



# Chief Executives Board for Coordination

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

(Virtual meeting, 5 and 6 October 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-second session in a virtual format on 5 and 6 October 2021. The agenda of the session and the list of participants are contained in annexes I and II, respectively, to the present report.

2. At the meeting on 5 October, the Chair of the Committee, Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Guy Ryder, welcomed HLCP members and guests, and presented the agenda for approval. He noted that the first day of the session would focus on considering a proposal on the Committee's strategic direction and high-level priorities, building on a discussion held at the forty-first session of HLCP, in March 2021. On the second day, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) would provide an update on the workplan of the inter-agency working group on artificial intelligence, as well as highlight potential future activities in the context of the soon-to-be adopted UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and the Committee's future areas of work. The Committee would also consider the achievements and possible renewal of the mandate of the HLCP inequalities task team, led jointly by 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). Furthermore, members would be updated on progress achieved in and future plans for the cross-pillar predictive analytics pilot project in the Sahel, initiated and led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Committee would additionally approve its updated terms of reference and operating modalities, and phase II of the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System (2020–2030), as well as take note of progress on the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

### II. Future areas of work of the Committee

3. In introducing the item on future areas of work of HLCP, the Chair indicated that the recently released report of the Secretary-General entitled "Our Common



Agenda” provided important context for the Committee’s deliberations. He referenced a quote by the Secretary-General that Our Common Agenda was “above all an agenda of action, designed to strengthen and accelerate multilateral cooperation – particularly around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – and make a tangible difference to people’s lives”,<sup>1</sup> emphasizing that the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda were complementary and mutually reinforcing. The Chair noted that throughout the proposal of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, the United Nations system was repeatedly called upon to act: to deepen solidarity, to deliver on gender equality, to better engage youth, to “think for the longer term” and to better anticipate and respond to risks and global crises. The Chair observed that all HLCP member organizations could rally behind the priorities of the Secretary-General and contribute to their realization, individually in line with their mandates but also through integrated, collective, coherent effort across the United Nations system.

4. The Chair recalled the initial discussion on the Committee’s strategic purpose at its forty-first session. At the time, members had looked at a range of possible themes and entry points through which HLCP could contribute in support of the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and in anticipation of the articulation of the vision of the Secretary-General for Our Common Agenda. The Committee had pinpointed some critical conceptual issues and identified an overarching architecture to frame its future work in a way that was ambitious and supportive of the broader needs of the system. At the conclusion of the discussion, members had agreed to further examine and unpack those issues at the Committee’s forty-second session and looked forward to the Chair presenting a vision for the strategic purpose and priorities of HLCP, oriented within the outcome of deliberations by Member States on Our Common Agenda.

5. Responding to that decision, the Chair’s paper on the Committee’s future areas of work, presented for members’ consideration at the current session, put forward a strategic narrative with three thematic pillars that drew on suggestions from the March 2021 HLCP discussion, the objectives of the decade of action and delivery and the Our Common Agenda report of the Secretary-General. It identified a number of entry points through which HLCP could meaningfully contribute, with the aim that it would help organize the Committee’s work over the next two to three years, utilizing the core strengths and functions of HLCP and supporting the Secretary-General and CEB. The Chair stressed that, as the Committee was a mechanism for policy coordination and coherence which, uniquely, reached virtually all corners of the United Nations system, its members had a shared responsibility to support the realization of key elements of Our Common Agenda and to bring much-needed impetus to the decade of action and delivery.

6. The HLCP Secretary, Maaïke Jansen, provided more detail on the context and process for developing the Chair’s paper, which was the basis for the current session’s discussion of the Committee’s strategic direction. She recalled the survey and interviews on the Committee’s operating modalities and future areas of work that had been conducted in the lead-up to the forty-first session, and cited the breakout discussions organized around four clusters: the response to rapid technological change; structural transformation to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in the context of recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic; cross-pillar issues; and the future of multilateralism. Several possible areas of engagement had emerged from the Committee’s deliberations, but HLCP had decided to wait to take a final decision until after the release of the Secretary-

<sup>1</sup> Secretary-General’s remarks to the General Assembly presenting Our Common Agenda (see [www.un.org/sg/en/node/258971](https://www.un.org/sg/en/node/258971)).

General's Our Common Agenda report to ensure that its work would be responsive to his vision.

7. Turning to the Chair's paper subsequently developed for the forty-second session, with the support of the United Nations University (UNU) Centre for Policy Research, the Secretary recognized the critical contribution of the UNU team in applying a Common Agenda "lens" to the March 2021 HLCP discussion and emphasizing points of connection for the Committee's consideration at the current meeting. The Secretary recognized the constructive online feedback on the Chair's paper from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and UN-Women and invited reactions from the assembled members on the overarching narrative and related initiatives, with a view to identifying activities that fit strategically and were most appropriate for the Committee to take forward.<sup>2</sup>

8. The Chair expressed his appreciation to the Rector of UNU, David M. Malone, for making the New York policy research team available to help deliver the strategic paper to aid in shaping and provoking discussion during the Committee's deliberations on its future strategic direction. Observing that it was a high-quality paper that he fully supported, the Chair invited the Executive Director of the UNU Centre for Policy Research, David Passarelli, to introduce it.

9. Mr. Passarelli observed that the paper was aimed at bringing into conversation the ideas generated from within HLCP with those found in Our Common Agenda, noting that while the headings in the Chair's paper evoked themes in the report of the Secretary-General, many of the foundational ideas were drawn from the Committee's March 2021 deliberations and the consultative process that had preceded the forty-first session. Those included the sentiment that the COVID-19 recovery was as an opportunity to address and push forward urgently needed structural transformations and the widely shared view that the concept of "a new social contract" could help generate new momentum for the structural transformations previously discussed by the Committee. Additionally, he recalled that the Committee had been of the view that (a) bold ideas were needed to adapt and adjust multilateralism as conceived of and practised in the present day; and (b) the United Nations badly needed to reach individuals and communities far removed from the traditional centres of power, policy and debate, notably traditionally excluded and marginalized groups. (The Committee had defined the latter priority as "bringing the United Nations from the inside to the outside".)

10. Mr. Passarelli observed that Our Common Agenda had diagnosed many of the same ailments and some of the same remedies that HLCP had in March. Both shared a concern over growing nationalism, perceptions of weakening solidarity, and rapid climate and environmental change that put at risk current and future generations. Both looked to renewed investments in social protection, trust, networks and extension of the focus of the leave-no-one-behind agenda to future generations as solutions. He stressed that broad investments in solidarity, trust, networks and global public goods could only support the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals during the current pivotal decade of action and delivery.

11. The Chair's paper was aimed at framing HLCP as an enabling force for the transformative ideas in Our Common Agenda. By contributing analytical capacity, networks and subject matter expertise, HLCP could help turn ideas into actions. The three-pillar framework – duties to the future, new global public goods, and networked and inclusive governance – would signal the Committee's investment in areas of

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<sup>2</sup> Items best suited to be addressed by the High-level Committee on Programmes are those which are relevant across the United Nations system, not duplicative of other processes, forward-looking, demand-driven and responsive to feedback from the United Nations system, including the field.

immediate relevance and would help communicate the work of HLCP to key stakeholders. Under that framework, a number of possible activities were proposed that aligned with current HLCP workstreams. Concluding, Mr. Passarelli observed that the value of HLCP could be judged at least in part on its ability to inject expert advice and link up to efforts in other parts of the United Nations system, improving overall coherence.

12. The Chair invited the Committee to consider the overarching narrative, proposed thematic pillars in terms of strategic fit and encouraged members to discuss the potential value to the United Nations system of the individual initiatives proposed in the paper or suggest any additional initiatives that could be pursued within the overarching narrative.

13. In the subsequent discussion, the Committee welcomed the Chair's paper and expressed support for the integrated narrative and its three pillars, which were seen as an effective organizing principle for the future work of HLCP. Members felt the framework was broad enough to build upon existing HLCP efforts in support of CEB and flexible enough to allow HLCP to respond to new and emerging challenges. The three themes were recognized to be qualitatively different, though interconnected, and to require cross-fertilization. Some saw global public goods and inclusive networked governance supporting an overarching strategic pillar on duties to the future.

14. Members felt the framework reflected well ideas expressed during the forty-first session of HLCP and was aligned with and supportive of Our Common Agenda. Yet, it was stressed that the Committee's work needed to be guided by the priorities of the 2030 Agenda, as well as the COVID-19 recovery. The proposal provided opportunities for organizations across the United Nations system to collaborate, as well as to build on and complement the work of other inter-agency groups. Throughout the discussion, members signalled their interest in contributing to particular pillars and engaging in specific initiatives proposed in the Chair's paper and offered expertise, experience and substantive input.

15. Many members felt that global challenges, including climate change, growing inequalities, pandemic preparedness, and cyber and digitalization gaps (including the gender digital divide) and threats should feature prominently across the three pillars, as should the role of science and technology in addressing such challenges. In that respect, existing gaps in the understanding of and investment in research and data on the lasting, cumulative, compounding impacts of those global challenges on the multiple vulnerabilities and needs of affected communities should be recognized. It was stressed that partnerships were key to improving the status quo. It was observed that a more prospective effort to incorporate risk-sensitive approaches to development – from an angle of prevention or preparedness – would provide a good understanding of the conditions that increased the vulnerability of human beings to different types of hazards, rather than continue the accumulation of risk, making future disasters even more complex.

16. Members saw a variety of entry points across the strategic narrative for each of the three current HLCP mechanisms: the Foresight Network, the inter-agency working group on artificial intelligence and the inequalities task team. The need to consider how to operationalize the established priorities in all three pillars was stressed. As a first step, ideas presented in the Chair's paper should be elaborated and broken down into more concrete and focused work processes.

#### **Pillar 1: duties to the future**

17. The thematic pillar on duties to the future attracted considerable interest and support among members. Several stressed that explicit attention needed to be paid to human rights in that context. The concept of solidarity should also be integrated in

such work. Strategic foresight, scenario planning and predictive analytics could be utilized to contribute to reflections on future generations, and a role for the HLCP Foresight Network was foreseen in that context. It was observed that the inequalities task team would be well placed to contribute to the work on intergenerational equity, if its mandate were to be renewed by HLCP.

18. It was stressed that the language was important, and that HLCP had to be careful not to oversimplify the concept of intergenerational equity to be only about youth (a single constituency among many others) or to present “duties to the future” as a dichotomy between generations. Rather, it needed to encompass the various constituencies currently alive, including older persons, as well as generations yet to come, and to balance the rights and aspirations of current and future generations, including young people. Additionally, it was stressed that concern for future generations must not detract from efforts to solve problems of discrimination due to race, gender and class now or in the future, as addressing discrimination in the present was a necessary precondition for improving equality in the future. Disaggregated measures needed to be used across time to better cater to the needs of groups in the present and groups in the future. It was noted that forcibly displaced and stateless people should be included among the vulnerable groups in that analysis.

19. Ultimately, the term “intergenerational equity” was felt to provide the proper framing for the work, and the Committee agreed on the importance of unpacking it as a concept and discussing what constituted the key elements of future well-being that needed to be attended to at present. Members identified a range of duties, including reducing inequalities, combating climate change, preserving the environment, safeguarding biodiversity, protecting the oceans and investing in a healthy planet and in the rights of non-human species and nature. The international meeting entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”, to be held in June 2022, would provide important context and direction for work under the pillar. Economic transformation and debt were also identified as vital components of the intergenerational equity discussion.

20. With respect to the new social contract, attention needed to be paid to addressing inequalities and economic insecurity, building trust and promoting social cohesion. The possibility for HLCP to contribute to future policy conceptualization to reduce inequalities and support the new social contract was highlighted. More specifically, it was suggested that the Committee could look at different aspects of social protection and different levels of intervention, with a view to translating the vision put forward in Our Common Agenda into a more detailed programmatic framework. Structural transformation was critical given the changes that needed to be made to fulfil the duties to the future. It was emphasized that the economic perspective, including with respect to issues of production limitations, productivity and trade, would have to be fleshed out in order to determine the economic underpinning of the social contract, as it was not a question of redistribution and taxation alone. Rather, it was about thinking through which political economy considerations could facilitate a massive new investment in social protection and how to make those investments sustainable over time. In particular, it was suggested that emphasis should be placed on innovative green investment. The Secretary-General’s policy brief on “Investing in jobs and social protection for poverty eradication and a sustainable recovery”<sup>3</sup> and the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection, led by ILO, were highlighted as very relevant for that pillar, pointing again to the need for HLCP to properly connect with ongoing initiatives.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/secretary-generals-policy-brief-investing-jobs-and-social-protection-poverty-eradication>.

21. In terms of proposed actions set out for discussion in the Chair’s paper, the hope was expressed that initiatives pursued under that theme could go beyond the analysis and distillation of best practices. The United Nations Population Fund offered to co-lead, together with interested members, the development of an analytical paper on age-specific inequalities and the intergenerational benefits of universal social protection, using disaggregated data with illustrative examples. Some members supported pursuing the proposal to conduct an analytical study on the intergenerational benefits of universal social protection. An initiative to co-create a multisectoral framework to guide cross-temporal programming was also put forward.

## **Pillar 2: new global public goods**

22. The pillar on new global public goods was welcomed and recognized as central to Our Common Agenda and also very relevant and appropriate for engagement by HLCP. It was seen as important to understand how the attributes of global public goods as defined in the paper would evolve over time. Members variously identified culture, health and science as possible topics to explore from a global public goods perspective. Some felt that the peace and security or prevention angle could be enhanced. It was further observed that emphasizing resilience in that pillar could help to move the work in a direction that would meaningfully serve the objectives of Our Common Agenda.

23. Under pillar 2, it was suggested that HLCP could play a role in supporting the existing legal framework on global public goods, for example, in the areas of climate and biodiversity. Relatedly, the point was made that, due to privatization, health, education, housing, and water and sanitation – which were supposed to be human rights – had become commodities rather than “public goods” and that the United Nations needed to push back against that trend because it was inconsistent with its norms and standards.

24. In particular, framing data as a global public good was widely supported. Data was seen to have economic value, but also social value, for example, in such areas as health and climate. The recent UNCTAD Digital Economy Report on cross-border data flows and development<sup>4</sup> was brought to the Committee’s attention. The report stated that the gains from data were highly unequal as a consequence of the digital divide and that, unless there was appropriate data governance and data-sharing, it would be difficult to create social value. In that vein, it was proposed that HLCP examine the need for a new global governance approach to data flows supported by the United Nations to ensure that data worked for people, especially in developing countries, and the planet and supported sustainable development. It was pointed out that the 2021 *World Development Report: Data for Better Lives*<sup>5</sup> by the World Bank highlighted similar concerns. That report called for a new social contract for data that enabled the use and reuse of data to create economic and social value and promote equitable opportunities to benefit from data.

25. In deliberating on the proposal for a new global governance approach for data, members observed there were many ongoing processes considering regulation of the collection and use of data, as well as examining related social, economic and environmental impacts, and implications for human rights, including those related to privacy. The potential value of HLCP conducting a scanning of international data governance processes as a contribution to the system’s understanding and organizing of ongoing efforts was highlighted. The effort could include identifying present data governance bodies both within and outside the United Nations, looking at gaps that existed and pinpointing capacities that would be needed in the United Nations system

<sup>4</sup> See <https://unctad.org/webflyer/digital-economy-report-2021>.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2021](http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2021).

to carry forward any data governance recommendations, with the intent of feeding the findings into the Secretary-General's high-level advisory board on global public goods, the proposed Global Digital Compact and other follow-up mechanisms of Our Common Agenda, as well as supporting the 2030 Agenda. It was agreed that any work HLCP was to undertake in that area should be compatible with and add value to ongoing efforts across the system, without duplication and in support of greater coherence and advancement of the common purposes of the 2030 Agenda and Our Common Agenda, and that therefore close consultation with relevant actors would be imperative. Over the course of the discussion, several entities were identified as having an important role in that effort, including the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System, UNCTAD, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the World Bank, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology.

### **Pillar 3: networked and inclusive governance**

26. Although there was less discussion on this pillar as compared with the first two pillars, networked and inclusive governance was understood to be an inherent and important part of the strategic narrative of HLCP. While recognizing that the United Nations was a system centred on Member States, members felt that the inclusion of a range of stakeholders in intergovernmental bodies was important, as laid out in the Our Common Agenda report. More broadly, networked and inclusive governance was a means of advancing global development objectives by utilizing the comparative advantage of allied actors in an effort to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. It was observed that inclusive governance should be about reaching out and reaching down to those who did not have power.

27. Ongoing work across the United Nations system on engaging local and regional governments in intergovernmental and national planning processes could be drawn upon within pillar 3. At the same time, it was noted that there were population groups that were not represented through Governments, such as indigenous people or stateless people, which should be considered in efforts to help advance networked governance.

28. It was suggested that both the United Nations Global Compact and the United Nations Office for Partnerships could be better leveraged to engage companies in United Nations processes. At the same time, the need to acknowledge power imbalances between private sector and other stakeholders was stressed. Different levels and types of accountabilities of the different partners should be recognized.

29. Members, including ITU, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), saw value in moving forward to work on harnessing stakeholder engagement and participatory approaches as foreseen under pillar 3. A proposal was made to conduct a system-wide analysis and assessment of good practices for the effective engagement of stakeholders in intergovernmental bodies to better understand the landscape and options, including formal and informal non-governmental, civil society and community engagement. Also suggested as a possible activity was a mapping and analysis of multi-stakeholder initiatives hosted or coordinated by the United Nations, capturing, for example, governance and accountability models, success factors, challenges, best practices and tools in a "playbook", with a view to enhancing their effectiveness, scale and impact. Moreover, a role for HLCP was seen in supporting the establishment of civil society focal points within United Nations system organizations, as envisioned by Our Common Agenda, and leveraging them to open space and deepen the engagement of civil society across the system.

30. Reflecting on the rich discussion, Mr. Passarelli thanked members for their constructive engagement and for welcoming the three-pillar framework proposed in the Chair's paper. He recognized the appetite of the Committee to support Our Common Agenda in a way that was helpful and that complemented other efforts of the United Nations system. Recalling that one goal of the Chair's paper was to inspire leadership and collaboration across HLCP, he celebrated the enthusiastic discussion and the many offers to engage in and take forward initiatives proposed therein, as well as suggestions for additional activities that supported the framework.

31. In concluding the session, the Chair expressed appreciation to members for their high-quality substantive debate on the strategic direction of HLCP and their readiness to think and work together. He observed that there was strong consensus on the framework set out in the Chair's paper, including the three interlocking thematic pillars. The Committee had agreed that the framework represented an effective organizing principle for its future work that would allow HLCP to remain agile and responsive to challenges that emerged and lessons learned along the way. The Chair noted that the overall direction was relevant to all member entities, was important for the system's collective work and built on the Committee's previous initiatives. Members had clearly appreciated the proposal's compatibility with the 2030 Agenda, the decade of action and delivery, and the vision of the Secretary-General as laid out in Our Common Agenda. There was also a strong recognition that the work of HLCP should support and advance other areas of activity across the United Nations system and be carefully orchestrated to avoid duplication and focused on where it could best add value.

32. In order to reach agreement on some initial concrete activities to pursue, the Chair laid out three specific actions that had gained support during the discussion, one under each pillar. With respect to the pillar on duties to the future, the conversation had led to the conclusion that "intergenerational equity" as a concept was worthy of deeper exploration from various angles, with a view to informing future analytical products, such as those proposed in the Chair's paper. Under the theme of new global public goods, he recalled that the issue of international data governance had commanded significant attention among members; therefore, a good starting point would be for HLCP to scan relevant processes, to contribute to understanding that crowded and fragmented area of work and to promote coherence across the tracks, in close consultation with relevant entities and mechanisms. On networked and inclusive governance, the Chair recalled that members felt there was merit in analysing and learning from the variety of stakeholder engagement and participatory approaches used in different United Nations system entities. Recognizing that those were "broad brush" concepts, the Chair encouraged interested HLCP members to collaborate to develop more precise plans, with the support of the HLCP secretariat.

33. The Committee expressed support for the Chair's proposal. Accordingly, the Chair requested the Secretary to follow up with interested entities to move ahead in each area of work. The Chair underscored that the HLCP workstreams on artificial intelligence and inequalities would be important to draw upon under the just-agreed organizing framework for the Committee's work, promoting cross-fertilization. He reiterated that the HLCP Foresight Network was well placed to contribute under all three pillars, but foremost on intergenerational equity, and looked forward to the Network updating the Committee. The Chair intended to bring the conclusions of the discussion to the attention of the Secretary-General and CEB, to convey where the membership felt the Committee could most productively bring the weight and capacity of the full United Nations system together to help realize the vision of the Secretary-General, also taking into consideration the forthcoming reactions of Member States to the proposals in Our Common Agenda.



## Conclusion

34. The Committee welcomed the Chair's paper on HLCP future areas of work as the basis for the Committee's strategic direction and agreed that the three thematic pillars represented an effective organizing principle for its work in the near to medium term. Members agreed to initially pursue one activity under each of the three pillars, namely: (a) exploring and unpacking the concept of "intergenerational equity" as a first step towards developing future analytical products, including a paper on age-specific inequalities and the intergenerational benefits of universal social protection; (b) undertaking a scanning of processes related to international data governance as a contribution to the United Nations system's understanding of and promotion of coherence among ongoing efforts in that space; and (c) analysing and learning from the variety of community stakeholder engagement and participatory approaches used in different United Nations system entities.

## III. Artificial intelligence

35. The Chair opened the discussion on the item on artificial intelligence by noting that such technology could be transformative, with potential positive and negative impacts on people and the planet, and that the growth of and dependence on artificial intelligence had only accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had highlighted digital inequalities due to a lack of access to technologies, as well as inequalities that were the result of technological change without guardrails, further emphasizing the importance of the work of HLCP in that area. He noted the links between artificial intelligence and all three pillars of future areas of work that the Committee had agreed to earlier in the session, as well as the Our Common Agenda report.

36. The Chair recalled that the Committee had worked on artificial intelligence since 2017, covering issues related to capacity development, such as the development, led by ITU, of a United Nations system-wide strategic approach and road map for supporting capacity development with regard to artificial intelligence, as well as addressing the important normative questions of ethics, human rights and necessary guardrails, including through system-wide input to the UNESCO ad hoc expert group for the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, tabled for adoption at the General Conference of UNESCO in November 2021. As those issues were not separate but rather interrelated and required a cohesive approach, the Chair recalled the establishment of the inter-agency working group on artificial intelligence to follow up on the Committee's work in an integrated manner, which was reflected in the working group's terms of reference adopted intersessionally in March 2021. He expressed appreciation to the co-leads of the working group, ITU and UNESCO, and thanked the 36 United Nations system entities that were members of the working group for their active contributions. He drew attention to the background paper prepared by the co-leads providing an update on the work of the working group and its next steps.

37. HLCP members received a presentation from the co-leads of the working group, Preetam Maloor of ITU and Clare Stark of UNESCO, who outlined the recent work of the working group, its growing membership and its main objectives, as outlined in its terms of reference. They highlighted that, leveraging the findings of a gap analysis provided to the Committee, the working group had identified an initial set of priority areas, establishing various workstreams with several United Nations system entities engaged in each. The current workstreams of the working group focused on the following aspects related to artificial intelligence: strategic foresight, research and

analysis, a readiness framework, an ethics impact assessment, an ethics observatory, ethics policy guidance for the United Nations system, guidelines and a toolkit for small and medium-sized enterprises, procurement and deployment guidelines, justice and education. The co-leads invited entities to participate in any of the workstreams and welcomed the proposal by entities of additional workstreams if there was sufficient interest. In addition, the co-leads described how the various workstreams could contribute to the three pillars of the strategic narrative of HLCP. The linkage made in the Chair's paper regarding the impact of rapid technological change on inequality and groups that were left behind was also acknowledged by the co-leads.

38. Collaboration and co-creation with members of the working group were emphasized as key for the development and implementation of the workstreams. In addition, the co-leads shared with the Committee the engagement of the working group with the HLCP Foresight Network, both the Procurement Network and the Digital and Technology Network of the High-level Committee on Management (HLCM), the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, other inter-agency and multi-stakeholder mechanisms and relevant external stakeholders. The working group was viewed as both a network of experts on artificial intelligence issues within the United Nations system and a platform for system-wide engagement on artificial intelligence and related technologies in the context of future areas of the Committee's work in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and proposals contained in the Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda report. The co-leads underscored the importance of coordinating and developing the workstreams in a cohesive manner that both addressed the capacity development aspects of enabling the application of artificial intelligence and facilitated the responsible development of artificial intelligence through coherent normative guardrails, underpinned by human rights and ethics.

39. In the ensuing discussion, members welcomed the work of the working group and its co-leads in the development of its workstreams to advance the responsible development and use of artificial intelligence within the United Nations system, which promoted the need to innovate and build capacity to use artificial intelligence while ensuring necessary guardrails grounded in human rights and ethics. There was wide agreement that due diligence, human rights safeguards and ethical frameworks were important given the risks associated with artificial intelligence in the future, as well as the harms that were happening in the present. There were concerns that technological transformation was outpacing the norms, regulation and controls necessary to ensure that human rights were protected and that technology was used ethically. There were also significant concerns that artificial intelligence was being used to influence elections, suppress democratic processes and amplify inequalities. There was broad agreement that technological transformation should benefit all people and support the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, and that the normative dimension was an area of comparative advantage for the United Nations system and should remain a priority in the work on artificial intelligence and related technologies.

40. Members reflected on the importance of the forthcoming UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, which provided a universal framework of values, principles and actions to guide Member States in the formulation of their legislation, policies or other instruments regarding artificial intelligence, consistent with international law, and which would not only protect but also promote human rights and human dignity. It was felt that the Recommendation, along with recent guidance offered by the Human Rights Council on technology and human rights, could form a basis for the United Nations system to ensure the development and use of artificial intelligence that was ethical and in accordance with human rights principles and to guide the United Nations system's own use and

development of artificial intelligence in a manner that was ethical, respected human rights and was reflective of United Nations values. Members welcomed the workstreams related to ethics and human rights and looked forward to opportunities for further implementation as those workstreams developed.

41. In addition to the normative dimension, members also emphasized the importance of harnessing artificial intelligence within the United Nations system in an ethical manner. There was significant support for enhancing capacity development and innovation within the United Nations system to leverage artificial intelligence across organizations, including the development of tools, frameworks and methods to scale capacity development to strengthen United Nations system-wide capacity on artificial intelligence, and of tools that could support capacity development for Member States. The issue of data was also raised by members, given the dependence of artificial intelligence on data, which was linked to efforts under way by the United Nations system to implement the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics. There was additional interest expressed by members in joining the working group to share information and to join specific workstreams on the application and use of artificial intelligence in different settings. Members encouraged the measurement of progress, including through key indicators, and additional workstreams. Further information regarding each workstream was available through the co-leads and the online platform of the working group.

42. Members expressed appreciation for the efforts of HLCP and the working group to enable the collective inputs of the United Nations system to be synthesized as an input to the development of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, led by UNESCO, referring to the input as a good example of concrete and effective joint contribution to intergovernmental processes. Members also noted the importance of continuing to leverage HLCP for collective inputs to intergovernmental initiatives related to artificial intelligence, including for the follow-up to and implementation of proposals contained in the Our Common Agenda report.

43. The co-leads of the working group acknowledged the importance of normative processes and development and the need to institutionalize the bringing together of the system on these important developments. The co-leads also expressed their appreciation to numerous entities that had indicated their desire to join the working group and specific workstreams and thanked members that had contributed to the working group and its workstreams. The Chair thanked Mr. Maloor and Ms. Stark for their leadership of the working groups and the efforts made to facilitate participatory and inclusive processes within it.

## **Conclusion**

44. **The Committee took note of the background paper and requested the working group to take into consideration the suggestions and comments made by the Committee as its work progressed.**

#### **IV. Strengthening the United Nations system's impact and visibility on reducing inequalities and Sustainable Development Goal 10, in support of the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030**

45. The Chair opened discussion on the item by stressing that inequalities remained pervasive and had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, and that it was central for the United Nations system to promote a more coordinated and integrated approach to combat that challenge. He noted that the 18-month workplan of the HLCP inequalities task team<sup>6</sup> had come to an end, but addressing gender, racial, economic and other inequalities remained fundamental to building trust and ensuring social protection, as called for in the Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda report. The Chair highlighted that the task team was prepared to continue to be a system-wide platform for engagement and coordination to integrate the addressing of inequalities in the work of the Committee. He recognized the representatives of UN-Women and OHCHR for their leadership of that work over a number of years, thanked the 21 HLCP entities for their contributions to the task team and invited the co-leads to present their report.

46. In her role as co-lead of the task team, Aparna Mehrotra, the representative of UN-Women, underscored that inequality was among the defining issues of our time, observing that the theme was very prominent in Our Common Agenda. She made a case for the Committee's continued engagement in that area, noting that the COVID-19 pandemic had deepened inequalities and led to highly unequal policy responses. She highlighted the disparate impacts of the crisis, which should be of deep concern to each entity of the United Nations system. Providing evidence of inequalities, markers of disadvantage and marginalization of women in employment, she cited statistics demonstrating the serious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the inadequate attention to gender equality in social protection and labour market policies implemented globally to respond to the crisis. She noted that UN-Women had recently launched *Beyond COVID-19: A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice*<sup>7</sup> to promote a gender-responsive recovery, which complemented the Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda report. She stated that the inequalities task team had been working over the past 18 months to give visibility to efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 10 and 5, and that there would be a need to continue operating in some form, as inequalities were at the centre of the efforts of the United Nations to support countries in getting through the crisis and recovering, and to prevent future crises.

47. In his role as co-lead of the inequalities task team, Craig Mokhiber, the representative of OHCHR, echoed the sentiment that inequalities represented one of the defining challenges of the current era, breaching United Nations norms and standards and undercutting peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. The United Nations system shared framework for action on equality and non-discrimination<sup>8</sup> was the system's answer, setting forth a system-wide approach to battling inequalities, with United Nations norms and standards as its basis, challenging destructive orthodoxies and promoting social protection, labour rights, economic and social rights, anti-discrimination laws, fair and progressive taxation and fiscal policies, and gender equality. He recalled that HLCP had mandated the task team to work for 18 months to act on that agenda, create a dedicated space for United

<sup>6</sup> See <https://unsceb.org/inequalities-task-team>.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/feminist-plan-for-sustainability-and-social-justice#view](http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/feminist-plan-for-sustainability-and-social-justice#view).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://unsceb.org/un-system-framework-action-equality>.

Nations work on inequalities and make sure that Sustainable Development Goal 10 on inequalities did not remain an orphan goal in the system. Mr. Mokhiber stated that the enthusiasm for the work had been strong, with more than 20 entities participating in the group.

48. The task team had first convened in February 2020, held a virtual workshop a few weeks later and then pursued a set of activities designed to strengthen United Nations leadership on inequalities, enhance the visibility of the issue and of the shared framework and promote coordination within the system. Specifically, the task team had worked with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to disseminate the shared framework, along with a package of related materials, to all heads of entities and departments, Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams. It had also contributed to the landmark 2020 Nelson Mandela International Day speech of the Secretary-General on tackling the inequality pandemic and channelled those ideas into the process of drafting the Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda report, issued one policy brief on "COVID-19, inequalities and building back better" and would issue another on "Tackling inequalities in public service coverage to 'build forward better' for the rural poor", engaged in the preparatory process for the high-level political forum on sustainable development and convened a high-level panel event on "Building back fairer: equality in a post-COVID world" and worked, through meetings, workshops and webinars, to ensure a strong focus on inequalities in the United Nations initiative to promote transformative economies and its related United Nations Sustainable Development Group guidance materials. Work had been done to strengthen links to the Group, and an online space had been set up as a platform for the task team to facilitate joint thinking and the sharing of tools and methodologies.

49. The co-leads were convinced that such work had made a difference: pooling United Nations system expertise, raising the visibility of United Nations leadership on the equality agenda and creating more space for work on inequalities within individual agencies. Moreover, the members of the task team believed that it was essential that HLCP continue its focus on that critical issue in some form.

50. In the discussion that followed, the members of the Committee expressed appreciation for the task team's achievements in promoting greater system-wide coordination on inequalities and thanked UN-Women and OHCHR for their leadership. Several highlighted that the task team's work was an important contribution to a critical, wide-ranging issue and also contributed to supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It was foreseen that the task team could have a role in supporting some of the proposals in Our Common Agenda, which had identified inequalities as an overarching issue. Reflecting also on the rich discussion and positive feedback received on the Chair's paper on future areas of work of HLCP, the Committee saw the potential for the task team to identify specific contributions to support those areas of work, as the subject of inequalities was relevant to all three thematic pillars.

51. In that context, as well as considering the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on reinforcing inequalities, members expressed support for extending the mandate of the task team. Absent a single institutional home focused on addressing inequalities, the importance of continuing to bring the system together in a coordinated, coherent, collaborative and complementary manner to increase visibility and to make an impact in the fight against inequalities was recognized.

52. With respect to the priorities of HLCP, members saw a natural fit between the competence of the task team and the first pillar on duties to the future. There was a suggestion to focus on the aspect of intergenerational equity, in particular linkages with social protection, as part of efforts to operationalize the new social contract. The

task team could contribute to an analytical study on the intergenerational benefits to all population groups of social protection, as suggested in the Chair's paper, which would also support the proposals in Our Common Agenda. Increased investment in, and financing and economic development for, a new social contract was another area that the task team could pursue. The potential for the task team to contribute to the second pillar on global public goods, with regard to equal access to vaccines and to preventing future health crises, was also highlighted. Further, the task team could provide support to enhance networked and inclusive governance, the third pillar of future HLCP areas of work, based on its expertise. Beyond the HLCP narrative, it was observed that the task team could also more broadly contribute to coordinating concrete actions that would fill specific gaps in the United Nations system's work on inequalities.

53. It would be important that the task team work with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to review the operationalization of the United Nations system shared framework for action on equality and non-discrimination at the country level, with a focus on accelerating roll-out through resident coordinators and United Nations country teams. Closing the digital divide and responding to rapid technological inequalities to achieve digital inclusion would be areas that would benefit from a system-wide perspective. There was broad agreement on the importance of addressing the effects of global climate change and disasters on inequalities; therefore, the task team should aim to support just transitions to environmental sustainability and provide support for those affected by climate change and environmental degradation.

54. The Chair concluded the discussion by thanking the members for their valuable comments. He expressed his appreciation for the strong understanding of and common perspective on the realities, dangers and implications of inequalities as they existed and future trajectories unless something was done. Societies around the world were facing deeply entrenched, structural social injustice, and current policy settings were making inequalities worse. Addressing inequalities was a fundamental contribution of the United Nations system towards realizing the 2030 Agenda and Our Common Agenda. Given that reality, the Chair acknowledged the resounding agreement among members that work to combat inequalities had to continue. The task team could serve as the specific point through which the United Nations system would come together to redouble efforts to increase its effectiveness and impact.

55. With that in mind, he proposed that the task team, under the continued leadership of OHCHR and UN-Women, prepare a foundational and far-reaching reflection paper, which would serve as a background document to a resumed discussion at the forty-third session of HLCP on the United Nations system's efforts to combat inequalities. The intent would be to consider the state of inequalities in the world and determine what efforts needed to be stepped up, refocused or redirected. Given the changes in recent years, the Chair noted that among the fundamental questions to be answered was the extent to which the United Nations system shared framework for action on equality and non-discrimination remained fit for purpose in the current context, what needed to be done to improve or strengthen it and what other steps should be taken to increase the impact of the United Nations, including in relation to the newly agreed HLCP priorities. The paper should also address practical questions and constraints, such as resourcing.

56. In their closing remarks, the representatives of UN-Women and OHCHR expressed their appreciation for the Committee's support for extending the mandate of such a network of specialists on inequalities and endorsed the way forward as outlined by the Chair. The situation demanded the escalation of efforts by the United Nations system to support normative coherence, as well as coherent action at the country level. The time was right for a review of the shared framework. Looking

ahead, the co-leads stressed the need to ensure that the task team would be resourced properly to deliver effectively for HLCP and the broader system. Depending on the way forward, that could include securing even greater engagement from member entities in future activities and having the work of their entity focal points for the task team integrated into their personal workplans.

### **Conclusion**

57. **The Committee decided to take a fresh look at the topic of inequalities at its forty-third session in order to examine the United Nations system's work in the current global context, with a view to elevating engagement and ambition in supporting Sustainable Development Goals 10 and 5, as well as relevant aspects of priority areas of work of HLCP. The Committee requested the task team, under the leadership of UN-Women and OHCHR, to prepare a foundational reflection paper to inform that discussion.**

## **V. Promoting innovation to enhance evidence-based support for sustainable development and the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030: predictive analytics pilot exercise**

58. In his opening remarks, the Chair recalled the important objective of understanding the interconnectedness of displacement, climate risks, food insecurity, increased violence and threats to livelihoods in the Sahel region so that the United Nations system could tackle those challenges through evidence-based data and analysis. He further recalled that, at its thirty-eighth session, in 2019, within its discussion on promoting innovation to enhance evidence-based support for sustainable development, the Committee had supported initiating a predictive analytics pilots exercise, to be led by UNHCR. The concept for the pilot exercise had been presented to CEB later in 2019, and the Committee had received a progress update at its fortieth session, in 2020. The pilot exercise had made significant progress in analysing those complex linkages and had transitioned to the region for further implementation under the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and aligned with the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, which was encouraged by the Committee at its fortieth session. UNHCR had committed to continue to support the project's implementation. The Chair noted that predictive analytics touched upon the data and "anticipating the future" elements of the Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda report, and that the pilot exercise contributed to the growing expertise and application of data analytics within the system and provided methodologies that could be scaled or used by other entities and inter-agency mechanisms.

59. The Committee received a presentation and final report from the UNHCR Special Adviser on Climate Action and lead of the predictive analytics pilot exercise, Andrew Harper, who confirmed that the transition of the pilot exercise to the region was advancing under the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and in support of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. The importance of understanding forthcoming challenges across the nexus between peace, humanitarian assistance and development to enable better identification of opportunities for anticipatory and transformative action and to strengthen preparedness for growing and interconnected risks in the Sahel was emphasized. Mr. Harper noted in the context of the Sahel that incremental approaches were not sufficient in the light of population growth, as well as challenges associated with climate change, and that therefore more anticipatory policy action was needed.

60. Mr. Harper shared with the Committee the consultation processes the pilot exercise had conducted with United Nations system entities, as well as outreach to external research and academic institutions, noting that an expert consortium on predictive analytics for the Sahel had been formed with leading universities, including Uppsala University and Columbia University, as well as some United Nations system entities such as UNU. However, there remained challenges regarding the coordination and accessibility of data, including the limited collection of data at the subnational level and time series data, gaps in data standardization, the dispersion of data within and across organizations and a limited culture of responsible data-sharing between United Nations system entities. He underscored the importance of regional capacity-building and supporting national statistical offices and national research institutions in collecting and standardizing subnational-level data to enable modelling that was more accurate.

61. Preliminary findings from the predictive analytics pilot exercise linking issues such as climate change, water scarcity, conflict, food security, displacement and socioeconomic factors were presented to the Committee, with Mr. Harper noting that they could be useful in future decision-making and in enhancing the level of transformation through policy and programmatic interventions that addressed underlying drivers and linkages. It was also suggested that the model could be replicated in other contexts or regions to support decision-making within the United Nations system.

62. In the ensuing discussion, the Committee reinforced the call for better data-sharing and analysis towards common objectives and outcomes. Taking into consideration the lessons learned, many members highlighted similar challenges in receiving data from other United Nations system entities and emphasized the need to address the issue of data-sharing across entities. There was also support for further addressing in detail data gaps, data collection, data coordination and funding for data. The need for disaggregation of data concerning ethnicity, religion, language and gender was also raised. Members suggested that standardizing data and making more granular data available was important for predictive modelling and that a central repository for the United Nations system would be beneficial. The need for enhanced data collection, standardization and sharing was also addressed in the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics. It was suggested that code, algorithms and model details could also be made more accessible and shareable among entities.

63. Members expressed support for the cross-pillar approach of the predictive analytics pilot project, which looked at the possible combinations and linkages between different risks and was aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015–2030. Members acknowledged that risk was systemic and could not be treated in a siloed way or addressed separately, and expressed support for addressing the nexus between peace, humanitarian assistance and development. Members viewed coordination and working more closely together across the United Nations system as key given the importance of cross-pillar approaches. It was also suggested that human rights was an important pillar to include in predicting risks, and that human rights violations were potent warning signals. Members suggested that the anticipatory nature of the pilot exercise was important for the United Nations system, as it was looking at possible impacts, shocks and hazards that might be faced in the future by the system.

64. The engagement of the pilot exercise with stakeholders was also seen as a positive example of working across institutions. Members expressed support for the approach of bringing together universities and local research centres, as it aided in data integration and the interpretation of data based on local contexts. It was suggested that data could also be shared with communities at the forefront of the crisis



as a tool to empower them to act. The Economic Commission for Africa was suggested as an entity that could contribute data and analysis to that effort in the Sahel. Beyond the Sahel, members also expressed support for the examination of opportunities to apply similar methodologies to other regions.

65. Reflecting on the feedback from the Committee, Mr. Harper stressed the importance of United Nations entities sharing data and increasing their capacity to share data through data collection and standardization across all pillars. He underscored that the next priority for the pilot exercise was capacity development at the local level within the region, including through partnerships between international universities and local or regional research institutes to improve both the collection and the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Mr. Harper welcomed the Committee's support for the idea of examining the potential to apply the model to other regions and to bring United Nations entities and other stakeholders together around a more ambitious vision aligned with the Our Common Agenda report.

66. The Chair concluded the discussions by noting the Committee's appreciation for the achievements of the pilot and the valuable lessons learned, noting in particular the need for the system to work in a way that was networked, inclusive and effective, including with regard to the sharing of data. The Chair acknowledged the utility of predictive analytics and encouraged different partners to work together on the replication of that methodology in other settings to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and in the follow up to the Our Common Agenda report.

## **Conclusions**

67. **The Committee welcomed the final report and took note of the continuation of the project beyond the pilot project supported by HLCP and CEB through the ongoing transition to the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.**

68. **The Committee encouraged UNHCR to lead an effort to explore opportunities to replicate and scale up the project in other vulnerable regions in the world, building on the partnerships developed with world centres of excellence in predictive analytics, including by developing frameworks for data gathering.**

69. **The Committee encouraged UNHCR, and other HLCP member entities, to explore opportunities to leverage and support ongoing activities to implement the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics to reinforce national statistical agencies and research institutes in order to foster greater ownership of the project and to ensure that the data gathered, particularly at the subnational level, met the needs of key stakeholders.**

70. **The Committee encouraged UNHCR, and other HLCP member entities, to take the lessons learned from the pilot exercise to support the work of other relevant inter-agency mechanisms and initiatives in order to advance evidence-based support for sustainable development, including by looking for ways to support the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General in the Our Common Agenda report.**

## **VI. Operating modalities of the Committee**

71. The Chair recalled that HLCP had held a discussion at its forty-first session to reflect on its operating modalities, with a view to enhancing its functions, practices and impact. He noted that, at the time, members had been largely satisfied with the functioning of the Committee but had agreed that some areas could be strengthened.

Consequently, the HLCP secretariat had been requested to update the 2008 terms of reference and document operating modalities for the Committee for approval at the Committee's forty-second session.

72. In introducing the draft for approval, the HLCP Secretary recalled that she had circulated an initial version of the updated terms of reference to the Committee for comment in August 2021. She stressed that the secretariat had taken care to reflect the common understanding of the functions and operating modalities of HLCP, as expressed in the Committee's discussion at its prior session. The updated version (see annex III) codified practices that had evolved over time and also incorporated some elements that the Committee had felt needed to be strengthened. She thanked members of the Committee who had expressed their support for the draft, which had been adjusted based on feedback received and was before the Committee for approval at the current session.

73. The Chair invited any final comments on the updated terms of reference and operating modalities. None were forthcoming, and he confirmed the adoption of the revised terms of reference and the Committee's operating modalities appended thereto (see annex III, appendix). He concluded that the approved terms of reference would be transmitted to CEB for endorsement as an annex to the HLCP report on its forty-second session.

#### **Conclusion**

**74. The Committee adopted the updated terms of reference of HLCP, with an appendix on the Committee's operating modalities.**

## **VII. Summary of information items**

75. Further to the electronic review and endorsement of progress reports in advance of the session, the Committee took note of the progress report on the ongoing effort to mainstream the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 into the work programmes of organizations of the United Nations system, submitted by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

76. The Committee also took note of the progress report on the work carried out by UN-Water and UN-Energy, submitted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which served as their secretariat; and the progress report on the work carried out by UN-Oceans, submitted by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea in the Office of the Legal Affairs.

#### **Conclusion**

**77. HLCP took note of the progress report on the ongoing effort to mainstream the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, as well as the progress reports on UN-Water, UN-Energy and UN-Oceans.**

## VIII. Other matters

### A. Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030

78. In 2019, CEB endorsed the phase I of the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030, entitled “Environmental sustainability in the area of management” ([CEB/2019/1/Add.1](#)). Upon endorsement of phase I, the Board requested that it be incorporated into a comprehensive sustainability strategy for the United Nations system, encompassing a broader and fuller picture of environmental and social sustainability in United Nations system policies, programming and support functions.

79. Phase II of the strategy, entitled “Towards leadership in environmental and social sustainability”, responds to that mandate, sharing the same comprehensive vision for environmental and social sustainability as phase I while translating this vision by means of a theory of change into a framework for environmental and social sustainability for all functions of the United Nations. Developed by a United Nations Environment Management Group task team comprising over 40 entities, phase II includes (a) a comprehensive set of environmental and social sustainability principles that need to be mainstreamed across all functions; (b) a theory of change to mainstream the principles in different system-level and entity-level processes; and (c) a draft scorecard to measure progress, which will evolve as the strategy matures.

80. Phase II, which was shared with HLCP members in August 2021 for comments and recirculated to the Committee on 1 October 2021 following the review of the Environment Management Group technical segment, was due to be endorsed by the meeting of the Group’s senior officials on 7 October 2021.

81. Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the New York Office of UNEP, Ligia Noronha, who is also the Secretary of the EMG secretariat, thanked entities for their contributions to the strategy’s development and encouraged them to support its implementation.

#### Conclusion

82. **The Committee approved the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030, for onward transmission to CEB for endorsement.**

### B. United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy

83. In line with the decision taken at the CEB first regular session of 2019 requesting HLCP, along with HLCM and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, in the context of their respective mandates, to review the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Committee took note of a progress report on the status of implementation of the Strategy, circulated electronically for information.

#### Conclusion

84. **HLCP took note of the report on the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.**

**C. Any other business**

85. Angela Me, on behalf of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System, informed HLCP that implementation of the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics endorsed by CEB was progressing well, and that the Committee would be reporting back to HLCP accordingly. One element that was taking more time was a United Nations data portal, for which there was high demand in the United Nations system. A proposal was currently being developed for the Secretary-General by the Statistics Division.

**IX. Dates and location of the forty-third session of the Committee**

86. The Chair proposed the dates of 31 March and 1 April 2022 for the forty-third 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 for the health and well-being of Committee members.

**Conclusion**

87. **The Committee approved the dates of its forty-third session, 31 March to 1 April 2022, with the format, location and host to be determined.**

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## Annex I

### Agenda

1. Future areas of work of the Committee.
2. Artificial intelligence.
3. Strengthening the United Nations system's impact and visibility on reducing inequalities and Sustainable Development Goal 10, in support of the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030
4. Promoting innovation to enhance evidence-based support for sustainable development and the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030: predictive analytics pilot exercise
5. Operating modalities of the Committee
6. Summary of information items
  - (a) Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries
  - (b) Progress reports: UN-Water, UN-Energy, UN-Oceans
7. Other matters
  - (a) Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030
  - (b) United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
  - (c) Any other business
8. Dates and location of the forty-third 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, Sustainable Development Unit	Michelle Gyles-McDonnough Julie Morizet
Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Strategic Planning and Monitoring Unit	Ayaka Suzuki Kersten Jauer
Development Coordination Office	Helena Fraser Christopher Stokes
Department of Economic and Social Affairs	Leslie Wade Xenia von Lilien
Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs	Teresa Whitfield Renato Mariani
Peacebuilding Support Office	Henk-Jan Brinkman
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	Hansjoerg Strohmeyer Murad Jeridi
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	Craig Mokhiber
Office for Outer Space Affairs	Simonetta Di Pippo
Regional commissions	Rosa Malango
United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Recovery	Ricardo Mena Speck
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	Jean-Yves Le Saux Mariagrazia Squicciarini Clare Stark Riel Miller (lead, HLCP Foresight Network)

International Civil Aviation Organization	Thilly De Bodt
	Chrystelle Damar
World Health Organization	Werner H. Obermeyer
	Igor Pokanevych
World Bank Group	Laura Jaitman
	Farhad Peikar
International Monetary Fund	Robert Powell
Universal Postal Union	Abdellatif Meskine
International Telecommunication Union	Ursula Wynhoven
	Preetam Maloor
International Maritime Organization	Azara al-Hassan Prempeh
World Intellectual Property Organization	Ola Zahran
International Fund for Agricultural Development	Joanna Veltri
United Nations Industrial Development Organization	Ayumi Fujino
	Tsung-Ping Chung
World Tourism Organization	Zoritsa Urosevic
	Claudia Lisboa
International Atomic Energy Agency	Nuno Luzio
	Camilla Scott-Todd
World Trade Organization	Said El Hachimi
International Organization for Migration	Ugochi Daniels
	Kieran Gorman-Best
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	Paul Akiwumi
	Shamika Sirimanne
United Nations Development Programme	Haoliang Xu
	Umberto Labate
United Nations Environment Programme	Ligia Noronha
	Mara Murillo
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	Annika Sandlund
	Andrew Harper (presenter)
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 Nkeiruka Didigu
World Food Programme	Valerie Guarnieri David Kaatrud
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime	Bo Mathiasen Jean-Luc Lemahieu
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
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	Daniele Violetti
International Trade Centre	Riefqah Jappie
<b>Guests</b>	
Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System	Angela Me
Global Pulse	Robert Kirkpatrick Chris Earney
Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology	Yu Ping Chan Jason Munyan
Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth	Marija Vasileva-Blazev
Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination	Simona Petrova Remo Lalli Cheryl Stafford Li Zhou Marije Van Den Berg Simon Vandenbroucke Marta Lorenzo Fernandez Christine Weimann



## Annex III

### Updated terms of reference of the High-level Committee on Programmes<sup>1</sup>

In 2021, against the backdrop of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on Our Common Agenda mandated by the General Assembly in that context,<sup>2</sup> the twentieth year (in 2020) of work of the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and the United Nations system policy responses for recovering better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, HLCP reflected on its operating modalities and future work at its forty-first session.

With respect to the operating modalities of HLCP, members considered the Committee's overall character, policy coherence, think tank functions and working methods; the processes for developing HLCP products and their implementation, impact and related accountability provisions; and the role of HLCP in the United Nations system's inter-agency space, including with respect to coordination with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group,<sup>3</sup> following the 2020 review of the working arrangements of the Group.

The below terms of reference and operating modalities have been updated in the light of the HLCP discussion and its conclusions (see [CEB/2021/4](#)). They can be reviewed by the Committee or CEB at any time, as required, and adjusted as determined by HLCP itself or by CEB.

1. HLCP is responsible to CEB for fostering coherence, cooperation and coordination on policy and programme dimensions of strategic issues for the United Nations system.
2. The HLCP Chair will be appointed by the Chair of CEB to serve a two-year term, which can be renewed. If deemed necessary by the HLCP Chair, the Chair of CEB can also appoint an HLCP Vice-Chair to support the execution of his or her responsibilities.
3. HLCP is composed of senior staff of CEB member organizations<sup>4</sup> responsible for policy, programme planning and development authorized by their executive heads to take decisions on their behalf. HLCP will meet twice a year in

<sup>1</sup> The terms of reference ([CEB/2008/6](#), annex III) and operating modalities of the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) (contained in conference room paper CEB/2008/HLCP-XV/CRP.1/Rev.1, paras. 11–31) were last updated in 2008 in the light of a 2007 review by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) of its role and functioning that led to the establishment of three pillars to support the work of HLCP, the High-level Committee on Management and the United Nations Development Group, with an overall aim of achieving an integrated approach to the challenges facing the United Nations system. The previous version of the HLCP terms of reference (see [CEB/2002/4](#), annex IV, appendix) was also referenced by the HLCP secretariat in the course of the 2021 review.

<sup>2</sup> General Assembly resolution [75/1](#), para. 20.

<sup>3</sup> In 2017, CEB decided to delink the United Nations Development Group from the CEB machinery (see [CEB/2017/2](#), para. 25), reversing the above-noted 2007 decision by the Board to add it as a third pillar. Subsequently, the United Nations Development Group evolved into the United Nations Sustainable Development Group.

<sup>4</sup> Including United Nations entities represented at CEB sessions as part of the delegation of the Secretary-General.

regular session and will hold other meetings, including through virtual means, on an as-needed basis.

4. HLCP will serve two key functions, namely:

(a) Fostering system-wide policy coherence and coordination in response to intergovernmental mandates, with a view to:

(i) Supporting coherent and coordinated programme development and implementation, and maximizing the impact of the United Nations system in support of the implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the outcomes of other United Nations conferences and summits, as well as other intergovernmental mandates;

(ii) Supporting the integrated and coordinated preparation of major United Nations conferences and summits;

(b) Scanning for and identifying emerging programme issues requiring a system-wide response, with a view to:

(i) Developing common strategies, policy approaches, methodologies and tools to respond to demands for strengthened system-wide policy coherence and coordination, in line with intergovernmental mandates;

(ii) Advising CEB on matters that require its priority attention in the timely elaboration of strategies and policies in response to emerging issues and challenges facing the United Nations system;

(iii) Serving as a forum for collective strategic thinking, inter-agency dialogue, consultations, coordination and knowledge-sharing on policy development and programming on matters of system-wide concern to enhance transparency, develop consensus and learn and apply proven practices and policies.

5. In pursuing the above and as elaborated in the appended operating modalities, HLCP will:

(a) Seek to achieve a balance between directed think tank discussions in support of CEB and the creation of tangible products that respond to demands for strengthened system-wide policy coherence and coordination;

(b) Address cross-cutting, cross-pillar and multisectoral issues, giving special attention to policy areas not already addressed in other contexts or forums;

(c) Utilize efficient and effective working arrangements to address policy themes under a lead entity approach;

(d) Collaborate with and leverage the expertise that resides in thematic, operational and other inter-agency bodies while maintaining due regard for the respective roles and mandates of each mechanism;

(e) Engage with external stakeholders, as appropriate.

6. In the exercise of these functions, HLCP will operate within the framework of the constituent instruments of member organizations and the relationship agreements between the United Nations and the specialized agencies and Bretton Woods institutions.

## Appendix

### Operating modalities of the High-level Committee on Programmes

#### I. Membership

1. As noted in its terms of reference, the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) is composed of senior staff of United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) member organizations<sup>1</sup> responsible for policy, programme planning and development authorized by their executive heads to take decisions on their behalf. Such individuals will be called “members”. In addition, the HLCP Chair may wish to confer “participant” status on representatives of other United Nations system entities. Normally, there should be one representative from each member or participant organization; representatives may be accompanied by an organizational expert on an as-needed basis for substantive presentation and discussion. The HLCP Chair may also choose to invite “guests” to engage on a specific agenda item or items at a given meeting.

2. Representatives will maintain a strong system-wide perspective when engaging in HLCP, brief their senior leadership and contribute to the preparation of their entity’s principal for the subsequent CEB session, facilitate the engagement of technical experts from their organizations in HLCP workstreams and promote the visibility and uptake of HLCP products within their entities.

#### II. Agenda-setting

3. HLCP will be strategic in addressing issues for which it is the appropriate inter-agency coordination mechanism. In consideration of this, HLCP should focus on the results it is best placed to achieve, given its mandate. Policy issues most appropriate for the agenda of HLCP are those that are relevant across the United Nations system, demand-driven, forward-looking, not duplicative of existing initiatives and responsive to feedback from the United Nations system, including at the country level.

4. Prior to each Committee meeting and bearing in mind the need to maintain agility to absorb new and emerging issues, the HLCP secretariat, under the guidance of the HLCP Chair (and Vice-Chair) and in consultation with the Committee, will prepare a provisional agenda taking into account the following:

- (a) CEB and HLCP conclusions and decisions, including on specific items referred to the Committee, bearing in mind the role of HLCP in preparing for and following up on CEB discussions and decisions on programme and policy matters;
- (b) Issues emerging as a result of intergovernmental mandates directed to CEB and its mechanisms;
- (c) Priorities established by the Chair of CEB;
- (d) Proposals from HLCP members and participants;
- (e) Referral of policy dimensions of issues under consideration by other inter-agency coordination bodies (including the United Nations Sustainable Development Group);

<sup>1</sup> Including United Nations entities represented at United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination sessions as part of the delegation of the Secretary-General.

(f) Identification of issues to be addressed in tandem with the High-level Committee on Management (HLCM).

5. The HLCP secretariat will ensure alignment and coordination of work priorities and processes with HLCM to ensure proper sequencing of issues and maximize complementarities and synergy between the CEB structures in support of greater system-wide coherence in realizing intergovernmental mandates. In order to ensure that products developed by HLCP aid country-level operations, as appropriate, the HLCP secretariat will also support coordination between HLCP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, in line with their respective mandates, including through collaboration with the Development Coordination Office. Further, to bring broader policy perspectives, the HLCP secretariat will identify opportunities to take up the policy dimensions of issues under consideration by thematic, operational and other inter-agency bodies in a mutually beneficial manner, while maintaining due regard for the respective roles and mandates of each mechanism.

### III. Workstream management

6. Most agenda items will typically be addressed through a dedicated workstream. As indicated in the terms of reference, HLCP will utilize efficient and effective working arrangements such as task forces, working groups and other ad hoc mechanisms that engage HLCP members, as well as technical experts from across the system, to address policy themes. These mechanisms will be inclusive, time-bound and output-oriented. Moreover, HLCP may identify opportunities to incubate less structured thematic communities of practice among United Nations system practitioners.

7. Virtual communication methods (e.g. videoconferencing, online collaboration platforms and email) will generally be used to advance individual workstreams between sessions.

8. Lead entities will be identified to manage each workstream. Their responsibility vis-à-vis individual workstreams includes, but is not restricted to, the mapping of activities undertaken by organizations of the system, the holding of consultations under their aegis to develop system-wide approaches and recommendations and the preparation of documentation for meetings of HLCP and, as required, for CEB. The lead entities are expected to support the workstream for which they are responsible throughout its life cycle, including by guiding and shepherding implementation by the United Nations system after the conclusion of the HLCP process, where applicable, and marshalling – individually and collectively – adequate support, including capacity and resources, to ensure its success.

9. Lead entities and members contributing to HLCP workstreams are expected to conduct inclusive and effective preparatory processes, integrating features that increase the likelihood of implementation and the impact of the final products, including by delineating responsibilities among entities when feasible. The HLCP secretariat will help to guide each individual process, as appropriate, in accordance with the product's unique purpose and nature.

10. HLCP may engage external (non-United Nations system) actors and outside experts, including representatives of government, civil society, academia, youth and the private sector, as well as traditionally marginalized and vulnerable groups, as appropriate, on an ad hoc basis when members deem it useful to advance particular workstreams.

11. HLCP may receive periodic updates on and review the status of implementation of products produced by workstreams under its auspices, focusing primarily on

solutions to unblock bottlenecks. Such updates may, but are not required to, be associated with a regular session. The HLCP secretariat will facilitate light follow-up processes upon the request of the lead entities. For purely informational updates, lead entities are encouraged to utilize the Committee's online collaboration platform.

#### **IV. Organization of meetings**

12. HLCP will hold two regular sessions per year, with dates agreed at the conclusion of the prior session. Dates should be established in tandem with the setting of dates for CEB sessions, with HLCP meeting no less than four weeks prior to CEB sessions.

13. If and when needed, HLCP may hold ad hoc meetings between sessions to address specific, time-sensitive issues. Virtual meeting modalities (e.g. videoconference, teleconference or online meeting platforms) may be utilized. Where a face-to-face intersessional meeting is required, it should be organized around other meetings (such as meetings of the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council) during which a large number of members will be on site.

14. HLCP meetings will proceed according to the annotated agenda (see sect. V). The Chair (or Vice-Chair) will normally moderate the discussion for each item, with support from the HLCP Secretary, but arrangements may be made for guest moderators.

15. For each item, the lead entities will present the related documentation, in an intervention limited to five minutes. It is customary to hold an open discussion among members before concluding an item. Speakers taking the floor during the discussion should address topics from a system-wide perspective and avoid extensive accounts of their organization's activities.

16. In concluding each item, the Chair (or Vice-Chair) should summarize the discussion, making clear which decisions have been taken and which are being referred to CEB, as well as the process for taking forward and implementing the decisions.

17. The Committee should exercise strict discipline in keeping to a minimum information items and "other matters" that could be addressed through other means, including email and online collaboration platforms.

18. After each regular session, the HLCP secretariat will prepare a concise report summarizing the discussion and conclusions for each agenda item for review by the Committee and onward transmission to CEB for endorsement.

#### **V. Meeting documentation**

19. In consultation with the lead entities concerned, the HLCP secretariat will prepare a concise and precise annotated agenda for each meeting. Actions proposed for the consideration of HLCP will be highlighted under each agenda item.

20. Documentation supporting the agenda items is generally prepared under the lead entity arrangement. All documents should be succinct and tailored for United Nations system senior managers. Documents should contain an executive summary (of up to three paragraphs), clearly identify the issues for discussion and present specific recommendations for the consideration of HLCP. Charts, infographics and other visualizations may be used in the body of the document to convey detailed or complex information. Lead entities must ensure that draft documents are prepared in full consultation with all relevant organizations prior to their finalization.

21. Documentation prepared for meetings of HLCP should adhere to length guidelines. Documents for decision or action (e.g. concept notes, background papers and progress reports) should be no more than five pages in length (not counting any annexes). Products for endorsement by CEB should be as succinct as possible, but are not subject to specific restrictions.

22. The HLCP secretariat will circulate all documentation to HLCP members and participants no later than two weeks before the meeting. To facilitate their timely dissemination, drafts of meeting documents should ideally be submitted to the HLCP secretariat four weeks before the meeting for processing and to inform the finalization of the annotated agenda. If required, reference information may also be submitted for circulation.

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