



Lessons in Multilateral Effectiveness

**Is this time different?
UNDS Reform: Progress,
challenges and
opportunities**



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ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

BOS	Business Operations Strategy
BSSC	UNOPS' Shared Service Centre in Bangkok
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CEB	Chief Executive's Board for Coordination
CF	Cooperation Framework (see also SDCF)
CP	Country Programme
CIDP	Country Integrated Development Programme
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
CPD	Country Programme Document
CT	Country Team (see also UNCT)
DaO	Delivering as One
DCO	UN Development Coordination Office
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSG	Deputy Secretary General
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ECOSOC	UN Economic and Social Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GA	General Assembly
GE	Gender Equality
GELI	Global Executive Leadership Initiative
GSSC	Global Shared Service Centre
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HLCP	High-level Committee on Programmes

HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDA	International Development Association
IDDC	International Disability and Development Consortium
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	International Finance Institution
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMS	Information Management System
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
MAF	Management and Accountability Framework
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
MS(s)	Member State(s)
NRA	Non-resident agencies
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
RC	UN Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
RR	Resident Representative
SDCF	Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

SERP	Socio-Economic Response Plan
SG / DSG	Secretary General / Deputy Secretary General
SIDS	Small island developing states
SPTF	Special Purpose Trust Fund
SQ	Sub-question
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDCS	United Nations Development Cooperation Strategy
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNITAID	The International Drug Purchasing Facility
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNPRPD	United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General
UNSSC	United Nations System Staff College
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

OVERVIEW

The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) is an independent network of 20 countries sharing a common interest in improving the effectiveness of the multilateral system.¹ MOPAN commissioned this analytical study to build upon its well-established performance assessments, adding value by offering a contribution to system-level learning about progress on reforming the UN development system (UNDS). This study is one of the first in a series of *Lessons in Multilateral Performance* being conducted by MOPAN on a range of salient topics related to the multilateral system.

The overall aim of this study is to inform strategic thinking on UNDS reform in preparation for upcoming policy discussions and operational decisions by UNDS stakeholders. It seeks to provide an independent perspective on how the UNDS reforms have progressed regarding the following:

- Extent of implementation of select transformation areas
- Underlying drivers affecting the reform
- Associated risks and challenges
- Suggested key and immediate areas for attention to support the success of the reform
- Questions for further exploration as the reform continues to evolve

The evidence for the study is weighted towards the lived experience of those in the reform process, and in particular UNDS entities. Evidence was drawn from interviews with more than 180 key informants and 200 documents at both headquarters (HQ) and country level.²

¹ MOPAN members as of January 2021 include: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Qatar joined as an observer for 2021.

² This included MOPAN assessments. At the time of data collection, MOPAN was concurrently conducting assessments of ILO, UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF, and UNOPS. It had previously conducted assessments of all other agencies included in the sample.



- At HQ/system level, interviews were conducted with UNDS reform leads and senior managers in nine UN agencies, in the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO), and with senior experts across the UN system and broader development landscape.³
- At country level, interviews were conducted with key informants, including UN Resident Coordinators (RCs), UN country teams (UNCTs), and government representatives and partners in eight sample countries: Bangladesh, Colombia, the DRC, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Nepal and Timor-Leste.

Of the seven transformation areas mandated in UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/72/279, the study looked at five: the Reinvigorated Resident Coordinator System; the New Generation of UNCTs; Partnership for the 2030 Agenda; the Funding Compact, and Direction, Oversight and Accountability. The study excluded the regional level system-wide strategic document as well as the system-wide evaluation function.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

There has been notable progress across many of the central transformation areas, signifying success in building the architecture of the reform. Key achievements include the establishment of a reinvigorated RC system and a more coherent, inclusive UNCT, brought closer together through and as demonstrated by the COVID-19 response. At the same time, the reform is at a critical juncture in which the strong top-down leadership and political will that have driven implementation to date must transition to a more human-centred phase focused on embedding cultural and behavioural changes that can make the reform self-sustaining. Key challenges to the reform include embedding ownership and buy-in across both UN entities and member states (MS), where inconsistencies in capitals/HQ and field levels lead to behaviour misaligned to global commitments. The COVID-19 crisis has supported progress in collective working and is an opportunity for transformation, but must be actively seized or risk going to waste. Against this positive momentum, the reforms face a number of countervailing forces that threaten to stall or regress the change process – chief among these is a funding environment that has not transformed as envisioned and that presents a particularly worrying outlook.

³ ILO, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS, UN Women, WFP and WHO

The reinvigorated Resident Coordinator System

The new Resident Coordinator (RC) system has been successfully set up and is one of the areas of the reform that has seen the most progress. Actors across the development system, including UNCT members and governments, broadly recognise and appreciate the role of the RC, which has already yielded concrete benefits for coherence, including in supporting the response to COVID-19. The de-linking process went relatively smoothly thanks to strong support from both DCO and UNDP. The enhanced capacity of the Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) has also proven valuable, although these offices may still be insufficient for some of the more demanding contexts.

Challenges remain related to the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF), which is not yet empowering the RCs to the degree intended. There are also some gaps around creating incentives and attractive career paths to attract RCs with the right skills for such a demanding position, and more fundamental questions about their authority to tackle the most difficult issues, such as country presence or mandate overlap. While the initial funding to get the system set up has been a success, sustainable funding for the RC system remains perhaps the most critical risk – not only for the RC system, but also, because of its centrality, for the reform as a whole.

The new generation of UN Country Teams

UNCTs have developed Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (SDCFs) to positive effect. It is still too early to examine the implementation of the SDCFs and there have been some challenges that are still in the process of being resolved, including around sequencing and alignment with Country Programme Documents (CPDs). The SDCFs are generally viewed as improvements on their previous counterparts, particularly in terms of inclusivity in the development process, which reflects a broader opportunity for smaller and non-resident agencies to participate more fully in UNCTs. Among the many good examples of joint working and collaboration by UNCTs, some instances have been enabled or supported by the reform. However, challenges still remain in articulating a common value proposition of a collective effort, and there was very little observable progress in the reconfiguration of country presence.

A major driver of UNDS coherence, including with the broader development system (e.g. government, International Finance Institutions - IFIs) was the imperative created by the COVID-19 crisis itself, which echoes a more general pattern of acute crises enabling partnership and





coherence. The COVID-19 response and experience with the Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERPs) demonstrated, with some variability, the agility and coordination of UNCTs, both supported by and supporting the reform. Momentum for the reform and positive changes stemming from the COVID-19 response risk not leading to transformational change for the UNDS' broader objectives – the SDGs.

Partnership for the 2030 Agenda

Looking at partnership with IFIs and the private sector in particular, the study found many good examples of joint working aligned to the 2030 Agenda. These partnerships are generally highly driven by needs and thus well aligned to country context. There is also a broad recognition by agencies at the global level of the importance of partnership, reflected in some important agreements there. System-level guidance is also seen as valuable, particularly in the private sector.

That said, the approach to partnership envisaged for the reform has not been achieved; partnership remains fragmented, individual-driven, and opportunistic in nature, and stakeholders lack a clear, common picture of the alternative. This may be related to a lack of common understanding among potential partners – both agencies and external entities such as IFIs – about how they work, what they have to offer in a partnership, and what their value-add is in the service of development objectives. Some of the skills required to act as a credible convener for IFIs and the private sector are not commonly found across the UNDS. The Global Compact, while seen as a positive among those who are aware of it, is not widely understood or utilised and has thus yet to realise its potential.

Funding Compact

The Funding Compact itself is a notable achievement that recognises the need for mutual accountability alongside a transformation of financing to achieve the SDGs. Agencies have been making clear progress on delivering their end of that deal in terms of improvements in transparency, visibility, reporting, and efficiency. A lot of important foundational work to explore avenues for efficiency gain has taken place, particularly in the UNSDG; many of the low-hanging fruit have been picked, which is expected to already yield sizable and recurring cost savings. More fundamental shifts will take time and, critically, investment to produce the degree of gains envisioned for the reform.

On the MS side, there have been some modest advances, for example on the share of pooled funding. However, the transformation toward higher quality and more predictable funding – agreed as essential to

achieve the reform – has not been taken place. Progress on the share of pooled funding and some increase in volume are modest in contrast to the overall undercapitalisation of such key instruments as the Joint SDG Fund. Implementation of the 1% levy to support the RC system has not been administered or paid as intended ('at source') and is de-facto coming from agency programme budgets. The current situation around funding, and in particular for the RC system as a central component of the reform, is particularly worrying given the looming socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

Direction, Oversight, and Accountability

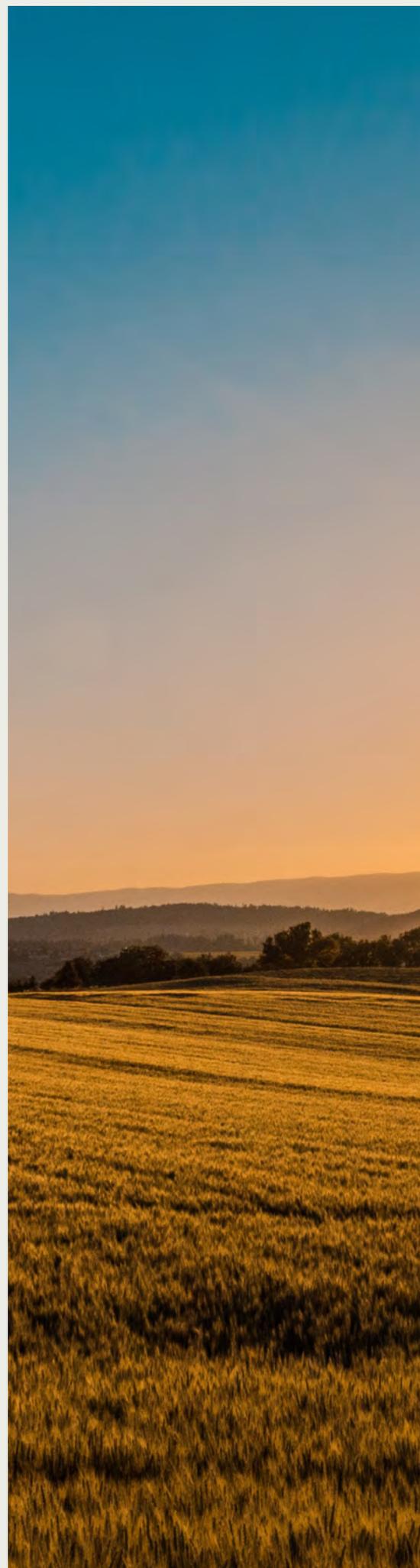
One strength of this iteration of UNDS reform is the broad, deep buy-in across UNDS stakeholders – notably leadership by the Deputy Secretary General and buy-in from the broad swath of MS. Although not completely uniform, the clarity and commonality of the vision for the reform had a meaningful impact on stakeholders' implementation on the ground. There has also been progress setting up accountability mechanisms, such as the MAF, and improving interoperability between agency systems, although work remains on both fronts. Some exchanges between boards have occurred, and there have been important interventions at the governing-body level in support of UNDS coherence, which demonstrates strong ownership by MS. However, fragmented governance remains a key barrier to the reform overall. These and other initiatives, such as UNINFO, have also incurred heavy transaction and bureaucratic costs for agencies, which further strains already limited resources.

Underlying and compounding these issues is that the understanding and buy-in for the reform is highly inconsistent at the layers below global, senior management. Due in part to the lack of an integrated change management process, officials at working level do not necessarily understand or own the reform, nor do they appreciate the role they play in ensuring its success. This is a challenge for agencies and MS alike, with the latter not necessarily reflecting the agreements made in New York either on the ground or in the various governing bodies.

Overarching narratives and areas for attention

Cutting across the transformation areas, four overarching narratives emerged that frame where the reform stands and where stakeholders could focus their attention. These are:

1. **Funding is a central risk to the reforms:** Funding, and in particular, the lack of sustainable funding for the RC system and limited progress by MS on Funding Compact commitments, presents a major challenge for the reforms' success.



2. **From crisis to true transformation – accelerating the SDGs after COVID-19:** The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for the reform. In the short term, it has caused a shift towards more collaboration and an increase in partnerships within and outside the UNDS. These changes must be acted upon quickly to maintain momentum and to secure transformation in support of the reform and the SDGs.
3. **Bringing the global vision into effective ownership and action at every level:** The strong global vision of the reform needs to translate into ownership and action at every level – from HQ to regional to country. It is critical to strengthen the linkages between different levels of the UNDS and to raise awareness about the reforms across different parts of government.
4. **An integrated, long-term approach to change management to drive behaviour change and ensure sustained reform:** The lack of an integrated approach to change management has inhibited behavioural and cultural change within the agencies constituting the UNDS, the MS, and the UN Secretariat structures that are key enablers for achieving the system-wide vision. The time is ripe to pivot to the soft and hard human dimensions of the change process to ensure sustainability.

Under these four overarching narratives, the study identifies eleven specific and immediate areas on which UNDS stakeholders may focus to enable the reform's success.

On funding:

1. **Addressing risks around the sustainability of funding for the RC system (all UNDS stakeholders)** – urgently finding a way to ensure adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding for the RC system, which is a cornerstone of the reform.
2. **Accelerating MS' progress on Funding Compact commitments (donors)** – including by translating the global collective commitments into individual country actions and having MS hold one another to account.
3. **Using financing mechanisms to their best effect (all UNDS stakeholders)** – increase pooled funding to key instruments such as the Joint SDG Fund; focus on shared outcomes and using pooled funding to its best effect, and creating the enabling environment for catalytic and blended financing.

On moving from the COVID-19 crisis to transformation:

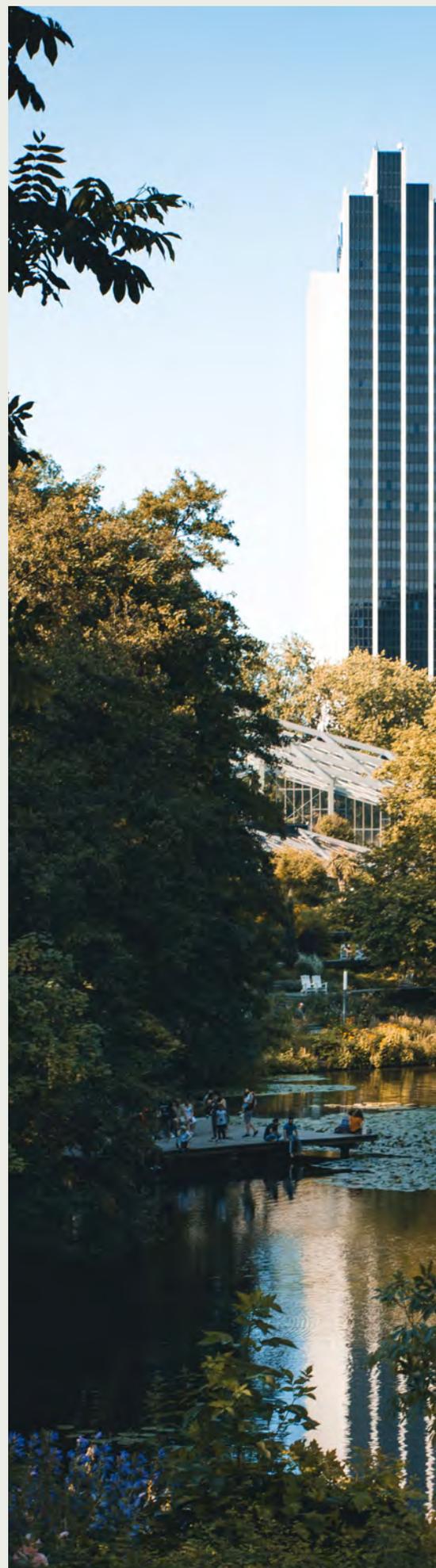
4. **Preserve and build on gains made during the crisis towards a collaborative environment so as to achieve transformation (all UNDS stakeholders)** – learning lessons and reinforcing positive behaviour changes, including by institutionalising good practice.
5. **Draw lessons from the SERPs both for the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (SDCFs) and for the system-wide strategic document (UN Secretariat, UNDS entities, MS)** – linking up the SDCFs and learning from global guidance, division of labour, how funding was agreed, and other aspects that worked well in the SERPs.
6. **Develop a more systemic approach to partnership (UN Secretariat, UNDS entities, broader development partners)** – building on good practices at country level to drive bottom-up process with partners, especially IFIs.

On translating global vision to ownership and action at every level:

7. **Strengthening the linkages between different UNDS levels (UNDS entities, UN Secretariat)** – bringing systems and processes in line or at least making them interoperable; building ownership and understanding at regional and country levels.
8. **Raising awareness of the reforms across different parts of government (UN MS)** – ensuring a whole-of-government approach in governing bodies, at field level, and in line ministries.

On creating an integrated, long-term approach to change management:

9. **Developing a clear change management strategy with realistic timescales (all UNDS stakeholders)** – based on a compelling case for change, with clear leaders and plans to communicate and roll out each step in the process; designed to be embedded in all levels and functions.
10. **Embedding incentives and accountability for change at all levels (all UNDS stakeholders)** – ensuring that individual staff are incentivised to support change at every level and that agencies are incentivised and accountable for change on their governing bodies.
11. **Making the reform process accessible and realistic (all UNDS stakeholders)** – limiting transaction costs, putting in resources to support change (recognising that this is not a 'cost-neutral' endeavour), and demonstrating a return on investment over a realistic timeframe.





Looking beyond - areas for further enquiry

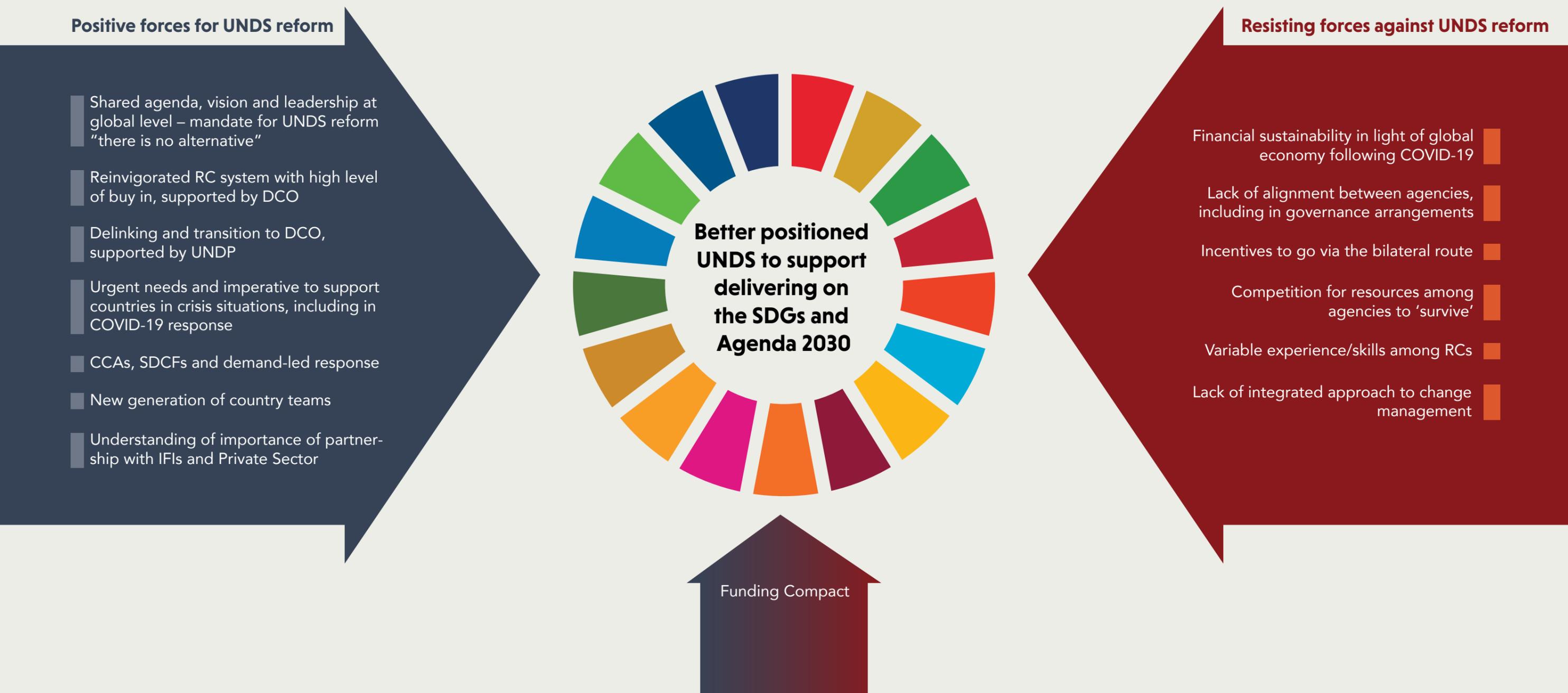
The study concludes by presenting eight questions that sit within the transformation areas and also address some of the wider conditions influencing the UNDS reform. These questions remain open for further enquiry:

1. How does country context affect the relative strength and/or fragility of the UNDS reform process?
2. How do mandate, nature, size, and other unique characteristics shape agencies' perception and engagement with the opportunities and challenges of UNDS reform?
3. What is the best approach to ensuring meaningful measurement of results against common objectives – notably evaluating the SDCFs? What is the appropriate role of the UN system-wide and in-agency evaluation functions?
4. What are the expectations about the role of the regional tier in the UNDS reform? Is this being delivered on? What are the conditions/needs required of regional actors to support the reform?
5. What does a more systemic approach to partnership with IFIs, civil society, and the private sector look like, and what are the appropriate roles of the various stakeholders (e.g. agencies, RCs, MS) and institutions (e.g. the Global Compact, International Organisation of Employers)?
6. What challenges and opportunities exist and how does UNDS reform relate to development-peace-humanitarian actions, including in relation to the RC function in complex contexts?
7. What are the tracks and existing resources available for a system-wide change management approach focused on the (now critical) behavioural and cultural change aspects of UNDS reform?
8. What shapes and drives the internal consistency of MS cross-government decisions and behaviour in respect to UNDS reforms?

The figure below summarises the main positive and countervailing forces affecting the reform. It is followed by an overview of what is going well, what is evolving, and what is challenging in the five selected transformation areas. The main report discusses findings and the supporting evidence in greater detail.

POSITIVE AND RESISTING FORCES FOR UNDS REFORM

This figure summarises the study's findings on the positive and resistant forces around the UNDS reform. It is important to note that although there are fewer forces resisting the reform, each is substantial, and unless they are addressed, the UNDS reforms are unlikely to succeed. The positive forces show areas of important progress and momentum building which, if continued and pulled together into a coherent whole, will provide a necessary but not sufficient condition for the success of the reform overall. The change management challenge involving all stakeholders in the UNDS reforms is now more apparent and defined to be acted upon.



OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS IN THE TRANSFORMATION AREAS

Reinvigorated Resident Coordinator System

What has been achieved/is going well

- The independent, impartial and empowered RC plays a recognised and appreciated role, and is helping to bring greater clarity of leadership for the UNCT and for country governments.
- The role of the newly empowered RCs has helped to facilitate a collaborative, timely response across the UN system to the COVID-19 crisis.
- The new RC system is fully established, and has successfully recruited for key posts from a more diverse pool, with effective guidance and support from the newly established DCO.
- Delinking from UNDP has been successfully completed, with effective leadership and support by DCO and UNDP to achieve the transition within a relatively short time.

What is evolving

- While progress has been made in implementing accountability mechanisms, some adjustment is required of the MAF and its use at country level.
- The quality of the RC pool is continuing to develop, supported by DCO, to cover the range of skills required in these demanding roles.
- The “right-sizing” of RCOs needs to be addressed in some contexts, despite good progress made in staffing the majority of these.
- Initial steps have been taken to fund the RC system, including putting the levy in place.

Challenges and risks

- The initial set-up of the RC system was resourced, but substantial risks exist for its future funding.
- Potential disincentives for reform for RCs and UNCT members need to be addressed.
- RCs lack hard power which, coupled with the varying dynamics with UNCTs, can sometimes be an obstacle to reform alignment.
- Creating effective career incentives for RCs is an important area that must be and is starting to be addressed.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS IN THE TRANSFORMATION AREAS

New Generation of UN Country Teams

What has been achieved/is going well

- CCAs are now in place and provide a shared assessment of needs at country level, a critical first step towards a demand-led approach.
- There is progress in developing the SDCFs that has provided a visible and important focus for planning and dialogue within the UNCTs.
- Newly empowered RCs are facilitating the greater cohesion of the UNCTs.
- Many positive examples of joint working at the country team level existed before and during the reforms. Joint working has grown over the last two and a half years and seems increasingly enabled by the reforms.
- Shared experiences and mature relationships from crisis response, in particular, have enabled joint working.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and developing the SERPs have also provided a shared imperative that has strongly accelerated progress on joint working.

What is evolving

- The process of moving from developing to implementing the SDCFs is at a very early stage and has not begun in most countries.
- There are positive signs around some aspects of country presence, working with the RCOs, and greater inclusion of NRAs in the UNCT discussions.
- Effective sequencing of SDCFs and agency country programme documents has been agreed as a priority and reflected in guidance by agencies, demonstrating buy-in and intent. However, much detailed work is required to ensure that work plans, monitoring systems and planning cycles are fully aligned.

Challenges and risks

- There is a risk that the positive collaborative behaviours established during the pandemic response will not be sustained and that more agency-driven approaches will resume. This is exacerbated by tendencies to use bilateral funding routes.
- Effective operationalisation of SDCFs is contingent on addressing issues around pooled funding and on the interoperability of systems, which are inherently difficult and structural in nature.
- Comprehensive reconfigurations of country presence in response to country needs have not yet begun nor is it clear that the incentives for it exist in the agencies or from the countries.
- The common value proposition – how the UNDS will add value in support of Agenda 2030 – is neither entirely clearly articulated nor understood.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS IN THE TRANSFORMATION AREAS

Partnership for the 2030 Agenda

What has been achieved/is going well

- Many partnerships broadly aligned to aspects of the 2030 Agenda are underway, showing the UN's role as a convener and thought leader.
- Such partnerships are more often driven by specific development and humanitarian needs rather than directly by the UNDS reforms and the attendant focus on a system-wide response to strategic partnerships to deliver the 2030 Agenda.

What is evolving

- Building from the shared will and commitment on partnerships from the top-down and the recognition that a partnership-driven approach is fundamental for delivering on the SDGs, UNDS agencies are developing their capacity around partnership and engaging in strategic partnerships through MoUs and other vehicles. This is often focused on financing.
- New guidance has recently been shared from the UN system on developing partnerships with the private sector.

Challenges and risks

- Partnership remains relatively fragmented in practice – there has been limited if any progress on developing and delivering a systemic approach to such partnerships across the UN system.
- There is no clarity yet on what a more systemic approach would look like. Roles have yet to be articulated, for example, about whether partnership can be driven from the global level at all or is more agency-specific.
- Partnering with the IFIs has been mixed and inconsistent and mainly opportunistic – driven by individual leaders at country level – rather than systemic and strategic, although there has been some good partnering around the COVID-19 response.
- The Global Compact has yet to realise its potential for steering private-sector partnerships as part of the reform agenda.
- The skills needed to support a more effective approach to partnership are not yet strongly developed across the UN system. Some UN agencies have recognised the need to develop their skills in partnering with the IFIs and the private sector and are taking actions to address this.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS IN THE TRANSFORMATION AREAS

Funding Compact

What has been achieved/is going well

- UN agencies are delivering on many of their specific commitments on the Funding Compact, including on visibility, reporting, and use of pooled funding.
- As part of and in parallel to the Funding Compact, the system is starting to make some significant gains in efficiency by using shared services, common back-offices, and by broadly adopting Business Operations Strategies (BOS). This has been accomplished thanks to strong leadership and “heavy lifting” at the task team level and at the operational level in country.
- Detailed and necessary preparatory work has been done by many agencies to build a ‘platform’ for achieving greater efficiencies around shared services and in other areas.

What is evolving

- Realising efficiency gains in practice is a process that continues but which has yet to produce the full scale of envisaged resources. The agencies see considerable potential here but addressing the practical challenges will take time and further investment.

Challenges and risks

- MS have not yet met all their global commitments on the Funding Compact. The gap is particularly significant on funding quality and predictability, and around the major pooled funds, which are under-capitalised.
- There are substantial risks around future funding to the RC system.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS IN THE TRANSFORMATION AREAS

Direction, Oversight, and Accountability

What has been achieved/is going well

- The reforms have benefitted from a strong drive from the top, including from the SG and DSG, MS, senior leaders in the UN agencies and support from the newly established DCO.
- MS buy-in for the reform is seen as stronger than in previous reforms. This is paying off in the visible progress in such areas as establishing the RC role and SDCFs.
- System-wide accountability tools have been set up in key areas, such as the country-level MAF as a supporting tool for the re-invigorated RC system, and monitoring and reporting systems.

What is evolving

- While the Joint Boards concept has not progressed as intended so far, there has been considerable interagency exchange and harmonisation at high levels.
- Progress has been made on improving the interoperability and usability of shared systems such as UN INFO, but system-wide transparency is a potential area for improvement.

Challenges and risks

- The vision and clear direction from the top is reaching the country level and various staff groups inconsistently. This applies to both agencies and stakeholders across governments.
- The top-down approach to the reform process has not yet evolved into a more holistic, long-term approach to change management that is fully embedded at every level.
- Incentives for sustained behaviour change within a “whole of system” response appear to be mixed at best.
- Repositioning the UNDS is creating transactions costs and bureaucracy in some areas, which is having a negative impact on the agencies alongside their delivery imperatives.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

MOPAN's study series on Lessons in Multilateral Performance aims to provide learning opportunities on issues cutting across the multilateral system. These studies build on MOPAN's unique position within that system, and the well-established body of knowledge and expertise developed through its assessments of organisational performance. In contrast to MOPAN assessments, these studies have no accountability objective but rather are focused on learning.

The overall aim of this study is to inform strategic thinking on UNDS reform in preparation for continuing policy discussion and operational decisions by UNDS stakeholders. This study seeks to give an overall sense of progress on the UNDS reforms, including:

- The extent to which select aspects of the reforms are implemented.
- The underlying drivers affecting the reforms and how the UNDS is responding, including any risks and challenges.
- Suggested areas to consider as the reforms continue.

This study provides MOPAN members and other UNDS stakeholders with a general sense of lessons emerging from the reform, including in preparations for discussion around the UNSG's comprehensive review of the RC system and its funding.

The intended audience for this study is all stakeholders of the UNDS and those interested in the reforms' progress, including not only the study sample countries and MOPAN members, but all UN MS. The study also aims to provide value and insight to the RCs, UN DCO and to the UN entities and their partners living and implementing the reforms at HQ and at regional and country team levels.

1.2 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 Positioning and approach**
 - 2.1 Context** – including the genesis of the reforms, their intended outcomes, and the specific challenges around COVID-19.
 - 2.2 Methodology** and limitations – including the study scope and approach as well as practical and methodological limitations.
- 3 Transformation areas** – main findings for each transformation area, including the extent to which specific reforms in each transformation area have been implemented as planned and key drivers identified as powerful forces pushing the reform forward or restraining it.
- 4 Conclusions and way forward** – including potential areas for attention for UNDS stakeholders and areas for further enquiry.



2. POSITIONING AND APPROACH

2.1 CONTEXT

This study examines a set of reforms in the development system to which UN MS committed in 2018. The expected changes build on a long history of reform in the UNDS and in the UN more broadly. In parallel with this reform, management and peace and security reforms are also underway. This section briefly describes some of these contextual matters for readers to consider, including the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 crisis facing not only the UNDS, but also the entire world.

2.1.1 Genesis of the reforms and the UNDS commitments

Reform of the UNDS is a longstanding area of discussion and effort. Various iterations of reform have taken shape over the decades, with a notable milestone in the mid-2000s around the Delivering as One reform, first mandated by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 2007 and subsequently piloted in several countries.⁴ As the term suggests, the Delivering as One era of UNDS reform centred on more cohesive, coherent delivery by the UNDS toward achieving the MDGs and other global commitments.

Since the September 2015 adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 SDGs at the UN Sustainable Development Summit, the UN system has been moving to align with it. In January 2017, at the beginning of his term, UN Secretariat General (SG) António Guterres made proposals to reform the UN to that end.

Global leadership for this reform has been fundamentally different from previous iterations. MS were key in recognising Agenda 2030 as a transformative and ambitious framework that required an improved UNDS.⁵ By contrast, previous reforms focused more on greater efficiencies or system-wide coherence rather than on a structural change in approach.⁶ Developing countries, especially those in Africa, Small Island Developing States, and Middle Income Countries, are also pushing for greater relevance of the system.⁷ The current UN SG, who was elected on a platform of reform, has been extremely vocal on this topic.⁸

⁴ United Nations, 2007. Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. A/RES/62/208

⁵ Hendra, J. and FitzGerald, I., 2020. "Change in the UN Development System: Theory and Practice", (Chapter 18, pp. 249-262) in Thomas Weiss and Stephen Browne (ed.) The Routledge Handbook on the UN and Development, pg. 252

⁶ *ibid.*, pg. 252

⁷ *ibid.*, pg. 252

⁸ UNSG, 2020. Deputy Secretary-General's remarks to the Third Plenary Briefing on the Remaining Mandates of the Repositioning of the UN Development System [as prepared for delivery], pg. 1

To improve the delivery of its mandate, the UN aims to make changes in the following three tracks:⁹

1. Development – by repositioning the UNDS to support the 2030 Agenda
2. Management – by improving the culture of accountability within the Secretariat
3. Peace and Security – by adjusting the architecture and working methods of the peace and security pillar of the Secretariat, as well as more joined-up efforts in delivering mandates

Regarding the 'Development track' on repositioning the UNDS – on which this report focuses – the SG's report of 2017¹⁰ recommended **seven major changes** (transformation areas) encompassing measures across **38 actions** designed to be mutually reinforcing that were subsequently mandated by the UNGA in Resolution A/RES/72/279.¹¹

The UNDS Reforms focus on the following seven key areas for transformation:

- 1. New generation of UNCTs:** *Demand-driven and tailored to meet countries' specific development priorities and needs.*
- 2. An impartial, independent and empowered RC:** *Development-focused, with stronger capacity, leadership, accountability and impartiality.*
- 3. A coordinated, re-profiled and restructured regional approach:** *More regional cohesion and coordination.*
- 4. Direction, oversight and accountability:** *Strengthening horizontal governance and system-wide transparency and evaluation.*
- 5. Partnership for the 2030 Agenda:** *Several workstreams to strengthen UN partnerships and South-South cooperation.*
- 6. Funding Compact:** *Proposed mutual commitments to foster investments in the UN System and stronger funding mechanism for the 2030 Agenda.*
- 7. System-wide strategic document:** *A strategic tool to help guide and accelerate alignment with the 2030 Agenda, focusing on concrete actions.*

⁹ In addition, achieving gender parity, through the SG's UN-wide Gender Parity Strategy, has also been flagged as a priority for reform. See: <https://reform.un.org/content/gender-parity-strategy>

¹⁰ United Nations, 2017. Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet. Report of the Secretary General, A/72/684.

¹¹ United Nations, 2018. Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (A/RES/72/279).

On December 21, 2020, the UNGA adopted the 2020 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) Resolution providing guidance to the UNDS for the next four years (2020-2024) by laying out how the UN system should be supporting countries to implement the 2030 Agenda and responding to COVID-19.¹² The resolution is the first QCPR since the UN undertook the reform process to reposition the UNDS so that it better aligns its activities with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The 2020 QCPR calls on the UNDS to further mainstream the SDGs into planning, work, and reporting. Development bodies should also support countries to accelerate the implementation, follow-up, and review of the 2030 Agenda, including by addressing the gaps and challenges identified by voluntary national reviews (VNRs). The 2020 QCPR resolution also recognises that, “the individual entities of the UNDS have specific experience and expertise, derived from and in line with their mandates and strategic plans, and stresses in this regard that improvement of coordination, collaboration, efficiency and coherence at all levels should be undertaken in a manner that recognizes their respective mandates and roles with consideration for comparative advantages, and enhances the effective utilization of their resources and their unique expertise”.¹³

GA Resolution A/RES/72/279 requested that the SG “submit for the consideration of the General Assembly, before the end of the 75th session, a review with recommendations on the functioning of the reinvigorated resident coordinator system, including its funding arrangements”. This review will be an important milestone in taking stock of one of the central facets of the UNDS reform. Two other important reporting processes occurred in parallel to this study: reporting of the SG to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on the QCPR, and the Chair of the UNSDG’s report on DCO. This MOPAN learning study can support UNDS stakeholders in identifying areas of the reform critical for further investigation, potentially provide a source of triangulation for specific findings, and otherwise spur thinking about how to move towards a successful implementation of the reforms going forward.

¹² United Nations, 2020. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 21 December 2020, Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, RES/75/233.

¹³ Ibid., para 14.

2.1.2 The exceptional global challenges of 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic

The UN SG has identified the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated economic disruption as “the greatest challenge that our world has faced since the creation of the United Nations”.¹⁴ The pandemic is thus a major threat to the 2030 Agenda and to the SDGs, which the UNDS and the reforms are ultimately designed to address. There are concerns that capital outflows from developing countries and investment are being diverted during the response.¹⁵ The UNDS has faced an unprecedented context for the rollout of its reforms at an early and crucial stage. This context has tested the UNDS’ relevance and efficacy, and will continue to do so as the economic consequences of the pandemic are predicted to last for years.¹⁶

While they do not explicitly refer to the UNDS reforms, the strategic documents underpinning the UN’s COVID-19 response suggest that the reforms play an important role, including the role of the RC as the focal point for a united UNCT response.¹⁷ This gives the lead agencies – OCHA (humanitarian), WHO (health), and UNDP (social and economic response and recovery) – a direct reporting line to the SG during the response and allows for greater coherence between the responses of the humanitarian country team and the UN country team.¹⁸ Captured in the mantra to ‘build back better’, UN Frameworks have emphasised the necessity of partnerships and the need to leverage pooled funds to promote joint programming.¹⁹

¹⁴ United Nations, 2020g. Report of the Secretary-General, Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR), E/2020/5, p. 5

¹⁵ UNSDG (2020), Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of Covid-19, 11

¹⁶ Jorda, O., Singh, S.R., and Taylor, A.M., 2020, ‘The Long Economic Hangover of Pandemics’, International Monetary Fund Finance and Development, June 2020, vol. 57, num.2

¹⁷ UNSDG (2020), A UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to Covid-19, 31

¹⁸ UNSDG (2020), A UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to Covid-19, 32

¹⁹ UNSDG (2020), A UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to Covid-19, 36

There is also a keen sense in the UN's strategic thinking around the response that it provides an opportunity for a new business-as-usual, underpinned in part by multilateral collaboration.²⁰

In some ways, the COVID-19 crisis has been a wrench thrown into the reforms; in other ways, it has been an accelerator. It has undoubtedly shifted responsibilities and focus toward more immediate priorities than a more coherent UNDS offering for achieving the SDGs, but it has also created an immediacy that cuts through cultural and procedural blockages to collaboration within the UNDS and with partners. The crisis came at a crucial and early moment in the reforms as key components like the new RC system were just coming online. At the time of this writing and as the crisis continues, with the prospect of immense socio-economic impacts coming into view and on the horizon, the UNDS reforms are again at a watershed moment. They can either turn the corner to consolidate gains and push towards transformation, or risk relapsing. The COVID-19 crisis has been an opportunity for the UNDS to demonstrate its effectiveness, and it has also created a momentum for change that should not be wasted.

Study findings indicate how some components of the UNDS reforms have been consolidated through the crisis, encouraging parts of the UNDS and the broader system of stakeholders to come together quickly and around a common cause – exemplified by the rapid development and utilisation of the SERPs. The UNDS reforms also enabled some of this responsiveness: clearer and more empowered leadership of the UNCT-supported agility and coherence. However, the crisis also caused disruptions to the planned bedding down of certain key aspects of the reform, such as shifting the focus of funded programmes away from the SDG goals.

²⁰ UNSDG (2020), A UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to Covid-19, 39-40

2.2 METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

2.2.1 Scope

The study focused on selected elements of the most recent iteration of UNDS reform outlined in GA Resolution 72/279. Within that relatively broad remit, several specific scoping decisions were taken:

- **Transformation areas:** Five (of seven) transformation areas were selected on the basis of their relative maturity and therefore ability to be studied, with some important exclusions (see below):
 - Impartial, Independent and Empowered Resident Coordinator²¹
 - New Generation of UNCTs
 - Partnership for the 2030 Agenda
 - Funding Compact
 - Direction, Oversight and Accountability
- **Exclusions:** Several aspects of the reform, including outside and within the five selected transformation areas, were excluded due to resource constraints and because at the time of data collection they were premature to be fruitfully studied. Most notably, the study did not examine the regional level of the reforms; the System-wide Strategic Document; and the system-wide evaluation function (under Direction, Oversight, and Accountability). Other elements of the wider reform, such as humanitarian-development-peace actions, recognised as highly salient, were also excluded due to resource constraints.²² While excluded from the study design, some of these issues did arise in data collection and are addressed in the body of the report in a limited way, where relevant and with all due caveats. Limitations are discussed further below.

Additionally, to manage within the resources available while still covering a fundamentally global process, a sample of specific entities and country-level contexts were selected for logistical reasons and also to obtain a diverse set of perspectives:

²¹ Including the delinking from UNDP and transition of responsibilities to DCO, which was a key underpinning aspect of the reforms and setting up the new RC system.

²² However, this was part of the sampling criteria for both agencies and country contexts, drawing on a mixture of development agencies and multi-mandated agencies.

- **UN entities:** key informants and documentation were drawn from selected UN entities to get views on the reform from organisations varying widely in their size, mandate, and operational nature. To facilitate data collection, five agencies being assessed in the current (2020) MOPAN cycle of assessments (ILO, UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF, UNOPS) were selected, and four others (UNFPA, UN Women, WFP, WHO) were added during the inception phase to provide a more balanced sample. A further focus for interviews was DCO and the DSG’s office.
- **Countries:** The importance of including a country lens was recognised early on in the inception phase, although full country case studies were not part of this study due to resource constraints. Interviews were conducted with UNDS stakeholders, primarily UNCTs, in eight countries: Bangladesh, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Nepal, and Timor Leste. These were selected to ensure a variety of contexts regarding the nature of the UN presence, country needs, geographic region, and on the basis of insights gathered during the inception phase.

The study also focused primarily on interviews with stakeholders from the multilateral system, and within that, from UN entities. Only a limited number of interviews outside this group were conducted. This aspect of scoping is explained further below.

2.3 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This study was designed for learning rather than for purposes of accountability. It did not seek to provide a definitive or comprehensive coverage of the reforms, but rather to give a broad picture and define emerging lessons. The technical details of the methodology are available in the inception report.²³

Data collection was structured around three key questions:

- What is the implementation status of the select transformation areas of the UNDS reform?
- What is the progress for each of the key drivers of change of the UNDS reform?
- What is the emerging pathway for UNDS reforms?

²³ IOD PARC, 2020. “Analytical Study on UNDS Reform: Inception Report”, MOPAN

Scoping for these questions and on data collection was undertaken during an inception phase (September-November 2020). For logistical reasons and to focus on MOPAN's comparative advantage, data collection centred on multilateral organisations, drawing on country-level insights that may not otherwise be visible (e.g. through system-wide reporting mechanisms).

The Theory of Change for the UNDS reforms was a key aspect of the approach taken for this study.²⁴ The most critical drivers, considered to be key for successfully implementing the reforms, were initially drawn from the Theory of Change developed by the UNDG and explored further during inception.²⁵ These drivers were narrowed by reviewing documents and during initial discussions with some key stakeholders and the reference group. Ultimately, the drivers examined in data collection were:

- **Leadership**

- To what extent is leadership at global, regional and country levels driving the reform in a collaborative way to achieve collective results?

- **Political will and shared vision**

- How far does a common understanding of the reforms and of their objectives extend?

- **Mandates and structures, roles and responsibilities**

- To what extent is there a shared understanding of mandates needed for the reforms to progress?

- **Incentives and accountability**

- Are individuals and organisations being incentivised and held to account by their management at different levels to ensure that the UNDS reform is successful?

- **Funding and financial sustainability**

- To what extent are the necessary resources being made available and in the right way to support progress?

- **Capability – human resources and skills**

- To what extent is the UN able to draw on the necessary skills and human resources to support reform?

- **Capacity and country presence**

- What is needed to ensure that the entities and UNCTs have the right capacities in place for the SDG era?

²⁴ UNSDG, 2016. A “Theory of Change” for the UN Development System to Function “As a System” for Relevance, Strategic Positioning and Results, Summary Paper 1.0

²⁵ UNSDG, 2016. A “Theory of Change” for the UN Development System to Function “As a System” for Relevance, Strategic Positioning and Results, Summary Paper 1.0

Overarching questions based on the drivers and transformation areas were further unpacked into sub-questions that formed the basis of interviews and document reviews. Documents were sourced through the agencies, from various UN websites, and other, primarily public, sources. Data were coded on MaxQDA to organise evidence by thematic area and topic.

Data included 138 interviews with 182 key informants across ten different organisations and eight countries. Nearly 200 documents were reviewed. By accessing the recent survey conducted by OIOS as part of an advisory engagement in 2020 and referring to data from other ongoing or recently published studies, findings could be triangulated to a degree across a broader group of countries, although this could only be done relatively late in the study process when the data were shared in more detail.²⁶

Another useful route for triangulation was provided by discussions with the assessment teams working on individual organisations. This was done at a high level to protect confidentiality and the independence of this study and others that are being conducted. In particular, all exchanges with teams undertaking MOPAN assessments were one way; assessment teams directed the study to relevant documents or particular interviewees to ensure that data collected as part of this study would not impact those assessments in any way.²⁷

2.3.1 Limitations and areas for further study

The UNDS reforms are a wide-ranging, complex subject, and this study does not claim to be comprehensive. Its focus is to provide insights into the state of play (focusing on five transformation areas) and to contribute to wider learning alongside ongoing studies on UNDS reform commissioned by the UN and others.

Data collection focused mainly on UNDS entities including RCs and their offices, and it is the nature of this work to be heavily perception-based. Views from MS and from the broader development system are less well represented and would certainly have provided additional understanding of the progress of the reforms. Further, the sample of country contexts is a limitation in that each UNCT and context is going to present different views and understanding of the reforms. Insights, while based on robust and diverse data collection, may not be generalisable or representative.

²⁶ The survey data from the OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform have not been published. Other studies are still being conducted at the time of writing, while some, such as the Report on Early Lessons and Evaluability of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF, were published as this study was being written.

²⁷ The MOPAN assessments for the 2020 Cycle are expected to be released in mid-2021 and will be publicly available on MOPAN's website: www.MOPANonline.org

The reforms themselves are a work in progress and thus a moving target for study. Their effects are not yet fully apparent. In some respects it is still too early to really gauge how well or how far certain reform areas have advanced in their implementation or how well they are owned. The reforms were further affected by the COVID-19 crisis, which, whether positive or negative for the progress of the reforms, makes the picture still more complex and multifaceted.

Access to interviewees from the UNCT and stakeholders more broadly at the country-level created a challenge at times, although great efforts were made to reach as many key informants as possible, assisted by DCO, the RCs and their offices. While some interviews were held with representatives from civil society, and some limited insights were gained from documentation, analysis around partnerships with civil society was largely out of scope for this study.

Up to date data on the Funding Compact were not available; interviews were the primary source of evidence and observations about it. The analysis may therefore tend to reflect more strongly the views of the UN agencies and their staff than those of MS.



3. TRANSFORMATION AREAS

This section presents findings of the study by area of transformation, noting areas of substantial progress and positive trajectory, areas that are evolving, and more challenging areas and associated risks. It also calls attention to the status of key drivers under the transformation areas to highlight specific and notable dynamics, both enabling (yellow boxes) and constraining (red boxes).

Again, it is important to note that evidence underlying these findings is heavily based on perception and limited in a number of other important ways. While the evidence base is robust and the findings represent a balanced analysis against a large number of sources, it is important that the reader keep these limitations in mind.

3.1 THE REINVIGORATED RC SYSTEM

What has been achieved/is going well

- The independent, impartial and empowered RC plays a recognised and appreciated role, and is helping to bring greater clarity of leadership for the UNCT and for country governments.
- The role of the newly empowered RCs has helped to facilitate a collaborative, timely response across the UN system to the COVID-19 crisis.
- The new RC system is fully established, and has successfully recruited for key posts from a more diverse pool, with effective guidance and support from the newly established DCO.
- Delinking from UNDP has been successfully completed, with effective leadership and support by DCO and UNDP to achieve the transition within a relatively short time.

What is evolving

- While progress has been made in implementing accountability mechanisms, some adjustment is required of the MAF and its use at country level.
- The quality of the RC pool is continuing to develop, supported by DCO, to cover the range of skills required in these demanding roles.
- The “right-sizing” of RCOs needs to be addressed in some contexts, despite good progress made in staffing the majority of these.
- Initial steps have been taken to fund the RC system, including putting the levy in place.

Challenges and risks

- The initial set-up of the RC system was resourced, but substantial risks exist for its future funding.
- Potential disincentives for reform for RCs and UNCT members need to be addressed.
- RCs lack hard power which, coupled with the varying dynamics with UNCTs, can sometimes be an obstacle to reform alignment.
- Creating effective career incentives for RCs is an important area that must be and is starting to be addressed.

The establishment of an independent, impartial and empowered RC function is one of the key features of the UNDS reform. The original commitments outlined for this transformation area include delinking the RC role from that of the UNDP Resident Representative (RR), and transitioning responsibility for RC system oversight from UNDP to DCO. Further changes include establishing a more diverse pool of RCs, and better resourcing RCOs. The strengthened authority of RCs over UNCTs is to be supported by the MAF for the RC System, which establishes performance appraisals and a dual reporting model designed to create mutual accountability. Crucially, the delivery of these changes is to be backed by commitments from MS and UNDS members to ensure more adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding for the RC system.

The transition to a reinvigorated RC system is one of the transformation areas of UNDS reform that has seen most progress to date, although some key challenges and significant risks remain. Development stakeholders broadly recognise the increasingly independent and empowered RC and see it as bringing positive outcomes in terms of greater inclusion of UN entities (particularly non-resident agencies (NRAs), more effective collaboration and advocacy, a coherent UN voice, and for promoting strategic partnerships. Senior-level leadership and support provided by the DCO and other stakeholders have supported the progress in institutionalising the RC role and ensuring its effectiveness.

While acknowledging impressive progress to date, several areas continue to evolve, as is to be expected at this stage. These areas, including creating career incentives for RCs and right-sizing their offices, fully embedding the new performance management systems, and further building the quality of the RC pool, are being addressed in partnership by the EOSG, DCO and the UN entities.

The main risk around this transformation area, and for the reform as a whole, is ensuring adequate, sustainable financing for the RC system over the longer term. This requires urgent attention and is not being addressed so far, producing a troubling outlook.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED/IS GOING WELL

Recognition of the independent RC role is already providing valuable leadership

Stakeholders within the UNDS and the broader development system generally recognise the enhanced independence of the new RC system and appreciate the value brought by the RC leadership role. From facilitating a more coherent UNCT to negotiating the SDCF, supporting crisis response, and taking a more inclusive approach with NRAs, an independent, empowered RC is proving valuable to the effective functioning of the UNDS. However, results in terms of more effective delivery of the SDGs are yet to become apparent.

RCs have created an important pathway for including smaller agencies and NRAs into the UNCTs, which has in turn allowed for greater contributions to cross-cutting issues such as gender, disability inclusion, human rights and Leave No One Behind. This achievement by RCs has been enabled by their impartiality, their knowledge of the UN system and what different agencies have to offer, and their recognised role as a convener and focal point for the UN and development system as a whole. Their position vis-à-vis national governments is also increasingly recognised and can be a valuable and appreciated tool for government stakeholders for simplifying engagement with the UN. Other development stakeholders, including the IFIs, have also expressed this dynamic although challenges remain with them and other partners in establishing the RC as a primary focal point to enable coherence.

The shift to an independent, empowered RC has proven, through the COVID-19 pandemic, to be valuable and effective in confronting a crisis.^{28, 29} There is evidence of an initial concern about tensions between the RC role and the WHO as leader of the COVID-19 Health Response; such concerns proved unfounded, by and large.³⁰ Documents and interviews state that WHO regularly provided briefings to RCs, provided technical input to UNCTs, and benefitted from RCs maintaining host government relationships.³¹

²⁸ UNFPA, 2020b. Information note: Implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system, 28 April 2020, pg.2

²⁹ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published, pg.4

³⁰ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published, pg.4

³¹ WHO, 2020. Collaboration within the United Nations system and with other intergovernmental organizations: Reform of the United Nations development system and implications for WHO, Report by the Director-General, pg.3

KEY DRIVER – LEADERSHIP

DCO and UNDP leadership has supported the transition to the new RC system. The RCs themselves have played a key role in facilitating a coherent UNCT response to COVID-19. More broadly, RC leadership is a key enabler for the success of the reforms.

Good progress in filling RC positions and staffing RCOs

The initial target for filling all RC vacancies was no later than December 31, 2021. Recruitment has been largely successful: 128 of 130 posts have been staffed to date of which only 15 are incumbents retained on an ad-interim basis.³²

RC diversity was also an explicit objective. Here too the pool has trended positively: gender parity was achieved in 2018 and North-South parity was achieved after the most recent round of recruitments.³³ There has also been progress in recruiting RCs with more diverse professional experience as posts are being filled by candidates from across several UN agencies and from outside the UN system. Key informants observed that these recruitment successes have been underpinned by strong support from agencies, many of which have put forward top candidates.

Successes in establishing the RC function have been underpinned by the progress in staffing RCOs, many of which have recruited the five staff members identified in the SG's report as the minimum requirement for meeting the needs of UNCTs.³⁴ Recent figures suggest that approximately two-thirds of RCs feel that the RCOs are adequately staffed and an even greater number agree that the staff recruited have the necessary skills to do the work required by the post-reform RC function.³⁵ This was also largely confirmed in interview findings. Respondents identified progress in staffing RCO positions and of agency field offices having established good working relationships with RCOs.

Leadership and support provided by the DCO and UNDP to facilitate the transition

The delinking process has been completed successfully thanks to efforts by both DCO and UNDP. DCO has been instrumental in providing both operational support and strategic guidance.³⁶ It has also assumed responsibility for managing day-to-day RC activities, initiating dialogue with RCs on systems thinking and promoting collaborative leadership to

³² UNSDG, 2021. Resident Coordinator Statistics, 26 February 2021.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ United Nations, 2017a. Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet, A/72/684, pg.6

³⁵ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published, pg.11

³⁶ United Nations, 2020a. 2020 Report of the chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group on the Development Coordination Office, pg.11

assist in their coordination role within UNCTs.³⁷ DCO has also undertaken an overhaul of online platforms to ensure that the RC system maintains good visibility, for example, by supporting a coherent online presence within existing data systems/portals (e.g. UN INFO and IMS).³⁸ The majority of RCs feel that they have received adequate support from DCO on the MAF, BOS, the SDCFs and CCAs. Additionally, DCO is said to be responsive and accessible in the majority of cases, playing a key role in making the system more inclusive for smaller agencies.

The progress that has been achieved has also been catalysed by support of UNDP. Respondents agreed that the huge disruption to UNDP's working practices and organisational norms wrought by the overhaul of the RC system and re-staffing of RR posts was well handled. UNDP successfully recruited a new cadre of RRs while also supporting the introduction of the new RC system in a very tight timeframe.³⁹ That said, UNDP is still working through and communicating its changed role since the delinking, and the level of understanding in other agencies varies. The "integrator" role of UNDP is not yet fully understood across the UNCT and in governments, and it would be useful to clarify how this adds value as the reform process matures and to ensure appropriate communication across the system to eliminate any ambiguities.

WHAT IS EVOLVING

Establishing effective RC accountability mechanisms

Enhanced authority over the alignment of agency programmes and inter-agency pooled funds was one of five key factors identified in the original resolution on UNDS reform as being necessary for strengthening RC leadership and authority.⁴⁰ Changes to allied and supporting accountability mechanisms began when the draft MAF was first circulated in April 2019. It

³⁷ UN Secretary-General, 2019. Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, E/2019/4, 14

³⁸ United Nations, 2020a. 2020 Report of the chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group on the Development Coordination Office, pg.19

³⁹ United Nations, 2019c. Financial Report and Audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2019 and Report of the Board of Auditors Volume I, pg.19

⁴⁰ United Nations, 2018b. Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, A/RES/72/279, pg.2

KEY DRIVER – CAPABILITIES, HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS

While the vast majority of evidence points to highly skilled individuals in RC positions, developing and recruiting the right skills for both RCs and RCOs is a critical driver for the reforms and is still being developed. Specialist skills in certain areas, such as understanding humanitarian contexts, are not always as strong as is required.

has since been subject to revisions.⁴¹ In its current country-level form, the MAF is a foundational tool to reinvigorate the RC system, which establishes lines of accountability between the RC and UNCTs to deliver the SDCF. Agencies are positively engaging: UNDP has elicited regular feedback from staff in country offices on implementing the MAF, and analysing the associated data to improve engagement. However, as discussed below, the MAF requires further iteration to make it more powerful in practice.

There has been significant progress in several other complementary areas. A number of agencies have updated their performance appraisal indicators to provide inputs to RCs as per MAF stipulations.⁴² Consequently, competencies and behaviours in the revised RC profile are being used to influence UN agencies' leadership development and performance management criteria.⁴³ Revised job descriptions from agencies such as the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) include responsibilities for representatives to work in close coordination with other UNCT members, engage in joint programming, and feed into the matrixed reporting arrangement.⁴⁴

Ensuring the right skills for new RCs

Evidence collected from interviews suggests that some stakeholders from UN agencies find that some of the RCs who have been recruited lack the appropriate skills mix and experience to perform their role, which affects their credibility and effectiveness. Concerns were raised that those RCs recruited from outside the UN system may not yet have the necessary in-depth understanding of UN entities and behaviours needed to bring the system together in collaboration. This point was raised more at HQ than in the countries considered in this study, where the feedback on the RC role was highly positive, although some interviewees spoke to the general need for balancing fresh perspectives and more experienced hands from the UN system in the new RC function.

⁴¹ UNFPA, 2019b. Information note: Implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system, 14 May 2019, pg.2

⁴² UNICEF, 2019. Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 72/279 on "Repositioning of the UN Development System", Information Note, UNICEF Executive Board – Annual Session 2019, pg. 2

⁴³ UNICEF, 2020b. Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 72/279 on "Repositioning of the UN Development System", Information Note, UNICEF Executive Board – Second Regular Session 2020

⁴⁴ UNFPA, 2019b. Information note: Implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system, 14 May 2019, pg.2

Formalised training does not always address these limitations in skillsets to help newly appointed RCs perform the collaborative and leveraging elements of their role more effectively. Current training provisions are not sufficient to ensure the skills required for coherent leadership of UNCTs, and RCs cannot rely in practice solely on accountability mechanisms to support a more coordinated way of working. This is especially true in very challenging situations; one RC described facing ‘mutiny’ by some UNCT members against reform measures, including alignment with the SDCF. Crisis settings also make it difficult to assess, measure, and train in the requisite competencies for effective RCs.⁴⁵ Efforts by DCO including mentoring and coaching for all first-time RCs, global RC meetings, a revamped induction process and more ambitious projects such as the Global Executive Leadership Initiative (GELI) are useful and need to be further expanded to ensure that RCs are well equipped to take up these leadership and coordination elements of their role and manage the resistance to new ways of working.

One of the challenges of RC recruitment is the mixed incentives for agencies to put forward strong candidates for RC positions and the ability to attract strong candidates for the position. Smaller agencies may feel a need to retain their best staff rather than put them forward to join the RC talent pool. Furthermore, the most senior UNDS staff may not find that taking up the RC role is an attractive career move given the lack of clarity on subsequent career progression, a sense of losing one’s “home agency” and the role’s sheer complexity.

Some stakeholders are concerned that the selection process for RC positions may not be appropriately located to identify the best candidates. Some interviewees felt that because the Secretariat is responsible for selection, the recruitment process risked vulnerability to MS politicisation, noting anecdotal examples of unsuitable candidates being put forward or of suitable candidates promoted by UN agencies being blocked by MS.

“Right-sizing” RCOs

Despite the progress in establishing RCOs and broad appreciation for the enhanced capacity, there are clear instances where insufficient RCO capacity risks creating a bottleneck. The current “one-size-fits-all” approach may not be appropriate in all contexts. On the other side, several key informants (especially from within the large programmatic agencies) raised concerns over the potential for “mission creep”, with some RCOs mobilising resources and going beyond their mandate. RCOs should not become programme implementers. However, they must also be empowered, including with sufficient resourcing, to secure alignment from agencies and support a UNCT that works in concert to achieve the SDGs. While this is largely going well, there is, ultimately, a clear need to balance the necessary staffing of RCOs

⁴⁵ United Nations University, 2018. What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field. United Nations University Centre for Policy Research.

CONSTRAINING FACTOR – CAREER INCENTIVES FOR RCS

Talented individuals need incentives to become RCS, including clear career paths to balance their loss of “home agency.” The willingness and ability of agencies – particularly smaller ones – to encourage their best staff to apply for these roles is still evolving and can present a challenge to recruitment.

(recognising a minimum level required to effectively deliver core functions) across different country contexts while retaining the RCO’s original function as a coordination mechanism.

Initial steps in funding the RC system

One of the key factors underlying the creation of a successful RC system is the establishment of a mechanism for adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding. Paragraph 10 of Resolution 72/279 sets out the three funding streams established for the RC system: (i) a 1% coordination levy on tightly earmarked third-party non-core contributions to UN development-related activities, to be paid at source; (ii) doubling the current UNDG cost-sharing arrangement among UNDS entities; and (iii) voluntary, predictable, multi-year contributions to a dedicated trust fund to support the inception period.

To date, a number of positive steps have been taken to implement these funding streams. First, 44 MS provided voluntary contributions of USD97.8 million to the Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF) for the new RC system in 2020. Agencies also quite quickly met the requirement outlined in the resolution to double cost-sharing arrangements, with contributions from UNSDG members being maintained at double the baseline figure of USD77.5 million, over three consecutive years.⁴⁶ There has also been progress on the 1% coordination levy on tightly earmarked third-party non-core contributions.

USD40.4 million was collected through the levy in 2020, a marked increase from USD29.9 million collected in 2019. Many agencies transferred receipts from the levy to the SPTF on a regular basis.⁴⁷ Importantly, in 2020, three donors also contributed directly to the levy as “donor administered” rather than as “agency administered”, which reduced the hidden transactional burden placed on agencies. The financing system for the RC function has been commended for its transparency and hailed as a strong example that other UN processes may follow as exemplified by the establishment of an online portal to track real-time expenditures and contributions.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ UNSDG, The Special Purpose Trust Fund: An Overview, Accessed: <https://unsdg.un.org/SPTF>

⁴⁷ UNFPA, 2020a. Information note: Implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system, 22 January 2020, pg.3

⁴⁸ United Nations, 2020l. Draft resolution submitted by the Rapporteur of the Committee, Diamane Diome (Senegal), on the basis of informal consultations on draft resolution A/C.2/75/L.18, Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 1 December 2020, pg.17

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND RISKS

Adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding of the RC system is a critical risk

Despite the initial progress described above, adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding for the RC system in the medium to longer-term remains one of the most serious risks to the reforms overall. Given the fiscal and socio-economic impact of COVID-19, the outlook is particularly worrisome in the coming period. Failure here threatens to unravel the gains in credibility and recognition made so far, and, potentially, the entire reform agenda.

Studies produced early on in the UNDS reform process suggest that funding was below the necessary threshold identified by the SG.⁴⁹ In 2020, a total of USD215.6 million went to finance the RC system, drawn from USD97.8 million in voluntary contributions; USD77.5 million from UNSDG Agency cost-sharing; and USD40.4 million from the levy. For 2021, the total budget required for the SPTF is USD281 million.⁵⁰ If a continued cost-sharing contribution of USD77.5 million and a reasonable increase in the levy to USD50 million are assumed, this would leave USD155 million in voluntary contributions required to fund the SPTF – a significant increase from 2020 and a concerning figure against

the USD40.2 million contributed to date.⁵¹ While there was an important increase in 2020, receipts from the imposition of the 1% levy on earmarked funding fall below projections made at the time of the resolution.⁵² Evidence suggests that this may be due to the fact that the levy is working – as intended – as a disincentive to earmarking, although it may be too early to draw a correlation here.^{53,54} Additionally, interview data highlighted that some MS were deducting the levy from their original earmarked contributions rather than including it as an additional contribution to the SPTF.

⁴⁹ Baumann, M. O., 2018. Mission Impossible? Country Level Coordination in the UN Development System, German Development Institute, Discussion Paper 7/2018, 22

⁵⁰ As accessed 15 March 2021: <https://unsdg.un.org/SPTF>

⁵¹ As accessed 30 April 2021: <https://unsdg.un.org/SPTF>

⁵² International Labour Office, 2020. Update on the United Nations Reform, GB.338/INS/9

⁵³ See DCO, Funding Compact Commitments Status Update, 13 August 2020: <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/DCO-FundingCompactUpdate-Indicators.pdf>

⁵⁴ United Nations, 2020g. Report of the Secretary-General, Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR), E/2020/55, p.37

Moreover, the additional budgetary burden and impacts on future resource envelopes associated with COVID-19 have made future projections on levy intake even less predictable.⁵⁵ On top of all this, the associated costs and processes attached to the levy are imposing an additional burden on agencies. The levy is taken de facto from operational budgets, as donors impose its cost on agencies rather than incur it “at source”, and nearly all levy funds are administered by the agencies, which entails transaction costs.

This issue is further discussed in the chapter on the Funding Compact, but it is important to note that the successes achieved and positive trajectory for the revitalised RC function can be undone easily and quickly if the funding issue is not resolved in a timely manner.

Accountability mechanisms – addressing unintended incentives and effects

Despite progress on MAF implementation, a gap remains between incentives and accountability on paper and how these mechanisms play out in practice. The MAF relies on the prominence and effective implementation of RCs’ “soft skills”, which vary. On going work must be completed to adjust the MAFs at different levels and calibrate them on the basis of experience.

There is no consistent application or understanding of the MAF across all UNCTs. Its efficacy relies on the RC’s ability to communicate and implement it as the primary accountability mechanism at country level and unless this is uniform, UNCTs will have different levels of accountability. In some cases, interpretations of the MAF have led to friction within UNCTs. For example, agencies are flagging a risk that RCs might interpret the MAF in unhelpful and unintended ways, limiting agency engagement with senior levels of government, or informing donors that all funding should be directed through the RCO. That said, most RCs are very clear that this is neither an effective way of operating nor their appropriate role, and are instead seeking to play a facilitating role and leveraging the expertise in the agencies as intended.⁵⁶

When used effectively, the MAF should promote oversight, accountability and cooperation between RCs and the UNCTs. However, stakeholders widely recognised that the MAF is not sufficient to drive the required changes in attitudes and behaviours. Collaboration and accountability continue outside

⁵⁵ UNDP, 2020. Progress Update on the Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 72/279 on Repositioning of the UN Development System: Information Note for the Executive Board Annual Session 2020, pg.2

⁵⁶ UNICEF, 2020a. Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 72/279 on “Repositioning of the UN Development System”, Information Note, UNICEF Executive Board – First Regular Session 2020, 1-2

the MAF. One key informant stated, “we hear about it [the MAF] but we rely on other things, it is like a rule book on how to behave... but there are more effective incentives.” Performance management roles within the MAF continue to be unclear.⁵⁷ Some stakeholders view the MAF as a tick-box exercise and added bureaucracy with no tangible power or repercussions attached to it. It is an administrative exercise that does not target the structural issues of incentives and accountability needed to drive systemic behaviour change. This finding is supported by the 2021 UNSDG Chair’s Report on the DCO, which recognises consistent system-wide alignment to the MAF as an area for improvement.⁵⁸

For the MAF to become a more effective tool, the issues underpinning the current country-level MAF, including around stakeholder understanding and support by regional- and global-level counterparts, must be addressed. The 2021 Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 75/233 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System recognises that there is still work to be done to embed the MAF and ensure uniform compliance from RCs and UN agencies, particularly those without a country presence. It also recognises that the MAF must be completed at regional and global levels to be fully effective and create strong ties with vertical accountability and incentivise behaviour change.⁵⁹

Power and accountability of the RC to drive reform

In interviews, agencies frequently spoke of RCs’ lack of “hard power” to push reforms forward and address issues such as overlap in agency mandates, strategic selection of country presence and review of funding modalities, areas identified as critical for reform in the evaluation of Delivering as One.⁶⁰ In practice, the RC cannot rely solely on mechanisms like the MAF, but must also have the right skillset and support from DCO to deliver reform. One RC stated that it is important for RCs to be bold and pursue reform with “tenacity” but this is difficult for RCs with weaker skillsets or less confidence in the face of dominant UNCT members.

⁵⁷ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published.

⁵⁸ Development Cooperation Office, Report of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2021

⁵⁹ United Nations, 2021, ‘Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System, pg. 15

⁶⁰ United Nations, 2012. Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One, Summary Report, pg.32

Several RCs suggested that performance appraisal systems for them, for which DCO takes into account agency feedback, do not always encourage RCs to fully pursue reform, particularly if those providing feedback have not bought into the reform. Other respondents suggested that RCs can be disinclined to push hard for reforms to avoid a negative response (e.g. treating agencies equally, even where weighting their country presence differentially would increase responsiveness to country needs). Some challenges remain for the appraisal mechanism to become the intended enabler for RCs to pursue a demand-driven UNCT aligned to the SDCF. The work of the new generation of UNCTs is expected to be demand-driven and tailored to countries' specific development priorities and needs. The reforms called for a revitalised, strategic, flexible, and results- and action-oriented UNDAF as the main planning instrument. This has taken the form of the new SDCFs, developed on the basis of discussions between the UNCT and programme country governments, and informed by the needs and priorities identified in the CCAs. The new generation of UNCTs is also meant to entail more tailored, needs-based country presence, stronger capacity, skillsets, and resources for UNDS entities to support the achievement of the SDGs.⁶¹

⁶¹ This transformation area also includes common business operations and back offices, and while this is covered to a degree here, it is also examined through the efficiency gains lens under the chapter on the funding compact. Note that a review of Multi-Country Offices (MCOs) was not included in the scope of this study.

3.2 THE NEW GENERATION OF UNCTS

What has been achieved/is going well

- CCAs are now in place and provide a shared assessment of needs at country level, a critical first step towards a demand-led approach.
- There is progress in developing the SDCFs that has provided a visible and important focus for planning and dialogue within the UNCTs.
- Newly empowered RCs are facilitating the greater cohesion of the UNCTs.
- Many positive examples of joint working at the country team level existed before and during the reforms. Joint working has grown over the last two and a half years and seems increasingly enabled by the reforms.
- Shared experiences and mature relationships from crisis response, in particular, have enabled joint working.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and developing the SERPs have also provided a shared imperative that has strongly accelerated progress on joint working.

What is evolving

- The process of moving from developing to implementing the SDCFs is at a very early stage and has not begun in most countries.
- There are positive signs around some aspects of country presence, working with the RCOs, and greater inclusion of NRAs in the UNCT discussions.
- Effective sequencing of SDCFs and agency country programme documents has been agreed as a priority and reflected in guidance by agencies, demonstrating buy-in and intent. However, much detailed work is required to ensure that work plans, monitoring systems and planning cycles are fully aligned.

Challenges and risks

- There is a risk that the positive collaborative behaviours established during the pandemic response will not be sustained and that more agency-driven approaches will resume. This is exacerbated by tendencies to use bilateral funding routes.
- Effective operationalisation of SDCFs is contingent on addressing issues around pooled funding and on the interoperability of systems, which are inherently difficult and structural in nature.
- Comprehensive reconfigurations of country presence in response to country needs have not yet begun nor is it clear that the incentives for it exist in the agencies or from the countries.
- The common value proposition – how the UNDS will add value in support of Agenda 2030 – is neither entirely clearly articulated nor understood.

The main areas of progress thus far are around developing CCAs (as a basis for a shared, demand-led approach to responding to country needs), the development work on the new SDCFs, coordinated by the RC, and the positive behaviours shown in the UNCTs as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found good examples of joint working in many areas in relation to the pandemic and in crisis response more generally. Prior UNCT experience with a humanitarian crisis was found to be one key enabling factor of effective collaboration among development actors. This created a shared imperative, which may also explain the drive to collaboration seen in response to COVID-19 and in the development and implementation of the SERPs. An issue around the SDCF was found regarding sequencing and alignment to agencies' CPDs, which is now being addressed following board level discussions and new guidance within agencies.

At the same time, it remains to be seen how well the SDCFs will be operationalised to fully transition to collaborative responses to the needs of countries as they emerge from the pandemic. There are challenges in translating gains in collaborative ways of working made during crises, most notably from COVID-19, into a broader, more "normal" development context of achieving the SDGs. Meanwhile, UNCTs are still struggling to achieve and really internalise a coherent narrative on the common value proposition, despite some gains. Some aspects of change, such as the reconfigured country presence, have barely begun at all and demonstrate a lack of buy-in to transformative change, particularly among larger operational agencies.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED/IS GOING WELL

New CCAs are complete and provide a shared analysis of country need

The new CCA is an important instrument for assessing country level need and provides a platform for a shared approach. All countries have successfully taken this essential first step towards a demand-led approach by the new generation of country teams.

Developing and agreeing on the SDCFs has provided a shared platform for dialogue and planning

Following on from the CCAs, there has also been considerable work on planning and dialogue among the UN agencies and with governments in developing the SDCFs. As of March 2021, these are being implemented in 11 of 130 countries; the remainder are set to be implemented over the

KEY DRIVER – MANDATES AND STRUCTURES

Agency mandates with similar thematic areas of focus can be clear drivers for partnership and joint programming. For the Rome-based agencies (FAO, IFAD, WFP), for example, food security under SDG2 “Achieving a Zero Hunger world” is central to their respective mandates and different collaborative efforts. Agencies whose mandates differ, such as the multilateral consortium around the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All can also bring their comparative advantages to resolving complex problems.

coming five years.⁶² This process has provided an important, a highly visible focus for the new generation of country teams to have a shared dialogue about planning, a collaborative response to needs and identifying areas for collaboration/joint programming, and a clear division of labour. Interviewees stated that it compared favourably with the previous UNDAF, providing further opportunity for collective planning and leveraging the UNDS as a whole, although a few individuals felt the SDCFs remained a collage of CPDs as with the UNDAF.

In Jordan and Ethiopia, the new SDCF development process was recognised as a useful exercise for uniting the UNCT and leveraging each member’s expertise. Further, it has assigned responsibility for delivery against SDCF components to relevant UNCT members according to their mandate and technical expertise. This responsibility is underpinned by progress measures and indicators tracked by the UN INFO platform.

Joint working at country level has expanded

Joint working at country level has expanded significantly and appears to be enabled by the reforms, reflecting the role of the new RC and greater coherence and coordination among the UNCT.⁶³ That said, joint working is not new and tends to respond to specific needs on the ground. While this set of reforms has been influential in formalising existing joint working practices, other drivers to joint working exist. Notwithstanding, key informants from UN entities noted greater engagement with their peer agencies over the last two and a half years. The document review also identified various exercises and guidance to improve joint programming.⁶⁴ The need for outcome- rather than project-based funding mechanisms that foster collaboration rather than inefficient competition was recognised.⁶⁵

⁶² Of those SDCFs still to be implemented, 4 are set to begin in 2021, 33 in 2022, 43 in 2023, 12 in 2024, and 27 in 2026. Source: https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Final_SDCF%20Implementation-Table-160321_0.pdf

⁶³ See for example: Joint Programme in the Eastern Caribbean “Enhancing Resilience and Acceleration of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Eastern Caribbean: Universal Adaptive Social Protection”; joint programme to support countries design and implement disability inclusive response and recovery planning for COVID-19, financed in part by the Covid-19 Response and Recovery MPTF; joint programme to support countries design and implement disability inclusive response and recovery planning for COVID-19, by ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO, UN Women, UNFPA, UNDESA, OHCHR and other implementing partners (IDA and IDDC), with core support provided from UNPRPD, implemented in multiple countries including Nepal and Timor-Leste, and financed in part by the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF.

⁶⁴ UNDG, 2014. Guidance Note on Joint Programmes.

⁶⁵ United Nations, 2017. Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet. Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/684, para 24.

Crisis response has had an enabling effect on joint working

Interviews and documents found that when UNCTs share prior experience of responding to a crisis, a collaborative approach is facilitated. In particular, it is easier if the UNCT can use mechanisms, relationships, and tools that have developed around collective efforts across humanitarian and development actions. UNCTs who already support and/or have supported countries going through crises related to climate, migration, refugees or political conflicts and requiring a strong collective effort, were able to create mature relationships with each other and forge habits using coordination tools such as the cluster system. These contexts also underline the importance of greater alignment of the UN's humanitarian, development, and peace work (Box 1).

Box 1: Reform in practice: humanitarian – development – peace-building actions

There are a number of important ongoing initiatives linking humanitarian and development programming, for example the exercise between DCO and OCHA, and the UNCHR – UNICEF Blueprint for Joint Action in support of refugee and returnee children, their families and host communities. The RCs' new role is highly relevant here, particularly where they wear three hats in their roles as Deputy Special Representative of the SG, RC and Humanitarian Coordinator. This enables greater coordination within the UNCT and strengthens the approach to holistic and resilient programming.

The relationship between UNDS reform and working across humanitarian – development – peace-building actions at the country level is not yet well articulated. While beyond the scope of this study, it would be a useful area for further investigation, along with how UNDS reform is related to other areas of reform and the broader integration agenda.

COVID-19 response and developing and implementing the SERPs have accelerated collaboration

A similar dynamic was found to be at play for the COVID-19 crisis, demonstrating that the UNCTs could collaborate in response. The majority of UNCTs developed SERPs very quickly – 118 SERPs covering 136 countries were developed within 9 months of the crisis – and evidence suggests that they helped enable a coherent country response.^{66,67} Interviews indicated that the UNCTs' agile, coordinated action was a good example of the benefits of the new generation of country teams (e.g. more inclusive of NRAs) and new RC function (e.g. able to coordinate impartially and authoritatively),

⁶⁶ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published, pg.4

⁶⁷ United Nations Secretary General, 2020. Deputy Secretary-General's Remarks at Virtual Global Resident Coordinators Meeting (as prepared for delivery), 8 December 2020, pg.1

and that it demonstrated the flexibility and agility of coordination within the system.⁶⁸ The template and global guidance created by UNDP and DCO is evidence of strong collaboration enabling improved policy advice.⁶⁹

The impact of this successful collaboration could be highly significant and fundamental for the future of the reform. In country interviews, agencies noted that they were more aware of the contributions of other agencies to both the health and economic response because of the increase in virtual UNCT meetings. Host government officials echoed these comments and often described the clarity of leadership. Of particular salience during the pandemic, good practice was also evidenced with UNCTs noting that the BOS facilitated access to a wider range of staff wellbeing services than otherwise possible through individual agencies. Combined with insights from other crisis contexts, this suggests that the crisis presents an opportunity to cement the new UNCT and a more collaborative approach. While momentum and the opportunity are there, challenges remain for connecting tools and approaches from a crisis to transformation in development contexts.

WHAT IS EVOLVING

Moving from planning to implementing the SDCFs

When this study was being conducted, the SDCFs were, unsurprisingly, too new for any real sense of how they would fare during implementation: it takes time to establish the RC system, to develop the CCAs, and to develop and have the SDCFs agreed with governments. On top of that, in 2020, the pandemic was the necessary focus. However some see the experience in developing and implementing the SERPs as a positive indication of the possibilities of using shared planning vehicles in response to needs.

Some positive signs around inclusion of non-resident agencies in the UN country team

COVID-19 and the move to virtual programming presented a meaningful opportunity for UNCTs to benefit from having more agencies contribute. The format benefitted smaller, technical and, more frequently, non-resident UNDS agencies in particular to extend their reach to UNDS colleagues and host government counterparts as individuals become more comfortable

⁶⁸ The SERP development process reflected increased interaction with both resident and non-resident agencies. See for example: United Nations Development Coordination Office, 2020. Concept Note – Member States dialogue with Resident Coordinators, pg.2

⁶⁹ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published, pg.4

with virtual platforms. The inclusion of NRAs and smaller agencies means that the UNDS can be better equipped to deliver on cross-cutting issues like gender, disability, and human rights.

The use of RCOs is another opportunity. A number of agencies interviewed describe attentively watching the RCOs move towards a minimum of five substantive officers, which should increase the UN's capacity to provide better policy and programmatic support. Some agencies are considering "piggybacking" and placing their staff in the RCO, providing further cohesion among UNCTs.

For example, in discussion with DCO, UN Women is considering the deployment of a Gender Equality (GE) Coordinator to a RC's office in countries where they no longer have a formalised presence. This would, on one hand, help establish some GE leadership capacity within a UNCT, and on the other, give UN Women an opportunity to deploy its expertise and coordination mandate with relatively low cost.

Practical challenges around sequencing and aligning planning

Effective sequencing of the SDCF and of agencies' own country planning documents was being worked through during the period of the study. Moving to a demand-led collaborative approach depends on national ownership of the SDCF, which is based on effective consultation and a clear understanding among agencies that the Cooperation Framework is the primary vehicle for decision making: that is, the SDCF will drive decisions in the agency country plans and not the converse.

Specifically for some funds and programme agencies, it was evident during the study that MS are holding them accountable for reform, as is shown by their joint letter to the executive boards of UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFPA reinforcing the need to align their work with the SDCF and to ensure that all country programmes flow directly from the priorities it sets out. The agencies' responses appear to indicate that they have taken this message on board in their formal decision making and guidance responses.

In practice, some time may be needed to fully work through the sequencing issue. Some entities naturally wish to position their country planning documents within the common approach, recognising the opportunities to use the SDCF both to leverage their own objectives and results areas, and to support financing. However, bringing country programme documents and the SDCF together also involves addressing several practical issues:

- **Differences in decision-making processes:** The SDCF is a national document agreed to between national governments and the UN system at the country level. It is not reviewed outside the country setting. By

contrast, the CPD is developed by the relevant agency in consultation but not negotiated with the government; CPDs must also go through the inter-governmental approval process by each agency's executive boards at a HQ (global) level. Another difference is that when MS on the executive board review the CPD, they do so against the alignment of resources with specific agency results, not necessarily the broader results of the UNCT. The processes to develop plans are expected to be in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, but any gaps in understanding the process can hamper the continuity of programme implementation at the country level.

- **Differences in timing and transaction costs:** Timing and implementation issues can also lead to challenges. For instance, now that the SDCF is the primary instrument, entities report that most of their 2020 country programme documents must be extended into 2021 to await the signature of the SDCF so that they can then develop a new, aligned CPD. This does not seem to be detrimental to an entity's work in the development context but it does bring transaction costs.
- **The need to coordinate on strategic plans and monitoring, reporting, and evaluation:** Collaboration around joint work plans, strategic plans, and monitoring, reporting, and evaluation systems are also crucial. The New York-based agencies are making numerous efforts (e.g. consultations, workshops, a joint roadmap) to collaboratively design the upcoming strategic plans. Guided by the new QCPR, agencies see an opportunity to enhance coordination. Harmonising monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems is also critical to keep the system moving towards the same goals. Under the former UNDAF, separate corporate systems were continued without being streamlined across the UNDS or tightly aligned to the UNDAF, thus requiring UN staff to manage multiple duplicative processes. This issue should not be repeated with the SDCFs. Further, as operationalising the SDCFs is so central to the overall success of the reforms, ensuring robust and quality-assured systems for evaluating achievement against them without creating undue or duplicative burdens will be crucial going forward.

Building skills for dynamic leadership in the field

Implementation of the reform also depends on the skills and understanding of UNCT staff, and in particular leadership, which can present a challenge, particularly in less visible contexts where staff sometimes lack strategic and thematic expertise within the SDG Agenda and represent an organisational shortfall.

Several initiatives are being developed to ensure a shift in leadership and underlying competencies, mindsets, behaviours and operational culture. As the success of the reform requires “new”, dynamic leadership in the field, DCO and many UNSDG Agencies, Funds and Programmes are applying the UN’s first Leadership Framework, which, in part, demands new ways of working. DCO has also undertaken a number of important steps to strengthen the leadership skills of RCs, including mentoring and coaching, virtual peer exchanges on leadership and on individual and team resilience in contexts of disruptive change, and efforts to help them build relationships and broaden their networks with their new stakeholders.

Additionally, two recent initiatives are in place and underway that could drive a shift in leadership and underlying competencies across the UNCT to promote systemic change in behaviour and operational culture include:

- The Global Executive Leadership Initiative (GELI) was developed in 2020 in close collaboration with DCO, OCHA, and IASC members (NGOs, IFRC/ICRC, UN Representatives).⁷⁰ Hosted by UNOPS, GELI offers knowledge and development opportunities for executive leaders of humanitarian, development, and peace operations based in countries of operation through bespoke programmes.
- The SDG Leadership Lab project is owned and developed by DCO. It is intended to support a collaborative leadership approach and to introduce a forward-looking organisational model that will help transform leadership behaviour, strengthen leadership practice, and support collaborative leadership processes in humanitarian and developmental operational settings. Tested in Uganda, the SDG Leadership Lab will introduce the concept of systems leadership to operations in twenty-four countries around the world.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND RISKS

Sustaining collaborative behaviours beyond the crisis

Many key informants noted the positive aspects of behaviour change during the pandemic, prompted by the shared imperative of a rapid response to a global crisis. However, interviewees expressed uncertainty over whether this was likely to be sustained: “the jury is still out”. Behaviours risk reverting to more traditional agency/supply-driven patterns because of survival incentives in a very tight funding environment. The experience is that donors are encouraging agencies to use bilateral funding routes, giving the agencies no choice but to follow the resources. Agencies, for their part, have varying degrees of resistance to this push.

⁷⁰ See: www.GELI.org

There is a strategic difficulty in connecting the response to the “decade of action” and joining up short and long-term objectives. In principle, there is some commonality, for example, 18 SERP indicators are actually derived mostly from the SDGs, but there are practical challenges. One way forward could be to integrate the SERPs into SDCFs, but there is an issue of overlap – 28 of the SDCFs naturally started in January 2021.⁷¹ This seems to be a strategic, albeit surmountable, challenge for the system.

Risk around operationalising the SDCFs

As the UNCTs move forward operationalising the SDCFs, certain practical risks and challenges are likely to materialise. Interviews suggested several areas to watch.

First, the practical challenges around joint working between the agencies themselves: differences between agency systems that require workarounds in practice that can be time-consuming and create disincentives to partnership. Pooled funding routes at country level are still evolving and the global thematic funds are under-capitalised whereas without joint approaches to resourcing, joint programming is inevitably constrained. System-level constraints exist related to policy, programmatic and operational areas such as mismatched capacity (i.e. having the required capacity and field presence to equally contribute to the design and implementation of joint programmes) and the issue of managing accountabilities.⁷²

Second, there are challenges concerning how agencies interact with government. While the SDCF should ideally include all aspects of the UNCT’s programming, agencies with a normative role know that governments may not always welcome some core areas of particular agencies’ work that could be more politically sensitive (e.g. on human rights or governance). Some agencies may therefore refrain strategically from fully using the SDCF.

Third, agencies are still very much mandate driven. This is understandable as it is their fundamental purpose but it does not necessarily align with expressed demands at country level. Some agencies stated that they were less likely to follow an SDCF if their mandate did not figure prominently in it. In particular, there is an ongoing need to ensure that specialised agencies are incentivised to deliver on collective UNCT results as opposed to more

⁷¹ UNSDG, SDCF Implementation Table as of 11 February 2021

⁷² UNICEF’s internal initiative on Joint Programme Strategy Development, 2021. The final outcome of this exercise will be released by the end of March 2021.

narrowly pursuing their own mandates.⁷³ This is further complicated by the majority of UNDS entities lacking any formal requirement to derive their country programme outcomes from the SDCF, and some yet to take any action to harmonise their agency-specific programming in line with SDCF guidance.

Risk management is another challenge for the smaller agencies. They noted a more limited ability to share risk across a pool of activities; if they participate too much in the new generation of UNCTs and seek to respond to national demand, they might be overstretched.

Reconfiguring country presence to reflect needs and country demands

Capacity and country presence have been part of a long-standing reform agenda. A key aim is that the UNDS be more needs-based and better tailored to ensure the best presence on the ground, including greater coordination and efficiency.⁷⁴

Overall, there is a lack of dynamism with respect to capacity and country presence across the UNDS. There is little evidence to show that agencies open or close offices in relation to the strategic priorities of the country team. Many agencies interviewed acknowledge that some of their current country offices are linked more to the historical significance of the post rather than to the strong relevance of host governments' goals. Others indicated that there is some strong resistance to this aspect of reform, including the use of common back offices (CBOs), which goes beyond mere collaboration and into consolidation. An approach to country offices that does not look across the system can be inefficient and expensive.

UNDS members have different operational and programmatic requirements for being in-country, which also presents an obstacle when considering UNDS country presence. Modalities of capacity building for host government vary greatly. For example, one-third of WHO country offices are located in host governments' health departments, which is one key for maintaining strong country relationships and understanding the situation on the ground.

The role played by host governments in determining country presence can be delicate. Interviewees indicated that some countries may want less UN presence and the ability to determine which agencies are permitted to have representatives, whereas other countries may wish to increase UN presence to raise the visibility of their needs. This view (from the UN side) however, has not been fully tested in this study through direct discussion with host countries and should be regarded with caution.

⁷³ UNEP, 2020. UN Development System Support System, [draft], as of 24 July 2020

⁷⁴ Hendra, J and FitzGerald, I., 2016. "Who Wants (To) Change? A 'Theory of Change' for the UN Development System to Function as a System for Relevance, Strategic Positioning and Results", United Nations University Centre for Policy Research Papers, pg.252

Further clarifying the common value proposition and operationalising the SDCFs

The common value proposition and shared strategic objective of a UNCT to address new challenges in the global development landscape is not yet clear. Documentary evidence shows that individual entities are able to articulate their own value proposition but that no similarly strong narrative exists about a UNCTs' common value proposition thus far.⁷⁵ Interviews disclosed that the system seems to be relatively inward-looking and mandate- rather than needs-driven, and that while the collective offer message is put forward, it is not fully internalised for want of individual or internal incentives.

Regarding the broader external landscape and the 2030 Agenda, the document review also shows that within the UN system no commonly shared understanding of 'sustainable development' exists. This is a crucial missing element, especially at the country level, where the 2030 Agenda is actually operationalised. Going forward, the SDCFs can play a critical role in establishing a common proposition for the UNCT's contribution to each country's sustainable development. Doing so can help establish a clearer definition for the broader development system.

⁷⁵ See individual UNSDG entities' Strategic Plans

3.3 PARTNERSHIP FOR THE 2030 AGENDA

What has been achieved/is going well

- Many partnerships broadly aligned to aspects of the 2030 Agenda are underway, showing the UN's role as a convener and thought leader.
- Such partnerships are more often driven by specific development and humanitarian needs rather than directly by the UNDS reforms and the attendant focus on a system-wide response to strategic partnerships to deliver the 2030 Agenda.

What is evolving

- Building from the shared will and commitment on partnerships from the top down and the recognition that a partnership-driven approach is fundamental for delivering on the SDGs, UNDS agencies are developing their capacity around partnership and engaging in strategic partnerships through MoUs and other vehicles. This is often focused on financing.
- New guidance has recently been shared from the UN system on developing partnerships with the private sector.

Challenges and risks

- Partnership remains relatively fragmented in practice – there has been limited if any progress on developing and delivering a systemic approach to such partnerships across the UN system.
- There is no clarity yet on what a more systemic approach would look like. Roles have yet to be articulated, for example, about whether partnership can be driven from the global level at all or is more agency-specific.
- Partnering with the IFIs has been mixed and inconsistent and mainly opportunistic – driven by individual leaders at country level – rather than systemic and strategic, although there has been some good partnering around the COVID-19 response.
- The Global Compact has yet to realise its potential for steering private-sector partnerships as part of the reform agenda.
- The skills needed to support a more effective approach to partnership are not yet strongly developed across the UN system. Some UN agencies have recognised the need to develop their skills in partnering with the IFIs and the private sector and are taking actions to address this.

The UN identified partnerships as an area of reform that had been fragmented and lacking in a strategic, system-wide approach. The hurdles, which include heterogeneous due diligence approaches, lack of transparency and disparate organisational attitudes to partnerships, are restricting innovative solutions required for the 2030 Agenda. Concretely this transformation area includes:

- A system-wide approach with the RCs as a hub for system-wide partnership building.
- Strengthening integrity, due diligence, and risk management across the system, including accepting the Global Compact as the common partnership standard for working with the private sector.
- Supporting the Global Compact, including Global Compact Local networks.
- Developing partnerships with the World Bank and other IFIs, and invigorating South-South cooperation, as requested by MS.

Noting the breadth of this transformation area, the study looked specifically at the extent to which the reforms are supporting or leading to a more collaborative approach – mainly at country level – between the UNDS and broader development partners, in particular, the IFIs and the private sector.

It found many examples of positive experience of partnerships, supported by an overall commitment to their importance and the UN's comparative advantage as a thought leader and convenor. Despite these positive examples, however, little evidence exists of the systemic shift toward strategic partnerships to achieve the SDGs as the reform envisioned. Few of the positive examples could be clearly ascribed to the most recent reform agenda, suggesting the likelihood that those partnerships are being driven more by specific country requirements and by urgent and/or specific needs for development and humanitarian response.

Many of the challenges in this transformation area are longstanding. They go beyond an instrumentalised approach and improving understanding between, for example, the UN and the IFIs about what each can bring to a partnership and how they work. The COVID-19 crisis has had the effect of accelerating partnerships, as with collaboration within the UNCT and with the World Bank on specific aspects (COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access, COVAX). The challenge there is to translate this collaboration into a more permanent shift toward strategic partnership.

As mentioned in the limitations section above, and especially important here, this analysis is based mainly on the perspective of the UN agency stakeholders. Interviews with the full range of partners were beyond the scope of this work, although some contributed at country and HQ levels.

KEY DRIVER – POLITICAL WILL AND SHARED VISION

A clear commitment to advancing partnerships within the UNDS exists at HQ. UNDS and agency-specific documentation show a shared commitment to strategic partnership to achieve the SDGs, recognising that no single entity can help achieve them on its own. All agencies considered in this study have made commitments to expanding their partnerships with IFIs, with the private sector and with civil-society organisations. Agency documents refer to the important role that the agencies can play in convening and facilitating knowledge sharing in South-South cooperation.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED/IS GOING WELL

Shared will and commitment on partnerships explicit in SDCFs

The SDCFs developed thus far make clear system-wide commitments to working with civil society, the IFIs, and the private sector so as to take a holistic approach to Agenda 2030.⁷⁶ For example, the Jordan SDCF explicitly mentions forging strategic partnerships with the World Bank, the IMF, and the European Union and improving domestic resource mobilisation.⁷⁷ The job description for RCs emphasises their role in leading partnership development on behalf of the UNCT and some interviews suggested that including economists in RCOs helps strengthen work with IFIs and national ministries of finance.⁷⁸

The UN's role as a convener of partnerships for the 2030 Agenda

The UN has great potential for being a convener of partnerships among IFIs, the private sector, and national governments. Crucially, it has the potential to draw together its collective technical expertise from all of its constituting agencies around national priorities. Private sector partnerships have enormous potential, particularly as the funding landscape continues to evolve and shifts from funding projects to financing the SDGs. Informants from across the system widely recognised this.

The UN is a trusted partner that can broker deals in areas that directly support progress towards the SDGs providing government access to the private sector and supporting governments in engaging with it. Kenya is a key example (Box 2). The RCO's SDG Partnership Platform has brought together private sector firms that invest in innovation and technology with the Government of Kenya and UN agencies to work on providing quality primary healthcare for all.

⁷⁶ UNSDG, 2019b. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – Internal Guidance

⁷⁷ Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation Jordan, 2017. United Nations Sustainable Development Framework 2018-2022

⁷⁸ UNSDG, 2019c. UN Resident Coordinator Generic Job Description, published January 2019

Box 2: Reforms in Practice: Kenya's SDG Partnership Platform

The SDG Partnership Platform in Kenya is part of a broader strategy to move Kenya from a project-funding environment to financing the SDGs. By bringing together 23 UN entities with the government and the private sector, the platform aims to coordinate, convene, connect and catalyse SDG financing. It is structured around “windows” based on Kenya's Big Four Agenda. Primary Health Care was the first platform window to be launched. The private sector had been reluctant to invest in health, as it seemed to offer few profitable opportunities. However, a study conducted by the RCO, USAID, and McKinsey identified a range of private sector investment opportunities that introduced partnership opportunities for the private sector and the UN. Representatives from the Government of Kenya co-chaired platform working groups alongside a UN agency lead, ensuring that the platform remains demand-driven from the government and grounded in the UN's technical expertise. The working groups also include the private sector, philanthropic organisations and donors. The platform, which also supports strong cooperation with the World Bank, is driving behaviour change among UNDS entities: more are joining as the wider funding landscape evolves.

The UN as a thought leader in strategic partnerships

The UN works best in partnership when it provides strategic leadership, normative and technical expertise. Organisations vary in their interpretation of how partnership practices should work to best contribute to the 2030 Agenda. Agencies with normative mandates – such as UNEP, ILO and UN Women – are clearly committed to partnerships to achieve the SDGs. While they are not new to strategic partnerships, the reforms have heightened the need and enhanced the space for them. In both documentation and interviews, the agencies refer to wide partnership networks and examples of where they successfully work with partners to advance their agendas. ILO and UN Women also cited more positive experiences of working with MDBs than did other agencies.⁷⁹ UN Women has played a pivotal role in establishing gender-financing partnerships under the UN's Financing for Development initiative, bringing together ministers of finance and IFIs, and also works extensively with civil society.^{80,81} UNEP has long worked with the private sector. Crucially, when these organisations partner, they form strategic partnerships where the UN takes on a role as influencer, advocate, or thought leader in areas of technical expertise, often including crosscutting issues.

The accelerator effect of crisis response in promoting collaboration in practice

Just as crisis has enabled greater collaboration within the UNCTs, successful collaboration between the UN and other development actors and national governments often stems from crisis response. For example, in countries that have faced humanitarian emergencies such as the Syria crisis in Jordan

⁷⁹ UN Women, Update on Resources in UN Women Covid-19 Response, 2020

⁸⁰ UN Women, UN Women Executive Board Informal Briefing on International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Innovative Financing, 2021

⁸¹ UN Women, Structured Dialogue on Financing UN Women Strategic Plan, 2020

and the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, key informants gave many examples of UN collaboration with the government and IFIs, suggesting that this way of working is the norm in emergency situations.

The SERPs show clear engagement and collaboration with IFIs in response to the pandemic, with SERPs providing a meaningful platform for partnership with IFIs. As of December 2020, approximately half the SERPs had insights from the World Bank and one-third from the IMF.⁸² However, there is limited evidence that UNDS reform facilitated partnerships established during the COVID-19 response and it appears rather that the COVID-19 crisis itself provided an urgent, overriding imperative that drove these responses. That said, some key informants did however feel that the new role of the RC and their offices was an enabler, and that in a more general sense, the discussions on collaboration through the reforms had helped to lay the ground for partnership during the COVID-19 response.

Crisis appears to be a catalyst for partnership across the development system as it is necessary and in the interest of all actors to rapidly align their efforts behind a holistic, joined-up approach. Collectively consolidating those partnerships established in crisis response and converting them into strategic partnerships for the 2030 Agenda should be one area of focus for the UN.

WHAT IS EVOLVING

Moving from a focus on financing to more strategic partnerships

Whereas normative agencies are increasingly forming strategic partnerships, many UN agencies see partnership with the private sector and IFIs primarily as a financing mechanism: partnership for the SDGs means additional funding for their work on the SDGs. This is made clear when agencies refer to the additional budget as the partnership's principal demonstrable benefit.⁸³

The success of partnership as a route to financing appears to be growing, however, and resource mobilisation is a key factor for every agency's success. Questions nonetheless remain about whether this is an effective route to achieving the SDGs, particularly if it promotes competitive behaviour rather than joint programming. Key informants noted greater competition among agencies for funding from IFIs. Moreover, this raises concerns as the UN's strength and value added to partnerships lies in strategy, convening, and policy advice, rather than in programme delivery.

⁸² UNDP, 2020. UNDP's contributions to the United Nations Development System (UNDS) and its reforms in 2020 - Note to the Secretary-General (through the Chef de Cabinet), pg.3

⁸³ See, for example: UNFPA, 2019, Report on Structured Funding Dialogue

Some behaviour change in UNDS entities shows a commitment to making partnerships more strategic. UNFPA indicated that it had expanded its thinking around private sector partnership from focusing solely on resource mobilisation to visibility, outreach, and innovation.⁸⁴ Similarly, while UNDP partners with the IFIs and the private sector to secure financing – they directly refer to working with IFIs to use their technical assistance and concessional financing – they act increasingly as a convener or strategic partner.⁸⁵ For example, UNDP’s work with the China Development Bank on financing and investment standards, with the World Bank on the Pathways for Peace Report, and with the Caribbean Development Bank on financing the blue economy extend to joint implementation.⁸⁶ In Paraguay, UNDP “is partnering with the National SDG Commission and other UN entities in a new Public-Private Partnership that is facilitating integrated responses to the country’s health and social-economic crisis.”⁸⁷ These illustrate the shift in the approach to partnerships from resource leveraging only to something more strategic and convening.

New initiatives around private sector partnerships

The UNSDG Private Sector Task Team is leading consultations to help the UN better establish and leverage partnerships with private sector actors. This includes addressing due diligence for new partnerships using a common approach to working with the private sector on the 2030 Agenda while accommodating the requirements of individual agencies. The UNSDG Common Approach to Prospect Research and Due Diligence for Business Sector Partnerships aim to address what has been missing to date: UNDS-wide consistency on due diligence regarding private sector partners.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ UNFPA, 2017, Report on contributions by Member States and others to UNFPA and revenue projections for 2017 and future years

⁸⁵ United Nations, 2019h. Structured dialogue on financing the results of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, DP/2019/27

⁸⁶ United Nations, 2019h. Structured dialogue on financing the results of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, DP/2019/27

⁸⁷ UNDP, 2020. Progress Update on the Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 72/279 on Respositioning of the UN Development System: Information Note for the Executive Board Annual Session 2020

⁸⁸ UNSDG, UNSDG Common Approach to Prospect Research and Due Diligence for Business Sector Partnerships, 2020

Strengthening capacity to advance through the UNCT partnerships for the SDGs

There is broad recognition that financing the SDGs will take innovative solutions beyond the traditional models that predominate at the UN, including partnership with IFIs and the private sector. At the same time, there is also a sense that UN staff may not have the necessary skills and understanding to credibly convene the right partners or to seize opportunities.

UNDP and UNICEF are developing a Joint Financing Literacy Course for staff working with the World Bank and IFIs to leverage funding for development and to establish a base of practitioner experts in financing for the SDGs. They are also leading the World Bank, other IFIs, and other UN entities in creating integrated national financing frameworks for the SDGs.⁸⁹

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND RISKS

Approaches and skills for partnerships for the SDGs

Notwithstanding clear examples of limited progress in this transformation area at this stage of the reform process, significant obstacles remain, especially about the approach to and capacity for partnership. There is a clear divide between partnerships for individual agency agendas (where there is more experience), and those for the SDGs, which the UNDS pursues collectively as a key part of the reforms guided by the RC in country.

The UNDS has not yet integrated a consistent, systemic approach to partnership. Engagement tends to be bilateral between UNDS entities and external development partners rather than driven by UNCTs via RCs.^{90,91} The capacities of individual agencies, some of which are more experienced than others in working with partners beyond the UNDS, tend to shape these partnerships.

⁸⁹ UNICEF, Annex to Information Note Examples of UN Reform in Practice: Transformative Collaboration with UNDP, WFP and UNHCR', 2020

⁹⁰ One expert and former RC commented that this may simply reflect the fact that, more broadly, the momentum behind the Paris Declaration and Accra have flagged considerably, so the impetus for development partners to provide concerted leadership at country level in the spirit of the "new aid environment" is no longer there in most countries.

⁹¹ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published.

A commitment exists at agency HQ to the principle of partnership but does not translate evenly to all levels of the organisation. In one agency where the documentation speaks to commitments to partnership, for example, key informants highlighted that staff do not feel empowered to establish partnerships and that there is no clear organisational guidance about what partnerships should look like. In another large agency, key informants also highlighted that staff lack the skillsets to establish public-private partnerships. If partnerships are to be a key mechanism in working towards the SDGs, this area requires attention.

Inefficiencies and heavy bureaucracy can also make the UN hard to work with despite collective will. Partnerships in which the UN is an “implementer” therefore tend to be less successful than those where it is a strategic or thought leadership partner. The exception to this is UNOPS as a purely operational, delivery entity. They have positioned themselves as an effective implementation partner not just within UNDS but also to IFIs, regional intergovernmental organisations and governments, from whom they are getting more demand for partnership.⁹²

While the documentation illustrates a clear willingness for private sector partnership, not all key informants reflected this sentiment. Concerns remain about the private sector’s standards. Some agencies such as WHO have raised concerns regarding proper due diligence of private sector partners. ILO in particular has a stake in ensuring that private sector partners meet standards for decent work and labour rights and is trying to embed this across the UNDS.

IFI engagement – moving from the specific/instrumental to the systemic

Key informants, who again came primarily from UN entities, described partnership between the UNDS and IFIs, and with the World Bank in particular, as mixed or at least as something that could be developed much further.

Meaningful collaboration with the World Bank is on going in numerous thematic areas particularly regarding fragile states and more recently COVID-19. There have also been interactions at senior level, for example, where the DSG has presented on the reforms to the World Bank’s board.

At country level however, successful collaboration seems to be driven by personalities and specific opportunities rather than by a more systemic, strategic approach between the UN system and the IFIs. One obstacle is that these entities work in very different ways. UN entities and their staff have an uneven understanding of how the World Bank works and there is no universal comprehension of the World Bank’s focus on working through a government that then decides how to operationalise the projects being funded.

⁹² UNOPS - Midterm review of the UNOPS strategic plan, 2018-2021

CONSTRAINING FACTOR – MANDATES AND STRUCTURES, MISSION CREEP

Interviews pointed to mission creep as a significant challenge for partnership for the 2030 Agenda. Increasingly, UN entities are moving into new areas of work, often to access funding opportunities, which comes at the expense of entities already established in these areas. Instead of forming partnerships to address complex or multi-sectoral areas of work, agencies are more inclined to go it alone.

Forming partnerships can entail high transaction costs for normative agencies that must work very hard to communicate their mandate to partners within the system. Mission creep thus poses a greater risk to their positioning within the system, with larger multi-mandated operational agencies perceiving that they have less to gain from engagement in new partnerships from a system perspective.

There is a clear perception from the UN side that IFIs, and the World Bank in particular, do not “need” the UN and have few incentives to collaborate generally or on strategic matters, though that is not the case on particular issue areas. In countries such as Jordan and Bangladesh, IFIs have their own access to the government; in Jordan, they occupy a larger share of the development space than does the UN. A consistent perception from the UN side is that the World Bank sees it as an implementing partner rather than as a strategic partner. This makes for a difficult relationship, as there is also a perception in the World Bank that the UN’s bureaucracy and slower processes make it less than the most effective implementing partner. Strategy and thought leadership are the UN’s real added value in this partnership but long-standing perceptions prevent a universal understanding and or appreciation of this.

While in some countries the UNDS has established strong engagements with the World Bank, these tend to be isolated examples or concern a specific agency rather than the UNDS as a system. They also tend to be based on specific programmes rather than on sustained collaboration across the SDGs. In Jordan for example, UNHCR and the World Bank have a strong relationship and work on the refugee response; there are also strong relationships in Nepal and Ethiopia. It is worth noting that many of the examples of strong working relationships preceded the UNDS reform. However, interviews cited the skill and perseverance of RCs as an enabling factor for partnerships to endure and form.

The Global Compact as a contributor to UNDS reform

In the reform agenda, several points were made about the role of the UN Global Compact (UNGC) and its position to steer private-sector partnerships across the UNDS. The document review and key informant interviews show little evidence to reflect UNGC’s contribution to shifting behaviour and capacity across the UN system. One interviewee stated that the inclusion of a UNGC staff member in the DCO office improved access to guidance and strategic engagement with the private sector, but the overall picture is less positive. Agencies still have no formalised provisions with Global Compact Local Networks and a survey conducted by UNGC and Accenture in 2018 cites that only 28% of UN leaders believe that their organisations were doing enough to engage with the private sector.⁹³ No more recent statistics are available, however. Any clearer determination on the progress of this aspect of UNDS reforms requires further information.

⁹³ Accenture Strategy, 2018, ‘Special Edition: Transforming Partnerships for the SDGs’, United Nations Global Compact.

3.4 FUNDING COMPACT

What has been achieved/is going well

- UN agencies are delivering on many of their specific commitments on the Funding Compact, including on visibility, reporting, and use of pooled funding.
- As part of and running alongside the Funding Compact, the system is starting to realize some significant efficiency gains through use of shared services, common back-offices and widespread adoption of Business Operation Strategies (BOS). This is thanks to strong leadership and 'heavy lifting' at the task team level and at the operational level in country.
- Detailed and necessary preparatory work has been done by many agencies to build a 'platform' for achieving greater efficiencies around shared services and in other areas.

What is evolving

- Realising efficiency gains in practice is a continuing process that is yet to release the full scale of envisaged resources. The agencies see considerable potential to achieve efficiency gains but addressing the practical challenges will take time and further investment.

Challenges and risks

- MS have not yet met all their global commitments on the Funding Compact. There is a particularly significant gap around the major pooled funds, which are under-capitalised, and on funding quality and predictability.
- There are substantial risks around future funding to the RC system.

The Funding Compact is the overarching political agreement by which UNDS entities and MS are mutually accountable for focusing on results and transparency in delivering the reforms, underpinned by higher quality, predictable funding, the use of pooled funds to support joint work and improvements in efficiency. It reflects an understanding that for the UNDS to successfully reposition, the predictability and flexibility of its funding base and decisive action about how funds are allocated to it and disbursed by it must be improved.

The Funding Compact is one of the most challenging areas of the reforms and a critical foundation for other areas. It involves five key commitments by the UNDS to enhance transparency and accountability:⁹⁴

1. Annual reporting on system-wide support for the SDGs, including a plan to present aggregated information on system-wide results by 2021.
2. Enhance transparency and access to financial information across all entities through system-wide enrolment in the International Aid Transparency Initiative and full compliance with international transparency standards.
3. Independent system-wide evaluations to provide MS with a credible assessment of results achieved.
4. Fully comply with existing cost-recovery policies and pursue opportunities for harmonising approaches across different entities.
5. Allocate at least 15% of non-core resources to joint activities to complement resources from pooled agency funds.

The UNDS commitments are complemented by four commitments from MS:

1. Increasing core budget allocations to UN entities from 21.7% to 30% by 2023.
2. Doubling inter-agency pooled funds from USD1.7 billion to USD3.4 billion by 2023, increasing from 8% to 16% of total non-core contributions and increasing entity-specific thematic funds from USD407 million to USD800 million.
3. Ensuring adequate and sustainable funding for a reinvigorated RC System (USD255 million), including a discretionary fund of USD35 million to provide RCs with USD270 000 per annum to provide integrated policy support to national partners.
4. Ensuring full capitalisation of the new Joint Policy Fund to Advance the 2030 Agenda at USD290 million per annum, and a quantum leap in funding to the Peace-building Fund as an immediate step.

⁹⁴ For information about progress against the various commitments, see DCO, Funding Compact Commitments Status Update, 13 August 2020: <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org/ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/DCO-FundingCompactUpdate-Indicators.pdf>

Agencies and the OIOS advisory engagement indicate substantial progress on the UNDS side, including efforts to improve transparency and reporting and increase the use of pooled funds. For MS, the progress is generally limited and more mixed.⁹⁵ There has been some progress in increasing their share for general pooled funding arrangements at the global and country level, and a few MS have also demonstrated good practice in ensuring that the levy to finance the RC system is paid at source. Overall however, progress on MS' commitments is very uneven.

Strong political will for the reforms notwithstanding, MS have not acted to substantially change the funding environment. The situation is likely to get even more challenging given the economic and fiscal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional funding streams, particularly earmarked and bilateral funding and cuts in ODA, are already taking place in some cases and while MS are holding the UNDS to account for reform, no collective horizontal pressure exists for them to meet their commitments. This may become starker in 2021 as the impact of the recession on public expenditure and private investment unwinds – a recurrent theme in every area of the reforms.

The May 2020 SG's report noted that it was rather early for any definitive assessment of progress on the Funding Compact. This transformation area is also limited because these findings on the Funding Compact are drawn from a picture involving 2018 and (partly and with late-stage integration) 2019 data sets to which this study had access. Data to support the drawing out of the most recent financing trends was not available. This includes the key area of the most recent changes in MS funding through core/non-core. Various agencies and MS also have very different experiences with the Funding Compact. Finally, to simplify presentation, this section also covers efforts to enhance efficiency of the UNDS that formally fall outside the Compact, and the study acknowledges that these efforts are a substantial area in and of themselves.

⁹⁵ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED/IS GOING WELL

Agencies meeting their commitments

On the UNDS side, the agencies have made a substantial effort to meet their commitments on transparency and reporting and have sought to increase their own use of pooled funds. Feedback from agencies and OIOS advisory engagement is that there has been substantial progress on the UNDS side. Agencies are delivering on visibility, reporting, and exploring ways to achieve efficiency gains.⁹⁶ This is confirmed by recent agency reports to their own boards that were shared with the study team and are now public. ILO, for example, provides DCO with annual reports on its efficiency gains, while others such as UNDP are moving away from redundant compliance processes in an attempt to streamline its work.⁹⁷ While other commitments are still in the early stages and drafting is ongoing, there has been progress in this area.

Creating a platform to deliver efficiency gains around shared services

Agencies have, both individually and collectively, put substantial work into achieving efficiency gains which is expected to yield significant recurring savings.⁹⁸ This includes building towards shared services and shared premises, as well as inter-agency efforts towards the successful rollout of the common BOS, which has been credited with making the UN more responsive during the COVID-19 response.^{99,100} Notably, the BOS is an area of UNDS reform that has made significant progress, with 123 of the 130 UNCTs that were targeted for rollout by December 2021 having already completed the process. This has been accompanied by phase one of a shift towards common back offices (CBOs) within country teams, which has successfully consolidated selected common services into one country-level centre in the countries piloted.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published.

⁹⁷ ILO (2020), Midterm Review of the Integrated Resources Plan and Integrated Budget, 2018-2021, UNDP (2017), UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021, p.22

⁹⁸ For example, according to a DCO factsheet on the efficiency agenda (United Nations Development Coordination Office, 2021), the annual recurring cost avoidance from the BOS is projected to be approximately USD100 million per year.

⁹⁹ These country level initiatives are underpinned by the guidance laid out in the global Business Operations Strategy 2.0, a flexible tool to be leveraged by UNCTs in strategic planning, management, monitoring, and reporting on common business operations.

¹⁰⁰ See the joint NYU-DCO study BOS' Resilience Under Covid: Covid-19 Responses Under the BOS, which also highlighted the BOS' positive impact on cost savings.

¹⁰¹ According to the respondents at the time of data collection.

Agencies across the UN system have invested heavily in exploring efficiencies through shared services. Implementing such an approach has involved considerable technical work to understand costing assumptions and identify potential economies of scale. There is some evidence that cost savings will be considerable if shared services platforms are delivered appropriately.¹⁰²

The UN Global Centre for Human Resources Services (Box 3) is one important example of efficiency measures being implemented across the UNDS through a shared services approach.

Box 3: Reforms in Practice - OneHR Centre

Further the adoption of the 2013 – 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review in resolution A/RES/67/226 and the subsequent CEB decision to commission the UNDG and the HLCM to strengthen efforts to promote harmonization of business practices across the UN system, the HR Network recommended, and the HLCM endorsed the establishment of a UN Global Centre for Human Resources Services (OneHR Centre) to offer HR services to UN system organisations to enhance standardisation and benefits from economies of scale.¹⁰³

Four years since its official inception, the OneHR Centre offers job classification and/or background verification services to twenty UN system organisations. Discussions to increase the number of UN system organisations using the Centre continue. An updated business plan is under development, and discussions have begun on establishing generic job profiles to be used in all UN system organisations, as well as on adding services to the OneHR Centre, including a central UN system job announcement portal. The benefits of economies of scale will increase as more organisations take advantage of the centralised system.

All UNDS entities depend on similar administrative services (e.g., office space, hiring, procurement etc.). To date, some have turned (internally) to shared services centres to improve efficiency and reduce costs by leveraging

¹⁰² Efficiency reporting is a new exercise for most UN agencies, the results of which are being shared with ECOSOC in 2021. It will cover three kinds of data: inter-agency data which DCO provides centrally on efficiency gains at a system level; data on efficiency gains captured from bilateral initiatives – e.g. if UNDP provides a service to UNFPA and vice versa. Then there are efficiency gains from each organisation (internal). DCO creates a UN-wide report to be shared with ECOSOC. The agencies appear to be actively engaging on this, making plans for data collection and training staff.

¹⁰³ United Nations Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, 2021

economies of scale within their own agencies in less expensive locations.¹⁰⁴ Beyond prompting the identification of new cost-saving initiatives, the introduction of the current UNDS reform appears to have accelerated on going efficiency initiatives in individual agencies such as FAO's Shared Services Centre in Budapest, UNICEF's Global Shared Service Centre (GSSC) in Budapest (see Box 4), UNOPS' Shared Services Centre in Bangkok (BSSC), and UNDP's Global Shared Services Unit—HR, formally known as SAS in Copenhagen.

Box 4: Reforms in Practice - UNICEF's GSSC

After an internal consideration of increasing its own organisational efficiency, UNICEF launched a pilot GSSC in Budapest in 2015 to identify the types of organisation's decentralized business processes that could benefit from centralization to a single site. UNICEF has since been highly successful with its GSSC, particularly in the completely centralized payroll area, and continues to push to further streamline the GSSC and its country offices to free up time and resources to fill their mandate. The Centre now saves UNICEF an estimated \$ 25 million annually through greater economies of scale, a figure likely to increase.

The UNDS reform has not only driven the identification of potential economies of scale across the system, but, as interviews with key stakeholders have revealed, it has also driven several country-level pilot (agency-specific) initiatives aimed at realising efficiencies and promoting cost-recovery, despite some delayed results due to COVID-19. Currently, UNDP is trialling the use of country offices as innovation hubs and testing fee-for-services-based consultancy models.¹⁰⁵ UN Women has done its own research on strengthening programming when it is non-resident and findings suggest it can contribute meaningfully to country planning processes.¹⁰⁶ WFP is also assessing its current presence and what can be done to make it more effective and efficient. These initiatives reflect goodwill in agencies about creatively seeking solutions to ensure the maximum value of country offices at reduced cost.

¹⁰⁴ UNSSC, 2017. Case Study Series Number 3, Global Shared Services and Transformation of the UN System.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations, 2017b. UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021, DP/2017/38, pg. 23

¹⁰⁶ UN Women, 2016, Strengthening Organizational Structure to Deliver Gender Equality Results, pg. 3

WHAT IS EVOLVING

Realising efficiency gains takes time and investment

Although progress has been substantial on some low-hanging fruit, time and upfront investment are required to realise the efficiency gains being sought and the change process more generally. The clear message from senior managers and operational staff is that the process of realising efficiency gains linked to the reform is slow and will take further time and investment. The timeframes and the scale of cash-releasing savings originally envisaged provoke a sense of realism/scepticism. That said, if the UN agencies push ahead, there is a strong sense of the potential and value in this area.

Despite the various pilots underway to increase efficiency by sharing services platforms and country-level initiatives to implement cost-recovery mechanisms, several practical challenges exist to realising efficiency gains by streamlining country presence. Overall, the evidence that an agile, effective UNDS has reduced or restricted country presence and yielded efficiency gains is mixed. For example, little progress was found in reducing transaction costs during the Delivering as One pilot, where significant weaknesses in HR management were found to offset efficiencies.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, achieving further efficiencies by streamlining country presence assumes that agencies have not already streamlined their presence in previous reforms.¹⁰⁸ Smaller entities often already delegate their back office operations to their HQ, so joining shared premises is unlikely to bring any economies of scale.¹⁰⁹

While agencies work to further streamline their country level presence, there is a real concern about limited capacity to absorb the changes stemming from these reforms as well as their implications for staffing and institutional memory. While national/local staff from host countries can drive the UN's agenda sustainably at country level, there are some concerns that local staff employment is what often gets cut most and that locally employed staff are not given opportunities to advance their careers, which risks greater turnover and the loss of working relationships and experience acquired over time.

Despite some notable progress in achieving efficiency gains and substantial efforts both from individual agencies and at the inter-agency level, evidence from interviews suggests that agencies are running up against the structural challenges of system differences among entities. Furthermore, while moving from shared services at agency level to a similar approach at system level could have major benefits, it is quite challenging.

¹⁰⁷ United Nations, 2012. Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One, Summary Report, pg. 19

¹⁰⁸ [No author], 2019. United Nations Reform Case Study Final, published 9 November 2019, pg. 98-101

¹⁰⁹ [No author], 2019. United Nations Reform Case Study Final, published 9 November 2019, pg. 98-101

CONSTRAINING FACTOR - REFORM IS HEAVILY CENTRALISED AND NEEDS TO BE MATCHED BY A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH.

There is a disconnect between what MS commit to at the global level and the extent to which they have ownership or demonstrate buy-in to the reform process at a country-level. MS make global commitments to reform but at country-level, line ministries do not always have the same understanding of reform or of UNDS work, which undermines reform implementation. In addition, there is the systemic challenge that very few governments take a whole-of-government approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda.

The progress exploring and implementing efficiency gains has required substantial effort and requires more time to be fully put in place and yield the benefits before pushing for further reform. It may be unrealistic to pursue efficiency gains that can be implemented without investment and yield visible benefits in a short period of time. Achieving efficiency gains, including with tangible resource savings, require investments in time, relationships, and finances.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND RISKS

Limited progress on MS commitments on quality and predictability of funds

Funding quality, predictability, and sustainability are some of the biggest challenges undermining progress on the reform. Uncertainties around financing create an environment that impedes closer collaboration and partnership on needs-based approaches from a system-wide lens. There are no financial incentives to back up the commitments on paper to coherent and collaborative working. While the Funding Compact and SDG pooled funds have sought to support actions identified in the SDCF, the funding and financing system continues to work in the same unchanged manner overall.

Lack of recent data prevented this study from incorporating a quantitative analysis, but UN agency-level staff feedback has suggested that funds not only continued to be earmarked but that earmarked funds may have also increased. Furthermore, RCs and UNCT members identified the lack of pooled country/joint funding and ongoing high levels of earmarked funding from donors as two of the top three barriers to effective reform.¹¹⁰ Agency operations staff report limited if any change in the quality and predictability of funds. Furthermore, some agencies have felt that the COVID-19 crisis has driven an increase in earmarking, leaving them with less agility to respond to the crisis; other interviewees cited concerns about funding contributions being shifted from the Joint SDG Fund and repurposed to the COVID-19 Fund, which will invariably impact results on the 2030 Agenda.¹¹¹

Both the Joint SDG Fund and the PBF remain substantially undercapitalised, although the PBF has enjoyed three years of significant growth.¹¹² Attempts by agencies to actually make use of pooled funds at global and country levels have had mixed success, according to UN staff. Differences in agency systems, competing demands for resources (e.g. from COVID-19 and humanitarian programming) and incentives to go through traditional routes such as bilateral funding have all posed practical obstacles to using pooled funds. Some

¹¹⁰ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published.

¹¹¹ United Nations, 2020i. United Nations Comprehensive Response to covid-19: Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Recovering Better, pg. 10

¹¹² See the PBF factsheet: <http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/PB000>

important positive examples of progress exist, such as the peace-building fund being connected to local pooled funds in Colombia, but these were not the general experience.

Given the practical constraints in implementation, some key informants questioned whether pooled funds were the best or only means to drive coordination. Some interviewees argued that where pooled funds may be an enabler of coordination, the main impetus for joint work should come from other sources – the SDCF itself, the relationships within the UNCT, trust, a clear division of labour and a shared experience of how to respond to country needs. Some noted that high quality collaboration can occur when resources channelled through individual agencies are being used.

Risks on funding the reinvigorated RC function

The most serious challenge facing the successful implementation of a reinvigorated RC system is ensuring adequate, predictable and sustainable funding; studies produced early on in the UNDS reform process suggest that funding remained below the necessary threshold identified by the SG.¹¹³ While there is an impressively broad and deep commitment by many MS to the SPTF, there is no guarantee that the required level of voluntary contributions will be made this year or on an annual basis going forward. Discussions during the upcoming review of the RC system and its financing by the UNSG will inevitably look to various possibilities for ensuring predictable, sustainable funding, including the possibility of assessed contributions for that pillar.

Additionally, inconsistent practices in MS have resulted in a trade-off between funding the RC system and agency programme budgets; agencies are bearing the transaction costs of the RC levy. Stakeholder feedback and documentary evidence suggest that rather than adding the RC levy to existing contributions some MS are deducting it from their original contribution, meaning that coordination costs count as a deduction from agency programming budgets. The resolution specifically indicated that levy contributions were “to be paid at source”. A few donors are doing just that, and there is a significant risk that other donors (to date) have not followed suit.

Furthermore, after the resolution was passed, both MS and agencies presented numerous caveats for exempting certain earmarked contributions from the levy, which may be worth reconsidering.

¹¹³ Baumann, M. – O., 2018. Mission Impossible? Country Level Coordination in the UN Development System, German Development Institute, Discussion Paper 7/2018, 22

3.5 DIRECTION, OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

What has been achieved/is going well

- The reforms have benefitted from a strong drive from the top, including from the SG and DSG, MS, senior leaders in the UN agencies and support from the newly-established DCO.
- MS buy-in for the reform is seen as stronger than in previous reforms, which is paying off in the visible progress in such areas as establishing the RC role and SDCFs.
- System-wide accountability tools have been set up in key areas, such as the country-level MAF as a supporting tool for the re-invigorated RC system, and monitoring and reporting systems.

What is evolving

- While the Joint Boards concept has not progressed as intended so far, there has been considerable interagency exchange and harmonization at high levels.
- Progress has been made on improving the interoperability and usability of shared systems such as UN INFO, but system-wide transparency is a potential area for improvement.

Challenges and risks

- The vision and clear direction from the top is reaching the country level and various staff groups inconsistently. This applies to both agencies and stakeholders across government.
- The top-down approach to the reform process has not yet evolved into a more holistic, long-term approach to change management that is fully embedded at every level.
- Incentives for sustained behaviour change within a 'whole of system' response appear to be mixed at best.
- Repositioning the UNDS is creating transactions costs and bureaucracy in some areas, which is having a negative impact on the agencies alongside their delivery imperatives.

UNDS reforms in the Direction, Oversight and Accountability transformation area set the stage for the rest of the reform agenda. This includes the role of leadership bodies at the systemic and regional levels in providing a coherent vision across policy and operational functions, and introducing new accountability systems for the other reform areas including the RC system.¹¹⁴ The study looked at overall direction and accountability systems in the system in support of the reforms, and particularly how the leadership and direction setting at global level was translating into clear direction and accountability at country level. Other aspects included joint-board interactions and tools to enhance mutual accountability such as the MAF. This section also examines the DCO's position as manager of the RC system.

The study found a number of important areas of progress in the Direction, Oversight, and Accountability transformation area. Leadership by all top-level stakeholders – MS, agency principals, and UN leadership – has been an important driver for setting out a common direction for the reforms. This has been accompanied by some signs of growing national ownership of the reform by programme countries, and appreciation of how key tools enable effective interaction with the UNDS. Tools that support accountability to the RC system and national ownership, such as the MAF and SDCF, have in many cases been set up and used to their intended effect.

Despite clear high-level buy-in for the reforms, there have been some challenges in changing the way that UN agencies are governed and in creating incentives for behaviour change below the level of senior management. Changes to the performance management systems across UNDS entities have not been sufficient to drive greater collaboration in the absence of coherent change management and efforts to build ownership of reforms at the working level.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED/IS GOING WELL

A strong drive from the top to make the reforms work

Evidence from interviews and documents suggest that a top-down approach has been a fundamental driver of initial progress, including high levels of ownership and commitment from the levels of the SG, DSG, and principals representing the majority of UN entities and MS. Strong ownership at the top level across stakeholders has lent the reform process authority and has set this reform apart from previous iterations of UNDS reform.

¹¹⁴ Other related areas, not covered by this review as being too nascent, include changes to the regional tier and the introduction of the system-wide evaluation function.

KEY DRIVER – LEADERSHIP

There is a strong commitment from MS, the SG and the DSG, building on earlier reform efforts, to put the initial architecture in place. There has been strong leadership at the top of the agencies to push through the reforms and convey the message that this is a genuine effort and that there is no alternative.

As opposed to the country-level focus under Delivering as One, this iteration of reforms encompasses global level transformation and has global leadership, with the ambition to implement the reform consistently across the entire system. This ambition is led by having MS share an understanding of the reform's purpose and potential benefits for the UNDS. Unlike previous initiatives, this reform process is owned by the MS and has been shaped at their request with the explicit purpose of making the UNDS fit-for-purpose to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Importantly, there is clear buy-in from MS from the Global South.

This high-level of ownership and political will has been evidenced by the active involvement of MS in governance measures to support the rollout of the reforms. In 2019, MS supported the transition to DCO and the establishment of the new RC system via the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the First Committee and ECOSOC.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the 2020 Secretary General's Report on the Implementation of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review suggests that MS strongly support the reform and have engaged in on going oversight during its rollout.¹¹⁶ This enhanced transparency has allowed for MS to engage more clearly with decision-making around the SDG agenda at different levels, fostering ownership and creating more opportunities for direction via new pooled-funding mechanisms.¹¹⁷

There is also a strong ongoing dialogue between MS and the heads of agencies. MS have clearly committed at the global level to improving the coherence and efficacy of executive boards and have provided guidance and support to agencies' governing bodies and executive boards in beginning to implement reforms. Resolution 74/297 Progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system highlights MS' on going investment in the process ahead of the 2020 QCPR. The 2020 QCPR resolution is now in place, providing further guidance and oversight on operationalising reform commitments. MS are very much in the driver's seat on what this operationalisation looks like. They are holding agencies accountable for reform in some cases, as is illustrated by their joint letter to the executive boards of UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA, which reinforces the need to align their work with SDCFs and ensure that all country strategic plans flow directly from the priorities set out in the SDCF.

¹¹⁵ UNDCO, 2020 Report of the Chair of UNSDG on DCO

¹¹⁶ 2020, Secretary-General's Report on the Implementation of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review

¹¹⁷ UNDCO, 2020 Report of the Chair of UNSDG on DCO

Beyond the level of ownership for the reform demonstrated by MS, the commitment of principals and senior managers to the reform is visible in their strong engagement and leadership.¹¹⁸ This is evident for example in their support to UNSDG decision-making processes at the global level such as on UNSDG Task Teams, in agency-to-agency agreements (MoUs) for global flagship initiatives, and in town hall meetings in their organisations to inform and guide the individual organisations on UN reform elements.¹¹⁹ One RC stated that organisations became more supportive of reform and working collaboratively with the RC and UNCT once they receive letters from their HQ instructing them to do so. This links strongly to individual incentive: staff will deliver on the work against which they are appraised; if this does not include reform-related work or they are not recognised for collaborative behaviour within the UNCT, the reform agenda could be neglected.

National buy-in for the reform agenda

Efforts to work in a more coherent, collaborative manner have in some cases been supported by strong national ownership of the reforms. In 2019 over half of UNCTs reported strong joint strategic planning, knowledge sharing and partnership with governments.¹²⁰ On a national level, 80% of RCs and 66% of UNCT members reported “strong or moderate host government buy-in” to the reforms;¹²¹ but this was not uniform across all countries considered for this study. Strong national buy-in was most evident in countries with a large UN footprint, such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Nepal, suggesting that those used to working with the UN understand the reform better, the support they can leverage, and the ability to direct relationships in line with the reform agenda. Country knowledge of what the UNDS could offer or what they want to get out of the system can help facilitate effective buy-in for the reform.

¹¹⁸ Such as the ECOSOC dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UNDS in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, which has been called for in the ECOSOC RES2014/14 by MS. ECOSOC, 2014. Progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 67/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. E/RES 2014/14.

¹¹⁹ UNSDG, 2020. Interim Task Teams, September 2020 – March 2021. Proposed Terms of Reference.

¹²⁰ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published.

¹²¹ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published.

Set-up of system-wide accountability tools and agency changes for alignment and greater coherence

Good progress has been achieved in updating job descriptions and the performance appraisal process in line with the reforms. This embeds vertical accountability between staff and their agencies, ensuring that senior staff be accountable for supporting the reforms and seeking coherence and collaboration within the system. UNOPS, UNEP, and ILO have included the UN reform in the job descriptions of their senior staff members, who are appraised against its progress.^{122, 123} UNICEF has also updated its performance indicators and appraisal templates for senior staff to support inputs from RCs while UNDP has updated RR job descriptions and staff performance appraisals to align with the MAF and new responsibilities in the UNCT.¹²⁴

Efforts towards horizontal governance and accountability are evident at HQ level in the joint activity of the executive boards of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, WFP and UN Women. Within the RC and UNCT systems, horizontal accountability for reform is formally embedded in the MAF and in the RC performance appraisal system.¹²⁵ Yearly RC appraisals gather input from UNCT, the host country, and from other partners in country while 180-degree feedback, although in its infancy, is starting to be used for feedback between the UNCT and the RCs.^{126, 127} Meanwhile, the RC system is supported by the MAF, which commits all parties to report on the progress of SDCF implementation and is a tool for RCs to drive reform efforts within the UNCT. 89% of RCs and UNCT state that they are familiar or somewhat familiar with the MAF's implementation, and the same percentage also reported that guidance from their own agencies was consistent with roles and

¹²² United Nations, 2019. Survey of UN Agencies' Headquarters.

¹²³ International Labour Organisation, 2019. Update on the United Nations Reform, GB.335/INS/10

¹²⁴ UNICEF, 2019. Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 72/279 on "Repositioning of the UN Development System", Information Note, UNICEF Executive Board – Annual Session 2019

¹²⁵ UNDP, 2020. Progress Update on the Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 72/279 on Repositioning of the UN Development System: Information Note for the Executive Board Annual Session 2020

¹²⁶ United Nations, 2020a. 2020 Report of the chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group on the Development Coordination Office

¹²⁷ Ibid.

responsibilities outlined in the MAF.¹²⁸ In addition, progress measurements and indicators have been built into the SDCF and are intended to promote accountability and to be tracked in UN INFO.¹²⁹

WHAT IS EVOLVING

Joint board interactions and their effects

Despite senior-level ownership of reforms and progress achieved in the area of harmonisation of governance and processes among UN agencies, interviews and the document review revealed that further harmonisation is sometimes being impeded by differences in governance processes, despite more frequent inter-agency interactions such as joint board meetings. The experience with the executive boards (EBs) in New York is that, while joint meetings of individual EBs do take place, they add another level of bureaucracy that does not lead to decision-making. Each agency has to go back to its own EB where decisions are adopted by consensus among its members. To address this, MS may in future wish to again consider the SG's recommendation to move to a joint board under the guidance and leadership of MS.¹³⁰

Interoperability and usability of shared systems for transparency

The UN INFO platform aims to improve transparency on progress against the SDCF and associated work plans.¹³¹ This is complemented in turn by the DCO Information Management System. UN INFO has great potential for being a useful transparency and monitoring mechanism, as illustrated in its use for tracking COVID-19 socioeconomic response plans during 2020-21.¹³² A detailed assessment of UN INFO and the DCO information management system was beyond the scope of this study, however, UN INFO, in particular

¹²⁸ United Nations, 2021 Secretary General's Report on Implementation of General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2021

¹²⁹ UNSDG, 2019a. The United Nations System-wide Strategic Document (SWSD) to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 10 July 2019.

¹³⁰ United Nations, 2017. Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet. Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/684, paras 113-120.

¹³¹ UNSDG, 2019b. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – Internal Guidance

¹³² United Nations, 2021 Secretary General's Report on Implementation of General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2021

was cited as an area that demonstrated improvement regarding system-wide transparency. Improved usability and interoperability with existing systems is key to the success of UN INFO. Some entities considered in the study cited UN INFO as a significant investment, particularly around the cost of integrating and replacing systems and human resources needed to provide the required data. UN INFO is only as useful as the data it inputs into the system; if processes are too burdensome for agencies to support, its potential as a tool for monitoring and transparency is undermined. These challenges can be compounded by double reporting, which has been especially apparent while monitoring the COVID-19 response and for certain joint funds. At the same time, agencies need interoperable, if not harmonised, systems to achieve transparency efficiently.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND RISKS

Inconsistency in translating the clear direction from the top through all levels of the system

Although national and mid-level staff were identified as being critical in the DaO pilot because of their role in embedding the new way of working,¹³³ relatively little effort has been put into securing ownership and buy-in at this level, threatening the sustainability of the reforms. As a result, agencies have reported challenges in operationalising the formal mechanisms put in place to hold their staff accountable for reform. Commitments on paper are not yet translating into effective practice. While senior staff in all agencies considered in this study have clear accountability for implementing the reform, middle-management staff or staff in operational roles did not have as clear an understanding of how reform impacts their work. As such, the incentives to implement successful reform are weaker. One key informant stated, “incentives and accountability are weak because as a system we continue to tolerate behaviour that isn’t collaborative”. Both RCs and UNCT members cited the absence of incentives for change as the biggest barrier to effective reform.¹³⁴

Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) research indicates that this challenge has consistently been a barrier to reform: 45% of organisational reforms at 26 UN organisations between 2010 and 2018 showed limited to no change

¹³³ United Nations, 2012. Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One, Summary Report, pg. 21

¹³⁴ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published.

management.^{135,136} The gap has most often manifested itself as a failure to explain the need for the reform, which resulted in the changes being ineffective, misunderstood or ignored. Cooperative leadership that connects HQ messaging with grounded country ownership is imperative to consolidate progress.

This is about fully embedding the reforms and moving from a top-down to a bottom-up approach with higher levels of ownership at every level. Some recommendations can be adopted from the JIU's Change Management Report: encouraging executive heads to develop and standardise organisational staff surveys across the UN system; giving greater prominence to the role that strategic HR management plays in organisational change management such as promoting changes in individual attitudes and behaviours, establishing mechanisms to reinforce positive behaviours and creating channels to communicate feedback across all personnel.¹³⁷ A fully worked up strategy for this next stage of the change process is required and it will clearly take longer than the two years that have so far been the focus.

Incentives for sustained behaviour change are not yet clearly established

From both country and agency perspectives, individuals are most incentivised to support reform when it is linked with their individual performance, progress and appraisal mechanisms. One key informant called this leveraging "enlightened self-interest". Individuals must understand the impact and benefits of the reform on their position so that it becomes a personal priority rather than an abstract concept. While agencies have begun to establish such incentives and accountability in job descriptions and appraisals of senior staff, they must be embedded at all levels.

Dual accountability and the creation of "matrix management" have faced particular challenges. While the MAF aims to bring horizontal accountability for the UNCT members and the RC, it remains in strong competition with vertical accountability mechanisms in agencies. UNDS agency leads are first and foremost accountable to their agencies' executive body and governing

¹³⁵ The JIU defined change management as "a set of approaches and practices to involve people in the process, to improve the chances of success in organizational reform. The evidence suggests that an organizational reform will fail if its objectives are not clear, if it neglects to engage with staff on what is being proposed, if it does not explain to staff and equip and support them through the process, and if it does not outline "what is in it for them" and what they will be expected to do differently."

¹³⁶ United Nations, 2019f. Review of change management in United Nations system organizations: Report of the Joint Inspection Unit, JIU/REP/2019/4, pg. 5

¹³⁷ United Nations, 2019f. Review of change management in United Nations system organizations: Report of the Joint Inspection Unit, JIU/REP/2019/4, pg. vi

boards and are responsible for delivering the agendas set there. As one stakeholder stated, “there is more an idea of collective accountability but individual agency accountability to their internal structures is still first and foremost”. In the absence of sufficient reinforcement of the need for reform at every level – from the UNGA to executive boards to regional- and country-level – the drive to promote greater collaboration and cohesion will diminish in favour of agency agendas and mandates.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

This section draws together overarching conclusions and suggests potential areas for attention for UNDS stakeholders going forward, contextualised within four broad stories of the reform. In lieu of recommendations – this is not an evaluation and is not intended as an accountability exercise – the study offers insights and ideas to provoke discussion and consideration by all UNDS stakeholders: UN MS, the UN Secretariat, and UNDS entities. Acknowledging the rich and complex landscape around these reforms and the limitations of this study’s scope, this section concludes with a look ahead at questions and areas that are particularly salient for further enquiry.

Figure 1 provides a picture of the dynamic of the UNDS reforms in the five transformation areas based on this study’s findings, showing both positive and resistant forces. It is important to note that while there are fewer forces resisting the reform, each one is a substantial challenge in itself that can thwart the success of the UNDS reform unless it is addressed. The positive forces show areas where progress has been substantial and where momentum is building. If continued and pulled together into a coherent whole, these will provide a necessary albeit not sufficient condition for the reform’s success. The change management challenge involving all stakeholders in the UNDS reforms is now more apparent, defined, and there to be acted on.



THE BIG PICTURE

Taking the collective findings of this snapshot view two years into the reforms, and situating them within the broader context and forward-looking perspective on the UNDS reform, the study identified four main narratives and, under these, potential areas for stakeholders' attention that are key, immediate entry points for mitigating the risk that the reforms stall or backslide:

1. Funding is a central risk to the reforms
2. From crisis to transformation – supporting the SDGs after COVID-19
3. Translating a global vision into ownership and action at every level
4. An integrated, long-term approach to change management to drive behaviour change and ensure sustained reforms

While each of these narratives is important in its own right, it is particularly pressing to consider how the associated actions and effects will be woven and melded together as UNDS stakeholders move into the next, more challenging phase of the reform. Building confidently on what has been achieved will require a continuing, orchestrated, and to varying degrees, accelerated shift within all transformation areas affecting every interdependent level of the UNDS (country, regional, global). Critically, MS will need to enable, equip, and empower the UNDS transformation by in-step and proportionate supporting actions and associated behavioural changes.

Shared ownership of the Agenda 2030 – the approach needed to deliver on the SDGs – also entails mutual accountability for achieving “the tapestry” of a repositioned UNDS, which has a unique and essential role in helping tackle the very complex development challenges the world faces today. At the heart of this shared global vision lies the imperative to give primacy to the normative and convening powers of an equipped and coherent UNDS acting as “one system”, able to credibly forge partnerships with the broader development system. This can only be achieved by actively countering the strong, pervasive current of a UNDS that may continue to be shaped, funded and assessed – facilitated by a mix of internal and external traits – as a landscape of large programmatic agencies and a constellation of smaller (often under-resourced) specialist agencies.

In this setting, there is no overstating the magnitude and significance of the change envisaged by the reform to reposition the UNDS to more effectively support the 2030 Agenda. The SG report on the implementation of the 2020 QCPR, and the vision statement accompanying his bid for a second term, made it clear that there is no turning back on this journey





of reform. This learning study yielded a series of insights that give, among other things, a sense of the human/behavioural dimensions of the reforms in progress. While it is broadly aligned with the findings of the SG's QCPR report and other recent review exercises in terms of the momentum building within the reforms, this study also signals the risks – some very immediate and pressing – to continued progress and to achieving transformation. These risks are lodged within the component areas of the reform process, many of which demand shifts in behaviour and ways of doing business across UNDS stakeholders.

Therefore, alongside a renewed commitment to deliver on the Funding Compact and other key parts of the reform's essential scaffolding, a conversation will be needed on the extent to which the nature and degree of the changes inherent in the reform can be tackled without a deliberate investment in change management both system-wide and in a manner tailored to each agency. A stronger focus at this juncture on the human hard and soft dimensions of the reform process is likely to challenge the original construct of a cost-neutral implementation of the reform. It is also expected to highlight the leadership role of the executive boards and governing bodies of agencies to drive the reform, and as part of this, the growing importance of a coherent whole-of-government position within MS.

4.1 Funding is a central risk to the reforms

Financing is a major theme of this report and an ongoing challenge for the reforms. The Funding Compact bringing together commitments of MS, of agencies, and of the system, is more important than ever.

Agencies made some important initial progress in increasing transparency and establishing platforms for efficiency gains, including and beyond the Funding Compact, though it may take more time for the results to become apparent. Meanwhile, the necessary transformation of financing envisaged in the Funding Compact to support the reforms has yet to materialise. This is particularly the case in the key areas of improving the quality and predictability of funding flows to the UN system, thus going beyond a project-centred approach, capitalising the major pooled funds at global level and addressing the imbalance between levels of core and non-core resources. Competition for resources and the tendency to use bilateral funding routes came up repeatedly in this study as drivers of behaviour that tend to undermine the collaborative goals of the reforms.

Although the transformation of financing – in form more than in quantity – is crucial to the overall success of the reform, financing for the revamped RC system may be the most pressing issue here due to the centrality of

the RC function for a coherent system. The system has been financed enough to be set up, which has been a crucial enabler for the reforms and for an effective UNCT response to the COVID-19 crisis, but adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding for the RC function is not yet in place. Funding from the levy is lower than what was assumed and the resource comes de facto partly from agencies' operating budgets because MS have not put additional resources into the system nor adjusted their approach to cover it. These challenges are expected to worsen as the effect of the global recession affects donor decisions on ODA, some of which has already materialised.

Potential areas for attention

Taking into account the centrality of financing for implementing the reforms and positioning the UNDS well to help deliver on the 2030 Agenda, the following areas around funding warrant attention going forward:

1. Addressing the risks around the sustainability of funding for the RC system (all UNDS stakeholders)

Initial funding of the RC system has been relatively successful but the risks include diverting resources from programmatic work to the levy and that the SPTF is not resourced. If this is not resolved, recent progress on the RC system and the reforms more broadly could easily be undermined. This must be addressed urgently and emphasises the importance of the SG review of the RC system and its funding.

2. Accelerating MS' progress on Funding Compact commitments (donors)

There appears to be a major challenge for MS to deliver fully on the Funding Compact commitments at system level, on more predictable, higher quality funding, and on pooled funding (key funds, particularly the Joint SDG Fund, remain under-capitalised though there has been some growth in pooled funding). The importance of addressing this issue cannot be overstated. Although the way forward may be hard to envisage, it might include a combination of the following:

- Each MS could more specifically articulate the meaning of system-level commitments for them as individual countries and what they can and cannot deliver in practice. This would add tangibility to the commitments for MS officials (see below), and help strengthen transparency and accountability to back up the commitments made in the resolution, including by enabling MS to better hold one another to account.



- Building ownership and understanding of Funding Compact commitments at every level of MS administrations – including line ministries and in-country officials and staff – is essential to supporting implementation of the reform. Appreciating both the positive commitments and the disincentives for reform created by some types of funding is essential.

3. Using financing mechanisms to their best effect (*all UNDS stakeholders*)

A range of financing options needs to be explored to enable UNDS reform and more broadly achieve the transformative agenda of the SDGs. Striking the right balance, and using the different financing pathways to their best effect, is crucial to enabling the success of the reforms by creating the right enabling environment and incentives, and to achieving the SDGs. To that end, stakeholders should focus on:

- Fully financing pooled funds central to coherent UNDS functioning – notably the Joint SDG Fund.
- Revisiting an emphasis on the instruments themselves (the supply end) and focus more on aligning around shared outcomes and needs on the ground so that the instruments evolve in response to the imperative to work better together (as has clearly worked well in crisis situations and on COVID-19).
- Understanding where and how to use pooled funding to best maximise impact and leverage, including to empower RCs and support alignment to the SDCFs.
- As it is broadly recognised that achieving the SDGs requires innovative financing approaches, including drawing on investment from the private sector, further efforts are required to establish a stronger enabling environment for such financing mechanisms. This includes building the skills, structures, and processes needed to promote and better leverage blended finance and catalytic instruments, and to position the UNDS as a credible convener and strategic partner vis-à-vis the private sector and IFIs.

4.2 From crisis to transformation – accelerating the SDGs after COVID-19

This study noted an interesting dynamic in how the UNDS works during a crisis, including in the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been, in many ways, the biggest crisis it has ever faced. Where UNCTs had experienced some kind of crisis situation – refugee, natural disaster, conflict, etc. – it was an enabler of coherence within the UNCT and of better partnerships with other key actors, including government and IFIs. This can be explained

by two factors: first, by creating a shared imperative with a clear focus, and second, by developing the mature relationships and trust that come from addressing tough, complex problems together in a crisis.

With respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, the study also heard how the newly independent and empowered RC role helped to enable collaboration on an effective response. Some key players (e.g. WHO, the RCs, and UNDP) were able to work together more quickly and effectively than in the past. Documents and interviews with country teams reflect more interaction between agencies, both resident and non-resident.¹³⁸ Agencies noted that they were more aware of other agencies' contributions to the health and economic responses because of more frequent virtual UNCT meetings. Host government officials mirrored these comments and often described the clarity of leadership.

The experience with the SERPs was important.¹³⁹ The global system-wide framework for them effectively guided and mobilised a coherent response to the COVID-19 crisis. At the country-level, SERPs were developed exceptionally quickly – 118 SERPs covering 136 countries within nine months of the crisis – which required flexibility and agile coordination.¹⁴⁰ They also provided a meaningful platform for partnerships with IFIs: as of December 2020, approximately half of the SERPs had insights from the World Bank and one-third from the IMF.¹⁴¹ Funding modalities also shifted quickly to channel funds to the crisis; some pooled funds were established within days.¹⁴² Linking access to pooled funding to the SERPs also helped enable their uptake and incentivised active participation in their development and implementation. Although SERPs were not uniform in their implementation, they were broadly successful in demonstrating the agility and coherence of the UNDS and of the broader system when an urgent, multi-dimensional need arose.

¹³⁸ United Nations Development Coordination Office, 2020. Concept Note – Member states dialogue with Resident Coordinators, pg.2

¹³⁹ Data from an OIOS advisory engagement conducted in 2020 on an early assessment of the RC System Reform. Not published, pg.4

¹⁴⁰ United Nations Secretary General, 2020. Deputy Secretary-General's Remarks at Virtual Global Resident Coordinators Meeting (as prepared for delivery), 8 December 2020, pg.1

¹⁴¹ UNDP, 2020. UNDP's contributions to the United Nations Development System (UNDS) and its reforms in 2020 - Note to the Secretary-General (through the Chef de Cabinet), pg.3

¹⁴² United Nations, 2020b. A UN Framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, pg. 11



Interviews and documentation on the SERPs suggested the challenge is to keep going, ensuring their integration within the SDCFs at country level. The COVID-19 crisis response brought on and demonstrated many positive changes and has in many ways created a momentum for further transformation. However, lasting change should not be taken for granted. Rather, this needs to be consolidated on top of recent behaviour shifts and further nourished with an eye towards the future.

Potential areas for attention

Together, the experience of crisis response as an enabler of collaboration and the stress test of the COVID-19 response point to the need to preserve and build upon gains made during the crisis to achieve transformation. To that end, UNDS stakeholders could focus on the following areas for attention:

4. Preserve and build on gains made during the crisis towards a collaborative environment so as to achieve transformation (all UNDS stakeholders)

It is important to capture the most useful and perhaps most surprising specific changes in behaviours and in ways of working during the pandemic, and to identify fruitful lessons from this and earlier crises to be built upon in the next stage of the reform.

The macro-dynamics of new pathways for partnership and the tools that enabled collaboration should be considered along with the effect of the different, more frequent, and sometimes informal ways that leaders and their teams communicated during the pandemic response. It would be useful to understand how staff felt (empowered or otherwise) as the working environment changed overnight in response to COVID-19 and what they learned about their partners. The forced experiment with remote working has apparently created a new normal: what have been the benefits/challenges and how can they impact the use of shared premises, engagement by non-resident agencies, and engagement with government?

Beyond identifying lessons, actions should be taken going forward to reinforce and institutionalise positive changes. Crucially, leaders from across all UNDS stakeholders should try to identify the positive behaviour changes that have occurred and where they can support them through messaging or by institutionalising pathways for collaboration (e.g. meeting structures, streamlined processes). Donors should also look at how financing, or financial processes, enabled agility and flexibility – or did not. Stakeholders can draw upon the upcoming MOPAN assessments, which will provide additional insights on how COVID-19 has affected the agencies, their mandate, mission, operations and activities.

5. Draw lessons from the SERPs both for the SDCFs and system-wide strategic document (UN Secretariat, UNDS entities, MS)

The SERP experience is very rich and should be able to help the UNCTs in the next stage of the reform, including with the critical task of operationalising the SDCFs. While the SERPs and their accompanying global guidance differ in focus from the SDCFs and a system-wide strategy, the shared aspects of how guidance was provided from the top, of joint working and division of labour, inclusivity and access to expertise, agreeing priorities, incentives in how funding was agreed and other aspects are good practice to learn from. At the same time, practical decisions must be reached on updating and adjusting the SDCFs in light of the SERPs, and to integrate the two as much as possible.

6. Develop a more systemic approach to partnership (UN Secretariat, UNDS entities, broader development partners)

This study noted that no systemic approach to partnership exists as yet across the UNDS system as part of these reforms but that many good examples of effective partnership do exist on the ground. As part of a broader approach to partnership, it is important to explore how to build a more systematic, systemic approach – notably with the IFIs and the private sector – with the use of tools that allow for context-driven approaches. The COVID-19 experience is an ideal opportunity for building on some positives and this opportunity should be pursued as part of a discussion with these partners, taking a bottom-up approach to draw on lessons from the country level.

4.3 Bringing the global vision into effective ownership and action at every level

The level and breadth of stakeholder ownership at the global level is one of the most important differences between this and previous iterations of UNDS reform. While not uniform across all actors, the heads of agencies, the UN Secretariat, and MS (both donor and programme countries), particularly as represented in New York, share a strong degree of alignment in intent/vision for the reforms broadly speaking. However, there is not consistent understanding at all levels. Huge variation exists in buy-in and appreciation of the reforms from headquarters – in the governing bodies in Geneva, Vienna, and Rome – to regional and country levels. There are also major differences across MS' administrations between different parts of governments and at different geographic levels (field and capitals). This remains one of the biggest barriers to reform.





The study found field-level leaders need clear direction from headquarters and a good understanding of the reforms to make them a priority at the level of implementation. However, evidence shows variability in understanding and ownership of key tools such as the MAF, and of the collective offer of the UNDS as a whole. This was particularly true past the senior-level of staff, where lack of buy-in and understanding of one's role in implementing the reforms was often lacking. Although there has been some good progress in aligning agency systems and policies to those of the broader system, significant work remains to be done. The regional level was beyond the scope of this study, however evidence pointed to the importance of having alignment at that level to enable implementation of the reform and coherence, particularly in contexts facing complex cross-border realities.

For MS, global commitments are not automatically translated or addressed in their country-level institutions, both at the point of implementation and in governing bodies. This is readily apparent with the Funding Compact, where a collective agreement has not meaningfully translated into an appreciation of the actions that each particular country must take. Understanding of the reform's implications can also be an issue with programme countries, where line ministries may not have the same coherent approach to the UNDS as a central coordinating ministry. Ownership and appreciation by programme countries of the reforms can be a major positive driver, but it must translate clearly to line ministries. A whole-of-government approach for MS, therefore, remains a critical need to be met.

Potential areas for attention

To ensure that the strong, top down direction created for these reforms is fully leveraged and translated into sustained change at all levels of the UNDS, the following areas warrant attention:

7. Strengthening the linkages between different levels of the UNDS (UNDS entities, UN Secretariat)

Clear vision and direction from the top of the UNDS is a strength of the reform and is necessary, but insufficient, to garner transformation at the point of implementation. Agencies need to further align and to make interoperable processes and tools in line with the system, while also working to extend understanding and ownership of reforms beyond the top. The regional tier, which is outside the scope of this study, was frequently mentioned in interviews as being crucial to get right to ensure implementation of the reforms at country-level. While there has been major progress on key tools like the SDCFs, more needs to be done to

ensure buy-in and linages across the system. This also applies to central tools to enable the reform like the MAF, which need to be completed at the regional and global levels to complement the country-level, and to which agencies still have work to do to align to. Further, operational and technical staff should be supported so that they understand and buy into the reforms to the same degree as the leadership.

8. Raising awareness of the reforms across different parts of government (MS)

Similarly, MS commitment and ownership of the reforms, as shown by the representatives in New York and in their development, planning and foreign ministries, is not, understandably, always mirrored by the same level of understanding in various parts of the same governments and in different geographic levels. This can lead to mixed messages and is an area that could usefully receive more attention to ensure consistent support and alignment from MS. This applies to donors, who need to ensure that their own understanding and commensurate behaviour on the ground in terms of funding matches global commitments. It also applies to programme countries, which should work to bring their line ministries onto the same page with respect to their engagement with the UNDS. Finally, on governing bodies and executive boards, all MS need to ensure that their behaviour is aligned to and supportive of the reforms; as they can play a powerful role either promoting or constraining the success of the reforms.

4.4 An integrated, long-term approach to change management to drive behaviour change and ensure sustained reform

Until now, the reforms have not had a clear change management strategy providing a grip for system-wide change going beyond the transformation areas themselves. The focus on getting the reform established as a process did not include a clear change management plan for how certain actions will establish change in the system, and how reform processes should be implemented such that behaviours change. Critically, it did not include steps to ensure a common understanding, and buy-in, across the system.

This is a clear weakness of the existing reform process. Differentiated approaches taken by different UN entities, embedding reform among senior staff but to a lesser extent in middle management and frontline staff, and the fact that guidance around the reform transformations has not been released simultaneously with the reform rollout, all speak to the lack of an integrated change management approach. This has caused



confusion and variation in how agencies implement the reforms and leaves some questions unanswered about how they will be owned and self-sustaining in the long term, particularly at country level.

The reforms demand significant long-term shifts in culture, attitudes and processes across the UNDS. It is very early in the transformation process to see and assess long-term behaviour change. That said, some clear challenges to behaviour change have already emerged. There has been only ad hoc consideration of the motivation of individuals who comprise the system or of how to get them to change behaviour. Any change management process must consider the people in the organisational structures. There is evidently change fatigue among UN staff. Many of those interviewed in this study pointed to the fact that the UNDS is constantly reforming and that the ideas packaged in this set of reforms are not new. The challenge is how to take these ideas and operationalise them consistently, with staff buy-in at all levels. This is undermined by the lack of a clear change management approach.

The time seems ripe to pivot from an approach that repositions the UNDS, which has so far been about putting the RC system in place and building other aspects of the architecture (“construction”), to one about building ownership of sustainable change at every level (“behavioural”).

Potential areas for attention

To reach a position where the reforms are likely to be more self-sustaining, embedded throughout the system, and less reliant on central drivers, the following areas warrant attention going forward:

9. Developing a clear change management strategy with realistic timescales (all UNDS stakeholders)

Any strong change management process rests on four principles:

1. Ensure a compelling case for change and that the change process is seen as essential.
2. Ensure a well-designed change process with clearly identified change leaders.
3. Have a clear plan to communicate and roll-out each step of the transformation process.
4. Ensure that sustainable change is embedded in all levels and functions.

Although it is best established earlier on in a change process, the UNDS reform process would benefit from establishing a coherent change management process based on these principles to facilitate a successful next phase. The lessons from the recent JIU report on change management may be useful here: the need to actively promote changes in individual

attitudes and behaviours, establish mechanisms to reinforce positive behaviours and create channels to communicate feedback across all personnel.¹⁴³ Insights from managing the changes around the efficiency agenda may also be valuable. While a consistent and integrated approach is important, the model must be flexible enough to work for all types of agencies, and inclusive of all different actors to the reform – including MS. This change process should also establish better linkages to other areas of reform, notably on peace-humanitarian-development actions and the integration agenda.

The organisational transformation, culture and behaviour change to which the reform process aspires are long-term ambitions. The process would benefit from clear interim steps to work towards these goals. A fully worked up strategy for the next stage of the change process would be a sensible step. Importantly, it should set a realistic timeframe demarcating what can be achieved in the short term (next two years) and what can be achieved in the years to come, noting the unrealistic expectations to date about what could be achieved in the short term.

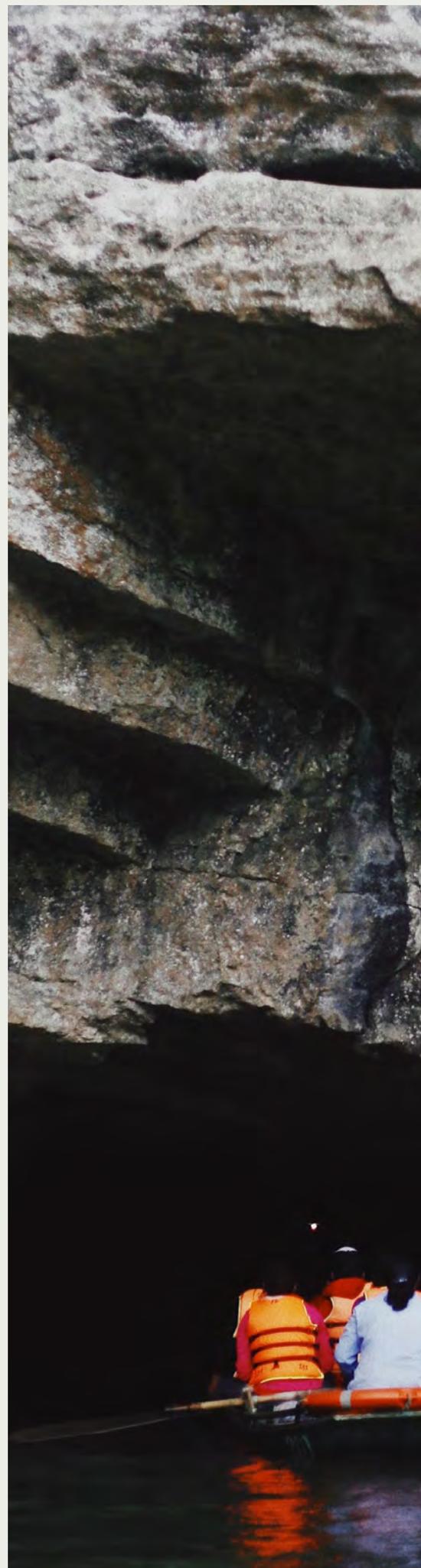
Perhaps most crucially, this change management process must be owned and executed by all UNDS stakeholders. Agencies and MS ultimately play as crucial a role in the success of the UNDS reform as the Secretariat, and need to appreciate and play that role appropriately. The reforms should be felt at the country-level, in governing body and executive board meetings, and in agency team meetings. A change management process for all is what is needed.

Finally, the enormity and complexity of this task must be acknowledged. It may be necessary to take an iterative and focused approach to achieve key milestones while working within an overall strategy.

10. Embedding incentives and accountability for change at all levels (all UNDS stakeholders)

The UNDS must ensure that incentives and accountabilities for change are embedded at all levels of the organisation. Change leadership is critical to start a reform process, and the UNDS reforms have successfully embedded this, but staff at all levels across all organisations must understand their role in delivering the reforms. To combat change fatigue among staff requires a collective understanding of how these reforms make a difference to daily challenges and why they are necessary. Key tools that promote positive accountability for the reforms – such as centring responsibility for reforms in job descriptions, individual performance plans, and performance

¹⁴³ United Nations, 2019f. Review of change management in United Nations system organizations: Report of the Joint Inspection Unit, JIU/REP/2019/4, pg. vi



appraisals – need to be implemented across all agencies and all levels, especially for staff on the ground. Better understanding and embedding these accountability structures is also crucial.

On the MS side, it is critical to create an enabling environment for reforms, not only through changes in funding as described above, but also on governing bodies and executive boards, and engaging with the UNDS at country level. Ultimately, UNDS staff are incentivised to respond to MS needs and demands, and feel most accountable to the agency structures that exist. MS, therefore, play a crucial role in building the right accountability structures and incentives for change, and can do more to ensure that their own internal understanding, culture, and even accountability systems are supportive of the reforms.

11. Making the reform process accessible and realistic (all UNDS stakeholders)

Barriers to reform or high transaction costs cited by some agencies pose a disincentive for reform and must be addressed. Reforms are linked to organisational survival, including financial stability, organisational capacity, and mandate. If UNDS entities do not soon see a return on investment in the process they could lose motivation for change.

MS also need to appreciate that change not only takes time, but managing change also takes resources and collective effort. Additional processes, reporting requirements, and even meetings without commensurate resources leave staff feeling like they are being asked to do the impossible.

Looking beyond – areas for further enquiry

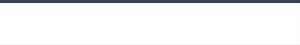
This study benefitted from extensive discussion amongst stakeholders on the draft report ahead of its finalisation and launch. The discussions provided important input to the key and immediate entry points for mitigating the risk of the reforms stalling or slipping back, they also provided some critical questions that will be important for further enquiry and discussion going forward, and which were beyond the scope of this study.



These questions point to the importance of further coverage of the reforms as they continue to evolve, including from independent actors like MOPAN. They also underline the importance of ongoing or recently completed work by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, the Early Lessons and Evaluability of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery from the EOSG, and the Secretary-General's Review of the RC System and its funding.

The questions posed below cover concerns that sit within the transformation areas and also some of the wider conditions which influence the UNDS reform. Each of them directly connects with the driving and delivery of the change agenda that lies at the heart of the repositioning of the UN development system.

- 1. How does country context affect the relative strength and/or fragility of the UNDS reform process?**
- 2. How do the mandates, nature, size, and other unique characteristics of agencies shape its perception and engagement with the opportunities and challenges of UNDS reform?**
- 3. What is the best approach to ensuring meaningful measurement of results against common objectives – notably evaluating the SDCFs? What is the appropriate role of the UN system-wide and within agency evaluation functions?**
- 4. What are the expectations on the role of the regional tier in the UNDS reform, is this being delivered on, and what are the conditions/needs required of regional actors to support the reform?**
- 5. What does a more systemic approach to partnership with IFIs, civil society, and the private sector look like and what are the appropriate roles of different stakeholders (e.g. agencies, RCs, MS) and institutions (e.g. the Global Compact, International Organisation of Employers)?**
- 6. What challenges and opportunities exist and how does UNDS reform relate to development-peace-humanitarian actions, including in relation to the RC function?**
- 7. What are the tracks and existing resources available for a system-wide change management approach focused on the (now critical) behavioural and cultural change aspects of UNDS reform?**
- 8. What shapes and drives the internal consistency of member state cross-government decisions and behaviour in respect to UNDS reforms?**



ANNEXES



ANNEX 1: KEY INFORMANTS

Agency Level Key Informants	
Name	Role
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION: ILO	
Beate Andrees	Special Representative to the UN and Director of the ILO Office for the United Nations
Claudia Coenjaerts	Deputy Regional Director, Latin America & Caribbean
Richard Howard	Director, ILO Kathmandu Office
Parth Kanitkar	Development Partner Relations Officer
Margaret Mottaz	Senior Coordinator for Multilateral Affairs, Multilateral Cooperation Department
Tuomo Poutiainen	Director, ILO Dhaka Office
Peter Rademaker	Coordinator, Development Partner Relations Unit
Giovanna Rossignotti	Deputy Director, Strategic Programming and Management Department
Wolfgang Schiefer	Senior Coordinator for Multilateral Affairs
Geir Tonstol	Senior Programme Officer
Philippe Vanhuynegem	Director, Decent Work Team & Country Office for Andean countries
Rie Vejs Kjeldgaard	Director, Partnerships and Field Support Department
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION: UNDCO	
Laila Baker	Regional Director, Arab States
Bakhodir Burkhanov	Chief of Business Management
Munyaradzi Chenje	Regional Director, Regional Office for Africa
Zia Choudhury	Resident Coordinator, Botswana
Rosemary Kalapurakal	Deputy Director, a.i.
Taijia Kontinen-Sharp	DCO Chief of Staff
Claire Messina	Chief, RC System Leadership Branch
Jan Nemecek	Regional Office for Arab States, Regional Liaison Officer
Robert Piper	Assistant Secretary-General for Development Coordination
Edward Rees	Resident Coordinator, Sri Lanka / Reconciliation and Development Adviser
Christian Salazar Volkmann	Regional Director, Regional Desk for Latin America and the Caribbean
Christopher Stokes	Chief of Policy and Programme, now Senior Advisor UNSDG
Brian James Williams	Senior Policy and Programme Adviser (formerly Resident Coordinator, Albania)

Agency Level Key Informants	
Name	Role
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION: UNDP	
Peter Batchelor	Head, Conflict & Fragility Policy & Engagement, Crisis Bureau (CB)
Michele Candotti	Chief of Staff
George Conway	Deputy Director, CB
Lina Fernandez	Team Leader, Partnerships Group
Mariana Gonzalez	Financial Institutions Lead, Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy (BERA)
Janil Greenaway	OIC, UN Systems Affairs, BERA
Nick Rene Hartmann	Director, Partnership Group (and the MOPAN focal point)
Constance Hybsier	UNDS Reform Advisor, BERA
Ulrika Modeer	Director, BERA
Laurel Patterson	Head, SDG Integration, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS)
Darshak Shah	Senior Advisor, ExO
Gulden Turkoz-Cosslett	Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Director, BERA
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION: UNEP	
Mahir Aliyev	Regional Development Coordination Officer, Europe Region
Chris Ambala	Programme Officer, Policy and Programme Division
Juliette Biao	Regional Director, Africa Region
Alexandre Caldas	Chief, Country Outreach, Technology, Innovation and Big Data Branch
Jonathan Gilman	Regional Development Coordinator, Asia & Pacific Region
Ebrahim Gora	Deputy Director Policy and Programme Division
Leo Heileman	Regional Director, LAC Region
Tim Kasten	Director of Policy and Programme Division
Sonja Leighton-Kone	Director of Corporate Services Division
Jian Liu	Division Director, Science Division
Piedad Martin	Regional Development Coordination Officer, Acting Deputy Regional Director, LAC Region
Mara Murillo Correa	Senior Programme Officer and UNSDG alternate Sherpa
Bruno Pozzi	Regional Director, Europe Region
Satya Tripathi	Assistant-Secretary-General, Head of Office
Dechen Tsering	Regional Director, Asia & Pacific Region
Frank Turyatunga	Deputy Director, Africa Region
Jochem Zoetelief	Senior Programme Officer, Cross-cutting Capacity Development

Agency Level Key Informants	
Name	Role
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION: UNFPA	
Dominic Allen	Chief a.i., Operational Support & Quality Assurance Branch , Policy and Strategy Division
Mariarosa Cutillo	Chief, Strategic Partnerships Branch, Division for Communications and Strategic Partnerships
Isabelle Hentic	Resource Mobilization Adviser, Resource Mobilization Branch, Division for Communication and Strategic Partnerships
Alexander Pak	Team Leader, Inter-Agency Affairs, Policy and Strategy Division
Andrew Saberton	Director, Division for Management Services
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION: UNICEF	
Segolene Adam	Chief, Office of Emergency Programmes
Sajid Ali	Associate Director, Division of Human Resources
Mark Beatty	Director, Global Shared Service Center
Aytugce Biredinc	Public Partnership Manager
Genevieve Boutin	Deputy Director, Programme Division
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Marcio De Carvalho	Senior Planning Specialist, Programme Division
Maricar Garde	Programme Manager, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
Tasleem Hemani-Tuan	Public Partnerships Specialist, Public Partnership Division
Mark Hereward	Associate Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
Pernille Ironside	Deputy Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
Yulia Krieger	Senior Advisor, Public Partnership Division
Radu Leontescu	Chief of Operations, Global Shared Service Center
Rudi Luchmann	Chief, Strategic Planning, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
David Matern	Senior Advisor
Cairan O'Toole	Planning Manager, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
Leila Pakkala	Senior Advisor, Global Partnerships
Shane Sheils	Chief, Strategic Planning, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
Carole Vignaud	Humanitarian Policy Specialist, Office of Emergency Programmes
Silke Von Brockhausen	Public Partnership Manager
Solome Zemene	Public Partnerships Specialist, Public Partnership Division

Agency Level Key Informants	
Name	Role
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION: UNOPS	
Sven Eckert	Head of Project Finance
Grete Faremo	Executive Director
Nicholas O'Regan	Director Implementation Practices and Standards at UNOPS
James Provenzano	UNOPS General Counsel & Director, New York Liaison Office
Andrew Reese	Senior Portfolio Manager
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION: UN WOMEN	
Jean-Luc Bories	Secretary to Executive Board, Executive Board Secretariat
Paivi Kannisto	Chief, PPID/Women Peace and Security
Aparna Mehrotra	Director, UN System Coordination Division
Abigail Neville	Deputy a.i., Resource Mobilization Section, & Focal point for UN funding and inter-agency issues.
Louise Nylin	Chief, Political Analysis and Programme Development Unit (PAPDU)
Julien Pellaux	Head of Executive Office, Executive Director Office
Silja Rajander	Interagency Coordination Specialist, UN System Coordination Division/UNCT Team
Sebastian Rottmair	Advisor, Change Management
Gabriel Tuan	Coordinator, Development and Diversity & Inclusion
Sara van Gaalen	Human Resources Specialist, Division for Human Resources
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION: WFP	
Amir Abdulla	Deputy Executive Director
Manoj Juneja	Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant Executive Director, Chief Financial Officer (Resource Management and Accountability)
David Kaatrud	Director of WFP's Humanitarian and Development Programme
Jakob Kern	Director, Supply Chain
Joyce Luma	Human Resources Director
Karin Manente	Director, Public Partnerships and Resourcing
Jennifer Nyberg	Deputy Director, Performance Management, Corporate Planning and Performance
Harriet Spanos	Secretary to Executive Board & Director, Executive Board Secretariat
Philip Ward	Director, Management Services

Agency Level Key Informants

Name	Role
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION: WHO	
Shambhu Acharya	Director, Department of Country Strategy and Support
Peter Graaff	Director, Office of Health Emergencies Preparedness and Response (for COVID-19 and UN Reform)
Ivana Milovanovic	Senior Policy Lead (Office of DG Envoy for Multilateral Affairs)
Ramesh Shademani	Adviser, Strategic Initiatives
Stewart Simonson	ADG
Raul Thomas	Assistant Director-General, Business Operations

Country Level Key Informants

Bangladesh Key Informants

Name	Organisational Affiliation	Role
Alpha Bah	WFP	Deputy Director and Chair of OMT
Tomoo Hozumi	UNICEF	UNICEF Country Representative, Bangladesh
Shoko Ishikawa	UN Women	UN Women Country Representative for Bangladesh
Rumana Khan	UNFPA	Head of Office, UNRCO Bangladesh
Sudipto Mukerjee	UNDP	Resident Representative, Bangladesh
Tuomo Poutiainen	ILO	Country Director, Bangladesh
Richard Ragan	WFP	Country Director, Bangladesh
Maria Seppo	DCO	Resident Coordinator, Bangladesh

Colombia Key Informants

Name	Organisational Affiliation	Role
Jessica Faieta	DCO	Resident Coordinator (a.i.), Colombia
Ashild Falch	Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bogota	Head of Cooperation, Norwegian Embassy, Colombia
Adriana Mejia	MOFA Colombia	Vice Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia
Jozef Merckx	UNHCR	UNHCR Country Representative, Colombia
Pontus Ohrstedt	DCO	Head, Office of Resident Coordinator, Colombia
Aida Oliver	UNICEF	UNICEF Country Representative, Colombia & Co-chair of Inter-agency Cooperation
John Petter Opdahl	Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bogota	Ambassador, Norwegian Embassy, Colombia
Verónica Simán	UNFPA	UNFPA Representative, Colombia
Dr. Gina Tambini	Pan-American Health Organization	PAHO Representative for Colombia

Country Level Key Informants

DRC Key Informants

Name	Organisational Affiliation	Role
Edouard Beigbeder	UNICEF	UNICEF Representative to DRC
Aboubakri Diaw	DCO	Head of Office, UN RCO DRC
Christopher Gabelle	World Bank	Fragility, Violence and Conflict Advisor
Marco Kalbusch	UN	UN - Head of Integrated Office
David Mclachlan-Karr	DCO	Resident Coordinator, DRC
Awa Ndiaye	UN Women	Resident Representative of UN Women in DRC

Ethiopia Key Informants

Name	Organisational Affiliation	Role
Ann Encontre	UNHCR	UNHCR Representative to Ethiopia
Worknesh Mekonnen Gonet	UNOPS	Director UNOPS Ethiopia
Dr. Abdul Kamara	African Development Bank	Deputy Director-General, East Africa Region, African Development Bank Group, Ethiopia (Addis)
Adele Khodr	UNICEF	UNICEF Representative to Ethiopia
Dr. Catherine Sozi	DCO	Resident Coordinator, Ethiopia

Jordan Key Informants

Name	Organisational Affiliation	Role
Usman Akram	UNOPS	Director – UNOPS Operational Hub in Amman, Jordan
Tone Allers	MFA Norway	Norwegian Ambassador to Jordan and Iraq
Jim Barnhart	USAID	Deputy Coordinator, Feed the Future, Bureau for Resilience and Food Security
Dominik Bartsch	UNHCR	UNHCR Representative to Jordan
Susanne Butscher	UNHCR	Senior Inter-Agency Coordinator
Costanza Farina and James Seibert	UNESCO	UNESCO Representative to Jordan
Feda Gharaibeh	Government of Jordan	Ministry of Planning and Cooperation, Government of Jordan
Baptiste Hanquart	Jordan INGO Forum	Coordinator, Jordan INGO Forum
Sara Ferrer Olivella	UNDP	Resident Representative Jordan
Anders Pedersen	DCO	Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, Jordan
Cristina Profili	WHO	WHO Representative to Jordan
James Seibert	UNESCO	Resource Mobilisation and Partnerships Officer
Ziad Sheikh	UN Women	UN Women Representative to Jordan

Country Level Key Informants

Kenya Key Informants

Name	Organisational Affiliation	Role
Fathia Abdallah	UNHCR	UNCHR Representative
Susan Aletia	One UN	Programme Coordinator, Turkana County and UN Joint Integrated Area-Based Development Programme
Walid Badawi	UNDP	Resident Representative Kenya
Paolo Belli	World Bank	Practice Manager, SP & Jobs, Eastern & Southern Africa
Siddharth Chatterjee	DCO	Resident Coordinator, Kenya
Mariya Essajee	UNON	Common Services Coordinator, Common Services Management Team Kenya
Arif Neky	SDG Partnership Platform	Senior Advisor – UN Strategic Partnerships Coordinator
Ira Ovesen	UNFPA	Chair, Common Services Management Team
Eddine Sarroukh	UNDP	Senior Technical Advisor, Innovation and Technology
Medhin Tsehiau	UNAIDS	Interim RCO, UNAIDS lead

Nepal Key Informants

Name	Organisational Affiliation	Role
Richard Howard	ILO	Director, ILO Kathmandu Office
Ms. Ayshanie Labe	UNDP	Resident Representative Nepal
Cynthia Rowe	FCDO	Head of Governance
Gitanjali Singh	UN Women	UN Women Deputy Representative for Nepal
Ankur Thapa	World Bank	World Bank Development Partnership Lead for Nepal
Rudi Louis Henriks Van Dael	Asian Development Bank	Unit Head, Portfolio Management

Timor-Leste Key Informants

Name	Organisational Affiliation	Role
Sunita Caminha	UN Women	Head of Office
Andrew Jacobs	EU Delegation	Ambassador
Dageng Liu	WFP	Country Director
Kanako Mabuchi	DCO	Head of RCO
Carli Shillito	DFAT, Australian Embassy	Councillor, Human Development, DFAT, Australian Embassy
Alexandre Tilman	DCO	Development Coordination Officer, RCO
Roy Trivedy	DCO	Resident Coordinator, Timor-Leste
Scott Whoolery	UNICEF	Acting Representative

Selection of Global Experts Key Informants

Name	Organisational Affiliation	Role
Sabine Bhanot	UN Lab for Organizational Change and Knowledge	Portfolio Manager, Change Management
Natalia Galat	United Nations System Staff College Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development	Learning Portfolio Manager
Michelle Gyles-McDonnough	Sustainable Development Unit, Executive Office of the Secretary-General	Adviser to the Deputy Secretary General
Panos Moutziz	Global Executive Leadership Initiative	Assistant Secretary General and Executive Director
Farhad Peikar	World Bank	International Affairs Officer, External and Corporate Affairs Team
Patrick van Weerelt	United Nations System Staff College Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development	Head of Office
Mathew Varghese	UN Secretariat	Senior Coordinator, System-Wide Evaluation, Executive Office of the Secretary-General, United Nations
Jens Wandel	UN Secretariat	SG's Designate, COVID-19 Recover Better Fund & Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Reforms
Bart Willemsen	One HR	Chief, Compensation and Classification Section, Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance

ANNEX 2:

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¹ NB: this grammatical error is included as it is part of the title of the original document.

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