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### Annual overview report of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination for 2020

#### Summary

The present report provides an overview of inter-agency cooperation within the framework of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) in 2020. The report includes highlights of the key activities of CEB in fostering a coherent approach to policy and management matters and enhancing United Nations system-wide coordination in support of intergovernmental mandates.

In 2020, CEB and its subsidiary bodies directed their efforts towards strengthening their collective capacities and engagement in the world's response to and recovery from the unprecedented impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Programmatic work included consideration by the Board of the increased financial and data requirements brought on by the crisis, leading to the endorsement of a System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics and mainstreaming the implementation of the data standards for United Nations system-wide reporting of financial data. Board members also considered ways to strengthen the visibility of the United Nations system and its impact on reducing inequalities and endorsed a call to action on building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future with indigenous peoples. In the area of institutional management coordination, the Board focused in particular on ensuring business continuity and fostering a safe and inclusive working environment across the United Nations system. Furthermore, it continued to uphold a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment, while strengthening victim-centred prevention and response efforts.

The report also highlights coordination activities between CEB and other jointly financed bodies.





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### I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2008 (LX), the present report provides an overview of the annual work of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). It is prepared in response to the request by the General Assembly, in paragraph 4 (b) of its resolution 64/289 on system-wide coherence, to include appropriate information on the work of the Board in its annual overview report to the Economic and Social Council, which is also considered by the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

2. The report includes highlights of the major activities carried out in 2020 under the auspices of CEB. As a coordinating body, CEB, as well as its subsidiary mechanisms, the High-level Committee on Programmes and the High-level Committee on Management, foster policy and management coherence to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of United Nations system activities. The Board's work conforms to intergovernmental mandates and supports the priorities of Member States.

3. During 2020, in view of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Board and its high-level committees held their sessions in a virtual format, rather than in person, scheduled additional intersessional meetings and revised their agendas.

4. The agendas for the Board's sessions held in a virtual format in May and November<sup>1</sup> 2020 were structured around mobilizing and aligning the United Nations system response to the pandemic and reflecting on a common agenda and challenges in a post-pandemic world. The high-level committees advanced their work through regular and ad hoc intersessional virtual meetings in March, April, July, September and October.<sup>2</sup>

### **II.** Pandemic response and recovery

5. In 2020, the world faced challenges of dramatic scale and impact, with ramifications for generations to come. The response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic became the subject of the Board's unwavering focus as the devastating global health crisis caused vast socioeconomic disruption, eroded the progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and gave rise to serious threats to human rights, global governance, ethics and international cooperation. A disease that knows no borders brought to the fore the importance of placing multilateralism and solidarity at the centre of the response.

6. Board members recognized that the pandemic also presented an opportunity not to be missed to place sustainable development at the core of recovery to make the world more resilient to future threats. They led their respective organizations determined to respond collectively – across mandates, pillars, functions and geography – and confront the challenges in all their aspects. They confronted the unfolding crisis early on, providing health, humanitarian and socioeconomic support

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See the summary of deliberations of the first regular session of 2020 (CEB/2020/1) and of the second regular session of 2020 (CEB/2020/2).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See the reports of the High-level Committee on Management at its thirty-ninth session (CEB/2020/3) and of the High-level Committee on Programmes at its thirty-ninth session (CEB/2020/4); the report of the High-level Committee on Programmes on its virtual consultation on the ethics of artificial intelligence (CEB/2020/6/Add.1); and the reports of the High-level Committee on Management at its fortieth session (CEB/2020/5) and of the High-level Committee on Programmes at its fortieth session (CEB/2020/6).

and policy advice to Member States, while putting people at the centre, with a focus on the most vulnerable.

7. In doing so, Board members underscored the importance of leadership and of taking an agile, multidimensional, collaborative approach in the face of a complex, unpredictable crisis. The leadership characteristics identified by CEB in its United Nations system leadership framework (see figure I) were employed to scale as the pandemic response advanced in both United Nations system entities' operations and in programmatic work in support of Member States.

#### Figure I United Nations system leadership model

United Nations leadership in action	Eight leadership characteristics	
CO-CREATION across all three pillars of the Charter of the United Nations Apply, identify, understand and develop SYSTEMS THINKING Drive TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE	Norms-based: United Nations leadership is grounded in United Nations norms and standards	Principled United Nations leaders defend norms and standards and their application
	Inclusive United Nations leadership is inclusive of all personnel and stakeholders	Accountable United Nations leadership demonstrates accountability within the system and to beneficiaries and the public beyond
	Multidimensional United Nations leadership is integrated and engaged across pillars and functions	Transformational United Nations leaders redefine approaches to partnership building, strategy and systems thinking to achieve positive change
	Collaborative United Nations personnel seek out collective "as one" cross-Charter thinking, joined-up approaches and solutions	Self-applied United Nations leaders model United Nations principles and norms to others in all interactions

Source: CEB/2017/1, annex.

# *Future of multilateralism: common agenda and challenges for the United Nations system in a post-pandemic world*

8. On the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, as the world confronted a global challenge of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War, CEB took the opportunity to reflect collectively on future opportunities and challenges. Members looked towards the centenary of the

Organization in 2045 and envisioned the role that the United Nations system would play in the post-pandemic recovery by strengthening systems at all levels to be better prepared for crises and to shape the next era of multilateralism.

9. Members began by conceptualizing the foundations of a common agenda anchored in a networked multilateralism that links global, regional and national institutions, as well as in an effective and inclusive multilateralism, that delivers for everyone and engages all stakeholders, including businesses, universities, cities and movements for gender equality, climate action and racial justice.

10. A new social contract would focus on the national level and comprise with investments to promote social cohesion and a new generation of policies that ensure social protection and promote resilience in the face of economic and environmental shocks. Education and digital technology – the two great enablers and equalizers – would make this possible. A truly integrated approach to policymaking would need to be applied that would be grounded in human rights for all and be centred on equity and sustainability, and also address employment, sustainable development and social protection.

11. A new global deal would seek to ensure that power, wealth and opportunities are shared more broadly. Fair globalization, free and fair trade and the prioritization of the well-being of future generations would be the building blocks of this new model of global governance.

12. Board members stressed that it would be critical to strengthen cooperation between international financial institutions and the United Nations system, revitalize the international trade system, reform peace and security mechanisms and transform intellectual property rights models. In working towards this desired future, the United Nations system would continue to provide a forum for discussion and building trust, mobilize stakeholders that share common objectives, maintain strong thought leadership on policy, fulfil its unique normative and policy functions and serve as an honest broker.

# Financing and data for the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the pandemic

13. The Board highlighted as a crucial area of concern the increased financial requirements for health, humanitarian and sustainable development activities in the light of the pandemic, which further compromised the timely achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It was particularly important for the urgent short-term financial needs dictated by the COVID-19 crisis to be aligned with the longer-term recovery objectives.

14. The sustainable development financing landscape was changing dramatically owing to the economic and fiscal impacts of the pandemic on Member States. Although new funding streams and mechanisms have been established, great uncertainty and challenges in terms of future financing were emerging in many developing countries, which put a sustainable recovery for all at risk.

15. The Board considered a number of key financing mechanisms launched in response to the pandemic that were aimed at achieving better coordination and synergies within limited resources: the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, which sought to address the health crisis; the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19; the COVID-19 response and recovery trust fund; as well as resources available through international financial institutions. Members stressed the importance of linking these funding mechanisms with the United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19 for a more sustainable and inclusive recovery.

16. Data and statistics were critical for ensuring the effectiveness of the response to the pandemic and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the decade of action. CEB members agreed that the United Nations system needed to make its data more accessible and provide the data in a timely manner when supporting Member States in rolling out evidence-based policies and responding effectively to the global crisis.

17. As a step towards achieving this goal,<sup>3</sup> in May 2020 CEB endorsed the Systemwide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics (CEB/2020/1/Add.1), developed in consultation with the High-level Committee on Programmes by the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System. The Board encouraged ambitious efforts to use more innovative data and statistical outputs that would be of better practical use to Member States and the international community. A further objective was to build the capacity of national statistical systems to allow countries to produce fit-for-purpose data and statistics.

18. The Board recognized that the United Nations data standards for system-wide financial reporting – also referred to as the data cube<sup>4</sup> (see figure II), developed in consultation with the High-level Committee on Management and launched in 2018,<sup>5</sup> was another vital vehicle for having readily available, timely, reliable, verifiable and comparable system-wide and entity-level data for decision-making.<sup>6</sup> The new standards enable United Nations system entities to report more comprehensive, harmonized and better-quality data.

19. The data cube also supports the fulfilment of the funding compact commitments by improving transparency and accountability on the reporting of system-wide financial flows, disaggregated by recipient and by Sustainable Development Goal, in line with international standards of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Aid Transparency Initiative, while giving contributors greater visibility. The data cube was selected as part of the initial strategic portfolio of priority data use cases for the *Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere: With Insight, Impact and Integrity*,<sup>7</sup> recognizing its merit and potential as a strategic data management initiative, as well as a fundamental enabler of a results-based culture, that provides disaggregated information on the utilization of resources towards the achievement of mandated objectives.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> In accordance with General Assembly resolution 75/233, paras. 23 and 32.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> High-level Committee on Management and United Nations Sustainable Development Group, "Data standards for United Nations system-wide reporting of financial data" (January 2020). Available at https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/UN\_DataStandards\_Digital\_20200324.pdf.
<sup>5</sup> CEB/2018/5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> In accordance with General Assembly resolution 75/233, paras. 50 and 117.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Available at www.un.org/en/content/datastrategy/index.shtml.



#### Figure II Visual representation of the data cube

Strengthening the United Nations system's impact and visibility on reducing inequalities in support of Sustainable Development Goal 10

20. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically compounded inequalities at all levels: personal, household, community and society. It revealed and exacerbated pre-existing inequities, fragility and entrenched discrimination, further deepening divides and reversing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. Increasingly, rising inequalities put sustainable development at risk by stoking social unrest, undermining social progress, threatening economic and political stability and undercutting human rights.

21. In early 2020, with the crisis looming, a shared sense of urgency and determination to act decisively to combat inequalities was felt deeply across the United Nations system. The magnitude of the pandemic's impact gave further weight to the pressing need for a rapid system-wide response. The 22 members of the inequalities task team of the High-level Committee on Programmes had identified many mutually reinforcing layers of inequalities, significant risks and vulnerabilities exposed by COVID-19 following decades of underinvestment in health systems, public services and social protection, resulting in the need for a new social contract.

22. The task team convened virtually in March 2020, under the joint leadership of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), to identify priority actions. The global crisis was a compelling backdrop and provided a strong impetus to the team's work. The team agreed that it was imperative to integrate a clear focus on inequalities, including gender inequality, in the response to the pandemic and in the Organization's overarching efforts in support of the 2030 Agenda and the decade of action. These efforts were to be firmly grounded in the United Nations system shared framework for action on equality,<sup>8</sup> endorsed by CEB, as well as the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights. The task team's time-bound workplan identified measures to strengthen coordination to combat inequalities, promote joint analysis and advocacy and intensify knowledge-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development – The United Nations System Shared Framework for Action, available at: https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/ imported\_files/CEB%20equality%20framework-A4-web-rev3\_0.pdf.

sharing and management by drawing on the breadth of its members' mandates and the depth of their expertise.

23. Subsequently, the task team developed a targeted policy brief entitled "COVID-19: inequalities and building back better"<sup>9</sup> to strengthen common approaches, joint analysis and outreach, and to ensure that inequalities were at the centre of the United Nations system response to the pandemic. The policy brief outlined the widening disparities brought about by the pandemic and put forward high-level policy guidance and specific recommendations for United Nations system entities, as well as governments and the United Nations country teams that support them, to seize this once-in-a-generation opportunity to build back better. The recommendations for bold action included: building stronger, equity-oriented health systems; strengthening social protection systems and public services to reduce inequalities; forging a job-intensive recovery for people-centred and environmentally sustainable economies; implementing gender-responsive economic policies based on international solidarity and multilateral collaboration; and ensuring social cohesion and community resilience. If effectively implemented, these measures could help lead Member States out of the current state of crisis and towards transformed economies and more equitable, gender-just societies that can allow everyone to enjoy the full range of their human rights without discrimination.

24. Furthermore, task team members reinforced common system-wide approaches and messaging on the issue of inequalities by contributing to the preparatory session on sharing economic benefits, addressing inequality within and among countries, decoupling growth from environmental degradation, and achieving sustainable development for future generations held in June 2020 ahead of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. To strengthen the United Nations system's collective engagement, visibility and impact on reducing inequalities, United Nations entities received key tools and policy references on inequalities, including the CEB framework and the operational guide for country teams on leaving no one behind<sup>10</sup> developed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Specific support to United Nations country teams was provided by integrating inequality issues into the guidance on economic transformation provided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group in line with the CEB framework.

# Aligning and coordinating the United Nations system institutional response to the pandemic

25. After the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency, the High-level Committee on Management, through its networks, engaged all CEB member organizations in intensive coordination to develop and put in place a set of common principles, measures, policies and administrative guidelines to provide strategic guidance support operational decisionmaking and monitor the management response to the outbreak.

26. The High-level Committee on Management developed a reference document outlining best practices on return-to-office approaches, flexible work arrangements, meetings and business travel, safety and prevention measures, and other key business continuity measures that were adopted by member organizations and evolved with each phase of the pandemic.<sup>11</sup> The document was updated continuously during the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> High-level Committee on Programmes, inequalities task team, "COVID-19: inequalities and building back better", Policy Brief (2020). Available at https://unsceb.org/covid-19-inequalitiesand-building-back-better-policy-brief-hlcp-inequalities-task-team.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Available at https://unsdg.un.org/resources/leaving-no-one-behind-unsdg-operational-guide-uncountry-teams-interim-draft.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Available at https://unsceb.org/covid19-aligning-and-coordinating-un-systems-return-office.

reporting period, highlighting commonalities and specificities for the various typologies of United Nations offices. This work was also informed by behavioural insights, which take into account the long-lasting impact of the pandemic on working modalities, the well-being of personnel, as well as on organizational culture and behaviour.

27. The CEB Human Resources Network issued and regularly updated five versions of the administrative guidelines for offices on the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>12</sup> for the United Nations system, to ensure close alignment among United Nations system entities. The High-level Committee on Management task force on the future of the United Nations system workforce considered various approaches to flexible and remote working arrangements and engaged in the development of a draft system-wide model policy on flexible working arrangements, to be finalized in 2021.

28. In response to the challenges facing the information and communication technology infrastructure across the United Nations system, the Digital and Technology Network of the High-level Committee on Management addressed the immediate technological needs faced by member organizations. The Network, in consultation with the Chief Interpreters across the United Nations system, issued guidelines and best practices for organizing virtual conferences, meetings and events, and suggested ways to support interactive remote participation.<sup>13</sup>

29. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a sudden and widespread switch to videoconferencing as the principal means used by organizations to coordinate, communicate and collaborate with staff and external partners alike, which resulted in a heavy reliance on tools that had not previously undergone a thorough security evaluation. In response to this emerging critical issue, the Information Security Special Interest Group of the Digital and Technology Network issued guidance on videoconferencing platforms that highlighted recommendations to be followed by both meeting organizers and participants.<sup>14</sup>

30. The Digital and Technology Network also pursued system-wide deployment of federated access to the United Nations Secretariat Office 365 tenant. Over 90,000 users from United Nations system organizations were added to the United Nations Secretariat tenant by the end of 2020. The project supported efficient inter-agency collaboration and coordination during the pandemic, by enabling telecommuting and by providing secured access to certain information resources, services and applications.

31. The Procurement Network of the High-level Committee on Management engaged in collaborative initiatives to strengthen the efficiency of the United Nations system's supply chain in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic supply chain network was activated as a coordination mechanism for demand, supply, allocation and distribution. The United Nations crisis management team also established an inter-agency coordination cell to address supply chain matters to support the issuance of strategic guidance, operational decision-making and the monitoring of the global humanitarian response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Available at https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/COVID-19%20Administrative %20Guidelines%20V%205.0 Jan%202021.pdf.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> CEB, High-level Committee on Management, "Virtual Events and Remote Participation Guidelines and Best Practices" (May 2020). Available at https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/ 2020-09/Digital%20%26%20Technology%20Network%20-%20Virtual%20Events%20and %20Remote%20Participation%20Guidelines.pdf.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Information Security Special Interest Group, Digital and Technology Network, "The evaluation of Zoom as a United Nations-system videoconferencing solution" (2020). Available at https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Digital%20%26%20Technology%20Network%20-%20UNISSIG%20Evaluation%20of%20Zoom.pdf.

32. The Working Group on Common Treasury Services of the CEB Finance and Budget Network developed the United Nations system-wide cash coordination and collaboration process to prevent the blocking of banking channels owing to the pandemic and to support an emergency "One Collaborative Channel" to guarantee the flow of funds to potential "hot spot" countries. The objective of both initiatives was to make cash and access to financial services available to all CEB member organizations and to ensure continuous cash provision to all countries worldwide.

### III. Strengthening policy coherence and coordination in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

33. Despite the grave disruption to many workstreams caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, CEB did not waver in its efforts to strengthen system-wide policy and programmatic coordination and coherence in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2020, the Board devoted attention to the least developed countries; indigenous peoples; biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development; and clean water and sanitation.

# Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020

34. In 2020, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States kept CEB abreast, through the High-level Committee on Programmes, of progress in the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, and of actions taken to promote investment in the least developed countries, as mandated by the General Assembly.<sup>15</sup> The preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries advanced despite challenges arising from the COVID-19 outbreak, with investment promotion to be an area of focus for the Conference. The pandemic accelerated technology transfer, including through the new Technology Access Partnership<sup>16</sup> supported by the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries. The partnership helps developing countries to enhance their capacity to manufacture essential COVID-19-related medical equipment, including personal protective equipment, diagnostics and medical devices such as ventilators. In addition, entities were encouraged to step up support to countries graduating from the least developed countries category, and to collaborate closely with the inter-agency task force on graduation and smooth transition.

# Call to action on building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future with indigenous peoples

35. The High-level Committee on Programmes recognized that indigenous peoples were among the groups considered to be the furthest behind in realizing the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda, and, moreover, that the COVID-19 pandemic was having a disproportionately devastating impact on the 476 million indigenous persons around the world. Subject to entrenched patterns of discrimination, these populations – in particular indigenous women and girls – are facing new threats to their health, survival and human rights. It was therefore timely that the Committee sought to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Most recently in resolution 75/227.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Technology Access Partnership, "UN agencies launch Tech Access Partnership in joint effort to scale up local production of life-saving health technologies for COVID-19", press release, 12 May 2020.

revitalize the system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples (E/C.19/2016/5). This added push, on the fifth anniversary of the action plan, took the form of a call to action by  $CEB^{17}$  that was developed by the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues and presented to the Committee for approval in October 2020.

36. CEB members endorsed the statement in November 2020 and affirmed their commitment at the highest level of leadership to supporting Member States in promoting, protecting and realizing the rights of indigenous peoples, and to redoubling efforts to ensure collaborative and coherent United Nations system action to support their rights and well-being. CEB acknowledged the imperatives to revitalize United Nations system-wide action for ensuring a coherent approach to achieving the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to work to build an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future with indigenous peoples. The statement recognizes that indigenous peoples are adaptive to the challenges that they face, are indispensable partners in, and contributors to, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and should more systematically participate in United Nations processes.

## Common approach on biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development

37. Despite the postponement of a series of global conferences, CEB members were strongly committed to ensuring that 2020 remained a "super year" for nature, including by heeding nature's dramatic warnings, including the severe repercussions of the loss and degradation of biodiversity demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and seizing the opportunity to act decisively to reset humanity's relationship with nature and get the world on track to take bold climate action, while rebuilding stronger, more resilient and sustainable economies. Following a dedicated discussion in May 2020, the Board called for stronger mobilization around nature across the whole United Nations system and tasked the High-level Committee on Programmes with developing a common approach to integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into United Nations policy and programme planning and delivery.

38. The common approach, developed under the co-leadership of the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme, and expected to be endorsed by the Board in 2021, will enable CEB members to pursue opportunities for collective and cohesive action and joint delivery of initiatives at the global, regional and country levels, and to provide evidence-based and integrated policy advice and programmatic support. The approach has been designed to enable the Secretary-General and CEB members to mobilize resources, promote integrated action and communicate the United Nations system's commitment to nature in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and post-pandemic recovery.

#### Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework

39. Water and sanitation were identified as key to fighting the COVID-19 crisis, leading to an increased need for resilient and sustainable water-related ecosystems and safe water supply and sanitation services to prevent and contain the current and future pandemics.

40. As part of the Secretary-General's decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (see General Assembly resolution 74/4), UN-Water,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, "Building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future with indigenous peoples: a call to action" (November 2020).

through a consultative process with the High-level Committee on Programmes, developed the Global Acceleration Framework,<sup>18</sup> a new, unifying initiative aimed at addressing the urgent need for a holistic, systemic and multilateral global response to rapidly improve progress in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6.

41. The Framework, welcomed by the Board and launched by the Secretary-General and a number of heads of United Nations system entities at the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development, aims to unify the international community's support to countries for the implementation of Goal 6 and to dramatically improve support through swift and well-coordinated responses to country requests, coordinated action under five accelerator themes in order to remove bottlenecks, as well as strengthened accountability.

# IV. Advancing the United Nations normative agenda on the ethics of artificial intelligence

42. In 2020, as technological transformation accelerated and far more people worldwide relied on algorithms in their daily lives, the High-level Committee on Programmes was deemed the optimal inter-agency platform to develop system-wide inputs to the draft recommendation on a possible standard-setting instrument on the ethics of artificial intelligence that had been mandated by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 2019<sup>19</sup> and is slated for possible adoption in late 2021.

43. The Committee mobilized the collective policy expertise of the United Nations system and played a catalytic role in making the case for strong ethical and human rights guardrails for artificial intelligence. The United Nations system input,<sup>20</sup> approved by the Committee following a virtual consultation held in July 2020, emphasized interconnected and interrelated issues in relation to artificial intelligence, to be reflected in further versions of the draft recommendation. It also contained an appeal to address inequalities and ensure alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, strengthen human rights and enhance governance and accountability.

44. Given the disparate impact of artificial intelligence on different countries and on different groups within countries, it will be vital to address the economic and social inequalities that may arise from the application of artificial intelligence and to promote alignment with the 2030 Agenda. CEB members noted the impact of artificial intelligence on the economic well-being of workers, as well as its potential role in exacerbating poverty and the digital divide, and in creating algorithmic biases against women, children and other vulnerable groups. The effects of artificial intelligence on people in humanitarian contexts and on the environment were also of concern. CEB members called for additional support to developing countries, or artificialintelligence-consuming countries, owing to disparities between them and developed countries, or artificial-intelligence-producing countries, and for increasing the alignment of the recommendation with the 2030 Agenda.

45. The High-level Committee on Programmes underscored the importance of using strong references to international human rights standards throughout the text and of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> UN-Water, "The Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework" (Geneva, 2020).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> See resolution 40 C/37 adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its fortieth session, entitled "Preliminary study on a possible standard-setting instrument on the ethics of artificial intelligence".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Input from the High-level Committee on Programmes to the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (virtual consultation held on 29 July 2020).

making the foundations of many of the recommendation's proposed values, principles and policy actions in the international human rights framework more explicit.

46. Beyond their importance in the development of artificial intelligence, human rights should also be central to the application of such intelligence, which should be used to promote, rather than violate, human rights; human rights impact assessments were highlighted as a valuable tool in this regard.

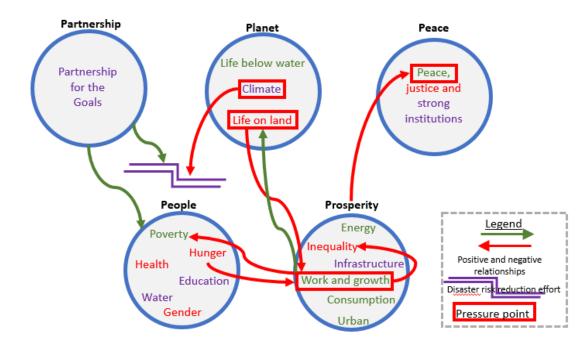
47. The High-level Committee on Programmes suggested enhancing the capacity of Member States to develop appropriate governance mechanisms and policies with respect to artificial intelligence at the national level, including with support from the United Nations system. Members recommended that accountability frameworks take into consideration the entire life cycle of artificial intelligence, not just its development phase, and noted that, in certain circumstances, existing legal frameworks could be interpreted to govern aspects of artificial intelligence.

# V. Innovating the working methods of the United Nations system

48. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the value and accelerated the application of modern tools, techniques and skills throughout the United Nations system. As it touched virtually all systems across the planet in a deeply interconnected way, the pandemic reinforced the power of applying systems thinking and using integrated responses, concepts promoted in the CEB analytical framework on risk and resilience (CEB/2017/6, annex III) (see figure III below). In order to enhance the ability to anticipate and respond to risk, CEB member organizations ramped up collaboration and are strengthening capacities so as to better equip their staff to address volatile, complex challenges – both external and internal – and continuously improve working methods.

#### Figure III

Illustration of fundamental dynamics and key risks in a possible crisis situation



Strategic foresight network of the High-level Committee on Programmes

49. In 2018, having first identified strategic foresight as a powerful tool to inform future-aware approaches to advancing sustainable development,<sup>21</sup> the High-level Committee on Programmes recognized that the COVID-19 crisis had crystallized its value: by using the future to shape the present, it could be possible to master volatile, complex and uncertain situations and develop the ability to adapt to meet the global challenges of the twenty-first century. The strategic foresight network of the High-level Committee on Programmes was formed only in late 2019, but interest within the United Nations system in developing and using this capacity quickly increased as the magnitude and complexity of the effects of the pandemic become apparent. Under the leadership of UNESCO, the strategic foresight network met this demand in 2020, serving as a central hub to bring together United Nations system entities to promote foresight capabilities, make connections, encourage learning by doing and foster cross-agency collaboration.

#### Pilot project on predictive analytics

50. In 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as a lead agency for an innovative pilot project backed by the High-level Committee on Programmes, took initial steps to promote the use of data to anticipate the interconnected effects on the displacement of people arising from climate change, food insecurity, violence and socioeconomic factors in the Sahel region.<sup>22</sup> The project is expected to transition to the region in 2021 under the leadership of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, and will leverage data for anticipatory planning across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding pillars, in support of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and of Governments in the region, with a view to replicating the approach in other operations around the world. A year after its launch, the project has completed a comprehensive needs analysis with the engagement of 22 United Nations system entities, received support from United Nations system leaders at Headquarters and in the Sahel, established partnerships with experts and researchers from the public and private sectors and secured project funding.

#### Working group on artificial intelligence

51. Two years after the endorsement of the United Nations system-wide strategic approach and road map for supporting capacity development on artificial intelligence (CEB/2019/1/Add.3), the High-level Committee on Programmes reviewed gaps in its implementation and prioritized actions to advance progress. In October 2020, the Committee agreed to establish an inter-agency working group on artificial intelligence<sup>23</sup> co-led by the International Telecommunication Union and UNESCO, aimed at fostering collaboration on the development of Member State capacities and at ensuring that ongoing work on artificial intelligence in the United Nations system is underpinned by ethical principles, including respect for human rights and gender equality. The working group, launched in early 2021, leverages expertise from across the United Nations system in order to facilitate access to knowledge and the exchange of information related to artificial intelligence, enhance inter-agency policy cohesion and programmatic coordination, and strengthen internal capacity on artificial intelligence in line with ethical principles.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> As recognized in General Assembly resolution 74/229, para. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> In support of Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/2, para. 2, and General Assembly resolution 75/124, paras. 15, 52, 53, 55, 57 and 75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> In support of, inter alia, General Assembly resolutions 75/202, para. 33, and 75/233, paras. 23 and 31.

Advancing innovation, mutual recognition and harmonization of management policies and practices

52. In 2020, work continued towards mainstreaming the principle of mutual recognition:<sup>24</sup> the Mutual Recognition Statement was signed by an additional four organizations, bringing the total number of signatures by executive heads to 21 and reinforcing the United Nations system response to the request by the General Assembly that entities within the United Nations development system operate according to the principle of mutual recognition of best practices (see General Assembly resolution 75/233).

53. The High-level Committee on Management continued to explore further opportunities for collaborative procurement<sup>25</sup> under the umbrella of the United Nations Global Marketplace, as well as through several other initiatives led by the Procurement Network, including: (a) supporting the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy through the development of guidelines on indicator 8 of the Strategy, which relates directly to procurement; (b) advancing the implementation of the common United Nations procurement templates, developed by the Network in 2019; and (c) launching an initiative for the development of a policy framework on human trafficking and forced labour in United Nations supply chains, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2388 (2017).

54. The Finance and Budget Network of the High-level Committee on Management continued its work on the harmonization of banking contracts, extending the use of common local banking agreements to Honduras, Peru and Trinidad and Tobago and further reducing banking charges and operational risks across the United Nations system.

55. The Committee's cross-functional risk management task force completed all the objectives set out in its terms of reference,<sup>26</sup> developing and issuing a reference maturity model for risk management, as well as guidance papers on risk appetite, embedding risk management, managing fraud risk and managing risk in the field and decentralized organizations. The task force also established a risk management information-sharing mechanism.

56. As the interest of organizations in the subject of risk management remained high, the High-level Committee on Management requested that the task force evolve into a forum for exchanging knowledge, networking and developing additional material.

57. The digitalization of organizations remained a priority of the Digital and Technology Network of the High-level Committee on Management, in alignment with the vision outlined in the Secretary-General's strategy on new technologies. Continuing its efforts towards the effective coordination of organizations' information and communications technology capabilities, the Digital and Technology Network discussed emerging areas of importance, including the next generation of enterprise resource planning systems, multi-factor authentication, e-signatures, the emergence of new technology-related job profiles and the role of information management and technology in enabling the innovation culture.

 $<sup>^{24}</sup>$  In accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/243 and to A/72/684–E/2018/7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 67/226 and 71/243.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Available at https://unsceb.org/rmtf.

### VI. Multilingualism: a core value of the United Nations

58. In its role as facilitator, the CEB secretariat<sup>27</sup> continued to reinforce the personal commitment of the Secretary-General to fostering multilingualism<sup>28</sup> throughout the United Nations system and to support his Coordinator for Multilingualism, the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management.<sup>29</sup> The United Nations Secretariat, as the lead entity on multilingualism across the United Nations system, guides a comprehensive and coordinated approach to multilingualism within the system.

59. In 2020, the CEB secretariat assisted the Coordinator for Multilingualism in fostering a coordinated approach to multilingualism across CEB member organizations by hosting, on the CEB website, a dedicated webpage curated by the Coordinator, and by sharing policies and tools across United Nations entities. The CEB secretariat also contributed to the Joint Inspection Unit review of the status of implementation of multilingualism across the United Nations system, providing information on the system-wide dimensions of multilingualism and identifying gaps and opportunities for the system to effectively pursue multilingualism as a core value. The CEB secretariat will continue to engage with the focal points on multilingualism in United Nations system organizations in their efforts to support the work of the Coordinator for Multilingualism.

### VII. Improving transparency and accountability

60. In order to improve access to information spanning all activities of CEB and its mechanisms, the CEB secretariat refreshed its online presence by launching a redesigned public website in early 2021 (www.unsceb.org).

61. The CEB secretariat also developed and launched a management dashboard to track and promote initiatives of the High-level Committee on Management, which includes charts summarizing the types of initiatives and areas of impact, implementation status at the entity level and links to relevant materials available on the CEB website and other portals.<sup>30</sup> The dashboard integrates the Committee's results-based management approach, orienting actions and resources towards clear and demonstrable results.

62. In order to enhance efficiency and coordination, the periodic collection of system-wide data on recruitment and vacancies conducted by UN-Women was integrated into the data management platform of the CEB secretariat. The data collection is now administered jointly by the CEB secretariat and UN-Women and includes an enhanced comprehensive verification process. This not only fosters collaboration among United Nations system entities but also enhances coherence of the data reported to Member States.<sup>31</sup>

### VIII. Addressing sexual harassment in the United Nations system

63. In 2020, CEB continued to give priority attention to addressing sexual harassment within the organizations of the United Nations system, through its ad hoc Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> In accordance with paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 71/328.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 54/64, 69/250, 70/9, 71/262, 72/19, 73/270 and 74/252.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> A/73/761, para. 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> See https://unsceb.org/hlcm-dashboard.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> See https://unsceb.org/topics/un-system-statistics.

Nations System, established in November 2017 with the aim of instilling a zerotolerance approach to sexual harassment, strengthening victim-centred prevention and response and fostering a safe, equal and inclusive working environment across the United Nations system. The Task Force moved into the second phase of its work, further recognizing the complexity of growing challenges related to racism, inclusion and diversity, along with the changed environment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

64. In 2020, the Task Force began administering a system-wide questionnaire on improved reporting on sexual harassment in the United Nations system. The questionnaire is to be disseminated on an annual basis, in order to enable the comparison of sexual harassment reporting within and across entities over time. The United Nations ClearCheck database, which enables the sharing among United Nations organizations of information on individuals against whom there are established allegations of sexual misconduct, was further expanded to include 25 United Nations entities. The overwhelming majority of United Nations system organizations adopted the Code of Conduct to Prevent Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at United Nations System Events. Work continued towards the completion of a manual for the investigation of sexual harassment complaints, to be disseminated in 2021. During a special session on values, attitudes and organizational culture in relation to sexual misconduct, Task Force members engaged in a facilitated dialogue on the issues underlying sexual misconduct, and paved the way for follow-up action in the areas of organizational and cultural change.

65. In a renewed effort to uphold the right balance between accountability and trust, the High-level Committee on Management approved a new workplan developed by the Task Force, which sets out five priority areas for concerted action. The first area focuses on putting victims and survivors at the centre of the approach through the development of a voluntary and anonymous survey designed to capture victims' experiences, coupled with establishing United Nations-wide definitions and principles for a victim-centred approach and ensuring that the support provided was appropriate for survivors. The second area involves providing training and communication materials to teams and personnel around the world, given that staff in the field and in high-risk duty stations are often the hardest to reach and the most powerless to speak up, in order to meet the need for useful and accessible references and build trust in the system. The third area relates to rolling out and monitoring the use of the common tools already developed in order to promote accountability within the system and leverage emerging evidence to correct course where necessary, including to ensure that actions are survivor-centred. The fourth area involves working closely with other stakeholders, including Member States and NGO partners, on sexual harassment and many interconnected issues, especially sexual exploitation and abuse and the abuse of authority, with the central aim of combating gender inequality and power imbalances. The fifth area relates to addressing head-on underlying issues of values, attitudes and culture in order to tackle the root causes of sexual misconduct and create respectful, inclusive and accountable workplaces, while also leveraging the notions and principles of behavioural science.

# IX. Coordination between the Chief Executives Board and other jointly financed bodies

66. Through its subsidiary bodies, CEB continued its well-established work of coordinating and contributing to the programmes of work of both the International Civil Service Commission and the Joint Inspection Unit.

67. The Human Resources Network of the High-level Committee on Management continued its long history of participation in the sessions and working groups of the International Civil Service Commission. In addition to its collaborative work on reviewing the post adjustment system, as well as the methodology for setting salaries for locally recruited staff, the Network, through its Field Group and direct participation in working groups of the Commission, collaborated closely with the Commission on matters such as the review of hardship classifications. The Network also closely engaged with the Commission on matters related to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., the amendment of danger pay provisions) and other emergency situations (i.e., immediate response following the explosions in Beirut, in August 2020).

68. In addition, the Human Resources Network conducted internal exchanges of experience, as well as dialogues with other partners within the United Nations system, on reform and innovation efforts in various areas of human resources management, including at the field level. This included the organization of a dedicated workshop with the Business Innovations Group of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group in February 2020, with the aim of identifying further potential action areas for human resources innovation and reform, with a focus on more harmonized and innovative recruitment and outreach efforts, including such pilot areas as joint virtual career fairs for target communities (including candidates with disabilities) and a dedicated talent pool for female candidates.

69. In his capacity as Chair of CEB, the Secretary-General conducted a review of the jurisdictional set-up of the United Nations common system, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 74/255 B. The review process involved extensive consultations with key stakeholders across the United Nations common system and was coordinated by the Under-Secretary-General for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and supervised by the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel. The CEB secretariat assisted with coordinating the efforts of the designated focal points from CEB member organizations, who were responsible for the consolidation of inputs from within their respective entities, while taking into account the human resources management and legal perspectives. The outcome of the review was submitted in a report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly in January 2021 (A/75/690).

70. In 2020, the secretariats of CEB and the Joint Inspection Unit continued to hold constructive dialogues, including an in-person meeting in March with the Chair of the Unit and its Executive Secretary, and a virtual dialogue in December with the inspectors and representatives of the secretariat of the Unit. Both meetings provided productive and practical insights into ongoing and future collaboration.

71. In consultation with CEB-related technical and issue-driven networks, the CEB secretariat provided comments on a number of draft reports of the Joint Inspection Unit and met with inspectors and staff of the Unit's secretariat to discuss issues pertaining to current and future reports. The CEB secretariat worked closely with the Unit on the preparation of its annual programme of work by providing substantive inputs regarding specific proposals; continuing to facilitate the collection of comments and views from the United Nations system on the Unit's reports of a system-wide nature; and regularly issuing related notes of the Secretary-General<sup>32</sup> on behalf of CEB members.

72. As Chair of CEB, the Secretary-General conducted consultations with CEB members and, in accordance with the procedures set out in chapter II, article 3, of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Available at https://www.unjiu.org/content/reports (see "Comments").

statute of the Joint Inspection Unit,<sup>33</sup> reviewed, for consideration by the General Assembly, the qualifications of one inspector proposed for appointment in 2021 and of one inspector proposed for reappointment, also in 2021.

### X. Sustaining compliance with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards

73. In its resolution 60/283, the General Assembly approved the adoption of International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) for presentation of the financial statements of the United Nations system. The High-level Committee on Management established a jointly funded system-wide project on the adoption of IPSAS, to be implemented by the Task Force on Accounting Standards. All 26 organizations of the United Nations system that have adopted the Standards have implemented them and continue to receive unqualified audit opinions, bearing testimony to the commitment and ability of the United Nations system to sustain compliance with the evolving standards for improved quality of financial reporting, enhanced transparency and accountability.

74. The Task Force on Accounting Standards continues to focus on sustaining compliance with the Standards and the realization of their expected benefits, including greater comparability of financial reporting policies and practices across the United Nations system. In that connection, the Task Force continued its ongoing engagement with the IPSAS Board. Several workshops were held during 2020 with the staff of the IPSAS Board and United Nations system organizations on the revenue and expenses pronouncements that are being developed. The IPSAS Board continues to update standards and issue guidance in response to changing user needs and environments.

75. The Task Force continued to monitor the work of the IPSAS Board, staying abreast of new pronouncements and upcoming projects and providing feedback to the Board on behalf of the United Nations system. Moreover, the Task Force reviewed consultation papers and exposure drafts issued by the IPSAS Board in the areas of financial reporting for accounting for revenue and transfer expenses, leases, heritage and infrastructure assets and public sector measurement.

76. The COVID-19 pandemic brought major challenges early on in 2020, and the Task Force reached out to the IPSAS Board to obtain guidance on accounting treatment and disclosures in the financial statements, which was shared with all United Nations system organizations. The Task Force continues to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the financial statements and financial reporting of United Nations system organizations.

77. Owing to the pandemic, in September 2020 the Task Force held its annual meeting in a virtual format, considering a range of issues, including an update from one of its working groups on interaction with the staff of the IPSAS Board regarding the consultation papers on accounting for revenue and transfer expenses. The meeting also provided the opportunity to interact with the Board of Auditors regarding key audit observations and outcomes, issues relating to COVID-19 and other emerging audit issues. Additional areas covered by the Task Force meeting included after-service health insurance liabilities, as well as the useful economic lives of assets and cryptocurrencies and their implications for financial reporting. These interactions are part of the mandate of the Task Force to facilitate dialogue among United Nations system organizations in order to promote the sharing of experiences and ensure the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> General Assembly resolution 31/192, annex, chap. II, art. 3.

consistent interpretation, application and sustainability of the Standards in financial reporting.

### **XI.** Conclusions

78. In 2020, CEB served as a driver of integration and coherence in the United Nations system across a wide range of programmatic and management issues in support of intergovernmental mandates and priorities. As the challenges faced by the international community were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations system rose to the occasion, providing support and policy advice to Member States.

79. The Board sustained its commitment to strengthening policy coherence and coordination in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, promoting system-wide preparation for and follow-up to United Nations conferences and summits, and improving and innovating the administrative and management functions of the United Nations system, always guided by the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and consistently taking a people-centred approach.