliver for those who need us most.” A few weeks later, the High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence, appointed by previous Secretary-General Kofi Annan, presented their report, *Delivering as One*. Panel cochairs—Shaukat Aziz, Luisa Dias Diogo, and Jens Stoltenberg, prime ministers of Pakistan, Mozambique, and Norway respectively—described their report as:

...a series of recommendations to overcome the fragmentation of the United Nations so that the system can deliver as one, in true partnership with and serving the needs of all countries in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals....

[The] proposals encompass a framework for a unified and coherent UN structure at the country level. These are matched by more coherent governance, funding and management arrangements at the centre.

On February 23-25, 2007, the Stanley Foundation hosted its 38th United Nations Issues Conference, with representatives from numerous member states asked to assess the importance and practicality of getting the United Nations to “deliver as one” in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance, gender equality, and protection of the environment. The mandate for the high-level panel traces back to the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, which called for improved system-wide coherence to address often overlapping and uncoordinated on-the-ground programs around the world. The objective of

this system-wide coherence initiative is clear: an improved implementation of programs that maximizes the impact of the United Nations’ resources on the ground.

Though conference participants agreed that greater coherence was urgently needed, there was significant discussion on which aspects of “delivering as one” should take priority. Similarly, there were differences over how to coordinate and assign authority to the multiple actors involved—governments and UN agencies, programs, and funds—each of which have their own budgets, priorities, and lines of authority. Indeed, there was skepticism whether structural changes, as opposed to operational or programmatic ones, are achievable in today’s political climate and fragmented UN system.

The specialized agencies, funds, and programs of the United Nations that work on development were created with much more modest mandates than today’s sprawling global operations. Moreover, the great bulk of international aid flows through donor governments’ own agencies (reflecting the donor’s priorities), or the World Bank. Despite calls by member states for greater efficiency, those same member states often micromanage UN agencies and departments, effectively blocking many efficiency reforms. Participants pointed out that the United Nations was not designed to function as a single cohesive organization. Instead, each agency was set up to accomplish its specific objectives. To the extent that the concept of “One UN” implies the merger of these entities into a unified whole, it may create a misimpression. The aim of coherence is to create synergy by having the UN agencies focus on shared objectives and mutually reinforcing approaches.

Similarly, conference participants expressed concerns about the possible unintended perceptions associated with the high-level panel’s motto of “delivering as one,” particularly in developing

The rapporteur prepared this report following the conference. It contains his interpretation of the proceedings and is not merely a descriptive, chronological account. Participants neither reviewed nor approved the report. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

countries. The inefficiencies and unfocused efforts that result from lack of coherence ultimately undercut progress on development in the host country, a participant pointed out. Yet developing country governments still might worry that coherence could result in decreased benefits; after all, the motto sounds as if many activities are being collapsed into just “one.”

Another question for recipients is whether they would have to “receive as one” and what costs might fall on them. This is part of a broader concern of recipient governments that bilateral and international financial institution aid is donor-driven. Donor governments are facing increased scrutiny from their parliaments and publics over funding duplicative and overlapping programs, particularly through a United Nations widely seen as inefficient. Developing countries continued to favor funding being channeled through the UN as a multilateral and neutral partner. Working with the United Nations, aid recipients feel, gives them more opportunity to define development priorities and less pressure to abide by donor-government wishes. The special legitimacy of the UN as a servant of governments, participants highlighted, provides a context in which the sovereignty of developing nations is given greater respect.

Overall, participants agreed that as the panel’s proposals are debated, identifiable needs and substantive priorities should be the focus before dealing with the recommendations on organizational structure.

One UN at the Country Level

The centerpiece of the coherence initiative is an effort to harmonize all of the United Nations’ development activities that are being carried out within a given country. A pilot program was launched recently that will include Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay, and Vietnam, with the project already under way in Vietnam and Cape Verde. The aim is to have all stakeholders in the country working within a shared framework, management, and budget. The pilot program is expected to yield multiple models for coherence and provide the basis to assess best practices. Conducting the

program as a “learning organization” will allow room for mistakes to be made early in the program without undermining the entire enterprise.

The early momentum of One UN in Country points toward how much easier it is to achieve coherence in the field than in the overall central structures. Indeed, conference participants saw a “remarkable split” between what they have heard about the country level versus what they hear from ambassadors in New York. The skepticism among diplomats from developing countries stands in contrast to the enthusiasm of pilot country governments and the additional member states that have volunteered in the hope of taking part as the program expands.

The next stages of the coherence program will involve a review by the secretary-general and broader discussion among member states—especially since, as a participant pointed out, the high-level panel developed its proposals with very little buy-in from the UN membership, and at the end of the previous secretary-general’s tenure. The president of the General Assembly has invited feedback on the panel’s recommendations, and the new secretary-general is also expected to engage with member states, UN bodies, and agencies. Conference participants suggested that giving field perspectives a higher profile in the debate would be very helpful in building a constructive discussion.

The pilot program is making a special effort to keep from being managed as a classic top-down program, with a heavy hand from headquarters. Its two-way approach and delegation of authority to an empowered resident coordinator is driven in part by the panel’s report, but also by trends in development programs that were already under way. The conference participants were united in their enthusiasm for the pilot program, but saw the importance of greater discussion and ownership by member states, perhaps in advance of any major change in or expansion of the program.

In most of the eight pilot countries, intense consultations are taking place between the UN in-country team and the host government to agree on goals and

instrumentalities. For two pilot countries however—Cape Verde and Vietnam—the program has progressed significantly farther. In Cape Verde, pilot program leaders are assessing the state of coordination within the country team as well as with other actors. In Vietnam, a dedicated group of in-country personnel is pushing ahead with the pilot program within that country, with panel personnel at the United Nations allowing them to set the pace for the most part.

Conference participants emphasized the importance of host country ownership of development priorities and a flexible approach to deal with countries at different levels of development. The One UN in Country approach is well suited to country ownership, since it focuses on a dialogue between UN agencies and the host government to set development priorities. As noted above, the United Nations has a stronger record and reputation of being respectful of recipient concerns. It will be important for the program to deal effectively with countries at different levels of development; middle-income countries, of course, have different needs than countries with widespread extreme poverty.

It is only natural that harmonizing so many different agencies will present challenges. Participants discussed ideas for how to handle the inevitable disputes and organizational obstacles. A “court of appeal” could be established by, for instance, the Chief Executives Board to help those on the ground who run into problems. This group, which may be extended to include other organizations, could help “untie the knots” perhaps by waiving certain program procedures.

As with any UN endeavor, the success of the program will depend on active policy and political engagement by recipient governments, donor governments, and relevant senior UN staff. One issue that was stressed repeatedly in the conference discussion was the need to rebuild trust between the North and South by demonstrating the industrial powers’ commitment to economic development and poverty reduction.

Experts warn against simplistic assumptions regarding cost savings, such as combined physical location or administration. The experience in Cape Verde proved counterintuitive. The cost of combined facilities prompted a short-term spike in the administrative costs of programs. The compatibility of information technology and other administrative systems is a major consideration. And where the host government provides the office space for a specific program, the combining of office spaces might push the United Nations into the commercial real estate market. Many of these costs will pay for themselves via long-term savings—hopefully plowed directly back into program activities—but the near-term increases must be kept in mind.

As country teams increasingly pool their resources and the development agencies try to become more flexible and responsive to opportunity, administrative boundaries will begin to blur and present challenges for resource planning. The options that have emerged include pursuing one common budget for the overall program or providing for budgets that remain primarily in the hands of different organizations working directly with participating governments but which are checked for compatibility with the overall program. One suggestion raised in the discussion was to apply a form of budgetary subsidiarity, applying funding authority where it is best needed and not where its leverage over coherence is limited.

Over time, member states will need to agree on the status of existing country programs and previously allocated funding that had been approved multilaterally by the several UN agencies. It was felt that a partial pooling of some initiatives and funds was possible, without stepping beyond limitations that have been agreed by existing boards. Where necessary, the panel will go back to the existing boards to discuss if and how such funds could be made available for use in other tasks. The panel will present to member states how the panel can be more responsive to the demands and the limitations confronting such progress, and where oversight in governing programs is necessary.

Of course the heart of coherence is a shared set of development objectives and priorities, with a strong sense of ownership by all stakeholders. This was also the purpose of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), but participants noted that the frameworks were really little more than stitched-together patchworks of preexisting programs, thereby perpetuating incoherence rather than correcting it. In addition, the national poverty-reduction strategies on which the UNDAFs were based were usually strongly driven by the World Bank, with little or no ownership by the host government.

The momentum of the coherence program will depend substantially on whether the pilot program is seen as delivering on the ground more effectively and cohesively than present efforts. Participants suggested that the program would be considered successful if governments and agencies were able to carry out recipient-owned development plans at lower cost (with savings reinvested back into development efforts in the country), increase cooperation among UN agencies and programs, and achieve greater administrative harmonization. In the end, however, participants agreed that the program would only be successful if it delivers economic development.

One UN at the Headquarters Level

Coordinating the efforts of 16 agencies, 14 programs, and 17 other offices of the Secretariat presents inherent and perennial challenges, as each of these organizations have their own agendas and priorities. Efforts are under way, though, to clarify and rationalize the relationship between the different functions of the agencies, particularly to facilitate coordination of their operational roles in the field. In June, a strategic plan outlining this proposed coordination will be presented to the governing boards of several of the UN agencies, followed by further consultations to ensure that the definition of roles fits with member states' visions.

The pilot program offers a chance to assess coordination in practice on the ground. Ideally, the coherence efforts in the pilot countries will be assessed every six months. A comprehensive assessment of

whether the pilot programs are producing the desired results should be possible in approximately two years. The next meeting with senior field managers will be in Rome in March to discuss not only the status of the pilot program but also to assess the performance of resident coordinators.

Participants expressed deep skepticism toward the structural reforms of the intergovernmental organs of member state governance that were recommended by the panel. The panel offered a number of architectural remedies to reduce duplication of effort and improve oversight. For instance, the panel proposed creating a United Nations Sustainable Development Board (UNSDB) to propel and oversee improved coordination and serve as a platform to give developing country governments greater information (and presumably leverage) over the entirety of UN development efforts.

However, in general, the participants were hesitant to proceed with changes in the governance structures through which member states oversee the specialized agencies. They viewed it as more productive at present to enhance coordination between governments and UN programs, clarify development priorities, and increase accountability in the UN system. Several participants pointed out that the real challenge is to boost the delivery of development assistance rather than create "board upon board, committee upon committee." The general feeling was that the UNSDB would be yet another layer in the bureaucracy, acting as a "super board" over the several existing executive committees, though some participants saw a need for a body that would cover the full sweep of development activities. Participants felt that if the pilot program goes well and expands greatly, the proposal for a UNSDB should then be reconsidered.

In addition to the question of a new board for the specialized agencies, there are broader issues regarding the mechanisms through which UN member states give political impetus to the development agenda. As the World Bank shifts its approach to failed states, the Security Council considers taking up climate change as a global security issue, and

progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) continues to lag, the necessity of coordinating the major actors on shared issues becomes more urgent. Participants agreed with the panel's assessment that the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is not performing its given function and has lost credibility among donor governments. At a day-to-day level, they said, ambassadors in New York simply do not invest the time in ECOSOC to give it any chance of having increased impact.

Since the international financial institutions (IFIs) bring much larger-scale resources to bear on development, any effort to boost the impact of the United Nations on development must involve strengthening links to the World Bank. Looking at recent efforts to bring directors from the Bretton Woods institutions to New York for consultations with ECOSOC, the IFI directors were not convinced of the value of engaging with ECOSOC. The Peacebuilding Commission that was created after the 2005 summit is aimed at supporting stronger post-conflict reconstruction, although the jury is still out on the question of how much value it will add. With so much skepticism toward the existing governance structures, conference participants were dubious about the Global Leaders Forum proposed by the coherence panel. As with any new UN body, including a Sustainable Development Board as well, fierce jockeying over election to membership would be inevitable.

In terms of development funding, participants highlighted the continuing divide between donor and recipient countries. The former insist they are achieving efficiency by boosting the use of results-based programs with minimal waste, whereas the latter are looking for compliance with aid commitments made through the Monterrey Consensus and other multilateral agreements.

On the question of results-based financing, participants noted the increased scrutiny on developing project outcomes from ministries of finance, national parliaments, and publics. One participant noted that the United Nations has a better reputation than it

did 10-15 years ago, but instituting results-based programs and accountability measures could help sustain and increase financial support of development programs by donor governments. (This domestic oversight must also be complemented by domestic coherence; foreign affairs and trade ministries should work hand-in-hand rather than at odds with each other on development policy.) If the pilot program succeeds, participants note, it may encourage more cooperation. Another participant questioned whether making programs results-based amounted to an additional conditionality to funding, while not addressing the quality of UN assistance to developing countries.

One participant pointed to his own government's experience with a bilateral aid partnership on the basis of trust in the recipient country's ability to prioritize spending and ensure proper use of the funds. In this cooperation arrangement, contributions flow more readily, even without the donor government having detailed knowledge about how the money will be spent. Similar confidence is needed in regard to how funds will be used by the UN system. Participants said it would be an important signal to developing countries to have more development funding, with greater flexibility, come through the United Nations, as an honest and neutral broker. Improving coherence in UN programs and funds will move governments—both donor and recipient—in that direction and also give the IFIs a greater incentive to coordinate.

The emphasis on results, however, begs the question of rigorous evaluation. As part of the mandate review process, it became clear that member states have not been willing to fund rigorous reviews of program effectiveness. The United Nations spent 0.1 percent on evaluations, the equivalent of a program being evaluated once in 27 years. Members of the G-77, the European Union, and the G-8 should be able to agree that to build confidence in the UN system, an improved system for evaluating UN programs will be necessary. When evaluation results become more available, the governance should become clearer and projects will have more support from donors.

In summary, there seemed to be a green light from conference participants to go forward with the pilot program at the country level. However, while recognizing the need for structural changes, participants viewed the panel's recommendations for major structural reform as impractical for the time being. They proposed to let such changes emerge from experience with One UN in Country. In the meantime, it was suggested that the existing boards of the various agencies work jointly to assess the pilot program and that member states should support the strengthened leadership role of the resident coordinators.

Gender: A Key to Effective Development

Promotion of gender equality is widely recognized as a powerful lever on economic development and poverty reduction. Empirical research indicates that for every year of elementary education a girl receives, there is a significant improvement in the future standard of living of her and her family. The high-level panel was asked to address gender as part of its terms of reference; indeed, the panel received thousands of letters and other communications as input on the subject. In its report, the panel urged a consolidation of the gender entities at the United Nations to better deliver effective development outcomes.

Compared with reactions to some of the report's other proposals, conference participants were more supportive of early implementation of the panel's recommendations on gender equality. The panel proposed to consolidate the three existing UN gender entities into an enhanced and independent under-secretary-general for gender issues, with strong normative and advocacy roles and sufficient funding. Participants agreed with the panel that this architecture would help strengthen voices for gender equality within the United Nations and influence policy related to gender issues. Consistent with the panel's overall vision, participants said, the gender-related architecture should be designed with a view toward improving development outcomes, for instance, by ensuring gender equality is a component of all in-country programs and is the mandate of the entire UN system. As an immediate practical matter, the creation of a new

under-secretary-general post would ensure that there is an advocate for gender issues in the room at senior-level meetings.

One participant highlighted a number of coherence-related items from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations' November 2006 policy directive, "Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations." First was the observation that, when operational budgets are under pressure, cuts are always made first in programs for gender equality. Second, there are too few females as heads of the peace operations and as resident coordinators for development programs. There is a need for a strong push to have more females in these leadership roles. Last, advertisements to fill vacancies in the UN system are circulated in such an *ad hoc* manner that awareness, particularly among women, is minimal. It was noted by conference participants, however, that some parts of the system have made serious efforts regarding this. In the UN Development Programme, for example, short lists of candidates for vacant posts always must include at least one or two qualified women among the candidates.

Questions were raised about the undefined authority of the new consolidated senior post, how to ensure that the new position would not be merely symbolic, and whether consolidation offered the most effective means of improving gender policy through the organization. The panel concluded that the existing gender entities were too fragmented to have a real impact. Indeed, the existing gender entities are themselves supporting the proposed consolidation. Consolidation would not collapse all the existing entities, since some mandated functions must continue to be performed. For example, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Commission on the Status of Women carry out functions that would need to continue.

Participants seemed to agree that while norm-setting on gender issues would remain the prerogative of member states, the consolidated post could promote compliance with agreed-upon gender goals. A number of the MDGs called for a commitment to female

education, and Security Council Resolution 1325 called for steps to protect civilian women in conflict zones. Member states have an obligation to act on these agreements, but, according to UNIFEM, only a handful of member states have done so to date and there is no action plan within the UN system to track compliance. Similarly, nearly all victims of human trafficking and forced sexual and domestic labor—contemporary forms of slavery, 200 years after its abolition—are women, and while many people are working on this issue, there is no coordinated action by governments.

A participant also pointed out that member states have resisted attention to certain gender-equality issues on the basis of the noninterference norm. The government of Pakistan denies that country's problems with honor killings and other violence against women. India has resisted discussions in the United Nations of human trafficking on the pretext of its own legalized prostitution, even though the issue clearly has to do with women forced into prostitution rather than the legality of prostitution itself. And in cases when UN peacekeepers have been accused of sexual abuse during their deployment, their governments bring them home, where they disappear back into their national militaries instead of being prosecuted in the country where the abuse occurred.

In summary, there was consensus among participants on the critical importance of ensuring gender equality in the One UN at the country level initiative and throughout the UN system. There is preponderant support for consolidating the three posts into one. There are still many questions regarding the operational details, but there is also confidence that they can be worked out. While such consolidation is necessary and could prompt greater compliance with the Beijing declaration and other norms, member states—developed and developing—need to deepen their commitment to gender equality and make commensurate investments in instruments of change.

Improving Coherence on Environment

Following the 2005 World Summit, world leaders came to the realization that the current architecture

for environmental governance at the global level was not adapting to the very serious governance challenges we face today, including global climate change. The UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) was created 35 years ago yet remains small and without adequate resources. The General Assembly is currently conducting consultations on how to address environmental challenges in a more comprehensive and coordinated matter.

Looking at the panel report, conference participants noted the visible lack of consensus within the panel regarding exactly how to improve environmental governance. Some on the panel seek to transform UNEP into a specialized World Environmental Agency that would serve as a strong UN environmental pillar, whereas the more skeptical prefer a simple, incremental strengthening of UNEP. Some participants believed there was an emerging consensus among member states on strengthening UNEP, but others said the substantive policy and action agenda need to take shape before any major organizational steps are taken.

That aggregate global climate change is occurring was undisputed, and governments are continuing to invest significant funds to answer yet-outstanding questions related to the issue. Participants discussed whether the existing knowledge base gives a clear basis for the direction of policy, and related architectural issues for the United Nations. If there were to be a change in the status of UNEP, there would be associated governance issues to deal with.

Some participants noted that underlying all of the practical and policy considerations are profound moral issues. In terms of responsibility, it is the developed world that causes global warming, while the developing world bears much of the impact. It was acknowledged that the costs of not acting will be much more expensive than acting. Governments will, of course, prioritize but should consider the needs of the people in the countries affected most by climate change, such as the small island states. Even if environmental damage cannot be reversed or halted entirely, efforts should be made to mitigate the effect

to the greatest extent possible. It may not be possible to reach global consensus on specific policies, but there needs to be a much more significant and coherent response by governments. (Such coherence must also extend to internal positions by governments' foreign affairs, environmental, finance, and energy ministries.)

Participants noted the current opportune moment to move forward on strengthening international cooperation on the environment due to increased public awareness. Making the relevant budgets more strategic and predictable is important, as is greater cohesion between the United Nations' scattered environmental facilities. For instance, governments should increase UNEP's capacity to help developing countries adopt emerging environmentally friendly technologies. General Assembly consultations on environment governance were welcomed by participants. Recognizing that environmental stresses could in turn lead to conflicts over scarce resources, they also predicted that the Security Council might also take up the subject of environmental governance as a security issue in April. One participant suggested that coordination on terrorism could be used as a model for intergovernmental cooperation to share information and technology. The first step toward stronger action on the environment will be to build good faith politically around a shared agenda. As with the problem of coherence on development, an improved architecture would be based on the outcome of such priorities and actions—rather than the other way around.

The Montreal Protocol phasing out use of ozone-destroying chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) was discussed both as a positive precedent and a warning against complacency. The lesson was that we never know for certain the rate of environmental deterioration, or repair. On CFCs, there was improvement for a time, but there has recently been a slowing of improvement, and maybe even regression. Participants discussed ideas for major polluters such as the United States and China to more strictly regulate vehicle emissions and pollutants from coal-fired plants.

On the whole, participants viewed growing public awareness of climate change as both an opportunity

and a call to action. There appears to be general agreement on increasing UNEP's capacity-building ability to help developing countries transition to environmentally sound policies, and that the next UNEP budget should include funding specifically toward that end. There appears to be mixed reactions, however, to transforming UNEP into a pillar of all UN environment activity but agreement on more effectively coordinating environmental concerns and development projects. Overall, there appeared to be wide consensus that the world needs a better environmental strategy that, in turn, could drive additional discussions on appropriate structures.

While the conference was broadly supportive of the panel's report—if not endorsing all of its specific recommendations—there was pessimism that the “politics of the UN” would undermine a constructive discussion of the need for system-wide coherence. The experience of the World Summit was cited as a discouraging precedent. The One UN at the country level program enjoyed the most support and enthusiasm, with much less support for the recommendations related to reforms at the headquarters level. Many participants suggested that the pilot programs would provide the best basis for progress on this agenda, but they noted the importance of member-state backing (resources and help breaking down bureaucratic barriers) to give the effort the best chances of success.

Many participants saw the mistrust between developed and developing countries as the root of the problem. It was suggested that reforms might have to wait until the political climate at the United Nations changes. One step suggested to avert a deadlock in the General Assembly would be to hold the debate in a wide variety of forums to keep it from being captive of the General Assembly's political groupings. There was also concern about expecting too much of the secretary-general so early in his term or judging him too harshly on his response to a report issued prior to his tenure.

A number of participants urged more discussions on the issues raised by the panel's report, particularly

conducted across regional lines and involving in-country staff. One participant gave an optimistic view that demonstrable improvement in coherence could significantly boost confidence in and support for development cooperation.

There was almost universal support for moving forward on a consolidation of the gender entities, though much less consensus on the appropriate structures for improving environmental policy. Conference participants stressed that any skepticism on their part was in the spirit of proceeding with the most practicable steps toward a United Nations that will do a better job at delivering better results on the ground—where it counts most.

Participant List

Chair

Richard H. Stanley, Chair and President, The Stanley Foundation

Rapporteur

Tony Fleming, Publisher, UNSG.org

Participants

Maged A. Abdelaziz, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations

Adnan Z. Amin, Director, UN System Chief Executives Board Secretariat, United Nations

Gerald C. Anderson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs, US Department of State

Cho Hyun, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations

Jean-Marc de La Sablière, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations

Ali Hachani, Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations

Emyr Jones Parry, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations

Jiro Kodera, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations

Michael Kraig, Director of Policy Analysis and Dialogue, The Stanley Foundation

Anders Arvid Lidén, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations

Liu Zhenmin, Deputy Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations

Johan Ludvik Løvald, Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations

Edward C. Luck, Professor and Director, Center on International Organization, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

Frank A. M. Majoor, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations

Thomas Matussek, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations

John McNee, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations

Ad Melkert, Under-Secretary-General and Associate Administrator, United Nations Development Programme

Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations

Richard Terrell Miller, US Representative to ECOSOC, United States Mission to the United Nations

Tommo Monthe, Member of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, United Nations

Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Special Adviser, Security Council and Follow-up Reforms, Office of the President of the General Assembly, United Nations

Robert C. Orr, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Planning, Executive Office of the Secretary-General, United Nations

Ignor N. Shcherbak, First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations

David Shorr, Program Officer, The Stanley Foundation

Observers

Paolo Galli, Principal Officer, Office of the Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations

Amr Mohsen Hamza, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations

Robert Pollock, Counsellor and Speech Writer, Office of the President of the General Assembly, United Nations

The Stanley Foundation Staff

Susan R. Moore, Conference Management Associate

Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only. Participants attended as individuals rather than as representatives of their governments or organizations.

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The Stanley Foundation
209 Iowa Avenue
Muscatine, IA 52761 USA
563-264-1500
563-264-0864 fax
info@stanleyfoundation.org

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