

Backgrounder on UN Summits



An Overview by the Public Health Agency of Canada
WHO Collaborating Centre on chronic noncommunicable disease policy

Backgrounder on UN Summits



Table of Contents

Backgrounder on UN Summits

SECTION 1 Purpose	1
SECTION 2 Background – UN System	3
SECTION 3 Background – UN Summits	6
SECTION 4 The UN Summit Process	8
SECTION 5: Conclusion	14

Annexes

ANNEX 1 General Assembly Decision-making Process	16
ANNEX 2 Overview of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).....	18
ANNEX 3 Glossary of Terms	20
ANNEX 4 References	23

SECTION I

Purpose

In September 2011, the United Nations will convene a summit to bring together Heads of State and other high-level officials to develop global strategies to address the urgent problem of the rising rate of chronic or noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) as the world's leading cause of death — and the leading cause of *preventable* death.

The 2011 UN Summit on NCDs represents the most significant forum to date addressing the social and economic burden of NCDs and builds on the objectives of the World Health Organization's *2008-2013 Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases* to raise the profile of NCDs and develop strategies to address the growing burden of NCDs.

UN Summits play a key role in shaping global priorities and mobilizing commitment for global action plans. Historically summits have promoted a collaborative, holistic approach leading to joint action across sectors and across a multiplicity of state, non-governmental, and private sector actors. Engaging non-health sectors, such as agriculture and food regulation, sports and fitness, is paramount to creating effective strategies to counter the rising trend in NCDs.

In order to support countries and public health professionals in their efforts to prepare for the 2011 UN Summit on NCDs, the Public Health Agency of Canada's World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on chronic noncommunicable disease policy has prepared this backgrounder for information purposes.

With one year remaining until the UN Summit, it is important to ensure that countries and public health officials have the capacity to effectively prepare for and contribute to the summit. As much of the summit outcomes are pre-negotiated prior to the global conference, it is essential for public health professionals to understand the preparatory process and identify key avenues for input. It is equally important to understand how summits delegate responsibility to other UN bodies for implementation and follow-up of summit goals.

The objective of this guide is to provide public health professionals with:

1. An overview of the UN system
2. An understanding of how UN Summits fit within the overarching UN System
3. An outline of the Summit process

This guide provides a basic introduction to the functions and processes of a UN Summit for health professionals, countries and organizations to prepare for the 2011 UN Summit on NCDs.





SECTION 2

Background – UN System

This section provides a brief overview of the structure, functions, and decision-making processes at the UN. A general understanding of the UN system is important for understanding how UN summits interact with other UN bodies and processes.

2.1 What is the UN?

- **Purpose:** The UN was established in 1945 in order to promote international peace and security, friendly relations among states, and address international economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian issues.
- **Economic and Social Issues:** In recent years, economic and social issues have become increasingly prominent on the UN agenda. The UN presents a global forum to address the multiple economic, social, and health dimensions associated with NCDs. According to the World Economic Forum, NCDs are ranked as the third largest risk in terms of global economic loss (WHO Background Paper, 2010).
- **Membership:** There are currently 192 Member States, making the UN the most representative international organization.

2.2 Structure of the UN

The UN is comprised of 6 main UN organs. Three of these organs – *the Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)* – are decision-making bodies represented by Member States.

2.3 Resolutions and Decision-Making at the UN

Although the UN is often thought of as a type of global legislature, in fact, few of its decisions have the binding force of international law. Instead, the UN relies on the voluntary commitments of Member States to comply with decisions taken at the UN.

i. Security Council Decisions: Only one UN body - the Security Council - has the power to make decisions that are binding on all other Member States.

UN Organ	Mandate, Representation and Powers
Security Council (SC) 1	<p>Mandate: “primary responsibility, under the UN Charter, for the maintenance of international peace and security”</p> <p>Representation: 5 permanent members (USA, UK, France, China, Russia); 10 non-permanent members elected by the General Assembly</p> <p>Powers: the sole UN body able to make decisions binding on all Member States; 5 permanent members may exercise a veto</p>
General Assembly 2	<p>Mandate: “main deliberative organ” of the UN. Determines much of the work of other UN bodies and agencies.</p> <p>Representation: representatives from all 192 Member States</p> <p>Powers: resolutions are non-binding</p>
Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) 3	<p>Mandate: “the principal organ to coordinate the economic, social and related work of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and institutions.”</p> <p>Representation: 54 Member States elected by the General Assembly based on regional representation</p> <p>Powers: non-binding resolutions; weaker than General Assembly</p>
Trusteeship council 4	<p>Mandate: “established in 1945 by the UN Charter to provide international supervision for 11 Trust Territories placed under the administration of 7 Member States...By 1994, all Trust Territories had attained self-government or independence.” No longer meets on a regular basis.</p>
International Court of Justice 5	<p>Mandate: “is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations;” located at the Hague in the Netherlands.</p> <p>Representation: 15 judges</p> <p>Powers: “It settles legal disputes between states and gives advisory opinions to the UN and its specialized agencies”</p>
Secretariat 6	<p>Mandate: “The Secretariat carries out the day-to-day work of the Organization. It services the other principal organs”</p> <p>Representation: staffed by international bureaucrats who report to the UN rather than Member States.</p> <p>Powers: administers peacekeeping operations, prepares reports and studies, provides official translation and communicates with international media, among numerous other roles.</p>

ii. General Assembly and ECOSOC Decisions:

Decisions made in the General Assembly (or ECOSOC) typically take the form of a **resolution**. General Assembly (and ECOSOC) resolutions, are not law, but recommendations that serve as an expression of collective will.

Resolutions are comprised of 2 sections: a preamble (basis for action) and a series of operative paragraphs (actions or directives).

*Definitions provided by the UN www.un.org/en/mainbodies/index.shtml

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly

64/108 Global Health and Foreign Policy

(preambular paragraphs)

Welcoming the outcome of the Annual Ministerial Review held by the Economic and Social Council in 2009, on the theme “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health,”

(operative paragraphs)

6. *Emphasizes* the need for further international cooperation to meet emerging, new, and unforeseen threats and epidemics, such as the recent Influenza A (H1N1) pandemic and the H5N1 and other influenza viruses with human pandemic potential, and acknowledges the growing health problem of antimicrobial resistance,

- The General Assembly is the preferred deliberative organ and most resolutions are debated and passed there.
- Although the Security Council is the more powerful body, the General Assembly is often thought to carry more legitimacy because of its representative nature. Since all Member States are represented in the General Assembly and have equal voting power (one State, one vote), General Assembly resolutions convey strong levels of international agreement and political weight.
- Since ECOSOC is less representative – only 54 Member States are elected to its assembly – resolutions passed in ECOSOC tend to be weaker than those passed in the General Assembly (Peterson, 2006).
- Resolutions passed by consensus (without vote) tend to demonstrate greater support and political commitment than those using a vote. Voting indicates some opposition as seen through number of abstentions or negative votes.

See annexes for a more detailed review of General Assembly and ECOSOC functions and decision-making processes.

SECTION 3

Background – UN Summits

3.1 What is a UN Summit?

- **Definition:** A 1980 UN Secretary-General report defines a UN Summit as “a conference that is not part of the regular recurrent conference program of a biennium, but that is convened in response to a specific resolution by the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council, for whose substantive preparation and specific additional budgetary provisions are made and which all States are normally invited to attend. Such a conference usually extends over a period of a minimum of two to a maximum of four to six weeks and requires an intensive level of planning and servicing” (Schechter, 2005).
- **Characteristics:** UN Summits are also commonly known as World Summits or UN Global Conferences. They are more formally referred to as “High-Level Meetings.” Unlike academic or scientific conferences, UN Summits typically involve Heads of State and are intergovernmental in nature.

3.2 Purpose of a UN Summit

- **Purpose:** UN Summits are typically convened to address a global issue concerning social, human, and/or economic development that necessitates sustained cross-sectoral action. Summits are proposed as a response to the inability of existing institutional structures to properly address the issue at hand (Schechter, 2005).
- **Relevance to NCDs:** For issues such as NCDs which require multi-level, multi-sectoral approaches to address the economic, social, and health impacts, UN Summits represent an effective avenue for global, cross-sectoral action (in agriculture, education, food production, pharmaceutical production, taxation, trade, urban development, and other areas).
- **Functions:** UN Summits serve to:
 - i. raise global consciousness and spur political urgency;
 - ii. galvanize action among state and non-state actors at the local, national, international and global levels;
 - iii. build dialogue with NGOs and civil society;

- iv. build institutional capacity and legitimize need for global governance;
 - v. establish international standards and guidelines;
 - vi. provide a forum where new proposals can be debated and gain consensus; and
 - vii. solicit commitment by governments and develop procedures for reporting progress back to the UN (Schechter, 2001; Schechter, 2005).
- Summits attract widespread participation, up to tens of thousands of government, business, non-governmental organization (NGO), academic and civil society representatives may attend (Schechter, 2001). NGOs with consultative status at the UN receive access to summit documents and are may be consulted during the preparatory process, though their substantive participation varies by conference (Schechter, 2005). NGOs frequently organize a parallel NGO Summit to provide a global forum for non-state actors to discuss and provide recommendations to the intergovernmental summit.

Chronology of UN Summits: 2000-2010	
2010	
2009	High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation World Summit on Food Security Summit on Climate Change
2008	High-Level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs
2007	2007 Global Compact Leaders Summit
2006	World Conference on Arts Education
2005	The 2005 World Summit
2004	
2003	The World Summit on the Information Society
2002	The World Summit on Sustainable Development International Conference on Financing for Development
2001	World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
2000	Millennium Summit: "The role of the United Nations in the 21st century" (New York, 6-8 September)

This chronology of UN Summits is based on the list of past events and conferences detailed on the UN website at www.un.org/en/events/archives.shtml. As there is no official set of criteria defining which events constitute a summit, the following parameters were used to construct this chronology. Events which included the words "Summit," "United Nations Conference," "International Conference," or "High-Level" in the title were included. For the purpose of this chronology, five and ten-year reviews of previous Summits were removed from the list. Those titles which referred to regular sessions, recurrent or ad hoc meetings of committees, councils, sessions or working groups were also excluded. Additionally, the websites of the events listed in the chronology contain clear references to broad participation by Heads of State or other high-level representation by Member States.

SECTION 4

The UN Summit Process

This section traces the UN Summit process from initiation through to implementation and review. It identifies the key UN bodies engaged in this process and demonstrates how a UN Summit interacts with other parts of the UN system.

The UN Summit process can be divided into **7 phases**:

Phase 1: Convening a UN Summit

Phase 2: Establishing the Planning and Coordinating Bodies

Phase 3: Pre-Summit Dialogue and Negotiations

Phase 4: Summit Proceedings

Phase 5: Summit Conclusions

Phase 6: Adopting Summit Outcomes in the UN General Assembly

Phase 7: Implementation and Follow-up

Preparations for the 2011 UN Summit on NCDs are presently in Phase 3 of Summit cycle. Country and regional consultations and preparations are currently being undertaken.

4.1 Role of the General Assembly and ECOSOC in Supporting UN Summits

The General Assembly and ECOSOC play key roles at the start and end of the Summit cycle by initiating summits, endorsing the resolutions, and coordinating implementation and follow-up.

1. *Initiating Summits*: Decisions to convene a UN Summit are introduced as resolutions in the General Assembly or in ECOSOC.
2. *Endorsing*: The General Assembly typically passes resolutions which endorse the declarations and programs of action developed at the Summit (Peterson, 2006).
3. *Implementation and Follow-Up*: ECOSOC was officially mandated by a General Assembly resolution (57/270B) to coordinate summit implementation and follow-up.

4.2 UN Summit Process Flow

Phase I: Convening a UN Summit

- A resolution to convene a UN Summit is passed by the General Assembly (or ECOSOC). This resolution or a subsequent ‘modalities resolution’ outlines the scope, purpose, length, and expected outcomes of the Summit.

Excerpt:

Resolution 64/265: Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Disease

Convinced of the urgent need to undertake multilateral efforts at the highest political level to address the rising prevalence, morbidity, and mortality of non-communicable diseases worldwide and to raise the profile accorded to non-communicable diseases, in development cooperation by enhancing such cooperation in this regard,

1. *Decides to convene a High-level Meeting of the General Assembly in September 2011, with the participation of Heads of State and Government, on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.*
2. *Also decides to hold consultations on the scope, modalities, format, and organization of the high-level meeting... with a view to concluding consultations, preferably before the end of 2010.*

Phase 2: Establishing the Planning and Coordinating Bodies

The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) (formally known as the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) provides overall oversight and direction of the conference (Schechter, 2005). Conference preparation is led by 2 key bodies, the Preparatory Committees (PrepComs) and the Conference Secretariat.

i. Conference Secretariat:

- **Composition:** The head of the Conference Secretariat is the Secretary-General or Rapporteur-General – a prominent individual who may come from either inside or outside the UN (Schechter, 2005).
- **Role:** The main task of the Conference Secretariat is to coordinate the administrative and logistical arrangements of the Summit. It

establishes the composition of the working groups which ultimately shape summit outcomes (Schechter, 2005).

- **Additional Roles:** The Secretary General also provides a pivotal leadership role, especially when a country or group of countries are impeding consensus on an outcome document. Finally, the Secretariat guides delegates through the rules of protocol and procedures during the summit.

ii. Preparatory Committees (PrepComs):

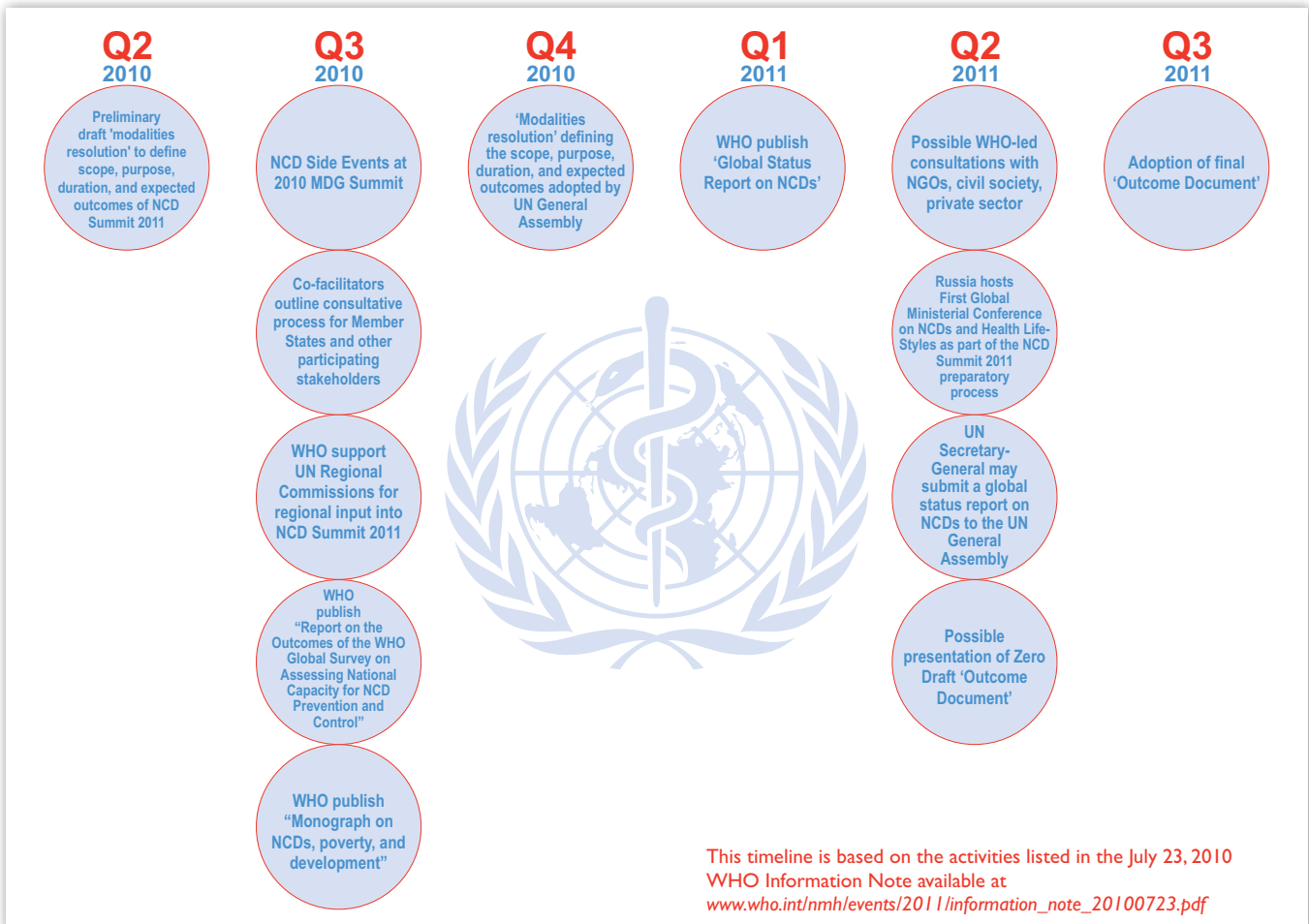
- **Composition:** The PrepComs is comprised of Member countries who are appointed by the President of the UN Assembly or an existing intergovernmental organization such as an ECOSOC commission (Schechter, 2005).
- **Main Role:** The main purpose of the PrepComs is to lead the pre-negotiations for the Summit outcome document. Efforts to negotiate the content of the outcome document begin months before the actual Summit. The Committee oversees the work of the conference secretariat, and expert and regional meetings (Schechter, 2005).
- **Additional Roles:** PrepComs is also responsible for setting the timelines for the Summit, outlining the draft agenda, and determining the procedures for engagement with UN system and other participants (Schechter, 2005).

Phase 3: Pre-Summit Dialogue and Negotiations

As much of the outcome document is prepared prior to the Summit, the preparatory process plays a key role in shaping the outcomes of the Summit.

- **Building Consensus:** A number of UN and non-UN venues are used to build consensus in preparation for the Summit. Preliminary consensus is sought through key fora such as: ECOSOC Regional Commissions; informal consultations with NGOs, civil society and the private sector; and other conferences.

- **A ‘Zero Draft’ outcome document:** The zero draft is a preliminary document that serves as the basis for formal negotiations. It is the foundation upon which the final outcome document is built. The zero draft is typically circulated well in advance of the Summit.
- A chronology of preparatory activities leading to the NCD Summit 2011 is provided below.
- **Role of the Plenary Sessions:** The plenary sessions play an important role in raising the profile of the issue in the media. Opening speakers often attract considerable media attention. Secondly, the plenary also allows Member States to publically articulate their positions. Thirdly, the plenary provides an official forum to approve the work of working committees (Schechter, 2005).



Phase 4: Summit Proceedings

- **Duration:** A typical Summit lasts about 2-6 weeks.
- **Proceedings:** The conference is typically divided into a series of concurrent plenary and round-table sessions. A plenary session is a session open to the entire membership.
- **Ensuring an Outcome Document:** If the PrepComs is unable to complete negotiations prior to the conference, an Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole (COW) will be established during the Summit. As the plenary session proceeds, COW will hold informal working group meetings to work out any remaining areas of contention.

Phase 5: Summit Conclusions

- **Outcome Document:** The goal of the Summit is to adopt an outcome document. Outcome documents are usually comprised of ‘agreed conclusions’ which are typically non-binding. Agreed conclusions often deal with economic, cultural, scientific, and technical cooperation issues. Declarations and Programmes of Action are two common types of outcome documents (Intergovernmental Negotiations, 2007).

- I. **Declarations:** “A formal statement of special significance issued by Ministers (Ministerial Declaration) or delegates at the closure of a conference, summit, or other event” (UNITAR Glossary). They convey political commitment and aspiration and are usually adopted at the level of Heads of State. Though they are non-binding, they tend to be stronger than resolutions. In some cases, declarations gain the weight of customary law, as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The format, length, and content varies considerably across declarations.

Excerpt: Millennium Declaration

The General Assembly Adopts the following Declaration:
United Nations Millennium Declaration

I. Values and principles

- I. We, heads of State and Government, have gathered at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 6 to 8 September 2000, at the dawn of a new millennium, to reaffirm our faith in the Organization and its Charter as indispensable foundations of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world.

III. Development and poverty eradication

12. We resolve therefore to create an environment – at the national and global levels alike – which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty.
19. We resolve further:
 - To halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world’s people whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and, by the same date, to halve the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water.

2. **Programs and Platforms for Action:** are often the outcome of a world conference and provide a blueprint for action on a certain issue. Such action plans are often used to designate responsibility for implementation.

Excerpt: 1994 International Conference on Population and Development

1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

B. Child survival and health Actions

- 8.18. For infants and children to receive the best nutrition and for specific protection against a range of diseases, breast-feeding should be protected, promoted and supported. By means of legal, economic, practical and emotional support, mothers should be enabled to breast-feed their infants exclusively for four to six months without food or drink supplementation and to continue breast-feeding infants with appropriate and adequate complementary food up to the age of two years or beyond. To achieve these goals, Governments should promote public information on the benefits of breast-feeding; health personnel should receive training on the management of breast-feeding; and countries should examine ways and means to implement fully the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes.

Phase 6: Adopting Summit Outcomes in the UN General Assembly

- The General Assembly typically passes resolutions which endorse the declarations and programs of action developed at the Summit.

Phase 7: Implementation and Follow-up

- The particular responsibilities of the various UN and non-UN bodies are usually outlined in the summit outcome document (Schechter, 2001). An example of the Institutional Arrangements section from the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development is provided below.

Excerpt: AGENDA 21**Section IV
Means of Implementation
Chapter 38****International Institutional Arrangements****A. General Assembly**

38.9 In particular, the Assembly could consider holding a special session not later than 1997 for the overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21, with adequate preparations at a high level.

B. Economic and Social Council

38.10 The Economic and Social Council should organize a periodic review of the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development envisaged in paragraph 38.11, as well as of system-wide activities to integrate environment and development, making full use of its high-level and coordination segments.

C. Commission on Sustainable Development

38.11 In order to ensure the effective follow-up of the Conference... a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development should be established in accordance with Article 68 of the Charter of the United Nations. This Commission would report to the Economic and Social Council in the context of the Council's role under the Charter vis-à-vis the General Assembly. It would consist of representatives of States elected as members with due regard to equitable geographical distribution...

4.3 Role of ECOSOC and the General Assembly

ECOSOC and the General Assembly play essential roles in assisting with the implementation, monitoring, and review of Summit progress.

I. Role of ECOSOC

A 2003 General Assembly resolution (57/270B) officially mandated ECOSOC to coordinate implementation and follow-up to UN summits. ECOSOC is responsible for delineating the division of labour and harmonizing the work of the various functional commissions, as well as, coordinating with the regional commissions (Schechter, 2001). ECOSOC also convenes an annual 'coordination segment' and Annual Ministerial Review which are actively used to review summit goals.

The following ECOSOC bodies often play a key role in summit follow-up:

- i. ECOSOC Functional Commissions:** Commissions hold primary responsibility for review and assessment of progress on Summit agreements. Commissions play a key role in monitoring the implementation of the action plan; coordinating the five-year review by the General Assembly; and facilitating the exchange of best-practices and lessons learned provided by country governments. In addition, commissions often solicit the participation of civil society and private sector groups. In accordance with the themes of past summits, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission for Social Development have been actively involved in follow-up work (Schechter, 2001).
- ii. ECOSOC Regional commissions:** Formed to address the specific needs of different regions of the world (Asia and Pacific, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and Western Asia), the five regional commissions assist with data collection, research and analysis, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation of regional (and global plans), and sponsoring regional ministerial conferences, national workshops, and NGO workshops (Schechter, 2001).
- iii. ECOSOC substantive sessions:** The 'coordination segment' of ECOSOC's substantive sessions is often used to review UN Summit goals (Weiss, 2007).
- iv. ECOSOC's Annual Ministerial Review (AMR):** Instituted in 2005 following the World Summit, the AMR reviews the UN development agenda. The AMR provides a venue to share lessons learned through country presentations and engage in dialogue with policy-makers, practitioners and academics. At the end of the AMR, ECOSOC adopts the Ministerial Declaration which serves as policy guidance for the General Assembly and other UN bodies (www.un.org/ga).

2. Role of the General Assembly

A Special Session is a meeting organized by the General Assembly in addition to its regular sessions in order to focus on a particular issue or group of issues. The General Assembly typically convenes a Special Session following each UN Summit to review progress made during the last 5 years. Examples include Special Sessions following the 1990 World Summit for Children and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women.

3. Role of the UN in Supporting Country-Level Implementation

The UN also provides country-level support to help governments tailor conference objectives to their specific country needs. The resident coordinator system, field-level committees, and round tables led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are some of the mechanisms used to provide such support and facilitate dialogue between the UN and national authorities (Schechter, 2001).

SECTION 5: Conclusion

This *Backgrounder to UN Summits* has provided a broad overview of how UN Summits proceed and how they interact with the larger UN System. Tracing the steps or phases of a UN Summit, it is clear that an immense amount of preparation and coordination is required during both the lead-up to and follow-up of a UN Summit. In identifying these steps, it is hoped that this guide will help public health professionals understand the function and processes of a UN Summit, and ultimately help countries and organizations prepare for the 2011 UN Summit on NCDs, and subsequent implementation and review.



Annexes



ANNEX I

General Assembly

Decision-making

Process

1. Role of the General Assembly

The General Assembly is one of the 6 principle UN organs and serves as the main deliberative and policy-making body of the UN. As the only UN body with complete representation from all 192 Member States, it is the preferred venue for passing resolutions (Peterson, 2006). The decisions made in the General Assembly dictate much of the work of other the UN bodies and agencies.

2. Functions of the General Assembly

The General Assembly is mandated to:

- Discuss and make recommendations on issues of international cooperation, peace and security (except if under discussion by the Security Council).
- Determine the powers and functions of other UN organs.
- Elect members of UN organs.
- Initiate studies and consider reports.
- Approve the UN budget.

3. Voting in the General Assembly?

Each Member State is accorded one vote. General Assembly decisions take the form of resolutions (non-binding recommendations to states). Depending on the issue, either a simple majority (50%) or 2/3 support is required to pass a resolution. In many cases, resolutions are simply passed by consensus without a vote. As voting tends to indicate some opposition (as seen through the number of abstentions or negative votes), resolutions passed by consensus tend to demonstrate greater support and political commitment than those passed by vote (Peterson, 2006).

4. Setting the Agenda

Determining Agenda Items: Topics of discussion are determined in advance of the opening of regular session. The agenda consists of items tabled on the provisional and supplementary lists. The provisional list is comprised of items proposed at least

60 days prior to the commencement of regular session; the supplementary list includes items proposed at least 30 days in advance.

Prioritization of Issues: Although any issue proposed by a Member State at least 30 days in advance will be included on the agenda, more significant issues will be accorded greater discussion time (Peterson, 2006). Items on the provisional list are accordingly afforded priority over those on the supplementary list. Items of an urgent nature can be added to agenda if there is sufficient support to do so.

Division of Work: Due to large volume of agenda items tabled (over 150 items), only the most prominent issues continue to be discussed in the plenary by the entire assembly (Peterson, 2006). The General Committee is responsible for determining how the agenda items should be divided between the plenary and the six General Assembly Committees. The six committees meet concurrently and usually begin work following the conclusion of the General Debate in the plenary (Peterson, 2006).

General Assembly Committees	
First:	Disarmament and International Security
Second:	Economic and Finance
Third:	Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural
Fourth:	Special Political and Decolonization
Fifth:	Administrative and Budgetary
Sixth:	Legal

*The Second committee tends to deal with development issues while the Third focuses predominantly on human rights issues and humanitarian disasters.

General Assembly Session Timelines

The General Assembly regular session opens in September and concludes late December. Emergency and special sessions can be convened on an ad hoc basis as required. Given the short 4-month time-frame to address over 100 agenda items, the plenary tends to endorse committee reports without further debate.

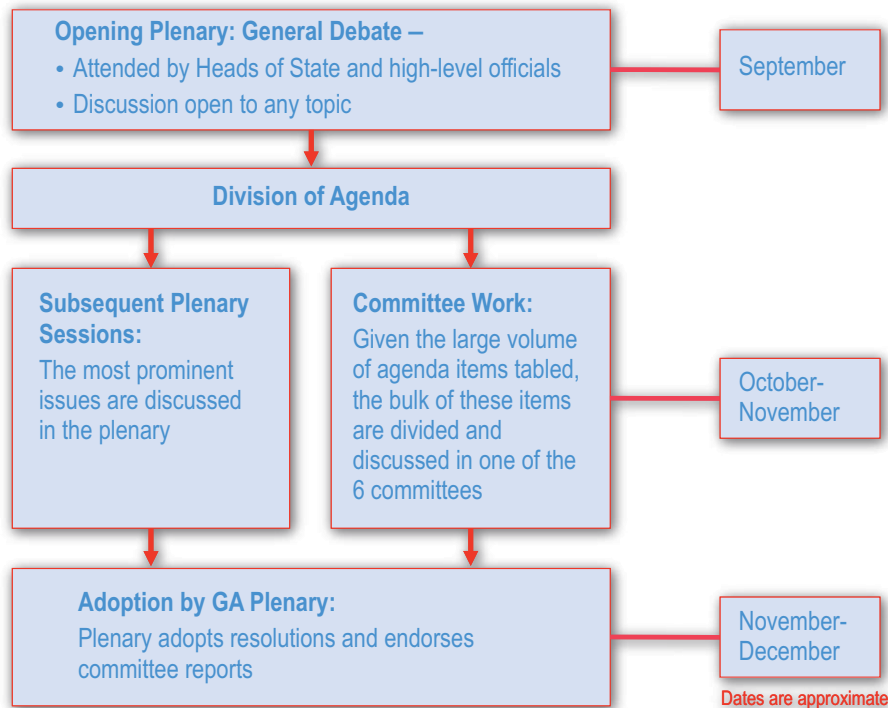


Diagram based on information from Peterson, 2006.

ANNEX 2

Overview of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

1. What is ECOSOC?

Mandate: ECOSOC is one of the 6 principle organs in the UN whose role is to “coordinate the economic, social and related work of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and institutions” (www.un.org/ga). This includes matters pertaining to health, culture, and human rights, among others. ECOSOC’s approach to addressing economic and social issues tends to be cross-sectoral in nature.

Composition: ECOSOC is composed of 54 Member State representatives elected by the General Assembly based on geographical representation.

Resources: It oversees approximately 70% of human and financial resources in the UN (www.un.org/ga/).

2. Functions:

ECOSOC plays a number of key functions including:

1. **Acts as a key venue to raise awareness and inform UN policy dialogue.** ECOSOC provides policy guidance to the General Assembly on relevant economic and social issues by preparing studies, reports, recommendations and draft conventions. The Ministerial Declaration adopted during the Annual Ministerial Review helps to elevate issues identified in the review.
2. **Coordinates the work** of the specialized agencies, 10 functional commissions, and 5 regional commissions by harmonizing agendas and work programs and delineating the division of responsibilities.
3. **Convenes ad hoc meetings on humanitarian emergencies.**
4. **May convene UN Summits and assist in the coordination and follow-up.**
5. **Grants consultative status to NGOs.**

3. ECOSOC Session Timelines

- ECOSOC convenes annually for 4 weeks in July. The 4-week substantive session is divided into 5 'segments: high-level, coordination, operational, humanitarian, and general activities segments. The high-level segment (which includes representatives from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Bank, the IMF, and the World Trade Organization) consists of a one-day policy dialogue devoted to a major theme determined during the preceding year. Follow-up to UN Summits are often discussed during the coordination segment.
- Additional sessions are usually held in February, May, and October.

4. Decision-making capacity

Like the General Assembly, resolutions passed by ECOSOC are not binding and require only simple majority (50%); however, as ECOSOC is often regarded as a more minor body than the General Assembly, ECOSOC decisions tend to carry less weight (Peterson, 2006). That being said, policy guidance and recommendations provided by ECOSOC, such as Ministerial Declarations, are nevertheless, strongly considered by the General Assembly and other UN bodies.

ANNEX 3

Glossary of Terms

Main Bodies of the UN General Assembly

Definitions taken from (www.un.org/en/mainbodies/index.shtml)

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC): “is the principal organ to coordinate the economic, social and related work of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and institutions.”

General Assembly: “is the main deliberative organ of the UN and is composed of representatives of all Member States.”

International Court of Justice: “The International Court of Justice, located at the Hague in the Netherlands, is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.”

Secretariat: “The Secretariat carries out the day-to-day work of the Organization. It services the other principal organs.”

Security Council: “has primary responsibility, under the UN Charter, for the maintenance of international peace and security” and is the sole body able to issue decisions binding on all Member States.

Trusteeship Council: “established in 1945 by the UN Charter to provide international supervision for 11 Trust Territories placed under the administration of 7 Member States, and ensure that adequate steps were taken to prepare the Territories for self-government and independence. By 1994, all Trust Territories had attained self-government or independence.”

Types of Actors

Definitions from UNITAR Glossary of Terms *except as indicated*

Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole (COW): “Sometimes established by a conference to facilitate discussion and negotiation. Like other committees, the power of the COW is limited to making recommendations for adoption by the conference in plenary.”

Chief Executives Board (CEB): Formerly known as the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), the CEB is a standing committee composed of administrative officers from the UN specialized agencies. It is the highest level coordination forum in the UN and convenes under the direction of the UN Secretary-General. (www.unsceb.org/ceb/brochure/overview/)

Conference secretariat: “a team of officials, usually but not necessarily, international civil servants organized and managed to provide administrative and support services to an international conference. The UN Secretariat provides the conference secretariat for virtually all UN conferences held in New York and many other UN conferences held elsewhere.”

Specialized Agencies: “an autonomous international organization joined to the UN through a special agreement” eg. World Health Organization (WHO).

Sponsor: “the delegation which proposes a resolution for adoption by a conference.”

Types of Documents

Definitions from Intergovernmental Negotiations except as indicated

Chairs Summary: “expresses the sense and direction of a meeting without including commitments for action by governments”; allows views to be officially recorded.

Chair’s text: “A draft text introduced by a presiding officer in an attempt to help the conference towards agreement...A chairman’s draft is often an attempt at a final text that might secure consensus.” (UNITAR Glossary)

Draft outcome text: is the “basis on which governments negotiate”; usually prepared by the Secretariat through solicitation of views from governments and UN agencies. Government proposals: proposed amendments to the text under consideration, delivered orally on the floor or submitted in written form.

Letters from governments: records of previously negotiated texts from non-UN forums.

Non-papers: proposed amendments to the text under negotiation prepared by governments but do not form part of official documentation.

Working papers: prepared by Member States, the Secretariat, chair or president to provide substantive background information.

Types of UN decisions

Definitions from Intergovernmental Negotiations except as indicated

Agreements: “refer to all consensus decisions made by Member States, whether or not they are legally binding”; often deal with economic, cultural, scientific, and technical cooperation issues.

Agreed Conclusions: “In some cases, governments decide to conclude a meeting with a

negotiated outcome but without commitments for action by governments. These ‘agreed conclusions’ can set the basis for policy development.”

Conventions: synonymous with treaty.

Decisions: “denotes formal action that is not a resolution, and that usually deals with organizational matters such as elections, appointments or the place of the meetings.”
Declarations: “A formal statement of special significance issued by Ministers (Ministerial Declaration) or delegates at the closure of a conference, summit, or other event. Declarations may be binding, but usually are not.” (UNITAR Glossary)

Programmes of actions: “provide a blueprint for action” on a certain issue and are often the outcome of a world conference. They are a statement of political commitment, but not legally binding.

Protocol: “An international legal agreement (e.g. treaty) appended to or otherwise closely related to another agreement.”

Resolution: “A written decision by a conference. Resolutions follow a standard format, which may vary only slightly from body to body. They consist of one sentence and a number of preambular and operative paragraphs.” (UNITAR Glossary)

Treaties: generic term for “instruments that are legally binding under international law.” Treaties are usually reserved for the most politically important agreements and normally require ratification.

Degrees of Agreement for passing Resolutions

Definitions from UNITAR Glossary of Terms

Abstention: “To vote (or a vote that is) neither in favour nor against the question. It registers absence of support, but with less opposition than with a negative vote. Under most rules of procedures, delegations that abstain are not counted as ‘present and voting’ in that vote.”

Acclamation: “A procedure whereby a conference adopts a resolution without a vote, all delegations having indicated their support for it eg. by applause.”

Consensus: “A procedure whereby a conference takes a decision without a vote. Consensus is

distinct from unanimity in that it can co-exist with differing views, to a degree...Consensus is the preferred mode of decision-making.”

Objection: “A statement, either written or oral by a State or delegation, informing the organization, conference or meeting that it objects to a proposed action or commitment.”

Reservation: “A Member States does not agree to comply with one or more of the document’s provisions. Reservations are intended to be used only temporarily, indicating that the state agrees with the decision in principle even if they are unable to realize it.”

Vote: indicates number of abstentions or negative votes by Member States.

Venues for Debate and Discussion

Definitions from UNITAR Glossary of Terms except where indicated

Open sessions: officially recorded, open to NGOs and media with accreditation. (Intergovernmental Negotiations)

Plenary sessions: “the whole conference meeting as such (as opposed to the committee of the whole (COW)) and therefore able to take decisions.”

Special Session: “A session of the General Assembly, outside and additional to its regular sessions, focused on a particular issue or body of issues.”

Summit: “Conference at which participants are Heads of State or government.”

Working groups: “a sub-delegation, so called to emphasize the point that it has a very specific and usually time-bound task.”

ANNEX 4

References

Books

Kaufmann, Johan. *United Nations Decision-Making*. Rockville: Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1980.

Peterson, M.J. *The UN General Assembly*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Schechter, Michael. *United Nations Global Conferences*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Schechter, Michael G. (Ed.). *United Nations-Sponsored World Conferences : Focus on Impact and Follow-up*. New York: United Nations University Press, 2001.

United Nations. *The United Nations Today*. New York: United Nations Publication, 2008.

Weiss, Thomas and Sam Daws (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Electronic Materials

World Health Organization

World Health Organization. "Preventing Chronic Diseases: A Vital Investment." Geneva: World Health Organization, 2005.
www.who.int/chp/chronic_disease_report/full_report.pdf

World Health Organization. "WHO Information Note – Issue 1: Towards Implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/64/265: Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Disease," Geneva, July 23, 2010.
www.who.int/nmh/events/2011/information_note_20100723.pdf

WHO Background Paper: Raising the Priority Accorded to Non-Communicable Disease in Development Work and in Related Investment Decisions.
www.who.int/nmh/events/2010/ncd_background_paper_20100913.pdf

NCD Summit updates available at:
www.who.int/nmh/events/2011/ncd_summit/en/index.html

United Nations

UN Website: www.un.org/en/index.shtml

United Nations System Chief Executives Board
www.unsceb.org/ceb/brochure/overview/

United Nations. *Intergovernmental Negotiations and Decision-Making at the United Nations: A Guide. Second Updated Edition.* New York: United Nations, 2007.
www.un-ngls.org/IMG/pdf/DMUN_Book_PAO_WEB.pdf

United Nations. "United Nations Conferences: What Have They Accomplished?"
www.un.org/News/facts/confercs.htm

Walker, Ronald and Brook Boyer. "UNITAR Glossary of Terms for United Nations Delegates." New York: United Nations Institute for Training and Research, 2005.
www.unitar.org/mdp/training-tools/terms-for-un-delegates

