TERMS OF REFERENCE
Informal HLCP Strategic Foresight Network

## I.    **Background**

1. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), world leaders agreed on a global vision for what the world of 2030 could look like. This vision explicitly acknowledges the complex, inter-related and volatile nature of our future, where technological transformations, geopolitical shifts as well as major social, demographic and environmental trends intertwine and converge in a wide range of plausible scenarios.

2. System-wide policy and programmatic coherence on a range of longer-horizon "frontier" challenges has been and continues to be an important focus of the work of the High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP). The Committee has directed its analytical initiatives in a manner that holistically takes into account the impacts of diverse and mutually-influencing global forces that were disrupting, in dynamic and highly unpredictable way, traditional development pathways and the prospects of realizing sustainable development. In these processes, HLCP has underscored the importance of building deeper analytical understanding of these complex nexuses in a proactive and forward-looking manner - as a basis to enhance the UN system capacity and readiness to address fast-evolving longer-term challenges.

3. It is in this context that the Committee has initiated its engagement on strategic foresight. Underscoring the importance of *foresight-aware* and *futures-intelligent* approaches to advancing sustainable development in the context of high unpredictability and uncertainty, HLCP recognized the strong relevance and potential of strategic foresight to deepening, enriching, and invigorating its policy and analytical work on global strategic challenges of system-wide concern. Accordingly, HLCP has decided[1] to pursue: i) a pilot exercise to further assess the practicality of integrating foresight in its work; and ii) options to promote foresight capacities and foster collaboration across the system.

4. As a basis to carry forward these decisions, HLCP has considered a light "mapping" analysis across the system, which revealed that the existing foresight experiences are, typically, confined to the structure and mandate of each entity, with little collaboration between entities or, never, on a system-wide basis. The mapping also revealed that the existing foresight-related capacities were dispersed in "pockets" within the system and inconsistent in approaches, while there was strong interest, across the board, in further increasing such capacity, both within and across entities through collaboration.  HLCP considered that these offered a promising building-block to foster mutual-learning and collaboration across the UN system, towards shared approaches and joint efforts that would enable strategic foresight to be integrated appropriately into the Committee's system-wide policy and analytical work.

5. As a step in that direction, the Committee decided to set up an Informal HLCP Foresight Network aimed to promote the sharing of foresight-related experience and knowledge.

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[1] Decisions from the HLCP 36th session (October 2018), as reaffirmed at its 37th session with agreement on the concrete way-forward measures.

## II.  Objectives and Scope

6.  The <u>immediate objective</u> of the Informal HLCP Foresight Network is to promote networking among foresight experts/practitioners within the UN system and facilitate the sharing and cross-fertilization of experiences, knowledge, best practices, and lessons - as a building-block to "*promote and support foresight capacities across the system and foster cross-agency and system-wide collaboration on foresight*"[2] as called for by HLCP.

7.  <u>In the longer-run</u>, the network is intended to develop into a "resource group" for HLCP, to offer – through collective futures-thinking and joint foresight exercises from integrated systems-perspectives – fresh ideas, alternative perspectives, insights in policy and analytical gaps, and suggestions for system-wide actions – with the view to informing and "*enhancing the Committee's agenda-setting, deliberations, and products*"[3] in support, ultimately, of the work of CEB.

8.  As the initiative under the auspices of HLCP, the scope of the network's efforts will focus on strategic and policy issues at the global level towards enhancing system-wide policy coherence and programmatic coordination, in line with the nature and scope of the Committee's mandate.

## III.  Foreseen Activities and Expected Results

9.  The network will function as an open and informal platform among HLCP member entities that are experienced or interested in strategic foresight, with the aim to:

a)  Promote <u>sharing/cross-fertilization of experience</u>, approaches/tools, and best practices/lessons-learned to strengthen the shared understanding of and collective capacity for applying foresight approaches to the efforts by the UN system.
   - To that end, a <u>series of "webinars"</u> could be organized featuring the experience of UN system entities already engaged/experienced in foresight(-related) efforts internally.
   - By cross-fertilizing various experiences, the network could work towards shared approaches/tools – e.g., a common "taxonomy" or "typology"[4] for strategic foresight or a shared repository of foresight tools/methodologies.

b)  Encourage <u>networking, mutual-learning, and synergies</u> among senior-level officials engaged in strategic foresight as well as between them and relevant external experts (e.g., non-UN international organizations, academia, private sector, etc.).
   - To that end, the network could provide an entry-point for the UN system's <u>engagement with external experts</u> on foresight, to learn from their experience/expertise and exchange ideas – as inputs to the network's internal thinking space/process.

c)  Provide future-aware analyses and perspectives, through collective futures-thinking and joint foresight exercises as appropriate, to inform, enrich, and "futures-proof" the work of HLCP (and CEB, as well as other pertinent UN mechanisms as relevant).
   - To that end, the network could contribute a <u>regular "foresight input" to HLCP</u>, with suggestions for its agenda-setting, thinking, and products/outputs.

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[2] Decisions from the HLCP 36th session (October 2018).
[3] Decision from the HLCP 36th session (October 2018).
[4] As suggested during the HCLP 37th session (April 2019).

- The network could, in turn, act on HLCP's request to review, "back-casting" through foresight, specific system-wide strategies/approaches developed/being developed by HLCP (or others if appropriate) to offer advice and inputs to enhance their futures-relevance and resilience and/or identify pertinent trends and areas of action for possible HLCP engagement.
- Through the above, the network could growingly develop itself into a role as a "resource group" for HLCP.

d) Support HLCP's efforts[5] to contribute to a culture of "futures-orientation" and promote "futures literacy" of UN staff through the sharing of foresight-related information and experience arising from the network's efforts.
- The network might consider an event – virtual or in-person – targeting broader UN staff to showcase the futures-thinking on an appropriate theme (e.g., related to its efforts under c) above).
- The network might contribute to promoting staff awareness/capacity-building/training on foresight, within each UN system entity as well as on a system-wide basis.

10. The network may, in consultation with HLCP and taking into account resource and capacity considerations, further explore options to:

e) Organize joint participative foresight sessions/workshops on topics of system-wide relevance/concern, outcomes and insights from which could contribute to informing and enriching the work of HLCP (and others as appropriate). This may require the network to identify a lead organizing/substantive entity in line with the chosen topic and mobilize additional resources. The network might seek to engage, as appropriate, outside experts relevant to the substance of the chosen topic.

## IV.    Membership, Structure and Functioning

11. The Informal HLCP Foresight Network, set up under the auspices of HLCP, will be open to all HLCP members that are experienced or seriously interested in strategic foresight and are able to commit to activity contributing to its work. Interested entities should designate a senior-level focal point within their organization.
- As deemed appropriate and at/for opportune timing/purposes, the network may opt to engage with existing networks and inter-agency groups (e.g. UN Strategic Planning Network (UNSPN), UN Innovation Network (UNIN), Young UN) or theme-specific expert groups.

12. The work of the network will be facilitated by UNESCO, which has agreed to play the lead/coordinator role. Following the nomination of member focal points, the network may agree as appropriate in further internal governance/coordination arrangements.

13. The network may regularly - and/or as requested - report on its work to HLCP.

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[5] As per the Committee's "scoping" discussion at the 37th session (April 2019).