

REVIEW OF CEB
PRELIMINARY PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

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I. Background and Process

At the last CEB retreat in October 2006, and in the framework of discussions on the reform of the United Nations, Executive Heads (EHs) began a reflection on the future challenges facing the multilateral system, as well as on improving coherence across the system. Given the key role of the CEB in this context, the then Secretary General (SG) Kofi Annan requested Juan Somavia, Director-General of the ILO and Pascal Lamy, Director-General of WTO, to lead a review of the functioning of the CEB and to report back with preliminary recommendations for consideration by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and later by the next regular meeting of the CEB, on 20-21 April 2007.

On 8 December 2006, Juan Somavia and Pascal Lamy sent a joint letter to all CEB members requesting their personal views and suggestions on ways to improve the CEB's functioning, role and impact. 18 written replies were received. A compilation of the views and suggestions received from EHs was distributed to all members by the CEB Secretariat. An organizational brainstorming meeting was held on 9 February 2007 with the participation of Juan Somavia and Pascal Lamy, as well as Thoraya Obaid, Chair of the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM), Lennart Bäge, Chair of the High-Level Committee on Programme (HLCP) and Kemal Dervis, Chair of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). Consultations followed with EHs in meetings and through telephone conversations, individually and in small groups.

The overall exercise was carried out by the EHs themselves, marking a difference with previous reviews of the CEB and its predecessors. It also points to a central conclusion of this exercise: if the CEB is to become a tighter and more effective instrument for inter-agency coordination, it will require more time and direct involvement of Executive Heads. This is an important step forward in the will of CEB members to more fully assume their responsibilities in the ownership and management of the CEB, under the leadership of the Secretary-General.

The sections below constitute an attempt to consolidate the generally shared views and priorities expressed by EHs and the suggestions for immediate and further action for consideration and decision by the CEB.

II. Objective and Approach

Consultations led to a clear conviction that the review should not recommend a major overhaul of the CEB, which was not felt necessary. Rather, the review should envisage a step-by-step process of tightening the work of the CEB and its machinery over the next 2-3 years, singling out some orientations to be adopted at the CEB session of April 2007, and some suggestions for future steps.

The review focussed on practical action responding to emerging convergences coming out of the consultations with EHs. A pragmatic approach was favoured over a theoretical analysis.

CEB Members acknowledged the critical role of CEB as a unique body of the multilateral system bringing together, under the aegis and leadership of the SG, the EHs of the specialized agencies, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the WTO and relevant UN entities, funds and programmes.

The value added of CEB was recognized as a privileged instrument of the Secretary-General to team-up with EHs of the system for sharing political perspectives, forward-looking thinking, exchange of ideas, development of policy directions and system-wide decisions at the highest level. In particular, it was felt that CEB had to find means of enhancing the value of multilateralism, seizing the opportunities and overcoming the existing challenges and concerns for such multilateralism at the national, regional and international levels.

Executive Heads repeatedly underscored their desire to make the CEB a source of strength for the system and for each of its members, using it as an instrument for the highest level expression of system-wide coherence, showing leadership and vision. As the apex inter-agency mechanism, CEB should provide inter-secretariat policy guidance by the Chief Executive Officers of the Secretariats of the organizations of the system.

The level of ambition and political impact of CEB has to be related to the specific issues under its consideration, and can vary from useful information-sharing among EHs, to ahead-of-the-curve brainstorming, or to collective decision-making on matters allowing for that. Individual mandates, respective strengths, capacities and areas of action, as well as different governance structures and constituencies of member organizations need to be recognized and respected. (For example, the ILO's Governing Body includes representatives of workers and employers organizations). CEB should not give the impression of a parallel decision-making system to that of governing structures in each organization.

The CEB needs to be inclusive and relevant, recognizing the diversity of its members and emphasizing what is common among them, as well as what connects them to each other and is useful for each. The value of interaction among peers at the top and the sense of sharing, belonging and togetherness was a major value added if well nurtured. It also

contributes to reducing overlapping activities between agencies and facilitating greater collaboration and production of joint outputs.

This diversity of the organizations they lead, and the variety and wealth of personal experience and knowledge of EHs, is a major asset for the CEB. The meeting of the minds of EHs at the CEB can have a major influence in the thinking and decision making of each of its members and in the group as a whole. This potential has to be fully exploited.

III. Common Agenda – Common Challenges – Common Will

Making the CEB what EHs, their organizations and the system as a whole need, value and expect of it, requires a high degree of trust and engagement of its members, with the leadership of the SG. The CEB has to be owned and led by its membership to be effective, and can only be as strong and effective as its individual members decide to make it.

There is momentum for such a leap forward. The multilateral system has a platform for a common agenda around the Millennium Declaration, the Internationally Agreed Development Goals (IADGs), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, defining the global framework and strategies for the collective and individual work of agencies gathered in CEB. The impact of globalization and global issues are increasingly coming to the fore – from climate change to migration – requiring concerted cross-sectoral responses. Funding trends –with increasing ODA but zero regular budget growth pressure on the system, pose major challenges to the system’s modes of operation. New actors in the international scene, including new issue-based organizations and global funds, are creating more diversity but at the same time increasing the risk of fragmentation and overlap in mandates and activities.

More than ever, the system needs to reflect and act together in confronting those challenges and in bridging the gap between commitment and action for tangible results in the lives of people. The CEB has the potential to increase the collective capacity of the system organizations to confront new challenges and to play a catalytic role in coherently addressing emerging issues of high priority to multilateral cooperation. This means reinvigorating the CEB and transforming it into a more dynamic instrument for shared reflection and collective action, harnessing the capacities and resources of the whole system.

The opportunity should not be missed. The arrival of Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, the release and discussion of the report of the High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence at the General Assembly and within governance bodies of individual agencies as well as the reform steps being undertaken within and outside the system, call for CEB to play its role. It must review and adjust its practices and future interaction, addressing the hard issues of duplication, lack of inclusiveness and unsatisfactory sequencing and effectiveness in inter-agency coordination across the system. The informal interaction in

the CEB has progressively “warmed” the relations among EHs and this very cooperative and open environment should be used to confront delicate issues that have diluted and even challenged the legitimacy of the CEB and its leading role within the system (for example, conflicting policy advice, mission creep, duplication, overlapping, conditionalities affecting other organizations’ mandate, etc.).

IV. Key issues to be addressed by CEB: Proposals for decision

1. Business practices: Harmonization of systems and procedures across the system is of primary importance, with emphasis on results-based management for efficiency and effectiveness, transparency and accountability. HLCM should proceed with the development of a Plan of Action approved by CEB and submitted to donors for funding.

The CEB has to play an active role in providing the executive leadership and direction necessary to ensure that work in this area can rise above individual agency interests and achieve meaningful collective results. Action in this field is urgent and should proceed forthwith.

2. Global policy issues: Overall coherence in all policies of member organizations is difficult to achieve, would have high transaction costs, and is probably unnecessary. On the contrary, the CEB should define and select a limited number of cross-cutting policy issues of concern/interest to the whole system, in which the rolling agenda of the CEB can make a specific contribution over the next 2 to 3 years. Activities on employment and decent work, on Aid for Trade as well as fighting corruption are already underway. There was strong support for immediate action to be taken on climate change, fair and equitable globalization, gender equality and Africa. Other issues mentioned include sustainable development as an overarching paradigm; vulnerable countries; MDGs, IADGs and follow-up to major UN Conferences; financing for development, 2010 – Millennium Declaration stocktaking, the rule of law – nationally and internationally

The CEB should indicate the sequence and approach in which future issues should be dealt with, and the expected outcomes, providing guidance to HLCP for the preparation of such CEB discussions, and for the coordination of the implementation of decisions and follow-up requirements.

3. Country operations: Guidance and oversight on country operations by the system is not currently under the aegis of CEB. With reform efforts for increased system-wide coherence and the focus on country-level results, this area should become an integral part of CEB major responsibilities, connecting with its policy, programme and management functions and seeking mutual support and reinforcement across them. CEB should develop an overall monitoring capacity but not involve itself in specific country activities.

A fundamental aspect is to bring the normative work of the UN and the in-country work closer together with the buy-in of all relevant organizations. This is of critical importance given the new responsibilities expected of the Resident Coordinator (RCs) system as the lead representatives of the whole UN system at country level.

It is also of crucial interest to agencies that have no or limited representation at country level, as well as for the regional and sub-regional bodies and branches that support country level action in the various regions, and which bring the regional dimension into play. Country-level coherence must be developed in the wider context of efforts to achieve increased coherence at the global and regional levels.

4. CEB High-Level Committees: CEB, as the pinnacle of inter-agency coordination, has to bring together the various major inter-agency mechanisms, including vertical and horizontal coordination, from global to regional and country level, and across the wide spectrum of mandates and expertise of CEB members.

HLCM and HLCP should continue to undertake improvement.

As a first step, proposals point to CEB High-Level Committees to be organized as follows:

a) HLCM: In addition to its current work on institutional business practices across the system, it should deal with general management issues in country-level operations, thus ensuring overall management coherence from global to country level. The Committee should be strengthened and authorized on behalf of CEB in developing coordinated approaches in the area of management policies and practices. This Committee would also monitor core and non-core resources of the UN system and the zero growth regular budget policy.

b) HLCP: Its work on promoting policy coherence should be deepened and operationalized through the development of common policy tools (e.g.: CEB toolkit to mainstream employment and decent work across the system or UN system overview like the “One United Nations: How the Millennium Declaration is changing the way the UN System works” report), in addition to its work on global policy and programme issues and global public goods.

c) UNDG, under the coordination of the UNDP Administrator, should operate within the framework of the CEB, thus maximizing system-wide coherence. This reflects the overall experience and responsibility of UNDP in country-level coordination and operations.

- Two major issues should be addressed in this context: One UN at country level, with immediate attention to the One UN pilots and the implementation of the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR); and the effective functioning and oversight of the accountability of the

Resident Coordinator (RC) system in their responsibilities vis-à-vis the whole system, as well as their ability to play a coordinating role.

- Proposals were made for UNDG to evolve into a new High-level Committee on Operations (HLCO). The relationships between the Management Group of UNDG and HLCM, and of the Programme Committee of UNDG and HLCP should be addressed.
- The transition to full integration of UNDG into CEB should be done in such a way as to align its functioning with strategic directions and priorities of CEB without undermining its dynamism, decision-making capacity and efficiency. CEB should decide on the appropriate process and timing to complete such transition, which could be carried out between the April and October 2007 meetings of the CEB.

d) HLCP and UNDG should develop methodologies for policy convergence and capacity building at the country level to ensure that the normative and analytical capacities of the system are fully drawn upon in support of countries' development.

The Role of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (ECESA) also needs to be defined in this context.

e) Committee Management: the two High-Level Committees should continue to be Chaired by an EH. A clear procedure for the appointment and renewal of Chair and Vice-Chair of each Committee should be established.

Participation of smaller organizations in the work of the High-Level Committees should be facilitated and consideration given to the implications for them of decisions taken at the overall UN level.

All Committees would keep direct reporting to the CEB, referring to CEB those issues that require further discussion and/or decision at CEB level. CEB should establish the timetable for reporting progress by the Committees.

Ad-hoc working groups of the Committees should be demand driven and time-bound, with precise sunset clauses for termination of their work.

The Chairs of the High-Level Committees should work together under the guidance of the Secretary-General, to prepare the agenda for the CEB meetings.

High-Level Committees should interact among themselves, with active support of the Secretariat, to maximize synergies and sequences, as well as the best utilization of mandates and capacities.

5. Cluster approach: In the context of CEB, smaller groups of EHs can decide to establish a cluster on a specific theme or issue of their interest. In this way, a group across the CEB can move together and those who wish to observe and join later, or not join at all, can choose to do so. This would allow for flexibility in moving forward with a sense of

realism and respect for cases where some CEB members have no direct interest or have constraints to participate.

Clusters can be replicated or operationalized at the level of one or more of the CEB Committees. The cluster approach will help in the mapping of the work being done by various organizations on a specific issue, area or theme, thus contributing to maximize coherence and synergies, and avoiding overlapping and duplication.

Thematic clusters and sub-bodies would be chaired on a rotating basis by the “front agencies” that have key mandates in the corresponding themes.

6. CEB meetings: By definition, CEB meetings are a privileged setting for personal interaction, information exchange and policy discussion led by the Secretary-General. They should be designed and conducted in a way that ensures the CEB relevance, concrete outcomes and added value impacting on the system as a whole, while reinforcing the sense of collegiality, solidarity and ownership among the SG and EHs members of CEB. For this purpose, CEB meetings should reflect the following principles:

Contents: focus, significance and uniqueness

- a limited number of items of collective significance, reserving space for frank political reflection and for adopting common positions and guidance for action when necessary;
- exchange of privileged information at EH level;
- prospective and strategic thinking tapping the richness of the diversity of its members.

Format: finding the right tone and balance

- at least two full days, with most of the time devoted to private/”retreat mode” sessions;
- more informal dialogue, unscripted, with EHs speaking their minds and avoiding reading written statements;
- avoiding prior official meetings of other bodies involving EHs. If necessary, they can be held after the CEB meeting.

Structure: improving/sharpening existing segments

- regular sessions focussed on issues brought up by, or entrusted to, the HL Committees;
- private meetings allowing for political briefings by the SG and EHs (tour d’horizon);
- seminar/brainstorming on crosscutting issues of common interest, ahead of the curve thinking, emerging/topical concerns, rapid response demands. CEB may be assisted by a group of thinkers nominated by EHs of interested member organizations.

Agenda: EHs driving the process

- CEB to set its own agenda and drive those of the High-level Committees, selecting items of high relevance and added value and capturing the interest of its diverse members;
- initiate a procedure for the adoption of agendas and substantive preparations.
- keep the HLP recommendations on system-wide coherence on its agenda as needed. Monitor the discussion by governments and governance bodies of its members.

Decision-making: keeping control

- CEB should take decisions on issues at its own discretion, delegating to the HL Committees when it considers it appropriate and establishing a procedure for resolving issues when agreements are not met at this level;
- EHs representatives in the various High-level Committees should be senior officials authorized to speak on behalf of their EHs; and working closely with them
- decision-making at CEB needs to take into consideration the limits imposed by the governing structures of its member organizations;
- a method for rapid decision making by EHs between CEB meetings should be adopted.

Frequency: maximizing interaction beyond regular meetings

- Keep two meetings a year and complement with focussed interaction through ICTs (phone, e-mail, video-conferencing, correspondence, dedicated website, as necessary.
- possibility of *ad hoc* meetings/consultations (personal or distance) when deemed necessary, called for by the SG at its own initiative or endorsing a proposal from EHs;
- cluster meetings should be at EH level.

V. Possible next steps in the CEB review process

At its session in April 2007, CEB could consider the following further steps in the review process:

Mapping of all inter-agency coordination mechanisms: CEB may wish to undertake a review of the existing inter-agency mechanisms, bodies, networks and groups and consider which of them should come under the CEB umbrella, under which form, the detected gaps and eventual linkages with those that should remain outside CEB purview. Areas of particular interest are: humanitarian, crisis and reconstruction, peace-building, economic and social affairs, water, energy, oceans, and others. The review should be an opportunity to further rationalize, unify and streamline complex inter-agency coordination mechanisms and address the uncontrolled growth of the “coordination industry”, while fostering an even wider and integrated focus on normative as well as operational issues.

Studying mandates and duplication: It appears urgent to have much greater clarity on duplications, mission creep, and overlapping of activities in specific areas. Analysis could begin in the subjects chosen for priority treatment by HLCP. In the longer run, a system-wide methodology to identify, remedy or justify treatment by different agencies of the same subject should be developed in order to have an overall mapping of the situation.

Coherence: An in depth analysis of the different dimensions of policy coherence is required. Advancing coherence among international organizations to respond to country ownership or internationally agreed development goals is affected, positively or negatively, by some complex external factors. Among others, different positions of governments in different international organizations; lack of policy integration at the national level or diverse donor conditionalities.

Developmental aspects of post-crisis recovery and disaster management: Need to be addressed, in close coordination with existing inter-agency mechanisms such as the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (ECHA) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) currently outside CEB, or to be created within CEB, including the possibility of a future High-Level Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (HLCH) bringing together the current coordination bodies in this area.

CEB Membership: CEB membership has expanded over time with a variety of members having different status. This issue needs to be addressed and resolved.

Financing of CEB: The level of funding required for the appropriate functioning of the CEB and its machinery needs to be examined after having defined the scope and expectations CEB will set for itself. Around 36% of its present budget comes from the UN budget and around 64% is financed by member organizations. Some members do not contribute (IMF, World Bank, WTO).

Equitable rules for adequate financial contributions from and accountability to CEB member organizations should be defined. It will be necessary to avoid the work of the coordinating bodies being hampered by an overlap of mandates and a multitude of secretariats and financial structures.

HLCM should be called upon to provide its contribution in this regard.

Strengthening Secretariat arrangements: Under the guidance of the Secretary-General, a close look should be undertaken, including on:

- functions to appropriately service and provide substantive and logistical support to the CEB and its clusters and Committees and their inter-linkages and to monitor the implementation of its decisions;

- staffing, location (New York/Geneva), pooling together existing secretarial capacity across Committees and possible secondment from member organizations;
- positioning and reporting lines, respecting the principles of neutrality, inclusiveness and ownership by CEB members;
- ensuring the sense of ownership of the CEB and its Committees by all of its members

Several specific, though not necessarily compatible, proposals were made in this regard, calling for further analysis and discussion among CEB members. These and other proposals will need to be envisaged and discussed in the light of the concrete implications of the initial set of decisions that CEB may wish to make out of the first phase of the CEB review.

Linkages to the inter-governmental process: CEB may consider the type of reporting and relationship with the governance structures of the UN (ECOSOC, UNGA, or other relevant bodies) and of CEB member organizations, and the implications of this for the work of CEB and that of its Secretariat. This item, in itself, would require a thorough analysis and discussion among CEB members, in the light of developments in the overall international and multilateral environment.

CEB may wish to agree on the timeframe and process for the next steps in the review, deciding on what should be undertaken up to its October 2007 meeting.
