

PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE

UNAIDS Secretariat

AUGUST 2023



ABOUT UNAIDS AND ITS SECRETARIAT

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) started operations in 1996 based on United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolution 1994/24 and with an independent Secretariat based at the World Health Organization (WHO). A 2021 United Nations (UN) General Assembly Political Declaration confirms UNAIDS' mandate and mission as “ending inequalities and getting on track to end AIDS by 2030”. This means ending AIDS as a public health threat, with associated targets of zero infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. The Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026 and the 2022-26 Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework (UBRAF) specify results, activities and budgets. The Programme Coordinating Board (PCB), which has representation from 22 member states, Cosponsors and civil society organisations, governs UNAIDS.

The UNAIDS Joint Programme brings together 11 Cosponsors supported by an independent Secretariat.¹

They collaborate in a complementary manner in line with an agreed Division of Labour. The Secretariat comprises headquarters in Geneva (referred to as the global centre), 70 country offices and 5 regional offices. Organisation realignment is ongoing. The Secretariat mobilises resources for the Joint Programme with the help of Cosponsors. The 2022-23 UBRAF estimates that the resources needed for the Joint Programme amount to USD 187 million to USD 210 million per year. These “core” resources are unearmarked funds. Cosponsors and the Secretariat are encouraged to raise additional “non-core” or earmarked resources. The core funding aspirations for 2022 were not met, and it is unclear whether they will be met for 2023.

This assessment focuses on the global function of the UNAIDS Secretariat, not on decentralised (regional and country) functions or the performance of UNAIDS Cosponsors. The assessment looks back on progress made by the Secretariat between 2017 and early 2021 in the areas for attention that the last (2015-16) MOPAN assessment identified. It also looks ahead – from 2021 to 2026, the end of the current five-year workplan – and beyond, examining how fit for purpose the Secretariat is to perform its agreed core functions. Given that the Secretariat is part of the UNAIDS Joint Programme, inevitably some aspects of the UNAIDS Secretariat assessment are inextricably linked to the Joint Programme Cosponsors. The assessment therefore contains considerations not only for the UNAIDS Secretariat, but also for the Programme Coordinating Board, member states and Cosponsors (see Box 2).

1. The Cosponsors are the WHO, World Bank, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, World Food Programme, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Labour Organization, and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

KEY FINDINGS

This MOPAN assessment finds that since the last MOPAN assessment in 2016, the UNAIDS Joint Programme has been the subject of several external reviews that reached largely similar findings and conclusions. These reviews assessed the Joint Programme as a whole, with specific findings and recommendations for the Secretariat and Cosponsors.²

The reviews broadly agree on the core strengths and continued relevance of a UN joint programme on HIV. Even beyond 2030, social determinants of HIV vulnerability will remain, key populations will still be disproportionately affected, and a multisectoral response to HIV will continue to be appropriate and necessary. The UNAIDS Joint Programme has been a trailblazer in terms of both UN joint programming and inclusive governance at global as well as national levels. Its role in advancing global guidance and norms through technical assistance and policy dialogue with member states is a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other global partners. Cosponsors have integrated HIV into their mandates, programmes and financial frameworks and currently provide HIV technical and programmatic support to countries in their respective mandate areas.

The external reviews also agree on the strengths and achievements of the UNAIDS Secretariat. Jointly, the Secretariat and Cosponsors have maintained a focus on the social determinants of HIV, including human rights, stigma and discrimination, gender, and other inequalities. The Secretariat specifically has provided leadership on global agreements around HIV, setting and monitoring global HIV targets. It has developed a joint UN system accountability framework (UBRAF) and has provided leadership on joint UN responses in priority countries, including technical support for HIV surveillance. **This MOPAN assessment finds that the recommendations made by these other, earlier evaluations of UNAIDS have not been fully addressed and that the identified problems still remain.** All reviews identified similar challenges for the Joint Programme, resulting in strikingly similar conclusions and recommendations to the Secretariat. The three main challenges relate to 1) reductions in HIV funding and the inability to fully fund the UBRAF budget, 2) an ongoing dispute between Cosponsors and the Secretariat over the allocation of UBRAF resources to the Secretariat relative to those allocated to Cosponsors, and 3) a lack of Cosponsor confidence in the transparency of decision making across the PCB, the Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations (CCO) and the Secretariat.

This MOPAN assessment finds that despite noteworthy strengths and achievements in areas under the Secretariat's direct control, the UNAIDS Joint Programme and the Secretariat are in a worse situation than in 2016. It concludes that the Secretariat's strained relations with Cosponsor representatives and the challenges associated with fully resourcing the UBRAF have created a vicious circle that threatens the continued effectiveness of the Secretariat as a co-ordinator of the Joint Programme. The inability of the Secretariat to lead the Joint Programme to 2030 and beyond undermines the relevance and effectiveness of the joint and co-sponsored UN response to HIV.

Specifically, the UNAIDS Secretariat has struggled to raise adequate resources and has been unable to fully fund the UBRAF since 2014. Mobilising resources for the biennial UBRAF workplans, jointly with Cosponsors, is one of the Secretariat's core functions, but this task has become challenging in the current financing climate. The 2022-26 resource mobilisation strategy acknowledges a funding crisis. The "core" UBRAF funds are unearmarked funding, preferred by the Secretariat and Cosponsors because such resources offer more flexibility than the earmarked funding that they raise individually to complement their UBRAF allocation. The UBRAF budget covers allocations for the Secretariat, Cosponsors and joint UN teams on AIDS (referred to as "country envelopes"). Failure to fully resource the UBRAF has resulted in cuts to all allocations: for example, cuts for each Cosponsor from USD 3 million to USD 2 million since 2022 and additional cuts of 30% in 2023 for country envelopes. The agreed reduction in the

2. In addition to the 2016 MOPAN assessment, the external reviews were the Global Review Panel on the Future of the UNAIDS Joint Programme Model (2017), the Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the Management and Administration Review of UNAIDS (2019), the Independent Evaluation of the UN System Response to AIDS in 2016-2019 (2019), and the UNAIDS Joint Programme Capacity Assessment (2022).

Secretariat's allocation was proportionately lower (10%) than in the Cosponsor allocation (28%). With the latest resource mobilisation strategy, the Secretariat hopes to sustain current funding levels via accessing new funding sources. The resource mobilisation strategy calls for but does not contain a value proposition of the Joint Programme. While the realignment process includes improving cost-effectiveness to increase financial sustainability, other cost reduction strategies are not evident.

Moreover, the UNAIDS Secretariat also struggles to satisfy the expectations of Cosponsors, which has led to growing tensions in the Joint Programme. The strained relationship between the Secretariat and Cosponsors, especially at global level, jeopardises the future of the Joint Programme. One source of tension is the role of the Secretariat in relation to Cosponsors and the Secretariat's comparatively large workforce and budget. Due to reduced UBRAF allocations, Cosponsors find themselves obliged to rely instead on their corporate HIV resources, which seriously impacts the ability of some Cosponsors to address HIV in light of the global reduction in HIV financing. Another source of tension relates to the Secretariat's role in global advocacy. Many global partners, donors and Cosponsors express concern that the Secretariat seems to be expanding the advocacy agenda beyond HIV to include addressing wider inequalities. Many perceive the Secretariat as encroaching on their own roles as it has extended its advocacy and programming into, for example, girls' education and pandemic preparedness and control. They expect razor-sharp focus on the "last mile" for controlling AIDS, and dislike what some call "mission drift" in global advocacy. Many global partners, donors and Cosponsors see this shift by the Secretariat not only as a reflection of the priorities of its senior leadership but also as its attempt to tap into new streams of resources. Many stakeholders feel this has a negative impact on the Joint Programme's focus and relevance. Cosponsors' reservations about the Secretariat also negatively affect the cohesion of the Joint Programme, which is only as strong as the relationship between its members.

Finally, many global partners are looking for leadership from the UNAIDS Secretariat in creating a long-term vision for the post-2030 UN response. With time, there will be even fewer resources for HIV and less unearmarked funding, underscoring the need for a rethink of relations between the Secretariat and Cosponsors. The last mile towards the 2030 goal to end AIDS as a public health threat is around the corner. Many stakeholders consider that it is not too early to start reflecting on what the UN system's response should look like after 2030 based on a critical assessment of HIV epidemic scenarios and needs beyond that horizon. Donors and global partners echoed the recommendation from an earlier review to explore alternative organisational options to co-ordinate joint UN action beyond 2030, recognising that the context has changed in terms of the pandemic itself (e.g. countries achieving epidemic control, while there is no cure or vaccine for HIV) and in terms of the global response (e.g. reduced global HIV funds, and shifts in roles of global players versus UN Cosponsors). Doing so would involve learning from the UNAIDS Joint Programme and other UN joint programmes to reimagine Secretariat functions; redefining "co-sponsorship" with respect to sponsoring a secretariat function; and considering flexible Cosponsor membership. However, Secretariat leadership has expressed reluctance to take the lead in developing such a long-term vision. At the same time, neither the usual mechanisms for Secretariat-Cosponsor co-ordination nor global co-ordinators and the CCO have been able to address earlier recommendations to redefine the Joint Programme operating model.

The UNAIDS Joint Programme governance mechanism, the PCB, may need to step in and to go back to the drawing board to determine the long-term options for a UN joint response. This assessment therefore includes considerations for the UNAIDS governing members.

BOX 1. MAIN STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR ATTENTION FOR UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

Main strengths

- The Secretariat leads the development of the Global AIDS Strategy effectively and continues to improve the UBRAF as a results framework for the UN contribution to the global response.
- The Secretariat is recognised for its ability to lead an HIV-relevant policy dialogue with member states and for advancing global guidance and norms.
- The Secretariat is a key provider of strategic information. The data on the global AIDS epidemiology and response produced by the Secretariat's strategic information unit support strategic planning effectively at country level.

Areas for attention for the UNAIDS Secretariat

- The Secretariat is not able to address expectations of the Cosponsors, resulting in loss of confidence of key Cosponsor representatives and affecting its co-ordination function.
- The Secretariat resource mobilisation strategy for the UBRAF has not kept up with the realities of global HIV funding (trending towards less HIV investment and more earmarked funding for specific activities), as it aims to sustain current budget and funding levels.
- The Secretariat leadership pursues an advocacy agenda that deviates from the HIV pandemic, the Joint Programme's core mandate. This has resulted in criticism of its core function of global leadership and also in accusations of mission creep.
- The Secretariat needs to put appropriate resources, structures and monitoring in place to implement the 2023 WHO policy on sexual misconduct. Ensuring it does so in a victim/survivor-centred way will be essential for building trust as it emerges from a high-profile case of sexual harassment and abuse of power.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

BACKWARD-LOOKING, PROGRESS ASSESSMENT

The first part of this assessment looks at progress made by the UNAIDS Secretariat against the five areas identified by the 2015-16 MOPAN assessment as needing attention:

1. congruence of organisational architecture with vision and operating model;
2. financial forward planning and engagement with Cosponsors for joint resource mobilisation;
3. global co-operation and co-ordination and transparency in decision making at the highest level;
4. an independent evaluation function;
5. cross-cutting issues including environment and climate change.

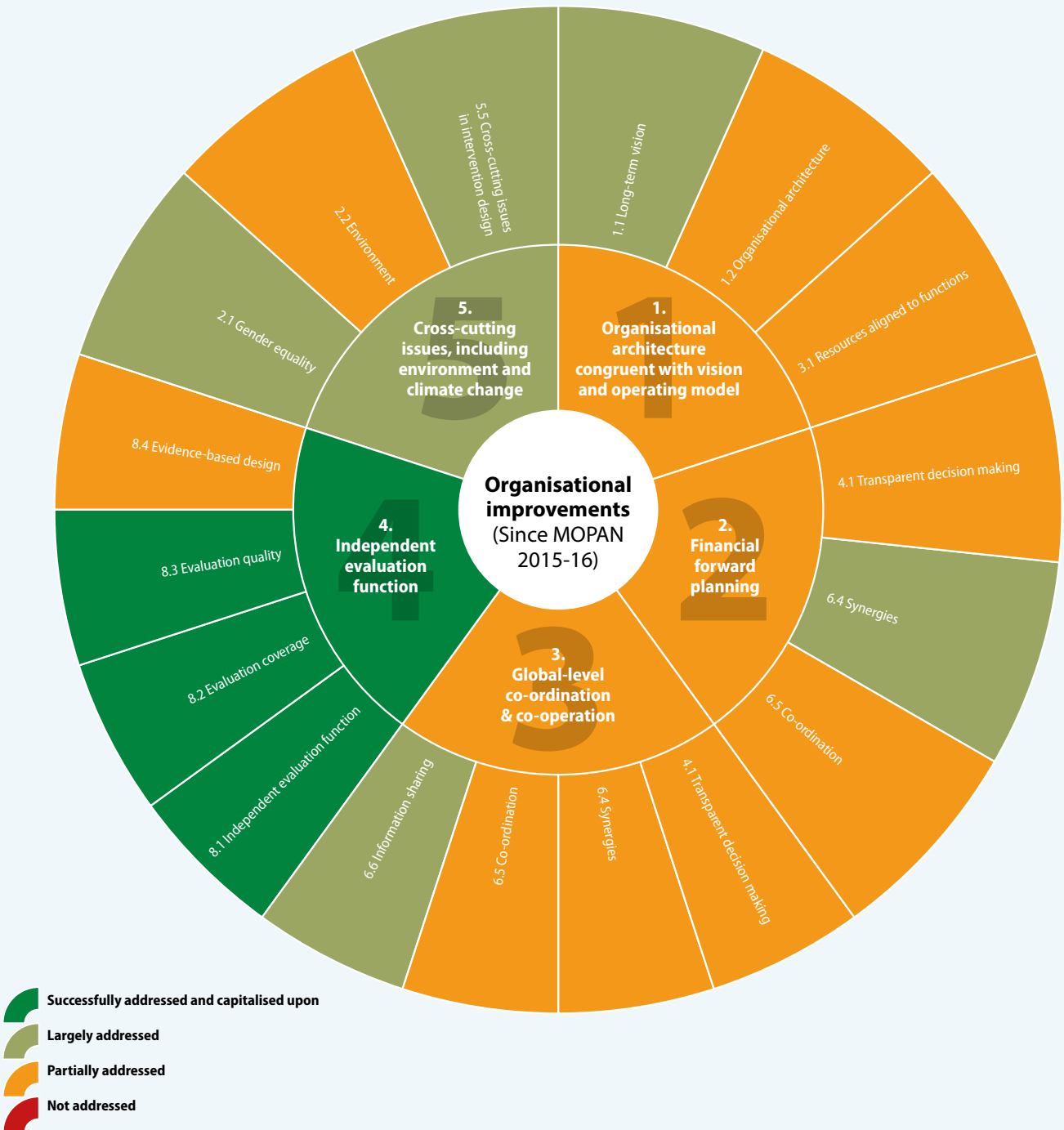
MOPAN finds that over the period from 2016 to March 2021 the UNAIDS Secretariat made progress in most key areas that the last assessment highlighted as requiring improvement³ (see Figure 1).

A key achievement of the UNAIDS Secretariat was the co-ordination of the Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026 and a Joint Programme operational plan, the 2022-26 UBRAF. It also established an independent, fully functional and quality-assured evaluation function, which allows it to generate more analytical data for programmatic decision making as well as evidence of the Joint Programme's contributions to results. Additionally, the Secretariat integrated gender equality, human rights and environmental sustainability as cross-cutting issues in its strategy and operations.

3. This backward-looking period is covered the 2016-21 UBRAF.

The assessment finds that the UNAIDS Secretariat made limited progress in areas that involved or depended on its external relationships, especially with Cosponsors. Resource constraints limited financial planning despite development of a resource mobilisation strategy in 2017. While the revised operational model supported country action, it negatively affected global-level co-ordination with Cosponsors. The recent organisational realignment of the Secretariat has raised concerns among staff.

FIGURE 1. BACKWARD-LOOKING ASSESSMENT: AREAS FOR ATTENTION AND RELEVANT MICRO-INDICATORS



FORWARD-LOOKING, FIT-FOR-PURPOSE ASSESSMENT

The second part of the assessment looks forward **from March 2021 to 2026 and beyond, and finds that the UNAIDS Secretariat is partly fit for purpose to perform the Secretariat functions of the UNAIDS Joint Programme**⁴ (see Figure 2). According to the 2018 UNAIDS Joint Programme Division of Labour⁵, the Secretariat is expected to fulfil the following functions:

1. global leadership, advocacy and communication to drive the global AIDS agenda;
2. partnerships, mobilisation and innovation to ensure coherence around global initiatives;
3. strategic information on the HIV epidemic and response;
4. co-ordination, convening and country-level implementation support;
5. governance and mutual accountability to co-ordinate with Cosponsors, fully fund the Joint Programme and support its governance model.

Among these functions, the UNAIDS Secretariat is well equipped to perform its technical functions. Its technical “strategic information” function is strong. It provides global partners with critical information for planning and supports countries with HIV surveillance. In its “country implementation support” function, the Secretariat successfully supports national governments and civil society partners through joint UN country teams, technical guidance, dedicated funding envelopes, and a Technical Support Mechanism.

On the other hand, the Secretariat is not sufficiently able to co-ordinate, fund and provide leadership to the UN Joint Programme, including to Cosponsors. Although the Secretariat successfully co-ordinated the development of a new 2022-26 UBRAF, it struggles to co-ordinate the UN Joint Programme partners to implement it. Collaboration with Cosponsors at global level is strained; the UBRAF is only partly funded. Although the Secretariat’s function of providing leadership and global advocacy for the HIV response is undisputed, leadership remains to be defined around a long-term vision for the UN response to HIV after the goal of “ending AIDS by 2030”.

BOX 2. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE UNAIDS SECRETARIAT, THE PROGRAMME COORDINATING BOARD, MEMBER STATES AND COSPONSORS

The UNAIDS Secretariat may want to consider the following opportunities to:

- start planning as soon as possible towards the “end of AIDS as a health emergency” in 2030, including a global event to celebrate the success of the global response and recommit to what remains needed at global level (e.g. cure and vaccine) and national level (equitable access to HIV services)
- engage PCB constituencies in post-2030 global HIV scenario planning and needs assessment for the specific UN contribution to the global response to HIV post 2030 (a process aligned with but different in scope than the “end game” planning for 2027-30)
- supplement the UBRAF resource mobilisation strategy 2022-26 with strategies to increase cost efficiency of UNAIDS Secretariat functions and operations and to hand over activities that are currently funded through earmarked funds, e.g., the Technical Support Mechanism and strategic initiatives.

The UNAIDS PCB and member states may want to consider the following opportunities:

- ECOSOC and the UNAIDS PCB may want to consider going back to the drawing board in order to confirm the continued relevance of a UN system response to HIV post 2030 and to revisit its architecture and modus operandi. This might include considering a smaller Joint Programme, with a more focused Secretariat supporting a reduced number of UN agencies, and a reinterpretation of “co-sponsorship” in the Joint Programme.

4. This forward-looking period is covered by the 2022-26 UBRAF.

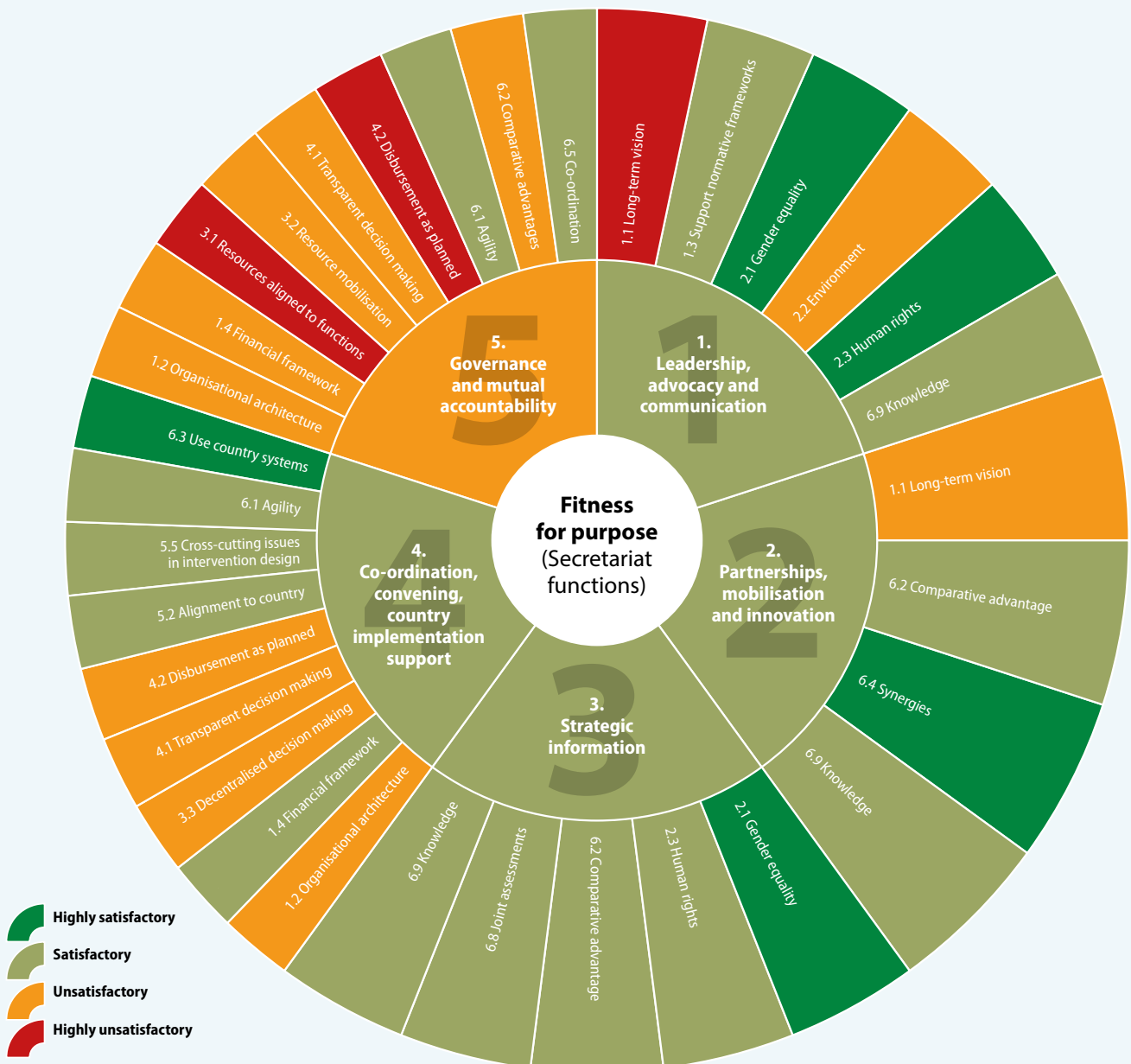
5. See <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2019/UNAIDS-Division-of-Labour>.

- The PCB could consider sunsetting elements of the Secretariat towards 2030 (“end of AIDS as a public health threat”) while sustaining critical functions. It could consider handing over functions such as country-level co-ordination (from UNAIDS country offices to a UN Resident Coordinator system), strategic information (e.g., to WHO), the Technical Support Mechanism (e.g., to the private sector) and resource mobilisation (to Cosponsors). Critical functions it may want to sustain are support to joint Cosponsor HIV programmes and global advocacy on behalf of Cosponsors.

UNAIDS Cosponsors may want to consider the following opportunities:

- Given that all the Cosponsors have committed to the Global AIDS Strategy, all Cosponsor agencies (their heads and boards) may want to reappraise their commitment to a Joint Programme and a Secretariat. They may want to assess their expectations of and contribution to a Secretariat. The PCB and ECOSOC may want to define “commitment” as 1) existence of a corporate HIV strategy, programme and budget and including 2) a full-time global HIV co-ordinator and 3) financial contribution to co-sponsor a Joint Programme Secretariat.

FIGURE 2. FORWARD-LOOKING ASSESSMENT: SECRETARIAT FUNCTIONS AND RELEVANT MICRO-INDICATORS



ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT OF THE UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

This assessment uses an adapted version of the MOPAN 3.1 framework. Deviating from the standard methodology, it applies both a backward-looking and a forward-looking perspective. This is because UNAIDS was in transition when the assessment started, adapting and aligning itself to the requirements of the 2021 Global AIDS Strategy, following significant strategic and structural change since 2016.

The MOPAN Secretariat and the assessment team therefore developed an adapted methodology with a twin purpose:

- to assess how well the UNAIDS Secretariat has responded to the five areas of improvement suggested in the MOPAN 2015-16 assessment during the remaining period of the 2016-21 UBRAF (i.e. January 2017-March 2021); and
- to consider the degree to which the UNAIDS Secretariat - from the point of adoption of the Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026 onwards - is fit for purpose to perform the five core functions agreed in UNAIDS' Division of Labour for 2022-26, the period of the Global AIDS Strategy and the 2022-26 UBRAF.

Relevant MOPAN micro-indicators were chosen for each part. In the absence of any evaluations of the 2022-26 UBRAF, results against the new strategy were not assessed. Unlike in standard MOPAN assessments, indicators were not scored. Instead, a qualitative judgment was made on each of the micro indicators, drawing on elements from the MOPAN framework as judgment criteria. Scoring was maintained only for assessing the protection of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Chapter 4 in the Assessment Report (Part I) explains the rationale and adapted methodology more fully.

The assessment was conducted through a rigorous and collaborative process that integrated the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders. Drawing on multiple lines of evidence (document review, interviews, and a partner survey) to validate and triangulate findings, it represents a robust source of evidence-based guidance to improve organisational performance.

THE ASSESSMENT APPROACH

The approach to MOPAN assessments has evolved over time to adjust to the needs of the multilateral system. The MOPAN 3.1 methodology applied in this assessment (in adapted form) is the latest iteration.

MOPAN conducted annual surveys from 2003 to 2008, used the MOPAN Common Approach during 2009-14, and the MOPAN 3.0 Approach since 2015-16. In 2019, MOPAN 3.0 was renamed MOPAN 3.0* to acknowledge a change in how ratings were aligned with the scores defined for indicators: The ratings threshold was raised to reflect increasing demands for organisational performance in the multilateral system.

As of 2020, all assessments use the MOPAN 3.1 methodology, which MOPAN members endorsed in early 2020. The framework draws on international standards and reference points, as described in the MOPAN Methodology Manual.⁶

ABOUT MOPAN

The mission of the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), comprising 22 members⁷ is to support its members in assessing the effectiveness of the multilateral organisations that receive development and humanitarian funding. Aiming to strengthen the organisations' contribution to overall greater development and humanitarian results, the network generates, collects, analyses and presents relevant and credible information on the organisational and development effectiveness of multilateral organisations. This knowledge base is intended to contribute to organisational learning within and among multilateral organisations, their direct clients/partners and other stakeholders.

6. MOPAN 3.1 Methodology Manual, 2020 Assessment Cycle, http://www.mopanonline.org/ourwork/themopanapproach/MOPAN_3.1_Methodology.pdf

7. Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States. Türkiye and New Zealand are observers. MOPAN also collaborates closely with the European Union.