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Programme questions: evaluation

Programme evaluation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

“The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has effectively supported intergovernmental decision-making, the global statistical system and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, but fell short in its system-wide coordination work and was challenged by low visibility and weak internal synergies”

Summary

The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as a priority programme for evaluation based on a strategic risk assessment carried out in 2008. The evaluation is submitted to the Committee for Programme and Coordination pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/229.

The present report is the first evaluation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as a whole since it assumed its current form in 1997. The Department is one of the Secretariat's most diverse entities and holds one of its broadest mandates. Of the 36 programmes listed in the Secretariat budget for the 2010-2011 biennium, the Department received the seventh largest regular budget appropriation and the sixth largest number of posts.

* E/AC.51/2011/1.



In undertaking the evaluation, OIOS examined the Department's relevance, efficiency and effectiveness, as well as its impact. It used a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, including a document review, staff and stakeholder interviews, staff and stakeholder surveys, field missions, direct observation of intergovernmental meetings, a bibliometric analysis of the usage of the Department's publications and an expert panel review of the quality of a sample of its key publications. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the norms and standards for evaluation established by the United Nations Evaluation Group.

In addition to this report, separate evaluation reports have been prepared for each of the 10 subprogrammes, including the executive direction and management of the Department.

The evaluation results showed that the Department does many things well. Its role in supporting the Economic and Social Council and related intergovernmental bodies, which is its most resource-intensive work, is the one most appreciated by Member States and other stakeholders. This role is unique in the United Nations system and underpins a range of normative and policy work by the intergovernmental bodies. The Department's support for the global statistical system fills one of the longest-standing functions of the Organization and is one of the areas in which its role and effectiveness are seen most clearly. The Department has also contributed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including monitoring their progress, and its publications are generally well regarded, despite some lack of visibility and uneven usage. In fulfilling these functions, the Department has been able to adapt, with flexibility and innovation, to changes in the priorities of the Member States.

In other functions, however, the Department's role has been less clearly defined. The Department operates in crowded territory, with responsibility for development shared within the United Nations system with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and a range of specialized agencies. While it has sometimes been described as the United Nations think-tank on economic and social issues, the Department is not the only entity to fill such a role. One area of potential overlap with other entities of the United Nations system is capacity-building.

The Department's impact is felt the most when it focuses on its areas of greatest strength. What differentiates the Department, and remains the source of its comparative advantage, is its support for the policy and normative work of the intergovernmental bodies, the global scope of its work, its convening power and its role as analyst rather than advocate.

Within such a complex Department, fostering coherence is an ongoing management challenge. Opportunities for cross-divisional collaboration and complementarities have not been fully exploited. Where such opportunities have been seized, the benefits have been acknowledged by staff and stakeholders, but a more systematic approach to the identification of such synergies is needed.

Intellectual leadership was not always supported by effective management practices. Staff concerns about the transparency and consistency of decisions and the quality of consultation and communication within the Department have been noted in previous OIOS reports and were again evident in the current evaluation.

OIOS recommends that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs:

- Further sharpen its strategic focus;
- Improve coordination with partners;
- Develop a Department-wide publication and outreach strategy;
- Strengthen internal coordination and communication.

OIOS also offers the following questions for consideration by the Committee for Programme and Coordination:

- Further clarification of the Department's mandate on policy coherence and coordination;
- Alternative placement of the post of Assistant-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs;
- Establishment of a "Chief Economist" title.

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I. Introduction

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as a priority programme for evaluation based on a strategic risk assessment exercise carried out in 2008. At its forty-ninth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested that the evaluation report be presented for consideration at its fifty-first session.¹ The selection was subsequently formalized by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/229 on programme planning.

2. In accordance with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, the overall objective of the evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness, including the impact, of the Department's programme of work.²

3. In carrying out the evaluation OIOS considered the Department's strategic framework and budget for the 2010-2011 biennium as the primary benchmark against which to measure its performance, and also reviewed data from the past three bienniums. The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women were assessed less comprehensively in the light of the decision of the General Assembly, in its resolution 64/289, that the two offices be consolidated into a new entity, UN-Women, as of 1 January 2011, and the 2010 OIOS thematic evaluation of gender mainstreaming.³ The evaluation did not include an assessment of the management of or projects carried out under the Development Account.

4. The present evaluation reports on the Department as a whole; more detailed assessments of its 10 divisions and offices and its executive direction and management, upon which this report is based, will be issued to the Department as internal management reports.

5. This report incorporates revisions based on comments received through ongoing dialogue with the Department during the drafting process. The final comments of the Department are appended in full, in accordance with the decision of the General Assembly in its resolution 64/263 (see annex II).

6. OIOS expresses its sincere appreciation for the collaboration and cooperation offered both by management and staff of the Department during the evaluation process.

II. Methodology

7. In conducting the evaluation, OIOS utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, drawing on data from the following 12 sources:

(a) A document analysis of the Department's strategic framework and other programme and project documents; service delivery records; monitoring and reporting information from the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS) and senior management compacts; the United Nations

¹ A/64/16, para. 41.

² ST/SGB/2000/8, regulation 7.1.

³ See A/65/266.

Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process; General Assembly resolutions; and prior evaluations, studies and audit reports;

- (b) 68 interviews of all senior managers in the Department;
- (c) 131 interviews of a stratified random sample of staff in all divisions and offices of the Department;⁴
- (d) 240 interviews of stakeholders (including the Permanent Representatives of Member States, government officials, representatives of civil society organizations, academics and staff and management from entities of the United Nations System) conducted in New York and over the phone;
- (e) Field missions to Thailand, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa;⁵
- (f) A web-based survey of all of the Department's management and staff;⁶
- (g) Web-based surveys of a non-random sample of stakeholders in each of the 10 subprogrammes of the Department, including its executive direction and management;⁷
- (h) A web-based survey of a non-random sample of heads of 40 United Nations entities;⁸
- (i) A survey of the Permanent Representatives of all 192 Member States;⁹
- (j) Observations of intergovernmental meetings serviced by the Department;¹⁰

⁴ Stratified random samples of the staff of the Department in all divisions and offices were taken in order to ensure representation of staff at all levels, including a 90 per cent confidence interval.

⁵ These countries were chosen for field missions based on a mapping of the Department's stakeholders, capacity development and technical assistance projects and division-level regional and country-level engagement.

⁶ The survey was sent to 540 staff members; 310 responded, yielding a 57 per cent response rate.

⁷ The 11 surveys were sent to a total of 1,418 individual stakeholders (encompassing all 10 subprogrammes of the Department and its executive direction and management); 399 responded, yielding a 28 per cent overall response rate. The same instrument was used for all 11 surveys, but administered to a different sample of stakeholders as relevant for the individual subprogrammes. Data reported are at the aggregate level.

⁸ The survey was sent to 40 entities; 17 responded, yielding a 43 per cent response rate.

⁹ All 192 Member States received a paper-based survey, to which 27 responded, a 14 per cent response rate.

¹⁰ OIOS observed 32 intergovernmental meetings of the Economic and Social Affairs Committee, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Commission on Population and Development, and the High-level Plenary of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals.

(k) An independent expert panel review of the quality and usage of a non-random sample of 18 of the Department's key publications and databases;¹¹

(l) A bibliometric analysis of the usage of the Department's publications, including citation metrics (Google Scholar), website traffic data, publication download data and the dissemination practices of the same non-random sample of 18 of the Department's publications and databases also assessed by the expert panel.

8. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the evaluation norms and standards established by the United Nations Evaluation Group. The evaluation results are derived from a combination of documentary, testimonial, observational and analytical evidence. Data were triangulated to strengthen the robustness of the evaluation. Individual citations have been used as illustrative of wider testimony resulting from multiple stakeholders.

9. At the request of the Task Force on Human Rights and Gender Equality of the United Nations Evaluation Group, OIOS participated in the pilot of a handbook currently being developed to assist evaluators in incorporating human rights and gender equality considerations into evaluations.

10. The evaluation had three main limitations. First, the relatively low response rates from the stakeholder and Member State surveys mean that the results could not be generalized to represent the views of the Department's stakeholders and the Member States as a whole. Second, the expert panel review included only 18 of the Department's publications and databases; although these were recommended by the Department as being representative of its key publications, the small sample size limited the extent to which the findings of the review could be generalized to encompass all of the Department's publications. Finally, the limitations of the

¹¹ The panel consisted of three independent academic researchers with economic and social expertise covering a range of regional specialization and topics. The 18 publications and databases selected in consultation with the Department as representative of its key work were: (a) *United Nations E-Government Survey 2010* (ST/ESA/PAD/SER.E/131); (b) Report of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration on its ninth session (E/2010/44-E/C.16/2010/5); (c) Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities of the United Nations development system (A/62/73-E/2007/52); (d) *Achieving Sustainable Development and Promoting Development Cooperation — Dialogues at the Economic and Social Council*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.08.II.A.11; (e) *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*; (f) *World Population Monitoring: Focusing on Population Distribution, Urbanization, Internal Migration and Development*, United Nations publication, Sales No. 09.XIII.3; (g) *Building Inclusive Financial Sectors for Development*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.A.3 (2006); (h) Report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to and implementation of the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development (A/65/293); (i) *World Economic and Social Survey 2010: Retooling Global Development*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.II.C.1; (j) *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2010*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.II.C.2; (k) *Report on the World Social Situation 2010: Rethinking Poverty*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.IV.10; (l) *World Youth Report: Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.IV.1; (m) *Handbook for legislation on violence against women*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.IV.2; (n) *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.IV.7; (o) *System of National Accounts 2008*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.08.XVII.29; (p) *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.XVII.11; (q) Sustainable Development Innovation Briefs, Issue 6, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, October 2008; and (r) Progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits in the area of sustainable development, as well as an analysis of the themes of the Conference (A/CONF.216/PC/2).

bibliometric analysis included limited comparability of the bibliometric data from one type of publication to another; large discrepancies between website usage data submitted by the Department and by the Department of Public Information; the exclusion of news media coverage; and the inherent difficulties in capturing information about these types of publications through conventional index citation. To address such limitations, OIOS triangulated data from multiple sources to support its results.

III. Background

11. Promoting international economic and social cooperation was identified as a fundamental purpose of the United Nations by its founders. Chapters IX and X of the Charter of the United Nations provide details on the rationale for international economic and social cooperation and the functions and role of the Economic and Social Council as the central intergovernmental forum with the power to initiate studies, convene meetings, draft conventions and make recommendations for action by Member States and the United Nations system. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs serves as the secretariat of the Economic and Social Council, providing substantive support to it and to the majority of its subsidiary bodies, including the functional commissions and expert groups.

12. The secretariat's economic and social affairs function and structure have changed over time; the most recent major restructuring of the Department was brought about through organizational reforms introduced in 1997.¹² The reforms also led to the establishment of four Executive Committees with coordination functions, with responsibility for the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs assigned to the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.¹³

13. The mandate and work of the Department have unfolded against the backdrop of United Nations conferences and summits involving the adoption of an array of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The international financial crisis of 2008 added further concern over the architecture of institutional arrangements in the area of global economic governance.

14. The proposed strategic framework for the Department for 2010-2011 articulates its overall orientation and objective of promoting and supporting international cooperation in the pursuit of sustained economic growth, the eradication of poverty and hunger and sustainable development for all. While focused on advancing the development pillar, the programme seeks to contribute to a mutually reinforcing relationship among the three pillars of the work of the United Nations: peace and security; development; and human rights.¹⁴ the Department's key functions are: (a) research and analysis of development issues and support to the global statistical system; (b) normative and policy support to intergovernmental processes; (c) assistance in capacity development to support implementation of the outcomes of global conferences at the country level; and (d) fostering collaboration and partnerships within the United Nations, civil society and the private sector.

¹² See A/51/950 and Add.1-7 and General Assembly resolution 52/12.

¹³ ST/SGB/1997/9.

¹⁴ See A/63/6 (Part one).

15. The Under-Secretary-General is responsible for overall executive direction, supervision and management of the Department in implementing its mandates and approved programme of work; the Under-Secretary-General is also the programme manager of the Development Account, and is held accountable for its effective management. The Under-Secretary-General is assisted by the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs and the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development. The Department implements 10 different subprogrammes, each carried out by a different division or office managed by a Director reporting to the Under-Secretary-General. The subprogrammes service a wide range of mandates, intergovernmental bodies and processes, resulting in inherent internal management challenges. Various substantive functions are serviced by the Department's executive direction and management function.

16. The Department's estimated expenditures for the biennium 2010-2011 were \$302 million, comprising \$168 million in regular budget and \$133 million in extrabudgetary resources. These resource allocations are listed by division/office in table 1.¹⁵ The proposed expenditures for the biennium represent a 17 per cent increase compared with actual appropriations of \$258 million (\$143 million regular budget; \$115 million extrabudgetary) pertaining to the 2004-2005 biennium, the time span that corresponds to the focus of the OIOS review.¹⁶ For 2010-2011, the Department had 581 established posts, 545 of which were under the regular budget. This compares to the total of 579 posts, of which 542 were regular budget posts, established for the 2004-2005 biennium. The programme of work mandated by the 2010-2011 budget had a total of 2,845 outputs scheduled for implementation during the biennium.

17. Relative to the combined regular budget for the Secretariat for the 2010-2011 biennium, the financial resources of the Department represented a 3.4 per cent share of the overall total and a 17.5 per cent share of proposed combined allocations to international and regional cooperation for development.¹⁷ During the period between the 2004-2005 and 2010-2011 bienniums, the Department's share of the regular budget declined, from 3.9 per cent of combined Secretariat appropriations and 19 per cent of appropriations to international and regional cooperation for development.¹⁸ Of the 36 programmes listed in the budget for 2010-2011, the Department received the seventh largest regular budget appropriation and the sixth largest number of posts.

¹⁵ See also A/64/6 (Sect. 9), part IV, sect. 9.

¹⁶ The total does not include part XIII, sect. 35 of the United Nations budget (Development Account) for which \$18 million was proposed for 2010-2011 (A/64/6 (Sect. 35)).

¹⁷ A/64/6 (Introduction).

¹⁸ Data for the biennium 2004-2005 regular budget appropriations are taken from A/62/6 (Introduction).

Table 1
Distribution of resources by component of the budget: 2010-2011
(In thousands of United States dollars)

<i>Component</i>	<i>Regular budget</i>	<i>Extrabudgetary</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total number of posts (regular budget plus extrabudgetary)</i>
B. Executive direction and management	6 781.3	—	6 781.3	16
C. Programme of work				
1. Economic and Social Council support and coordination	13 695.9	1 529.5	15 225.4	48
2. Gender issues and advancement of women	12 886.4	2 644.3	15 530.7	43
3. Social policy and development	17 750.2	2 396.0	20 146.2	61
4. Sustainable development	18 165.2	9 450.8	27 616.0	64
5. Statistics	33 775.2	5 620.0	39 395.2	125
6. Population	13 521.7	205.0	13 726.7	45
7. Development policy and analysis	13 316.9	—	13 316.9	46
8. Public administration and development management	13 451.1	23 210.5	36 661.6	51
9. Sustainable forest management	3 451.3	3 014.0	6 465.3	14
10. Financing for development	7 356.2	502.5	7 858.7	23
Subtotal C	147 370.1	48 572.6	195 942.7	520
D. Programme support		85 356.4		
1. Executive Office	8 681.0			
2. Information Support Unit	2 925.6			
Subtotal D	11 606.6	85 356.4	96 963.0	45
Total	168 444.3^a	133 929	302 373.3	581

^a Estimated resource requirements before re-costing. Total includes 2,686,300 allocated under component A of the budget of the Department, comprising the 10 policymaking commissions and expert bodies.

IV. Results

A. The Department has effectively delivered normative and policy support to United Nations intergovernmental processes

18. Of the four functions specified in the Department's 2010-2011 strategic framework, support to intergovernmental processes is the most resource intensive. The substantive servicing of meetings and parliamentary documentation accounted for more than half of the recorded outputs and around one third of recorded work-months in the Department over the last two bienniums. Each division of the Department services both the Economic and Social Council and at least one subsidiary body of the Council and/or General Assembly committees (see annex I). The Department's programme of work also includes other intergovernmental meetings, conferences, global preparatory meetings and informal consultations. The servicing of intergovernmental processes entails convening international actors (including Member States), providing information, analysis and technical advice and facilitating consensus.

19. Several performance indicators revealed that the Department operates effectively in this regard. The overall numbers of Member State and non-governmental organization participants and the number of statements submitted have increased, suggesting a higher level of engagement in intergovernmental processes. At one intergovernmental meeting observed by OIOS, several delegates specifically commented that increased Member State participation in the meeting had resulted in States using the forum as a platform to announce national policy changes. Furthermore, data provided by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management showed steady improvement in the timely submission of parliamentary documents by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, from 64 per cent compliance in 2006 to 86 per cent in 2010.¹⁹ Owing, in part, to the support provided by the Department, intergovernmental meetings have been successfully planned and executed, and stated meeting agendas have largely been met. For example, in 2010, the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination met or exceeded its goals for participation in the high-level segment of the Council. The Office had projected that the 2010 annual ministerial review, for instance, would include six voluntary presentations by Member States, while in fact 13 presentations were made. Also in 2010, the Development Cooperation Forum incorporated all six constituencies that the Office had targeted: civil society, private foundations, global funds, parliamentarians, private sector and academia.

20. The majority of stakeholders responding to OIOS interviews and surveys rated the effectiveness of the Department's support to intergovernmental processes positively, in fact more highly than any of its other functions. This was the case throughout the Department: in all but one of its 10 subprogrammes, at least 75 per cent of stakeholders surveyed indicated that they were satisfied with that support. The majority of Member States surveyed also replied that they were satisfied with support to intergovernmental processes. Staff of the Department identified this support function as the Department's most important area of added value.

The Department's role in servicing the intergovernmental processes, and its related convening authority, constituted a unique niche

21. The Department's primary added value results from its work in supporting the work of the intergovernmental bodies, its unique mandate to convene a diverse and representative set of actors and its ability to provide a platform for dialogue at the international level. It is this broad convening role on economic and social matters, a role not vested in any other United Nations entity, which was viewed as one of the Department's primary strengths. A large majority of subprogramme stakeholders and United Nations entity heads surveyed (at least 80 per cent in each group) agreed that the Department filled this unique niche, and observations of a number of intergovernmental meetings reinforced the significance of this convening role. For example, at a meeting of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, several participants commented that the Forum was critical for bringing together indigenous peoples to discuss issues of common importance. Similarly, at a meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development observed by OIOS, several delegates commented that the Department had the convening power and access to information at the global level that enabled it to engage actors from all sectors of society.

¹⁹ See A/63/119 and A/65/122.

The reports of the Department and its technical advice were important guidance for intergovernmental processes and policy work

22. In support of intergovernmental processes, the Department collects, compiles and analyses information on a wide range of topics. The expert panel found that the Department's publications supporting intergovernmental processes were of good quality overall; they were assessed as being clearly written for a non-technical audience and relevant as input to intergovernmental debate and policy discussions. Their use in policy work was also the most commonly cited use of the publications among respondents to the stakeholder surveys. Several participants attending intergovernmental meetings observed by OIOS commented that the Department's reports and technical advice provided important input to policy discussions. For example, at a meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development, OIOS observed that appreciation was expressed to the Secretariat for a comprehensive report that had helped to form a good basis for dialogue.

23. However, a small number of Member States and United Nations entity heads interviewed by OIOS lamented a perceived lack of innovation in some of the Department's publications and activities. For example, one permanent representative stated that some reports presented the same view, year after year, without any attempt to reflect more innovative thinking on the topic being discussed. In addition, the expert panel convened by OIOS to review the publications concluded that some reports lacked a sufficiently broad range of viewpoints, for example, the introduction of alternative or competing visions of issues being discussed. The panel concluded that there was unevenness in the degree to which the publications explored the full range of debates on economic and social topics.

24. The vast majority of stakeholder survey respondents gave a high rating to the staff of the Department for their overall substantive and/or technical expertise, including their responsiveness. Many stakeholders interviewed who had sought or received technical advice from the Department valued its advice because of its access to information at the global level.

The Department has made contributions to support the progress of the Millennium Development Goals

25. As the entity of the Secretariat with prime responsibility for economic and social affairs, the Department is positioned to provide both policy and practical support for the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and its programme of work reflects this (see table 2 for specific examples of how the Department's subprogrammes have contributed to progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals).

Table 2

Activities of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs contributing to progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals

<i>Division/Office</i>	<i>Activities</i>
Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination	Organized high-level sessions of the Economic and Social Council, including accompanying events on Millennium Development Goal-related themes Supported annual ministerial review of the progress of individual countries towards the Millennium Development Goals

Division/Office	Activities
	Facilitated negotiations and consensus at the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals
Division for the Advancement of Women	Contributed to Millennium Project Task Force 3 on Primary Education and Gender Equality (an independent advisory body)
Division for Social Policy and Development	Served as focal point on matters relating to the Youth Employment Network secretariat Produced research on poverty eradication, including the <i>Report on the World Social Situation 2010: Rethinking Poverty</i>
Division for Sustainable Development	Undertook Millennium Development Goal-related capacity-building activities, including training in monitoring indicator development Served as member of Millennium Project Task Force 6 on Environmental Sustainability
Statistics Division	Coordinated the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators and maintained the indicators database Coordinated the United Nations system-wide <i>Millennium Development Goals Report</i> Provided workshops on monitoring the Millennium Development Goals
Population Division	Provided population estimates used for denominators in several Millennium Development Goal indicators Monitored three of the four indicators pertaining to the Millennium Development Goal target of attaining universal reproductive health Participated in the inter-agency groups for child and adult mortality estimation (Goals 4 and 5)
Development Policy and Analysis Division	Co-chaired and coordinated the inter-agency Millennium Development Goals Gap Task Force (Goal 8) Undertook capacity development projects to help Governments assess financing strategies and macroeconomic policies for realizing the Millennium Development Goals
Division for Public Administration and Development Management	Supported development agendas of Member States by enhancing public administration capacity Supported information and communications technology capacity (Goal 8F) in the context of e-Government projects
Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests	Supported Member States in implementing the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, relevant to several Millennium Development Goals including environmental sustainability and poverty reduction
Financing for Development Office	Supported planning and follow-up to Member State agreements and commitments regarding financing for development, including the Millennium Development Goals (particularly Goal 8)

26. The vast majority of stakeholders responding to the survey as well as those interviewed agreed that the Department was effectively contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, given the limitations of its role. Significant shortfalls are expected in the realization of the Goals by the target year of 2015.²⁰ Specifically, based on current trends, the goals of eradicating extreme poverty, the attainment of universal primary education and reducing child and maternal mortality will not be achieved, although there has been progress towards the achievement of other goals, such as promoting gender equality, dealing with HIV/AIDS, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development. Stakeholders noted that the Department has provided a platform for dialogue and effectively facilitated consensus in related intergovernmental meetings. In this regard, the Department has attempted to integrate its considerable normative and analytical work with the operational work of the United Nations. One interviewee stated that the preparations for the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals were a great achievement, noting that the Department had co-written the entire text of the outcome document of the summit and had also contributed by creating, maintaining and amplifying a political framework.

27. Furthermore, the expert panel review of the Department's publications determined that the publications dealt effectively with issues of central concern to the world development agenda, particularly those associated with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In particular, a majority of stakeholder survey respondents (61 per cent) reported using the publication *Indicators for Monitoring the Millennium Development Goals: Definitions, Rationale, Concepts and Sources*,²¹ the most widely read report out of a total of 85 different publications issued by the Department about which stakeholders were surveyed.

B. The Department was particularly effective in its support of the global statistical system

28. After support to intergovernmental bodies, the second function of the Department most appreciated by stakeholders was its support to the global statistical system. Like its support for intergovernmental processes, support of the global statistical system is one of the longest standing, most clearly defined and least controversial functions of the Department. This function is carried out largely by the Statistics Division through its support of the United Nations Statistical Commission. The Population Division was also seen by many stakeholders as supporting the global statistical system by providing official population estimates and projections.

29. The uniqueness and centrality of the Department's role in supporting the Statistical Commission, and thereby the global statistical system, together with its effectiveness in discharging that role, were major achievements. The increase in the number of least developed countries participating in the Commission's sessions, workshops, expert group meetings and seminars has been a major support to the global statistical system, and many stakeholders attributed much of this increase to the efforts of the Statistics Division. The number of least developed countries

²⁰ *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.I.7).

²¹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.XVII.18.

represented at the meetings of the Statistical Commission increased from 9 in 2005 to 25 in 2010.

30. Most stakeholder survey respondents (76 per cent) rated the Department's performance in supporting the system as effective or very effective. Staff of the Department also rated this function highly, with 95 per cent of survey respondents saying that it was effective or very effective in that role. Some stakeholders did comment, however, that the development of norms and threshold standards for economic statistics was more advanced than that for social statistics. The Department's efforts to build global capacity had increased from 25 capacity development workshops in 2004-2005 to 45 workshops in 2008-2009. However, several stakeholders stressed the need for sustained improvement in the quality of official statistics and for greater coordination of statistical capacity development activities of the United Nations.

C. The Department has not developed a strategic focus that clearly defines its role in the development arena

Efforts at strategic planning and prioritizing have been challenged by broad and ambitious mandates

31. The Department faced several challenges in strategically planning and prioritizing its programme of work. While acknowledging that Member States shape its programme of work through their mandates and requests, the Department has not been strategic in its implementation. As one United Nations entity head interviewed stated, "by stretching itself too thin, the Department's ability to add value is an open question". The mandates of the Department are often articulated at a high level, necessitating a prioritization of the activities undertaken to implement them. In particular, many stakeholders perceived weak links between outputs promised in the Department's strategic framework and programme budget and its overall objective "to promote and support international cooperation in the pursuit of sustained international growth, the eradication of poverty and hunger and sustainable development for all". Division-level planning documents make few explicit linkages between the Department's primary outputs — the servicing of intergovernmental meetings and the research, preparation and dissemination of reports and publications — and its overall objective.

32. The Department has recently taken steps to bring more strategic focus to its programme delivery, with Department-wide task forces and other measures to facilitate greater interdivisional collaboration. In early 2010, it established a Strategic Planning Unit to facilitate these efforts and assist the Under-Secretary-General with: (a) pursuing substantive strategic priorities; (b) enabling Department-wide strategic reviews and actions; and (c) engaging with stakeholders and key strategic partners. Two staff members, at the D-1 and P-5 levels, were assigned to the Unit, which aims to ensure that the 10 divisions of the Department "work from a common perspective and pursue goals with cross-cutting issues" and to strengthen strategic linkages with other entities of the Secretariat. While many staff expressed optimism about the potential value of the Unit, few had a clear understanding of its work to date, in part because it is new, small in size and undertakes much of its work behind the scenes as facilitator and consultant.

In particular, the Department's capacity development role and strategy are still being defined

33. Since 1997, the management of the technical cooperation programme within the Department has been fully decentralized to the divisions, resulting in an ad hoc range of assistance. Despite recent worthwhile efforts to improve clarity, the Department's capacity development role was still not fully defined. While the Department has carried out technical assistance work since its inception, and one of its predecessor Departments focused exclusively on technical cooperation activities, it does not have a field presence similar to that of United Nations funds, programmes and agencies that are part of the operational activities for development and resident coordinator system. Nevertheless, the Department established a Capacity Development Office in February 2009 and has a Department-wide Capacity Development Steering Committee tasked with developing a coherent strategy for capacity development activities that will focus on projects capitalizing on the "upstream policy advice" that the Department can uniquely provide because of its relationship with the intergovernmental process. Senior leaders in the Department indicated that it intends to improve the alignment between the Department's strengths — its direct exposure to Member States, its policy expertise and its credibility as a neutral convener — and the work on capacity development undertaken by its divisions. The Secretary-General's bulletin on the organization of the Department, currently being revised, projects an increased prominence for capacity development activities within its programme of work.²²

34. The Department has taken steps to formalize the evolving focus of its capacity development work. A draft of the Department's capacity development strategy was completed in November 2010, which will be reviewed by the Capacity Development Steering Committee. The strategy will address the ad hoc nature of the Department's capacity development interventions and define its role in advising Governments on how to translate policy frameworks developed in United Nations conferences and summits into strategies and programmes at the country level, as well as build national capacities to develop and implement national policies and programmes. The strategy also identifies five thematic priority areas for DESA's capacity development work. Examples of implementing this approach include: support to workshops and travel of representatives of the least developed countries to the sessions of the Statistical Commission; extensive work in the area of statistical capacity-building under the Development Account portfolio; and support to the implementation of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests. In addition, the Department's work for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is being implemented as part of United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes at the country level.

35. Nevertheless, more work is needed to strategically define and implement the Department's capacity development function. The draft capacity development strategy is clearly an aspirational document that lacks detail as to what the Department's precise capacity development role will look like, especially in comparison to that of the United Nations country teams, but also with regard to the Headquarters entities of the respective field-based funds, programmes and agencies. In fact, the Department's staff, management and stakeholders did not share a common understanding of its capacity development role and its integration with the

²² See ST/SGB/1997/9.

Department's normative and analytical work and its provision of support to the intergovernmental process. Management of the Department, Member States and United Nations system stakeholders did not generally point to capacity development when discussing its current strengths or comparative advantage. Some stakeholders believed that the Department was not adequately translating its unique access to the intergovernmental dialogue and policy expertise into its work on capacity development support, although the Department's new capacity development strategy attempts to emphasize this aspect. Nor did the Department's staff generally view capacity development as the primary strength of most of the divisions. In interviews, staff members also pointed to the fact that vacancy rates for capacity development staff remained high.

The Department's research and analysis role is also unclear

36. As noted earlier, one of the Department's four main functions is research and analysis on development issues. Some of this work is directly related to producing original research, such as the production of population estimates and projections. Its work on research and analysis is largely meant to generate policy options for Member States, who use these recommendations for shaping intergovernmental decisions on global issues and regional and national level decisions. In this way, the Department's research and analysis functions are inextricably linked to its support for intergovernmental processes. However, with regard to defining its research role, there was lack of agreement on the extent to which it should carry out original research as opposed to synthesizing and disseminating existing research. Some high-level stakeholders within the Secretariat believed that the Department should act as a "think tank" for the Organization. One said that the Department was supposed to be home to "our economic and social thinkers. ... they have to be our think tank". Many other stakeholders and managers contrasted the Department's capacity to generate original research to the research and analytical capacity of the Bretton Woods institutions, with some stating that it did not possess the necessary resources and technical competencies, while others expressing confidence that it did. According to some stakeholders, the Department's role is to provide an alternative view to the research produced by the Bretton Woods institutions.

The Department is challenged in reconciling its expanding mandates with its capacity limitations

37. The mandated activities of the Department have been increasing without a commensurate increase in resources, leading, in some cases, to a diffusion in the focus of its work. In 2005, as part of the outcome of the World Summit, Member States requested that the Department undertake two new functions: supporting the Development Cooperation Forum and managing the annual ministerial review process of the Economic and Social Council. The latter consists of a global review of the United Nations development agenda, a thematic review and a series of national voluntary presentations on progress by Member States towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals. The Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination was granted one new post to carry out these mandates.²³

²³ This was 1 of 13 new posts for the Department under the "development pillar".

38. In addition, intergovernmental bodies assigned three new mandates to the Population Division between the 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 bienniums, and the Division anticipates two additional mandates for the 2012-2013 period. For example, following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 64/236, the Department was designated as the secretariat for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, by virtue of the appointment of the Under-Secretary-General as Secretary-General of the conference. Preparations for the conference (“Rio+20”) started in 2009. The Division for Sustainable Development did not receive additional resources for the organization of this major event. In addition, staff interviewed mentioned the increasing demands on their time for the preparation of briefing notes on economic and social issues for senior management, including the Under-Secretary-General — outputs that are not accounted for in the Department’s strategic framework or budget. At the same time, there was considerable time spent in servicing the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, including the preparation of briefing notes, as well as representing the Secretariat on inter-agency task forces. Lastly, proposed revisions to the Secretary-General’s bulletin on the organization of the Department also add activities to its workload without subtracting existing ones.

39. When asked in interviews about the role of the Department in the development realm, stakeholders and staff often mentioned the need to match expectations with the Department’s size. Management and staff were acutely aware that it is a relatively small player in the economic and social development arena in terms of financial and staff resources; its budget is dwarfed by entities like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). For the 2010-2011 biennium, for example, it operated with less than 600 staff and a budget of \$311 million, including regular budget and extrabudgetary resources. In contrast, UNDP, with approximately 11,000 staff, posted a 2010 programme expenditure of \$4,324 million. Staff throughout the Department indicated that the greatest constraint that they faced in carrying out their work efficiently was “lack of time”. Managers were in many cases aware that staff felt overworked and asserted that an increase in their staff resources would allow their divisions to be more responsive to Member State demands.

D. The Department was not fully effective in promoting collaboration, coherence and coordination within the United Nations system for economic and social development

The Department’s coordination mandate was not clearly spelled out and it lacked a strategic approach to enhance this function

40. The Charter of the United Nations calls for coordination through “consultation and recommendation”, underlining the decentralized nature of the United Nations system, whereby no single authority can compel compliance by system entities to act in a concerted manner.²⁴ Coordination and cooperation depend on the willingness of entities of the common system to work together in pursuit of common goals. Even if entities are willing to engage in collaborative efforts, competition for funding and “turf battles” can present major obstacles.

²⁴ Charter of the United Nations, Articles 58 and 63.2.

41. In this context, the Department is mandated to promote coordination in the economic and social arenas. Indeed, a number of its publications, including the *World Economic Situation and Prospects*, the *World Economic Situation and Social Survey* and the Millennium Development Goals Reports, build on inter-agency collaboration. As previously stated, one of the Department's four primary functions involves fostering collaboration and partnerships within the United Nations system and with civil society. Furthermore, the existing bulletin of the Secretary-General²² stipulates that the Department assists the Secretary-General in enhancing policy coherence and coordination both within and among organizations of the United Nations system. However, the details of how it does this are vague, leading to multiple interpretations of the mandate. With few exceptions, subprogramme-level coordination mandates are similarly broad, frequently referring to coordination in relatively general language, such as "promoting coordination and/or coherence", without any specific explanation of how this will be achieved.

42. The Department lacks a specific strategic plan for its coordination activities, and it does not have a dedicated capacity (a post or office) to focus on its coordination with United Nations partners. The current Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs is responsible for providing senior support to intergovernmental bodies on system-wide issues of coordination, policy development and cooperation in the economic and social fields, including the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, thus assuming a broader coordination role for the entire Secretariat. This leaves little if any time to focus on the specific coordination activities of the Department. In fact, senior management in the Department has identified the need to strengthen coordination with United Nations partners as a constraint to its effectiveness.

The Department and its partners viewed coordination somewhat differently

43. The majority of managers and staff reported being clear about their own particular divisional and departmental coordination roles and responsibilities and, moreover, saw their own efforts at coordination and/or collaboration as being effective. Stakeholders in the Department did not, however, agree that coordination was effective; for example, some United Nations entity heads interviewed by OIOS voiced their concern that the Department did not proactively facilitate system-wide coordination and wanted to see it combine innovation, leadership and its convening power to be of use to the United Nations system as a whole. One agency head stated that "the Department missed the opportunity to be the department for the Secretary-General to bring the economic, social and sustainable development context to a more strategic level. We miss opportunities in working with and achieving synergies with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs".

44. Staff and field-level partners of the Department interviewed held different views on how coordination between their entities worked, including different perceptions of how well they were being kept informed about their respective activities. When engaging at the regional and country levels, the Department was seen by some stakeholders as not providing sufficient communication or coordination with regional and field-based entities of the United Nations system. Although many activities relating to the intergovernmental process included interaction with national institutions, interviewees at the regional and field level felt that the Department often established direct contact with national entities without

informing the United Nations country team, which could create the perception that there was no coordinated United Nations approach. For example, staff members of one country team only learned from country stakeholders about prior interactions with the Department. At the same time, entities affiliated with the United Nations system of operational activities for development have their own mandates, governing bodies, budgets and operational systems, which they believe are adequate to carry out the development task. These separate arrangements militate against any coordination efforts undertaken by the Department.

45. Similarly, some staff at the regional commissions voiced concerns about less than adequate information-sharing and collaboration. Several examples reported to OIOS related to insufficient consultation concerning planned capacity development activities and requests for assistance that were limited to logistical rather than substantive support, even in cases where resources were in place and value could have been added by the joint planning and scheduling of activities. At the same time, however, respondents from agencies and United Nations country teams acknowledged that there was limited cooperation from their end.

The Department supported and promoted coordination and policy coherence primarily at the intergovernmental level

46. The Department was most effective in promoting coordination and policy coherence at the intergovernmental level. As noted above, Member States believed that the Department effectively contributed to enhanced coordination and coherence within the system, and several mentioned intergovernmental processes and high-level events among the most successful coordination outcomes to which it had contributed. Many stakeholders and staff also identified greater civil society involvement with the United Nations system as another positive outcome of the Department's coordination efforts. This work has resulted in a wider information exchange with non-governmental stakeholders and has enabled non-governmental actors to take an active part in intergovernmental meetings.

47. The Department also chairs the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, which aims to bring coherence and common approaches to United Nations entities engaged in normative, analytical and technical work in the economic and social arena. In a previous OIOS evaluation of United Nations coordinating bodies, the value added by the Executive Committee as a platform for exchanging information and promoting a sense of common purpose was recognized.²⁵ Although more effective in aligning policies and in sharing information, the Executive Committee has also had an effect in enhancing the coordination of programme planning, for example through a coordinated budget planning exercise. It is also seeking to fulfil its functions by facilitating information exchange and providing more joint outputs, including those to major events such as the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals in 2010. In interviews, while acknowledging that the members of the Committee had different mandates and governance arrangements, several stakeholders underlined the benefit of the exercise, and also pointed out that aligning outputs and sharing strategies should be included in the process in order to gain further efficiencies.

²⁵ See E/AC.51/2009/6, para. 18.

E. The visibility of the Department is uneven

48. Given the nature of the Department's work, including its functions in the public domain, stakeholders' knowledge of and familiarity with its products represent an important attribute of its effectiveness. The Department's visibility reflects its role as a United Nations entity whose work is often requested and produced in the name of the "Secretariat" or the "Secretary-General" in ways that may not afford individual branding. The wide array of intergovernmental bodies dealing with development, and the breadth of their mandates, present further challenges. The Department's staff and stakeholders identified its visibility as a factor material to its success. According to the 2010-2011 strategic framework of the Department, six of its divisions established targets for enhancing their visibility, as projected by performance measures pertaining to increased visits to and downloads from websites, increased demand for the Department's publications, data and digital products and improved timely access to research and analysis information.²⁶ Their goals were to increase understanding and awareness among stakeholders, increase and improve the accessibility and timeliness of the information produced by the Department and enable better and broader use of such information.

49. In assessing the visibility of the Department, OIOS reviewed three indicators: website traffic trends; visibility and utility of its principal publications and digital products; and, where relevant, visible presence in the field, especially among United Nations country teams.

The Department lacks a common brand

50. Several managers and stakeholders interviewed suggested that a more coherent and less fragmented Department "brand" would improve its visibility. In one example, its websites were assessed by the United Nations Board of Auditors as lacking an overarching identity. The Board stated that "in view of the highly decentralized nature of the Department and the high risk of confusion in the mind of the public on the scope of the Department, a brand that is shared by all of the sites would serve as a powerful vehicle for unification and identification".²⁷ The Department has started to address this issue by establishing a departmental design template, to which all divisions will eventually migrate. It has already been adopted by the Capacity Development Office and the Development Policy and Analysis Division, and the Population Division and the Division for Social Policy and Development will adopt it soon. The work of the Statistics Division and the Population Division were generally perceived to have higher visibility than that of the other divisions. In addition, the two divisions were seen as having developed their own brands apart from the Department, and it was unclear what benefit they might gain from being part of an overall Departmental brand.

²⁶ A/64/6 (Sect. 9): Division for Social Policy and Development, Division for Sustainable Development, Statistics Division, Population Division, Division for Public Administration and Development Management, and Development Policy and Analysis Division.

²⁷ Management letter on the audit of the communication and publishing policy of the Department, Board of Auditors, 31 March 2010.

User satisfaction with the Department's websites is high and traffic is increasing

51. Following ongoing enhancement of the Department's website, user satisfaction is generally positive, with 82 per cent of its subprogramme stakeholders expressing satisfaction with the quality of the division website with which they primarily interacted. Furthermore, 18 of 21 Member States and 6 of 10 United Nations entity heads surveyed stated that they were satisfied with the quality of the Department's website. Based on its own data, visits to several of the Department's websites also increased during the 2008-2009 biennium. The Statistics Division website, for example, recorded an increase of 43 per cent from the 2006-2007 to the 2008-2009 biennium. Visits recorded for the Division for Sustainable Development in 2008 were over 2.5 million, exceeding its target of 2 million for the biennium; and the website of the Division for Social Policy and Development registered 3.1 million visits for the biennium, exceeding its target of 2.5 million. In 2010, the Statistics Division website received 5.9 million visits, the website of the Division for Public Administration and Development Management received 5.8 million visits and the Population Division website 1.5 million visits.

While the Department's publications were generally highly rated, their usage was unclear

52. Both the expert panel convened by OIOS and other stakeholders viewed the Department's publications to be of generally high quality. The majority of stakeholder survey respondents (82 per cent) and many interviewees expressed satisfaction with the Department's publications overall, and a majority of Member States and United Nations entity heads reported that the publications were somewhat or very important for key activities in their work. The usage of these publications was less clear, however. Although some publications, such as the *World Economic and Social Survey*, the *World Economic Situation and Prospects*, the *Report on the World Social Situation* and the *System of National Accounts*, have been cited in academic and research literature, as evidenced by web search engines such as "Google Scholar", stakeholders reported that they had not used most of the reports identified on a list of 85 different publications and/or databases of the Department in the past five years. In interviews and surveys with staff and stakeholders, many also stated that the usage of the Department's publications was unknown and unmeasured, and therefore of some concern, given the resources dedicated to their production.

53. The visibility of the Department was further challenged by the lack of a publications strategy. The Department produces nearly 300 reports and an additional 300 publications annually, a significant number of which it is mandated to produce by the General Assembly. The Department has not, however, implemented an overarching strategy to guide its portfolio of publications. The Board of Auditors, in their March 2010 audit report, found that although the Department had established five clear editorial priorities in 2009, the "profusion of publications" that it subsequently produced did not appear to be linked to those priorities. The Board also found that the Department had failed to develop a coherent publishing programme to capitalize on synergies and to avoid duplication.²⁷

54. Moreover, staff of the Department reported that, as early as 2005, and preceding the financial crisis, the *World Economic Situation and Prospects* had drawn attention to the risks of a housing bubble and the unwinding of global

imbalances; however, according to some interviews with United Nations senior officials, these were not given the requisite attention. One stated “they predicted the warning signs of the financial crisis and nobody was listening”.²⁸ The same point was made by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs in an interview. Furthermore, during the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development, in June 2009, delegates did not publicly make reference to the Department’s forecasts of growth for the world economy and instead mentioned IMF forecasts in their discussions.²⁹

55. The visibility of the economic publications of the Department is further impacted by the existence of similar publications issued by other entities within the United Nations system and by other international organizations which Member States and other stakeholders may be more familiar with. There are a number of reasons for this, including the relatively limited role accorded to the Economic and Social Council in global economic and financial matters.³⁰ A comparison of one indicator (“Google Scholar”) of the visibility of some major publications of the Department with those produced by other international organizations showed ratios in favour of the latter. For example, a comparison of *World Economic Situation and Prospects* to the *World Economic Outlook*, published by IMF, showed an average citation ratio of 1 to 50.

The visibility of the Department at the level of the United Nations country team was low

56. The Department is a global entity whose operational activities are linked to its normative and analytical mandates. It has virtually no country programmes, and no dedicated funding to support country programmes, and is unable to cover the more than 130 countries where the United Nations has a country presence.³¹ Its main modality for operational activities is through global, interregional and intercountry cooperation, through which it selectively assists countries directly. This has created an inherent tension between its role as a global, Headquarters-based entity and its direct engagement with national Governments.

57. The Department can potentially serve as a vital interface between global policies in the economic, social and environmental spheres and national action. Its support to intergovernmental processes is thus directly relevant to the work of the regional economic and social commissions and the United Nations country teams as it provides the overarching framework for their work at the country level. As a member of the United Nations Development Group, including various task forces and working groups, the Department can provide indirect inputs into the United Nations development work on the ground. It has contributed to the guidelines of the Development Group such as its position statement on capacity development and its capacity assessment methodology user guide. Through its triennial comprehensive

²⁸ In contrast to IMF. The report of the IMF Independent Evaluation Office, “IMF Performance in the Run-Up to the Financial and Economic Crisis”, 10 January 2011, noted that the Fund’s analysis and economic modeling failed to spot the huge risks building up in financial systems.

²⁹ A/CONF.214/PV.1-10.

³⁰ Report of the Commission of Experts of the President of the General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System, 21 September 2009 (see http://www.un.org/ga/econcrisissummit/docs/FinalReport_CoE.pdf). See also A/65/189.

³¹ Some divisions have established a small country presence.

programme review, an assessment of the Organization's operational activities, it also contributes to the positioning of United Nations country teams.

58. However, although the Department has taken steps to engage with United Nations country teams, including through induction briefings to resident coordinators, its normative and analytical work was not adequately integrated with operational work at the country level. Out of the 214 United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks that have been completed to date, only 17 made any reference to the Department. In addition, several stakeholders interviewed at the country level stated that they have had no interaction with the Department and were ill-informed about its work; some mentioned that they had been unable to establish a link to the Department or to benefit from its expertise on global development issues. One member of a United Nations country team emphasized that "while the Department has critical knowledge, it has not successfully figured out a way to pass it on to the United Nations country team". Interviews with country-level stakeholders revealed two main reasons for this lack of interaction: limited knowledge of the Department and limited opportunities for collaboration. Furthermore, an OIOS review of documentation from workshops on best practices in capacity-development run by the United Nations Development Group from May 2008 to October 2009 found little if any contribution by the Department to the dialogue. Lastly, a 2006 Development Group working group report on non-resident agencies stated that there was insufficient knowledge among the international community at the field level of the Department's mandates and capacities. The United Nations country teams were not aware of the relevance of intergovernmental processes to their work and, therefore, the mandate of the Department as pivotal to the support of intergovernmental processes, and to the transference of interregional experiences, was lost.³²

F. The Department has had mixed results in mainstreaming gender and human rights perspectives into its work

59. With regard to mainstreaming a gender perspective into the substantive work of the Department, as mandated for all programmes by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/231, results have been uneven. While a majority of staff (83 per cent) rated their division effective in this regard, some divisions (such as the Statistics Division, the Population Division, the Division for Public Administration and Development Management and the Division for Social Policy and Development) were more proactive in incorporating a gender perspective. For example, compiling and reporting sex-disaggregated data was inherent to the work of the Statistics and Population Divisions. Most stakeholders and Member States surveyed rated the Department as being effective in mainstreaming a gender perspective. Nevertheless, interview data, as well as the results of a 2010 OIOS evaluation on gender mainstreaming, revealed that many staff of the Department did not understand what gender mainstreaming was or how to carry it out. Further concerns have been raised

³² See "Enhancing the participation of non-resident agencies in United Nations country-level development activities: a preliminary inventory of current tools and mechanisms, obstacles and opportunities", United Nations Development Group, Working Group on Non-Resident Agencies, 21 March 2006 (see http://www.undg.org/archive_docs).

with the move of the Division for the Advancement of Women to UN-Women as it is uncertain what part of the Department will take the leading role in this function.

60. The Department was rated less favourably, by staff and stakeholders alike, with regard to mainstreaming human rights into its work, as called for in the reform agenda of the Secretary-General and endorsed by Member States in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.³³ There was a limited understanding in the Department about applying a human rights-based approach, and several managers interviewed mentioned that human rights mainstreaming had been avoided due to “political” sensitivities involved in determining its precise practical meaning. The Department was perceived to be most engaged with human rights issues in relation to its work on older persons and persons with disabilities.

G. Within the Department, opportunities for collaboration and complementarities have not been sufficiently utilized

Despite management attempts to improve collaboration within the Department, inadequate communication and coordination adversely affected results

61. Senior management of the Department has taken various steps to improve internal communication and collaboration, and information-sharing remains a priority. These steps include: formation of the Strategic Planning Unit and the Capacity Development Office; the initiation of Department-wide working groups; the holding of regular meetings with division directors, including the sharing of minutes with staff; issuance of weekly status reports on the work of the divisions to the Under-Secretary-General and shared within the Department; DESAlert; and DESA News. In addition, in his compact with the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General pledged to work to increase the coordination and coherence of work across divisional lines, including an increase in the number of joint research and analytical products by the divisions and offices of the Department.³⁴

62. Nevertheless, problems with effective internal communication and collaboration persist. Although efforts are under way to address this, many senior managers, including division directors, indicated that the Department suffered from a “siloed” structure, with 10 discrete subprogrammes operating independently of one another. One staff member commented that “compartmentalization of divisions can create challenges. The divisions work in isolation”, while another stated that “management should promote more integration among divisions”. Additionally, many staff and interviewees reported that ineffective communication was a key factor adversely affecting the Department’s ability to achieve its desired results. Among staff, most (74 per cent) reported that they never, or infrequently, meet with staff members from other divisions. Additionally, nearly half (46 per cent) did not perceive communication between the divisions to be effective.

63. The inability of the Department to achieve productive collaboration across divisions has further undermined results. The Department was not perceived to be building on potential complementarities to a significant degree: divisions were perceived to compete rather than collaborate. Several staff raised these concerns.

³³ General Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 126.

³⁴ See Senior Manager’s compact with Secretary-General, 2010, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (see <http://iseek.un.org/LibraryDocuments/363-201002121201294328923.pdf>).

One stated that each division had an important mandate and work, but that there had been no synergy among them — thus the potential of the Department's work has not been fully exploited. Another staff member reported that there was no good system for working together, "We're not thinking about the Department as an entity; we don't coordinate our activities". Examples of unexploited synergies between divisions included joint work on women and sustainable development, the latter of which was perceived as an overarching issue of relevance to several different divisions. Further evidence of this lack of collaboration could be found in the fact that half of the staff reported that lessons learned were not effectively captured and shared within the Department. In addition, the report of the Board of Auditors on the Department's communication and publishing policy found that synergies between divisions on certain publications had not been sufficiently developed; for example, in the area of social analysis and demographics, four different divisions produced related reports but there was no coordination — in terms of content and editorial priorities — between them.³⁵

Human resources management also presented challenges to effectiveness

64. Although the Department has followed processes required under the United Nations staff selection system, within which there are systemic dimensions that need to be addressed at the Secretariat level, it was not perceived as being fully successful at recruiting and retaining top quality staff. A number of replies from staff and interviews with management indicated that current staff selection processes had not resulted in the recruitment of staff with the competencies and skills required to implement the Department's programme of work. Over half of staff surveyed for a recent OIOS inspection report on human resources and management (52 per cent) disagreed that staff selections had resulted in the hiring of individuals with the necessary skills.³⁶ For example, staff of the Statistics Division pointed to high vacancy rates. To some extent, the inflexibility of the recruitment practices of the organization was seen as reducing the Department's ability to compete in the fast moving marketplace for the most highly trained statisticians and information technology specialists. Some stakeholders also voiced their concerns that staff expertise was not always aligned with the economic and social development work that the Department engaged in.

65. In addition, some staff expressed concerns about the quality of management in their respective divisions. Staff in some divisions stated that while managers offered technical leadership, decision-making was not sufficiently consultative and information was not shared. Also, as reported in the recent OIOS inspection, one third of staff surveyed (35 per cent) rated the management of their division as excellent or good, 27 per cent as fair and 38 per cent as poor or very poor.³⁶

66. Furthermore, data from the electronic performance appraisal system (e-PAS) indicated that staff may not be receiving sufficient feedback to enable them to perform effectively. As indicated in table 3, compliance rates for e-PAS have fluctuated during the last three years and the most recent rate available, 62.4 per cent, is still below the targeted compliance rate of 100 per cent. In addition, based

³⁵ Management letter on the audit of the communication and publishing policy of the Department, Board of Auditors, 31 March 2010.

³⁶ OIOS inspection of human resources and management practices of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 30 November 2009, IED-09-007.

on the OIOS inspection report on human resources and management practices, nearly one third of the staff surveyed at the time of the inspection (31 per cent) indicated that they had not completed an e-PAS discussion with their supervisors in the last 12 months.³⁶ In that inspection, an OIOS analysis of a random sample of e-PAS workplans showed gaps in how they were developed: less than half (40 per cent) clearly defined outputs and deliverables, and only one third (32 per cent) articulated how the goals and performance would be assessed.

Table 3

Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Electronic performance appraisal system (e-PAS) compliance rate (June 2008-Dec. 2009)

(In percentages)

<i>June 2008</i>	<i>Dec. 2008</i>	<i>June 2009</i>	<i>Sept. 2009</i>	<i>Dec. 2009</i>	<i>Target</i>
50	84	40.3	55	62.4	100

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

67. The OIOS inspection also identified need for improvement in strategic human resources planning, including vacancy management and the retention of institutional memory. The Department estimates that at any point approximately one third of its posts are subject to mobility; this is part of a broader situation confronting the entire Organization. Over 60 per cent of managers who responded to a survey conducted for the 2009 inspection disagreed that the Department effectively assessed human resources gaps and plans for upcoming vacancies, and 64 disagreed that it had an efficient process for human resources planning. Some divisions have not had a director for more than one year, and these leadership voids were mentioned by staff interviewed as a challenge to the effective functioning of their divisions.

The Department is also challenged by an inadequate self-evaluation capacity

68. As originally reported in a 2009 OIOS inspection of the Department's programme level monitoring and evaluation (IED-09-004), the Department lacks: sufficient self-evaluation capacity, especially given its size and resources; a dedicated evaluation unit; and an evaluation policy. This detracts from its capacity in the areas of informed decision-making, accountability and learning.

V. Conclusion

69. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs occupies a pivotal position within the development pillar of the United Nations system. The Department has effectively supported intergovernmental decision-making, the global statistical system and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, but fell short in its system-wide coordination work and was challenged by low visibility and weak internal synergies. Its role in convening global dialogue and supporting normative and policy development is unique, and its in-house expertise and external networks enable it to provide considerable intellectual as well as organizational input to those processes. It is also well regarded by Member States and other stakeholders.

70. Although it undertakes a number of different functions, the Department's comparative advantage lies in those areas where its mandate is unique and its

strengths are most utilized — that is, its involvement in the parliamentary processes of the United Nations at the highest level, its global focus, the extent of the economic and social territory it covers, its ability to harness high-level expertise and the neutrality of its approach. At the same time, the breadth of the issues it covers, the speed with which priorities change, the number of other entities operating in the economic and social arena and the relatively small budget with which it operates mean that it needs a strong strategic focus in order to avoid duplication of its activities or dissipation of its resources through spreading its efforts too thinly. This will be challenging, given the broad range of its cumulative mandates. The structure of the Department will also need to be assessed to determine if it best facilitates its programme of work.

71. The Department's current efforts to focus on re-evaluating and redefining its role in areas such as capacity development should be enhanced. As a Headquarters entity, the Department has global reach, but for its work to have impact, regional and country-based entities of the United Nations system should know what it does and how its work is relevant to their own activities. Exploiting its strengths and avoiding competition with other entities within and beyond the United Nations can only increase the Department's effectiveness.

72. The Department confronts other risks. Its role, identity and place in the wider United Nations system are not universally understood or acknowledged by its partners and stakeholders. It lacks visibility, and its publications, while well regarded, are not as widely consulted as they could be. This lack of visibility risks undermining its effectiveness, since, where its role is clear, as in its support of the global statistical system, its effectiveness is widely acknowledged. Other examples of its focused efforts, resulting in greater visibility and impact, have also been noted in this report. Nevertheless, there remains considerable scope for improving the Department's linkages with other entities of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions, so as to ensure that its comparative advantage is better understood and its activities retain relevance. Better communication with those and other stakeholders, together with more targeted dissemination of the Department's range of data and publications, is also required.

73. The present report has highlighted a number of organizational arrangements and practices that appear to reduce both efficiency and effectiveness within the Department itself. These are more pervasive and damaging in some divisions than others. Nevertheless, the articulation and communication of a strong vision for the Department as a whole would bind the currently disparate divisions more closely and foster the perception of a unified entity. It would also encourage the identification of areas where greater interdivisional collaboration could be mutually beneficial, and thus enable the development of valuable synergies. Staff concerns with management styles and decision-making processes that are not inclusive and consultative must also be addressed. Ultimately, the Department's ability to contribute to global economic and social development at the highest level is dependent on its ability to attract and retain talented, committed and motivated people.

74. The Department's role in enhancing cooperation, coordination and coherence in the social and economic development effort is a difficult one. There appear to be limited incentives for system-wide cooperation in the United Nations, and even within the Department itself, the focus of each division on its own issues and its

own intergovernmental bodies limits the extent to which synergies are exploited. The United Nations risks the perception of dissonance resulting from multiple voices conveying different messages. The “Delivering as One” United Nations ideal is not served by perceived competition and duplication among United Nations entities. Thus, the Department needs to be more effective in fulfilling its coordination role in the fields of economic and social affairs.

VI. Recommendations

75. Based on the results above, OIOS makes the following four recommendations to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs:

Recommendation 1

Further sharpen the strategic focus of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

(See result C, paras. 31-39)

76. The Department should build upon the strategic planning work it has already initiated and further sharpen its overall focus. This should include more explicit identification of the priorities and critical activities of the Department that will maximize its comparative advantages — in particular its close ties to the intergovernmental processes and neutral convening power — leading to a more coordinated and efficient implementation of its mandate.

77. In doing this, the Department should consider:

(a) Identifying programme and subprogramme objectives that are more closely aligned and build on its unique position within the United Nations social and economic arena, with particular reference to maximizing synergies and avoiding overlap with the activities of other United Nations partner entities;

(b) Further clarifying the specific role that it will undertake with regard to capacity development work, taking into consideration its need to foster strong cooperation with field-based United Nations entities and taking into account its normative and analytical strengths;

(c) Strengthening internal mechanisms to monitor and evaluate its activities.

Recommendation 2

Improve coordination with United Nations system partners

(See result D, paras. 40-47)

78. Building upon efforts already under way to strengthen partnerships, the Department should intensify coordination with its partners in the social and economic development arenas by:

(a) Furthering the development of a clear Department-wide coordination strategy for work with its partners in the economic and social arenas, in consultation with those partners, in particular the regional commissions and field-based United Nations entities;

(b) Further specifying strategies for establishing closer workplan alignment and mutual complementarities with other United Nations entities;

- (c) Clarifying partnership roles and responsibilities.

Recommendation 3

Develop and implement a Department-wide publication and outreach strategy

(See result E, paras. 48-58)

79. In line with previous recommendations made by the Board of Auditors, this publication and outreach strategy should:

- (a) Emphasize the importance of a specific, actionable dissemination strategy for each different type of publication;
- (b) Fully leverage the relevant resources of the United Nations, such as the Department of Public Information;
- (c) Include a plan to periodically and systematically measure the impact of the Department's publications.

Recommendation 4

Strengthen internal coordination and communication

(See result G, paras. 61-68)

80. In addition to the steps already taken, as referenced in the present report, the Department should further improve internal communication and coordination by:

- (a) Strengthening further linkages across divisions to coordinate work planning in cross-cutting thematic areas that maximize interdivisional synergies;
- (b) Establishing mechanisms to facilitate cross-divisional lesson learning.

81. In addition to the recommendations made to the Department, OIOS also offers the following questions for consideration by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, in line with General Assembly resolution 59/275, which endorsed the request of the Committee that OIOS raise "questions in which intergovernmental guidance and follow-up, by the Committee for Programme and Coordination or other appropriate intergovernmental bodies, would be useful".³⁷ The results of the evaluation also identified issues relating to governance matters that potentially influence the effectiveness of the Department, thus warranting further attention from Member States. In order to facilitate debate and policy dialogue, OIOS suggests that the Committee for Programme and Coordination may consider the following questions:

Question 1

82. Would the Department's mandate to assist the Secretary-General to enhance policy coherence and coordination both within and among organizations of the United Nations system benefit from further clarification?

Question 2

83. Should consideration be given to evaluating the merits of having the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs placed within

³⁷ A/59/16, para. 383.

the Executive Office of the Secretary-General rather than within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs?

Question 3

84. Should the additional title of “Chief Economist” be added to one of the existing Under-Secretary-General or Assistant Secretary-General posts in order to enhance the overall authority (including visibility, effectiveness, relevance and impact) of the United Nations system in the arena of global economic issues?

(Signed) Carman L. **Lapointe**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
28 March 2011

Annex I

Intergovernmental bodies serviced by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

<i>Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Division</i>	<i>General Assembly bodies serviced</i>	<i>Functional commissions/bodies of the Economic and Social Council serviced</i>
Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination	Second Committee	Economic and Social Council NGO Committee
Division for the Advancement of Women/Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women	Third Committee	Commission on the Status of Women
Division for Sustainable Development		Commission on Sustainable Development
Division for Social Policy and Development	Third Committee: Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	Commission for Social Development Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Statistics Division	Fifth Committee (scale of assessments): Committee on Contributions	Statistical Commission United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
Population Division	Second Committee	Commission on Population and Development
Development Policy and Analysis Division	Second Committee	Committee on Development Policy
Division for Public Administration and Development Management		Committee of Experts on Public Administration
United Nations Forum on Forests		United Nations Forum on Forests
Financing for Development Office	Second Committee	Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters

Source: See A/63/6 (Prog. 7).

Annex II

Comments received from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the programme evaluation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs^a

I would like to thank the Office of International Oversight Services (OIOS) for the opportunity to provide comments on the above-referenced report. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) attaches great importance to this evaluation. The Department's senior management, evaluation focal points and the staff have all been requested to extend OIOS the cooperation and assistance required for this evaluation. The Department plans to study the report carefully and will take action to follow up on its recommendations, as appropriate. In this regard, the Department looks forward to the detailed subprogramme assessments.

The specific comments listed below address a number of issues raised in the report on which the Department would like to share its perspectives:

Paragraph 3 (Introduction)^b

The report states that it did not look at the Development Account, indicating that the Development Account is not attributed to the realm of the Under-Secretary-General's formal accountability. In the view of the Department, the Under-Secretary-General has been designated as the programme manager and is fully accountable for the effective and efficient management of the programme. Apart from the broader responsibilities in managing the Development Account, the Account plays a very significant part in the Department's capacity development efforts, providing the means to project the value and uniqueness of the Department's contribution to national development strategies and policies.

(Footnote 4 (in Draft version) removed)

Paragraphs 33-41: Strategic focus

The Department's role in the development area falls into three areas — policy analysis, substantive support to intergovernmental process and capacity development. Its programme of work is formulated in response to intergovernmental mandates.

In implementing such mandates, the Department is making renewed efforts to bring more strategic focus to its programme delivery. This remains an ongoing process engaging the entire Department. Among other actions, the Department is working to sharpen its strategic focus through Department-wide task forces and a

^a The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) herewith presents the full text of comments received from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the OIOS draft report on the programme evaluation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The inclusion of this information is in line with the decision of the General Assembly in its resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee. Overall, the Department concurred with the recommendations of OIOS. The comments of the Department on the draft report have been incorporated, as appropriate, into the final report.

^b In some instances the paragraph numbers referred to in the comments received from the Department do not correspond to the paragraph numbers in the programme evaluation.

variety of other measures to facilitate greater interdivisional collaboration and joint activities.

Facilitating such efforts is one of the objectives of the Strategic Planning Unit. As far as the Divisions are concerned, there is growing engagement and increasing readiness to work with the Unit for developing strategic approaches to their work within the given mandates. The Unit is also working at the Departmental level to strengthen ties and collaboration with other parts of the UN.

The Department's work on research and analysis is largely meant to provide policy support to Member States. Member States often make use of the policy options and recommendations provided by the Department for shaping their intergovernmental decisions on global issues, as well as decisions for implementation at regional and national levels. As such, the Department's research and analysis functions are inextricably linked to its support for intergovernmental processes. A "think tank" function may be desirable, but that cannot be the sole function of the Department. The Department is mandated to generate policy analysis that is practical and useful for the larger UN membership.

The Department's new capacity development strategy puts a particular emphasis on capitalizing on the Department's "... unique access to the intergovernmental dialogue and policy expertise in its capacity development work" (as suggested in paragraph 37 of the report). Examples of implementing this approach include support to workshops and participation of experts of least developed countries to the Statistical Commission, and the extensive work in the area of statistical capacity-building under the Development Account portfolio.

Overall, the Department's work in supporting the global statistical system and national statistical offices is a major comprehensive capacity development effort. Other pertinent examples are support to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; support to the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on Forests; and support to the annual ministerial review and the Development Cooperation Forum. The capacity development work on indigenous issues is based on the Department's work for the UN Forum on Indigenous Issues, and is now being mainstreamed in the UNDAF processes at country level.

Paragraphs 42-49: Collaboration

The Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs (ECESA), which the Department convenes, continues to work towards greater coherence and collaboration. Overall, ECESA is seeking to fulfil its expected functions by facilitating information exchange and by providing an increasing number of joint inputs, including those to major UN events, such as the 2010 MDG Summit and the ongoing preparations for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development. The continuing success of such collaboration is of course dependent on the engagement of all member entities. Indeed, while it is a part of the Secretariat based at Headquarters, the Department does not enjoy any special status vis-à-vis the UN system. This institutional feature notwithstanding, the Department has intensified efforts to foster better collaboration through ECESA.

Paragraphs 50-62: Visibility

The Department operates as an integral part of the Secretariat. It does not have its own logo or slogan. It does not have presence at the country level or in the field. Its work is most often requested and produced in the name of the “Secretariat” or the “Secretary-General”, in ways that may not facilitate individual branding. The challenges derive as well from the functional lines of UN intergovernmental bodies dealing with specific development issues. The broad nature of the UN work on development therefore makes it difficult to “box” it under one label or pack it in sharp sound bites.

Paragraphs 65-72: Collaboration within the Department

Information sharing with staff continues to be a priority of the Department. Minutes of weekly Directors’ meetings are shared with staff. Regular meetings with staff take place at the Divisional level to brief and discuss with staff substantive work and important administrative matters.

In the area of recruitment and retention of staff, the Department follows processes required under the staff selection system of the Organization. Thus, issues brought up in these areas have systemic dimensions that are to be addressed at the Secretariat level. The issue of strategic human resources planning needs to be viewed in the context of the broader situation confronting the Organization as a whole. The Department estimates that at any point of time, approximately one third of the posts are the subject of some type of movement. Additionally, there are difficulties encountered in back-filling temporary vacancies resulting from staff released on temporary assignments. With regard to the appointment of Directors, the Department has sought to duly evaluate candidates in a timely manner and has submitted the recommended lists to the Senior Review Group for further action.

Paragraphs 80, 82 and 84: Recommendations

The Department is already taking steps to promote strategic integration and planning in its work. The Department has always maintained that coordination is not an end in itself. The process of coordination should be driven by sharing and pursuing common strategic goals.

This is the approach that the Department is promoting within and with its partners, especially UNCTAD, the regional economic and social commissions and UNDP. Concerted efforts are being made to develop and nurture partnerships around key substantive priorities, such as MDG Summit follow-up, Rio+20, global economic governance, youth, etc. Likewise, the Department has initiated a review of its publications in response to the Board of Auditors’ recommendations and will take into account the OIOS recommendations in finalizing the departmental review.