

**Written Account
of the Core Group on Working Methods of the Executive Boards
of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women, WFP**

I. Introduction

Background

In General Assembly resolution 71/243 of 21 December 2016 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations System (QCPR), operational paragraph 46 stressed “the need to enhance system-wide coherence and efficiency, reduce duplication and build synergy across governing bodies of the entities of United Nations development system”, and called upon:

- (a) The respective bureaux to initiate discussions on improving the working methods of the joint meetings of the Executive Boards so that they offer a platform for exchange on issues with cross-cutting impact;
- (b) Member States to initiate discussions on the working methods of the respective governing bodies in order to improve the efficiency, transparency and quality of official sessions, ensure more systematic follow-up by the entities of the United Nations development system on issues raised by their governing bodies and ensure timely follow-up on the implementation of the present resolution; and
- (c) Entities of the United Nations development system to adopt and abide by clear rules, including on the dissemination of all documents and draft decisions, thereby allowing adequate time for prior consultation with Member States in their decision-making processes.

In response to this request in QCPR OP46, the Presidents of the 2017 Executive Boards of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP initiated discussions on the working methods of the Executive Boards, which resulted in a non-paper that was shared with the wider Board members in December 2017. This non-paper of the 2017 Presidents of the Executive Boards was the focus of an informal discussion entitled: “Reflections on improving the working methods of the Executive Boards,” at the 2018 joint meeting of the Executive Boards of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP (JMB), held on 1 June 2018 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Following the JMB session, a “President’s Summary” was incorporated in the final report of the 2018 JMB. This report reflected the outcomes of the discussions on working methods and provided an overview of issues aimed at improving the working methods of the Executive Boards.

The working methods also formed part of the discussion on the repositioning of the UN development system, whereby Member States on 31 May 2018 in the General Assembly resolution 72/279 operational paragraph 21 “takes [took] note of the proposal of the Secretary-General to gradually merge the New York-based Executive Boards of funds and programmes, and urges [urged] Member States to continue making practical changes to further enhance the working methods of the Boards with the aim of improving the efficiency, transparency and quality of governance structures, including through deciding on ways to improve the functions of the joint meeting of the Boards”. The 2019 Secretary-General’s report (A/74/73-E/2019/4) on the implementation of the QCPR resolution 71/243 addresses strengthening executive guidance and oversight of agencies, funds and programmes, and in paragraph 196 states “the practical changes to further enhance the working methods of the Boards and their joint meetings to enhance

system-wide coherence and efficiency, reduce duplication and build synergy across governing bodies of the UN development system.”

Formation of the Core Group

In the Second Regular Sessions of 2018, the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women, WFP respectively adopted decisions by which Member States requested the Bureaux of the Boards “to launch a joint consultative process with Member States, with a view to examining the efficiency and quality of its current sessions, as well as the functions of the joint meeting of the Boards.”

The Presidents of the four Executive Boards met on 5 November 2018 to follow up on the implementation of the Boards decisions and agreed to form a Core Group to efficiently lead the discussion forward in consultation with respective regional groups. The aim of the formation of the Core Group by the Presidents of the four Executive Boards was to make the joint consultative process as open, transparent and inclusive as possible while ensuring the efficiency of the process. As its main deliverable, the Core Group was expected to produce a written account to be presented at the 2019 Joint Meeting of the Boards for subsequent consideration of its findings and suggestions for improving the working methods in the respective Boards.

For the composition of the Core Group, two member states were designated from each regional group representing the bureau and boards of the relevant funds and programmes.

The following 10 countries joined as members¹ of the Core Group on working methods of the executive board:

Africa:	Republic of Mauritius, Republic of Sudan
Asia Pacific:	People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Republic of Korea
Eastern European:	Republic of Albania, Russian Federation
GRULAC:	Antigua and Barbuda, Republic of Guatemala
WEOG:	Republic of Finland, Swiss Confederation

The Core Group produced a draft procedural decision submitted to the Executive Boards for negotiation at the 2019 first regular session. As a result, in January and February 2019, each respective Executive Board adopted procedural decisions under the facilitation of the Republic of Guatemala and the Swiss Confederation. The decisions:

- Took note with appreciation of the formation of the Core Group of Member States to lead the joint consultative process with Member States, in an open, transparent and inclusive manner, with a view to examining the efficiency and quality of its current sessions, as well as the functions of the joint meetings of the Boards, building on the joint response prepared by the secretariats, and in close consultation with all Member States, seeking Member States’ input to the written account of the Core Group;

¹ Chull-joo Park (Coordinator/Republic of Korea), Vishal Luchoomun (Republic of Mauritius), Nawal Ahmed Mukhtar (Republic of Sudan), Masud Bin Momen (People’s Republic of Bangladesh), Ingrid Prizreni (Republic of Albania), Elena Melnik (Russian Federation), Tumasie Blair (Antigua and Barbuda), David Mulet (Republic of Guatemala), Jyrki Terva (Republic of Finland), Christine Schneeberger (Swiss Confederation). Other than the 10 members of the Core Group, Karla Gabriela Samayoa Recari (Republic of Guatemala), supported by Bruce Campbell (Swiss Confederation) participated on behalf of the WFP Executive Board Bureau.

- Requested the executive board secretariats to support the Core Group, upon request, in analysing the effects of its findings and suggestions;
- Looked forward to the written account of the Core Group, to be presented at the joint meeting of the Boards in May 2019, for subsequent consideration of its findings and recommendations by the members and observers of the respective Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP.

Overarching principles

The overarching objective of the discussions of the Core Group was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the working methods of the JMB and respective governing bodies while preserving the executive guidance and oversight of agencies, funds and programmes and without duplicating the function of the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment and the respective Executive Boards.

The Core Group also recognized that improvements in the working methods had to be made while respecting the different mandates and characteristics of each agency.

Process of incorporating inputs

Each Core Group member, as a representative of his or her respective regional group, was entrusted with the role of sharing with his or her respective regional group the substantive discussions ongoing at the Core Group and seeking feedback. This was done to ensure that the wider membership was informed and that their positions were reflected in the discussions of the Core Group. The inputs received from regional groups, some individual Member States, and WFP bureau were compiled and served as a basis for discussion.

A summary of each meeting of the Core Group was prepared and circulated in order to help Core Group members ensure consistency in the information and message members convey to their respective regional groups.

Reference material for the discussion

Following the structure of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) operational paragraph 46, the Core Group began substantial discussion on the working methods of the Joint Meeting of the Boards (JMB), respective Executive Boards, and the rules, documentation and decision-making methods. The discussion encompassed the content in the Presidents non-paper on the working methods that was shared with the wider membership in December 2017, the President's Summary of the 2018 JMB session on working methods, and the joint response of the Secretariats to this President's Summary. New ideas emerging from the Core Group discussion and inputs from groups were also incorporated in the discussions.

Meeting history

The Core Group met twice in January (8th, 14th), once in February (8th), twice in March (4th, 25th), and three times in April (12th, 17th, 29th). Core Group members gathered the inputs from their respective group members on the topics being discussed and presented their group positions at the Core Group discussions.

For coherence and efficiency, the structure of the discussion as well as the summary was aligned to the foreseen structure of the written account, with the summary constructing the findings and recommendations sections of the written account.

The first briefing to the wider membership with the participation of WFP via videoconference was held on April 10 in order to present on the progress in the Core Group discussion of the working methods of the Executive Boards. Based on the request of Member States in the first briefing, the second briefing was held on May 15.

II. Findings

1. Working methods of the Joint Meeting of the Boards (JMB)

1) Decision-making capacity and alternatives

Areas of convergence

- The Core Group agreed that the working methods of the JMB should be improved with the view of: improving the participation and level of participation at the JMB; discussing joint and actionable issues for possible consideration within respective Executive Boards that have an actual impact on the ground; in accordance with the respective mandate of the entities; not infringing on the oversight function of respective Executive Boards; without overlapping with the functions of respective Executive Boards and the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment.

Areas of non-convergence

- Many Member States were in favor of exploring the idea of a draft decision template prepared reflecting discussions at the joint informal briefings ahead of the JMB and at the JMB, to be used as the basis for negotiations and adoption of decisions at each respective Executive Board session taking place immediately after the JMB.
- A few Member States saw value in the JMB evolving into a decision-making body, given an increasing number of joint activities, e.g., pooled funding, joint programming and reporting, and increasing number of common issues like UNDS reform, working methods etc. Many Member States were not in agreement due to concerns of duplication/overlap of the functions of the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment, and decisions of each Executive Board, as well as the various mandates of Funds, Programmes and Entities. Member States would like clarification on the conditions and implications of giving legislative mandate to the JMB, especially regarding the intended scope of its potential mandate (see request to the Secretariat below). The WFP Bureau positioned itself against the JMB evolving into a decision-making body, given differences in mandate, WFP's dual parentage with FAO and concerns over duplication/overlap of the functions of the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment.
- Some Member States mentioned the possibility of having joint reports presented at the JMB with decisions remaining within the purview of each Executive Board.

2) Topics/Themes

Area of convergence

- JMB topics should be those of common interest to all Executive Boards.
- JMB topics on joint/common agenda items at Executive Board sessions, such as working methods, cost-recovery, sexual exploitation and abuse, and newly emerging issues of common interest, as decided by respective executive boards, such as the implementation of the repositioning of the UN development system were suggested.

Areas of non-convergence

- Some Member States supported the possibility of discussing the Common Chapter of the Strategic Plans, to which the Secretariats reminded Member States that the Strategic Plans of UNOPS and WFP do not contain the Common Chapter. Some Member States indicated that since 'audit' is an agency-specific topic, it should not be included at the JMB.

3) Timing/Duration/Frequency

Areas of non-convergence

- A proposal was made to convene the JMB prior to the first regular session.
- Another proposal was to extend the one day JMB to a two-day meeting.
- A third proposal was suggested to convene a JMB ahead of each formal session.
- A fourth proposal was suggested to retain a one-day session annually, as has been the practice since 2013.

4) Joint informal briefings

Area of convergence

- Member States agreed that joint informal briefings/consultations on the JMB topics should be jointly organized by the agencies and strongly encouraged that they be scheduled within socially acceptable hours to allow WFP Executive Board from Rome to participate albeit remotely.

5) Institutionalization of the Presidents' Meeting

Areas of convergence

- The Core Group generally converged on the value of the Presidents' Meeting for enhanced harmonization of common issues and increased coordination among agencies. More concretely, there was general consensus of holding the Meeting on a regular basis and of keeping formal minutes of the Meeting.

Areas of non-convergence

- There were varying views on the frequency and timing of the Presidents' Meetings. It was proposed to convene the Meeting before each formal session of the Executive Board, while other proposals included the idea of convening it ahead of the Joint Field Visit of the Executive Boards. There was an additional proposal to add a year-end meeting to discuss lessons learned for handing over to the newly-elected Presidents the following year. Some Member States suggested convening the Presidents' meetings twice per year.

- It was also suggested that the meetings be organized/coordinated on a rotational basis by the Secretariats.

2. Working methods of the respective governing bodies

1) Bureau

Areas of convergence

- The Core Group agreed on the need to elect the bureaux early on to minimize leadership gap and enhance the role and efficient functioning of the Presidency and Board at large.
- The Group noted that it is the prerogative of the regional groups to nominate respective Bureau members. However, at the same time, stressing the importance of continuity and smooth transition between outgoing and incoming bureaux, the Core Group converged on strongly recommending that, whenever possible, the Vice President for the regional group which is expected to assume the Presidency in the following year be selected as President of the Executive Board. The Core Group recognized that this is already an established practice that works well in some agencies whereby one of the Vice-Chairs/Vice-Presidents of the bureau, transitions into the Chair or President in the following year.
- The Core Group also agreed that the term of bureau members was also the prerogative of regional groups. Depending on the regional group, some would prioritize continuity while others would prioritize ensuring widest representation within regional groups.

2) Sessions

Areas of convergence

- In regards to the number of sessions and the duration of sessions, the Core Group agreed that this was the prerogative of respective Executive Boards.
- There was general consensus on moving the second regular session of the New York-based agencies] due to the workload, especially for smaller Missions, ahead of the General Assembly high level segment. Thus, it was suggested to look at the different alternatives of adjusting the dates of the second regular session mindful that it does not overlap with other schedules.
- The Core Group found the proposal of convening consecutive formal sessions of the Executive Boards worth exploring. Avoiding gaps between the formal sessions of the Executive Boards could allow delegates, including those coming from capitals, to participate in the Executive Boards Sessions consecutively and to consolidate the outcomes. Once this proposal is endorsed, the Committee of Conferences will be requested to schedule formal sessions of the Executive Boards consecutively.
- The Core Group supported further exploring the proposal of holding a one-day special meeting only to approve country programme documents, thus lightening the workload of the main Board sessions. The EB Secretariats may be tasked to look into the logistical implications and feasibility of such a proposal in consultation with the Agencies on the ground and inform the Boards accordingly for an informed decision to be taken.

Areas of non-convergence

- On the issue of reducing the number of sessions, some Member States proposed removing the second regular session, by perhaps redistributing the respective agenda items to the first regular and annual sessions. Joint topics could be discussed at the JMB.

- Others noted that this proposed change may have implications on the work of respective entities/secretariats, as the potential gap between the Annual and First regular sessions may affect the operational activities of the Funds and Programmes as well as the oversight function of the governing bodies.

3) Conduct of business

Areas of convergence

- The Core Group converged on the value in making the Executive Board sessions interactive, while recognizing the necessity to secure time slot for group and national statements.
- To ensure ample time for interactive discussion, the Core Group strongly encouraged the heads of agencies to provide the full text of their statements or opening remarks (presentation) online in advance and deliver shorter ones at the Executive Board sessions.
 - At UNICEF, a long version of the Executive Director’s opening remarks is shared electronically one week before each session and the Executive Director delivers only summary opening remarks during the proceedings. In order to allocate more time to listening to the comments from members, the ED had opted to reply to unanswered questions in written form after the Session.
- The Core Group strongly encouraged the Executive Boards to strengthen the implementation of time limit for group and national statements in their sessions.
- The Core Group converged on the benefits of building on the best practices of the WFP Bureau whereby a ‘lessons learned’ item is added to the Bureau’s agenda for the meeting following the conclusion of a session.
 - As part of the continued lessons learned feedback loop, the WFP Bureau includes a ‘lessons learned’ item on the Bureau’s agenda for the meeting following the conclusion of the formal session where Bureau Members provide List viewpoints on what went well and what could be improved for future sessions (e.g., speaking times, management presentations, etc.).

Areas of non-convergence

- Another Members State pointed out the necessity to arrange the time slot for national statements earlier in the day, noting it was not appropriate to keep high-ranking officials waiting until the end of the day to deliver their statements.
- A Member State did not agree to refer to the relevant clause of the Rules of Procedure (such as Chapter 11, Rule 14, paragraph 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board) in implementing time limit for statements and argued that the actual implementation of the clause is within the purview of the bureau. It was observed that WFP and UN Women were implementing stricter time limits and the Core Group strongly encouraged other bureaux and Executive Boards to strengthen their enforcement.
- One Member State noted that any format for enhanced interaction should also contain a follow-up mechanism like written account of the interactive session.
- One Member State strongly argued for the need to consider respective BoA Recommendations as well as respecting JIU reports and recommendations according to JIU resolutions of the General Assembly.

4) Participation

Areas of convergence

- The Core Group supported gender parity in the composition of panellists participating in Executive Board sessions, emphasizing that it should never be achieved at the expense of expertise.
- There was general support among Core Group members of the participation of diverse stakeholders in Executive Board sessions with full respect of the relevant clauses in the respective Rules of Procedure and based on the agreement of respective Boards.

Areas of non-convergence

- Some Member States called for gender parity within the bureaux and Executive Board themselves.

5) Field visits

Areas of convergence

- There was general support among Core Group members for the formula of one joint field visit and one individual Board visit. Member States emphasized the value of the field visits in providing insight into agency operations on the ground.
 - Following a 2018 Board decision that eliminated the yearly field visit of the Bureau of the Executive Board, the UNICEF Executive Board would participate in an individual field visit in addition to the joint visit from 2019 onwards.
- There was general support for deciding the destination of field visits two to three years in advance, allowing the flexibility to change host countries if circumstances dictated. Member States agreed that it was preferable to give host countries as well as agencies as much time as possible to prepare for the visits.
- The Core Group strongly encouraged the Executive Boards to consider having harmonized criteria for individual field visits. It was noted that UN Women does not have a guideline on its individual field visit at present, while other Executive Boards have their own guidelines that are not harmonized.

Areas of non-convergence

- One regional group proposed to have one joint field visit per year and two individual Board visits per year alternating every year, a rotation scheme resulting in 4 individual field visits over a two-year period (two per year).

6) Inter-agency coordination

Areas of non-convergence

- One regional group proposed that the Executive Board secretariats share the minutes of their monthly meeting with Member States to give greater visibility on the level and nature of their coordination. Another Member State expressed concern that this could be perceived as micromanaging the secretariats.
- One regional group proposed a merger of the four secretariats into one on the basis that they perform similar functions regardless of the different mandates of their respective agencies.

3. Rules, documentation and decision-making

1) Rules of procedure

Areas of convergence

- Core Group agreed to request the secretariats to produce a comparative overview structure table of rules of procedure of the four Executive Boards. Such a table would assist smaller delegations whose staff often work with multiple organizations.

Areas of non-convergence

- Some Member States were in favour of harmonizing the structure of the rules of procedure of four Boards. One Member State noted that harmonization efforts could begin by identifying existing rules that were similar for all four Executive Boards. However, another Member State urged the group to clarify the tangible benefits that would be achieved by harmonizing the rules of procedure of the Boards. The Member State also noted that any changes to the rules of procedure had to be approved by each Executive Board – in the case of WFP, by a two-thirds majority.
- One regional group proposed an idea of having unified rules of procedure for 4 Boards and noted that UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS abided by same Rules of Procedure despite their differing mandates and that the different functional commissions of the ECOSOC shared a unified Rules of Procedure.

2) Decision-making

Area of convergence

- While recognizing four Executive Boards have their own system for tracking the implementation of Executive Board decisions, the Core Group agreed to prepare a concise tracking matrix of decision implementation for common use and requested secretariats to prepare the draft matrix.
 - At WFP, the secretariat produced a comprehensive table to track actions responding to the requests made by Board members during their interventions at the formal session on the implementation of Board decisions; the system had been in place for a number of years and was well received by Board members.
 - The UN-Women Secretariat had recently developed its own matrix, following discussions with WFP to share best practices.
 - UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS have decision tracking matrices that monitor key requests coming out of each Board decision, indicating the completion status of each request.

3) Informal consultations

Area of convergence

- There was general consensus that initial language proposals by Member States for Executive Board decisions can begin before formal sessions.

Areas of non-convergence

- Many Member States showed their interest in a proposal that initial language proposals by Member States for Executive Board decisions can begin after the relevant informal

consultations and that the specific deadlines can be set by the facilitators of respective decisions.

- Some delegations supported the recent practice in the 2019 first regular session of the UNICEF Executive Board that set the deadline for language proposals for decisions one week ahead of the start of the session, without pre-empting Member States to bring in additional language during negotiations
 - In 2018, the UNICEF Executive Board approved a decision to circulate decisions two weeks in advance of sessions to give Member States time to submit their proposals before the session. UNICEF had also held two informal consultations before the last session in a bid to reduce the time needed for negotiations during the session itself.
 - UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS also shared the text of the decisions two weeks in advance of the session but Member States generally wait until the session to begin negotiations.

III. Recommendations

The Core Group recommends that each respective Executive Board consider the written account of the Core Group and act on the areas of convergence including by incorporating them into the decisions on Working Methods.

The Core Group also recommends that the four Executive Boards consider the way forward for future deliberations on the areas of non-convergence, and that the process for these deliberations should be inclusive and built on consensus.

The rights of member states as members of the Executive Boards under the rules of procedure are in no way restricted by these recommendations.

Annex

1. Compilation of inputs to the discussion of the Core Group
2. Responses of the Secretariats to the requests of the Core Group

For submission to the JMB on May 17, 2019