

UNDG Vision and Framework for Actions for UN Operational Activities in support of the post-2015 Agenda

Recommendations from the UNDG, as a contribution to the CEB post-2015 “fit for purpose” discussions in November 2014

Background and process

Through the QCPR and the global and national consultations on post-2015, Member States left no doubt that they would like to see a strong UN development system, one that is relevant, nimble and ready to help countries deliver on their sustainable development priorities. In his report “A Life of Dignity for All”, the UN Secretary-General expressed the commitment of the United Nations system to continue its reform and make itself “fit for purpose” to respond to the challenges of the emerging post-2015 development agenda.

At the CEB first Regular Session for 2014, the UNDG, HLCP and HLCM presented a joint contribution to the Board, framing the commitment of the three CEB pillars to support, in a complementary and integrated manner, the effort of the UN system to make the transition to the post-2015 agenda. The focus was on five ‘elements’: universality, equality, human rights, integration and the data revolution. On 30 May 2014, the Secretary-General wrote to the CEB Principals seeking their views and suggestions on *“actions in support of a coherent and coordinated system-wide approach to render the United Nations system competent in contributing to a transformative agenda”*.

Informed by these many contributions, the findings of an initial UNDG mapping of the current setup, capacities and positioning of the UN development system vis-à-vis the post-2015 agenda was presented to the UNDG ASG Advisory Group, who met on 23-24 October 2014. This report reflects the group’s vision and set of proposed actions which the full UNDG discussed and endorsed at their 14 November meeting. The Note is now for the UNDG Principals to consider towards their input to the upcoming CEB retreat, and the UNDG Chair will present this vision and framework for action issues at the CEB regular session on 20 November 2014, and, as relevant, for the ECOSOC Dialogues in December 2014 and January 2015.

The UNDG will task specific UNDG Working Mechanisms to take forward relevant action items through their 2015/2016 work plans, working closely with HLCP and HLCM where relevant. The full UNDG also agreed to take relevant agency actions in line with this vision, with a request for UNDG member entities to move this agenda within their respective agencies and governance structures, where possible. Without these actionable measures, it remains at the level of a vision in perpetuity, albeit a compelling one.

‘The UN System We Want’: a vision for a UN development system that optimally contributes to the Post-2015 agenda

If there ever was a time for a distinct and indispensable contribution by the UN development system to global development, that time is now. The coming years will provide a unique opportunity to build a stronger UN development system that is an exceptional partner to Member States and national stakeholders for the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

This is an extraordinary universal agenda, that calls for an extraordinary response by the UN to serve “we the peoples”. It will take visionary leadership, a unified UN staff, shared goals and a determined results-focus, plus a level of ambition on policy, programmes and operations that reach the highest standards of accountability, transparency and impact. And it can be done.

Sustainable development calls for a UN system that can set policy and operational standards which can be applied with flexibility in diverse national contexts, and provide a platform for discussion, design and solutions on the ground. A “fit for purpose” UN development system, in this context, will be expected to respond to the demands of a universal, transformative agenda; ground its work in cutting-edge analytics and strategies focused on the “dark spots” of inequalities, lack of rights and heightened vulnerability and risk; nurture open and common systems for the production, sharing and use of high quality data, knowledge and practices across the UN system; and be able to do the same with others who are engaged on the common agenda. This is the UN the world outside, and we within, would want to see.

With its presence at country level, the UN development system that is envisaged would be driven by a common core of values, policies and resources. In such a world, it is easy to envisage that a UN Country Team (UNCT) would be able to co-design programmes with stakeholders, facilitate nationally-led, inclusive dialogues, provide a platform for shared capacities and operations to deliver together, and all the while upholding UN norms and standards. This moves the UN from a ‘system’ to a UN ‘ecosystem’, living, breathing, growing and working in harmony, embracing its diversity but based on common roots and purpose. Thus the discussion about “fit for purpose” must go beyond what is possible through the UN’s architecture, resources, technologies and human capacities of today, and look beyond - to encompass more open spaces, larger networks and the ability to trigger coalitions for change.

In its operations, the UN development system will move to results-based, issue-focused and networked teams that operate with speed, flexibility and professionalism and add value. It will use cutting-edge technology and will be open to collaborate and interact more directly with civil society, the private sector and citizens to achieve its goals. Accountabilities will be clearly defined and acted upon at UN headquarters, regional and country levels, for the peoples and governments we serve. Performance and results of institutions and individuals will be monitored and evaluated thoroughly and transparently.

For this vision to be realized, the UN system must be even more “fit for purpose”. This comes with shared vision and unity of purpose, the incentives in the right mix and places, including the full funding of core functions, to allow for effective joint action and accountability across the UN pillars, enabling better integration of normative and operational work, and pooled resourcing of humanitarian and development results. It takes the whole system to make it work.

Elements of a longer-term transformation agenda for the UN development system

For the progressive realization of the above vision over the coming years, the following are proposed for consideration:

- The creation of **one UN international civil service** with incentives in place to facilitate mobility across the UN system for all staff. This entails a common UN staff contract, and an ability for more flexible, rapid deployment of expertise across the system as needed.
- **Investment in UN leadership and technical teams** that have the skills-mix to deploy and support national and regional post-2015 response strategies that integrate all dimensions of sustainable development. In this regard, optimize the placement of RCs and agency

representatives to ensure matching skills and capacities that team well together, and uphold the “UN first”. This also means constituting technical teams and pools of experts to make the experience, expertise, mandates and normative activities of the entire UN system accessible to Member States in diverse contexts.

- Pool resources around shared goals to realize this vision, including by **bringing together development and humanitarian financing** where it makes sense, and call for negotiated and sustained development financing for the long-term support to the post-2015 agenda. This calls for addressing donor funding coherence and their bilateral financing architecture.
- **Make fully transparent the available resources** (financial and human), both at the country, regional and global levels – share data, analysis, programme and operations information. In this regard, the UN development system should, first and foremost, commit to greater transparency and accountability to the beneficiaries and stakeholders of its field-based operations, including by releasing information about its activities, resources and results in the public domain.
- Intensify support to strengthening of national statistical capacity, **greater disaggregation and “localization” of national data and address all data “dark spots”**, using the distinctiveness of the UN global footprint and the capacities and scope of the UN system’s joint data coverage. The focus must be on better data for better development, particularly at sub-national levels.

It is recognized that some of these proposals, such as those on data capture and support, as well as on improving levels of transparency, while about a longer term transformation, also have ongoing momentum that must be built on and further actions can be initiated in the shorter term.

Proposed shorter-term initiatives to enable the UN development system to deliver on the post-2015 development agenda

- A key role of the UN development system will be to provide policy advice and technical support to governments and national stakeholders **preparing national frameworks** that respond to the post-2015 agenda. This in turn would inform the strategic content and planning of the next generation of UNDAFs/One Programmes, and the UN’s broader engagement at country level, regional and global levels. In this regard, ensure that conditions and guidance are in place to swiftly align UNDAF/One Programme and Operations frameworks to national sustainable development frameworks and/or platforms for action.
- Consider the introduction of **shorter, smarter country scans** that are more regular, and integrate country analysis across UN system entities, so that the core areas of inequality, vulnerability, human rights and climate change analysis, and political and humanitarian risk are joined up and support more integrated and shared policy outcomes.
- Involve key state and non-state actors with broader stakeholder engagement to **co-design UN country frameworks**. In this regard, demonstrate the ability to work jointly through multi-stakeholder issue-based coalitions, where possible, that are cross-cutting and of immediate relevance to the post-2015 agenda, building on the experiences of the undg global and national consultations.
- With the call for increased UN system-wide coherence, encourage and support the **universal application of the Standard Operating Procedures for “Delivering as one”** through their progressive realization, adapted to country context and needs.
- Dig deep and reach across to **engage the full expertise available across the UN** system (specialists to be deployed and embedded in UN country based teams as needed, surge capacity

made available throughout the system, technology-enabled mapping and matching of needs and creation of virtual policy/technical teams, where needed).

- Work towards **issue-based UN teams at country level** that draw technical, policy or operational capacities together, including those of non-resident agencies, to co-locate and address the post-2015 agenda at hand. To support such issue-based coalitions and extended UN Results Groups, deploy capacities and funding required at the country level, with delegated authority at regional level to ensure the needed deployments, including through innovative partnerships and operating modalities.
- This includes the more considered **integration of human rights and the normative agenda** into the UN's policy, programme and operations work at all levels. The priority to rights-based analytical products and focused capacity development engagements in-country, would move the human rights agenda (positively) forward in most locations.
- Make available **integrated policy analytics and assessment tools** to UNCTs for support to national post-2015 frameworks and the **ex-ante benchmarking of country progress on the SDGs**. Establish clear protocols for co-designing and using analytical tools from across the UN system, sharing information available through the various pillars of the UN system, for joint country scans, real-time monitoring and results capture. Prioritize country generation of data and analysis capacity, with joint support to strengthen **national data and the institutional capacities for monitoring and reporting on the SDGs**.
- Set up **One UN back offices** providing shared operational, logistical, ICT, and administrative support to all of the UN, in countries where it is the most efficient and effective way to deliver services. Operations issue-based groups could be set up in-country and at global levels, together with the HLCM, to extend the work on UN common procurement, ERP protocols and HR rules and regulations. Shared risk assessment and due diligence assessments and common risk management strategies are essential to this.
- **Implement the standards and principles of accountability and empowerment**, as agreed before, to enable the RC to oversee and coordinate the deployment of funds and resources from across the system, against priorities and deliverables identified and agreed with the UNCT.
- At global level, by January 2016, **align UNDG entities Strategic Plans, theories of change and results frameworks with the post-2015 agenda**, to the extent possible. And publish this data.