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**Policy Transfer and Bureaucratic Influence in the  
United Nations  
The case of AIDS**

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# Policy Transfer and Bureaucratic Influence in the United Nations

## The case of the AIDS<sup>1</sup>

### *Summary*

This paper focuses on the circulation of policy ideas within the United Nations (UN) system. Based upon a study of UNAIDS, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS, it shows how international bureaucracies can capitalize on policy-oriented information and knowledge to strengthen their autonomy and consolidate their authority within their own environment. Using a policy transfer approach as its analytical framework, the paper draws particular attention to the UNAIDS Secretariat, considered as a “transfer entrepreneur.” It argues that in the 2000s, the Secretariat has demonstrated a capacity to collect, develop and disseminate policy ideas on the epidemic and, consequently, has gradually participated in UN policy development. It thus suggests that the Secretariat has extended its authority within the UN system despite a restricted mandate and low resources. In conclusion, the paper points out the need to examine policy transfer among international organizations through actors, interests, and strategies, as a complement to holistic approaches.

### *Résumé*

Cet article étudie les conditions de circulation des idées dans le système des Nations Unies, à partir d’une enquête réalisée au sein du Programme commun des Nations Unies sur le VIH/sida, plus connu sous le nom d’ONUSIDA. Il montre que les administrations internationales font de la maîtrise des informations et des savoirs liés à l’action publique l’une des sources essentielles de leur autonomie et de leur autorité dans l’espace international. Recourant à un cadre analytique axé sur la sociologie des transferts, l’article porte un intérêt particulier aux activités du Secrétariat d’ONUSIDA, étudié ici comme un « entrepreneur de transfert ». Il défend l’idée que le Secrétariat est parvenu au cours des années 2000, grâce à son implication dans la collecte, la mise en forme et la diffusion de connaissances sur le sida, à influencer de façon croissante le développement de la politique onusienne de lutte contre l’épidémie. Il suggère ainsi que le Secrétariat a élargi son influence à l’intérieur du système des Nations Unies, malgré un mandat restreint et des ressources limitées. Dans la conclusion, l’article souligne la nécessité d’étudier le transfert des idées dans les organisations internationales en accordant une attention soutenue aux acteurs, à leurs intérêts et à leurs stratégies, en contrepoint d’approches macrosociologiques.

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1. The content of this paper is based on personal empirical research and direct observation. It does not represent the views of any organization to which the author has been affiliated.

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From local political arenas to global public policy networks, bureaucratic organizations use “policy ideas”<sup>2</sup> as crucial resources for strengthening both their legitimacy and their influence. In *Economy and Society* (1978), Max Weber identified specialized knowledge as the major instrument by which bureaucratic organizations build their superiority over citizens and private interests in society.<sup>3</sup> Following Weber, many scholars have paid particular attention to the role of information, knowledge, and expertise regarding public policies as a way to analyze the influence of international organizations at the global level. The ability to create, mobilize, or disseminate policy ideas thus provides critical resources for international organizations, through which they build up their capacity to influence other institutions’ choices and policies. Creating categories and norms, fixing meanings, constructing classifications, enforcing global values, or simply collecting and disseminating policy-oriented information, are core activities of many international organizations, including those that are considered as technical or operational organizations. These normative or intellectual activities not only contribute to strengthening their *autonomy* vis-à-vis the Member States composing their executive board, but also help consolidate their *authority* over their partners, constituents, and various stakeholders. In so doing, ideas “frequently legitimate and facilitate their own expansion and intervention in the affairs of state and non-state actors” (Barnett and Finnemore 2004:33).

This paper is based on an empirical analysis of the institutional life within the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS – better known as UNAIDS – at a global level. It focuses on interorganizational processes connecting the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN organizations, which coordinate their efforts through interagency partnerships.<sup>4</sup> It draws on “policy transfer” as an analytical framework to study the spread of policy ideas in a multi-organizational context. It particularly emphasizes the dynamic processes by which ideas can fuel policy development on AIDS in the UN system. It argues that policy transfer is a social construction involving policy actors who actively participate in the elaboration of policy-oriented information and knowledge. Depending on the context, these actors may be professionals, experts, and decision-makers working within UN organizations, as well as a wide variety of partners, stakeholders and observers working with these organizations (e.g., consultants, scientists, advocacy coalitions, civil society organizations, NGOs, epistemic communities, the private sector and the medias). They borrow, adapt, and put forward policy approaches and options, most frequently with a view to promoting the interests of their organization.

This analysis highlights the interdependency between the development of institutions, the circulation of ideas, and the promotion of interests. It pays attention to the role of intentions, opportunities, and choice in the dissemination of policy ideas.<sup>5</sup> It relates to analytical approaches that stress the role of actors who make ideas circulate. Political scientists have called these actors “policy entrepreneurs” (Kingdon 1984), “idea brokers” (Smith 1993), “carriers, exporters, and inducers” of

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2. In political science, policy ideas are defined as general information, scientific or expert knowledge, cognitive frames, representations, and moral values used by political authorities, bureaucracies, and their various partners, in order to justify collective choice regarded as public policies. Policy ideas circulate among political institutions, public administrations, the media, and non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), social movements, universities, think tanks, foundations, and even the private sector. They contribute to build shared views of the world and thus help define social reality.

3. “The primary source of the superiority of bureaucratic administration lies in the role of technical knowledge which, through the development of modern technology and business methods in the production of goods, has become completely indispensable [...] Bureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge. This is the feature of it which makes it specifically rational” (Weber, 1978:223, 225).

4. The paper does not explore the cooperation between these actors and the large number of stakeholders in their environment; nor does it examine coordination and harmonization among UNAIDS partners at the country level, nor the role of Member States on the executive board of UNAIDS.

5. Therefore, our analysis does not adopt a “diffusionist” approach, which lays emphasis on the incremental adaptations and adjustments by which policy ideas circulate from one jurisdiction to others. The diffusionist approach usually focuses on macrosocial processes, underestimating the importance of power and political relations in transfer processes.

ideas (Stone 2000), “generalist actors” (Nay and Smith 2002), “transfer entrepreneurs” (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996), “transfer agents” (Stone 2004) and “norm entrepreneurs” (Finnemore and Sicking 1998; Slagter 2004). Their activities may take place in various settings, such as public organizations or non-state organizations dedicated to producing ideas and norms, policy forums and networks, epistemic communities, or advocacy coalitions.

Following this perspective, our analysis concentrates on the UNAIDS Secretariat as an idea broker and policy entrepreneur. This choice derives from empirical observations on policy development within UNAIDS in the last decade: it suggests that the Secretariat, despite a limited mandate and low resources, has incrementally expanded its influence throughout the UNAIDS system by developing the capacity to convey and disseminate innovative ideas on AIDS policy responses. Consequently, through the study of policy transfer the following discussion addresses the issue of bureaucratic influence. It argues that bureaucracies cannot be conceived only as “agents” dependent on decisions made by their “principals,” but are also learning institutions, which may gain in autonomy and authority by controlling information and knowledge. The paper argues that policy transfer processes are a result of factors that are external to international bureaucracies and those associated with policy-making entrepreneurship within these bureaucracies.

This article is divided into two parts. In the first part, I discuss the analytical framework through which I propose to analyze the relationship between bureaucratic influence and policy transfer. In the second part, I elaborate on the extension of the UNAIDS Secretariat’s activity as an idea broker through the collection and dissemination of policy ideas about HIV/AIDS.<sup>6</sup>

## **I. POLICY IDEAS AND BUREAUCRATIC INFLUENCE**

UNAIDS provides interesting insights for the analysis of transverse bureaucratic activities through which policy ideas circulate within the UN system. The following discussion first concentrates on the capacity of UN organizations to participate in the collection and dissemination of ideas on development, followed by a presentation of characteristics and objectives of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS. It then discusses various analytical ways of examining how international bureaucracies can strengthen their influence in their environment by constructing and disseminating policy-oriented information and knowledge. Lastly, it argues that the “policy transfer” model is a valuable analytical framework for studying the activities through which international bureaucracies strive to gain such influence.

### **I.1. The UN and the dissemination of policy ideas on development**

To a large extent, the influence of the UN system can be assessed through its capacity to develop or at least to convey and circulate innovative ideas that are relevant to international policies regarding peace, security, and development. In addition to funding or implementing operational support activities, UN organizations devote significant resources to producing expert knowledge and guiding values that may help to build consensus on policy options and shape international conventions or national policies in the field of development.

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6. The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers who commented on a previous version of this paper.

This activity results from their model of legitimacy: as multilateral organizations, they are expected to develop policy guidelines that correspond to universal values, which transcend individual State interests. However, this activity is also linked to the type of resources UN organizations can mobilize at the international level. International organizations lack binding legal instruments to enforce international conventions in member countries; they lack the financial capacities that could serve as incentives to encourage national governments to enforce their recommendations; finally, their work is largely confined to pleading and advocating, with a view to persuading state and non-state actors to adapt their strategies and their practices in ways that meet international policy standards.

Moreover, UN public policies in the field of development are concerned with “behavior change,” as they target policy challenges such as reducing social and political discrimination, gender inequality, violence and abuse, and promoting human rights, educational standards, health-oriented behavior patterns, and microeconomic models. As information, education and communication (IEC) strategies can contribute to changing behaviors rooted in beliefs and social practices, most UN organizations engage in advocacy strategies aiming at promoting new domestic practices and new social patterns of behavior.

Within their field of intervention, all UN bodies – from the Secretariat General, the General Assembly, and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to specialized agencies, programmes, and funds – actively elaborate and circulate policy-relevant knowledge and information. This is true for institutions that are mandated with providing an intellectual contribution to peace and development (such as UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/UNESCO), and those tasked with promoting normative guidance and international standards (such as the World Health Organization/WHO or the International Labour Organization/ILO). But it is also true for technical agencies (such as the UN Development Programme/UNDP) and operational organizations (such as the World Food Programme/WFP or the UN High Commissioner for Refugees/UNHCR). It is even true for the World Bank, which dedicates major resources to carrying out studies, reports, and guidelines in various fields of expertise, in addition to its funding activities. Thus, ideally, international organizations should be highly responsive to emerging issues regarding development challenges and serve as an “epistemic community” equipping other actors with evidence-based and universal knowledge. Ernst B. Haas argued that international organizations are important “innovators” in international life, as learning institutions that demonstrate a capacity to adapt their methods for defining problems and subsequently to produce “consensual knowledge” for decision-making processes (Haas 1992).

Various observations during the last two decades may lead to a less optimistic view than that of Haas on the role of international organizations as innovators. On the one hand, it would be unfair to suppose that ideas systematically emerge at the periphery of such organizations. The UN has given major support to key notions that have become widely consensual and are at the heart of policy debates on development today. For example, it invented concepts that have stimulated new policy responses, such as “basic needs,” “human development,” and “human security.” It has also given traction to many other thematic issues, such as “sustainable development,” “democratic governance,” “responsibility to protect (R2P),” “gender equality,” “women’s empowerment,” “cultural diversity,” and “bioethics.” Nobody contests the active role of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in current worldwide discussions and national responses to environmental challenges. On the other hand, state and non-state actors developed many policy ideas before they were appropriated and adapted by UN organizations.<sup>7</sup> Many ideas in policy areas such as environmental protection, human

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7. One significant example is the “R2P” that derives from the notion of the “Right to intervene” supported by the NGO Médecins sans Frontières since the 1980s.

rights, gender issues, and the fight against HIV/AIDS have been discussed in various political, scientific, and community-based forums before being put on the agenda of UN organizations.

Three factors may explain the potential lack of innovative ideas in the multilateral system. First, UN organizations are intergovernmental bodies in which only consensual knowledge is promoted. Controversial issues, despite being crucial for ensuring an efficient response to development challenges, are frequently censored by UN experts if they are likely to be rejected by a coalition of Member States. Second, UN organizations are driven by bureaucratic administrations confronted with internal compartmentalization, complex decision-making procedures, and sometimes competition between agencies, which may impede knowledge innovation. Third, the field of development has become much more complex than it was in the early nineties. UN organizations are operating in an international environment that is composed of interconnected global public policy networks bringing together state and non-state actors (Reinicke and Deng 2000). There are therefore many more actors contributing to the production of ideas, including NGOs, universities, civil society organizations, think tanks, foundations, and even companies, as well as globalized epistemic communities and transnational policy networks (the latter combine different types of actors). In this new global landscape, UN organizations do not have the capacity to act as spearheads in the production of knowledge. They are reflective organizations among many others.

This paper focuses on the transfer of policy ideas throughout the UN system in the field of HIV and AIDS. Such a focus can be seen as critical for two reasons.

The first reason derives from the specificities of policy programmes responding to the global epidemic. As there is still no medical vaccine against HIV, the response to the epidemic cannot be purely therapeutic – even though there are antiretroviral treatment (ART) options for those who are already living with the virus. AIDS policies seeking behavior change are thus critical to prevent the expansion of the epidemic and mitigate its social and economic consequences (including fighting AIDS-related stigma and discrimination against infected and affected persons, and supporting particularly vulnerable populations). From this perspective, Information, Education and Communication (IEC) strategies are core prevention responses in countries where the virus is present or is likely to spread, all the more so as there have been – and are still – many misconceptions, non-rational beliefs, and taboos associated with AIDS.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, “advocacy campaigns” have also been strategic for involving national political elites and development partners who may have been reluctant to scale up the response to AIDS, or who have even been promoting ideological campaigns that hamper international efforts and make populations more vulnerable to HIV. In this context, the role of UN organizations is key in collecting and disseminating policy-oriented norms, standards, information, and values based on scientific evidence and grounded in human rights. This is their core activity.

The second reason is related to the global governance of AIDS. In 1994, the Members of the ECOSOC decided to establish a Joint UN Programme on HIV and AIDS, called UNAIDS. Through the Joint Programme, currently ten international organizations are invited to combine their efforts, with the active support of a Secretariat, in order to elaborate a massive multilateral response to the epidemic. UNAIDS brings these organizations together with the task of articulating their messages, harmonizing their strategies, and coordinating their activities. It also aims to build partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media, and the private sector,

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8. Nevertheless many recent scientific publications show that information and communication campaigns fail in changing behaviors that put individuals at risk (e.g., anti-tobacco, drug prevention or traffic control campaigns). Since behaviorist prevention policies are not always effective, today more strategies in the field of health also support “technical” responses for prevention – such as, in the field of HIV/AIDS, male circumcision, the use of microbicides for women, or HIV treatment as prevention (the so-called TasP or “Treatment as Prevention”).

whose ideas and resources are strategic for ensuring harmonized responses to AIDS. UNAIDS is thus conceived as a global public policy network, intended to assist the international response to AIDS by contributing to the sharing of information and knowledge across boundaries.

## **I.2. UNAIDS, a multi-organizational platform for sharing HIV/AIDS-related information and knowledge**

UNAIDS is a unique partnership mechanism within the UN system. Following a decision of the ECOSOC (1994), the UNAIDS Programme was launched in 1996. To a large extent, this creation resulted from the failure of the World Health Organization (WHO), in the early nineties, to fulfill its ambition to lead a global partnership programme to respond to AIDS in association with other UN agencies<sup>9</sup>.

Since 1996, UNAIDS has brought together the efforts and resources of UN organizations involved in the response to the epidemic.<sup>10</sup> Today ten organizations have the status of “Cosponsoring organizations,” better known as “Cosponsors.” They comprise the UNHCR, UNICEF (the UN Children’s Fund), WFP, UNPD, UNFPA (the UN Population Fund), UNODC (the UN Office on Drugs and Crime), ILO, UNESCO, WHO, and the World Bank. UNAIDS is thus a multi-organizational system mandated with helping the Cosponsors to elaborate a multi-sectoral response by harmonizing their goals and objectives, constructing common tools and instruments, sharing knowledge and technical expertise, speaking “with one voice,” and, finally, jointly delivering at the country level.

UNAIDS operates under the authority of an executive board called the Programme Coordinating Board (PCB), which brings together 22 Member States, the ten cosponsoring organizations, and five representatives of NGOs, including associations of people living with HIV. The UNAIDS Programme is also assisted by a Secretariat. Its task is to assist the Cosponsors to work together and scale up their efforts to fight against the epidemic. Over the years, the Secretariat has developed five main activities: developing policy guidance and disseminating strategic information among Cosponsors; mobilizing funding resources for UNAIDS; playing an advocacy role towards governments (from both donor and recipient countries) and the media; building a global database and providing an annual analysis of the state of the epidemic worldwide; and engaging with CSOs by supporting new partnerships and networks of people living with HIV and AIDS.

The global mission of UNAIDS as the main advocate for worldwide action against AIDS is to lead and strengthen a comprehensive response to the epidemic, with a particular focus on prevention; to sustain care and support programmes for those infected and affected by the epidemic; to assist national authorities in strategies aiming at mitigating individuals’ and communities’ vulnerability to HIV/AIDS; and to help national authorities to alleviate the socioeconomic and human impacts of the epidemic. In order to achieve these goals, UNAIDS is dedicated to encouraging Cosponsors and partners to combine prevention, care, support, and treatment aspects of the policy response into global strategies. UNAIDS’ task is furthermore to promote a comprehensive approach combining the social, educational, cultural, political, economic, and legal components of the response (Nay 2005).

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9. WHO launched a Global Programme on AIDS (GPA) in 1989. Nevertheless, the GPA was criticized for focusing primarily on health and therefore neglecting the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the epidemic. Above all, it was hampered by internal tensions between the top management of WHO and the managers of the Programme.

10. At the outset, UNAIDS brought together the efforts of six UN organizations (in fact one member, the World Bank, is a Bretton Woods system organization). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, four new UN entities joined UNAIDS.



As a cosponsored programme, UNAIDS was also established with a view to improving the internal governance of the UN system. The UNAIDS Programme functions as a cluster mechanism, mandated to strengthen inter-agency collaboration among Cosponsors in order to ensure a convergence – and, wherever possible, a close match – of policy goals and priorities, as well as the facilitation of agreements on joint UN procedures and work practices. The Programme challenges the Cosponsors to coordinate their plans, despite their complex organizational systems that are driven by their own norms, ideals, and agendas, specific knowledge and technical expertise, and distinct internal management procedures and bureaucratic routines. The programme also aims at reducing competition in fund-raising, fragmentation in decision-making, and the overlap and duplication of provision of technical assistance to governments and key stakeholders.

To a great extent, the UNAIDS Programme is a good example of the system-wide reforms undertaken by the UN Secretariat since the mid-nineties to improve the multilateral aid for development and humanitarian assistance. It was established as a groundbreaking institutional system, intended to change the way UN organizations design and implement multilateral public policies. From this perspective, UNAIDS provides a key illustration of the current restructuring efforts within the UN system to harmonize the programmes of the various UN bodies and improve coordination of their activities in the field. Despite recent improvements in the management of UNAIDS, a number of obstacles still continue to impede progress toward a unified UN response to AIDS (Nay 2009).

### **I.3. Information and knowledge as a source of bureaucratic influence**

This paper concentrates on the influence of the UNAIDS Secretariat considered as a transfer entrepreneur. It links to research agendas that draw attention to the authority of international institutions (Finnemore 1993; Reinalda and Verbeek 1998; Joachim, Reinalda and Verbeek 2007; German Law Journal 2008). It particularly relates to agendas that focus on the roles and activities of international bureaucracies<sup>11</sup> in the new global order (Barnett and Finnemore 2004), with a particular interest in those addressing the influence of secretariats that support intergovernmental organizations and assist in the implementation of international conventions<sup>12</sup> (Biermann and Bauer 2005; Busch 2006; Bauer 2006 and 2007; Mathiason 2007).

It addresses two sets of questions. Firstly, which factors might explain the increasing influence of the Secretariat within the UNAIDS Programme, despite a mandate limited to coordination, advocacy, and knowledge building? In other words, what are the specific resources associated with a Secretariat's mandate that is primarily dedicated to facilitating other organizations' activities? Secondly, to what

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11. We use the term "international bureaucracies," which refers to the administration (i.e. the secretariat, which comprises the headquarters and the field offices) of international organizations (the latter comprise both the administration and the Member States).

12. There are two kinds of international secretariat. The first category consists of the secretariats of international organizations and comprises a few hundred to several thousand civil servants and contractual agents. They are often based at the international organizations' headquarters. Many of them play an important role in the production of international expertise, the elaboration of normative instruments used in development policies, and the provision of technical support to developing countries. The other category contains secretariats that are set up to ensure the implementation of international conventions and treaties. They are much smaller (staff generally under 100). They usually play the role of facilitator and provide technical support for the preparation and follow-up of international meetings. Their influence on global public policy networks may not be insignificant. For example, there is a difference between the UNEP Secretariat (Bauer 2006) and the UNAIDS Secretariat considered in this paper. The first works mainly as an intergovernmental secretariat supporting and mobilizing national governments in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development. It is a secretariat of governments. The second is mainly dedicated to playing a catalytic role among UN organizations, although it is also mandated with supporting partnership initiatives with the media, CSOs, and the private sector. It is a "secretariat of UN secretariats."

extent do the ongoing reforms that affect the UN system in general, and UNAIDS in particular, constitute a set of opportunities that can serve the influence of the Secretariat?

There are various ways to discuss the influence of a UN secretariat: one may consider its influence within the UN system – here, the “UNAIDS family” – or its external influence on state and non-state actors that interact in HIV/AIDS-related public policy networks. Here, I look primarily at the first of these, while paying attention to the interrelation between internal influence and the external relationships established with various partners.

The influence of international bureaucracies may also be characterized using three analytical perspectives.<sup>13</sup> The first lens is *prescriptive influence*, a capacity to elaborate regulatory rules and norms with an impact on policy-building processes, policy instruments, and management rules. This influence has both a legal and a bureaucratic dimension: it is associated with the capacity to prepare, influence or implement legal regulations endorsed by decision-making bodies (such as executive entities), and to develop the standard procedures and formal rules followed by partners (such as Cosponsors); it is also connected to the capacity to shape informal rules, practical solutions, and routines to be used in organizational cooperation and the establishing of agreements.

Since bureaucracies cannot take binding decisions, the prescriptive influence strongly depends on their legitimacy in the international environment. High legitimacy strengthens a bureaucracy’s authority<sup>14</sup> and, consequently, its autonomy. It results both from the past activities of the administration, if shown to be well performed, and from the political support provided by national governments and regional political institutions (e.g., the EU). Following the seminal article by Powell and DiMaggio (1983), new institutionalist analyses argue that norms and procedures established by an organization may be copied by another organization if the activities of the first one are perceived as efficient and/or legitimate by the second one. In this regard, both the performance of the response to development policy issues on the one hand (“bureaucratic legitimacy”), and the greater political support provided by influential governments on the other hand (“political legitimacy”), may contribute to expand a bureaucracy’s capacity to influence other organizations in its environment.

For example, in the nineties, full support of the US federal administration and some OECD countries for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank gave a great deal of credit to these institutions in the discussion forums and decision-making mechanisms within which development policies were designed. This was particularly true for country-level coordination and partnership mechanisms: despite being multilateral, the financial institutions could frequently function as autonomous actors, and their voice was much stronger than any other UN organization’s in the view of government officials. In contrast, the major criticisms addressed to the top management of UNESCO in the late 1980s, combined with the official withdrawal of the US government from its executive bodies (1984-1997), contributed strongly to lowering the profile of this organization in multilateral forums as well as in UN internal coordination processes.

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13. This presentation draws in part on the analytical framework proposed by the MANUS research group of the “Global Governance Project,” which has been studying the influence of international bureaucracies in the field of environmental protection. The MANUS group distinguishes three dimensions of influence: cognitive, normative, and executive: “Bureaucracies may act as ‘knowledge-brokers’ that gather, synthesize, process, and disseminate scientific or other forms of knowledge and change the knowledge or belief system of other actors (cognitive dimension). They may perform as “negotiation-facilitators” that create, support, and shape norm-building processes for issue-specific international cooperation and can thus influence the outcomes of international cooperation (normative dimension). And they may operate as ‘capacity-builders’ that assist countries in their efforts to implement international agreements and thereby help countries to comply with international rules or even shape domestic policies (executive dimension)” (Busch 2006:2).

14. Barnett and Finnemore identify four types of authority for international organizations: rational-legal, delegated, moral, and expert (2004:20-29).

Yet another lens focuses on the *technical influence* of international bureaucracies that results from the development of specific technical instruments and skills by which the administration increases its capacity to assist partners (other international organizations, governments, NGOs, CSOs, etc.) to establish agreements, design programmes, and implement decisions. This influence increases when a bureaucracy has the capacity to shape policy tools and expertise that can be shared with a large number of partners and recipients involved in development policies (e.g., national governments, public administrations, NGOs, community associations, local populations, among others). It can relate to activities at several levels: international (e.g., fund-raising mechanisms), regional (e.g., support facilities), and national (e.g., technical assistance to public and private stakeholders).

Technical influence is strongly associated with the performance of international bureaucracies. It usually depends on their capacity to control over coordination procedures, funding instruments, field-based interventions, and recruitment of policy experts who may handle programme activities. It is therefore associated with the capacity to mobilize human and financial resources. For instance, the ability of international financial institutions to extend their influence over national economic strategies in developing countries, results both from their control over funding mechanisms for development (loans, debt relief and financial aid) and from their numerous experts who provide technical assistance to state and non-state actors at the country level.

The last lens refers to the *cognitive influence* of international bureaucracies, described as the capacity to gather, integrate, shape, generate, publicize, and circulate information and knowledge<sup>15</sup> used in international public policies. This activity is not limited to an “import/export” activity, which would consist in collecting relevant ideas in policy forums and then disseminating them to various organizations and stakeholders. It is also not restricted to elaborating “new ideas” that could be influential; this would offer a “heroic” vision of bureaucratic activity. To a great extent, it is the capacity to select ideas based on scientific studies and field experimentation, and to reshape them in a way that makes sense for a large number of stakeholders and can be accepted by partners situated in various settings or jurisdictions,<sup>16</sup> have different interests, do not support the same policy priorities, and do not share the same beliefs and moral principles.

Max Weber considered knowledge control to be a critical element of bureaucratic authority, and many researchers on international institutions have further developed this particular point (Haas 1992; Keohane and Martin 1995; Martin and Simmons 1998; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Venske 2008; De Wett 2008). This view is rooted in the fact that many international organizations – UN organizations in particular – concentrate on developing ideas, norms, and guidance because of the low enforceability of international public regulation. Unlike national legislation, which is binding, the enforcement of international laws depends to a great extent on the willingness of national authorities and on the views and beliefs of the many partners involved in each country.

The link between knowledge and bureaucratic authority can also be explained by examining the main characteristics of international organizations. One of the core aspects of the UN organizations’ mandate is to elaborate and disseminate policy guidance in order to encourage national governments to

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15. Information and knowledge refer to sophisticated ideas, norms, policy standards, assumptions, options, and representations, but also to simple data and known facts. They are associated with policy development, but also with practical and ordinary information used in interactions among actors. Thus they do not only comprise “scientific information” or “expert knowledge” (e.g., policy-oriented scientific expertise on sexual and reproductive health, pollution, or microfinance), but also “institutional knowledge” with an influence on the daily life of public organizations (norms, ideas, representations, management rules, patterns of behavior, and routines used in a particular organization or field of activity).

16. Depending on the policy area and the level of public intervention, these settings or jurisdictions may be policy networks, sectors, public organizations, political authorities, epistemic communities, regions, or countries.

go beyond their self-interest and build international consensus on key development issues<sup>17</sup> (Marcussen 2004). Despite their limited financial capacities and competing intellectual activities from non-state actors,<sup>18</sup> international organizations may succeed in circulating policy ideas if they are empowered with substantial legitimacy – a clear mandate, given by influential states, to act as facilitator in a particular field of activity – and if there is a significant political will to support multilateral mechanisms.

These three dimensions of bureaucratic influence should be viewed as Weberian “ideal types.” In real-world contexts they are interdependent and often mutually reinforcing. Bureaucracies’ cognitive influence is associated with their technical influence, as policy instruments are based on specific policy-relevant information and expert knowledge. For instance, the dissemination of information about best practices regarding HIV/AIDS policies may shape the technical solutions selected for policy implementation on the ground. Cognitive influence also combines with prescriptive influence, as the capacity to disseminate ideas is associated with the ability to implement standard rules for partnership.

In sum, the capacity of international organizations to enforce collective rules and make some policy instruments more legitimate than others increases with the ability to control information and knowledge. The control of information and knowledge can bolster the influence of a public organization over regulations that stabilize a particular governance system, and over policy instruments (e.g., evaluation tools and mechanisms). For instance, the influence of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the authority of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) result from their high-level scientific knowledge and sophisticated projection models, which give them the capacity to shape international regulations.

#### **I.4. Policy transfer as a result of policy entrepreneurship**

The literature on policy transfer provides a valuable analytical framework for the analysis of activities through which international bureaucracies facilitate the circulation of policy ideas among international organizations.

Studies on policy transfer usually concentrate on actors, configurations, and processes through which policy priorities and instruments, organizational standards, and institutional patterns can be transferred from one context (e.g., a specific period of time, a country, a sector, an organizational field, a level of government, a political setting, a scientific discipline) to (an)other(s). The policy transfer literature examines various processes such as policy diffusion, copying, imitation, learning, convergence, transplantation and adaptation (Evans and Davies 1999; Stone 1999; Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; De Jong, Lalenis and Mamadouh 2008; Delpeuch 2009). It also deals with a variety of research objects: ideas, values, shared norms and interpretations, ideologies, policy frames, policy goals and objectives, information, knowledge, expertise, scientific paradigms, social representations, schemata,

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17. The mandate of international organizations is to contribute to the political recognition of “common goods,” help governments to identify and agree on collective policy goals and priorities, and support the development of policy rules and instruments to help implement international agreements. Of course, international organizations have more limited chance of fulfilling their mandate when OECD governments decide to restrict their “voluntary contributions” to the multilateral system and to support other mechanisms for development (e.g., bilateral strategies and innovative funds), or when non-state actors develop private self-regulation systems and networks.

18. Non-state actors (such as international NGOs, think tanks, philanthropic foundations and companies) have become key development operators in the last twenty years. They provide technical expertise, publicize their own policy ideas, disseminate norms and values regarding policy problems, and therefore have an increasing capacity to influence national public agendas in the field of development.

and meanings, as well as management rules, policy instruments, decision-making, monitoring and evaluation procedures, and institutional practices, roles, and routines.<sup>19</sup>

The policy transfer approach may generate various analytical models that should not be confused. For example, “policy diffusion” and “convergence” perspectives lay the emphasis on cross-national processes through which policy goals, procedures, and instruments can be conveyed beyond national borders (McAdam and Rush 1993; Radaelli 2000). New institutionalist studies concentrate on transfer processes by focusing on organizational processes that ensure the dominance of some institutional models (values, policy-oriented beliefs, routines, standard procedures, roles and patterns of behavior, among others) and may result in “isomorphic processes” among organizations (Powell and DiMaggio 1983; Meyer and Scott 1992; Scott and Christensen 1995).

In contrast, other approaches examine the transfer of norms and ideas through interests, rational behaviors, and power distribution among actors involved in public organizations and policy networks (Mintrom 1997; Finnemore and Sicking 1998; Ladi 2000; Dezalay and Garth 2002; Acharya 2004). They may thus concentrate on “lesson drawing,” “policy learning,” and “norm localization.” For example, they may look into the role of experts who seek, *within* organizations, to disseminate management rules that may appear more efficient or more legitimate (e.g., task teams in charge of management reforms, departments of human resources and internal oversight services). They may also pay attention to transactional actors positioned *at the crossroads* of different settings (e.g. organizations, policy fields, countries and international regimes), whether they are individuals (e.g., diplomats, international experts, consultants or officers working in national inter-ministerial bodies), or organizational units (e.g., regulatory agencies, international secretariats and think tanks).

Drawing on the latter approach, the second section of this paper explores the activities by which the UNAIDS Secretariat has become involved in brokering policy ideas within the UN system. Many terms might describe what the Secretariat is doing in accordance with its mandate: facilitating, brokering, liaising, networking, coordinating, intermediating, conveying ideas, building bridges, disseminating, diffusing, relaying, integrating, merging and mainstreaming. Each term refers to a specific type of work, but they all relate to two broad sets of activities: firstly, establishing agreements among policy actors driven by self-interest (interest brokering); and secondly, shaping common understandings and shared perceptions regarding policy issues (idea brokering).<sup>20</sup> These two sets of activities rely on the ability to bring various actors together, strengthen cooperation and partnership, circulate strategic information, and help develop acceptable solutions for setting up institutional rules and matching policy priorities.

Following the policy transfer analytical approach, I argue that the UNAIDS Secretariat has been acting as a “policy entrepreneur” within the UN system. In the literature on public policy, this term refers to any individual or unit who develops the capacity to convey, introduce, and implement innovative ideas into public organizations or into a public policy network (Kingdon 1984; Roberts and King 1991; Weissert 1991; McCown 2005). It can therefore be associated with the notion of “knowledge broker” or “idea broker.” In the following discussion, I argue that the UNAIDS Secretariat, while originally dedicated to providing technical assistance to members of UNAIDS, has moved beyond its official mandate and played a critical role in the dissemination of policy ideas within the UN system.

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19. For instance, C. Bennett (1991) has identified five dimensions of convergence processes: objectives, substance, instruments, policy outcomes, and policy style. P. Hassenteufel (2005) proposes adding two dimensions to this list: the recipients and the main actors of public policies.

20. “Policy brokers” may be active with respect to both interests and ideas: on the one hand, they are active in building solutions of compromise bringing together groups and organizations who do not naturally seek to cooperate (even if they are expected to do so); on the other hand, they may also work to ensure a policy dialogue and circulation of ideas and knowledge that can contribute to building a common understanding of the situation (Nay and Smith 2002).

## II. BRIDGING IDEAS: THE CATALYTIC ROLE OF THE UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

This section focuses on the contribution of the UNAIDS Secretariat to the collection, integration, and dissemination of policy-relevant information and knowledge likely to be of use to the UNAIDS Programme. The Secretariat has been collecting and making available data and qualitative information that informs the UN programmes on HIV and AIDS. Moreover, it has actively contributed to redesigning the UNAIDS strategic framework by encouraging the Cosponsors to align their goals and priorities. Although it has no mandate for policy development, the Secretariat has also supported some emerging policy ideas so as to add them to the UN response to AIDS.

### II.1 The Secretariat: from coordination to policy development

Like any small-size coordination body set up to support an international programme, the UNAIDS Secretariat has never had the political legitimacy, technical expertise, or financial capacity<sup>21</sup> to build leadership on policy development in the field of HIV/AIDS. As an interagency structure, it is required to support the multilateral response led by UN organizations. It is mandated to assist the ten Cosponsors in their effort to share knowledge, coordinate their action, and identify policy priorities to be combined in the UNAIDS Programme. According to its mandate, the Secretariat's mission is to act as a facilitator whose main task is to help the Cosponsors in the development of a comprehensive and integrated UN response to AIDS. In a nutshell, it is required to support the Cosponsors, not to replace them. In this context, the Cosponsors do not hesitate to raise the flag and to defend their jurisdiction when they feel that the Secretariat is exceeding its mandate. They make sure that they keep control in policy areas under their responsibility, and protest each time they feel that another organization is infringing on their sector of intervention.

During the first years of the UNAIDS Programme, the Secretariat kept a low profile as a coordination body. Its staff was dedicated first and foremost to providing technical support for the meetings of the UNAIDS executive board and of UN organizations' executive directors. At the top-management level, it created the practical conditions for a policy dialogue between executive directors of UN organizations on the various aspects of the global response to the epidemic. But at a technical level, its activity hardly provided any opportunity to induce Cosponsors to build joint activities.<sup>22</sup> Not only did the Secretariat have few financial and human resources to fulfill this task, but it also had to deal with the weak commitment of Cosponsors' executive teams before the early 2000s. To a great extent, the Secretariat's reporting activities were restricted to collecting information on each Cosponsor's programme and formalizing a workplan and some policy documents (resolutions, guidance notes and reports) presented after the fact as a "Joint UN Programme." The Secretariat's capacity to encourage the Cosponsors to develop technical partnerships, establish constraining management rules, match Cosponsors' policy objectives, or flag new HIV/AIDS-related policy issues, remained exceptionally low.

Despite a limited budget and a mandate that initially did not include any programmatic responsibilities, the UNAIDS Secretariat has incrementally broadened its activities over the years,

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21. The UNAIDS Unified Budget and Workplan (UBW) is estimated at US\$469 million for the biennium 2008-2009, of which US\$182 million is pledged for the functioning of the Secretariat and US\$147 million for inter-institutional activities (some of which may be used by the Secretariat). The remaining funds are secured to support activities of the Cosponsors (US\$135 million) and emergencies (US\$5 million). 74 percent of the UBW targets country- and regional-level activities, while 26 percent is dedicated to global activities.

22. With an exception for the field of education and HIV/AIDS.

particularly since the mid-2000s. Two sets of factors have played a part in the gradual growth of the Secretariat's authority within the UNAIDS system.

For one part, growing pressure from the "principals" of UNAIDS – including donor States such as the United Kingdom, Canada or the Scandinavian states – in the global AIDS response has provided important symbolic resources for the Secretariat in its attempts to encourage the Cosponsors to move towards a more integrated UNAIDS Workplan. In 2000, the inclusion of the fight against HIV/AIDS in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and subsequently, the UN General Assembly's commitment to engage a massive response to the epidemic (United Nations 2001), gave greater responsibility to the UNAIDS Programme at the global level, and therefore greater legitimacy to the Secretariat in charge of its coordination. During 2003-2005, in the context of global high-level meetings on aid effectiveness,<sup>23</sup> the criticisms expressed by some governments of OECD countries about the deficit of multilateral coordination and the low policy results of the UN in the fight against AIDS weakened the credit of the entire UNAIDS system, which has been under scrutiny ever since<sup>24</sup>. But at the same time, these criticisms gave the Secretariat increased authority to engage the Cosponsors in a series of organizational reforms, especially since the UN as a whole is committed to carrying out "system-wide reform"<sup>25</sup> (United Nations 2005, 2006a and 2006b).

Additionally, greater participation of the Secretariat in the policy development of the UNAIDS Programme also results from internal activities, including the choice of its executive team to expand intellectual activities in the early 2000s. Since the start of the Programme, part of the mission assigned to the Secretariat has been to bring together Cosponsors and build interagency partnerships, with the aim of encouraging a policy dialogue on AIDS. The Secretariat has thus been collecting factual data, significant ideas, and contributions from various stakeholders. It has published an annual report and a series of case studies assessing the relevance and impact of global, regional, and country-led responses to the epidemic. By focusing and communicating on the trends of the epidemic, on country-led policy implementation, as well as on global governance issues, it has contributed to the flow of information and knowledge that may come to be incorporated incrementally into the UNAIDS Programme.<sup>26</sup> In these processes, the Secretariat's experts have a comparative advantage associated with their position within the UNAIDS architecture. They serve as liaison officers and act as gatekeepers. They play a crucial role in information dissemination within UNAIDS, since they are in charge of the preparation and finalization of all the documents submitted to the governing board and/or released under UNAIDS auspices. They are at the heart of organizational routines and procedures. They also control the "backstage information" with which most actors develop their expectations and strategies. This capacity to collect, combine, and circulate information and requests among UNAIDS partners is key, since they can filter the various inputs coming from Cosponsors, Member States, and CSOs. Under the cover of coordinating and combining Cosponsors' strategies, the Secretariat's experts can shape some policy options of the UNAIDS Programme by introducing inputs into substantive discussions at all levels.

The involvement of the UNAIDS Secretariat in the transfer of policy ideas on AIDS suggests that international secretariat cannot be conceived only as agents dependent on their mandate and on their

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23. See the Monterrey Conference (2002), the Rome Forum on Harmonization (2003), the Marrakech Round Table on Results-Based Management (2004) and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD-DAC 2005).

24. Cosponsors have been encouraged to pool resources, undertake joint programming, establish common databases and knowledge networks, coordinate their efforts in the provision of technical support, improve management procedures, evaluate their results on a regular basis, and align their programmes to governmental development plans (UNAIDS 2005b and 2007).

25. UN system-wide reform is spearheaded by the UN Development Group (UNDG), established in 1997.

26. This activity goes along with the capacity to address some issues that may be controversial and therefore undermined by the Member States (e.g., gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, or stigmatized groups).

executive board's decisions, but are also learning institutions that can gain in autonomy and authority by taking part in the collection and dissemination of information and knowledge regarding policy development. The following discussion explores three different aspects of these activities.

## **II.2 Collecting global data and disseminating information about field-based experiences**

Over time, the Secretariat has developed a research capacity and built expert knowledge about trends in the epidemic. Although it does not have the capacity to perform in-depth research, it has succeeded in establishing an effective system for collecting, compiling, analyzing, and updating information on HIV/AIDS. It has pulled together numerous data collections and much policy-relevant knowledge from civil society, universities, private research institutes, national statistics institutes, other international organizations, and the private sector. It has thus acquired greater influence on two levels: socio-demographic and economic projections on the evolution of the epidemic worldwide, and qualitative analysis of key policy results drawn from national programmes and grass-roots projects on with prevention, treatment, care, and support. The Secretariat has one of the most sophisticated data banks on the epidemic, and its annual report on the global AIDS epidemic, released on World AIDS Day (December 1), provides data and projections that are used by most actors and stakeholders working on AIDS.<sup>27</sup> It also publishes various reports, policy guidelines, abstracts, and documents, mostly in partnership with other organizations (other international organizations, bilateral aid agencies, international NGOs, universities, think tanks, foundations, CSOs, and the private sector). These publications usually include the results of qualitative and quantitative surveys (e.g., "best practices collection"), or present the state of knowledge about the epidemic.

Through these activities, the Secretariat accumulates policy inputs emerging from experiences and actors in the field, with the goal of building up a body of evidence-based, innovative knowledge to serve as general guidance for all stakeholders, including the Cosponsors. It thus contributes to the spread of information about successful country-led programmes. Of course, each of the UN agencies contributes in its own field of expertise (e.g., UNICEF on orphans and vulnerable children, WHO on ART, UNFPA on condom programming, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on injecting drug users, UNESCO on HIV prevention education). They consolidate data and disseminate innovative ideas from their own constituencies, including some that may be controversial. The ILO has played a major role in the mobilization of the trade unions and professional associations against AIDS. UNICEF has developed gender-sensitive approaches to prevention and treatment. UNHCR has brought up the issue of HIV prevention in refugee and internally displaced persons' camps.

However, the Secretariat has made this catalyst role the core of its research activities. Firstly, it has been active in developing partnerships with AIDS activists' organizations, networks of people living with HIV, community leaders, and associations representing vulnerable populations, as well as many other CSOs that are pressing on the UN system to develop innovative responses to HIV/AIDS. The incorporation of CSO inputs has contributed to the dissemination of new ideas now integrated into the UNAIDS Programme, such as the issue of HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination and the need for more inclusiveness of key populations in grass-roots programmes. Secondly, the Secretariat does not face the same institutional regulations as the Cosponsors. It has to report to a small-size

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27. Nevertheless, the UNAIDS Secretariat's estimations of the number of people living with HIV (PLWH) worldwide recently became controversial, as it was reduced from nearly 40 million to 33 million. Criticism was raised about the tendency of UN-AIDS to overestimate the spread of the epidemic which contributes to dramatizing the situation.



executive board<sup>28</sup> whose policy agenda concentrates on AIDS, whereas most of the Cosponsors have to bring on board various “in-house” sectors and departments, and their executive boards and plenary assemblies are usually involved in longer and more complex endorsement procedures. In this context, the Secretariat can react more quickly to emerging inputs on AIDS and therefore be able to play a proactive role within UNAIDS.

The expert knowledge assembled by the Secretariat might fuel reluctance of some Cosponsors to support documents published under the auspices of UNAIDS rather than under their own flag, as many Secretariat’s case studies and data collections are done in policy fields covered by the mandate of some Cosponsors. To avoid tensions with Cosponsors, the Secretariat experts have always ensured that UNAIDS documents are jointly published when they fall under the mandate of a UN agency.<sup>29</sup> Many information and guidance materials have thus been presented as a result of “interagency activities.”<sup>30</sup> In general, due to its fragile institutional legitimacy compared to well established UN agencies or national institutions working on AIDS, the Secretariat has always considered establishing intellectual coalitions that could help reach consensus on policy results among a large number of partners as its favored option. Hence, it took advantage from the establishment of “UNAIDS Reference Groups”<sup>31</sup> bringing together actors from various horizons (UN specialists, academics, experts from national research institutes, foundations, NGOs and governmental organizations) in order to build its legitimacy as a brokering institution.

### **II.3. Matching policy goals and harmonizing UN strategies**

Another aspect of the Secretariat’s contribution to policy development is its participation in the promotion of a multi-dimensional policy approach to the epidemic. This issue provides a good example of the Secretariat’s influence on the elaboration of the UNAIDS Programme.<sup>32</sup> In the early 2000s, the Secretariat’s experts started promoting the need for the identification of cross-cutting policy goals. This argument relied on evidence-based observations: scattered and sectoral projects on AIDS usually lead to ineffective and costly solutions for both national authorities and development partners. In contrast, comprehensive and coordinated programmes that articulate the various aspects of the response to the epidemic (epidemiological, medical, economic, financial, political, social, and cultural) are likely to lead to more coherent and more effective national AIDS programmes. The Secretariat therefore supported the idea that prevention, care, support, and treatment are mutually reinforcing elements of an effective policy and should be integrated at all levels, from community-based projects to international policies.

For several years the Secretariat promoted, within UNAIDS and to various governments and stakeholders, the urgent need for a multi-dimensional approach that would overcome the distinction between strategies focusing on access to treatment on the one hand and those targeting prevention, care, and support programme activities on the other hand. It regularly had to dispute the Cosponsors’

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28. The UNAIDS executive board comprises 22 Member States only.

29. Co-publications have the advantages of ensuring all stakeholders’ support. They lower the financial cost for each organization and increase the chance of a wide diffusion throughout various policy networks and knowledge communities.

30. See for instance the publication of annual epidemic updates, which has been one of the first intellectual collaborations within UNAIDS, bringing together epidemiologists and statisticians from both WHO and the Secretariat. They engaged in a permanent collaboration resulting in the annual publication of joint global estimates and projections on HIV prevalence.

31. They have been established to provide high-level technical expertise to UNAIDS (on estimates, modeling and projections), and to help the Programme to build a multidimensional response (on HIV prevention, or on HIV and human rights).

32. The objective of a multi-sectoral response was first suggested by the UNAIDS PCB in 1995 (UNAIDS/PCB(2)/95.7), without much impact on the Cosponsors’ programmes. The UNGASS Declaration of commitment reiterated this objective in 2001.

inclination to launch separate initiatives and to uphold specific priorities that were liable to be disconnected: WHO on treatment access, UNICEF on childhood and maternity, UNESCO on formal education, UNFPA on prevention among key populations, WFP on nutrition programmes, UNODC on drug use, prisoners, and trafficking, among others. While the Cosponsors concentrated on technical support for policy sectors covered by their mandates, the Secretariat engaged in an important normative activity by encouraging the incorporation of Cosponsors' sectoral initiatives into an overall UNAIDS strategic framework, with the goal of focusing on policy harmonization. For instance, between 2003 and 2005 the Secretariat made efforts to bring back the WHO initiative on treatment access<sup>33</sup> into the UNAIDS Programme, relying on the support of some Cosponsors. This initiative was a major challenge for UNAIDS: driven by WHO without prior consultation within the UN, it sparked criticism and tension among Cosponsors. During the winter of 2004-2005, efforts undertaken at the top level of organizations contributed to the integration of the initiative into the agenda of the UNAIDS Programme.

Since the mid-2000s the Secretariat has concentrated its efforts on the need for harmonizing Cosponsors' strategies for HIV prevention. This is clearly a multi-sectoral issue embracing a diversity of activities (from communication and education plans to health and social services). For several years no overall coherence was established in the UNAIDS Programme, which was marked by a dispersal of activity. Starting in 2003, the Secretariat organized technical consultations, with the aim of pushing Cosponsors to conceive common priorities for HIV prevention. In 2005 it published a policy position paper ("Intensifying HIV Prevention"), followed in 2006 by an action scheme presenting policy guidelines, expected results, and operational strategies. The proactive role of the Secretariat on this aspect of HIV response resulted in the recognition of its jurisdiction on the "overall policy, monitoring, and coordination on prevention" in the official UNAIDS Division of Labour adopted in 2005 to avoid competition among UN organizations (UNAIDS 2005a).

A few months later, strengthened by the recommendations made by a "Global Task Team" comprising leaders from major donor countries, countries from the developing world, CSOs, UN organizations, and other international institutions (UNAIDS 2005b), the Secretariat invited Cosponsors to participate in the design of common objectives and strategies for multilateral action. In accordance with the commitments made by the G8 governments at the 2005 Gleneagles Summit and, subsequently, by heads of state and governments at the 2005 UN World Summit in New York city, the Secretariat, along with its partners, sought to build a policy framework called "Towards Universal Access." A series of regional consultations was convened by the Secretariat in order to define priorities to be addressed by all international and national stakeholders. The Secretariat also organized sessions within UNAIDS to remodel the Joint UN Programme, in order to align the Cosponsors' strategies on consensual cross-cutting objectives. This consultation process led to the definition of 16 "Principal Results" and 49 "Key Results," which were used as the basis for implementing new results-based management procedures. By the end, the entire internal management of UNAIDS had been modified. The Secretariat no longer develops the UNAIDS Programme as a compiling of the Cosponsors' sectoral plans; now it is the Cosponsors' responsibility to prove their capacity to align their own AIDS strategies with the UNAIDS Programme.

#### **II.4. Importing emerging ideas and filling the policy gaps**

In accordance with its mandate the Secretariat is not tasked with developing programme activities. Its task is to assist Cosponsors in their efforts to scale up the global response to AIDS. Moreover, each

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33. The "3 by 5" initiative was a global target set by WHO to provide three million people living with HIV/AIDS in developing countries with life-prolonging antiretroviral treatment (ART) by the end of 2005. It was a step towards the goal of making HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment accessible to all who need them, as a human right.

Cosponsor is fully responsible for acting as the lead agency in the area(s) that relate(s) to its mandate (UNHCR focusing on refugees and internally displaced persons, WHO dealing with ART delivery, UNICEF with children and mother-to-child transmission, WFP with AIDS and malnutrition, UNESCO with HIV prevention in educational settings, among others). However, the Secretariat has demonstrated the capacity to introduce and convey general policy ideas in UNAIDS that have been proved to be critical in response to HIV. Not only do its experts work under the pressure of activists' organizations, international NGOs, funding agencies, and the media, who call for innovative, responsive, large-scale action on the epidemic, but they are also mandated by the UNAIDS executive board to help the Cosponsors elaborate a UN programme that includes all critical aspects of the response.

In the last decade the Secretariat's experts participated in policy development. They have mobilized emerging policy ideas liable to improve the quality of the response to the epidemic, and assembled ideas not properly addressed by governments or international organizations. In particular, they have raised neglected policy issues that do not clearly fall under the mandate of the Cosponsors or that are considered politically sensitive. It has therefore developed some new "programmatic niches" for which it has become an important UN player.

The campaign on women and AIDS is a significant example. In the early 2000s, more and more evidence appeared on the particular vulnerability of young women and girls to the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>34</sup> As no UNAIDS Cosponsor has a specific mandate for the protection and promotion of women's rights, the Secretariat raised the question by publishing and disseminating information on women and AIDS, participating in media campaigns, and helping to build networks of women's organizations. Its senior staff (including the deputy executive director of UNAIDS) played a key role in the launch of the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (GCWA), which has been actively involved in international advocacy campaigns.

Early on, the Secretariat experts also took the initiative to support the need to deal with the epidemic in the context of security, personnel in uniform, and emergency settings. This policy issue was addressed for the first time in January 2000, when the UN Security Council held a meeting on the potential impact of AIDS on peace and security. An increasing concern emerged with the high rates of prevalence observed among soldiers, policemen, security forces, and military observers, including UN peacekeeping troops. The results of various investigations suggested that the spread of HIV among police and military troops might increase the risks related to peace and security in certain regions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In the early 2000s, the Secretariat initiated a discussion within UNAIDS, as none of the Cosponsors had a mandate in the field of security and personnel in uniform. Although another UN interagency mechanism set up by the Secretariat General<sup>35</sup> in New York had also responded to this issue, the Secretariat continued to collect data. It was then recognized as a "Lead Organization" in the official Division of Labour, which describes the tasks of UNAIDS partners in specialized areas of technical support. A resolution adopted by the UNAIDS executive board in 2006 illustrates the commitment of the Secretariat on this particular issue.

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34. Many studies show that women are more vulnerable than men to HIV, for social and biological reasons. They face social discrimination that increases the risk factors of HIV transmission: unequal access to education, lack of access to social and health care services, economic dependency, lack of individual rights, gender inequalities, early marriage and sexual abuse, among others. When infected or affected by the virus, they face deeper discrimination associated with the disease: social stigmatization, dropping out of the school system, repudiation, loss of property and inheritance rights, loss of economic resources, to mention only a few of the issues. Moreover, being less well-informed, they may spread the virus to their children during pregnancy, childbirth or breast-feeding. Women are thus a key population whose specific needs should be fully integrated into national AIDS programmes to scale up prevention and treatment and mitigate the social impact of the epidemic.

35. Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

The Secretariat experts have also actively participated in the incorporation of “cross-cutting” policy issues in the UNAIDS Programme, which have been insufficiently tackled by Cosponsors even though they have been proved to be essential to successful response to the epidemic. For instance, the Secretariat took an active part within UNAIDS in policy development with respect to the need to incorporate HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination as a core element of national programmes. In this specific area, it published guidance notes showing that stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV and other affected persons<sup>36</sup> are major obstacles to the success of prevention, care, and support programmes, as well as to country-led efforts for scaling up treatment access. The Secretariat has also advocated among UNAIDS partners for incorporating new approaches grounded in human rights into the UN response. For instance, in the late 1990s the issue of gender equality was promoted by the vast majority of the scientific community and by international NGOs as a key component of national AIDS programmes.<sup>37</sup> The Secretariat, along with experts from some Cosponsors (such as UNICEF, UNFPA, and UNESCO), has strongly advocated for “mainstreaming” this policy issue in all UN programmes on AIDS.

The Secretariat has also significantly contributed to importing and disseminating within the UN system UNAIDS ideas promoted by non-state actors who actively participate in global AIDS policy forums and networks. Through its Office of partnerships and external relations, it has been involved in various advocacy campaigns involving international, regional and national NGOs/CSOs.<sup>38</sup> It has also established partnerships with such organizations to co-edit technical materials. And its activity as a publication editor has been influenced by the lobbying activity of the NGOs/civil society delegates of the UNAIDS executive board. The importation of ideas by the Secretariat is motivated by two main reasons. Firstly, it is in line with the ECOSOC mandate, which enjoined the Programme to “promote global consensus on policy and programmatic approaches” and to “promote broad-based political and social mobilization to prevent and respond to HIV/AIDS within countries.” Therefore the Secretariat has had complete legitimacy to support partnership initiatives aiming at bringing activist, faith-based, community and non-governmental organizations together with UN agencies, with a view to set global priorities and objectives. Secondly, the Secretariat’s normative activity also results from its lack of resources compared to most of the Cosponsors. As a weak institution within UNAIDS, with no right to develop technical assistance capacities, it has always had an interest in building advocacy partnerships with global AIDS coalitions, non-state actors (including the medias and the private sector), and Cosponsors.

The Secretariat has contributed to the dissemination of sensitive issues mishandled by some governments, for inappropriate reasons<sup>39</sup> that were – and still are – strong barriers to an effective response. For instance, in the early 2000s the Secretariat transmitted the call by CSOs to combat the “AIDS denial” on the part of many governments who were underestimating the course of the epidemic or the vulnerability of their country to HIV. It has built some advocacy partnerships (with NGOs, celebrities, and special representatives), supported social movements, and participated in media campaigns drawing attention to the need for strong political leadership on AIDS. It has also supported the idea of developing culturally appropriate and evidence-informed programmes to address sensitive issues in countries where these have not been appropriately addressed, such as sexual and reproductive

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36. Such as HIV-negative persons, who are vulnerable due to the economic and social impact of the epidemic.

37. Inequality between men and women in many countries remains a major obstacle to the implementation of prevention strategies. It also keeps women away from treatment campaigns. It has devastating social and economic consequences for their lives if they (or their relatives) become HIV-positive.

38. See for instance, the Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+), the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO), the International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International AIDS Society, the Society for Women against AIDS in Africa (SWAA), or The AIDS Support Organization (TASO) in Uganda.

39. These reasons may be political, electoral, moral, religious and cultural, or essentially financial.

health, age-based sex education, the use of drugs, and the spread of HIV in prisons and among security and military forces.

Another aspect of the response supported by the Secretariat has been the development of inclusive programmes on AIDS that encourage youth participation, the role of CSOs and communities, and the greater involvement of local populations, including people living with HIV. From the start of the UNAIDS Programme, Secretariat experts have collected key information about vulnerable populations. They have insisted on the need to both target and include these “key populations”<sup>40</sup> as priority groups in the response to the epidemic, by promoting their full involvement in the development of national AIDS programmes as well as in the implementation of field-based activities (planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation). Policy orientations addressing key populations are not limited to supporting the three most at-risk groups – sex workers, injecting drug users, and men who have sex with men.<sup>41</sup> They address the critical need for providing support to women and young persons (who are victims of gender-based inequalities, discrimination and violence, social exclusion and unemployment), vulnerable children (especially orphans and children whose life is affected by sick relatives), as well as a wide variety of communities, social units, and statistical groups whose specific situation, needs, and roles ought to be fully addressed in AIDS programmes.<sup>42</sup>

The Secretariat has put particular emphasis on passing on the calls by northern CSOs for “greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS”<sup>43</sup> (known as “GIPA”) in AIDS programmes. The GIPA principle is key to fighting the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV in many regions of the world, such as sub-Saharan Africa, Russia, central Asia, and the Caribbean. Its objectives are twofold. They are ethical, ensuring that HIV-positive persons have the same rights as HIV-negative persons, and they are efficiency-oriented, encouraging the incorporation of the views of persons who are the AIDS programmes’ main recipients.<sup>44</sup> The Secretariat has become involved as a policy broker between transnational CSOs and NGOs (the main “advocates” of GIPA), governments of the South (many of them reluctant to support HIV-positive persons, and above all to establish “inclusive” AIDS policies), and Cosponsors (to encourage them to promote the GIPA principle in their individual programmes). Pursuing this objective, the Secretariat has published technical materials on GIPA. It has supported coalitions and networks of people living with HIV to be present at global and regional levels, such as the GNP+ and the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW).

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40. Key populations are those whose vulnerability to HIV infection is increased by social and economic factors, including stigma and discrimination, poverty and lack of access to education, health, and other services. The expression emphasizes the positive role of these groups, particularly on their critical participation in AIDS programmes and field-based activities, not only as beneficiaries but also as conveyors of prevention messages and care activities to individuals and groups affected by the epidemic.

41. Sex workers, injecting drug users, and male homosexuals suffer from stigma and discrimination – and are sometimes criminalized – in many countries, not only because of their social marginalization and moral judgments on their way of life, but also because of substantial HIV prevalence rates and specific risk factors in these populations. Their needs have to be properly addressed at an early stage in policy response, before the virus spreads into the general population (Pisani 2009). Grass-roots studies demonstrate that their inclusion in AIDS policies increases the efficiency of prevention, care, and treatment programmes.

42. Depending on the national or regional context, these groups may also include migrants, transient workers, refugees and displaced persons, indigenous people, rural communities, prisoners, personnel in uniform, sex workers’ clients, street children, and child soldiers.

43. The GIPA Principle was put on the international agenda in 1994 during the Paris AIDS Summit (when 42 States agreed to “support a greater involvement of people living with HIV at all levels”). It was reiterated in 2001 in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, adopted by 189 UN member countries.

44. The involvement of HIV-positive persons in field-based projects is key since they can play a critical role as social workers, role models, and advocates to raise awareness among affected persons who are not easily reached because of self-stigmatization, social exclusion, and poverty.

The Secretariat has therefore contributed to two shifts in policy development within UNAIDS, that all the Cosponsors have had to incorporate into their own AIDS plan in recent years. The first shift is the development of a comprehensive and multidimensional approach that connects and merges the many aspects of the response to the epidemic. This change required going beyond organizational boundaries within UNAIDS and breaking down the resistance of Cosponsors keen to preserve their activities from external coordination and control. The second shift is the inclusion of new policy areas and cross-cutting issues that can help complement and/or improve the AIDS strategies of Cosponsors. In the last ten years most Cosponsors have enclosed critical issues in their own plan, such as the fight against political denial, GIPA, the questions of human rights and gender discrimination, and the requirement to address the specific needs of vulnerable and marginalized populations. Hence, the Secretariat has contributed to move the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness' agenda (2005) forward by supporting the process of harmonization of UN programmes on AIDS, with the support of donor countries.

## CONCLUSIONS

The empirical findings of this paper lead to five main conclusions about policy transfer and bureaucratic influence within the UN system.

First, the analysis suggests that some administrative bodies *within* the multilateral system may gain autonomy and authority through building up a cognitive influence over other organizations. In the UNAIDS case, the increasing capacity of the Secretariat to facilitate the dissemination of critical ideas on the epidemic and to develop policy guidance to be incorporated in other UN agencies' AIDS programmes, went with an extension of its influence within the multilateral system. This empirical case provides insights for understanding the relationship between bureaucratic authority on the one hand, and the capacity to collect, build and spread policy-oriented information and expert knowledge on the other hand.

Second, the analysis draws attention to the interdependency of ideas, institutions, and interest. It shows that policy transfer is associated with the activity of policy entrepreneurs who mobilize resources and develop proactive strategies to expand their influence in their environment. Such an approach to policy transfer encourages taking into account the rationality of top-level managers within bureaucratic organizations, even though this rationality is bounded and may be confined by institutional norms. It encourages paying greater attention to actors within the administration, power distribution, interests, expectations, anticipations, opportunities and strategies in order to explain the relationship between the spread of ideas and bureaucratic expansion. It complements holistic approaches to policy transfer, such as the new institutionalist approach to organizations – which builds on the premise that organizations frequently “import” ideas, objectives, rules, procedures, and routines present in their environment, but hardly explains *how* this may occur – and the diffusionist approach – which concentrates on macro-level imitation and adaptation processes, but does not pay much attention to the micro- and meso-levels. The analysis of UNAIDS shows that the Secretariat's participation in circulating emerging policy options within the Programme and promoting new policy standards among Cosponsors have contributed to consolidate its institutional position within the UN.

Third, the analysis of entrepreneurial activities should not lead to a “heroic” picture of transfer entrepreneurs. In the UNAIDS case, the Secretariat is far from being the only policy platform through which new policy developments on AIDS have arisen within the UN. Depending on their mandate, some Cosponsors provided early support for innovative ideas and strategies, and have thus played a

catalytic role in their field of expertise (e.g., UNFPA, UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNHCR in the fight against gender discrimination as a way to help prevent the epidemic and mitigate its social and economic impact; UNICEF and WHO on mother-to-child transmission; UNFPA on condom programming and prevention among out-of-school youth; WHO and UNESCO on treatment education; and ILO on the involvement of unions and companies in advocacy coalitions). In other words, the Secretariat is far from spearheading the development of the UNAIDS Programme. Furthermore, compared to the Cosponsors, the resources of the Secretariat within UNAIDS are limited. It has a small budget and limited staff. Its mandate is restricted to support Cosponsors, which means that it cannot legally intervene as an autonomous body within the Programme. It has no capacity to intrude on Cosponsors' mandates and it does not directly support national administrations and other stakeholders with funding or technical support. Its activity is restricted to ensuring smooth interagency coordination, disseminating strategic information on the epidemic and policy responses, and engaging with CSOs and the media in advocacy efforts. By contrast, the World Bank can provide funds (loans, credits, grants) and technical assistance to the governments of developing countries to help design national AIDS programmes; WHO provides technical expertise on HIV treatment; UNICEF and WFP lead country-led operational activities targeting vulnerable populations; UNDP coordinates UN assistance for development in countries.

Fourth, policy transfer among international institutions is a process driven by both coercion and opportunity. In the UNAIDS case, there has been a considerable pressure on the UN system from donor governments contributing to its budget, in addition to the pressure emanating from activists' networks and NGOs. Expectations for better coordination, efficiency, and accountability of the UNAIDS Programme have never been so high, especially since 2005. For the Secretariat, such a pressure has been experienced as a policy window to consolidate its institutional position. As a weak actor in the UNAIDS system, it has had a strong interest in promoting organizational reform and policy development, to expand its role as a facilitator. In sum, the top management of the Secretariat has swiftly incorporated the external pressure for reform emanating from donors in its self-expansion strategy.

Finally, the activity of transfer entrepreneurs within bureaucracies may result in a slow bureaucratization: increase in the number of staff, recruitment of experts, development of new policy niches, and increasing participation in official partnerships and decision-making bodies inside and outside the UN (Nay 2009). The Secretariat has a stronger country presence. Their staffs often stand in on behalf of the Cosponsors, but at the same time they also represent the UNAIDS Programme as an integrated UN entity and contribute to pushing its agenda forward. Thus the Secretariat is not only an "interorganizational intermediary," a "liaison administration," a "platform," and a "policy facilitator" through which the Cosponsors interact; but it is also slowly shifting to a more structured organization, with increasing roles and wider responsibilities.

## METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

This paper is part of a broader research agenda on UN organizations which focuses primarily on the UNAIDS Programme as an empirical field. It complements a previous paper published in *Question in Research* (Nay 2009). The content of this paper is based on personal empirical research; therefore it does not represent the views of any organization to which the author has been affiliated.

The research is based on direct observation made by the author while he was working as a special advisor of the UNESCO Global coordinator on HIV and AIDS (2003-2007) and participated in various decision-making mechanisms bringing together the UNAIDS cosponsoring organizations. The observation was consolidated by several semi-directed interviews carried out with former and current UN staff members; a systematic review of technical documents; and participation as an “observer” to several UNAIDS executive boards (2008-2009).

For reasons associated with confidentiality obligations, the author does not quote or mention individuals, both UN professionals working with/within UNAIDS and interviewed persons. This confidentiality does not mean that the role of individual actors should be underestimated in bureaucratic processes within UNAIDS. When the paper refers to the Secretariat as a “transfer entrepreneur,” it refers to the most influential Secretariat’s agents who participate in policy development and dissemination of knowledge and information about the epidemic (executive head, team leaders, and high-profile technical staff).



## ACRONYMS

AIDS: Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

ART: Antiretroviral treatment

CCO: UNAIDS Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations <sup>45</sup>

Cosponsors: UNAIDS Cosponsoring Organizations (UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO, World Bank)

CSOs: Civil society organizations

EU: European Union

GCWA: Global Coalition on Women and AIDS

GIPA: Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV and AIDS

GTT: Global Task Team

HIV: Human immunodeficiency virus

IFIs: International financial institutions

ILO: International Labour Organization

IMF: International Monetary Fund

MDGs: Millennium Development Goals

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

PCB: UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board<sup>46</sup>

UBW: Unified Budget and Workplan

UN: United Nations

UNAIDS: Joint UN Programme on HIV and AIDS

UNDG: UN Development Group

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNGASS: United Nations General Assembly

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

WFP: World Food Programme

WHO: World Health Organization

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45. The CCO serves as a forum for the Cosponsors to meet on a regular basis as a standing committee, to consider matters of major importance to UNAIDS, and to provide input from the Cosponsoring organizations into the policies and strategies of UNAIDS.

46. It is the executive board of UNAIDS, with representatives of 22 governments, the 10 Cosponsors, and 5 representatives of NGOs, including associations of PLWH.

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