

UN must act as 'one'

The United Nations is failing the poorest and most vulnerable because its funding projects are undermined by too many agencies duplicating each other's work, a high-level panel has warned. The panel, co-chaired by the prime ministers of Mozambique, Norway and Pakistan, and including the British Chancellor (Finance Minister), Mr Gordon Brown, issued a blueprint for UN reform that would streamline the activities of its development, humanitarian aid and environment bodies over the next five years.

In unusually tough language, the panel said: "The UN's status as a central actor in the multilateral system is undermined by lack of focus on results, thereby failing ... the poorest and most vulnerable. (Its) work on development and environment is often fragmented and weak. Inefficient and ineffective governance and unpredictable funding have contributed to policy incoherence, duplication and operational ineffectiveness." Mr Adnan Amin, Executive Director for the report, said: "The United Nations is punching well below its weight."

There has been concern for a long time that much UN funding goes to waste since many agencies duplicate each other's work. Developing countries also complain that they have to deal with each individual agency when discussing aid spending. The report says the UN should "act as one" at country level to save time and money.

Most worrying for the panel were development efforts in 17 countries where the United Nations Development Programme did not have the power to regulate other agencies and even competed with them. The panel recommends that the UNDP head reports to a new board, of the heads of principle agencies, to monitor performance on the ground.

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