

ECOSOC Dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UN development system

UNDG messages for Workshop 6, May 5th, 2016¹

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development covers a wide spectrum of inter-linked development, humanitarian, human rights, peace and security, and climate objectives. A universal, transformative, rights-based and integrated sustainable development agenda requires a UN that is ready and able to work together to deliver results.
2. More than ever, the diversity of the UN system will be a unique comparative advantage to support the implementation of this holistic and indivisible agenda. This depth and breadth of knowledge and expertise of its constituent parts, reflecting the system's important normative and operational roles, must be delivered through more tailored business models and differentiated country presence to provide the UNDS with unique capacity and flexibility to react to countries' needs across goals, sectors, and borders. Reform efforts must acknowledge the invaluable diversity, which lies at the heart of the UNDS, with entities working across the full spectrum of the UN Charter.
3. Any reform of UN governance and organizational arrangements should be guided by what helps the UN system better deliver results on the ground. Reform proposals and their implementation should be thought through and designed from the "bottom up", starting with how and what UN Country Teams can deliver best, and considering what adjustments and reforms will help maximize development impact at the country level.
4. In line with the 2012 QCPR, the UN development system to this point has developed a range of new instruments - from Standard Operating Procedures for UNCTs to common operational services to better integration of the work of individual agencies within a common development framework - while fully recognizing their unique operating conditions, their specialized knowledge and specific partnerships.
5. The need to facilitate greater collaboration and complementarity across the humanitarian, human rights, peace and development pillars and effectively support a universal agenda will require both deepening and accelerating these on-going efforts. Notably, it will be critical for the QCPR to provide a strong strategic compass to all constituents of the UNDS. This strategic focus should be reflected in the new generation of UN Development Assistance Frameworks.
6. To fully harness the diversity of the UN system and avoid the risks of fragmentation that a broader mandate entails, particular attention will need to be given to the set of incentives faced by individual agencies for joint initiatives. Greater cohesion will be achieved by creating incentives for UN entities to work better together. For example, greater use of collective funding mechanisms such as pooled financing instruments can incentivize greater collective action and reduce budget-driven competition.
7. Ultimately, the manner by which Member States provide policy guidance, oversight and funding makes the difference to whether the UNDS is divided or comes together to deliver results. Through their participation in the respective executive boards and governing bodies, they are the custodians of the strategic focus and organizational incentives shaping the work and results of each UN agency.

¹ Approved by UNDG ASG Advisory Group, following which it will be submitted for endorsement by the full UNDG.

UNDG Perspective on Governance

1. **A primary purpose of improving governance of the UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies should be to ensure the improved delivery of results with a positive impact on the lives of the people the UN system serves.** The UN system's global governance should be principled, practical, efficient and effective.
2. **Coherence of Member State policies and positions should hold across all UN governing bodies.** The undg recognizes the diversity of governance models and practices among undg members, and their historical evolution as well as specific mandates. Each and every member is encouraged to share good practice, lessons learned and challenges faced, for full understanding and learning.
3. **Building on ongoing QCPR and ECOSOC-led reforms.** Full implementation of the 2012 QCPR goes a long way in making the UNDS fit for purpose. The UNDS must build on the series of important reforms, particularly to urge action where change has been lagging behind, including by updating guidance and recommendations for the UNDS's support to implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
4. **Focus of reforms should be on effective support to implementation of the 2030 Agenda.** Comprehensive structural and institutional change is costly and time-consuming and risks significant disruption of UNDS support to countries at a time when the system is called upon to deliver. This is especially concerning in the absence of evident causal links to what improvement governance reforms would bring to impact on the ground.
5. **Creating incentives for system-wide coherence.** Better coherence and cohesion will be achieved by creating incentives for all UN entities to cooperate and work together. This includes, for example, a more strategic QCPR, a single UN framework at the country level, common operational services, and pooled financing mechanisms in key cross-cutting areas to incentivize collective action and offer comprehensive and integrated policy support.
6. **Coherence between UNDS Strategic Plans and the QCPR as a strategic framework.** The scope and effectiveness of the QCPR should be strengthened by transforming it into a high-level system-wide strategic framework for the UNDS as a whole. Governing bodies could be encouraged to enhance coherence between Strategic Plans and the QCPR.
7. **Coherent governance and oversight through Executive Boards.** The Boards' current direct relationship with government representatives who are experts on the issues covered by the particular entity provides for informed accountability, responsive to specialized mandates, thereby allowing in-depth and distinct discussions on particular issues. The merging of Executive Boards could add another governance layer and adding more process without necessarily leading to more strategic guidance and effective policy oversight.
8. **Exploring options for strengthening existing governance arrangements.** Existing arrangement should be strengthened with a view to increasing system-wide coherence while capitalizing on the diversity of UNDS entities and their mandates, for instance by:
 - Enhancing the role of EB bureaux and their capacity by providing adequate substantive support and information for evidence-based decision-making and effective strategic oversight by Member States. A more robust calendar of consultations between Member States and UN entities could be facilitated by the EB Secretariats between Board sessions to ensure that the expectations of Member States are addressed.
 - Strengthen the ECOSOC Operational Activities segment to provide policy guidance and oversight in a substantive, systematic manner, and reconsider timing of the session to do so.

9. **Making governance arrangements more inclusive.** Proposals for governance reform should explore the potential of more inclusive governance models considering that the 2030 Agenda is anchored in a people-centered response. There is no one-size-fits-all for this. [Instructive examples already exist within the UNDS, which can be built upon. In some governing bodies, for instance, civil society organizations are represented while a joint programme co-sponsored model has helped to advance multi-sectoral planning and action. The nature and type of such arrangements, while respecting the principle of inclusivity, can differ among entities.]
10. **Leveraging UNDS assets and capacities at the regional level.** Closer cooperation and collaboration between Regional Commissions and Regional UNDG Teams is very much desired, with RCMs and R-UNDG mechanisms ensuring systematic joint collaboration. It is important that further change builds on the agreed clear division of responsibilities between Regional Economic Commissions, Regional UNDG Teams and UNCTs, and be respected in full by the respective entities.
11. **Ensuring a modern and effective human resource policy.** UN entities rely on being able to move efficiently and quickly in deploying staff where they are needed at country and regional levels, especially in response to humanitarian crises. Diverse entities require diverse human resources skills and experience. A 'one size fits all' approach to human resources could prove to be less effective in many cases, especially when speed and flexibility of response is required.
12. **Ensuring seamless collaboration across the humanitarian, human rights, peace and development pillars.** The UNDS must harness the full diversity, expertise and leadership across its membership to bring about the best possible outcomes for those most directly affected. Ways in which to better streamline, provide greater clarity of roles and authority, and oversee shared activities and results is welcomed. In doing so, a common understanding, vision and integration efforts should be designed across the three interrelated pillars in a way that allows entities to implement their assigned responsibilities with maximum effect.

UNDG Perspective on Organizational Arrangements and Capacity

1. **The different organizational models and structures of UNDS agencies, funds and programmes are a strength.** Organizational arrangements should value this diversity by ensuring that they are effectively and coherently managed and leveraged to achieve common goals and deliver results.
2. **Integrated planning frameworks across the UN pillars at country level.** Experiment with 'One country, One UN framework' based on shared strategic sustainable development outcomes, root cause analysis, risk assessment and management, planning and monitoring. Next generation of UNDAFs to focus on UN system-wide efforts and shared results in support of the 2030 Agenda, based on UN norms and principles, innovative practice, and open and inclusive processes.
3. **Delivering as one is the preferred approach for strategic country level support for results for countries that wish to adopt it.** The UNDG Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for UN Country Teams are the new way of doing business at all levels. Actively advance the full implementation of the SOPs across all UNCTs, adapted to country context, and align agency programme and operational guidelines to the SOPs accordingly. It is recognized that agencies have different operational and budget structures that would need to be reviewed to see where adjustments can be made through their governance mechanisms. All agencies to systematically track and report to UNDG on progress made on the latter, within own agencies.
4. **Differentiated country office models and support.** The UNDS must develop differentiated models of support, tailored to individual country needs, based not only on income status, but also on human development achievements, fragility, human rights, vulnerability and risk and sustainability challenges, in line with the underlying principles of the 2030 Agenda and development effectiveness principles of national ownership and demand.

5. **A universal agenda requires universal support.** Organizational arrangements will need to evolve to support Member States to implement, monitor and report on the SDGs, and to meet and report on, normative commitments. However, universal support does not necessarily mean universal presence. Looking forward, modalities for providing support to developed and high-income countries will require further exploration by the UNDS and Member States.
6. **Embrace and support the data revolution at country level and strengthen UNDS support to capacity development of national institutions.** Ensure coordinated and where possible joint support to data and national statistical capacity strengthening, including for the purpose of monitoring those who otherwise would be left behind, drawing on relevant expertise from across the UN system. Globally, discussions are underway under the auspices of the CEB on how to ensure a coherent and integrated UN system-wide approach to the data revolution. At country level, ensure organizational arrangements support an integrated and transparent approach on the ground.
7. **Accelerate higher performing and common business practices** through the mutual recognition of each entity's best business practices and the system-wide adoption of best practice. Move to greater organizational openness, with the aim of delivering results through innovation, simplification, transparency and greater operational collaboration with each other. Ensuring such an enabling environment will have far-reaching impact across the system, at country, regional and global levels.
8. **Ensure UNDS system, staff and leadership capacities support SDG implementation and enable the UNDS to deliver key priority functions.** Re-positioning of the UN system must be pursued at all levels – programmatic, operational, and management – and concurrently. Key priorities include: building a modern workforce with the right values, expertise and skills; effective performance management and incentives; short term surge capacity; and managing risks including safety and security.
9. **Enhance leadership and accountability of the Resident Coordinator system** through strengthening policies and procedures, tracking implementation of the mutual accountability framework, including the functional firewall and support to new learning and performance management systems, to further develop and invest in a corps of high-performing UN leaders at the country-level. Invest in highly professional, high performing UN teams, including non-resident agencies, providing joined-up UN expertise across policy and technical areas that match country context and operational complexity. This includes teamed UN presence, capacities and operations also at regional level where appropriate. The Resident Coordinator System must continue to build upon and improve existing arrangements, and be managed in a cost-effective manner, ensuring that UNDS coordination supports the integrated policy, programming and operations functions in the field to best contribute to sustainable development results.
10. **Ensure all UNDS entities reach the highest levels of transparency** of data and information shared in the public domain based on IATI standards and underpinned by joint and system-wide analytics, monitoring and assessments. UNDS entities to be accountable, at all levels, for inter-agency approaches and agreements and align agency programming and operations with what has been agreed at the UNDG and CEB.
11. **Effectively, transparently and strategically measure, evaluate and report on the impact of UNDS support.** The UNDS will need to build on and extend the efforts made to date to measure, evaluate and report on results and increasingly on the impact of the UN development system's contribution to achieving global goals and commitments, including system-wide impact at country level. Accountability and transparency can be improved, for example, by supporting national governments through joint approaches for SDG monitoring, extending national/UN steering committees in Delivering as One countries, and common donor-UN templates for results reporting.
12. **Ensuring universal UNDS reach based on differentiated country presence and engagement.** Further elaboration is needed on addressing the complexities involved in advancing a sustainable

development agenda without a physical UN presence in a country. New country office models in small presence countries are being tested, and more flexible typologies for country presence can be developed with a view to achieving greater cost-efficiencies, while maintaining the UNCT's ability to respond to national needs in a strategic manner.

13. **Common back office functions** could be expanded and adapted based on cost-benefit analysis and the experience of pilots and a greater body of knowledge and experience with this type of integration. A menu of back office functions, where pooling of resources makes most sense and yields most efficiencies, could also be defined.
14. **Strengthening leadership and accountability.** While the UNDG has invested significant efforts in strengthening the Resident Coordinator (RC) selection, training, and appraisal process, the effectiveness of the RC system will depend on sufficient and predictable funding, empowered and effective leadership, collective ownership and mutual accountability of the system by all participating agencies.

UNDG Perspective on Partnership Approaches

1. **Partnership approaches must transform to align with and support the UN development system's key priority functions** in supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Dynamic partnership approaches will be fundamental to support delivery of the SDGs. The UNDS must play a role in the new generation of issues-based coalitions and partnerships that are evolving around the SDGs and accelerate its support to South-South and triangular cooperation and work more proactively with partners at the national and sub-national levels to build their capacities for human rights compliance, crisis prevention and response by using the full capacities across the pillars.
2. **New partnership instruments for financing and implementation** should be explored that fully engage and mobilize private sector, philanthropy and civil society, adhering to the UN's core values, the rule of law and using best practice and instruments from across each entity's legal and partnership arrangements. Review and streamline strategic partnership frameworks with the World Bank and the EU to enable joint funding approaches.
3. **Maintaining the dynamic nature of partnerships.** Dynamic partnerships will be fundamental for the implementation of the SDGs. Given that partnerships are built bottom-up, develop naturally, evolve progressively and are based on the close interaction between UN entities and potential partners on the ground, a centralized partnership approach would risk undermining these dynamic relationships. Not all partners are, or can be, 'system-wide' and UN entities have specific interests and/or requirements of partners. Benefits of a partnership support function can be seen, however, for developing screening criteria, databases for all UN entities to access, or exploring the option of partner-self maintained profiles that UN entities can access.