

Formative evaluation of the UNFPA engagement in the reform of the United Nations development system



UNFPA Evaluation Office

2022

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Foreword

Given its unprecedented level of ambition, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) requires bold changes to the United Nations development system (UNDS). These changes are at the heart of the reform proposed by the Secretary General of the United Nations in his reports of 11 July and 21 December 2017, further mandated by the General Assembly resolution 72/279 of 31 May 2018, which aims to improve the coherence, effectiveness and efficiency as well as the accountability of the UNDS in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

Several years into the reform, the formative evaluation of the UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform was conducted with a view to learning from the organization's past and current experience and helping it provide more effective support to the further development and operationalization of the reform while ensuring that the reform is also conducive to accelerating the achievement of UNFPA transformative results.

The evaluation highlights that UNFPA has actively engaged in the UNDS reform at all levels of the organization, thus contributing to advancing the repositioning of the system. For the most part, UNFPA has also been able to capitalize on the reform. This has reaffirmed the relevance of the UNFPA mandate while strengthening its role as a strategic partner in the areas of gender, youth and data.

However, engagement in the reform does come with costs and risks, particularly with regard to its implications for the efficiency agenda. The evaluation also points out the need for a more explicit strategy for UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform in order to maximize the benefits of, and ensure broad ownership of, the reform across the whole organization.

It is my hope that the lessons learned and the recommendations contained in this evaluation will help UNFPA to contribute more effectively to the operationalization of the reform while furthering its own strategic objectives and, ultimately, to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

Marco Segone

Director, UNFPA Evaluation Office

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Finally, I would also like to thank the government partners, representatives of other United Nations agencies, and bilateral and multilateral development partners who contributed to the evaluation.

Hicham Daoudi

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Acronyms

| | | | |
|---------------|---|---------------|---|
| APRO | Asia and the Pacific Regional Office | IRRF | Integrated results and resources framework |
| ASRO | Arab States Regional Office | ISWE | Independent system-wide evaluation |
| BIG | Business Innovations Strategic Results Group | JP | Joint programme |
| BOS | Business operations strategy | LACRO | Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office |
| CBO | Common back office | LNOB | Leaving no one behind |
| CCA | Common country analysis | LSSC | Local shared service centre |
| CEB | United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination | MAF | Management and Accountability Framework |
| CPD | Country programme document | MCO | Multi-country office |
| DCO | Development Coordination Office | MPTF | Multi-Partner Trust Fund |
| ECOSOC | Economic and Social Council | OEE | Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency |
| EECARO | Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office | PAD | Performance Appraisal and Development |
| EOSG | Executive Office of the Secretary-General | PBF | United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund |
| EQ | Evaluation question | PRC | Programme Review Committee |
| ESARO | East and Southern Africa Regional Office | PSG | Peer support group |
| FAO | Food and Agricultural Organization | PSEA | Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse |
| FGM | Female genital mutilation | RC | Resident Coordinator |
| GBV | Gender-based violence | RCO | Resident Coordinator office |
| GTG | Gender Theme Group | RCP | Regional Collaborative Platform |
| HAO | Humanitarian Action Overview | SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| HRP | Humanitarian Response Plan | SERP | Socioeconomic response plan |
| IASC | Inter-Agency Standing Committee | SPTF | Special Purpose Trust Fund |
| IBC | Issue-based coalition | SRHR | Sexual and reproductive health and rights |
| ICPD | International Conference on Population and Development | SRO | Subregional office |
| IDWG | Inter-divisional working group | UNCT | United Nations country team |
| ILO | International Labour Organization | UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| IMS | Information management system | | |
| IOM | International Office of Migration | | |

| | | | |
|---------------|--|---------------|---|
| UNDAF | United Nations Development Assistance Framework | UNEG | United Nations Evaluation Group |
| UNDG | United Nations Development Group | UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme | UNHCR | United Nations Refugee Agency |
| UNECA | United Nations Economic Commission for Africa | UNPRPD | United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| UNEDAP | United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific | UNSDCF | United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization | UNSDG | United Nations Sustainable Development Group |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children’s Fund | WCARO | West and Central Africa Regional Office |
| UNDS | United Nations development system | WFP | World Food Programme |

Executive summary

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

Several years into the repositioning of the United Nations development system (UNDS), UNFPA continues to state its commitment to the reform and support its operationalization.¹ As a result, the UNFPA Evaluation Office commissioned this formative evaluation of the UNFPA engagement in the reform of the UNDS to learn from experience in the process. The specific purpose of the present evaluation is to help UNFPA provide more effective support to the further development and operationalization of the reform of the UNDS while ensuring that the reform is also conducive to UNFPA achieving its transformative results.

Scope

The evaluation covers the UNFPA contribution to the reform as well as the effects of the reform on UNFPA at global, regional and country levels. It covers the period from January 2017 to the end of data collection in May 2022. The focus of the evaluation is, however, on the period after the approval of General Assembly resolution 72/279 in May 2018.

Objectives

The evaluation has four objectives:

- To assess the contribution of UNFPA to the design, development and operationalization of the reform (including how UNFPA has adapted to the reform)
- To analyse the effects of the reform on the strategic positioning, the ability to deliver and the organizational structure and institutional efficiency of UNFPA
- To assess the extent to which UNFPA has been able to leverage the reform to accelerate the achievement of UNFPA transformative results and the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action
- To draw lessons and good practices from UNFPA engagement in the reform, and formulate recommendations on how UNFPA can contribute more effectively to the operationalization of the reform while benefiting more successfully from the effects of the reform.

In addressing the above objectives, particular attention was paid to the distinctive features and the specific sensitivity of the UNFPA mandate. The evaluation also considered the factors influencing the implementation of the UNDS reform processes, both internal and external, including the unprecedented circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Intended users

The primary intended users of the evaluation are: (i) UNFPA senior management; (ii) the UNFPA Policy and Strategy Division; (iii) UNFPA business units at headquarters, especially the Intergovernmental Inter-agency and Policy Dialogue Branch and (iv) UNFPA regional and country offices. The results of the evaluation should also be of interest to a wider group of stakeholders, such as UNFPA Executive Board members and other United Nations organizations.

Methodological approach

The evaluation utilized a theory of change to identify the main areas of investigation and develop the evaluation questions. Both primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative data were collected through a variety of methods. Over 113 key

¹ UNFPA Information Note May 2021.

stakeholders were interviewed at the headquarters and regional levels (56 and 57 respectively). Detailed studies were undertaken in nine countries and one subregion countries, with 153 key stakeholders interviewed. Over 200 documents were reviewed, and internal and external data sets analysed. Three discussion papers were also prepared to provide early feedback to UNFPA stakeholders on key issues related to the evaluation.

KEY MESSAGES

Conclusion 1: UNFPA support for repositioning the United Nations development system has stood out throughout the design, development and operationalization of the reform elements. All levels of the organization have engaged actively to advance the reform, including by being constructively critical when appropriate.

Derived from findings: 4-6; 8-14

Summary of relevant findings: The contribution of UNFPA to the design of the UNDS reform is built on early work following the approval of the 2030 Agenda. Until 2018, UNFPA chaired the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) Assistant Secretary-General Advisory Group, tasked with the “elaboration of a set of options on how best the UN system can support the Member States in implementing the new sustainable development agenda”. UNFPA also played a key role in the “Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) dialogues” on the longer-term positioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. UNFPA further provided leadership in the development of key elements of the reform, such as the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) and guidance on the common country analysis (CCA) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).

As far as the operationalization of the reform is concerned, UNFPA made a significant contribution at all levels. At the global level, UNFPA supported operationalization of the reform through adjusting guidance, tools and business processes to ensure alignment with the reform; UNFPA headquarters also supported both the regional and the country levels in the implementation of the reform.

Overall, UNFPA has supported a more coherent, effective, efficient United Nations development system, especially at the country level.

Conclusion 2: The engagement of UNFPA in reforming the United Nations development system has helped to advance the repositioning processes. In the context of uneven progress in implementing the reform, for the most part UNFPA has also been able to capitalize on the reform for the benefit of its stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Derived from findings: 17-27; 32

Summary of relevant findings: The UNDS reform has not only reaffirmed the relevance of the UNFPA mandate but also strengthened its strategic positioning at all levels, and especially in terms of emphasising its role as a strategic partner in the areas of gender, youth and data. The reforms have also led to a reduction in competition in the country teams while at the same time allowed UNFPA to leverage other United Nations agencies for delivering on its mandate.

Competition for funding does, however, remain and while joint resource mobilization has created opportunities, joint programmes have become more important in this respect, as have some multi-agency pooled funds.

Conclusion 3: Although UNFPA has benefited from the reform and is likely to continue to do so, engagement does come with costs as well as risks. While benefits may outweigh them, efforts need to be made to reduce the costs and manage the risks.

Derived from findings: 30, 31, 33

Summary of relevant findings: Although not all elements of the reform have been implemented, and many of those that have are in the early stages, specific benefits of the UNDS reform for UNFPA are becoming clear. These benefits have not come without costs and associated risks.

The efficiency agenda, and particularly the establishment of local shared service centres, is likely to have implications for the careers of UNFPA staff, for which UNFPA is not prepared. Due to a lack of information, the quality of common services

rendered to UNFPA is hard to assess but potential reduction in quality, as implementation of the efficiency agenda deepens, remains a risk.

New regional development coordination offices (DCOs) and full-time Resident Coordinators (RCs) with capacitated Resident Coordinator offices (RCOs), cost UNFPA more than prior to the reform of the United Nations development system. Moreover, engagement in the reform is associated with high coordination costs for UNFPA.

Conclusion 4: While UNFPA has strongly engaged in the reform, the organization has not provided an explicit strategy for engagement to maximize the benefits, nor has it consistently internalized the elements in its policies, strategies and guidance in order to ensure broad ownership and application across the whole organization.

Derived from findings: 2, 3, 7

Summary of relevant findings: UNFPA senior management messages to staff, statements to the Executive Board and information notes on implementing the reform of the United Nations development system have all provided information on the reform, including on the strategic direction of UNFPA, and have indicated strong UNFPA commitment to the reform process.

However, there is no explicit strategy for UNFPA engagement in the reform of the United Nations development system, either within the strategic plans (including their annexes) or in a separate document that explains how UNFPA will use the reform to accelerate progress towards its goals and, ultimately, the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, beyond the essential areas of operationalizing the reform of the United Nations development system, organization-wide ownership has not occurred, and gaps exist in some areas.

Conclusion 5: Internal communications and working arrangements have facilitated the positive corporate approach to engagement in the reform of the United Nations development system, but UNFPA has not been able to integrate the spirit of the reform in the everyday work of all staff.

Derived from findings: 7, 8, 9

Summary of relevant findings: Successful UNFPA support to operationalizing the reform at country and regional levels can partly be explained by strong and timely guidance and communications from headquarters and regional levels. However, despite best efforts, knowledge of the reform is not universal among UNFPA staff and does not always extend beyond processes.

Conclusion 6: Given the nature of the reform of the United Nations development system, it is clear that further strengthening of UNFPA contributions to, and benefits from, the reform require a collective effort of the wider system.

Derived from findings: 9, 10, 15, 21, 23, 31, 32

Summary of relevant findings: Engagement in the reform is associated with high coordination costs for UNFPA, despite new regional development coordination offices and full-time Regional Coordinators and capacitated Regional Coordinator offices. UNFPA would benefit from a clearer division of labour between Regional Coordinator offices and United Nations agencies for coordinating and implementing UNDS reform processes and mechanisms at the country level, in the context of the broadly formulated Management and Accountability Framework.

Key data from the UNSDG information management system (IMS) are no longer disaggregated by a United Nations entity and such disaggregation would reduce the burden on UNFPA for collecting UNDS reform-related data, improve continuity of data tracking, and avoid data inconsistencies for better value from data.

Due to a lack of information, the quality of common services rendered to UNFPA is hard to assess and UNFPA would benefit from more attention being paid to the quality aspect of services delivered by other United Nations entities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: UNFPA should provide stronger strategic direction for its workforce within the framework of its strategic plan for its engagement with the UNDS reform.

Links to conclusion: 4

Targeted at: The Policy and Strategy Division, the Division for Management Services; the Division for Human Resources; the Change Management Secretariat

Recommendation 2: UNFPA should work towards broadening the ownership and deepening the institutionalization and internalization of the reform of the United Nations development system at all levels of the organization.

Links to conclusion: 5

Targeted at: The Office of the Executive Director/Change Management Secretariat; the Policy and Strategy Division; the Humanitarian Response Division; regional offices

Recommendation 3: UNFPA should address human resource challenges arising from the reform of the United Nations development system, and incentivize more staff to work in collaboration with their colleagues from other United Nations agencies.

Links to conclusions: 3, 5

Targeted at: The Division for Human Resources; the Division for Management Services

Recommendation 4: UNFPA should address UNDS reform-related challenges and risks for its programme work.

Links to conclusions: 2, 3, 6

Targeted at: The Policy and Strategy Division; the Technical Division; regional offices; the Enterprise Risk Management Secretariat

Recommendation 5: UNFPA should reassess the way it works in multi-country environments to deliver impact and accelerate the implementation of the commitments made as part of the multi-country office (MCO) review.

Links to conclusion: 3

Targeted at: The Policy and Strategy Division; regional offices; subregional offices

Recommendation 6: UNFPA should make special efforts to ensure that those working in humanitarian contexts make best use of the reform of the United Nations development system, and especially that they use the reform when working with partners across the development-humanitarian-peace nexus.

Links to conclusion: 4

Targeted at: The Humanitarian Response Division, the Policy and Strategy Division

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The evaluation finds UNFPA has been able to leverage the operationalization of the reform to advance the delivery of its transformative results.





INTRODUCTION

This report is organized into six sections:

Section 1 introduces the subject of the evaluation as well as its scope, purpose and objectives.

Section 2 provides the context through an overview of the United Nations development system reform process within which UNFPA operates and within which this evaluation has taken place.

Section 3 provides an overview of the methodology used, with more detailed information in Annex IV.

Section 4 presents the findings of the evaluation. The findings are organized under seven evaluation questions. For each evaluation question, a list of relevant findings is presented with the analysis and evidence collected through the evaluation process.

Section 5 presents conclusions drawn from the findings.

Section 6 presents recommendations based on the findings and conclusions.

BACKGROUND

In 2015, United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda)², an ambitious and potentially transformative framework that provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. At the heart of the 2030 Agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. Recognizing that the 2030 Agenda will require bold changes to the United Nations development system (UNDS), work quickly started on the longer-term positioning of the system in the new context. In 2017, the Secretary-General of the United Nations embarked on a new phase in the ongoing United Nations reform process, setting out his vision in his reports of 11 July and 21 December 2017 to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).³

The proposed reform responded to the guidance of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (General Assembly resolution 71/243 of 31 May 2018) and was then mandated by resolution 72/279 of 31 May 2018.⁴ A subsequent resolution, 74/297 of 13 August 2020, provided mandates

² United Nations. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. New York: United Nations: A/RES/70/1. 2015.

³ United Nations. Report of the Secretary-General on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a better future for all (A/72/124-E/2018/3). 11 July 2017. United Nations. Report of the Secretary-General on 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-E/2018/7). 21 December 2017.

⁴ United Nations. 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. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 31 May 2018. A/RES/72/279.

for multi-country office (MCO) and regional reforms. A new QCPR resolution 75/233 was adopted by the General Assembly on 21 December 2020. The resolution, inter-alia, reinforces efforts to fully realize the changes in the Resident Coordinator (RC) system and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) on the ground, as well as implementing the multi-country office and regional-level streams of the reform.

OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION

Several years into the repositioning of the UNDS, UNFPA continues to state its commitment to the reform and to support its operationalization.⁵ As a result, the UNFPA Evaluation Office (EO) commissioned this formative evaluation of the UNFPA engagement in the reform of the UNDS to learn from the organization's experience of the process. The evaluation was included in the transitional UNFPA quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan 2022-2025.⁶

UNFPA management recognizes that the reform process presents challenges and risks as well as opportunities. The evaluation is therefore timely, given that it can help identify what is working and what is not in relation to UNFPA support for the reform and to the effects of the reform on the work of UNFPA.

Although the groundwork for implementing the UNDS reform has been laid out, several reform streams remain at an early stage of implementation, particularly at the regional level and for multi-country offices. The evaluation is therefore formative (forward-looking) in nature, with a primary focus on the lessons that can be learned from the way UNFPA has engaged in, and been affected by, the reform, as well as providing accountability for its contributions to reform achievements to date.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are: (i) UNFPA senior management; (ii) UNFPA business units at headquarters (HQ), especially the Intergovernmental, Inter-agency and Policy Dialogue Branch of the Policy and Strategy Division; and (iii) UNFPA regional offices and country offices. The results of the evaluation will also be of interest to a wider group of stakeholders, such as UNFPA Executive Board members, other Member States, and other United Nations entities including members of the various task forces and other groups established to support design and operationalization of the reform.

PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

Evaluation at UNFPA serves three main purposes: (a) to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders on performance and on invested resources; (b) to support evidence-based decision-making; (c) to contribute key lessons learned to the existing knowledge base on how to accelerate implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The specific purpose of the present evaluation is to help UNFPA provide more effective support to the further development and operationalization of the reform of the UNDS, while ensuring that the reform is also conducive to achieving the UNFPA transformative results.

The objectives of the evaluation are as follows:

- To assess the contribution of UNFPA to the design, development and operationalization of the reform (including how UNFPA has adapted to the reform)
- To analyse the effects of the reform on the strategic positioning, the ability to deliver and the organizational structure and institutional efficiency of UNFPA
- To assess the extent to which UNFPA has been able to leverage the reform to accelerate the achievement of UNFPA transformative results and the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action
- To draw lessons and good practices from UNFPA engagement in the reform and formulate recommendations on how UNFPA can contribute more effectively to the operationalization of the reform, while benefiting more successfully from the effects of the reform.

⁵ UNFPA Information Note May 2021.

⁶ <https://www.unfpa.org/admin-resource/unfpa-quadrennial-budgeted-evaluation-plan-2022-2025>.

The scope of the evaluation includes the various elements of the UNDS reform set out in Section 2. It covers UNFPA engagement in the reform as well as the effects of the reform on UNFPA at global, regional and country levels. The evaluation covers the period from January 2017 - the beginning of UNFPA engagement in the thinking that led to the reports of the Secretary-General on the repositioning of the UNDS in 2017 - to the end of data collection in May 2022. The major focus of the evaluation is, however, on the period after the approval of General Assembly resolution 72/279 in May 2018.

In addressing the above objectives, particular attention was paid to the distinctive features and the specific sensitivity of the UNFPA mandate. The evaluation also considered the factors influencing the implementation of UNDS reform processes, both internal and external, including the unprecedented circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to note that this is not an evaluation of the UNDS reform itself, nor is it an evaluation of the contributions of UNFPA to implementing the QCPR. Moreover, the evaluation is focused on the development pillar of the overall United Nations reform process and not on the management and peace and security pillars.⁷ Neither is the humanitarian system included in the scope, although the evaluation did examine the engagement of UNFPA in the UNDS reform to ensure that sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and responses to gender-based violence (GBV) are integrated into emergency preparedness and responses on the ground.⁸ Finally, the evaluation did not cover the governance aspects of the repositioning of the UNDS related to strengthening ECOSOC and individual governing bodies.⁹

7 See the United Nations website “United to Reform” (<https://reform.un.org/>) for information on all three pillars.

8 Discussion Paper #3 developed as part of the evaluation examines UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform from the perspective of working in vulnerable and humanitarian settings (see Volume III, Annex III).

9 See A/RES/72/279 paragraphs 20 and 21.

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The evaluation finds that UNFPA has been able to advocate for leaving no one behind through active engagement in common country analysis and UNSDCF processes.



2

CONTEXT: THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM REFORM

The reform of the UNDS is not new and the reform efforts captured in General Assembly resolution 72/279 represent the latest phase in a process that has been ongoing for decades. Nearly 25 years ago in 1997, the then-Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, published “Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform”. It led to the establishment of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) in an attempt to ensure more horizontal coordination at the level of agency headquarters as well as to harmonize country programme documents (CPDs) through the introduction of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). In 2005, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) coined the term “One United Nations”¹⁰ and soon after a high-level panel on system-wide coherence produced the report “Delivering as One”,¹¹ which took the idea further. It started with eight pilots and ended with more than 50 volunteer countries implementing the delivering as one approach.

This section looks at the latest phase of the reform in more detail. There are five interlinked areas of reform as set out in General Assembly resolutions 72/279 and 74/297, together with a sixth that cuts across the others – that is, the efficiency agenda. The six areas of reform are:

- A reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system, including the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF)
- A new generation of United Nations country teams (UNCTs)
- Revamping the regional approach
- Strategic direction, oversight and accountability for system-wide results
- Funding the UNDS
- Streamlined operating practices through consolidation of back offices and service centres, resulting in both efficiency gains and higher quality services.

While these are interlinked areas of UNDS reform, they represent the mechanics of the reform process. In addition, key documents and reports related to the reform have emphasized the need to go beyond implementing processes to changing mindsets. The first report of the Secretary-General on repositioning in July 2017¹² noted that the shared objective of the reform is a United Nations that delivers on its mandate, with a focus on results and a culture of collaboration. By 2022, the report of the Secretary-General on the QCPR¹³ notes that the reform of the UNDS must bring about the changes in behaviour, culture and mindsets needed to maximize the collective offer of the United Nations.

10 United Nations Chief Executives Board. One United Nations - Catalyst for Progress and Change. 2005.

11 High-Level Panel on United Nations System-Wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. Delivering as one. A/61/583. 2006.

12 United Nations. Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a better future for all. Report of the Secretary-General. A/72/124–E/2018/3. 11 July 2017.

13 UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2022.

A reinvigorated Resident Coordinator (RC) system

The reformed Resident Coordinator system should have an independent and empowered Resident Coordinator at its centre. On 1 January 2019, the Resident Coordinator system was separated from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and placed under the overall management of the Secretary-General with day-to-day support provided by the newly established United Nations Development Coordination Office (DCO). All Resident Coordinators took over their new functions as the highest-ranking representative of the UNDS at the country level, leading 131 UNCTs serving 164 countries and territories, to deliver collective responses to national needs and ensure system-wide accountability on the ground. In order to fund the Resident Coordinator system, a new funding system was established consisting of: doubling United Nations entity cost-sharing contributions under the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) cost-sharing arrangement; voluntary contributions by Member States; and a 1 per cent coordination levy on tightly earmarked third-party voluntary contributions to development activities.

The management and accountability framework, endorsed by UNSDG Principals in 2019 and updated in 2021, is a foundational piece in the reinvigoration of the Resident Coordinator system. It provides a framework for management and accountability within UNCTs, to ensure a consistent approach across countries in a way that remains faithful to the letter and spirit of General Assembly resolution 72/279. Dual accountability should ensure that agency representatives remain fully accountable to their respective entities on individual mandates, while periodically reporting to the Resident Coordinator on their individual activities and on their respective contributions to the results of the UNDS towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda at the country level, based on the UNSDCF. In addition, Resident Coordinators are to periodically update UNCT members on how their activities support UNSDCF implementation.

In 2021, as requested by General Assembly resolution 72/279, the Secretary-General submitted a review on the functioning of the Resident Coordinator system.¹⁴ It found that significant progress had been made and outlined a number of actions that the system, including the UNSDG, individual agencies, the Development Coordination Office and Member States would need to take.

A new generation of UNCTs

In 2019, the first 11 UNSDCFs were developed and implementation of them began in 2020. The reformed UNDS seeks to increase coordination and coherence among operational activities at the country level through these new cooperation frameworks, underpinned by a thorough common country analysis (CCA). In 2022, 61 cooperation frameworks are under implementation, while 31 are being designed for a projected start in 2023.¹⁵ By the beginning of 2023, three quarters of the UNCTs should have replaced the previous UNDAFs with cooperation frameworks.

In April 2020, the UNSDG launched the United Nations Framework for the Immediate Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19, along with the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. At the core of the response was the conduct of socioeconomic impact assessments by UNCTs, followed by 121 socioeconomic response plans (SERPs) covering 139 countries and territories to support governments.

Recognizing that more is needed for multi-country office-served countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to advance the Agenda 2030 and deliver on the SAMOA Pathway,¹⁶ a comprehensive review of the existing multi-country offices was carried out in 2019 and updated in 2020. ECOSOC called upon the Secretary-General to proceed with the implementation of the recommendations as well as to conduct regular monitoring, reporting and follow-up. The system increased its support to multi-country offices, allowing for the deployment of coordination officers to seven additional countries in the Caribbean, and established a new office for the North Pacific. In addition, entities of the UNDS, including UNFPA, came forward with specific commitments to scale up tailored support, integrated policy advice, technical capacities and physical presence. They also committed to increased support for SDG financing, data systems and South-South and triangular cooperation.

¹⁴ United Nations. Review of the functioning of the Resident Coordinator system: rising to the challenge and keeping the promise of the 2030 Agenda. Report of the Secretary-General. A/75/905. 7 June 2021.

¹⁵ UN-Info Cooperation Framework roll-out status.

¹⁶ The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) accelerated modalities of action (SAMOA) was adopted in 2014 to help the sustainable development efforts of SIDS.

Revamping the regional approach

Revamping the regional approach is at the core of the UNDS reform and General Assembly resolution 72/279. The first phase of optimization of the current regional mechanisms and structures was initiated in the second half of 2018. Specifically, a set of key actions was agreed to improve collaboration between different United Nations actors at the regional level, and their interface with the wider system at both the global and country levels.¹⁷ At the same time, in response to the request in resolution 72/279 for the Secretary-General to provide options to ECOSOC in 2019, a regional review was completed in April 2019. In July 2019 the Secretary-General submitted his report to the operational activities segment of ECOSOC¹⁸ and it included five recommendations derived from the review, covering:

- Transitioning the previous UNDS regional coordination mechanisms into the new regional collaborative platforms (RCPs) and establishing issue-based coalitions (IBCs)
- Establishing regional knowledge hubs
- Enhancing transparency and results-based management
- Consolidating existing capacity in data and statistics
- Advancing efficiency efforts.

The recommendations of the Secretary-General were endorsed by ECOSOC in July 2020¹⁹ and by the General Assembly in August 2020.²⁰ All regions transitioned from previous coordination mechanisms to the new regional collaborative platforms, effective 1 December 2020. Each platform developed its annual workplan, devised the set-up of the regional collaboration architecture and put in place its joint secretariat, within the parameters of common working arrangements to ensure consistency across regions. Within the regional collaborative platforms, issue-based coalitions bring together the existing expertise of the regional UNDS entities to advance work at the regional level on cross-border, subregional, and regional issues and areas of common interest based on demand and the needs and priorities of the region and countries in the region.

Regional offices of United Nations entities are also expected to participate in peer support groups (PSGs), which primarily function as strategic planning expert teams, bringing an integrated, system-wide rather than “agency-specific” support to the UNSDCF process occurring at the country level in the respective regions.²¹

The 2019 Management and Accountability Framework did not include global- and regional-level chapters so that these levels would be shaped by ongoing reviews, including the regional review. The revised version of 2021 includes the regional elements and sets out the respective accountabilities, roles and responsibilities, modalities for collaboration, and working arrangements for the regional collaborative platforms, issue-based coalitions and other elements of the regional reform.

Strategic direction, oversight and accountability for system-wide results

At the country level, UNCT annual results reports constitute the cornerstone of United Nations transparency and accountability to programme countries. Data show that 128 UNCTs produced annual reports covering all or parts of 2021.²² Annual regional-level results reports are being produced for all five development coordination office regions.

With the establishment of the Development Coordination Office, the previous UNSDG information management system (IMS) was revamped and expanded as part of the new ‘UN-Info’. This is an online planning, monitoring and reporting platform that digitizes the results frameworks of UNCTs, coordination surveys and common business strategies in one place. It aims to

17 UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2019.

18 United Nations. Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2019. Report of the Secretary-General. A/74/73-E/2019/14. 2019.

19 United Nations. 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. Resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council on 22 July 2020. E/RES/2020/23. 2020.

20 United Nations. 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. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 11 August 2020. A/RES/74/297. 2020.

21 MAF September 2021.

22 UN-Info 2021.

improve coherence, transparency, accountability and coordination to better address the needs and priorities in pursuit of the SDGs.²³

New guidance for evaluating the UNSDCF²⁴ was introduced and the Development Coordination Office has increased its capacity for supporting cooperation framework evaluations. According to a recent report to the General Assembly in 2022,²⁵ 40 UNSDCF evaluations were underway or nearing completion (18 in Africa, 2 in Arab States, 9 in Asia Pacific, 5 in Europe and Central Asia, and 6 in Latin America and the Caribbean), whereby, based on the number of UNSDCFs and their cycles, these must predominantly be UNDAF evaluations, possibly using the UNSDCF evaluation guidance. At the global level, an interim system-wide evaluation unit was established within the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.

Funding the UNDS

General Assembly resolution 72/279 recognized that significantly improving voluntary and grant-based funding is vital to the successful repositioning of the UNDS. A Funding Compact in support of the reform was subsequently agreed by the General Assembly and ECOSOC in 2019.²⁶ The compact is a set of ambitious commitments by Member States and UNSDG agencies to ensure more predictable and flexible funding for United Nations development activities through providing incentives for Member States to contribute funds, and for United Nations development entities to increase their coherence, cooperation, transparency and efficiency.

The Joint SDG Fund, established after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was established to incentivize transformative policy shifts and stimulate the strategic investments required to get the world back on track to meet the SDGs. It is intended to be a key part of the reform of the development work of the United Nations by providing the 'muscle' for a new generation of Resident Coordinators and UNCTs to accelerate SDG implementation. In response to the global pandemic, the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund was established to provide a dedicated avenue of support to UNCTs implementing SERPs.

The efficiency agenda

In his December 2017 report,²⁷ the Secretary-General set out a number of targets to reform UNDS operations.²⁸ Of these, the Business Innovations Strategic Results Group (BIG) was tasked with delivering on the proposals envisioned to maximize programmatic gains through efficient and high-quality back-office operations. BIG has supported the implementation of a number of elements and enablers (see Figure 1), including the following major areas of work:

- Business operations strategy (BOS)
- Common back office (CBO) or local shared service centre (LSSC)
- Common premises
- Regional and global shared service centres.²⁹

23 UN-Info monitoring is at a high level and does not provide the level of specificity or coverage of individual agency monitoring.

24 UNEG and DCO. Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. September 2021.

25 United Nations. Development Coordination Office - Report of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. E/2022/54. April 2022.

26 United Nations. Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2019: Funding Compact. A/74/73/Add.1-E/2019/14/Add.1. 2019.

27 United Nations. Report of the Secretary-General on 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-E/2018/7. 21 December 2017.

28 Internal United Nations calculations consider a projection of savings of around USD 310 million a year by 2022, driven by a more conservative estimate of potential savings from the consolidation of business operations.

29 Global shared service centres were not originally part of the BIG.

FIGURE 1: Elements of reform of common business operations



Source: https://unitednations.sharepoint.com/sites/DCO-WG-UNSDG_CF/SitePages/CBS-home.aspx.

All 131 UNCTs have completed their business operations strategy, supported by an online platform for business operations strategy design and implementation as well as for collecting and reporting results. Annual recurring cost avoidance from the business operations strategy is projected to be approximately USD 100 million per year, based on estimates from UNCTs (provided full business operations strategy implementation). Efforts continue to establish local shared service centres for location-dependent services in specific countries with efficiency potential. Approximately 23 percent of 2,337 premises are common premises.

More recent developments

Following the approval of General Assembly resolution 72/279 in 2018, the key elements of the UNDS reform were included in General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the QCPR. In addition, to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the United Nations in 2020 the Secretary-General presented his report, "Our Common Agenda", to the General Assembly in September 2021. The report, subsequently approved by the General Assembly, looks ahead to the next 25 years and represents the Secretary-General's vision on the future of global cooperation and reinvigorating inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism. Driven by the Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda, and developed as part of a wider transformation in methods and practices towards a "UN 2.0", a "quintet of change" was established to accelerate the United Nation's transformation over the next five years. The package is focused on stronger capabilities for data, innovation, strategic foresight, behavioural science and results.

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The evaluation finds that UNFPA needs to integrate the spirit of the reform into the everyday work of all staff.



3

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The design of this evaluation follows United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the United Nations system³⁰ and abides by the UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct.³¹ To meet the requirements of the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), the evaluation also adheres to the UNEG gender-related norms and standards (Norm 8³² and Standard 4.7³³). More specifically, it is aligned with the standards set out in the UNFPA Evaluation Quality Assurance and Assessment (EQAA) system. The EQAA is aligned with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and includes guidance on disability inclusion in UNFPA evaluations.³⁴

OVERALL APPROACH TO DESIGN

The evaluation matrix lies at the heart of the approach to the evaluation (Annex V). The overall theory of change helped to define a set of evaluation questions, assumptions for assessment and indicators that form the basis of the evaluation matrix. Assessment of evaluability brought together the mapping of relevant activities and stakeholders as well as the initial review of documentation and administrative and monitoring data. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: Elements of the evaluation approach



Source: Evaluation team

The evaluability process involved mapping of relevant UNFPA activities; mapping the various stakeholders in UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform; identifying relevant documents and an initial review of them; and identifying administrative, monitoring and survey data.

30 UNEG Norms and Standards for evaluation (2016) <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>.

31 UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020) <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/2866>.

32 "The universally recognized values and principles of human rights and gender equality need to be integrated into all stages of an evaluation. It is the responsibility of evaluators and evaluation managers to ensure that these values are respected, addressed and promoted, underpinning the commitment to the principle of 'no-one left behind'."

33 "The evaluation design should include considerations of the extent to which the United Nations system's commitment to the human-rights based approach and gender mainstreaming strategy was incorporated in the design of the evaluation subject."

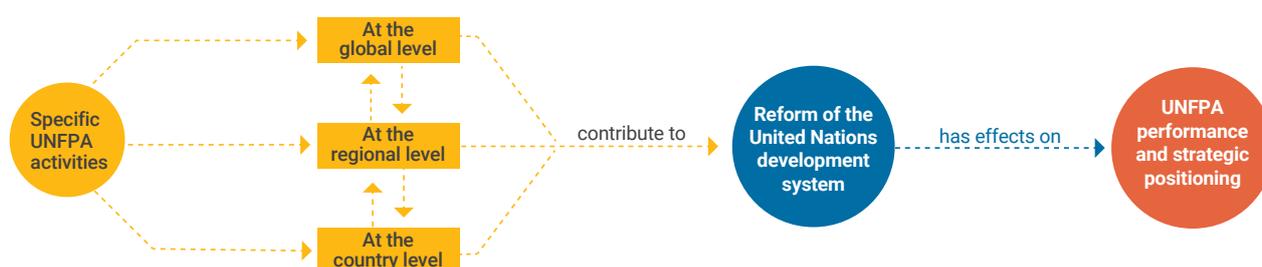
34 Guidance on disability inclusion in UNFPA evaluations <https://www.unfpa.org/admin-resource/guidance-disability-inclusion-unfpa-evaluations>.

THEORY OF CHANGE

The relationship between UNFPA and the UNDS reform is illustrated in Figure 3, which forms the basis for the overall framework used in the evaluation. Figure 3 looks at both sides of the relationship: the contribution of UNFPA to the UNDS reform and the effects of the UNDS reform on UNFPA, specifically its strategic positioning, its ability to deliver results, its operational structure and its institutional efficiency.

This relationship acknowledges that UNFPA is one of many United Nations entities contributing to UNDS reform and that within the UNDS, the Secretary-General and Deputy-Secretary General determine the ultimate direction of the reform. In addition, the relationship acknowledges that Member States provide the mandates for the implementation of the reform.

FIGURE 3: UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform



Source: Evaluation team

Figure 3 also shows that UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform occurs at all levels, with the country level including multi-country arrangements. It also indicates the relationship across the three levels. A more detailed and comprehensive version of the theory of change can be found in Figure 4.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

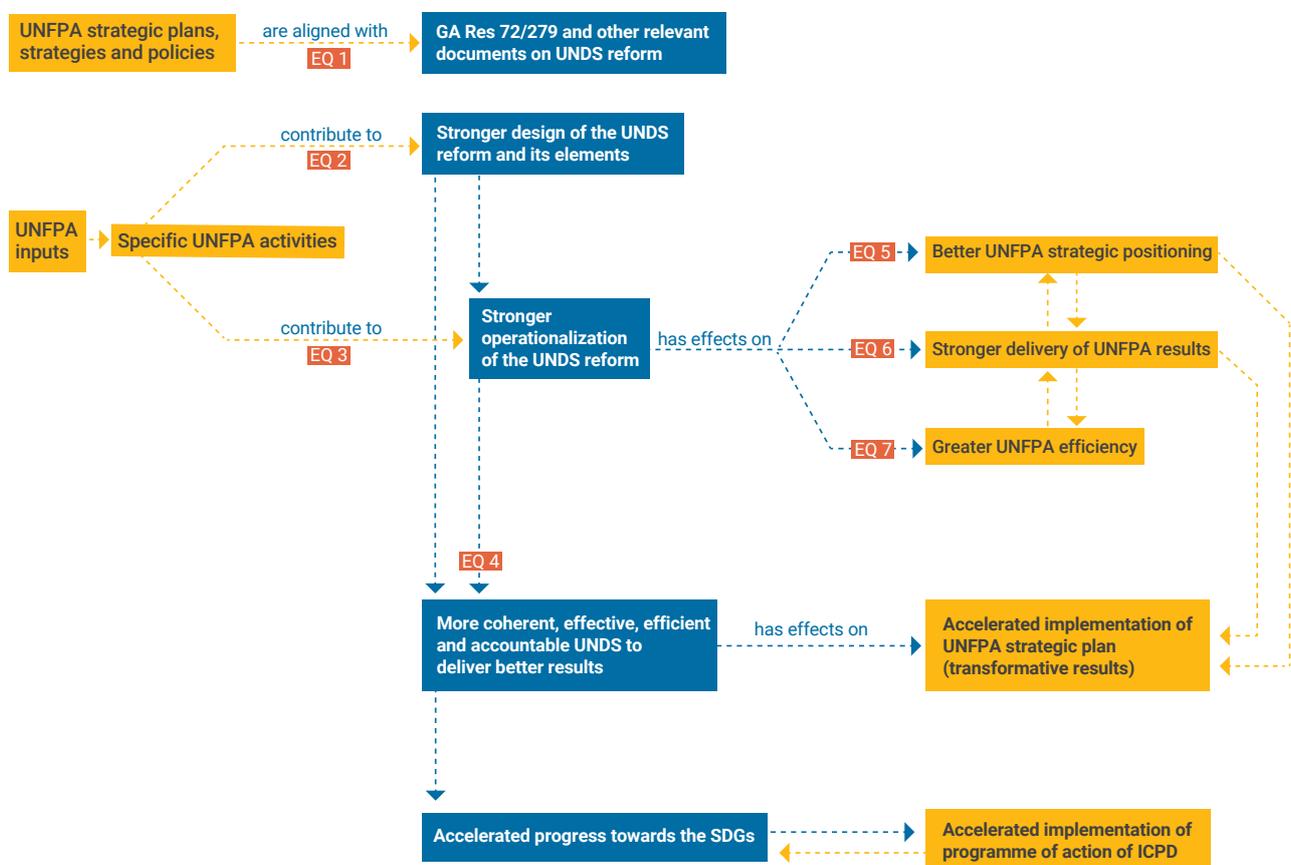
The following seven evaluation questions were taken from the evaluation terms of reference and adapted following the development of the theory of change and discussion with the evaluation reference group (ERG).

- **Evaluation question 1:** To what extent is the UNFPA strategic direction aligned with the objectives of the UNDS reform? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?
- **Evaluation question 2:** To what extent did UNFPA contribute to: (1) the design of the UNDS reform (design phase); and (2) the development (and further development) of elements of the UNDS reform (development phase), at all levels? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?
- **Evaluation question 3:** To what extent has UNFPA contributed to the operationalization of the UNDS reform (implementation phase), at all levels? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?
- **Evaluation question 4:** To what extent have UNFPA contributions supported a more coherent, effective, efficient and accountable UNDS at all levels? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?
- **Evaluation question 5:** To what extent has the ongoing operationalization of the UNDS reform affected the strategic positioning of UNFPA, at all levels? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?
- **Evaluation question 6:** To what extent has the ongoing operationalization of the UNDS reform affected UNFPA ability to deliver results? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?
- **Evaluation question 7:** To what extent has the ongoing operationalization of the UNDS reform affected UNFPA organizational structure and institutional efficiency? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?

Across all seven questions the evaluation examined the following four areas:

- The extent to which UNFPA not only identified and acted upon the risks and challenges, but also the opportunities associated with the UNDS reform
- The extent to which COVID-19 was an accelerator or obstacle for UNDS reform
- How UNFPA has engaged in different country contexts (including subregional offices)
- The extent to which UNFPA included human rights, gender equality, disability and other elements of leaving no one behind (LNOB).

FIGURE 4: UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform



Source: Evaluation team

DATA COLLECTION

A variety of data-collection methods was used to obtain the evidence from which the evaluation findings were developed. Table 1 contains an overview and a more detailed description can be found in Annex IV.

TABLE 1: Overview of data-collection methods used

| Data-collection method | Results |
|---|--|
| Stakeholder interviews at headquarters and regional levels | Over 113 key stakeholders interviewed in headquarters and at the regional level (56 and 57 respectively). All UNFPA regions were covered apart from the West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO). ³⁵ See Annex II for a full list of persons interviewed |
| Document review | Over 200 documents were reviewed from UNFPA, United Nations and external sources. See Annex III for a full list |
| Review of administrative, monitoring and survey data | Data sets reviewed and analysed including from internal UNFPA surveys on the implementation of the UNDS reform in 2019 and 2021, QCPR monitoring and reporting data, UNSDG IMS, UN-Info, BOS online platform, Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office Gateway |
| Country studies | More detailed studies undertaken in nine countries and one subregion with 153 key stakeholders interviewed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caribbean (subregion) • Cote d'Ivoire • Eswatini • Ethiopia • Kazakhstan • Indonesia • Serbia • Somalia • Timor-Leste • Tunisia |
| Discussion papers | Three discussion papers prepared to provide early feedback on key issues (see Volume III Annexes XI-XIII) |
| Validation survey | A series of very short online surveys was sent to specific groups of stakeholders to validate findings from the country studies and fill some key data gaps |

Source: Evaluation team

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analysed using the framework of the evaluation matrix. Evidence was triangulated using different sources of data and/or different methodologies for data collection. The analysis process led to the development of the findings found in Section 4. An evidence matrix based on the structure of the evaluation matrix can be found in Annex VI and sets out the sources of evidence for each finding, notes some of the challenges that were faced while collecting and analysing the data, and identifies the strength of the evidence. This ensured that conclusions were based on findings with the strongest evidence while also ensuring that weaker evidence was taken into account.

³⁵ During the data-collection phase, WCARO did not have the capacity to engage with the evaluation team.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The evaluation faced a number of challenges, the most important of which was the COVID-19 pandemic (see Box 1). Other challenges, together with mitigating actions, included:

- The evaluation was undertaken in the early stages of the operationalization of the UNDS reform. Some costs that may be significant in these early stages could be reduced over time. Equally, some benefits may not be captured until the reform has matured. The evaluation team was able to make estimates based on the evidence available
- There was no systematic and comprehensive collection of documents related to UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform. The evaluation therefore put together the documents to review from a variety of sources.

Box 1: COVID-19 and data collection

COVID-19-related travel restrictions meant that all interviews were virtual. This limited broad stakeholder engagement, especially with programme country governments. It also resulted in an extended period of data collection compared to undertaking a series of missions to countries, regional offices and agency headquarters. Nonetheless, virtual meetings covered a large set of stakeholders (153) at the country level and over 113 people were interviewed in headquarters and at the regional level.

Source: Evaluation team

A number of limitations remained, including:

- The lack of granularity of data from the UNSDG information management system, specifically disaggregation by member of the UNDS, meant that comparative analysis was not possible for some areas of investigation
- Limited availability of government interlocutors in the one subregion and nine country studies meant that the government perspective is not fully captured.

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The evaluation recommends that those working in humanitarian contexts should make the best use of the reform, especially by working with partners across the development-humanitarian-peace nexus.



4

FINDINGS

This findings section is structured by the seven evaluation questions and the findings were developed through the data collection and analysis processes described in the previous section. For each evaluation question a summary is provided that represents the overall response to the question.

4.1 STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT OF UNFPA TO THE REFORM OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Evaluation question 1: To what extent is the UNFPA strategic direction aligned to the objectives of the reform of the United Nations development system? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?

Overall response

Although the UNFPA strategic plans indicate commitment to, and are broadly aligned with, the UNDS reform, there is no explicit strategy for UNFPA engagement in the reform, either within the strategic plans (including their annexes) or in a separate document that explains how UNFPA will use the reform to accelerate progress towards its goals and, ultimately, the 2030 Agenda.

However, UNFPA senior management messages to staff, statements to the Executive Board, and information notes on implementing the reform have all provided information on the reform, including on the strategic direction of UNFPA, and have indicated strong UNFPA commitment to the reform process.

The first evaluation question concerns the alignment of the UNFPA strategic direction with the UNDS reform. It is assumed that the strategic direction comes from the four-year UNFPA strategic plans (including their annexes), key corporate strategies and statements and messages to staff by senior management. UNFPA contribution to operationalizing the reform through corporate guidance, policies and procedures is captured in evaluation question 3.

Finding 1: The UNFPA strategic plans indicate commitment to, and are broadly aligned with, the reform of the United Nations development system.

Aligned to the QCPR cycle so that they can incorporate the directions a year later in order to integrate Member States' global policy guidance, UNFPA strategic plans give the overall strategic direction to the organization. The 2016 QCPR led to a new cycle of strategic plans for the years 2018-2021, including for UNFPA. In terms of aligning to the repositioning of the UNDS as set out by the Secretary-General in 2017, the timing of the strategic plan was not ideal. But the vision contained in the reports of the Secretary-General came from earlier deliberations and provided an overall direction to the UNDS before the actual approval of General Assembly resolution 72/279. The 2016 QCPR underlined the importance of "an adequately resourced, relevant, coherent, efficient and effective United Nations development system in its support to achieve the Sustainable

Development Goals” and supported the “positioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (2016 QCPR, paragraph 7).

Developed within the framework of the 2016 QCPR, the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, expressed “a clear commitment to United Nations reform and greater coherence in support of results”. As can be seen in the preface to the strategic plan, UNFPA (together with UNDP, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and UN Women) took a pragmatic approach to the timing challenge, noting with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General on repositioning the UNDS (UNFPA Strategic Plan, paragraph 1) while recognizing that the report was meant to be further discussed by Member States and that the organization would therefore retain the flexibility to “respond to the decisions of Member States through the midterm reviews of the strategic plans” (UNFPA Strategic Plan, paragraph 10).

The UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, introduced for the first time a common chapter, shared with UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women in line with General Assembly resolution 71/243, as well as the Secretary-General’s repositioning report. The four organizations committed to working better together for the achievement of the SDGs, with a view to achieving greater coherence in support of results and specifically to strengthen how they work together in six areas where their collaborative advantages complement each other.

More than two years into the start of the UNDS reform, the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, provided a better opportunity to internalize the UNDS reform process. By the time design started, the reform was well underway, the Resident Coordinators had been delinked from UNDP and the first UNSDCFs developed. The strategic plan repeatedly notes that it is in line with the United Nations reform – for example, “aligned with the United Nations reform efforts” (paragraph 6) and that UNFPA “will continue to support and improve system-wide coherence and collaboration and capitalize on the United Nations reform as an enabler and opportunity to deliver on the strategic plan” (paragraph 109). In the introduction it also states that UNFPA will “work within” the UNDS “to support the achievement of the three transformative results, while working effectively and coherently within the overall framework of a reformed United Nations development system, UNFPA must also transform itself” (paragraph 3).

In terms of the various elements of the UNDS reform, the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, notes that UNFPA will closely align country programme documents with UNSDCFs and that it will encourage joint monitoring and evaluation of UNSDCFs. Moreover, one of the key strategic shifts identified in the document is “increasing the focus on joint accountability, in line with United Nations reforms, principles and practices”. According to the strategic plan, UNFPA will also integrate with UN-Info and harmonize tools with other United Nations entities. It also mentions the multi-country office review.

UNFPA set out the theory of change underlying the results articulated in the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, in an annex on “change stories”.³⁶ The theory of change aims to address why and how change happens in the context of the UNFPA strategic plan and presents a holistic view of the causal and enabling conditions that must be in place to achieve the three transformative results. “Improving alignment with the 2020 United Nations QCPR guidelines” is included as a key feature of the change story. In describing that alignment, the strategic plan notes that it presents the avenues for coordination, collaboration, efficiency and coherence with other United Nations entities at all levels in a manner that recognizes their respective mandates and roles, considers their comparative advantages and enhances the effective utilization of their resources and their unique expertise.

Where and how UNFPA will implement its strategic plan is defined in the UNFPA business model,³⁷ another annex to the strategic plan. The business model also presents the resource allocation and distribution system. Within the model, a demand is made for “a new way of doing business as called for in the UNDS reform”. In line with the direction and spirit of the UNDS reform, countries in any tier³⁸ can apply the five modes of engagement³⁹ and six accelerators⁴⁰ defined in the strategic plan to ensure the most impactful solutions to the local context, challenges and priorities. Specifically, the business model states

36 UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022 (DP/FPA/2021/8) Annex 2 “Change stories” to accelerate the achievement of the three transformative results. 21 July 2021.

37 UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 (DP/FPA/2021/8) Annex 3 Business model. 18 July 2021.

38 Through the business model, UNFPA classifies and prioritizes countries into three tiers, depending on whether all transformative results have not been achieved (tier I), two transformative results have not been achieved (tier II), or one or zero transformative results has not been achieved (tier III).

39 Five UNFPA modes of engagement: (a) advocacy and policy dialogue and support; (b) knowledge management; (c) capacity development; (d) service delivery; and (e) coordination, partnership and South-South and triangular cooperation.

40 UNFPA has identified six accelerators to achieve its six interconnected outputs.

that, while UNFPA country offices can use all modes of engagement, they must be customized within the overall framework of the UNSDCF.

Integrated results and resources frameworks (IRRFs) are included as annexes to UNFPA strategic plans and specify the goal, outcomes, outputs and indicators for the plan. Within the IRRF of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, more than 50 per cent of indicators are directly derived from the SDGs and 73 per cent of output indicators are common or integrated with other United Nations entities. This is an example of alignment with the vision of the reform. Table 2 compares the ongoing and previous strategic plans and Box 2 provides the accompanying definitions.

TABLE 2: Alignment of UNFPA IRRF indicators with SDG indicators or indicators of other United Nations entities

| | SDG indicators in per cent | Common or complementary indicators in per cent |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Strategic Plan 2018-2021 | 60% | 53% |
| Strategic Plan 2022-2025 | 50% | 73% |

Source: Evaluation team from IRRFs

Box 2: Definition of common and complementary indicators

Common indicators are the same in the results and resources frameworks of at least two entities. They are drawn, where possible, directly from other globally agreed frameworks - including the QCPR Monitoring and Reporting Framework 2021-2024.

Complementary indicators are not repeated verbatim in the results and resources frameworks of another United Nations entity. However, they are related or provide different but complementary insights into the same issue, high-level result and/or area of complementary work.

Source: UNFPA Indicator guide, Strategic Plan 2022-2025

The IRRF also contains a limited number of indicators related to the UNDS reform. Specifically, Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency (OEE) output number 3 - Expanded Partnerships for Impact - includes indicators related to UNDS reform. A similar set of indicators was found in the IRRF for the previous strategic plan. Table 3 lists the indicators together with the baselines and 2025 targets.⁴¹

TABLE 3: UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 IRRF OEE indicators related to the UNDS reform

| Indicator | Baseline | 2025 Target |
|--|----------|-------------|
| OE3.3 Proportion of UNFPA co-financing funded through pooled funds and thematic funding mechanisms: | | |
| (a) Pooled funds (millions of United States dollars (USD)) | USD 213 | USD 207 |
| (b) Thematic funding mechanisms (millions of USD) | USD 177 | USD 155 |

41 UNFPA. Report of the Executive Director (DP/FPA/2022/4(Part I). Annex 6: Integrated results and resources framework, UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. 22 April 2022.

| Indicator | Baseline | 2025 Target |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| OE3.4 Proportion of results group or issue-based coalitions chair or co-chair posts that UNFPA holds in: | | |
| (a) United Nations country teams | 15.9% | 16.5% |
| (b) United Nations regional collaborative platforms | To be determined | To be determined |
| OE3.5 Contributions provided to the Resident Coordinator system: | | |
| (a) Contributions in cash provided to the Resident Coordinator system (millions of USD) | USD 4.6 | USD 3.9 |
| (b) Contribution in-kind provided to the Resident Coordinator system | | |
| (b1) Strategic analysis and planning (number of country offices) | 104 | 104 |
| (b2) External communications and advocacy (number of country offices) | 87 | 87 |
| (b3) Serving at least a month as acting Resident Coordinator (number of country offices) | 41 | 35 |
| (b4) Number of candidates prepared by UNFPA to undertake an assessment to become Resident Coordinator | 5 | 15 |
| OE3.6 Number of countries in which UNFPA is contributing to joint initiatives: | | |
| (a) Joint programmes | 108 | 105 |
| (b) Joint conflict analysis together with humanitarian country team and/or United Nations mission (when present) | 59 | 63 |

Source: IRRF 2022-2025

The Global Programme 2022-2025, another annex to the strategic plan, states that UNFPA “will continue to align and improve system-wide coordination, leveraging the United Nations reform to deliver on the strategic plan”.⁴² More specifically, and in the spirit of the UNDS reform, for five of the six outputs in the programme results framework, a result is included related to the number of global United Nations inter-agency mechanisms, products and tools to which UNFPA contributes. In the text it also notes that UNFPA will develop tools and quality assurance and conduct capacity-building initiatives for UNFPA country and regional offices to enhance their results-based management capacity, including within the context of UNDS reforms (paragraph 92). Moreover, under OEE3, expanded partnerships for impact, it includes an indicator of the number of UNFPA country offices supported to contribute to joint initiatives (baseline: 40 per cent; 2025 target: 75 per cent).

Six UNFPA regional programmes are also part of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, replacing the “regional intervention action plans” of the previous plan. Each regional programme makes reference to the ongoing reform at the regional level, although unsystematically, which may reflect the uneven progress in the implementation of the reform elements among different regions. The regional programmes largely emphasize the work with the regional collaborative platform,⁴³ the issue-based coalitions,⁴⁴ the knowledge management hubs,⁴⁵ the peer support groups⁴⁶ and common back offices.⁴⁷ In line

42 UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 (DP/FPA/2021/8) Annex 4 Global and regional programmes 2. Global Programme (2022-2025): paragraph 76.

43 Asia Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Eastern and Southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

44 All UNFPA regions.

45 Asia Pacific, Arab States.

46 Arab States.

47 Ibid.

with OEE3.4 (see Table 3), three regional programmes⁴⁸ also include references to issue-based coalitions in their results frameworks. Specifically, they refer to the number of issue-based coalitions that UNFPA co-chairs and the level of ambition varies by region.

Finally, the UNFPA integrated budget for 2022-2025⁴⁹ presents the resources that will contribute to the achievement of the three transformative results. Although not an annex of the strategic plan, the integrated budget follows the same cycle and should be used in conjunction with the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, and its annexes. With the aim of helping country offices make informed decisions about back-office operations, “including in the context of the roll-out of United Nations reform processes such as common back-office and business operations strategy”,⁵⁰ the integrated budget 2022-2025 includes a USD 2.2 million allocation for support to the reform of back-office operations.

Finding 2: There is no explicit strategy for UNFPA engagement in the reform of the United Nations development system, either within the strategic plans (including their annexes) or in a separate document that explains how UNFPA will use the reform to accelerate progress towards its goals and, ultimately, the 2030 Agenda.

To support the development of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, 12 task teams were established focusing on areas that were both strategically important and that required further consultation. Led by personnel from UNFPA country and regional offices, and from headquarters, the teams produced final reports in early 2021. The terms of reference for these teams asked them “to keep in mind the new working environment, a reformed UN, elaborating how UNFPA should position itself and leverage this reform”. Despite these efforts, a desk review of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, and its annexes revealed that, while most of the elements of the UNDS reform are covered in different places, it is not always done systematically or consistently. Equally, it was noted that there is no separate strategy within the framework of the strategic plan that explains how the reform will be used to support acceleration towards UNFPA goals, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. In particular, engagement in the UNDS reform is not included in the list of accelerators that explain how UNFPA will achieve its outputs and contribute to its expected outcomes.

Some external observers interviewed by the evaluation team also noted that certain elements are missing from the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. However, reflecting a disconnect with those expectations, interviewed UNFPA staff tended to argue that the strategic plan is not the place for such detail, or that engagement with UNDS reform is part of the everyday work of the organization, and has been for some time.

Key strategies aligned with strategic plan cycles take the UNDS reform, or selective elements of it, into account. For example, the UNFPA Gender Equality Strategy, 2018-2021, and the Evaluation Strategy, 2022-2025. In other strategies, there is less explicit alignment to the UNDS reform (such as the Knowledge Management Strategy, 2018-2021). In addition, the strategic plan has implementation and communication guides to support roll-out. In the implementation guide,⁵¹ note is taken of the need to ensure there is space in the cooperation frameworks to work on the transformative results and for UNFPA to proactively position the transformative results in them. The UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 communication toolkit⁵² was launched in April 2022 and contains a set of tools to support the roll-out and utilization of the plan. As part of the toolkit, a PowerPoint presentation sets out 11 strategic shifts stemming from the strategic plan, with two related indirectly to the UNDS reform: (a) the need to move from individual accountability to joint accountability; and (b) the need to undertake more integrated approaches (with the assumption that these approaches would be multi-agency).

Finding 3: UNFPA senior management messages to staff, statements to the Executive Board, and information notes on implementing the reform of the United Nations development system have all provided information on the reform, including on UNFPA strategic direction, and have indicated strong UNFPA commitment to the reform process.

48 Arab States, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

49 UNFPA. Integrated budget 2022-2025. DP/FPA/2021/9. June 2021.

50 Paragraph 67; common back offices have been renamed local shared service centres.

51 UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. Implementation Toolkit. December 2021 Version.

52 A series of resources available in the UNFPA intranet.

UNFPA strategic plans are not the only means through which strategic direction and commitment to the UNDS reform can be channelled. Messages from UNFPA senior management to staff have been very clear on the importance of the UNDS reform for UNFPA and on the organization's commitment to capitalize the reform as an enabler and opportunity to deliver on the strategic plan. Immediately following approval of General Assembly resolution 72/279, the UNFPA Executive Director sent a message to all staff emphasizing the commitment of UNFPA to the reform agenda set out by the Secretary-General and endorsed by Member States.⁵³ The Executive Director went on to note:

Being one of the champions of the reforms and a smaller UN organization, operational collaboration and coordination with the rest of the UN system and other stakeholders have always been in our DNA. We are actively supporting the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General in operationalizing the resolution.

Six months later, following a meeting of the UNFPA Executive Committee with the Deputy Secretary-General to discuss progress on UNDS reform, the Executive Director sent a second message to all staff⁵⁴ reemphasizing the importance of the reform in reinvigorating the "way we work together to better serve the world" but also emphasizing the importance of the reforms for UNFPA:

Many of the system-wide reforms will have direct implications for UNFPA, but I have full confidence that the reform is an enabler and opportunity for UNFPA that will strengthen our ability to deliver on the three transformative results. I therefore count on your active engagement, collaboration and leadership in supporting this important transition to achieve rights and choices for all.

Each message was reportedly followed up at the regional level, where UNFPA regional directors wrote to country representatives who were encouraged to discuss the implications and opportunities of the reform with staff.

Statements by the Executive Director to the Executive Board have consistently set out UNFPA commitment to the reform and the strategic direction of UNFPA engagement with it. Since early 2019, UNFPA has regularly - once a year at least - produced information notes on its progress with implementing the repositioning agenda set out in General Assembly resolution 72/279 and presented them to informal meetings and formal sessions of the Executive Board. Information notes were also informed by two UNFPA surveys conducted in 2019 and 2021 aimed at collecting information about, and perceptions of engagement with, the UNDS reform from UNFPA representatives and regional directors. The information notes (see Annex III) are also available to staff and provide another source of information on UNFPA commitment to the UNDS reform.

4.2 UNFPA CONTRIBUTION TO THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE REFORM OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Evaluation question 2: To what extent did UNFPA contribute to: 1) the design of the UNDS reform of the United Nations development system (design phase); and 2) the development (and further developments) of elements of the UNDS reform (development phase), at all levels? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?

Overall response

UNFPA contribution to the design and development of the UNDS reform is much appreciated by key stakeholders in the reform process. It is built on early work following the approval of the 2030 Agenda and contributions have been consistent and constructive.

Strong leadership and clarity about what UNFPA expected from the reform have been important factors influencing contributions.

⁵³ Message from the UNFPA Executive Director to all staff, 8 June 2018.

⁵⁴ Message from the UNFPA Executive Director to all staff, 20 December 2018. The message also noted that a reform tracker had been developed and would be updated on a regular basis. This did not happen.

In answering this question, “design” has been taken to mean the high-level United Nations and inter-governmental processes leading up to the reports of the Secretary-General and major General Assembly and ECOSOC resolutions, including subsequent work related to the design of the regional and multi-country office reforms. “Development” is seen to cover the documents that come out of the overall reform design and are developed within the UNDS, such as the management and accountability framework, guidance on the common country analysis and UNSDCF. It also covers engagement in the further development of some of these approaches and further refinement (such as revisions to the management and accountability framework).

Finding 4: Building on early work following the approval of the 2030 Agenda, UNFPA made consistent and constructive contributions to the design of the reform of the United Nations development system, which is much appreciated by key stakeholders in the reform process.

It has already been noted that the reform of the UNDS comes from the need to work better to achieve the SDGs and 2030 Agenda. Immediately following the approval of the 2030 Agenda in General Assembly resolution 70/01 of 2015, work started on addressing the changes within the framework of the QCPR. At the time, the Assistant Secretary-General Advisory Group was asked by the UNDG to “further elaborate a set of options across global, regional and country levels on how best the UN system can support Member States in implementing the new sustainable development agenda for consideration and approval by the UNDG in preparation of the CEB meeting on 8/9 May 2014”.

The Assistant Secretary General Advisory Group was, until 2018, chaired by the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director for Management. The Deputy Executive Director also played an important role in the “ECOSOC dialogues” on the longer-term positioning of the UNDS in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. Running from December 2014 to July 2016, these dialogues were undertaken to prepare for the new QCPR. The subsequent QCPR included many of the elements that would end up in General Assembly resolution 72/279. Internally, in early 2015, UNFPA had established an inter-divisional working group (IDWG) on UN “fit for purpose” to engage with the ECOSOC dialogue and it henceforth became the IDWG on UN reform.

Key informants at the heart of the design of the UNDS were very positive about UNFPA engagement throughout the design process. It was made clear to the evaluation team that the key informants could always count on active engagement and helpful contributions. UNFPA could also be critical, but provided criticism in a useful and constructive manner. It was also made clear that this style of engagement came from the organization’s leadership. Interviewees believe that not only was UNFPA very clear about what it wanted to get out of the reform, it was also seen as very willing to adapt its models (for example, its country programming processes).

Finding 5: UNFPA provided important leadership in the development of key elements of the reform of the United Nations development system, and has consistently contributed to the reviews and development of system-wide guidance processes and systems across a number of reform streams.

Much of the praise given to UNFPA for its role in the design of the UNDS reform also relates to its work in support of the development of the basic inter-agency documents that would frame and guide the operationalization of the reform. The UNFPA IDWG on UN reform established for ensuring a wide discussion on the issue was also involved in support of the development phase. In addition, and in response to General Assembly resolution 72/279, the UNFPA Executive Committee established a number of “tiger teams” to take various elements of the reform forward and to inform UNFPA positioning and engagement in system-wide reviews. Specifically, the following four tiger teams were organized:

- **UNDP/UNFPA representation.** Lead: Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (EECARO) and the Division for Human Resources, with close engagement of the Legal Office
- **Multi-country office review.** Lead: Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (APRO) with support from Pacific and Caribbean subregional offices (SROs) plus the Division for Human Resources

- **Regional review.** Lead: East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) and Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO)
- **Common back offices:** Division for Management Services.

The idea was for the tiger teams to undertake preparatory work, conduct internal mappings exercises, analyse implications and provide recommendations for necessary internal actions while the scope of the relevant system-wide reviews was being developed by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. The team leads invited relevant regional office, headquarters and country office staff to contribute and reported to the IDWG on UN reform and eventually to the UNFPA Executive Committee on progress. Regional consultations reportedly took place to discuss operationalization of the UNDS reform, in conjunction with other regional events. Many staff interviewed at the country level felt that they had the opportunity to engage in some aspects, usually through commenting on the internal web/intranet, even if they did not take advantage of this opportunity.

A United Nations reform team was established in UNFPA to support internal coordination and coordinate work with the wider United Nations system. The team is situated in the Intergovernmental, Inter-agency and Policy Dialogue Branch, which is responsible for ensuring more effective programme support to country offices in the context of the UNDS reform and tighter coherence and coordination between UNFPA and inter-governmental and inter-agency processes. The Intergovernmental, Inter-agency and Policy Dialogue Branch is responsible for advancing the UNFPA normative positioning in key inter-governmental and inter-agency forums, delivering on the UNFPA strategic plan and 2030 Agenda, responding to the requirements of United Nations reform and championing the ICPD Programme of Action. Many internal and external interviewees put the reform team at the heart of the UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform process. The inter-agency team also acts as secretariat to the IDWG on UN reform.

On the development (and further development when appropriate) of guidance, instructions etc, UNFPA continued to play a key role, not least in leading groups established by the UNDG or UNSDG to support the process. UNFPA was entrusted with coordinating the development of a number of key elements of the reform.

At the start of the operationalization of 72/279, the UNFPA Executive Director was appointed co-chair of the Strategic Financing Results Group, together with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), one of three such groups that worked from 2018-2019. The group aimed to serve as a platform to support countries in shifting from funding individual projects to financing transformative change.⁵⁵

In terms of the key work of developing guidance for the new UNSDCF, the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director for Management chaired the UNSDG design team on the new Cooperation Framework Guidance (2018-2019). Interviews with stakeholders in the process suggest that UNFPA was very active in this role and went beyond the interests of UNFPA alone. UNFPA also served as “co-penholder”⁵⁶ with the Development Coordination Office in the development of the “Financing the SDGs and Funding the Cooperation Framework” companion piece to the SDG guidance.⁵⁷

Together with UNICEF, the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director for Management has been the co-chair of the BIG since 2020. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director for Programmes co-chaired with UN Women the UNSDG Task Team on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women from 2020 to 2021. Outputs include guidance on establishing gender theme groups (GTGs).

UNFPA has also been a member of a number of other groups within the framework of supporting the UNDS reform (see Annex IX-D for a full list). Beyond the formal groups, UNFPA has prepared position papers to be shared with decision makers in the reform process, for example on the management and accountability framework.⁵⁸ In some cases, the position papers have been with other members of the UNDS. For example, on the regional review where UNFPA joined UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, the World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in preparing a set of joint proposals.⁵⁹ These have been appreciated by the United Nations Secretariat as a constructive form of engagement.

55 Statement by the UNFPA Executive Director to the Executive Board 4 September 2018.

56 UNFPA Information note: Implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system. 16 August 2019.

57 UNDG. Resource Guide for Gender Theme Groups. March 2018.

58 UNFPA. UNFPA Initial views and feedback on the UNDS Management and Accountability Framework (MAF). January 2019.

59 Regional Review - IRT: Joint proposals from UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women, WFP, UNHCR. 22 October 2019.

4.3 UNFPA CONTRIBUTION TO THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE REFORM OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Evaluation question 3: To what extent has UNFPA contributed to the operationalization of the reform of the United Nations development system (implementation phase), at all levels? Which enabling and hindering factors explain this assessment

Overall response

At all levels, UNFPA has worked hard to strengthen operationalization of the UNDS reform. At headquarters, UNFPA provided support to both the regional and country levels, ensuring that corporate processes were largely aligned with the reform. However, these processes were not adopted universally across the whole organization.

Beyond the essential areas of operationalizing the reform, organization-wide ownership has not occurred, and gaps exist in some areas. Moreover, despite efforts at headquarters and the regional level, knowledge of the reform is not universal and does not always extend beyond processes.

At the country level, UNFPA is generally very active in the preparation of the common country analysis and cooperation framework, including through supporting UNCTs to meet their data needs for the common country analysis. At both country and regional levels, UNFPA has been active in the groups established as part of the new collaboration architecture, acting as co-chair for a significant proportion of them.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in UNFPA strengthening collaboration at all levels and while this has been facilitated by the reform of the UNDS it also presented obstacles.

While the UNFPA contribution to operationalizing the efficiency element of the UNDS reform has been significant, at the start of the reform the organization already had a high level of engagement in the efficiency agenda.

This evaluation question on UNFPA contribution to the operationalization of the UNDS reform moves from the strategic direction outlined in evaluation question 1 to the operational area of UNFPA work. It starts by looking at the contributions at the global, regional and country levels and concludes with two areas of contribution that cut across these three levels, namely COVID-19 and the efficiency agenda.

Finding 6: At the global level, UNFPA has worked hard to strengthen the operationalization of the reform of the United Nations development system, including through support to the country level.

Within the framework of its strategic plans, strategies and policies, UNFPA has supported operationalization of the UNDS reform through adjusting guidance, tools and business processes across the various streams of its work. UNFPA headquarters has also supported country offices in the implementation of UNDS reform, including by working with other United Nations agencies at the global level to respond to issues in the development of cooperation frameworks.

In response to the 2019 Management and Accountability Framework, UNFPA revised the job descriptions of its representatives in close collaboration with other United Nations entities. Common language on responsibilities as a UNCT member, on joint programming and on the matrixed reporting arrangement was used in the process. Moreover, the UNFPA performance appraisal system integrates feedback from Resident Coordinators and the principles of mutual accountability. However, contribution to UNDS reform is not a mandatory part of the performance appraisal systems of all staff engaged in areas of work where they contribute to the UNDS reform.

General Assembly resolution 72/279 (paragraph 10) sets out three funding streams to finance the Resident Coordinator system:

- A 1 per cent coordination levy on tightly earmarked third-party non-core contributions to United Nations development-related activities, to be paid at source

- Doubling the current UNDG cost-sharing arrangement among UNDS entities
- Voluntary, predictable multi-year contributions to a dedicated trust fund to support the inception period.

In May 2019, UNFPA issued its guidance⁶⁰ on managing the 1 per cent levy (with interim guidance in February 2019). The total budget of the Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF) for the new Resident Coordinator system is USD 281 million for 2022. In 2019-2022 inclusive, UNFPA has contributed through the cost-sharing agreement USD 17.7 million (USD 4.6 million per year in 2019-2021 and USD 3.9 million in 2022).⁶¹

Already at the heart of the development of the UNSDCF through co-chairing the working group that is developing the framework at the global level, UNFPA moved quickly to prepare for the first round of UNSDCFs. UNFPA recognized that it not only had to contribute to the roll-out of the new framework but also to ensure that its transformative results are effectively positioned. The Policy and Strategy Division coordinated the organization's efforts to orient staff even before the UNSDCF guidance was issued in June 2019. In May 2019, the Policy and Strategy Division launched a webinar series to introduce the cooperation framework to staff members and in June 2019 organized a global learning workshop. New country programme document guidance was issued in March 2020 and capacity-building activities were held in 2020 and 2021. Furthermore, UNFPA regional offices adapted the global training to regional realities and conducted region-specific capacity-building activities.

All guidance and resources were made available on a UNSDCF resources toolkit on the UNFPA intranet (MyUNFPA). The toolkit was established as an interactive learning space to access resources, exchange successes and challenges and ask for support throughout the UNSDCF process. It is a one-stop shop for resources and a hub for exchanging experiences among countries embarking on the development of a UNSDCF. The toolkit also provides the opportunity for country offices to access support.

The main global-level contribution to greater accountability of the UNDS is through support to independent system-wide evaluation. The UNFPA commitment to system-wide and joint evaluations is demonstrated by the fact that more than 50 per cent of its centralized evaluations are either system-wide or joint (see Table 4). UNFPA has uploaded all centralized evaluations to the UNEG Evaluation Database.

TABLE 4: Joint centralized evaluations as a percentage of total centralized evaluations, by year

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--|------|------|------|
| Number of centralized evaluations | 15 | 14 | 14 |
| Number of joint or system-wide centralized evaluations | 7 | 8 | 8 |
| Joint evaluations as percentage of total | 47% | 57% | 57% |

Source: Annual reports on the evaluation function 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017

The UNFPA Evaluation Office is fully engaged with the evaluation offices of other United Nations entities. UNFPA is an active member of the UNEG Task Force for Independent System-Wide Evaluations (ISWE), whose purpose it is to develop an updated policy to institutionalize those types of evaluations to be submitted to the Executive Office of the Secretary General for its consideration. It was also a member of the UNEG group set up to support development of the UNSDCF evaluation guidelines.⁶² UNFPA is also an active member of the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation group whose purpose is to implement and deliver independent system-wide evaluations in the humanitarian field.

60 UNFPA. Operational Guidance for business units negotiating non-core contribution agreements: Implementation of UN coordination levy (1 per cent) for tightly earmarked third-party non-core contributions to UN development-related activities. Step-by Step Guidance.

61 <https://unsdg.un.org/SPTF/where-the-funds-are-coming-from> (last accessed 4 June 2022).

62 UNEG. Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. September 2021.

Beyond evaluation, UNFPA has also contributed to the system-wide reporting on contribution to the SDGs. UNFPA has contributed to the inter-agency working group tasked with advising UNSDG Principals on a methodology for future system-wide reports on SDG support and results. Early efforts at reporting on system-wide results have been included in the annual report of the chair of the UNSDG.

At the second regular session of the Executive Board in 2018, UNFPA presented a proposal for structured funding dialogues.⁶³ The proposal was based on the guiding principles as laid out in the report of the Secretary-General on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, General Assembly resolution 72/279 and the QCPR as well as earlier decisions of the Executive Board. In line with this, one of the principles of the structured dialogue was that it would be focused on the consistency of approaches of other United Nations funds and programmes.

Finding 7: Beyond the essential areas of operationalizing the reform of the United Nations development system, organization-wide ownership has not occurred, and gaps exist in some areas. Moreover, despite the best efforts, knowledge of the reform is not universal among UNFPA staff and does not always extend beyond processes.

For the strategic direction to be aligned with the UNDS reform, all dimensions of the reform need to be taken into account across the whole organization. After the adoption of General Assembly resolution 72/279 there was no systematic exercise for ensuring integration of the UNDS reform. Following the approval of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, by the Executive Board at the second regular session in 2021, UNFPA started implementing a 100-day plan of critical actions to ensure a systematic roll-out of the strategic plan. This was an opportunity to ensure the UNDS reform was fully integrated and institutionalized across the organization.

This is especially true in areas where the relationship between the reform and the work undertaken by UNFPA business units is not immediately obvious. For example, on the positive side, the Director of the Humanitarian Response Division and the Humanitarian Response Division liaison advisor in New York are members of the UNFPA IDWG on UN reform and, in 2021, the Policy and Strategy Division as part of the ongoing UNSDCF webinar series for country offices, performed a special sub-series dedicated to countries and their staff in humanitarian contexts and a specific chapter on humanitarian aid has been included in the UNSDCF toolkit.⁶⁴

Yet, despite this positioning, the 2020 note on UNFPA work to address the humanitarian-development-peace nexus⁶⁵ makes no mention of the UNDS reform. Nor does the 2020 UNFPA document on Achieving the UNFPA Vision for Humanitarian Action.⁶⁶ This is in contrast with other parts of the international community that have identified strong linkages between the UNDS reform and humanitarian contexts. For example, the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative has included “impact and concrete positive outcomes of the UN development system reform on humanitarian action” as one of their five priorities for 2021-2023.⁶⁷

Moreover, the structures put in place to manage the engagement of the reform have led to a situation where the IDWG on UN reform is led by the management side of the organization and the Secretariat is within the programme side.

At the same time, even if well-communicated, to be effective, support and guidance also requires knowledge of the reform at all levels. Senior staff interviewed by the evaluation team generally have a good knowledge of the reform but this is not the case universally. This largely corresponds with the UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform conducted in April 2021 and aimed at UNFPA representatives and heads of office (see Table 5). It should be noted that, at the time of the survey, some workstreams were in their infancy (such as multi-country offices, regional-level reforms or system-wide evaluation) while other areas may only be of interest to representatives in specific contexts (such as multi-country offices).

63 DP/FPA/2018/10/Add.1.

64 As a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and Joint Steering Committee (JSC), UNFPA is part of the global United Nations humanitarian architecture. It also has an important role in the humanitarian cluster system, specifically leading the GBV area of responsibility within the Global Protection Cluster. The JSC is at the heart of the efforts of the United Nations to develop the humanitarian-development-peace (triple) nexus and is seen as a part of UNSDG and the reform.

65 UNFPA. UNFPA's work to address the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. October 2020.

66 UNFPA. 2020. Achieving the UNFPA Vision for Humanitarian Action: An Accountability Framework for Strategic and Transformative Change. Final Draft 31 January 2020.

67 <https://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/about-us/current-co-chairs.html>.

TABLE 5: Extent to which UNFPA representatives/heads of office are familiar with various UNDS reform workstreams, 2021

| UNDS reform workstream | Very familiar or familiar |
|--|---------------------------|
| Common business operations | 94% |
| Management and Accountability Framework | 90% |
| UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework | 81% |
| System-wide results-based management and reporting | 63% |
| Funding Compact | 57% |
| Regional reform | 57% |
| System-wide evaluation | 53% |
| Multi-country office review | 36% |

Source: UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform April 2021, Q3

Most other staff have sufficient knowledge to do their job, while others know about the UNDS reform in theory, read about it or have heard about it, but little more. A small number of staff members interviewed by the evaluation team stated that the first time they heard of the reform was when they received the invitation for an interview.

Staff obtain knowledge from a variety of sources - headquarters, regional offices, Resident Coordinator offices (RCOs) - and through different channels - emails, websites and internal exchange networks such as Yammer. But it is not systematic and since staff receive a lot of information, they need to prioritize what they read. In practical terms, some noted that information has not been targeted to specific roles in the country office. While others argued that they have good knowledge about the reform only in the areas where they work. Interviews did not clarify whether the knowledge is largely about processes or whether it goes to the spirit of the reform.

Finding 8: UNFPA has provided significant support to key elements of the reform of the United Nations development system at the regional level, mainly focused on substantive support to issue-based coalitions and peer support groups. There has been less success in contributing to the new regional knowledge hubs across all regions. Other areas of reform are still at an early stage of development.

Regional collaborative platforms are chaired by the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General and vice-chaired by the Executive Secretary of the respective regional economic commissions, at the Under Secretary-General level and the UNDP Regional Bureau Director, at the Assistant Secretary-General level. UNFPA is a member of all five platforms, represented by its regional directors. UNFPA guidance on engaging with the regional collaborative platforms,⁶⁸ published following the approval of the new management and accountability framework, encourages UNFPA membership in the regional collaborative platform management group, the peer support group, issue-based coalitions and the working group on joint reporting. According to responses to the UNFPA regional office survey on UNDS reform in 2021, respondents in all regions believed they were actively engaged in the UNDS reform.⁶⁹ The survey also indicated that a majority of UNFPA regional directors had a positive outlook on the benefits of regional reform, all agreeing that the regional collaborative platforms provided UNFPA an opportunity to

68 UNFPA. Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System. Information Note. Internal Document. 2021.

69 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q7.

better position the ICPD Programme of Action.⁷⁰ The vast majority of UNFPA regional directors also believed that the reform contributed to increased collaboration between UNFPA and the respective regional economic commissions.⁷¹

Feedback from other members of the United Nations system at the regional level revealed that in most regions UNFPA is seen as an active participant in the regional collaborative platform and the various mechanisms within it. UNFPA is seen as very reform friendly, a good team player, providing inputs and constructive criticism when necessary. It also compares very well with other members of the UNDS at the regional level. Most importantly, there is a general perception that it does not put up opposition, but is flexible. Strong leadership by UNFPA regional directors has been an important part of the success in many regions.

All five regions have established issue-based coalitions.⁷² In some regions (Arab States, Eastern Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean) the issue-based coalitions were initially an amalgamation of existing collaboration groups, identified as remaining relevant to addressing critical regional issues. For example, five of the seven issue-based coalitions in Eastern Europe were established in 2016 and a review by the regional collaborative platform determined that they remained valid.

TABLE 6: UNFPA participation in issue-based coalitions by UNSDG region 2020⁷³

| | Africa | Arab States | Asia Pacific | Eastern Europe and Central Asia | Latin America and the Caribbean | Total |
|--|--------|-------------|--------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| IBCs | 7 | 8 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 32 |
| UNFPA member | 6 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 |
| % of total IBCs where UNFPA is a member | | | | | | 78% |
| UNFPA co-chair | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| % of total IBCs where UNFPA is a co-chair | | | | | | 16% |

Source: Author's calculation based on 2020 annual reports of the RCPs and RCP websites

The figures in Table 6 can also be compared with the expectations set out in the regional programmes that monitor UNFPA chairing of issue-based coalitions. The Arab States Regional Office (ASRO), with a baseline of one, expects the number to increase to two by 2022 and to three in 2025. LACRO plans to co-chair five issue-based coalitions while EECARO expects 30 per cent of issue-based coalitions to be chaired or co-chaired by UNFPA. APRO and ESARO include indicators on co-chairing a wider range of collaboration groups beyond the issue-based coalitions and both expect increases throughout the life of their programmes. It should be noted that issue-based coalitions are need-based and timebound, based on regional priorities toward accelerating the implementation of the SDGs, through more coherent regional support to countries and UNCTs. In addition, in some cases the issue-based coalitions have changed and co-chairs may be rotated, affecting the figures in Table 6. Moreover, the regional aspects of the reform are not well captured on UN-Info and therefore the collective impact of the United Nations system at the regional level toward SDG or country results cannot be easily quantified.

In terms of the subject of the issue-based coalitions co-chaired by UNFPA, the majority are related to gender equality with others related to youth and data. This is in line with the recommendations provided by UNFPA in the guidance for the implementation of the Management and Accountability Framework, following the approval of the revised Management and Accountability Framework in late 2021 (see Box 3). Although the issue-based coalitions may not explicitly cover all the core areas of the UNFPA mandate, they cover some extremely important streams, such as gender equality and youth empowerment. At the same time, issue-based coalitions often cover some of the megatrends important for each region as well as for UNFPA work (such as climate change and demographic shifts). As Table 6 reveals, UNFPA co-chaired 16 per cent

70 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q4.

71 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q6.

72 In the Africa region these are referred to as Opportunity and Issue-Based Coalitions (O-IBC).

73 Interpreting Table 6 needs to take into account the fact that Chairs may rotate and in some regions the number of IBCs has changed.

of the issue-based coalitions in 2020. This is a large commitment for a medium-sized entity that is only one of 20 or more members of the regional collaborative platform in each region.

Box 3: Regional collaborative platforms: What are possible technical areas UNFPA can prioritize?

UNFPA can prioritize gender equality, youth and human rights, including through the roll-out of the Gender Scorecard/Gender SWAP, the Essential Service Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence, the Youth 2030 Scorecard and the Secretary General's Call to Action on Human Rights.

It can also prioritize data, including its analysis on census data and demographic and health surveys to support regional data capacities on the identification of populations most at risk.

Source: UNFPA. Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System. Information Note. Internal Document. 2021

While the issue-based coalitions, as a part of the broader regional collaborative platform, are a core part of the UNDS reform at the regional level, UNFPA has also played a major role in some of the other coordination mechanisms and platforms, including longstanding legacy groups that UNFPA has been leading for some time. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNFPA does not co-chair any of the five issue-based coalitions but it does co-chair a number of other groups that may also play an important role at the regional level, including: a youth working group, a partnership and communication working group, an SDG data and statistics group, and the regional operations management team. These are not subject to the same formality as issue-based coalitions and most regional collaborative platforms have identified certain areas where collaborative groups are required but where the formal structures of the issue-based coalitions are not appropriate.⁷⁴

Peer support group

The peer support group primarily functions as a strategic planning expert team that brings an integrated, system-wide, rather than agency-specific, support to UNSDCF processes at the country level. It also flags needs and opportunities for additional technical and strategic support to the regional collaborative platform. These pre-existing mechanisms have been reformed with new terms of reference issued in 2021. As a result, they were absorbed into the regional collaborative platform and, while they were previously chaired by a member entity on a rotational basis, they are now chaired by the Development Coordination Office regional director.

While the bulk of the work undertaken to prepare a UNSDCF is clearly undertaken by the UNCT under the stewardship of the Resident Coordinator, the peer support group provides technical support to UNCTs for the development of three products and related design steps of the UNSDCF cycle: (1) the roadmap; (2) the common country analysis on the basis of which the UNSDCF is to be designed [not the periodic common country analysis updates]; and (3) the UNSDCF document. The peer support groups play a critical role in quality assurance of common country analyses and UNSDCFs by accompanying the Resident Coordinator and UNCT through the country-planning process and finalization of these products. As the peer support group is not a thematic/policy body, and does not engage on UNSDCFs after signature, it complements the full range of inter-agency regional assets, with issue-based coalitions being best placed to provide technical and policy support to UNCTs on the implementation of UNSDCFs.

Although membership in a peer support group is voluntary, UNFPA is a member of all five peer support groups and, reportedly, in most regions it is an active one. The regional collaborative platforms are chaired by the directors of regional development coordination offices to ensure a system-wide approach, and feedback from peer support group members on the UNFPA contribution is generally very positive. The UNFPA survey on UNDS reform revealed that most UNFPA regional directors believe that the peer support group was effective or very effective in providing support and quality assurance to UNCTs in the development of common country analyses and UNSDCFs.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See Annex IX-E for more details on membership of IBCs and other collaborative groups at the regional level by region.

⁷⁵ UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q10.

Most regions have examples of delayed UNSDCF with implications for the preparation of country programme documents of those United Nations entities that prepare them, including UNFPA. With strict deadlines set by governing bodies, it is sometimes difficult to reconcile UNSDCF alignment with meeting the deadlines. UNFPA and other members of the regional collaborative platform reported that regional directors, including UNFPA, and the Development Coordination Office have cooperated to address the issues when they occur.

The second of the five recommendations of the Secretary-General refers to “the establishment of strong knowledge management hubs in each region, by pooling together policy expertise currently scattered across entities”. The hubs would provide knowledge and harness the substantial assets of some 8,000 staff at the regional level to better support the country-level, regional and subregional priorities of the Member States. All five regions have established knowledge management hubs. Some of these are based on existing structures and some are new. A review of the status of the knowledge management hubs completed in early 2021⁷⁶ noted that although all regions were successfully sharing United Nations knowledge products with the public, there was less progress with sharing knowledge internally and inter-regionally with colleagues.

Although all UNFPA regional offices have contributed to the creation of region-specific knowledge management hubs,⁷⁷ a review of the content indicates, in some cases, a very limited coverage of issues related to the UNFPA mandate. A rapid and contemporary review of the hubs indicates very different designs and content, especially when it comes to: (a) information on the core areas of UNFPA work; and (b) UNFPA documents. For example, a search for UNFPA documents in the Latin American and Caribbean hub revealed 70 UNFPA resources versus 9 in the Asia and the Pacific hub. This may reflect the different configurations of the knowledge hubs in different regions but nonetheless, this may be a missed opportunity.

Another area, linked to knowledge management hubs, where there has been less progress is on identifying experts and accessing expertise internally and inter-regionally. This is effectively a regional roster of individuals across the United Nations family in the region. The United Nations Deputy Secretary-General in her end-2021 message to the vice-chairs of the regional collaborative platforms identified mapping and accessing relevant expertise as a priority that needs a significant lift in 2022, noting that:

Providing demand-oriented support requires much greater momentum in terms of knowledge management. This means finalizing the mapping of expertise and complementing it with the establishment of vibrant communities of practice. I encourage you to draw on appropriate expertise and commit to rapidly deploy regional assets in support of UNCTs. The mechanism should unlock organizational constraints and create incentives to ensure a more targeted and timely response.

The UNFPA regional office survey on UNDS reform revealed that specific discussions on pooling existing expertise, capacities or assets as part of the regional reform has taken place in all regions.⁷⁸ Since then, there has been slow progress on developing the set of regional rosters. For example, in Eastern and Southern Africa, the Task Team on Knowledge Management is operationalizing a Virtual Expert Pool with regional assets (specifically, human resources clustered by areas of expertise). For UNFPA contribution, the regional sexual and reproductive health and rights technical assistance hub led by ESARO under the “2gether 4 SRHR” programme is expected to feature as a dedicated asset.

UNFPA and United Nations system interviewees at the regional level noted, however, that there is significant resistance to the developing of the rosters and expressed concern over, in particular, populating them with scarce resources. Although it is not the responsibility of UNFPA to solve these issues, there are questions of payments and other administrative challenges as well as legal obstacles that still need to be addressed.

The third recommendation was to “implement a series of initiatives to enhance transparency and results-based management at the regional level”. All five UNSDG regional groupings produced 2020 annual reports in 2021. These reports were prepared soon after the establishment of the regional collaborative platforms and some documents note that they are transitional. The evaluation team noted that styles, structure and content vary significantly across the regions. In the UNFPA survey

76 KM Networks. 2021. Stocktaking: Knowledge Management (KM) Component of the UN Regional Review.

77 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q15.

78 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q16.

on UNDS reform, all regional offices reported that UNFPA had contributed to the 2020 joint results reports of the regional collaborative platforms.⁷⁹

The fourth recommendation was to “launch a region-by-region change management process that will seek to consolidate existing capacities with regard to data and statistics, as well as other relevant analytical functions that may be currently duplicative”. UNFPA has strong capacity with data and statistics and, unlike other United Nations entities with such capacity, a wide field presence. As Table 7 below indicates, UNFPA is playing an important role at the regional level through co-chairing data and statistics groups. Responding to the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform, all UNFPA regional directors reported that the regional-specific change management process had begun to consolidate data and statistical capacities and that UNFPA has contributed to this process.⁸⁰

TABLE 7: UNFPA engagement with regional data groups

| Africa | Arab States | Asia and the Pacific | Europe and Central Asia | Latin America and the Caribbean |
|---|-------------|--|-------------------------|--|
| Co-Chair (with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)) IBC on strengthened integrated data and statistical systems for sustainable development | | Co-chair (with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)) of SDG Statistics and Data Means of Implementation Working Group | | Co-Chair (with UNICEF and UN Women) of SDG Data and Statistics Group |

Source: Information provided by UNFPA regional offices

The fifth element of the reform, efficiency, is discussed in Finding 12, which examines UNFPA engagement in the efficiency agenda at all levels. Examples of good practice in all areas of the reform are found in the discussion paper on regional reform (Volume III of this report).

Finding 9: UNFPA is generally very active in the preparation of the common country analysis and cooperation framework, often leading groups established to develop the documents and/or supporting data needs for the process. Although cooperation framework outcomes have been copied verbatim into UNFPA country programme documents, the substantive alignment of country programmes beyond the outcome statements is not always clear.

Interviews in the country studies suggest that all of the UNFPA country offices were active in the common country analysis and UNSDCF processes. As Table 8 indicates, this is in line with the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform where the majority of country offices believed their support for the common country analysis was strong or very strong apart from in the area of the funding framework and SDG financing (recognizing that at the stage of the survey, not all countries had started the UNSDCF process).

79 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q20.

80 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q18 and Q19.

TABLE 8: *The extent to which UNFPA country offices engage in areas of UNSDCF formulation*

| Area of UNSDCF formulation | Strong and very strong |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Common country analysis | 81% |
| UNCT programme management team | 74% |
| UNCT strategic prioritization | 71% |
| UNCT consultations with government | 70% |
| Design of UNSDCF outcomes and outputs | 67% |
| UNSDCF theory of change | 62% |
| UNCT configuration | 51% |
| Funding framework and SDG financing | 42% |

Source: UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform, Q42

UNFPA has generally supported key cross-cutting issues through advocating for important issues (leaving no one behind (LNOB), persons with disabilities, gender, youth), supporting civil society groups engagement in the process, and supporting data needs. In some countries the latter has been especially important in providing disaggregated data for identifying those most left behind. Some country offices also noted that they have received good support on how to engage and a good flow of information from UNFPA headquarters and regional offices on engagement. A number of interviewees also noted that there was a strong incentive for UNFPA to engage in these processes as it is one of a set of United Nations entities with a country programme document, making it necessary to transparently align with the cooperation framework.

One of the core changes to country-level programming with the UNDS reform is for all United Nations entity-specific country programmes to be derived from the cooperation framework, and not vice versa. According to UNSDCF guidance, those entities with country programme documents (or equivalent) must derive their country programmes from the cooperation framework based on the three options set out in Box 4.

Box 4: Options for derivation of country programme documents from UNSDCFs

Option A: United Nations development system entities adopt the cooperation framework as their own country development programme document; they do not prepare a separate entity document.

Option B: United Nations development system entities develop an entity-specific country development programme document with cooperation framework outcomes copied verbatim.

Option C: United Nations development system entities develop an entity-specific country development programme document with cooperation framework outcomes copied verbatim, plus additional outcomes that are not in the cooperation framework, included only on an exceptional basis to capture normative and standard-setting activities not prioritized in the cooperation framework.

Source: UNSDCF Guidance paragraph 79

Besides listing the above-mentioned options, there is no system-wide guidance on the meaning of derivation. In its place, corporate UNFPA guidance on derivation exists as part of general guidance on country programming in the context of UNSDCFs, and UNFPA country programme documents are subject to an internal quality assurance process, a programme review committee (PRC), that includes examining alignment with the cooperation framework. The evaluation team noted

that UNFPA internal guidance and practice promote alignment, and, in particular, that UNFPA country programme documents have been derived from UNSDCF through Option B as set out in Box 4.⁸¹

However, going beyond copying the UNSDCF outcomes verbatim, an analysis of the positioning of UNFPA transformative results in UNSDCF and country programme documents in Discussion Paper #2 showed a noticeable level, and a variety of ways, of disconnect, and especially between transformative result indicators included in country-specific country programme documents and UNSDCF, which indicates some challenges with alignment. Specifically, an analysis of 70 country packages that looked at situations where the transformative results indicator(s) for maternal health, family planning, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage included in the UNSDCF and country programme documents is/are the same or vary, found that there were different patterns where the two results frameworks do not contain the exact same transformative result indicator(s) (see Box 5). While further qualitative research on reasons for this would be useful, interviews and feedback revealed that inconsistencies can also be attributed to delays in the Resident Coordinator-led UNSDCF formulation process and late changes to cooperation frameworks.

Box 5: Patterns of disconnect between transformative result indicators in UNSDCF and country programme documents, 2018-2022

- There are no transformative result indicator(s) in the UNDAF/UNSDCF results framework, while the country programme document results framework contains transformative result indicator(s)
- There are no transformative result indicator(s) in the country programme document results framework, while the UNDAF/UNSDCF results framework contains transformative result indicator(s)
- There are more transformative result indicators in the UNDAF/UNSDCF results framework than in the country programme document results framework
- There are more transformative result indicators in the country programme document results framework than in the UNDAF/UNSDCF results framework
- There are the same number of transformative result indicator(s) in the UNDAF/UNSDCF and country programme document results frameworks, but the indicators are not the same

Source: Evaluation team Discussion Paper #2

Besides the internal quality assurance process, when producing a new country programme document, the Resident Coordinator is required to provide a written confirmation of alignment. However, the evaluation team noted room for interpretation regarding the scope of the review by the Resident Coordinator based on UNSDCF guidance and the management and accountability framework.⁸² Nonetheless UNFPA has Resident Coordinator letters confirming alignment on file for 50 out of the 51 new country programme documents presented to the Executive Board over the course of 2021 and 2022.⁸³

Furthermore, Executive Board members are provided with an opportunity to comment on all new draft country programme documents during a three-week commenting period; to facilitate that review of draft country programme documents presented to the Board, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (finalized or drafts) are made available at the same time on the UNSDG website. This presents Members and Observers of the Executive Board with the opportunity to check that country programme documents derive from cooperation frameworks.

⁸¹ Review of the CPDs indicates some minor differences in language in some CPD (13 of the 50 examined) possibly due to late cooperation frameworks and the need to use cooperation frameworks before they are finalized.

⁸² UNSDCF Guidance June 2019: "The RC will have the opportunity to review and comment on entities' country development programming documents before their submission to governing mechanisms, with a view to confirming alignment and coherence with the Cooperation Framework, identifying opportunities for synergies and complementarities, and avoiding duplication and overlap". MAF September 2021: "When producing a new country programme, the RC [provides] written confirmation to the respective Regional Director or equivalent of her/his agreement that the document derives from the Cooperation Framework priorities, before the respective entity proceeds with sign-off, in line with the Cooperation Framework Guiding Principles and Guidance. The feedback of the RC is limited strictly to alignment to the Cooperation Framework priorities and should not be a technical review of the CPD".

⁸³ The evaluation team also noted inconsistent data on the matter, potentially due to the lack of a clear definition on alignment and the scope of the RCs' role. The latest UNSDG IMS data suggest that the CPD was shared with the RC and a letter of derivation produced in only 54 per cent of 41 countries with UNSDCF.

Finding 10: UNFPA has been very active in results groups and other collaborative groups where the members of the United Nations country team come together, both as a member and as a chair or co-chair. It has also been fully engaged in the development of joint work plans and has continued to undertake a significant part of its work through United Nations joint programmes.

UNFPA has been active in the results groups set up to support implementation of the UNSDCF as well as in other collaborative groups that more generally foster inter-agency coordination at the country level, some of which existed before the start of the UNDS reform. Table 9 indicates the high percentage of membership in, and leadership of, inter-agency working groups covering cross-cutting issues important to UNFPA in 2019.

TABLE 9: UNFPA engagement in country-level inter-agency working groups 2019

| Group | Total | Member | Percentage total | Chair | Percentage total |
|--|-------|--------|------------------|-------|------------------|
| Gender | 99 | 96 | 97% | 34 | 34% |
| Youth | 39 | 36 | 92% | 27 | 69% |
| Data | 19 | 19 | 100% | 15 | 79% |
| Disability | 3 | 2 | 67% | 1 | 33% |
| Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) | 3 | 3 | 100% | 2 | 67% |

Source: UNSDG IMS 2019

More recent data are not available from the UNSDG information management system as it no longer disaggregates the data by United Nations entity. However, the UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform (see Table 10) revealed the groups UNFPA has chaired or co-chaired (recognizing that not all country representatives responded to the survey and that not all countries have all the groups). It is clear that the cross-cutting issues of gender and youth are where UNFPA is playing a major role. UNFPA is generally very active in gender theme groups and other related groups on gender.

TABLE 10: Inter-agency groups chaired or co-chaired by UNFPA

| Inter-agency groups | Chaired or co-chaired by UNFPA | |
|--|--------------------------------|------------|
| | Country offices | Percentage |
| Gender equality or gender-based violence | 64 | 76% |
| Youth | 37 | 44% |
| Health or sexual reproductive health | 31 | 37% |
| Data | 26 | 31% |
| Monitoring and evaluation | 23 | 27% |
| Other | 19 | 23% |
| Programme | 13 | 15% |

| Inter-agency groups | Chaired or co-chaired by UNFPA | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| | Country offices | Percentage |
| Operations | 11 | 13% |
| Communications | 10 | 12% |
| Human rights | 9 | 11% |
| Unspecified | 1 | 1% |

Source: UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform 2021, Q33

UNFPA country offices provide data to UN-Info managed by the Resident Coordinator offices. The UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform indicated that 19 per cent of respondents were positive about their experience with reporting results in UN-Info and 71 per cent were neutral (Q50).

This positive picture of contribution through UNCT collaborative groups is not without its challenges. Some country offices, especially smaller ones, have not had the necessary capacity to participate in relevant results groups and other coordination or collaboration mechanisms. Numerous interviewees explained how the UNDS reform has reinforced and added new layers of bureaucracy. In particular, smaller and medium-sized agencies such as UNFPA are thinly stretched to participate in results groups and other UNCT collaboration mechanisms, thus negatively impacting its potential contribution and its quality. It is also a major constraint for the multi-country offices where one UNFPA representative is dealing with multiple Resident Coordinators and UNCTs, and a small number of technical advisors participate in collaborative groups across topics and across countries.

Greater information sharing through a variety of means as a result of the UNDS reform provides greater opportunity for UNFPA to contribute to operationalizing the reform through joint work. Learning from each other and about the scope of work of other members of the UNCT, through results and other groups, is often an important opportunity for UNFPA to undertake more joint efforts, but some groups are perceived as being simply for reporting. The lack of harmonization of procedures between members of the UNCT often makes designing and implementing United Nations joint programmes very difficult.

Interviews in the nine country studies and one subregion study indicate that UNFPA country offices often face challenges to operationalizing the UNDS reform through collaborative efforts. For example, engaging in joint programmes is made more difficult through the lack of appropriate guidance.⁸⁴ More generally, poor clarity on mandates, 'mission creep' and some competition for resources can make UNFPA efforts to operationalize the UNDS reform through collaborative efforts more difficult.

Finding 11: The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in UNFPA strengthening collaboration at all levels and this has been facilitated by the reform of the United Nations development system. The pandemic has also presented challenges for deepening collaboration and unity within the process of operationalizing the reform.

Less than two years after the approval of General Assembly resolution 72/279 and in the early stages of its implementation, the repositioning of the UNDS was faced with the challenge of urgently responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. While this challenge was a test of the reform, it was also an opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of the new way of collaborating at the country level. In April 2020, the United Nations completed a United Nations system-wide framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19.⁸⁵ Within this framework, the Resident Coordinator has the mantle of overall leadership of the UNDS COVID-19 response at the country level, with support from the UNDP representative at the country level, working collaboratively with all members of the UNCT, including regional economic commissions and non-resident agencies that carry unique policy solutions to respond to the economic effects of the pandemic.

⁸⁴ UNSDG is preparing new guidance on joint programming to replace the current version from 2014.

⁸⁵ United Nations. A UN framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19. April 2020.

At the same time, UNFPA rolled out its Global Response Plan to the COVID-19 Pandemic, comprising three strategic priorities: (a) continuity of SRHR services, including protection of the health workforce; (b) addressing gender-based violence and harmful practices; and (c) ensuring the supply of contraceptives and reproductive health commodities. UNFPA also served as the lead agency for maternal health, youth and gender in the system-wide framework. At the country level, UNFPA has worked closely with the UNCT under the leadership of empowered Resident Coordinators, to deliver joint responses on the health, humanitarian, and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19.

At the global level, UNFPA collaborated with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General on an ongoing basis to develop and contribute to policy briefs and reports on COVID-19 and gender, human rights, people on the move, children, older persons and mental health and psychosocial support.⁸⁶

The April 2021, the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform revealed that 94 per cent of UNFPA country offices⁸⁷ agreed that the Resident Coordinator had effectively enabled UNFPA active participation in country-level COVID-19 socioeconomic response and recovery efforts. In addition, 74 per cent of respondents agreed that SERPs had led to more integrated support to host governments.⁸⁸ On the funding side, 55 per cent responded “no” to the question concerning challenges in mobilizing resources through the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund/Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF).⁸⁹

The pandemic also pushed for greater collaboration in the area of procurement. UNFPA procurement guidance for personal protective equipment (PPE) noted the importance of joint tenders with sister United Nations agencies.⁹⁰ Where approval for local procurement had been granted, the UNFPA message was to give priority to joint procurement with other United Nations agencies at the local and regional levels as the first option. In line with the thrust of the efficiency agenda, when it came to procuring personal protective equipment, the procurement guidance recognized that the only way UNFPA can secure a portion of the relatively limited production of personal protective equipment is to make the business case attractive to big manufacturers by combining the procurement volumes and spending of all United Nations organizations in one single tender.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also presented challenges to collaboration. While advances in video communications reduced the impact of isolation in many parts of the world, it was not appropriate for all countries where UNFPA works. For implementing a reform based on greater collaboration, some countries report that challenges to communication across United Nations entities has hindered progress, especially in areas where personal relationships are extremely important. Equally, in multi-country offices, where virtual collaboration is the norm across a number of geographically disbursed countries, it was less of challenge to adapt to the new ways of working in the pandemic.

Finding 12: UNFPA contribution to operationalizing the efficiency element of the reform of the United Nations development system is significant, in part thanks to the fact that at the start of the reform the organization already had a high level of engagement in the efficiency agenda.

Although the efficiency agenda is included in the scope of the UNDS reform, much of the work in this area is a continuation of existing efforts (such as the development and implementation of the business operations strategy or the move to common premises). In the case of UNFPA, it was already relying on others for key parts of business operations (for example, UNDP for payroll and treasury services). It has already been noted that UNFPA has been providing leadership in the efficiency agenda through co-chairing the BIG. At the same time, although the organization has been making a significant contribution to the ongoing work in this area of the reform, it is a relatively small player.

Within the UNSDG business operations reforms, three enablers were identified to support the process: (a) mutual recognition; (b) principles for measuring client satisfaction; and (c) principles of costing and pricing services. Agreements to abide by all three were quickly signed by UNFPA (see Table 11). Mutual recognition is an operational principle that allows United Nations agencies to rely on each other’s best practices in terms of policies and procedures. UNFPA, as one of the biggest users of

86 UNFPA. Update on UNFPA response to the COVID-19 pandemic. January 2021.

87 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q13.

88 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q56.

89 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q26.

90 Crisis Response Team (CRT) COVID-19. Interim guidance for regional and country offices on COVID-19 response. 03 April 2020.

common services in the UNDS, has been accepting policies and procedures of some UNFPA service providers for some time,⁹¹ and by signing the mutual recognition statement, formalized existing relationships under one agreement. After signing the mutual recognition statement, UNFPA issued guidance on how to deepen its engagement with the concept, noting that offices should be actively looking for opportunities to benefit from mutual recognition within the areas mentioned in the guidance.

The principles for costing and pricing services ensure that costs for services provided by one United Nations entity to another should be fully recovered, but not over-recovered, covering both the direct and indirect costs. The cost and income associated with providing that service should be transparently reported by the service provider to the recipient. Details of the service and related pricing, together with the objective of value for money should be agreed in a service-level agreement.

The client satisfaction principles govern the provision of back-office shared services to ensure that they are managed with transparency and accountability. They do this through the monitoring and review of key performance indicators established under service-level agreements. They relate to a wide range of services, specifically administration, finance, human resources, information and communication technology, logistics and procurement.

TABLE 11: *Signing the BIG enablers*

| Enabler | Date signed |
|--|------------------|
| Mutual recognition statement | 12 November 2018 |
| Principles for measuring client satisfaction with regard to all back-office services | 8 July 2020 |
| Principles for costing and pricing services | 8 July 2020 |

Source: *Signed documents*

For regional reforms in this area, the fifth recommendation of the Secretary-General was to identify administrative services that could be provided more efficiently to regional offices through common back offices (such as human resources and procurement), similar to efforts at the country level. Where feasible, co-location in common premises would also be sought. This is a process that started before the UNDS reform and although it has been absorbed into it, it has its own energy. Regional operations management teams (OMTs) have been established in all UNSDG regions, but progress on the efficiency aspects of the regional reform has reportedly been limited. Guidance on the Regional Business Operations Strategy⁹² was distributed in 2021.⁹³ UNFPA is a member of all regional operations management teams and chairs the one in the Latin America and the Caribbean region.

91 For example, under UNFPA financial rule 115.2(b), UNFPA has been authorized to “[enter] into a contract in reliance on a procurement decision of another organization”.

92 Local common business operations refer to operations collaboration within a country. Regional common business operations refer to location-dependent services at the regional level, aiming at collaborations to be utilized by several countries in the region. The regional common operations services are captured in a Regional BOS (R-BOS). R-BOS is a results-based framework that focuses on joint business operations at the regional level to scale up the efficiencies and to form regional collaborations, aiming to eliminate duplication, leverage the common bargaining power of the UN and maximize economies of scale. Examples of regional collaboration:

- Facility management services: medical services
- HR services such as regional capacity development and training
- Strategic planning: procurement, market canvassing, and regional LTAs
- Logistics services: regional mapping of warehouse capacity and deployment to accelerate regional humanitarian crisis response.

93 UNSDG. Regional Business Operations Strategy (R-BOS). Guidance document for Regional Operations Management Teams (R-OMT). 5 December 2020.

TABLE 12: Areas of common business operations most important for UNFPA

| Area | Country offices | Percentage of country offices |
|--|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Procurement | 57 | 68% |
| Administration including facilities management | 51 | 61% |
| Finance | 46 | 55% |
| Information and communications technology | 43 | 51% |
| Human resource management | 29 | 35% |
| Logistics | 19 | 23% |
| Fleet management | 5 | 6% |

Source: UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform 2021, Q18

Table 12 indicates the main areas of common business operations where UNFPA is engaged. The information from interviews corresponds with the responses to the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform, which found that the country offices of 90 per cent of respondents had engaged in the implementation of UNCT common business operations, including through the implementation of the business operations strategy (Q20). Data from the UNSDG information management system shows that UNFPA is a member of 87 of the 111 operations management teams, about 78 per cent of the total, but holds no positions of co-chair.

UNFPA has also been engaged in common premises for some time and this has not changed as a result of the introduction of the UNDS reform (see Table 13). These levels are significantly higher than the Funding Compact target of 50 per cent by 2021.

TABLE 13: UNFPA common premises, percentage of total premises

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| Common premises as percentage of total | 70% | 72% | 72% | 72% |

Source: Annual reports of the UNFPA Executive Director

4.4 UNFPA PERFORMANCE IN CONTRIBUTING TO THE REFORM OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Evaluation question 4: To what extent have UNFPA contributions supported a more coherent, effective, efficient and accountable United Nations development system, at all levels? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?

Overall response

Overall, UNFPA has supported a more coherent, effective, efficient and accountable UNDS, especially at the country level.

The reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system and the new generation of UNCTs, including the common country analysis and UNSDCF architecture, have given UNFPA the opportunity to support a more coherent and effective UNDS, especially with a focus on those left behind.

Building on its existing collaboration towards greater efficiency, UNFPA has continued to contribute towards making the UNDS more efficient and has supported new reporting processes to ensure greater accountability.

Evaluation question 4 raises the level of analysis from examining the contribution of UNFPA to asking the question “so what?”. Specifically, it looks for evidence of a plausible link between the contribution of UNFPA and an improvement in the coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of the UNDS at all levels.⁹⁴ While this evaluation is not an assessment of the UNDS reform itself, to answer the evaluation question it is still necessary to identify changes that have so far resulted from the UNDS reform so that the contribution of UNFPA to the changes can be assessed.

The evaluation also recognizes that UNFPA is only one of 37 members of the UNDS/UNSDG and that the Development Coordination Office and Resident Coordinators have a major role to play in the reform. Nonetheless, UNFPA has a role and this section also looks at where it went beyond just participating in the process and where it could do more. It also assesses where UNFPA has gone with the spirit of the reform rather than just engaging in the process, however useful that support may be. While there are no stated outcomes of the UNDS reform, progress across a range of indicators is monitored through the QCPR process. Responses from programme country governments are especially important as they represent the communities that the United Nations is serving.

Finding 13: UNFPA has supported a more coherent United Nations development system through its constructive engagement. In addition to broadly aligning its country programmes with the priorities of cooperation frameworks (see Finding 9), the most important area where UNFPA has contributed is through less duplication of efforts through its strong engagement in inter-agency coordination mechanisms.

Existing evidence suggests that the UNDS reform is resulting in a more coherent UNDS at the country level. The 2021 QCPR survey of programme country governments revealed that 73 per cent of respondents believed that, since the implementation of the new Resident Coordinator system in 2019, the Resident Coordinator has displayed increased or strengthened coherence (reducing duplication of efforts). In addition, 77 per cent believed the Resident Coordinator has increased capacity to coordinate activities in support of country priorities.

Interviews with Resident Coordinators indicate that UNFPA is generally considered one of the most cooperative and constructive United Nations agencies. Resident Coordinator comments include: “should be featured as good practice”, “responds to requests”, “trail blazer in trying to adapt to reform”, “excellent player in UNCT”. This positive perspective on the engagement with UNFPA is consistent with a very informal survey of Resident Coordinators undertaken in early 2020 by the Development Coordination Office.⁹⁵

In a small number of cases, Resident Coordinators were not so happy with the way UNFPA has been working, sometimes in relation to expectations of the role UNFPA would play. For example, some Resident Coordinators had expectations that UNFPA would play a greater role in coordination of the UNCT support for data and statistics. Another perception of some Resident Coordinators was that UNFPA needs to go beyond constructive engagement in the new processes to doing things differently, to be more transformative in its approach. As one Resident Coordinator put it, “UNFPA played a traditional role in the [development of the] UNSDCF but it’s not a traditional UNDAF”. The evaluation team could not assess if these expectations were valid in the contexts but nonetheless they demonstrate a disconnect between the expectations of the Resident Coordinator and the UNFPA country office.

UNFPA directly supported the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system in some countries through its representatives stepping up to be acting Resident Coordinators when needed as well as through supporting Resident Coordinators offices before they were fully staffed. Table 14 indicates that the vast majority of UNFPA country offices contributed in-kind support to the Resident Coordinator office in the form of: (a) strategic analysis and planning; and (b) external communications and advocacy. In 2021, UNFPA representatives acted as Resident Coordinator for a month or more in approximately a third of the countries where UNFPA works. Moreover, 87 per cent of respondents to the UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform were formally invited to participate in the Resident Coordinator and UNCT performance appraisal in 2020.

⁹⁴ The outcome of an improvement in the coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of the UNDS comes from General Assembly resolution 72/279 paragraph 10. More on the meaning of each can be found in Annex IV on methodology.

⁹⁵ Information informally shared by DCO.

TABLE 14: UNFPA in-kind contribution to the Resident Coordinator system 2018-2021 (number of UNFPA country offices)

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| Contribution in-kind provided to the resident coordinator system - strategic analysis and planning | 107 | 89 | 100 | 104 |
| Contribution in-kind provided to the resident coordinator system - external communications and advocacy | 82 | 78 | 93 | 87 |
| Contribution in-kind provided to the resident coordinator system - serving at least a month as acting Resident Coordinator | 39 | 26 | 34 | 41 |

Source: Implementation of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, Report of the Executive Director. Annex 1: 2021 Cumulative progress scorecard and indicator updates. 25 April 2022

Finding 14: The most important contribution to effectiveness made by UNFPA is through helping to make cooperation frameworks more relevant to national priorities and better focused on meeting the needs of those left behind.

It may be too early to assess the effectiveness of the UNDS reform in terms of how it has contributed to the SDGs or even UNSDCF results at the country level, but it is possible to see if the reform has put the UNCTs on the right path to results. Two important factors that will influence effectiveness and where positive results are seen are: (a) the degree to which the UNDS is closely aligned with national needs and priorities through the UNSDCF; and (b) the degree to which the UNDS assesses the situation of, and then addresses the needs of, the poorest, the most vulnerable and those left behind. Table 15 indicates positive feedback from programme country governments on both and a significant improvement over time.

TABLE 15: Programme country government perceptions on key issues related to effectiveness

| Indicator | Baseline value | Baseline year | 2021 |
|--|----------------|---------------|------|
| Percentage of programme country governments that consider the activities of the UNDS, as articulated in the cooperation framework, to be closely aligned with national needs and priorities | 85% | 2017 | 93% |
| Percentage of programme country governments that agree that the UN [assistance] contributes substantially to: | | | |
| Assessing the situation of the poorest, most vulnerable, and those furthest behind | 90% | 2021 | 90% |
| Addressing the development needs of the poorest, the most vulnerable, and those furthest behind | 84% | 2021 | 84% |

Source: QCPR Monitoring Framework 2021-2024

UNFPA has contributed to this positive performance of the UNDS in two major ways. First, UNFPA has contributed to helping the UNDS address national needs and priorities through its support to generation, analysis and dissemination of data and statistics. Specifically, to support the capacity for disaggregating data to reveal the needs of the poorest, the most vulnerable and those left behind. As already noted, statistics, and especially support for a more coordinated UNCT response to national statistical capacity development, is an area where some Resident Coordinators see the potential for UNFPA to play an even greater role.

Second, UNFPA has been playing a role in bringing together certain groups and giving them voice in the common country analysis process of identifying national needs and priorities.

Finding 15: The UNFPA contribution to system-wide efficiency gains has been large for a medium-sized agency, not only reflecting the size of the efficiency gains made by the organization but also the leadership in moving the efficiency agenda forward.

According to the 2022 Report of the Secretary-General on the QCPR, overall, efficiency initiatives in place resulted in savings of over USD 195 million in 2021, which is a 53 per cent increase from USD 127 million in 2020. Over the period 2020-2021, the largest efficiency gains were in the areas of the business operations strategy, with an increase of 144 per cent, followed by entity-specific initiatives, which increased by 47 per cent. Efficiencies from bilateral initiatives were 19 per cent lower over this period. As noted in the previous section, all 131 UNCTs now have a business operations strategy in place, which is ahead of the anticipated schedule. Efficiency gains are currently estimated at USD 460 million over a five-year period 2019-2023.

UNFPA is participating in 126 business operations strategies and its contribution to the benefits of the business operations strategy represents about six per cent of the total. In terms of the benefits of the business operations strategy, UNFPA has avoided costs of USD 30 million, representing 6 per cent of the total costs avoided by the UNDS of USD 350 million. This represents the sixth-largest cost avoidance among the members of the UNDS. Yet, for a medium-sized agency, this is significant. It is difficult to assess the contribution to the increase in quality dimension of efficiency as envisaged by the Secretary-General. But as a percentage of overall expenditures, it is among the highest rates of benefit.

At the time of the report of the Secretary-General on repositioning mid-2017, UNFPA was already outsourcing essential operations and contributing to the efficiency agenda. For example:

- Treasury, benefit entitlements and payroll outsourced to UNDP
- Tax reimbursement, insurance services and mail and pouch services outsourced to the United Nations
- A shared enterprise resource platform with UNDP, UN Women and other United Nations entities (ATLAS).

Noting that some agencies were pushing back with some areas of the reform (the idea of opting out of important initiatives), the Secretary-General thanked the co-chairs of the BIG, including the Deputy Executive Director for Management of UNFPA, for “their remarkable leadership” that has helped overcome some of these challenges and bring back commitment across the system.

Finding 16: UNFPA has supported the annual reporting process at the country level and, while it is supporting the conduct of more effective cooperation framework evaluations through engagement at all levels, there were opportunities to take leadership in strengthening a more integrated system at the country level.

The 2021 survey of programme country governments revealed stronger accountability through the process of annual reporting by the Resident Coordinator. Table 16 indicates that when it comes to annual reporting there has been an improvement in all indicators apart from financial reporting. Although the reporting is the responsibility of the Resident Coordinator and the Resident Coordinator office at the country level, a large part of it is based on the data provided by the members of the UNCT.

TABLE 16: Programme country governments and the quality of UNCT annual reporting

| Indicator | 2017 | 2021 | Change |
|---|------|------|--------|
| Percentage of programme country governments that agree in respect of annual reports provided by the Resident Coordinator to them that: | | | |
| They receive reports regularly enough to meet their needs | 67% | 72% | +5 |
| The information is up to date | 83% | 89% | +6 |

| Indicator | 2017 | 2021 | Change |
|--|------|------|--------|
| The results of the whole UN system are included | 71% | 81% | +10 |
| Sufficient financial data is included | 64% | 58% | -6 |
| The reporting includes resources leveraged for financing the SDGs in the country | NA | 72% | - |
| The reporting includes information on resources mobilized and delivered by the UN development system | NA | 79% | - |
| The reporting is structured around the outcomes of the cooperation framework/UNDAF | 88% | 89% | +1 |
| Reporting is linked to national development results | 73% | 83% | +10 |
| The reporting includes relevant expertise of agencies without physical presence | | 75% | |

Source: QCPR Monitoring Framework 2021-2024 Question 3.1.12

System-wide evaluation of the UNSDCF has also improved since the start of the repositioning reform. The percentage of UNSDCF evaluations⁹⁶ that have: (a) actionable recommendations with a clear target audience and a timeframe for implementation; and (b) a management response, increased from 37 per cent in 2016 to 77 per cent in 2021. Coverage also increased from 71 per cent in 2019 to 91 per cent in 2021. These indicators point to an increase in accountability of the UNDS at the country level.

UNFPA contribution to the development of a better country-level United Nations evaluation system through support to the development of new UNSDCF evaluation guidance has already been described. In so doing, UNFPA has supported greater accountability of the United Nations at the country level. But many challenges were referred to by interviewees, not least the need to examine the efficiency and burden on national stakeholders of a series of country-level evaluations undertaken at the same time as the UNSDCF evaluation. Previously, UNDAF evaluations were under-funded and often weak or not undertaken, even though mandatory since 2010. Between 2010 and 2014, only 33 out of 88 programme countries with active UNDAF cycles submitted UNDAF evaluations as per the 2010 UNGD guidelines. But with the new UNSDCF there is greater emphasis on evaluation and more guidance on conducting them. All UNSDCFs will have an evaluation towards the end of the programme cycle while the number of individual United Nations entity evaluations at the country level has been increasing. The potential for overburdening national stakeholders through conducting multiple evaluations at the same time is a serious risk not just for efficiency but for the reputation of the Resident Coordinator and UNCT.

In this respect, two UNFPA regional offices have provided specific support to the development of the UNSDCF evaluations at the country level and are experimenting with more efficient and effective approaches to country-level evaluation. For some time, the United Nations monitoring and evaluation advisors at the Asia and the Pacific regional level have been active in cooperating to address system-wide issues, and UNDAF/UNSDCF evaluations in particular, through the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific (UNEDAP). UNEDAP is an inter-agency network that promotes an evaluation culture and contributes to United Nations coherence on evaluation. It also aims to strengthen regional evaluation capacities among United Nations agencies and their partners. Ultimately, UNEDAP aspires to ensure that evaluation is addressed as a distinct and strategic function by United Nations agencies and their partners, which share the same goals and vision of promoting human development.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ This would include UNDAF evaluations.

⁹⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/eap/transparency-and-accountability>.

UNEDAP has been experimenting with different approaches to collaboration to reduce these risks. Now, the need is to ensure that lessons are learned systematically and that these lessons are fed back formally to headquarters and UNEG. Similar work is also being undertaken in Latin America and the Caribbean (supporting UNDAF/UNSDCF evaluations, exchange of experiences, joint evaluations, national evaluation capacity development, etc). As an example, a more joined-up approach of individual entity evaluations in Bolivia is being piloted. Moreover, UNEDAP intends to contribute to the professionalization of the evaluation function in the region. There is also a need for system-wide collaboration in the areas of capacity development for evaluation to prevent overlap and fragmentation of approaches across different parts of the government. Again, UNFPA is supporting similar efforts in the Latin America and the Caribbean region.

4.5 EFFECTS OF THE REFORM OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM ON THE STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF UNFPA

Evaluation question 5: To what extent has the ongoing operationalization of the reform of the United Nations development system affected the strategic positioning of UNFPA, at all levels? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?

Overall response

Globally, the reform of the UNDS, which aims to reposition the system to better deliver on the 2030 Agenda, has reaffirmed the relevance of the UNFPA mandate and created a more enabling environment for the organization to position itself to deliver. It seems to be helping UNFPA to achieve greater clarity on mandates and to be reducing competition at the country level in areas relevant to its mandate, but only in combination with informal interactions, and more support from UNFPA headquarters and regional offices is called for.

Independent Resident Coordinators and cooperation frameworks stand out as promising reform elements for strengthening the strategic positioning of UNFPA to pursue its objectives, as do inter-agency groups at country and regional levels, provided that UNFPA country offices are able to engage pro-actively and respond to opportunities. In terms of UNFPA programme priorities, and as was already the case under the previous reform regime, the reform has seen a broad positioning of UNFPA transformative results. Furthermore, UNFPA has been able to emphasize its role as a strategic partner in the cross-cutting areas of gender (including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse), youth and data.

Evaluation question 5 concerns the implications of the UNDS reform and its different reform elements for the strategic positioning of UNFPA with its mandate areas and objectives within the UNDS. The assessment speaks to the extent to which the repositioning agenda and UNDS reform elements have strengthened or weakened the importance, visibility and leadership of UNFPA.

Finding 17: Globally, the reform of the United Nations development system, which aims to reposition the system to better deliver on the 2030 Agenda, has reaffirmed the relevance of the UNFPA mandate and created a more enabling environment for UNFPA to position itself to deliver.

On various occasions early on in the UNDS reform process, UNFPA voiced the expectation that the reform will help to create opportunities to reposition the UNFPA mandate.⁹⁸ Responses to internal UNFPA surveys on the UNDS reform in 2019 and 2021 confirmed that the UNDS reform has been a positive change.

More precisely, UNFPA country office responses generally confirmed that the reform had increased the relevance of UNFPA⁹⁹ and enhanced its ability to engage on normative issues, human rights and the women's rights agenda within UNCTs and with

98 UNFPA Information Sheet September 2018; UNFPA Information Note May 2019.

99 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q4. Strongly agree: 16 country offices (19 per cent); Agree: 49 country offices (58 per cent); Disagree: 18 country offices (21 per cent); Strongly disagree: 1 country office (1 per cent).

Resident Coordinators.¹⁰⁰ The exclusively positive responses of UNFPA regional offices reinforce the overall impression of positive implications of the UNDS reform for the strategic positioning of UNFPA and its mandate areas globally.¹⁰¹

Interviewees also considered the UNDS reform useful for countering push-back on and reinforcing sensitive UNFPA priorities due to the fact that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to which the reform responds, is premised on gender equality and human rights. In particular the LNOB principle, which is at the heart of the UNFPA strategic plan and of the UNDS reform and is a guiding principle of UNSDCFs,¹⁰² was considered a key entry point for promoting UNFPA issues with country programme governments and development partners.

Finding 18: Independent Resident Coordinators and cooperation frameworks stand out as promising reform elements for strengthening the strategic positioning of UNFPA to pursue its objectives, as do inter-agency groups at country and regional levels, provided that UNFPA country offices are able to engage pro-actively and respond to opportunities.

UNFPA has publicly welcomed the decision to empower and strengthen the independence and impartiality of Resident Coordinators.¹⁰³ As far as the implications of the new Resident Coordinator function for UNFPA strategic positioning is concerned, both UNFPA surveys on the UNDS reform confirmed advantages and greater opportunities for the organization. In 2021, a large majority of UNFPA country offices found the support from Resident Coordinators for normative issues and for UNFPA mandate and work to have - at least partially - increased.¹⁰⁴ Specifically, they consistently confirmed that Resident Coordinators had effectively enabled their active participation in country-level COVID-19 socioeconomic response and recovery efforts, an assessment that was reiterated by UNFPA in a note to the Executive Board in May 2022.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, evidence confirms that independent Resident Coordinators are not negatively impacting UNFPA visibility, but are more likely to stand up for UNFPA and its priorities - as part of their representative duties and in policy advocacy and public communications.¹⁰⁶ Advantages of this new arrangement for UNFPA are seen in a more impartial Resident Coordinator, combined with access to higher levels of authority within programme country governments, and their full-time dedication to coordination. At the same time, Resident Coordinators and Resident Coordinators offices have not always been fully capacitated, which is critical for moving inter-agency processes forward, and independent Resident Coordinators reportedly have less funding at their disposal than UNDP had previously. Their affinity to defend UNFPA topics depends on personalities and the sociocultural context, and is not a given – in other words, it is important for UNFPA to engage.¹⁰⁷

Evidence gathered also shows that the UNSDCF development process has been experienced as a strategic opportunity to position UNFPA issues within UNCTs and across the broader spectrum of sustainable development.¹⁰⁸ Interviewees appreciated the UNSDCF process, where, in contrast to UNDAFs, the country programme government and Resident Coordinator are expected to play an enhanced leadership role and from which United Nations agencies are required to derive their country programmes, as an opportune occasion for strategically positioning UNFPA priorities at the country level. Some emphasized how the system-wide strategic planning process has lent itself to integrating UNFPA areas of work across a broad range of sectors covered by UNCTs, and especially UNFPA cross-cutting priorities such as data, youth, gender and human

100 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020; UNFPA country office survey 2021, Q8. Engage within the UNCT: Increased: 24 country offices (29 per cent); Partially increased: 48 country offices (57 per cent); Partially decreased: 7 country offices (8 per cent). Engage with RCs: Increased: 22 country offices (26 per cent); Partially increased: 54 country offices (64 per cent); Partially decreased: 5 country offices (6 per cent).

101 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q3.

102 UNSDCF Guidance June 2019: "The Cooperation Framework ... outlines the UN development system's contributions sought by national stakeholders to reach the SDGs in an integrated manner, with a commitment to leave no one behind, human rights and other international standards and obligations."

103 UNFPA Information Sheet September 2018; UNFPA Information Note May 2019; UNFPA Information Note April 2020.

104 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q9. Engagement in normative issues and women's rights agenda: Increased: 25 country offices (30 per cent); Partially increased: 57 country offices (68 per cent); Partially decreased: 1 country office (1 per cent). Support for UNFPA's work and mandate: Increased: 25 country offices (30 per cent); Partially increased: 53 country offices (63 per cent); Partially decreased: 5 country offices (6 per cent).

105 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q13. Y: 79 country offices (94 per cent); N: 5 country offices (6 per cent). UNFPA. Information Note to the UNFPA Executive Board. 20 May 2022.

106 The majority of country office respondents to the 2021 survey and all UNFPA Regional offices agreed that RCs were contributing to better engagement with host governments. Source: UNFPA country office survey 2021, Q4. Strongly agree: 14 country offices (17 per cent); 45 country offices (54 per cent); Disagree: 23 country offices (27 per cent); Strongly disagree: 2 country offices (2 per cent); UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q3. Strongly agree: 1 regional office; Agree: 5 regional offices.

107 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020.

108 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020.

rights. Others highlighted strategic opportunities to position UNFPA in the context of multi-dimensional challenges such as urbanization, migration, climate change and economic shocks. This said, the evaluation team found that the integration of UNFPA interests in common country analysis and UNSDCF documents necessitates an intensive involvement of UNFPA country offices with the necessary support and guidance from UNFPA regional offices and headquarters, especially for smaller offices. Initially, challenges included outdated country programme document policies and procedures that needed to be aligned to the new UNSDCF guidance.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, it was suggested that the added value of a strong strategic positioning declines in the absence of country programme government ownership and a lack of funding for implementation.¹¹⁰

Chairing and co-chairing UNSDCF results groups and inter-agency thematic groups as part of the country- and regional-level reforms is not only an appreciated contribution to making the UNDS reform work, but can also positively affect UNFPA positioning within the UNDS.¹¹¹ Experience shows that taking on such responsibilities has provided good opportunities for UNFPA to stand out and reinforce its reputation and authority in particular areas. This is also the case at the regional level where issue-based coalitions and other, less formal, coordination mechanisms appear to have been more effective at the technical level than regional collaborative platforms at the policy level in terms of strategically positioning UNFPA. As regards regional collaborative platforms, interviews conducted at the regional level provided a nuanced picture – that is, that the ability of UNFPA to position its substantive interests and concerns has in instances been affected by an initial focus of the new set-up on activities, processes and compliance; perceived lack of commitment by or limited capacities of other United Nations entities; diverse visions and expectations; and difficulties placing issues.

Finding 19: The reform of the United Nations development system has seen a broad positioning of UNFPA transformative results, as was already the case under the previous reform regime. UNFPA has been able to emphasize its role as a strategic partner in the areas of gender (including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse), youth and data.

In terms of actual effects of the UNDS reform on the strategic positioning of UNFPA priorities, most respondents to the UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform and interviewees agreed that the UNDS reform has been useful for positioning the three UNFPA transformative results – which are, ending preventable maternal deaths, ending unmet need for family planning and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices.¹¹² Discussion Paper #2, designed as a quantitative analysis, confirmed that UNFPA transformative results are indeed regular features in common country analyses and UNSDCFs, although there is scope for more focus on child marriage and female genital mutilation in high-incidence countries, and that UNFPA country offices enjoy flexibility to enter into “out-of-UNSDCF” commitments. However, it found no evidence that the transition to UNSDCFs has made a significant difference in terms of increased prioritization of the transformative results vis-à-vis earlier UNDAFs.

Discussion Paper #3 found that the inclusion of humanitarian dimensions in the common country analysis was considered a key benefit of the UNDS reform for UNFPA humanitarian action, in part by facilitating the inclusion of emergency preparedness in cooperation frameworks. However, the paper also revealed that the principle of increased government ownership of the UNSDCF could make it difficult for UNFPA (and other United Nations agencies) to adhere to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.

The evaluation team also took a closer look at any changes to UNFPA positioning in the areas of gender, youth and data where UNFPA has vested interests. It found that the UNDS reform has positively influenced the organization’s position as a leader in gender equality, alongside UN Women.¹¹³ In response to the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform in 2021, 64 country offices answered that they had chaired or co-chaired gender equality and gender-based violence inter-agency thematic groups.¹¹⁴

109 The UNFPA CPD development and approval guidelines were adapted in March 2020; the Programme Review Committee (PRC) user guide in July 2020.

110 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020.

111 Note: The UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 will track the proportion of results groups or issue-based coalitions chair or co-chair posts that UNFPA holds in: (a) United Nations country teams; and (b) United Nations regional collaborative platforms.

112 In connection with the UNSDCF. UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q32. Strongly agree: 23 country offices (27 per cent); Agree: 54 country offices (64 per cent); Disagree: 5 country offices (6 per cent); 1 country office (1 per cent).

113 Besides other evidence, responses from 18 UNFPA country offices to a short validation survey (as of 5.7.2022) also reflect the view that UNFPA has been able to position itself better in the area of gender thanks to the UNDS reform. Better: 9; Slightly better: 4; Same as before: 4; Slightly worse: 1.

114 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q33. 64 country offices correspond to 76 per cent of responding country offices.

Recognizing that not all country offices responded to the survey, this indicates a much higher number of groups with a focus on gender than chaired or co-chaired by UNFPA in 2017-2018 and in the first year of the reform in 2019. It is also a much higher share of groups - at least 62 per cent.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Discussion Paper #1 found that most issue-based coalitions and other collaborative groups co-chaired by UNFPA relate to gender – that is, four out of five groups across all regions.¹¹⁶

More specifically, evidence from interviews and other sources suggests that together with the leading role of UNFPA within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the UNDS reform has also contributed to UNFPA positioning at the country level as an expert organization in the area of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), a concern that is generally receiving more attention.¹¹⁷ Most recent information sets out that UNFPA-funded coordinators are leading PSEA networks in 11 of 30 countries where PSEA coordinators are reported; UNFPA is also providing common services in the area of PSEA in 11 countries, which is more than any other United Nations agency.¹¹⁸ In other contexts, where there are existing technical and financial resources within country offices, UNFPA has volunteered to be the UNCT PSEA focal point.¹¹⁹

UNFPA has played a lead role in the area of youth and appears to have gradually expanded its position since the beginning of the UNDS reform.¹²⁰ In 2021, 37 UNFPA country offices responding to the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform stated that they were chair or co-chair of inter-agency thematic groups on youth.¹²¹ Recognizing that not all country offices responded to the survey, this is considerably more than in 2017-2018 and in 2019. It is also a much higher share - at least 90 per cent.¹²² For the regional level, Discussion Paper #1 lists three out of five youth-related issue-based coalitions and other collaborative groups that are chaired or co-chaired by UNFPA.¹²³ However, interviews revealed some difficulties for UNFPA in shaping and leading the youth agenda because of differing prioritizations, approaches, capacities and resources among the United Nations agencies for working on youth development and participation.

In 2020, the UNFPA Executive Director emphasized to the Executive Board that UNFPA has much to offer UNCTs in the area of data: data for development, on youth, on harnessing the demographic dividend and to create financing momentum.¹²⁴ This evaluation found that the UNDS reform has enabled UNFPA to emphasize its comparative advantage as a data agency, but that not all stakeholders are convinced. As seen above, UNFPA has built itself a reputation by supporting data needs for UNSDCF processes. With the UNDS reform, the number of UNFPA country offices leading UNCTs on data grew in parallel with an increase in the number of inter-agency groups with a focus on data – that is, from 12 in 2017 to at least 26 in 2021 (of a total of 40).¹²⁵ Discussion Paper #1 concludes that UNFPA has positioned itself well as co-chair of data and statistics groups in three regions. However, some stakeholders did expect more of UNFPA in the area of data and statistics.

115 UNSDG IMS 2017-2019. 2017: 29 of 99 (29.3 per cent); 2018: 27 of 97 (27.8 per cent); and 2019: 34 of 99 (34.3 per cent). According to UN-Info, there were a total of 103 inter-agency thematic groups that identified gender as a theme in 2021.

116 Africa region: Harnessing demographic dividends through investments in youth and women's empowerment (Health, education and employment) for sustainable development; Asia and Pacific: Gender equality and human rights; Arab States: Gender justice and equality; Europe and Central Asia: Gender equality.

117 In connection with the MAF. Sources: MAF September 2021 and UNFPA MAF Internal Information Note 2021. Note: PSEA is a corporate priority for UNFPA, which leads PSEA work at the global level, with the Executive Director being the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) 2021 Champion on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (PSEAH). Besides other evidence, responses from 18 UNFPA country offices to a short validation survey (as of 5.7.2022) also reflect the view that UNFPA has been able to position itself better in the area of PSEA thanks to the UNDS reform. Better: 8; Slightly better: 6; Same as before: 4.

118 UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board Annual Session 2022. Background Note on Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH). Undated. Total of 30 PSEA coordinators based on UN-Info for 2021. According to BOS online platform, as of 20.5.2022, UNFPA common services in India, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritania, Mauritius, Montenegro. In response to the UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021, seven country offices reported having chaired or co-chaired a PSEA inter-agency network. Source: UNFPA country office survey 2021, Q33, April 2021. In 2017, UNFPA chaired 1 (of 1); 2018: 1 (of 3); 2019: 2 (of 3). Source: UNSDG IMS 2017-2019.

119 UNFPA MAF Internal Information Note 2021.

120 Besides other evidence, responses from 18 UNFPA country offices to a short validation survey (as of 5.7.2022) also reflect the view that UNFPA has been able to position itself better in the area of youth thanks to the UNDS reform. Better: 5; Slightly better: 9; Same as before: 2; Slightly worse: 2.

121 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q33. 37 country offices correspond to 44 per cent of responding country offices.

122 UNSDG IMS 2017-2019. 2017: 24 of 37 (64.9 per cent); 2018: 30 of 35 (85.7 per cent); and 2019: 27 of 39 (69.2 per cent). According to UN-Info, there were 41 inter-agency groups with a thematic focus on youth in 2021.

123 Africa region: Harnessing demographic dividends through investments in youth and women's empowerment (Health, education and employment) for sustainable development; Latin America and the Caribbean: Youth; Europe and Central Asia: Adolescents and youth.

124 UNFPA Executive Director Statement February 2020.

125 2017: UNFPA chaired 12 of 16 (75.0 per cent); 2018: 14 of 20 (70.0 per cent); 2019: 15 of 19 (79.0 per cent). Source: UNSDG IMS 2017-2019. In 2021, 26 country offices reported having been chair or co-chair of such groups. Source: UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q33. 26 country offices correspond to 31 per cent of responding country offices. According to UN-Info, there were 40 inter-agency groups with a thematic focus on data in 2021.

Finding 20: Reform elements seem to be helping to achieve greater clarity on agency mandates and to be reducing competition in areas relevant to the UNFPA mandate at the country level, but only in combination with informal interactions, and more support from UNFPA headquarters and regional offices is called for.

One of the key interests of UNFPA during the design phase of the UNDS reform was for the reform to clearly delineate roles and complementarities among the United Nations agencies in order to address recurrent issues of mandate encroachment and duplication of efforts.¹²⁶ Responses to the UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform indicate that competition with other United Nations agencies had initially increased.¹²⁷ However, more recently, interviews with UNFPA staff at the country level and responses to a validation survey conducted as part of this evaluation suggest that the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system and the new generation of UNCTs are indeed helping somewhat to provide more clarity regarding agency mandates and division of labour on the ground and to decrease competition.¹²⁸

But relying on the reform is not sufficient. Besides the necessity of UNFPA country offices and regional offices having adequate resources and capacities at their disposal for fulfilling their roles and not leaving gaps, informal dialoguing and interactions outside formal UNDS reform mechanisms have also been an important enabler, facilitated by physical vicinity in common premises or through virtual channels - as was necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite all progress, in practice, there is still insufficient clarity on mandates and unhealthy competition for recognition, visibility and for non-core resources – for example, for programmes and normative work in the areas of gender equality and gender-based violence, adolescents and youth, and maternal health. Some UNFPA staff pointed to limitations at the country level, including for Resident Coordinators and programme country governments, to prevent or solve clashes, and the need for more support from UNFPA headquarters and regional offices.

4.6 EFFECTS OF THE REFORM OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM ON THE ABILITY OF UNFPA TO DELIVER RESULTS

Evaluation question 6: To what extent has the ongoing operationalization of the reform of the United Nations development system affected UNFPA ability to deliver results? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?

Overall response

The requirement for UNFPA country programme documents to derive from cooperation frameworks has challenged the timely preparation of, and seamless transition to, new country programmes, especially in humanitarian situations. However, thanks to flexible guidelines, this has not unduly delayed submission of country programmes to the Executive Board. Strategic planning and programming arrangements established at the country level have helped UNFPA to leverage other United Nations agencies for delivering on its mandate, recognizing that personalities are also an influential factor. Furthermore, an enhanced emphasis on joint resource mobilization has created opportunities. More UNFPA country offices are engaged in United Nations joint programmes than prior to the reform.

In terms of the UNFPA funding situation, data for Member State commitments to the Funding Compact provide a balanced picture for UNFPA, globally. Important downsides are the low share of core resources and the narrow funding base, and the finding that financial and political landscapes have a greater influence on funding patterns. UNFPA has especially benefited from inter-agency pooled funds. Multi-partner trust funds that are central to the reform, including the Spotlight Initiative, the Joint SDG Fund and the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, have benefited many UNFPA country offices, but have had only a minor impact on the UNFPA global funding situation.

126 UNFPA. Secretary General's report on repositioning of the UN development system: UNFPA internal reflections and strategic positioning. Draft 15 August 2017.

127 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q9. Increased: 21 country offices (25 per cent); Partially increased: 30 country offices (36 per cent); Partially decreased: 27 country offices (32 per cent); Decreased: 2 country offices (2 per cent).

128 Validation survey as of 7 July 2022: Division of labour: Agree: 6; Slightly agree: 7; Slightly disagree: 3; Disagree: 2. Competition: Agree: 6; Slightly agree: 7; Slightly disagree: 3; Disagree: 2.

Efforts to revamp the regional approach have not significantly changed UNFPA country office interactions with the regional level for better programme delivery, whereby engagement of peer support groups appears to have been more useful for UNFPA than that of issue-based coalitions. Similarly, the reform is only starting to produce system-wide evaluative evidence that UNFPA can use for learning purposes and to improve its performance. While the coverage of cooperation framework evaluations is expected to be higher than for UNDAFs, their quality and usefulness for UNFPA remains to be seen. The main benefit for UNFPA so far of having UN-Info has been gradually better access to information.

Evaluation question 6 talks to the effects of the UNDS reform on the ability of UNFPA to deliver on the ground. It discusses the extent to which the UNDS reform has affected the ability of UNFPA to leverage other United Nations agencies through joint activities and joint programmes in particular and to mobilize funding for delivering on its strategic plan and development programmes. It also speaks to regional-level reforms and efforts to strengthen the accountability of the UNDS as enablers and opportunities for UNFPA.

Finding 21: Strategic planning and programming arrangements established at the country level as part of the reform of the United Nations development system have helped UNFPA to leverage other United Nations agencies for delivering on its mandate, however personalities are also an influential factor.

Both surveys of UNFPA country offices in 2019 and 2021 revealed increased opportunities for joint programming and activities between UNFPA and other United Nations agencies thanks to the UNDS reform. In 2021, the ability of UNFPA to partner with stakeholders and to engage UNCTs on UNFPA-specific mandate areas was considered for the most part to have increased.¹²⁹ Furthermore, more survey respondents affirmed than disagreed that the UNSDCF had led to increased participation in joint programming initiatives.¹³⁰

The UNSDG information management system confirms benefits for UNFPA. Data show that the number of joint programmes with UNFPA participation¹³¹ and the number of UNFPA country offices working with other agencies through joint programmes grew steadily between 2017 and 2019 when the UNDS reform was launched (see Table 17), reduced rapidly in 2020, presumably linked to the outbreak of COVID-19, and increased again in 2021.¹³² Although it is not possible to say to what extent joint programmes were initiated by UNFPA, in 2021, 70 per cent of the organization's 121 country offices had at least one joint programme compared to 64 per cent in 2017.

TABLE 17: Number of United Nations joint programmes with UNFPA participation 2017-2021

| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---|------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Total number of country offices | 77 | 79 (+2.6%) | 86 (+8.8%) | 68 (-20.9%) | 85 (+25.0%) |
| Total number of joint programmes | 147 | 162 (+10.9) | 192 (+18.5%) | 133 (-30.7%) | 189 (+42.1%) |
| Percentage of country offices with at least one joint programme | 64% | 65% | 71% | 56% | 70% |

Source: Evaluation team from UNSDG IMS UNFPA Agency Reports 2017, 2018, 2019; IMS 2020, 2021

129 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q8. "Partner with stakeholders": Increased (14 country offices; 17 per cent); Partially increased (51 country offices; 61 per cent); Partially decreased (13 country offices; 15 per cent); Decreased (0 country offices; 0 per cent). "Engage the UNCT on UNFPA's specific mandate areas": Increased (18 country offices; 23 per cent); Partially increased (53 per cent; 63 per cent); Partially decreased (7 country offices; 8 per cent); Decreased (1 country office; 1 per cent).

130 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q39. Y: 33 country offices (39 per cent); N: 11 country offices (13 per cent); N/A: 40 country offices (48 per cent).

131 Based on UNSDG IMS/UN-Info data for "active" JPs - i.e., disbursing funds. Numbers reported by UNFPA to its Executive Board differ: 118 country offices participated in JPs in 2018; 93 per cent of country offices participated in 219 JPs in 2019; 93 per cent of country offices participated in 2019 JPs in 2020; over 93 per cent of country offices participated in 397 JPs in 2021. Sources: UNFPA ED Annual Report 2019; UNFPA ED Annual Report 2020; UNFPA ED Annual Report 2021; UNFPA ED Annual Report 2022. UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 targets for # of JPs are 101 (2022); 103 (2023); 105 (2024) and 105 (2025) against a baseline of 108.

132 By comparison, UNDP participated in the largest number of JPs in 2021 (320), followed by UNICEF (251), UNFPA (189) and UN Women (157).

Interviews confirmed that the UNSDCF formulation process, as well as UNSDCF results groups and other inter-agency coordination mechanisms where UNFPA is a member or which it (co-)chairs, can be useful platforms for scaling up UNFPA activities and results. Interviewees provided examples where these arrangements have facilitated UNFPA outreach to, and more in-depth collaboration with, other United Nations agencies. Examples of new entry points through non-traditional partnerships in the countries studied in more depth as part of this evaluation are: collaboration with International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on youth; with the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and WFP on agriculture and food security; with UNHCR on gender-based violence, youth and refugees; and with International Office of Migration (IOM) on SRHR.

However, Discussion Paper #2 suggests that there is room for laying a more robust basis for collaboration and delivery of results through UNSDCFs. Specifically, the paper, designed as a quantitative analysis, found discrepancies between the very high level of positioning of the transformative results as UNCT priorities in UNSDCFs and the use of transformative results indicators to guide UNCT planning and country-level programming and monitoring. Moreover, the discussion paper found a noticeable level of disconnectedness across common country analyses, UNSDCFs and UNFPA country programme documents at the individual country level in terms of coverage and prioritization of the transformative results.

Furthermore, it can be inferred from the evidence that UNFPA cannot rely on the existence of reform mechanisms alone for leveraging the human and financial resources and networks of other United Nations agencies. Many interviewees stressed the significance of the new generation of UNCTs having the right mix of personalities and chemistry for effective inter-agency and bilateral collaboration and for promoting the UNFPA agenda.

Finding 22: Globally, data for Member State commitments to the Funding Compact provide a balanced picture for UNFPA, important downsides being the low share of core resources and the narrow funding base. Global and national financial and political landscapes have a greater influence on funding patterns than the Funding Compact.

Following General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system, in 2019, the Secretary-General submitted the United Nations system-wide Funding Compact for consideration by ECOSOC and the General Assembly. Generally speaking, the Funding Compact obliges the UNSDG to accelerate results for countries through more collaboration, while reporting on needs and results more clearly, consistently, transparently and efficiently. Member States voluntarily commit to aligning their funding with the requirements of UNSDG entities, in terms of quantity, quality and stability of both core and non-core resources,¹³³ thus contributing to higher delivery and reduced competition.

Since the design stage of the UNDS reform in 2017, UNFPA has organized structured funding dialogues with its Executive Board on trends linked to development funding and the implementation of the Funding Compact.¹³⁴ Document review showed that core and non-core mobilization targets for the UNFPA strategic plan cycle 2018-2021 were surpassed (see Table 18).¹³⁵ In 2020, core resources revenue reached its highest level since 2014 when a downward trend had set in. In 2021, core resources continued to exceed the strategic plan 2018-2021 minimum target of USD 350.0 million,¹³⁶ but declined slightly compared to 2020. Under the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021, annual non-core resources of USD 525.0 million¹³⁷ were projected, an amount that was comfortably exceeded in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.¹³⁸

In terms of the quality of funding, UNFPA has continued to receive a large portion of its contributions as non-core resources in recent years, including for its humanitarian work (see Table 18).¹³⁹ While UNFPA core resources as a share of overall funding

133 UNSG Funding Compact Report 2019.

134 <https://www.unfpa.org/structured-funding-dialogues>.

135 UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, contribution targets: overall total of USD 3,500 million (USD 1,400 million for regular resources and USD 2,100 million for other resources). Source: Revised Integrated Budget 2018-2021.

136 Revised UNFPA Integrated Budget 2018-2021; UNFPA Structured Funding Dialogue Report 2019: One of the specific objectives that UNFPA expects to achieve through the structured funding dialogues are to maintain or surpass the minimum floor of USD 350 million in core resources throughout the entire cycle of the strategic plan, 2018-2021.

137 Revised UNFPA Integrated Budget 2018-2021.

138 UNFPA Statistical and Financial Review Reports 2020, 2021, 2022; UNFPA Structured Funding Dialogue Report Annex 2021.

139 Note: UNFPA humanitarian co-financing revenue fell slightly in 2020 with total contributions of USD 273 million, but corresponding to 37 per cent of UNFPA co-financing revenue, the highest percentage of co-financing at that point. UNFPA received USD 293 million in 2019 (30 per cent of co-financing revenue) and USD 172.3 million in 2018. Source: UNFPA Structured Funding Dialogue Report 2021.

for development-related activities increased between 2018 and 2020, it dropped to 28 per cent in 2021.¹⁴⁰ This was above the average system-wide share of 26.9 per cent,¹⁴¹ but below the Funding Compact target of 30 per cent. Another important downside is that the number of donors that provide core resources has remained below target,¹⁴² although it increased in 2021 - specifically, to 101 - after dropping from 150 in 2010 to 120 in 2017 and 96 in 2020, when it declined to less than 100 for the first time.¹⁴³ Even so, UNFPA core resources are highly reliant on 15 governments affiliated with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) that contributed 98 per cent of total core resources in 2020.¹⁴⁴

Non-core resources for UNFPA can take on various forms. As opposed to project/programme-specific funds, non-core funding provided by Member States through development-related inter-agency pooled funds and entity-specific thematic funds¹⁴⁵ are considered of higher quality in the sense that they should provide the organization with more flexibility than tightly earmarked funds. Data show that the share of UNFPA non-core resources received through these channels, and especially inter-agency pooled funds, have presented a significant and steadily increasing portion of the organization's non-core funding flows (see Table 18), and has increased far beyond the respective Funding Compact targets and the UNDS combined average of 17.6 per cent.¹⁴⁶

TABLE 18: UNFPA core and non-core resources revenue 2017-2021, USD

| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Core | 349,900,000 | 378,800,000 | 373,500,000 | 416,800,000 | 412,600,000 |
| Non-core (including humanitarian) | 717,600,000 | 876,800,000 | 996,700,000 | 850,900,000 | 1,051,500,000 |
| Total | 1,067,500,000 | 1,255,600,000 | 1,370,200,000 | 1,267,700,000 | 1,464,100,000 |
| Core, as percentage of total for development-related activities (target: 30%) | 19.4% | 30.0% | 28.0% | 33.0% | 28.0% |
| Percentage of non-core resources for development-related activities channelled through single-agency thematic funds (target: 6%) | 3.0% | 23.0% | 25.6% | 22.0% | n/a |
| Percentage of non-core resources for development-related activities channelled through inter-agency pooled funds (target: 10%) | 5.0% | 18.0% | 26.0% | 32.0% | n/a |

Source: Evaluation team from United Nations Population Fund Executive Board documentation

140 UNFPA Structured Funding Dialogue Report Annex 2021; Statement of the UNFPA Executive Director to the Executive Board at its annual session 2022.

141 QCPR Monitoring Framework 2022.

142 UNFPA Structured Funding Dialogue Report 2019: One of the specific objectives that UNFPA expects to achieve through the structured funding dialogues are to increase the number of core contributors from 120 (2017 baseline) to 150 (2018 target) and maintain that level throughout the entire cycle of the strategic plan, 2018-2021.

143 UNFPA Structured Funding Dialogue Report 2021.

144 Ibid.

145 UNFPA Supplies Partnership; Maternal and Newborn Health Thematic Fund; Humanitarian Thematic Fund; Population Data Thematic Fund.

146 QCPR Monitoring Framework 2022.

The UNFPA resource environment remains volatile. Funding flows have moved in different directions and have been influenced by different factors and circumstances. The implications of the UNDS reform and of UNFPA performance in the reform for the organization's share of donor funding is not evident. A considerable critical stance regarding the benefits of the Funding Compact on UNFPA resource mobilization at the country level was noted. While, in response to the UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform, 50 country offices either "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed", only 34 country offices agreed that the Funding Compact had enabled better resource mobilization.¹⁴⁷ Document review¹⁴⁸ and interviews did not reveal instances where improvements to the commensurateness and quality of funding were explicitly attributed to the UNDS reform. Where reasons were provided, decreases in contributions were explained by currency fluctuations and changing funding priorities (for example, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine) while increases were explained by currency fluctuations; the pandemic; humanitarian funding; investment revenues and cost-recovery charges.

Finding 23: In the context of continued competition for funding, joint resource mobilization has created opportunities for UNFPA to fund its country programmes. United Nations joint programmes have become more important and benefited more UNFPA country offices and programme countries than prior to the reform.

With the Funding Compact and the management and accountability framework, the concept of joint resource mobilization is an element that has been strengthened vis-à-vis previous phases of the United Nations reform.¹⁴⁹ Overall, in the context of continued competition for funding, evidence from interviews and the UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform suggests that reform mechanisms as well as other opportunities that promote partnerships for advancing the SDGs have helped UNFPA to access more non-core resources for implementing its country programmes.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, data from the UNSDG information management system in Table 18 above sets out that the share of UNFPA country offices benefiting from resource mobilization through joint programmes has increased from 64 per cent in 2017 to 70 per cent in 2021 and, post-COVID-19 pandemic, the number of joint programmes with UNFPA participation has nearly reached the highest number recorded in 2019 – that is, 189 (compared to 147 in 2017).

The UNSDG information management system does not indicate sources of funding nor agency shares of total joint programme budgets. However, document review confirmed that UNFPA has been able to allocate a high and increasing proportion of its non-core resources for development-related joint activities – that is, 15 per cent in 2018; 18 per cent in 2019 and 26.5 per cent in 2020 (against a system-wide target of 15 per cent).¹⁵¹

At the same time, the evaluation team noted that certain factors largely outside the organization's control can reduce potential UNFPA benefits from joint resource mobilization – for example, the thematic scope of funds that does not fit the UNFPA mandate; eligibility of countries to apply for funding; the level of Resident Coordinator and Resident Coordinator office support for UNFPA participation in joint resource mobilization; and the quality and timeliness of joint funding proposals. Internally, the organization has recognized that UNFPA headquarters and regional offices should better support country offices in developing proposals for joint initiatives.¹⁵²

Finding 24: Financially, UNFPA has greatly benefited from Member State contributions to inter-agency pooled funds. Six multi-partner trust funds that are central to the reform of the United Nations development system, including the Spotlight Initiative, the Joint SDG Fund and the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, have benefited many UNFPA country offices, but monetarily speaking, have had only a minor impact on the UNFPA global funding situation.

147 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q24. Strongly agree: 2 country offices (2 per cent); Agree: 32 country offices (38 per cent); Disagree: 42 country offices (50 per cent); Strongly disagree: 8 country offices (10 per cent).

148 UNFPA Statistical and Financial Review Report 2022; UNFPA Statistical and Financial Review Report 2021; UNFPA Statistical and Financial Review Report 2020.

149 MAF September 2021.

150 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020; UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021, Q8. Partially increased: 57 country offices (68 per cent of respondents); Increased: 13 country offices (15 per cent); Partially decreased: 7 country offices (8 per cent); Decreased: 3 country offices (4 per cent).

151 UNFPA Structured Funding Dialogue Report Annex 2021. Funding Compact indicator "Fraction of United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities reporting at least 15 per cent of development related expenditures on joint activities; baseline (2017): 9/29 or 31 per cent; target (2021): 75 per cent.

152 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020; UNFPA Information Note April 2020.

UNFPA has fared very well as regards the system-wide 10 per cent-target of non-core resources for development-related activities channelled through inter-agency pooled funds.¹⁵³ Starting from a high level, the organization has reported a significant increase in inter-agency pooled funding as a share of its development-related non-core resources – that is, from 18 per cent in 2018 to 26 per cent in 2019 and 32 per cent in 2020.¹⁵⁴

While not comprehensive, an analysis of data contained in the MPTF Platform disclosed increasing budgets approved for UNFPA from all funds and joint programmes administered by the MPTF Office since the beginning of the UNDS reform in 2019 up to and including 2021 (see Table 19).¹⁵⁵ A comparison of the MPTF-approved budgets against total other resources revenue revealed that MPTF-approved budgets have corresponded to 10.3 per cent of total other resources for UNFPA.

TABLE 19: UNFPA MPTF approved budgets versus total other resources 2019-2021, USD

| | Total UNFPA MPTF approved budgets | In percentage of total other resources |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 2019 | 75,806,716 | 7.6% |
| 2020 | 102,922,552 | 12.1% |
| 2021 | 119,051,446 | 11.3% |
| Total | 297,780,713 | 10.3% |

Source: Evaluation team from MPTF Office Gateway, 9 May 2022.

New financing mechanisms in support of inter-agency collaboration and the UNDS reform have been established since 2018/2019 and are administered by the MPTF Office – these are, the Joint SDG Fund, the Migration Fund and the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. Earlier MPTFs, frequently referred to during interviews, have continued to allocate money for joint programmes under the leadership of Resident Coordinators – for example, the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), the United Nations Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and the Spotlight Initiative.

An analysis of data contained in the MPTF Platform disclosed budgets allocated to UNFPA – that is, to 93 UNFPA country offices – from the above-mentioned six MPTFs. Research revealed that UNFPA has managed to raise funds from all MPTFs (see Table 20), a grand total of USD 179,933,211 since 2017 and USD 164,148,706 (91.2 per cent) since the beginning of the UNDS reform (2019-2022), of which USD 13,240,190 (8.1 per cent) is from those MPTFs established since 2018/2019. A comparison of the approved budgets since the beginning of the UNDS reform in 2019 up to and including 2021 against UNFPA total other resources revenue, revealed that the six MPTFs have had only a minor impact on the UNFPA funding situation globally – that is, 4.7 per cent of total other resources revenue.¹⁵⁶

This said, the most important of the six MPTFs by far in monetary terms is the Spotlight Initiative, from which UNFPA has mobilized more funds than each of UNDP and UNICEF and a similar amount to UN Women. UNFPA is also in a comparatively good position as regards the UNPRPD Fund. The PBF is also an important source of non-core resources, but UNFPA has raised less from this fund than its sister United Nations agencies.

153 Funding Compact indicator “Percentage of non-core resources for development-related activities channelled through inter-agency pooled funds; baseline (2017): 5 per cent; target (2023): 10 per cent. Development-related inter-agency pooled funds are commingled contributions to a multi-entity funding mechanism, not earmarked for a specific United Nations entity. Funds are held by a United Nations fund administrator, and fund allocations are made by a United Nations-led governance mechanism for activities specifically aimed at promoting the sustainable development of programme countries, with a focus on long-term impact. Source: UNSG Funding Compact Report 2019.

154 32 per cent corresponds to USD 272 million. UNFPA Structured Funding Dialogue Report and Annex 2021. And compared as follows in 2020 for UNDP (8 per cent); UNICEF (9 per cent) and UN Women (32 per cent). Sources: UNICEF Funding Compact Progress 2021; UNDP Funding Compact Progress 2021; UN Women Funding Compact Progress 2021. Note: The UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 will track the proportion of UNFPA co-financing funded through pooled funds in IRRF OE3.3.

155 Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office Gateway <https://mptf.undp.org/>. As of 9.5.2022. While UNDP clearly benefited more in monetary terms during the same period (USD 1,101,984,369), UNFPA is within a similar range as UNICEF (USD 333,359,2018) and UN Women (USD 298,967,456).

156 2019: USD 30,908,363; 2020: USD 43,249,822; 2021: USD 42,303,634. Total 2019-2021: USD 137,085,895 (4.7 per cent of 2,899,100,000).

TABLE 20: Total approved budgets from selected MPTFs 2017-2022, USD

| MPTF | UNFPA (number of country offices) | UNDP | UNICEF | UN Women |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| JSDG Fund | 5,021,568 (27) | 59,473,343 | 38,786,840 | 8,146,468 |
| Migration | 473,362 (2) | 2,469,870 | 1,750,000 | 1,820,000 |
| COVID-19 | 7,810,450 (31) | 14,066,206 | 14,380,971 | 7,287,163 |
| Total | 13,305,380 | 76,009,419 | 54,917,811 | 17,253,631 |
| Spotlight | 108,823,225 (26) | 95,519,773 | 80,566,537 | 183,091,553 |
| UNPRPD | 4,079,135 (27) | 16,326,040 | 4,122,752 | 2,872,911 |
| Peacebuilding | 53,725,471 (39) | 333,742,471 | 60,872,773 | 72,141,638 |
| Total | 179,933,211 | 521,597,703 | 200,479,873 | 275,359,733 |

Source: Evaluation team from MPTF Office Gateway, 9 May 2022.

Finding 25: The requirement for UNFPA country programme documents to derive from cooperation frameworks has challenged the timely preparation of, and seamless transition to, new country programmes, especially in humanitarian situations, but, thanks to flexible guidelines, has not unduly delayed submission of country programme documents to the Executive Board.

In line with the UNFPA Policy and Procedures for Development and Approval of the Country Programme Document of May 2018,¹⁵⁷ UNFPA guidance on country programming in the context of UNSDCF (March 2020)¹⁵⁸ informed UNFPA country offices that draft country programme documents may be submitted to any session of the Executive Board in order to afford countries sufficient time to plan. Specifically, country programme documents starting in January, for example, did not need to go for approval to the second regular session of the preceding year in order to provide countries with the opportunity to finalize their country programme documents in line with UNSDCFs. Furthermore, country programme documents may be extended to allow country offices to finalize new country programme documents in line with the UNSDCF and in case of government delays in UNSDCF approval. (First-time extensions of country programmes up to one year are approved by the Executive Director and presented to the Executive Board for information. All other requests for extensions of country programmes are submitted to the Executive Board for approval.)

Country programme documents for 37 countries were extended over the period from 2020 to 2022, two-thirds of which for the first time (see Annex IX). The document review revealed that UNFPA mainly justified extensions with the need to align country programme documents to delayed UNSDCFs because of changes in government, crisis situations (including COVID-19) and alignment with new national development plans or pending finalization of the UNSDCFs. The document review also supports the issue already raised by Discussion Paper #3 – that is, that humanitarian programme countries are more likely to have delays in getting UNSDCFs approved by governments.¹⁵⁹ While there are a considerable number of programme extensions caused by delayed UNSDCFs, the extensions are in line with UNFPA corporate guidance. Many programme extensions may also have happened to accommodate national contexts.

157 Updated in July 2022.

158 UNFPA. Country Programme Document (CPD) in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Guide For UNFPA Field Offices Developing New Programmes. Policy and Strategy Division, Operational Support and Quality Assurance Branch. March 2020.

159 The evaluation team noted that of the 37 countries, 17 have humanitarian response plans (HRPs); a further 11 countries figure on the list of humanitarian countries according to the 2022 Humanitarian Action Overview (HAO).

Despite flexibility provided by corporate guidance in terms of timing the submission of country programme documents to Executive Board sessions, interviewed UNFPA staff reported negative implications of timing challenges related to parallel UNSDCF and country programme document formulation processes and to delays in the Resident Coordinator-led implementation of UNSDCF roadmaps. These negative implications took the form of staff frustration, stress and the risk of programmatic incoherence. UNFPA is reportedly collaborating on this issue with the Development Coordination Office, and as recent as October 2021 revamped the UNFPA country programme development and approval processes.¹⁶⁰

Finding 26: Efforts to revamp the regional approach have not significantly changed UNFPA country office interactions with the regional level for better programme delivery. Engagement of peer support groups in the common country analysis and UNSDCF processes appears to have been more useful for UNFPA than that of issue-based coalitions.

Regional reforms have by nature been designed in large part to support Resident Coordinators and UNCTs, and by so doing should also indirectly help UNFPA be more effective. Keeping in mind that the regional-level reforms were initiated during the second half of 2018 but only formalized in August 2020 with the adoption by the General Assembly of five recommendations deriving from a regional review,¹⁶¹ the evaluation team thus explored to what extent revamping the regional approach has benefited the work of UNFPA country offices.

In 2021, UNFPA country offices responding to the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform were split between agreeing and disagreeing that regional reforms had resulted in increased support from the regional UNDS to country offices and subregional offices.¹⁶² Responses to the UNFPA regional office survey on UNDS reform were more positive, with the majority of UNFPA regional offices agreeing that the regional reforms had resulted in increased support.¹⁶³ In particular, the regional offices appeared to consider support provided by peer support groups - which pre-date the UNDS reform but were reformed with new terms of reference in 2021 and are newly chaired by the Development Coordination Office - to be more effective than that of issue-based coalitions.¹⁶⁴ Responses to a validation survey conducted as part of this evaluation suggest that this may still be the case, and that direct support from UNFPA regional offices is more appreciated.¹⁶⁵

Based on these survey responses and other sources, Discussion Paper #1 concluded that support from issue-based coalitions has not been universal, and while some have been stronger and more focused on the country level than others, the country level has yet to see benefits. Furthermore, the paper concluded that peer support groups have generally provided valuable feedback and hands-on support in the preparation of UNSDCFs. Some good examples were identified, such as very positive feedback from the country level on the work of the human rights and gender issue-based coalition in Asia and Pacific; active engagement of the gender equality issue-based coalition with UNCTs in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; and the pragmatic and tactical work of the opportunity-issue based coalitions on strengthened integrated and statistical systems for sustainable development in the Africa region.

Another paper by the evaluation team, Discussion Paper #3, speaks to the regional UNDS reform from the perspective of humanitarian and vulnerable contexts. In conclusion it found that the main regional reform element to support UNFPA country office humanitarian efforts has been the issue-based coalitions that cover issues of particular importance in humanitarian contexts, such as on: peace, security and human rights; resilience building; the nexus; climate change; and large movements of people and displacement. However, not all are equally effective or known at the country level.

160 UNFPA. Revamping the UNFPA Country Programme Development and Approval Processes - Roll-Out Plan. Endorsed - 13 October 2021.

161 General Assembly resolution 74/297.

162 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q4. Strongly agree: 2 country offices (2 per cent); Agree: 37 country offices (44 per cent); Disagree: 40 country offices (48 per cent); Strongly disagree: 3 country offices (4 per cent).

163 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q6.

164 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q10 & Q11.

165 Validation survey as of 5 July 2022. IBCs: Agree: 2; Slightly agree: 5; Slightly disagree: 4; Disagree: 3; Do not know: 4. PSG: Agree: 6; Slightly agree: 6; Slightly disagree: 3; Disagree: 1; Do not know: 1. Support from regional offices: Agree: 13; Slightly agree: 3; Slightly disagree: 1; Disagree: 1.

Finding 27: The reform of the United Nations development system is only starting to produce system-wide evaluative evidence that UNFPA can use for learning purposes and to improve its performance. While the coverage of cooperation framework evaluations is expected to be higher than for United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, their quality and usefulness for UNFPA remains to be seen. The main benefit for UNFPA so far of having UN-Info has been gradually better access to information.

The UNDS reform also aims for improvements in the area of strategic direction, oversight and accountability for system-wide results, and it appears that UNFPA country offices generally expect this reform component to benefit UNFPA.¹⁶⁶

In particular, as per the Funding Compact, the UNDS reform is expected to increase collaboration on joint and independent system-wide evaluation products to improve United Nations support on the ground.¹⁶⁷ New evaluation mechanisms have been set up or are being set up and capacities increased in New York and in some regions to manage evaluations. Pending the establishment of an independent system-wide evaluation office, a senior coordinator for system-wide evaluation was appointed to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. Furthermore, the Development Coordination Office recruited an evaluation advisor and UNEG guidance on UNSDCF evaluation was finalized in September 2021. No standard structure for system-wide evaluation is prescribed at the regional level, but the evaluation team was made aware of arrangements in the Asia Pacific¹⁶⁸ and Latin America and the Caribbean regions.

Respondents to the UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform were split between being familiar and unfamiliar with the new system-wide evaluation workstream.¹⁶⁹ Interviews with UNFPA and other UNCT members at the country level revealed that thinking about and collaborating around new joint and system-wide evaluations has not become a priority concern since. Indeed, the evaluation team found that not much has changed in terms of availability and quality of evaluative evidence for UNCTs in general and UNFPA in particular. According to information provided by the United Nations Evaluation Group to ECOSOC and the General Assembly for 2021, two global-level independent system-wide¹⁷⁰ and zero regional-level evaluations had been undertaken in the previous 12 months.¹⁷¹ While all are planning to do so, not all UNCTs evaluated their UNDAFs during the previous programming cycle, and only few, if any, would have used the UNSDCF Evaluation Guidelines issued in September 2021.¹⁷² However, limited capacities and resources for managing and financing UNSDCF evaluations, and questions around responsibilities, put into question the quality and usefulness of future UNSDCF evaluations for UNFPA.

Additionally, in 2020, UN-Info became mandatory for all UNCTs embarking on a UNSDCF and now serves as an online platform for UNCT members to document their activities and to jointly monitor and report on progress in implementing the UNSDCF in support of programme countries.¹⁷³ Positive implications of UN-Info and system-wide results reporting is expected to help make UNFPA work more visible and show the importance of UNFPA work, as part of broader efforts of the UNDS.¹⁷⁴ Compared to reforms to the evaluation function, UNFPA country offices appear more familiar with system-wide results-based management and reporting as an element of the UNDS reform.¹⁷⁵ According to the UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform, the majority of country offices (60) responded that their experience with UN-Info had been “neutral”.¹⁷⁶ Interviews conducted at the country level suggest, meanwhile, that the main benefit so far of UN-Info has been a gradual increase in

166 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q47. Strongly agree: 13 country offices (15 per cent); Agree: 62 country offices (74 per cent); Disagree: 8 country offices (10 per cent); Strongly disagree: 1 country office (1 per cent).

167 According to DCO, a joint evaluation implies the participation of at least two United Nations entities; an ISWE implies the participation of a majority of United Nations entities with a mandate related to the evaluation topic.

168 United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific (UNEDAP), established prior to the UNDS reform.

169 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q3. Very familiar: 8 country offices (10 per cent); Familiar: 36 country offices (43 per cent); Partially familiar: 29 country offices (35 per cent); Unfamiliar: 11 country offices (13 per cent).

170 United Nations. Evaluability assessment report on the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund. United Nations. Interim Report: System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Response to COVID-19. Executive Office of the Secretary-General. March 2022. <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/interim-report-system-wide-evaluation-unds-response-covid-19>.

171 QCPR Monitoring Framework 2022.

172 UN-Info 2021.

173 UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2020.

174 UNFPA MAF Internal Information Note 2021.

175 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021, Q3. Very familiar: 11 country offices (13 per cent); Familiar: 42 country offices (50 per cent); Partially familiar: 26 country offices (31 per cent); Unfamiliar: 5 country offices (6 per cent).

176 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q50. Positive: 16 country offices (19 per cent); Neutral: 60 country offices (71 per cent); Negative: 6 country offices (7 per cent).

UNFPA access to information about other United Nations agency activities, which is considered important for UNFPA to be able to better shape its country planning and programming in a complementary manner, avoid overlap and create synergies.

4.7 EFFECTS OF THE REFORM OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFICIENCY OF UNFPA

Evaluation question 7: To what extent has the ongoing operationalization of the reform of the United Nations development system affected UNFPA organizational structure and institutional efficiency? Which enabling and hindering factors explain the assessment?

Overall response

In terms of organizational structure, the delinking of the Resident Coordinator function provided UNFPA with an opportunity to upgrade the leadership of its country offices headed by national staff. On the other hand, it has not systematically used the UNSDCF and UNCT configuration exercise as entry points to review and better tailor its country presence or staffing situation. In the context of the multi-country office review, only initial steps have been taken towards strengthening the organization's footprint in the Caribbean and Pacific. Furthermore, the efficiency agenda, and particularly the establishment of LSSCs, is likely to have implications for the careers of UNFPA staff, for which UNFPA is not prepared.

Regarding institutional efficiency, engagement in the reform is associated with high coordination costs for UNFPA, despite new regional development coordination offices and full-time Resident Coordinators and capacitated Resident Coordinator offices, which cost UNFPA more than prior to the reform. Experiences with implementing the UNCT business operations strategy and the very few LSSCs are mixed, therefore the general appreciation for the principle of mutual recognition stands out. For lack of information, the quality of common services rendered to UNFPA is hard to assess. While the global coverage of the UNCT business operations strategy has considerably relieved the UNFPA budget for management services, the extent to which avoided costs have increased country programme allocations is unclear.

This part of evaluation question 7 concerns changes to the organizational structure of UNFPA that can be connected to the UNDS reform and UNFPA engagement in the reform. It also analyses the effects of the UNDS reform on UNFPA institutional efficiency, with a major focus on the efficiency agenda and particularly the business operations strategy as an inter-agency initiative.

Finding 28: The UNSDCF and United Nations country team configuration exercises have not been used systematically as entry points to review and better tailor the country presence or staffing situation of UNFPA. Only initial steps have been taken towards strengthening the footprint of UNFPA in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

As part of developing their UNSCDFs, UNCTs are expected to determine optimal UNCT configuration by defining the specific types of presence for entities to best contribute to UNSDCF implementation and to access expertise available across the system, led by the Resident Coordinator.¹⁷⁷ By the end of 2021, 50 out of 68 (73 per cent) UNCTs with UNSCDFs had undertaken a configuration exercise.¹⁷⁸ Where data gathering provided further information, it appears that the structured configuration dialogue has generally suffered from misunderstandings and organizations' fear of being closed down, which has impacted its meaningfulness, and consequently follow-up has been lacking.¹⁷⁹ In 2021, the Secretary-General reported to Member States the need to intensify the pursuit of a new model of country team configuration that is more tailored to the needs and priorities on the ground and to see more significant changes to country team configurations by United Nations entities.¹⁸⁰ The evaluation team was informed that reviewing the UNCT configuration exercise is part of the 2022 workplan of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Programme Development and Results.¹⁸¹

177 UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2019. Also see UNSDCF Guidance June 2019.

178 UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2022.

179 Only nine UNCT configuration joint concept papers are available on the UNSDG Knowledge Portal: Albania, Armenia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kosovo, Maldives, Somalia, South Africa and Turkmenistan. As of 3 May 2022.

180 UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2021.

181 It should also be noted that UNFPA has an exit strategy through the Business Model.

As regards UNFPA, the UNFPA Executive Director informed the Executive Board in 2018 that - as an organization with a business model for differentiated country support - UNFPA had offered its expertise in the development of country-presence modalities for the new generation of UNCTs.¹⁸² In 2020, UNFPA acknowledged that critical and constructive assessments of UNFPA country presence was needed, including reviewing hiring processes and contracting modalities to expand and decrease office size as needed.¹⁸³ In 2021, 43 UNFPA country offices that responded to the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform affirmed their engagement in the UNCT configuration; 31 country offices responded “not applicable”.¹⁸⁴

Along with draft country programme documents, UNFPA country offices are obliged to produce and discuss human resource plans with the concerned UNFPA regional office. A high-level organogram and salient data are then submitted to the UNFPA Programme Review Committee using a predefined template.¹⁸⁵ The evaluation team reviewed a set of human resource plans submitted to the Programme Review Committee in 2020.¹⁸⁶ It found that, of those 17 plans, only 9 talk to the UNSDCF and other UNDS reform elements (for example, the business operations strategy, joint programmes, inter-agency groups) as part of the rationale for future staffing requirements. In terms of actual adaptation of UNFPA country offices in order to optimize the organization’s presence to implement cooperation frameworks more meaningfully, no centralized information is available within UNFPA. Ten of the 18 UNFPA country offices that responded to a validation survey as part of this evaluation reported movements as regards staffing structures and/or skills mix to better deliver since the beginning of the UNDS reform.¹⁸⁷

As a core group member, UNFPA was part of the process that led to the publication of a multi-country office review report in May 2019. Among other things, the multi-country office review invited United Nations agencies to enhance and align their physical presence in the Caribbean and the Pacific subregions (action area 2).¹⁸⁸ The first improvements on the part of UNFPA were only reported in 2021¹⁸⁹ - these being, the availability of additional national and international staff capacities in the Pacific thanks to donor funding, and delegated authority to donor-funded programme staff in the Pacific and UNFPA liaison officers in the Caribbean to lead on programme implementation and engage with governments and other partners.¹⁹⁰ While no changes have been made in the Caribbean, in May 2022, UNFPA informed the Executive Board that its physical presence in the Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, Tonga and the Solomon Islands has been strengthened.¹⁹¹ Discussions as to how to best further enhance the organization’s position and multi-country programme support, potentially by changing office structures and core resources allowing, reportedly continue.

Finding 29: The delinking of the Resident Coordinator function at the beginning of 2019 provided UNFPA with an opportunity to upgrade the leadership of its country offices headed by national staff.

The delinking of the Resident Coordinator function from UNDP at the beginning of 2019 provided an opportunity and led to the UNFPA decision to discontinue UNDP representational functions and signature authority where UNFPA country offices and the implementation of UNFPA country programme documents are headed by national assistant representatives. Early on, in September 2018, the UNFPA Executive Director suggested to the Executive Board that, in the face of the UNDS reform, the

182 UNFPA ED Statement September 2018.

183 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020.

184 Of the remainder, eight country offices considered their engagement to have been weak. Source: UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q42. Very strong engagement: 30 per cent (25 country offices); Strong engagement: 21 per cent (18 country offices); Weak engagement: 10 per cent (8 country offices); Not applicable: 37 per cent (31 country offices).

185 See, for instance: UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 Implementation Toolkit. December 2021. Or: UNFPA. Country Programme Document (CPD) in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Guide for UNFPA Field Offices Developing New Programmes. March 2020. Or: PRC User Guide – Quality Assurance Guidelines for Country Programme Documents, under the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021. July 2020.

186 Extracted from MyUNFPA. Azerbaijan; China; Colombia; Côte d’Ivoire; Eswatini; Ethiopia; Indonesia; Malaysia; Panama; Somalia; South Africa; Syria; Timor-Leste; Tunisia; Türkiye; Uganda; Uruguay.

187 Validation survey as of 5 July 2022. Eight of the 18 respondents reported “no change”. Country office organigram changed: 6; posts reprofiled: 8; new posts created: 7; posts abolished: 4.

188 UNSDG. MCO Review: Update to Member States. 27 January 2020. Enhance and align physical presence by increasing and strengthening on-the-ground capacities in MCO-hubs and in countries covered by the hubs depending on coordination and programming needs; establishing a new MCO in the North Pacific; reviewing the delegation of authority to staff at country level; and aligning entity coverage and presence with MCO configurations.

189 At the beginning of 2021, UNFPA subregional offices responded to the UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey that no measures had been taken to align UNFPA country coverage and presence (Q69).

190 UNFPA. MCO Commitments Tracker. Updated on 13 September 2021.

191 UNFPA Information Note 2022.

continued suitability of the arrangement (in accordance with an agreement with UNDP from 1996) needed to be revisited and alternative modalities explored.¹⁹² A new management model was introduced in July 2019. According to the arrangements, the assistant representative position was upgraded to head of office with more authority to represent UNFPA interests externally and internally vis-à-vis the Resident Coordinator and within the UNCT, while continuing to report to non-resident UNFPA Country Directors - for the benefit of UNFPA strategic positioning and its ability to deliver.¹⁹³ Among other things, the move was expected to promote stronger substantive partnerships with the new Resident Coordinator system and UNCTs.¹⁹⁴ The UNFPA online staff directory shows 29 heads of office across five regions.¹⁹⁵

Finding 30: The efficiency agenda, and particularly the establishment of local shared service centres, is likely to have implications for the careers of UNFPA staff, for which UNFPA is not prepared.

Country-level interviews revealed concerns among UNFPA staff that the operationalization of the efficiency agenda could have implications for the number and composition of country office posts, potentially leading to layoffs or non-extension of contracts. There is a particular concern as regards the rolling out of common back offices or LSSCs as they are now called. In Eswatini, however, the only existing LSSC among the eleven countries studied in more depth, the evaluation team was informed that UNFPA admin and finance staff were recruited by the service centre.

Information on the actual effects of the efficiency agenda on the UNFPA business operations staffing situation to date is not routinely collected by UNFPA, and so it was not possible for the evaluation team to validate concerns. Furthermore, interviews clarified that staff transitions and lay-offs are indeed a realistic scenario if required in order for business operations to be better, faster and less costly. However, the evaluation team was also informed that - contrary to UNDP, UNICEF and WFP - UNFPA does not have an internal policy on how to prepare for and handle (horizontal and vertical) career transitions and lay-offs. Such a policy in UNFPA would be valuable in the context of the UNDS reform.

Finding 31: Despite new regional development coordination offices and full-time Resident Coordinators and capacitated Resident Coordinator offices, which cost UNFPA more than prior to the reform of the United Nations development system, engagement in the reform is associated with high coordination costs for UNFPA.

A particular concern of UNFPA during the design stage of the UNDS reform was to avoid additional layers of bureaucracy and parallel reporting.¹⁹⁶ However, while no hard evidence is available, and it is not possible to compare with the situation prior to the current round of reforms, interviewees associated engagement in the UNDS reform with high workloads, which have particularly taken their toll on the staff of small country offices and of those working in multi-country environments. Reform elements that appear to create the most coordination costs in terms of time spent are demanding common country analysis and UNSDCF formulation processes as well as engagement in the plurality of UNSDCF results groups and other inter-agency coordination mechanisms,¹⁹⁷ and preparing joint programme proposals. Furthermore, while it is appreciated that common systems - specifically, UN-Info and business operations strategy - are now online, they have gone through a number of updates, and remained parallel to, and disconnected from, UNFPA systems (Atlas and SIS), thus causing double work.¹⁹⁸

Moreover, the operationalization¹⁹⁹ of the newly introduced 1 per cent coordination levy for tightly earmarked third-party, non-core contributions to UNFPA development-related activities, by which Member States provide funding to the repositioned

192 UNFPA Information Sheet 2018.

193 MyUNFPA. PPM Update: Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): Division of Labour between Country Director and Head of Office in Countries without a UNFPA-Appointed Representative. Message from Laura Londen, Deputy Executive Director, Management. Undated.

194 UNFPA Information Note August 2019.

195 Status: 4 May 2022. EECA: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan; AS: Algeria; Djibouti, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia; LAC: Argentina, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Paraguay, Sao Tomé & Príncipe, Uruguay, Venezuela; ESA: Comoros, Eswatini, Ethiopia; AP: Bhutan, Maldives, Mongolia.

196 UNFPA. Secretary General's report on repositioning of the UN development system: UNFPA internal reflections and strategic positioning. Draft 15 August 2017.

197 According to UN-Info, in 2021, a total of 504 RGs and 554 inter-agency thematic groups - an average of eight groups per country.

198 Also see UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020.

199 Specifically, negotiation, administration, tracking and reporting of the 1 per cent coordination levy.

Resident Coordinator system (mainly agency-administered option), has also turned out to be process-heavy and not cost-neutral,²⁰⁰ besides carrying the risks of translating into a net reduction of development resources for UNFPA if the principle of “additionality” is not applied and of disincentivizing potential private sector partners.²⁰¹

At the regional level, the situation appears similarly strained. Discussion Paper #1 sets out that the high level of participation in peer support groups and issue-based coalitions can be time-consuming for UNFPA management and especially for technical advisors and at times has required a trade-off between indirectly supporting UNFPA country offices through the UNCTs and providing direct support and advice. Regional offices voiced the concern that coordination costs could further increase with anticipated growing demand from the country level for support from the regional level for developing and implementing UNSDCF and the planned regional expert rosters. The paper concluded that UNFPA will need to prioritize where it wants to use its human resources at the regional level or decide to invest in additional staff.

While not attempting to assess the work burden due to the UNDS reform and potential room for efficiencies, the evaluation team noted that staff engagement in the UNDS reform is not planned or acknowledged by way of a standardized workplan output in the UNFPA Performance Appraisal and Development (PAD) system. In other words, time spent is often above and beyond staff responsibilities. Data collection also revealed that the larger Development Coordination Office structures, for which UNFPA, since 2019, has had to double its financial contribution to the Resident Coordinator system and is required to charge donors a 1 per cent coordination levy, apart from voluntarily providing in-kind contributions (see Finding 6), has not systematically alleviated the burden on UNFPA country offices.²⁰² According to the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform in 2021, 78 country offices considered the ability of Resident Coordinators and Resident Coordinator office staff to facilitate inter-agency work to have partially increased (49) or “increased” (29).²⁰³ Only three UNFPA regional offices clearly agreed that the regional development coordination office was effectively coordinating the peer support groups.²⁰⁴ Interviews provided plenty of examples where UNFPA has appreciated the coordination support of the regional development coordination offices and Resident Coordinator offices. However, the opinion was occasionally voiced that they could shoulder more coordination functions for the money, and the question was raised whether development coordination offices and Resident Coordinator offices could even be creating additional coordination costs for UNFPA and other agencies through new requests for coordination, information, reporting and technical support.²⁰⁵

200 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020; UNFPA Information Notes May 2019, August 2019 and January 2021; UNFPA ED Annual Report 2020 Annex 6; UNFPA. UNFPA operational guidance for business units negotiating non-core contribution agreements. Implementation of UN coordination levy (1 per cent) for tightly earmarked third-party non-core contributions to UN development-related activities. Undated.

201 UNFPA Information Notes April 2020 and January 2021.

202 Capacitated RCOs have been put in place as part of the UNDS reform. Together with DCO in New York, five new regional offices of DCO and independent RCs, they are co-funded by UNFPA through a 1 per cent coordination levy (around USD 500,000 in 2020) and through a special purpose trust fund (SPTF) (to date a total UNFPA contribution of USD 17.7 million). Sources: UNFPA Statistical and Financial Review Report 2019; UNFPA Information Note January 2021; SPTF web portal, 6.5.2022. Note: In IRRF OE3.5, the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 will track the cash and in-kind contributions provided to the Resident Coordinator system.

203 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q9. 93 per cent of all survey respondents. Increased: 29 country offices (35 per cent); Partially increased: 49 country offices (58 per cent); Partially decreased: 4 country offices (4 per cent); Decreased: 1 country office (1 per cent).

204 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q3.

205 The responsibilities of RCOs are found in different parts of the MAF. According to the MAF, RCOs fulfil five key functions in support of the responsibilities of the RC and the UNCT: (1) strategic planning; (2) development economics; (3) partnerships and SDG financing; (4) data, and results management and reporting; and (5) communications and advocacy. The RCO supports the RC leadership of the UNCT through the provision of strategic policy, programmatic and operational advice on the above-mentioned areas, as well as any other area relevant for inter-agency coordination. Furthermore, RCOs are responsible for ensuring that mechanisms are established so that all members - regardless of physical presence in country - can fully participate in UNCT consultations and decision-making processes and are informed through regular communications and information sharing. They ensure that UNCT members receive adequate access, technical support and guidance on the use of UN-Info, and provide technical support to UNCTs to ensure real-time reporting through UN-Info and on disaggregated data-sharing and collaboration. The roles of the regional DCO can be found on pages 22 and 23 of the MAF.

Finding 32: UNFPA experiences with implementing United Nations country team business operations strategies and the very few local shared service centres are mixed and, for lack of information, the quality of common services rendered to UNFPA is hard to assess. The general appreciation for the principle of mutual recognition stands out.

By the end of 2021, all 131 UNCTs had a business operations strategy in place.²⁰⁶ UNFPA country offices were participating in 126.²⁰⁷ There has been less progress on the efficiency aspects of the UNDS reform at the regional level. In 2021, most UNFPA regional offices affirmed that they were engaging in the implementation of common business operations.²⁰⁸ In 2022, the UNSDG reported that a business operations strategy had recently been put in place in the Arab States region, while work was ongoing in the other regions.²⁰⁹

In response to the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform, 60 country offices “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they had experienced “some sort of efficiency gains”; 23 disagreed.²¹⁰ Four regional offices agreed.²¹¹ Country-level interviewees stressed that the extent to which new efficiency gains can realistically be expected thanks to the business operations strategy depends on how far UNCTs had already progressed with the efficiency agenda during previous phases of the United Nations reform – that is, how much more room for manoeuvre remains. Furthermore, an often-heard view was that co-locating in common premises simplifies joining common services and, although it also bears financial risks, has the greatest potential for generating additional efficiencies for UNFPA, but that the organization’s share of common premises was already very high and difficult to further increase.²¹² Non-harmonization of financial and other operational systems, policies and procedures among United Nations agencies is also considered to impede the smooth implementation of the business operations strategy.²¹³

Moreover, Discussion Paper #3 questioned whether the efficiency agenda can be as effective for UNFPA in humanitarian contexts as in development contexts. While some interviewees were concerned that a sudden onset of a crisis with increased pressure to act and scarcity of essential supplies may reduce benefits, others trusted in an increased agility of the system. Even where UNFPA is engaging, a view was voiced that the humanitarian side of UNFPA may not be taking full advantage of the efficiency agenda.

Generating efficiencies in quality terms is also part of the efficiency agenda and making the business case for common services based on cost-benefit analyses. Moreover, the UNSDG Business Operations Strategy 2019 elaborates on the principles for measuring client satisfaction with regard to all back-office services. However, the quality of services appears difficult to assess and not to be a corporate focus.²¹⁴ On the occasion of the UNFPA survey on UNDS reform in 2019, the majority of participating UNFPA country offices reported that the quality of the operational services received had either improved or remained stable, but they were not asked to assess the quality. More recently, in most of the 22 countries where UNFPA country office operations managers responded to a validation survey undertaken as part of this evaluation, the quality of services is considered “fair” or “good”.²¹⁵ The direction of change to the quality is not uniform, with “no change” and “slightly improved” prevailing.²¹⁶ During country-level interviews, UNFPA staff emphasized that a considerable number of services continues to be outsourced to UNDP, which leads the implementation of many back-office functions and manages

206 UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2022.

207 BOS online platform, as of 7 June 2022. According to the UNFPA ED Annual Report 2022, UNFPA was participating in only 82.

208 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q25.

209 UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2022.

210 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q17. 60 country offices or 71 per cent of respondents. Agreed: 53 country offices; 63 per cent; Strongly agreed: 7 country offices; 8 per cent; Disagreed: 22 country offices; 26 per cent; Strongly disagreed: 1 country office (1 per cent).

211 UNFPA regional office survey 2021, Q22.

212 The evaluation team noted that (in a context of delayed implementation of the common premises workstream) the percentage of UNFPA country offices that share premises with other United Nations agencies has not increased since 2019 when 72 per cent was already reported. In 2017, the percentage was 69 per cent; in 2018, 68 per cent. UNFPA is reportedly part of inter-agency efforts to identify locations with the highest potential for creating additional common premises. Sources: UNFPA ED Annual Report 2018; UNFPA ED Annual Report 2019; UNFPA ED Annual Report 2020; UNFPA ED Annual Report 2021; UNFPA ED Annual Report 2022; UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2022; UNFPA Information Note May 2022.

213 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020.

214 The evaluation team was informed that the Facilities and Administrative Services Branch of the Division for Management Services conducted a survey on quality of common services in June 2022. Results should be available later this year.

215 Fair: 9; Good: 9. Only in three cases is the quality considered poor. One country considered them excellent. Validation survey as of 5.7.2022.

216 Same: 8; Slightly improved: 7; Improved: 2; Slightly worsened: 2; Worsened: 2. Validation survey as of 5 July 2022.

common premises.²¹⁷ Their experiences with the quality of services and feedback from further UNFPA operations managers that responded to the validation survey are mixed.

In a step towards further consolidation as part of the UNDS reform, inter-agency efforts are underway to establish LSSCs for location-dependent services at the country level with efficiency potential. As of December 2021, the establishment of LSSCs had been initiated in 18 countries, far less than originally planned; the on-the-ground development and testing of the LSSC methodology was happening in six countries.²¹⁸ Acceleration of LSSC implementation with a focus on the 50 largest UNDS presences, representing 80 per cent of United Nations expenditure, is planned for 2022.²¹⁹ Delayed reforms can also be attributed to concerns, including within UNFPA, that the benefits of LSSCs may not outweigh the necessary upfront monetary and time investments and running costs, regarding questions around staffing and quality and differing views about the possibility for entities to opt out of services, and the trend towards vertical integration through global shared service centres. The establishment of an LSSC in Serbia, which is part of the ongoing piloting, appears to have been delayed because of uncertainties among UNCT members regarding the business case and the limited scope for cost avoidance.²²⁰ On the contrary, feedback from the UNFPA country office on the jointly funded common services unit in the One UN House in Viet Nam was positive and improvements have been seen. A few LSSCs were already in place during the design phase of the UNDS reform – for example, in Brazil and Eswatini. In Eswatini, interviewed UNFPA staff also favourably regarded the LSSC,²²¹ which was launched in August 2018 in connection with the construction of a new United Nations House. The dedicated unit, which UNFPA has been co-financing, is considered to provide and better manage a range of useful services and saves UNFPA money. Upfront costs for investment expenses were a challenge.

The principle of mutual recognition²²² is generally appreciated by UNFPA staff, as the UNFPA country office survey on UNDS reform and interviews at the country level show. A total of 58 country offices responding to the survey confirmed that the global mutual recognition agreement has led to the implementation of common operations in their respective UNCTs.²²³ Interviews revealed examples of how UNFPA country offices are saving time and money by being allowed to piggyback on another agency's processes and contracts without further approvals being required – for example, recruitment, procurement and harmonized approach to cash transfer (HACT) assessments. Of the UNFPA regional offices, four confirmed that the mutual recognition agreement had led to the implementation of common operations.²²⁴ A good understanding among United Nations agencies, which is not always the case, is a precondition for a fully effective principle of mutual recognition.²²⁵

217 According to the BOS online platform (as of 8.6.2022), UNDP-led common services result in around USD 19 million in cost avoidance for UNFPA, around 50 per cent of estimated total cost avoidance for 2019-2029, and of which USD 16 million in the administration service line. The other important service providers are: WFP (USD 6.7 million) and UNICEF (USD 6.5 million).

218 Brazil, Kenya, Serbia, Sudan, Tanzania, Viet Nam. Source: UNSDG. UNSDG Business Innovations Group (BIG). Results 2021 - Priorities 2022.

219 The initial proposal was to establish CBOs for all UNCTs by 2022. Sources: UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2022; UNSDG. UNSDG Business Innovations Group (BIG). Results 2021 - Priorities 2022.

220 As concerns UNFPA, calculations for the initial year show that the cost apportionment for UNFPA would be USD 31,928,000 (3.02 per cent of the total LSSC budget) compared to current costs of USD 34 million. Local Shared Service Centre Business Case Serbia, September 2021 Version 0.1.

221 United Nations in Eswatini. Financial Sustainability in Small Country Sustainability in Small Country Presences - Consolidated Business Operations in the Kingdom of Eswatini - UN Local Service Centre (LSC). 2018.

222 The principle of mutual recognition pre-dates the UNDS reform. It is a direct response to A/RES/71/243, which underscores that UNDS entities should operate according to the principle of mutual recognition of best practices in terms of policies and procedures, with the aim of facilitating active collaboration across agencies and reducing transaction costs for governments and collaborating agencies. In December 2018, the UNSG and the Executive Heads of several United Nations entities, including UNFPA, signed a statement of mutual recognition.

223 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q19. 58 country offices corresponding to 69 per cent of responding country offices. 26 country offices (31 per cent) replied "no".

224 UNFPA Regional Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q24.

225 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey Analysis January 2020.

Finding 33: The global coverage of United Nations country team business operations strategies has considerably relieved the UNFPA budget for management services. The extent to which avoided costs have increased country programme allocations is unclear.

Inter-agency efficiency gains are expected from the UNCT business operations strategy, from common premises and from LSSCs.²²⁶ In 2021, 57 country offices “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that the implementation of common business operations had generated cost savings; only 27 agreed.²²⁷ Twelve months later, an analysis by the evaluation team of business operations strategy data for UNFPA revealed an estimated cost avoidance globally of USD 36,127,056 for the period 2019 to 2029²²⁸ and realized cost avoidance of USD 22,215,608 (see Table 21), which is roughly the equivalent of core resources for the 13 smallest UNFPA country programmes.²²⁹ The greatest cost avoidance so far was recorded for 2021. The order of importance of service categories in terms of realized cost avoidance is administration by far, followed by information and communications technology (ICT), finance, logistics, procurement and human resources.

TABLE 21: UNFPA realized cost avoidance thanks to the Business Operations Strategy, 2019-2025

| | Admin | Finance | HR | ICT | Logistics | Procurement | Total |
|--------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|
| 2019 | 3,511,196 | 98,372 | 14,661 | 618,041 | 51,582 | 42,921 | 4,336,773 |
| 2020 | 2,997,035 | 185,785 | 42,269 | 452,226 | 232,775 | 104,493 | 4,014,583 |
| 2021 | 12,239,157 | 380,871 | 133,552 | 643,828 | 327,372 | 114,633 | 13,839,413 |
| 2022 | -8,044 | 14,251 | - | 41,570 | 410 | 3,540 | 51,727 |
| 2023 | -1,851 | 702 | -1 | -11,443 | - | 4,824 | -7,769 |
| 2024 | 97 | - | - | -10,443 | - | 1,148 | -9,198 |
| 2025 | - | - | - | -9,921 | - | - | -9,921 |
| Total | 18,737,590 | 679,981 | 190,481 | 1,723,858 | 612,139 | 271,559 | 22,215,608 |

Source: Evaluation team from UN-Info BOS online data, 11 May 2022.

Compared to other selected United Nations agencies, UNFPA has realized less cost avoidance thanks to the business operations strategy than UNICEF (USD 42,716,816) and UNDP (USD 29,952,348), which have larger operations, but considerably more than UN Women, which has less country presence (USD 3,842,819). To date, most cost avoidance has been realized in the Africa region at large (see Table 22).

226 The evaluation team did not have access to any data regarding common premises and LSSCs.

227 UNFPA Country Office UNDS Reform Survey 2021 Q4. 57 country offices or 68 per cent of respondents. Disagreed: 48 country offices; 57 per cent; Strongly disagreed: 9 country offices; 11 per cent; Strongly agree: 2 country offices (2 per cent); Agree: 25 country offices (30 per cent).

228 Also see UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2022.

229 UNFPA. CPD Database - August 2021 Update. Algeria, Armenia, Belarus, Costa Rica, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Libya, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malaysia, Maldives, Moldova, Panama, Serbia (including Kosovo RRF).

TABLE 22: Estimated and realized cost avoidance for UNFPA by region thanks to the Business Operations Strategy 2019-2025

| | Africa | Asia Pacific | Arab States | Europe and Central Asia | Latin America and the Caribbean |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Estimated | 17,018,074 | 3,926,505 | 10,123,910 | 2,583,225 | 2,585,757 |
| Realized | 13,394,517 | 1,386,503 | 6,400,568 | 592,459 | 440,061 |
| Percentage | 78.7% | 35.3% | 63.2% | 22.9% | 17.0% |

Source: Evaluation team from UN-Info BOS online data, 11 May 2022.

Efficiencies, be they through inter-agency, bilateral or entity-specific initiatives, are expected to translate into additional resources for programming. United Nations agencies are expected to redeploy costs avoided in the area of business operations for the benefit of their development activities, including coordination.²³⁰ In the words of the Secretary-General: "It is a simple realization: every dollar saved through more efficient operations represents an additional dollar for programmes and for people."²³¹ The evaluation team could not find any evidence of more resources being available for more effective service delivery thanks to efficiencies. However, one key informant suggested that redeployment to programmes would automatically be the case - at least in the short term. In the long-term, there is a risk that efficiencies affect the way budgets are allocated, thus penalizing success and disincentivizing future efforts.

230 Repositioning Resolution 2018: "Emphasizes the need to ensure full achievement of the efficiency gains envisioned in the report of the Secretary-General in a timely manner and to redeploy these efficiency gains for development activities, including coordination."

231 UNSG QCPR Implementation Report 2022.

5

CONCLUSIONS

The six conclusions provided in this section correspond to reasoned judgments of the evaluation team on the engagement of UNFPA in the ongoing reform of the UNDS. They are based on the findings presented in Section 4 and also take into account discussions held with the evaluation reference group (ERG) during a validation workshop held in New York on 12 July 2022. While the findings generally look back to the work that UNFPA has carried out in the past, the conclusions identify and reflect issues found across findings from the different evaluation questions.

Conclusion 1: UNFPA support for repositioning the United Nations development system has stood out throughout the design, development and operationalization of the reform elements. All levels of the organization have engaged actively to advance the reform, including by being constructively critical when appropriate.

Derived from findings: 4-6; 8-14

Working in over 150 countries, UNFPA had a strong rationale for engaging in the core reform elements of reinvigorating the role of the Resident Coordinator system, establishing a new generation of UNCTs, and increasing system-wide efficiency. Moreover, the nature of its mandate has required close collaboration with other partners, especially other United Nations entities. Even before the start of this phase of the reform, UNFPA engagement with the long-running reform efforts was significant. UNFPA support has also gone beyond what would be required for the organization to benefit from the reform and includes supporting the broader UNDS and the efforts of the system to support achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

Understanding the need for the reform, UNFPA has provided major support for the UNDS at all levels. For an agency of its size, and despite recent limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has strongly engaged in the architecture and operationalization of the reform, from UNSDG task forces, through regional issue-based coalitions, to results groups at the country level. It has also played a major role in promoting some of the cross-cutting issues that are important for the whole UNDS; areas such as gender, youth and, very importantly in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda, making sure no one is left behind. Moreover, it rapidly aligned many corporate processes and systems in core areas of the reform.

The UNFPA approach to engagement in the UNDS reform has largely been appreciated at all levels and UNFPA has generally been seen as an important partner in the process. This does not mean that it has not provided criticism to proposals, when considered necessary, but it has done so in a constructive manner.

Leadership has been a critical factor. At the global level, the approach of the Executive Director and clear messaging has been essential in high-level engagement as well as in guiding the rest of the organization. Deputy Executive Directors for management and programme have, at different periods of time, provided senior-level support for the process and led some key stages of the process. At the regional level, it was found that regional directors themselves have set the right tone and, equally, UNFPA representatives have been leading changes at the country level.

Conclusion 2: UNFPA engagement in reforming the United Nations development system has helped to advance the repositioning processes. In the context of uneven progress in implementing the reform, for the most part UNFPA has also been able to capitalize on the reform for the benefit of its stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Derived from findings: 17-27; 32

For the most part, the UNDS reform has strengthened UNFPA, which is positive for the organization's stakeholders and beneficiaries. Engagement in the reform has helped to emphasize the organization's strategic positioning and is making UNFPA more effective and efficient to deliver on its mandate and strategic plans. The reformed UNDS, including independent Resident Coordinators, common country analyses and cooperation frameworks, and inter-agency groups at country and regional levels, has provided an enabling environment for UNFPA to position its strategic priorities and leverage joint programming for results. Furthermore, application of the principle of mutual recognition and participation in the business operations strategy are clearly helping the organization to generate efficiencies.

It is clear that the main benefits for UNFPA are at the country level, but the contribution is at all three levels. UNFPA headquarters, which drives engagement with the reform agenda, has made a large contribution but, as would be expected, does not directly experience the benefits from the reform in the same way. This is similar at the regional level, where the purpose of the UNDS reform is to create mechanisms aimed at making a difference for the country level. Capturing the benefits at the country level and communicating them to the region and to headquarters become important if the momentum of the reform is to be maintained.

However, UNFPA is not yet able to rely on certain reform elements because they remain at an early stage of development. This is notably the case in terms of: system-wide support for its country offices in policy and technical matters from the regional level; the LSSCs for better quality business services; and UN-Info and system-wide evaluations at country and regional levels for demonstrating accountability and for supporting evidence-based learning and decision-making. In particular, the UNSDG information management system and UN-Info cannot be counted on as a one-stop repository for information on the operationalization of the different elements of the UNDS reform. Nor can they be relied on for comprehensive information on progress towards system-wide results in support of the 2030 Agenda, together with the achievement of UNFPA transformative results by 2030, an aspect of the reform that is gaining importance.

Conclusion 3: Although UNFPA has benefited from the reform of the United Nations development system and is likely to continue to do so, engagement does come with costs as well as risks. While benefits may outweigh them, efforts need to be made to reduce the costs and manage the risks.

Derived from findings: 30, 31, 33

Benefits for UNFPA have largely come about thanks to UNFPA senior management leadership and the strong engagement of UNFPA staff, and a sense of team spirit among agencies. However, engagement has placed a high burden on UNFPA staff involved in the different dedicated reform processes and mechanisms, often without such tasks having been factored in as part of formal performance expectations. Moreover, corporate measures are not in place to care for staff concerns in connection with the ongoing operationalization of the UNDS reform and especially the potential implications of the efficiency agenda on jobs and career paths.

Moreover, although corporate processes are already in place for human resources planning in connection with UNFPA country programme development and approval (which should derive from cooperation frameworks), UNFPA has hardly seized the opportunity of the UNDS reform to systematically review and reconfigure its presence at the country level and in the context of multi-country programmes.

Some of the heaviest opportunity costs are felt in the context of multi-country offices. With one UNFPA representative and their staff dealing with multiple Resident Coordinators and UNCTs, these contexts present special challenges for UNFPA engagement in operationalizing the reform. The costs of coordination are significant in such contexts and inevitably mean less time for supporting programmes and subsequently poorer results.

To better manage the costs, UNFPA needs to prioritize its engagement where it is making the greatest difference in terms of either its own goals or through support to the UNDS. This may not be in co-chairing a large number of issue-based coalitions or results groups, but possibly through more informal approaches to collaboration in the spirit of the reform.

UNFPA engagement with the UNDS reform also includes a number of risks. For example, while full engagement in the efficiency agenda through using services provided by other members of the UNDS is commendable, there is a risk concerning the reliability and quality of services provided. A second example concerns funding the Resident Coordinator offices and the possibility that underfunding could result in extra work for UNCT members that may fall disproportionately on the smaller offices. Other examples include possible continued delays in finalizing UNSDCFs or the risk of UNSDCFs not including critical language for UNFPA to undertake the work required to fulfil its mandate.

Conclusion 4: While UNFPA has strongly engaged in the reform of the United Nations development system, the organization has not provided an explicit strategy for engagement to maximize the benefits nor has it consistently internalized the elements in its policies, strategies and guidance in order to ensure broad ownership and application across the whole organization.

Derived from findings: 2, 3, 7

Although UNFPA senior management has placed great emphasis on the reform with the message reemphasized at the regional and country levels, the lack of an overall engagement strategy may reduce the opportunities to benefit from the reform and manage both costs and risks. Moreover, the reform elements are not yet fully integrated in corporate strategies, policies and guidance.

Working arrangements and organizational structures have not been conducive to wide ownership of the reform. Not all units and not all staff see that they have a role to play in engaging with the reform and this contributes to missed opportunities. This is a special issue when dealing with UNFPA humanitarian work.

UNFPA played an active role in the multi-country office review and, like other entities of the UNDS, its management came forward with specific commitments to scale up tailored support in the Caribbean and Pacific subregions. However, UNFPA has not taken advantage of the opportunity provided by the multi-country office review to redefine the way it works in such environments, including to address the significant challenges of subregional offices having to engage with multiple - and an increasing number of - Resident Coordinators and UNCTs. Neither the organizational structure, nor skills mix and alignment have been fundamentally reconsidered.

Conclusion 5: Internal communications and working arrangements have facilitated the positive corporate approach to engagement in the reform of the United Nations development system, but have not been able to integrate the spirit of the reform in the everyday work of all staff.

Derived from findings: 7, 8, 9

The current phase of the reform has been described as “the most ambitious and comprehensive change process of the United Nations development system in decades”.²³² While the UNFPA strategic plan highlights the need to end “business as usual”, and while UNFPA has indeed been a strong and constructive partner from the beginning of the endeavour, the UNDS reform has not been addressed in all its ongoing elements and across the whole organization.

In his report to the General Assembly in 2022 on implementing the QCPR, the Secretary-General noted that “we must continue our efforts to ensure the reform of the United Nations development system brings about the changes in behaviour, culture and mindsets that can maximize the collective offer of the United Nations”. This is also valid for UNFPA where, despite extensive efforts, not all staff have adequate knowledge of the reform or understand how they can use the spirit of the reform to advance UNFPA goals and the broader SDGs.

²³² United Nations Development System Repositioning: Key Messages.

In addition to broadening ownership of the UNDS reform, now is the time for UNFPA to focus on addressing the culture of the organization in terms of individual behaviours and all staff working in the spirit of the reform. This conclusion, as well as the previous one, is consistent with the 2021 Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) study of the UNDS reform, where it was suggested that the UNDS needs to move from building the architecture of reform (“construction”) to building ownership of sustainable change at every level (“behaviour”).

Conclusion 6: Given the nature of the reform of the United Nations development system, it is clear that further strengthening of UNFPA contributions to, and benefits from, the reform require a collective effort of the wider system.

Derived from findings: 9, 10, 15, 21, 23, 31, 32

As noted in conclusion 1, UNFPA has been heavily engaged in the UNDS reform and has led some key stages of the process. However, as a medium-sized agency and one of 37 members of the UNSDG chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General on behalf of the Secretary-General, it depends on the openness and capacities of others. The evaluation found a number of areas where deepening the reform would benefit UNFPA and, potentially, the broader UNDS.

For example, an inter-agency review of the indicators and an increase in the level of data disaggregation for the UNSDG information management system questionnaires under the current QCPR cycle would reduce the burden on UNFPA for collecting UNDS reform-related data, improve continuity of data tracking, and avoid data inconsistencies for better value from data. UNFPA would also benefit from a system-level effort to promote a more effective and efficient management of UNDS reform-related data, including through data interoperability.

A second example relates to reducing and avoiding potential further increases in coordination costs for UNFPA at the expense of its programme, and to increasing the added value of the Resident Coordinator system. As such, UNFPA would benefit from a clearer division of labour between Resident Coordinator offices and United Nations agencies for coordinating and implementing UNDS reform processes and mechanisms at the country level, in the context of the broadly formulated management and accountability framework. Additionally, the UNSDCF configuration exercise should also include the tailoring of Resident Coordinator office support to the needs of specific UNCTs.

Thirdly, as a service recipient, and for more efficient and effective programme delivery, UNFPA would benefit from further work on operationalizing, including monitoring, the standardized client satisfaction principles. More attention should be paid to the quality aspect of services delivered by suppliers through bilateral initiatives, the business operations strategy and, because of their long-term structural implications for UNFPA, shared service centres in particular.

6

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations follow logically from the conclusions. In formulating the recommendations, an attempt has been made to focus on issues that are relevant at a high strategic level, rather than on details of UNFPA engagement with specific areas of the UNDS reform. Specifically, the recommendations are aimed at strengthening UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform, including to help ensure that the organization optimizes its benefits from the reform.

To promote utility of the evaluation, a workshop was held with members of the evaluation reference group in New York on 12 July 2022 to develop the recommendations. As with the conclusions, the recommendations below take into account discussions with the evaluation reference group and also benefited from engagement with the senior management of UNFPA.

All recommendations indicate the unit or units responsible for implementing the recommendation and therefore for preparing the specific management response. They also indicate the priority of the recommendation in terms of timing, importance and scope. Links to specific conclusions are also provided.

Recommendation 1: UNFPA should provide stronger strategic direction for its workforce within the framework of its strategic plan for its engagement with the United Nations development system reform.

Links to conclusion: 4

Targeted at: The Policy and Strategy Division; the Division for Management Services; the Division for Human Resources; the Change Management Secretariat

Priority level: Very high

Suggested actions

1.1 To ensure a comprehensive and results-oriented approach to its engagement in the UNDS reform, and within the framework of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025, UNFPA should develop an explicit strategy for UNFPA engagement in the UNDS reform. This strategy should not imply that UNFPA has not embraced or integrated principles of the reform into its programme of work and strategic plans, but rather attempt to further deepen the implementation of the reform. Specifically, the strategy should aim to:

- Ensure wide consultations across all elements of the UNDS reform to facilitate and enhance operationalization of the strategy
- Explain how UNFPA will further contribute to the reform and set out the actions to be undertaken to maximize the benefits from the reform and manage the associated costs and risks (including those set out in this set of recommendations)
- Ensure actions will result in the UNDS reform being mainstreamed throughout the organization
- Link the strategy to the change management process set out in recommendation 2.

- 1.2 In connection with the above, and to anchor the engagement strategy in the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025, UNFPA should examine whether the UNDS reform should be considered an accelerator for the achievement of the outputs of the strategic plan, and use the opportunity of the mid-term review to reflect on this issue.
- 1.3 UNFPA should review the body of strategies and policies across the organization to ensure consistency with the UNDS reform and address gaps where necessary to strengthen the organization's contributions to, and benefits from, the reform process.

Recommendation 2: UNFPA should work towards broadening the ownership and deepening the institutionalization and internalization of the reform of the United Nations development system at all levels of the organization.

Links to conclusion: 5

Targeted at: The Office of the Executive Director/Change Management Secretariat; the Policy and Strategy Division; headquarters; UNFPA regional offices

Priority level: High

Suggested actions

- 2.1 To broaden familiarity with and ownership of the UNDS reform across the whole organization, UNFPA should establish a formal change management process that encourages change in the understanding and mindsets of staff, tailored to different groups. The process should include the following elements:
 - Addressing working arrangements for managing engagement with the reform (see suggested action 2.2)
 - Addressing communications and capacity strengthening about the reform (see suggested action 2.3)
 - Introducing methods to monitor change, such as broad staff surveys.
- 2.2 To better institutionalize the UNDS reform, and linked to the recommended strategy for engagement in the UNDS reform (see recommendation 1), UNFPA should examine and adapt as necessary the roles and responsibilities of different UNFPA business units, including the Humanitarian Response Division, and relevant internal working arrangements, first and foremost the IDWG on United Nations reform.
- 2.3 To better internalize the UNDS reform, UNFPA should strengthen its internal communication of the reform, including with additional practical examples of good practices from within UNFPA or other United Nations agencies that can be replicated in similar contexts and across regions or adapted to fit UNFPA needs.

Recommendation 3: UNFPA should address human resource challenges arising from the reform of the United Nations development system, and incentivize more staff to work in collaboration with their colleagues from other United Nations agencies.

Links to conclusions: 3, 5

Targeted at: The Division for Human Resources; the Division for Management Services

Priority level: High

Suggested actions

- 3.1 To help UNFPA staff better manage workloads related to dedicated UNDS reform processes and mechanisms and engage better, thereby avoiding staff dissatisfaction, UNFPA should ensure that responsibilities are planned, acknowledged and accounted for in individual staff performance, appraisal and development systems - at all levels of the organization.
- 3.2 Going beyond dedicated UNDS reform processes and mechanisms, and to broaden ownership of the reform within the organization and achieve more United Nations system-wide coherence, UNFPA should prepare guidance on using the performance, appraisal and development system to incentivize and recognize staff who collaborate with and

leverage other United Nations agencies to achieve their work objectives, including for work across the development-humanitarian-peace nexus.

- 3.3** As service recipient, UNFPA should ensure that the concerns of its operations staff about potential negative implications of the transition to shared service centres on jobs and career paths are reflected in the final UNSDG Human Resource Transition Strategy, following which it should develop and communicate internal UNFPA guidance and tools.

Recommendation 4: UNFPA should address United Nations development system reform-related challenges and risks for its programme work.

Links to conclusions: 2, 3, 6

Targeted at: The Policy and Strategy Division; the Technical Division; UNFPA regional offices; the Enterprise Risk Management Secretariat

Priority level: High

Suggested actions

- 4.1** To clarify and improve the derivation of the priorities of its country programme documents from cooperation frameworks, UNFPA should continue working with the Inter-Agency Working Group on Programme Development and Results and adapt and make better use of its internal quality assurance mechanisms.
- 4.2** To better leverage United Nations sister agencies and other development partners, UNFPA should adapt corporate guidance and support mechanisms, including at the regional level, for including relevant transformative results indicators across UNSDCFs and for generating the necessary monitoring data; as well as for prioritizing the elimination of female genital mutilation and child marriage, in line with programme country needs.
- 4.3** In light of budget shortfalls for the Resident Coordinator system in recent years and the state of the global economy, UNFPA should ensure an effective management of associated risks and potential constraints on UNFPA programmes as a consequence.
- 4.4** In a situation of uncertainty regarding shared service centres, and to avoid disruptions and ensure sustainability of administrative and financial services for achieving results, UNFPA should ensure an effective management of the risks that it is exposed to with the further implementation of the efficiency agenda, and especially the transition to shared service centres, in terms of reliability, costs and quality of services.

Recommendation 5: UNFPA should reassess the way it works in multi-country environments to deliver impact, and accelerate the implementation of the commitments made as part of the multi-country office (MCO) review.

Links to conclusion: 3

Targeted at: The Policy and Strategy Division; UNFPA regional offices; subregional offices

Priority level: High

Suggested actions

- 5.1** In order to best position UNFPA to achieve the transformative results and implement the SAMOA pathway priorities in countries and territories serviced by multi-country offices, UNFPA should reflect on, and define principles for engagement with, programme country governments and UNCTs in such environments, clearly stating the level of ambition for the organization. Starting with the Pacific and the Caribbean, the process should:
- Engage UNFPA staff in subregional offices and regional offices and include targeted consultations with the Development Coordination Office and the UNDS, and in particular with those United Nations agencies with similar footprints, as well as Member States

- Guide subregional offices on how to engage and prioritize engagement with the plurality of inter-agency coordination mechanisms in these settings
- Explore the possibility of creating a community of practice or network of technical staff with SIDS expertise that can be drawn upon as needed
- Factor UNSDCFs and multi-country programme commitments into strategic thinking around the composition, organization, footprint and resourcing of the subregional offices
- Support regional offices in guiding the subregions in implementing the principles for engagement.

5.2 To ensure that both UNFPA and the UNDS fulfil their commitments resulting from the multi-country office review, as well as to manage expectations of Member States, UNFPA should do its part to accelerate the commitments made in the review. To this end UNFPA should:

- In consultation with the Development Coordination Office, revive the workstream on “Action Area 3 Strengthened and more visible policy and technical resources” and in unison with other United Nations agencies explore improved and feasible support to countries
- Plan for an internal discussion on the entity-specific commitments made by the organization to identify the bottlenecks and accelerate progress or amend these commitments as necessary.

5.3 UNFPA should capitalize on experience and lessons learned from a new way of working in multi-country environments to explore benefits for other situations where UNFPA staff are dealing with multiple programme countries and UNCTs (for example, in the Indian Ocean).

Recommendation 6: UNFPA should make special efforts to ensure that those working in humanitarian contexts make best use of the reform of the United Nations development system, and especially that they use the reform when working with partners across the development-humanitarian-peace nexus.

Links to conclusion: 4

Targeted at: Headquarters; the Policy and Strategy Division

Priority level: Medium

Suggested actions

6.1 To ensure broader ownership and better integration of the UNDS reform in humanitarian work and contexts, UNFPA should:

- Encourage more active participation of the Humanitarian Response Division into discussions on the reform, especially from a nexus perspective, including in the context of the Management and Accountability Framework – for example, by ensuring that Humanitarian Response Division colleagues fully participate in consultations on the UNDS reform as well as discussing UNDS reform integration and implications in humanitarian settings
- Develop better internal communication of the implications of the UNDS reform for UNFPA humanitarian operations as well as development work in humanitarian settings, including both challenges and opportunities
- Undertake better integration of UNDS reform into UNFPA humanitarian guidance and policy documents.



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