Evaluation of the Resident Coordinator system contribution to country-level programme coherence

Inspection and Evaluation Division

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OIOS
Office of Internal Oversight Services

INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function

"The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;" (General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B).

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Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) determined the extent to which Resident Coordinators (RCs) have enabled greater coherence of United Nations Country Team (UNCT) programming at country level in order to achieve two outcomes of: a) more coordinated United Nations (UN) operational activities for development and b) improved integrated UN policy advice to host governments, in terms of relevance and effectiveness, to accelerate Member State progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The evaluation collected data using global surveys of RCs and UNCT members; interviews with host government officials, UNCT agency heads, RCs and Community Service Organizations (CSO) and observation of meetings across six country case studies; and document and secondary data reviews.

Two-and-a-half years after the introduction of RC system reform, coherence of UN country-level programming has largely been achieved. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs, hereafter referred to as CFs) were highly aligned with national development needs and priorities and based on collective agency comparative advantages. Additionally, measures of programming coherence – including better UNCT engagement on outcome area planning, more efficient interactions with UNCT through the RC and less duplication of programming – were reported by government representatives, RCs and UNCT members as having improved since the reform. RC system contributions included independent leadership and an important convening role of the RC, identification of programming result areas and use of instruments introduced with the reform, and the good practice of RC focus on higher level strategic issues. Nevertheless, country-level integration of non-resident agencies was still evolving.

Improved programming coherence has not yet, however, resulted in fully coordinated delivery of operational activities at country level. Progress on developing and implementing joint work plans was moderate, while joint programmes were not consistently seen as the most feasible mode of coordinated programme delivery. In the six case study countries, more coherent programme delivery was impeded by a lack of coordination, duplication, and insufficient division of labour based on agency comparative advantages. Nevertheless, examples of coordinated operational activities have shown promise in leveraging the UN's comparative advantage and better meeting the needs of host governments.

Some progress has been made on developing and providing more integrated policy advice. While RCs and UNCT members perceived policy coherence to have improved since reform, government feedback was more mixed, and bilateral policy engagements continued in most case study countries. Policy coherence was impeded at times by limited RCO capacity to bring together the expertise of the UN system, lack of UNCT support, insufficient political influence and government instability. In the six case study countries, there were examples where RC-coordinated thematic groupings and the CF process have facilitated more integrated policy advice which, when delivered, had positive outcomes.

Outcomes around coordinated operational activities and integrated policy advice were hindered by several factors, including disparate UNCT agency planning processes, authorities and reporting lines which have at times favoured UN agency priorities over CF priorities. Funding competition, lack of pooled funding, donor earmarking and bilateral funding arrangements have also undermined coherence. Furthermore, the reporting burden on participating UNCT agencies introduced with the reform was perceived by UNCT members as heavy.

Enabled by reform planning tools and RC leadership, gender and human rights, and to a lesser extent disability and the environment, have been addressed across UN country level programming but have not yet been systematically operationalized at project level. Challenges included lack of RCO capacity to support, political sensitivities with host governments, and UNCT agency capacity and focus.

All parts of the UN system must be given credit for the significant progress made on the reform of the RC system. Nevertheless, the next phase of the reform – operationalizing coordinated and integrated delivery of policy advice and programmes – will need critical change from across the entities of the UN development system and donors to be successful.

OIOS makes four important recommendations to DCO:

1) Support the Chair of the UNSDG to provide UN system governing bodies with the relevant information and tools to facilitate their oversight role;

2) Strengthen knowledge sharing of good practices for coherent country programmes and integrated policy advice;

3) Review UNCT collective reporting requirements to inform UNSDG deliberations on ways to simplify, and encourage entities to fully utilize UN INFO; and

4) Support RCOs in operationalizing existing guidance on mainstreaming cross-cutting issues.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of this Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the extent to which Resident Coordinators (RCs) have enabled greater coherence[1] of United Nations Country Team (UNCT) programming[2] at country-level, in order to achieve two outcomes: a) more coordinated United Nations (UN) operational activities for development and b) improved integrated UN policy advice to host governments, in terms of relevance and effectiveness, to accelerate Member State progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The topic was arrived at through a scoping exercise and risk assessment conducted in early 2021.[3] The theory of change identifying these and other outcomes is provided in Annex I.

2. The evaluation conforms with the norms and standards for evaluation in the UN system.[4] Development Coordination Office (DCO) management comments were sought on the draft report and taken into account in the final report. The DCO response is included in the annex.

II. Background

Mandate, roles and stakeholders

3. The RC system mandate is derived from General Assembly resolutions 71/243 and 72/279; the latter aimed to fundamentally transform the UN Development System (UNDS) to better respond to Agenda 2030 and called for "*a new generation of United Nations Country Teams […] facilitated by the Resident Coordinator, to ensure the best configuration of support on the ground, as well as enhanced coordination, transparency, efficiency and impact of United Nations development activities, in accordance with national development policies, plans, priorities and needs*".[5]

4. The RC system budget document outlines two results for 2021 to reach the objective of accelerating Member State progress towards achieving the SDGs:[6]

- **Result 1:** New generation of RCs and UNCTs able to deliver high-quality policy and programming support to countries for achieving the SDGs.

- **Result 2:** Scaling up delivery on the decade of action for the SDGs through strengthened RC leadership for more joined-up support to governments.

5. The RC system is guided by various normative frameworks and documents, with Agenda 2030 and the SDGs at their core. At the country-level, the primary UN planning instrument, the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), has been replaced by the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF, hereafter referred to as the CF), informed by the Common Country

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[1] Definition of coherence: the extent to which the whole of UN support is aligned to country-level needs and priorities and is delivered in an integrated, coordinated and complementary fashion across pillars and sectors and consistent with Agenda 2030 goals.
[2] "Programming" refers to planning of UN activities that are operationalized as UN "programmes" implemented at country-level.
[3] OIOS-IED. Inception Paper. Evaluation of the RC System Country Programme Coherence. 18 March 2021. The two outcomes were drawn directly from DCO success measures.
[4] United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). Norms and Standards for Evaluation, 2016.
[5] A/RES/72/279, para 2.
[6] A/75/76 (Sect. 1).

Analysis (CCA). This is intended to be the "*most important instrument for planning and implementation of UN development activities in each country*".[7] Figure 1 presents the CF cycle.

Figure 1: CF cycle phases

6.   Table 1 below shows the number of CFs by start dates and by region.

Table 1: CF start dates and regions

CF start date	Africa	Arab States	Asia & the Pacific	Europe & Central Asia	Latin America & the Caribbean	Total # countries
2020	7	0	0	0	4	11
2021	8	4	4	12	4	32
2022	15	2	6	2	12	37
2023	14	4	11	4	5	38
2024	9	0	3	0	0	12
TOTAL						130

Source: DCO, March 2021

7.   The Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) outlines country-level relationships and accountabilities between RCs and UNCT members in five functional areas: i) leadership of UN development activities, ii) strategic planning and programming, iii) communications and advocacy, iv) common services and v) funding/resource mobilization.[8]

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[7] A/RES/72/279.
[8] UNSDG. MAF. 15 September 2021. https://unsdg.un.org/resources/management-and-accountability-framework-un-development-and-resident-coordinator-system

Leadership structure

8.   The UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) is the main oversight body for the RC system and is led by the Deputy Secretary-General as UNSDG Chair.[9] DCO holds the managerial and oversight functions of the RC system, under the leadership of an Assistant Secretary-General and a global development coordination management team.[10] Five regional offices support the country-level coordination function. The global reporting structure is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: RC system global reporting structure

UNSDG	UN Sustainable Development Group
DCO	Development Coordination Office
ASG	Assistant Secretary-General
RCP	Regional Collaborative Platform
UNCT	United Nations Country Team

Source: DCO, November 2021

Resources

9.   The RC system is funded through three streams: a 1 per cent coordination levy on tightly earmarked non-core contributions to UN development-related activities; a cost-sharing arrangement among UNSDG entities; and voluntary contributions. As shown in Figure 3, financial resource totals $281.8 million USD for 2021, with $155 million expected from voluntary contributions, $77 million from cost-sharing and $50 million from the 1 per cent coordination levy. Most funding (86.3 per cent), $243.3 million, is allocated to country coordination.[11] A new pooled funding instrument – the UN Joint SDG Fund – was established in 2019 to provide strategic investments required to meet the SDGs.

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[9] UNSDG. A New Way of Working Together for the 2030 Agenda. August 2019.
[10] A/RES/72/279.
[11] A/75/6 (Sect. 1).

Figure 3: RC system budget, 2021

Total RC system
financial resource 2021
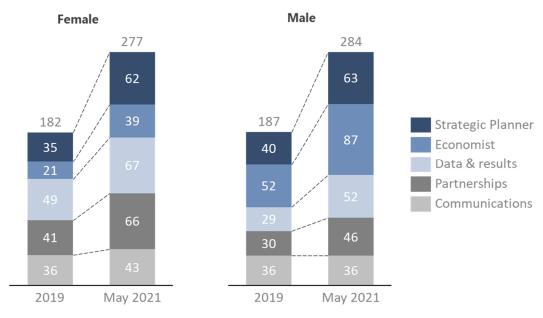($281.8 million USD)

4%   1%

95%

- Exec. direction & mngmt
- Programme of work
- Programme support

Programme of work
budget component 2021
($267.3 million USD)

5%   4%

91%

- Global coordination
- Regional coordination
- Country coordination

Source: A/75/6 (Sect. 1)

10.   At the country level, the UNCT is led by the RC - the highest-ranking representative of the UNDS and designated representative of the Secretary-General for development at the country-level. As of March 2021, the system comprised 130 RCs covering 162 countries and territories. There were a total of 128 RCs in post (of which 14 were RC a.i.), with two vacant posts. Thirty-one RCs were also Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and 13 RCs were also Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (DSRSGs).

11.   The RCs are supported in country by the RC office (RCO), comprising a core complement of five staff members in key functional positions: strategic planning/RCO Head; Senior Economist, Data Management and Results Monitoring/Reporting Officer; Partnerships and Development Finance Officer; and Programme Communication and Advocacy Officer. Figure 4 illustrates global RCO staffing.

Figure 4: RCO staffing

Female

277

62
39
67
66
43

182

35
21
49
41
36

2019   May 2021

Male

284

63
87
52
46
36

187

40
52
29
30
36

2019   May 2021

- Strategic Planner
- Economist
- Data & results
- Partnerships
- Communications

Source: DCO, June 2021

III.   Scope and Methodology

12.   The evaluation covered the period from January 2019 to August 2021 and had the following scope:

- **Country-level focus:** The evaluation focused on outcomes at the country-level since the RC, supported by their RCO, is positioned as the key enabler of coherence at country-level. The impact of DCO global and regional support structures on coherence was not assessed.

- **Development focus:** The evaluation assessed coherence within the development pillar and did not include an assessment of coherence across the humanitarian and peace pillars (triple nexus).

- **Exclusion of funding mechanisms:** The evaluation considered the role of the RC in formulating joint funding frameworks and leading joint resource mobilization but did not assess agency and donor funding mechanisms.

- **Exclusion of COVID response:** To avoid overlap with other UN system oversight, the coherence of the COVID response, and therefore the socio-economic response plans (SERP), was not included.

13.   The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach comprising the following qualitative and quantitative methods:

a) **Surveys:** Two global surveys of RCs and UNCT Agency Heads, administered from June to July 2021, with the following survey populations and response rates:

Survey	Population[12]	Responses	Response Rate
Resident Coordinators	127	82	65%
UNCT agency Heads[13]	1877	949	51%

b) **Case studies:** Six country case studies, selected in consultation with DCO. These were Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Honduras, Jordan, Sierra Leone and Timor Leste. Selection criteria included: CF status (4 CF and 2 UNDAF); Human Development Index ranking; UNCT size; and regional geographic distribution. Peacekeeping missions, multi-country offices and countries recently engaged in other oversight activities were excluded. Each case study focused on a CF/UNDAF result area. Case studies were conducted virtually, consisting of a document review, direct meeting observations and interviews. Stakeholder interviews conducted across the six case study countries were as follows:

Case study stakeholders	Number of interviewees
Host government officials (Ministers and senior officials)	25
UNCT agency Heads (varied agency sizes, roles and presence)	34
RCs (in all six countries) and RCO staff	14
Community Service Organizations (CSOs)	12
Total	**85**

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[12] Excluding undeliverable messages and those no longer in post.

[13] A UNCT survey non-respondent analysis determined no significant non-response bias to survey results.

c) **Direct observation**: Structured assessments of 14 UNCT meetings observed virtually held internally and/or with government officials and other external stakeholders in all six case study countries; these included, meetings of the UNCT, results groups and a Joint Steering Committee.

d) **Document review**: Structured content analysis of CFs (39), UNDAFs (9), joint work plans (JWPs) (10) and agency country programme documents and strategic notes (25).

e) **Trend analysis**: Review and tracking of relevant Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) data from 2015 to 2021.

f) **Oversight review**: Review of 13 accountability and oversight reports from 2020 and 2021. This included reviews undertaken by the Executive Office of the Secretary General (EOSG), DCO, Multilateral Organizational Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) and OIOS-IED.

IV.   Evaluation Results

A.   Two-and-a-half years after the introduction of Resident Coordinator system reform, coherence of UN country-level programming has largely been achieved

Enhanced coherence of country programming was evidenced by CFs that were highly aligned with national development needs and priorities and based on collective agency comparative advantages

14.   Alignment of UN country programming to national needs and priorities has improved since the reform with the introduction of the CF. A review of 39 CFs showed that a large majority (36) were aligned to host government national development plans and priorities. Furthermore, nearly all government officials interviewed in the four CF case study countries were highly satisfied with the alignment of UN programming to national needs, as were those in the two UNDAF countries now engaging in CF consultation processes. Most of the 39 CFs reviewed were developed with high engagement with national government, but with somewhat less engagement with NGOs/CBOs, private sector and regional and local government stakeholders (Figure A1). This was consistent with the large majorities of surveyed RCs and UNCT members (89 and 86 per cent respectively) who reported that the host government had been engaged to a moderate or great extent in the CF process.
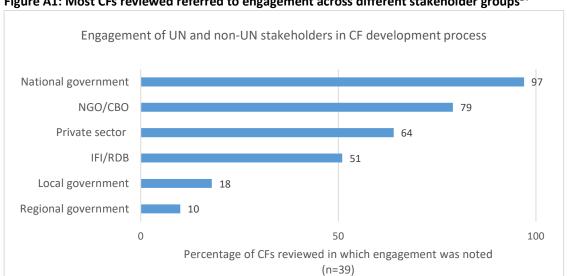
Figure A1: Most CFs reviewed referred to engagement across different stakeholder groups[14]

Engagement of UN and non-UN stakeholders in CF development process

Stakeholder	Percentage
National government	97
NGO/CBO	79
Private sector	64
IFI/RDB	51
Local government	18
Regional government	10

Percentage of CFs reviewed in which engagement was noted (n=39)

15. Country-level UN programming through the CF has increasingly been based on a more holistic perspective: the particular technical and substantive expertise and capacity on the ground of individual UN entities, including smaller entities that were less likely to be fully taken into account pre-reform, were increasingly considered collectively under the reformed RC system. Of 39 CFs reviewed, nearly all (38) included an analysis of or reference to comparative advantages of UN agencies. The adjacent UNCT member quote expresses a common view that the CF has facilitated a more coherent approach to programming. Additionally, most surveyed RCs and UNCT members (95 and 84 per cent respectively) reported that agency comparative advantages had been adequately considered to a moderate or great extent, with those in CF countries slightly more likely than those in UNDAF countries to report this. In five of six case study countries, the identification of programming result areas was fully informed by agency comparative advantages.

> *"The new CF replacing the UNDAF is real progress – the way it is structured, the alignment with national priorities – here we have a real opportunity to do something different. The CF now is not anymore that patchwork of activities – there's really a reflection on strategic thinking on what we could do to change things at country-level. […]. Already the process has been extremely healthy for the UNCT."* UNCT member.
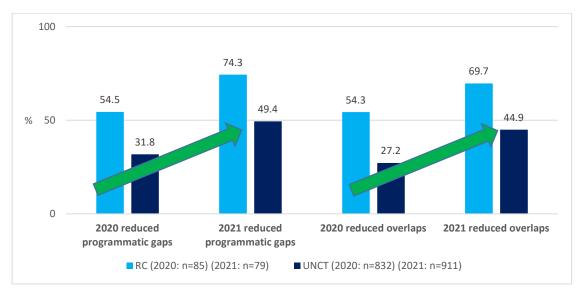
Measures of programming coherence were reported by government representatives, RCs and UNCT members as having improved since the reform, though room for improvement remained

16. There was general agreement that programming coherence had been enhanced since the introduction of the reform. In most case study countries, interviewed government representatives noted improved coherence of UN programming. For example, they reported better engagement with the whole UNCT on planning in outcome areas, more efficient UN interactions with government through the RC, and less duplication of programming. Furthermore, RCs and UNCT members surveyed reported improvements from 2020 to 2021 to the positive outcomes associated with enhanced programming (Figure A2). A majority of RCs and just over half of UNCT survey respondents (66 and 55 per cent respectively) reported that the degree of programme coherence within country teams was excellent or good.

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[14] CF guidance indicates that the process should be participatory and inclusive of different stakeholder groups.

Figure A2: More RC and UNCT survey respondents in <u>2021</u> reported positive impacts of reform on reducing programming gaps and overlaps compared to when they were surveyed in <u>2020</u>
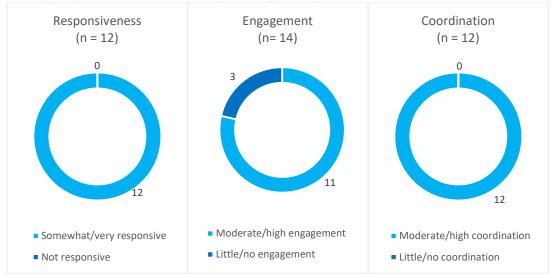

The RC independent leadership and convening role have contributed to more coherent programming[15]

17. The independent leadership and convening role of the RC have contributed to greater country-level programming coherence. RCs in all six case study countries were assessed by government officials and UNCT members interviewed as generally engaging and coordinating well with government and to a lesser extent with other non-governmental groups. Internally, RCs leveraged their convening role to mobilize UNCT members for collective attention to key issues. Smaller agencies also reported that they were better able to leverage their mandates in the country due to this convening role. RCs frequently sought talking points and messages from UNCT members to reinforce in their meetings with government officials and were seen actively reporting back to UNCT members in meetings observed. In a few case study countries, however, concerns were raised by RC and UNCT interviewees over a lack of clarity between UNDP and RC roles, including leading on political issues and donor funded joint projects.

18. Examples from the six case studies demonstrated how the independence and convening role of the RC contributed to greater programming coherence. These included the RC role in leading the CCA and CF processes, as well as Socio-Economic Response Framework (SERF) exercises, which nearly all government and UNCT interviewees reported as having been very well delivered and producing more coherent UNCT programming. Furthermore, in nearly all case study meetings observed, RCs actively coordinated UNCT meetings to achieve specific outcomes and agreements, were responsive to questions and issues raised and proactively integrated the inputs of different stakeholders to establish coherent UNCT positions (Figure A3). The RC-led planning processes were reported by stakeholders to be highly participatory and to have produced high quality outputs. For example, across most case study countries, the CF, CCA and SERF development processes included participation of UN and non-UN stakeholders in technical workshops, the Joint Steering Committee and various high-level government fora.

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[15] Recall "programming" refers to planning.

Figure A3: In nearly all meetings observed, RCs were seen to be actively coordinating, engaging and being responsive to issues raised by meeting participants

The identification of programming result areas and use of instruments introduced with the reform have also facilitated greater programming coherence

19.   The results group structure was a critical feature of improving the coherence of UN programming in most case study countries. These groups, with UNCT agency co-leads, were intended to work collaboratively on outcomes articulated in the CF based on alignment of their mandates to the result, with RCOs providing guidance and some administrative backstopping. In all six case study countries, especially CF countries, the results group structure was a highly effective mechanism for UNCT coordination in thematic areas and for mobilizing integrated action on targeted issues. UNCT members interviewed reported that the benefits of this approach included regular information sharing and progress reporting, aligned indicator reporting and enhanced engagement with the RC for support with government.

20.   The instruments introduced with the reform - the CF, CCA and, to a lesser extent, the MAF - were also increasingly seen to be improving the coherence of UN programming. Surveyed RCs and UNCT members consistently reported more positive views from 2020 to 2021 on the impact of these instruments in contributing to more coherent programming (Figure A4). In addition, interviewed RC, UNCT members and government officials in the six case study countries reported that the new CF and/or CCA processes contributed to more coherent UN programming.
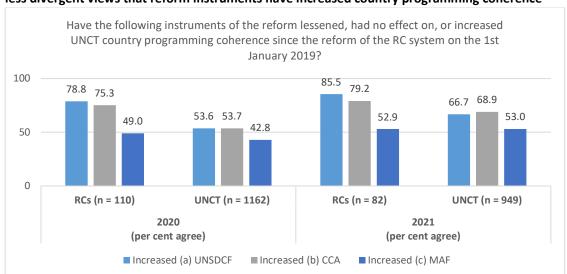
Figure A4: RC and UNCT survey respondents in <u>2021</u>, compared to <u>2020</u>, had more positive and less divergent views that reform instruments have increased country programming coherence

RC focus on higher level strategic issues has been a good practice for enhancing programming coherence

21.   In four case study countries, the RCs, in undertaking their overall coordination mandate, demonstrated a good practice of taking opportunities to focus on issues of higher-level strategic importance to achieving national development goals in their country. In one example, the RC, working with the relevant UNCT result group, responded to a political opportunity to support the government on modifying laws that disadvantaged women and girls. In two case study countries, the RCs strategically led efforts to capitalize on perceived government receptivity to important issues; for one, the RC was instrumental in having the CF document debated at a government cabinet committee and for the other, the RC raised gender equality and women's empowerment in the CF as a result area in recognition of an opportunity where the government was highly receptive to those issues.

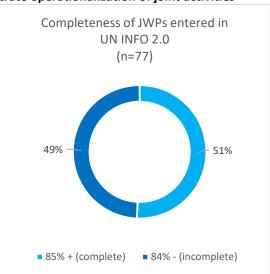*The integration of non-resident agencies to country-level programming was still evolving*

22.   In most case study countries, RCs connected non-resident agencies to resident agency counterparts working on similar issues, and actively sought their involvement in CF, CCA and other UNCT proceedings. However, non-resident agency staff interviewed in the six case study countries noted that, despite these good efforts, their participation was curtailed by logistical constraints created by physical distance, having a multi-country focus and weaker connections to country stakeholders. Non-resident agency representatives gave specific examples of not being able to participate in UNCT meetings when asked, and several suggested that there was a need to more proactively reach out to them on specific issues for which their particular expertise was needed.

B.   Improved programming coherence has not yet resulted in fully coordinated delivery of operational activities

Moderate progress has been made on developing and implementing joint work plans

23.   Despite noted improvements in UN programming coherence, as discussed in result A, there has been less progress on developing and implementing JWPs. This involves the following three activities, based on the more systematic guidelines introduced with the reform to ensure coherent programme delivery:

- **Articulating joint work***: Common UNCT strategic priority areas, outcomes and performance measurements must be articulated in the CF or UNDAF results framework. Outcome and result activity areas were defined in the results matrices of 88 per cent of the 39 CFs and 9 UNDAFs reviewed.

- **Developing multi-annual JWPs and inputting these into UN INFO***: Following the identification of the results framework, multi-annual JWPs covering the entire CF/UNDAF implementation period must be developed and input in the common UN INFO system.[16] This system-wide digital planning, monitoring and reporting platform, hosted by DCO, holds the JWPs and results frameworks; it is an important part of the UN's efforts to improve transparency, accountability, coherence and coordination, in support of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. A review of data from DCO found that just 39 of the 77 JWPs entered into the UN INFO system contained sufficient data to demonstrate operationalization of joint programme activities (Figure B1).[17] In addition, the COVID pandemic, humanitarian emergencies and rapidly evolving political contexts had negatively impacted multi-annual JWP operationalization. For example, in one CF case study country, few activities in the JWP have been operationalized due to fund repurposing and programme diversion to emergency response initiatives for COVID and flooding.

Figure B1: Almost half of multi-annual joint work plans entered in UN INFO did not yet have complete data to demonstrate operationalization of joint activities

Completeness of JWPs entered in
UN INFO 2.0
(n=77)

49%   51%

■ 85% + (complete)   ■ 84% - (incomplete)

- **Creating annual work plans:** Annual and/or result group-level work plans should be developed from the CF and/or multi-annual JWPs. This has improved but has not yet been systematic. For example, few or no activities were detailed for the selected result area in half of the case study country JWPs reviewed. This stalled progression was also noted in the QCPR monitoring and reporting framework, which reported that the percentage of "*UNCTs with JWPs of results groups that were aligned with CF/UNDAF and signed by all*

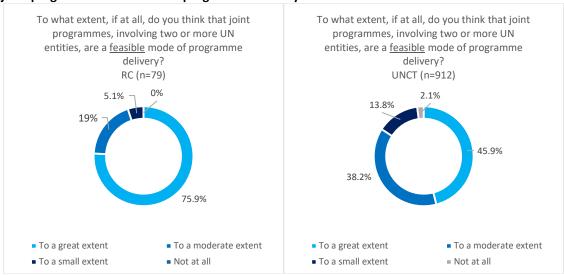[16]In August 2021, JWPs for 77 of 130 RCOs had been entered into UN INFO to varying degrees of completeness.
[17] OIOS criteria included result area, UN agencies, partners, available funding, start/end dates. DCO internal benchmark for completeness was 85 per cent of data entered.

involved entities" was still a work in progress, even though the figure had increased from 24 per cent in 2015 to 58 per cent in 2019.[18]

Joint programmes were not consistently seen as the most feasible mode of coordinated programme delivery

24.   Joint programmes, where two or more UN agencies worked together on the same programme with joint funding, were not always perceived as the most feasible mode of coordinated programme delivery. In particular, RC and UNCT survey respondent views on the feasibility of joint programmes differed, potentially due in part to agencies having the primary responsibility for joint programme implementation (Figure B2). Also, while a large majority of RCs surveyed (83 per cent) reported that the ability to deliver activities as part of a coordinated effort had increased since the reform, far fewer UNCT members surveyed (54 per cent) reported the same.[19] In four case study countries, UNCT members reported numerous challenges related to joint programme delivery. These included differing agency programming and funding processes, cycles, and implementing partners, the lack of internal guidance for joint programme operationalization and the high transaction costs and reporting burden involved; these are discussed further in result D below.

Figure B2: There was a divergence between RCs and UNCT members surveyed on the feasibility of joint programmes as a mode of programme delivery

In the six case study countries, more coherent programme delivery was impeded by a lack of coordination, duplication, and insufficient division of labour based on agency comparative advantage

25.   The RCs and UNCT members in all case study countries, as well as government officials in three countries, reported that coherent programme delivery was inconsistent. Specific reasons offered for this included:

a)   **Lack of coordination at the activity level:** A general lack of coordination between UN agencies on the implementation of shared programming areas was reported by RCs, UNCT

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[18] QCPR monitoring and reporting framework, May 2021. Indicator 80.
[19] Specialized agencies were more likely than other UNCT members to report the UN's ability to deliver activities as part of a coordinated effort had increased.

members, government representatives and/or other external stakeholders in all six case study countries. For example, one agency Head cited UNCT members being unaware that others had received significant amounts of funding for climate adaptation, despite targeting the same issues. Government officials in three countries also noted that coherent implementation was a work in progress and highlighted the need to improve coordination between UN agencies, donors, CSOs and the government at the project level, as highlighted in the quote above. Further, RCs and UNCT members surveyed indicated that coordinated delivery was still a work in progress.

> *"The problem of malnutrition is like a huge enemy on the mountain, and we all push one at a time. But if they all push at the same time, you can move it over from the mountain. We need to be using one system. I see that challenge still, after we plan, we work separately."* Government official.

b) **Duplication in programme delivery:** Government officials and UNCT members referenced duplication in programme delivery in two case study countries. For example, in one country, government officials noted duplication between UN agencies and the various stakeholders with which the UN works, as well as concern regarding duplication of the work of NGOs delivering projects for UN agencies and for government agencies in similar areas of work such as on youth and gender equality programmes. In the other, UNCT members cited continued duplication and overlap on both programme and policy activities, including on climate change programmes.

c) **Insufficient division of labour based on agency comparative advantage:** In another two case studies, CSOs and UNCT members reported that some agencies were working on projects and programmes beyond their area of expertise and outside of their agreed areas of comparative advantage. In certain cases, this was reportedly due to agencies seeking visibility in all initiatives as well as funding opportunities that arose during humanitarian emergencies and COVID-19.

Nevertheless, examples of coordinated operational activities have shown promise in leveraging the UN's comparative advantage and better meeting the needs of host governments

26. In several case study countries, more coherent, joint activities were being implemented successfully through CF results groups. For example, in one case study country UN entities united in a so-called One Stop Shop for sexual and gender-based violence where programme and policy activities were allocated amongst members and coordinated with CSOs. Other examples of successfully coordinated operational activities included a joint programme on labour intensive techniques and cultural conservation and a nationwide cash transfer scheme that reached 98 per cent of all eligible households.[20]

27. A number of factors supported the implementation of joint activities in the six case study countries. These key drivers of coherence included:

- The CF (a better tool to promote stakeholder participation, coordination and coherence);
- Results/outcome groups (promoting coherence, joint advocacy and agency accountability);
- Strong government engagement and receptivity;
- Strong RC coordinating role and active engagement of all stakeholders;

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[20] Review of the functioning of the RC System (7 June 2021) para 118, Box 4.
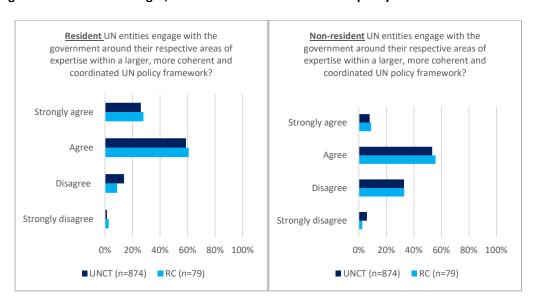
- Drive and personal attitudes of, and relations between, the RC and UNCT Heads for collective action; and

- Increased information sharing within the UNCT.

C.   Some progress has been made on developing and providing more integrated policy advice

RCs and UNCT members perceived policy coherence to have improved since the reform

28.   Most RCs and UNCT members surveyed (84 and 62 per cent respectively) reported that UNCT policy dialogue and advice to the government had improved since RC system reform; in 2020, 83 per cent of RCs and 55 per cent of UNCT members surveyed reported the same improvement.[21] QCPR monitoring data affirmed that policy advice has been increasingly coordinated since the reform (66 per cent of RCs surveyed in 2017 compared to 72 per cent in 2019).[22] Most RCs and UNCT members surveyed (68 and 54 per cent respectively) also rated the overall coherence of UN policy advice positively. UNCT members in CF countries (60 per cent) were more likely to rate policy coherence positively than those in UNDAF countries (50 per cent).

29.   Furthermore, most RCs and UNCT members surveyed agreed that both resident and non-resident entities engaged with the government within a larger, more coherent and coordinated policy framework (Figure C1). However, there was less agreement with regard to non-resident entity engagement, mirroring the finding in paragraph 22 that non-resident agencies were less likely to be integrated into country programming. Once again, UNCT members in CF countries (66 per cent) rated this more positively than colleagues in UNDAF countries (58 per cent).

Figure C1: The majority of RCs and UNCT members surveyed agreed that UN entities engaged with the government within a larger, more coherent and coordinated policy framework

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[21] The gap between RC and UNCT perceptions of improvement narrowed from a 28-point difference in 2020 to a 22-point difference in 2021.
[22] QCPR monitoring and reporting framework, May 2021. QCPR indicator 9a.

Government feedback on receiving coherent policy advice was more mixed, and bilateral policy engagements continued in most case study countries

30.   Government officials provided mixed perceptions of the coherence of UN policy advice within and across the six case study countries. In some instances, government officials reported working with a more harmonized UN, noted receiving high-quality policy advice, appreciated UN coordination in thematic policy areas and stated that the RC is the main UN focal point for policy advice. QCPR monitoring data also reported that the percentage of governments that agreed that the UNDS provided integrated policy advice tailored to national needs and priorities had increased from 79 per cent in 2017 to 88 per cent in 2020.[23]

31.   In contrast, other government officials interviewed, sometimes in the same countries, reported a lack of policy coherence. For example, some officials were critical of the degree to which policy advice was integrated and aligned across UNCT members. As one example, a government official was concerned that the UN did not provide enough integrated guidance on what budgetary resources the government should spend on food security issues, or the most effective actions to take. Other government officials interviewed referenced the lack of coherence amongst UN entities in providing policy advice, as noted in the adjacent quote summarizing the views of government officials who did not see any significant improvement in this regard.

> *"I see them as separate organizations. Whenever I deal with one of them, I felt that I'm dealing with a separate organization […]. So, it wasn't totally coherent and rarely you see UN organizations partnering and working together." Government official.*

32.   Furthermore, bilateral UN agency-government engagement on policy advice without RC awareness, and/or without being provided within an integrated UN policy framework, appeared to largely still be the status quo. In four case study countries, representatives from one or more Ministry engaged directly with UN agencies rather than through the RC on policy advice. For example, government Ministry staff in one country reported working directly with their implementing agencies in the area of agriculture and fisheries rather than having any direct line of communication with the RC. Additionally, government officials interviewed in some countries were not fully aware of the role played by the RC and/or RCO.

Policy coherence was impeded at times by limited RCO capacity to bring together the expertise of the UN system and external factors including the lack of UNCT support, insufficient political influence and government instability

33.   The capacity of RCOs was a determining factor for the achievement of integrated policy advice. In five of the six case study countries, RCs and UNCT members interviewed assessed the RC as only "*moderately well equipped*" to foster integrated, high quality and timely policy advice. Key challenges identified in these countries included the lack of policy expertise within the RCO as well as insufficient advisory support from agencies. Furthermore, UNCT members noted the significant strain on the RCO to deliver policy advice while also delivering on its coordination mandate. Globally, only half of RCs surveyed (51 per cent) agreed that they had sufficient human and financial resource capacity to bring together the expertise of the UN system for integrated, high quality and timely policy advice; most UNCT members surveyed (66 per cent) agreed.

34.   Insufficient RC political influence and government instability also at times impeded policy coherence. For example, the RC in one case study country reported that they had limited political weight due to donor influence and the lack of financial incentive for the government to engage with the RCO. In another case study example, the RC, UNCT members and a private sector respondent

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[23] QCPR monitoring and reporting framework, May 2021. QCPR indicator 9b

reported distinct challenges related to frequent government administration changes and high turnover of officials, and thus agendas and priorities, acutely impacting government relations, long-term planning and sustained policy coherence.

In the six case study countries, there were examples where RC-coordinated thematic groupings and the CF process have facilitated more integrated policy advice which, when delivered, had positive outcomes

35.   Across the case study countries, RCs have increasingly led on delivering integrated policy advice in thematic areas such as gender, as well as placing strong emphasis on strategic alliance-building. Thematic groupings have in some instances facilitated high-quality and integrated policy advice that the host government credited with having led to positive outcomes. These included:

A gender empowerment policy and the drafting of a gender equality act

A national plan on gender-based violence accompanied by the establishment of a national referral mechanism

A coordinated strategy on returning IDPs with inputs from UNCT members in their areas of expertise

36.   Correspondingly, the new CF process was reported in the six case study countries to have better enabled high quality policy advice that was increasingly tailored to national needs and priorities. The RCs, UNCT members and some government officials interviewed in these countries reported that, following the CF process, RCs focused more on aligning UN planning with national development needs and priorities, which was a significant departure from the more siloed approach with the UNDAF. In 10 of the 11 relevant meetings observed in the case study countries, alignment between the UNCT and government policy positions was moderate to high.

D.   Factors hindering outcomes around coordinated operational activities and integrated policy advice included disparate agency systems and processes, funding arrangements, and reporting burdens

Disparate UNCT agency planning processes, authorities and reporting lines have at times favoured UN agency priorities over CF priorities
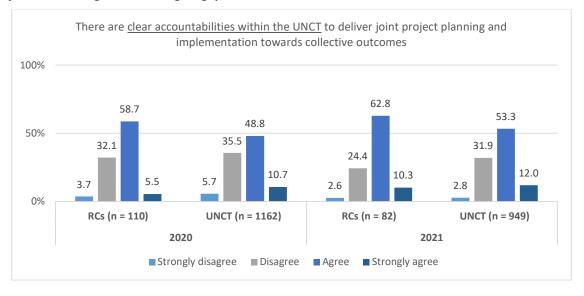
37.   Disparate UNCT agency planning processes for developing country programmes were not consistently derived from the CF process. While the amount of joint work had increased, agency planning processes were not systematically aligned to supporting the goals of CFs in their countries of operation. This meant that agencies at times prioritized internal management and donor project preferences over agreed CF activities, with no way to reconcile differences. More than half of UNCT survey respondents (54 per cent) noted that their agency's planning structures were not aligned to the CF cycle for their country of operation. Furthermore, a review of sampled programme documents for the six case study countries showed that 10 out of 25 were not fully aligned with the CF/UNDAF and no agencies had adopted the CF as their primary programme document (Table D1).

Table D1: One-third of reviewed country programmes were only partly aligned to country planning instruments

Content analysis: Country programme (CP) derived country planning instrument	CPs with CF countries (n = 16)	CPs with UNDAF countries (n = 9)	
CF adopted by agency as CP (A)	0	0	Fully Aligned (15)
CF outcomes copied verbatim and CP outcomes aligned within these (B)	14	1	
CF outcomes copied verbatim + additional outcomes added (C)	1	2	Partly/not aligned (10)
CP does not contain CF outcomes	1	6	

38.   Issues of differing agency authorities and reporting lines have also hindered coherence. Country case studies showed that MAF arrangements were clear, but interviews with RCs and UNCT members showed implementation varied greatly by country team and agency. There were no case study countries where RCs universally contributed formally to head of agency performance appraisals, as stipulated in the MAF.[24] While the proportions of surveyed RCs and UNCT members that agreed there were clear accountabilities within the UNCT for joint project planning and implementation towards collective outcomes increased, there also continued to be a gap between RC and UNCT views (Figure D2). This gap suggests a possible risk to implementing coherent joint programmes. Additionally, a DCO internal review and interviewed RCs and UNCT members in two case study countries reported that the UNCT configuration exercise did not take account of the regional and HQ authorities needed to adjust agency configuration to support the needs of the CF.[25]

Figure D2: Positive views among surveyed RC and UNCT members on agency accountability for joint work has grown, although a gap between RC and UNCT views remained

There are clear accountabilities within the UNCT to deliver joint project planning and implementation towards collective outcomes

- Strongly disagree
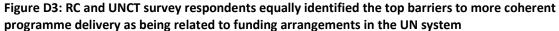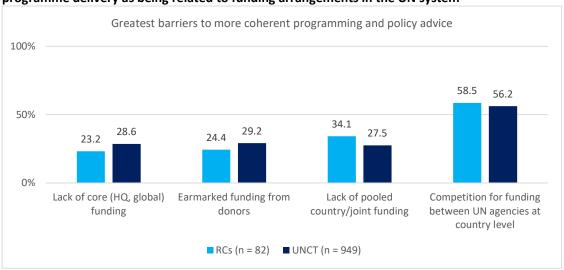- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

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[24] MAF. 15 September 2021., pgs. 7, 29.
[25] DCO. 2021. UNCT Fit For Purpose. p.,1.

Funding competition, lack of pooled funding, donor earmarking and bilateral funding arrangements between host government departments and UN agencies have undermined delivery of coherent operational activities and policy advice

39.   RC and UNCT survey respondents and interviewees in all six case study countries consistently identified funding arrangements as the main barrier to improved coherence in delivering country-level programmes and integrated policy advice. Funding-related issues accounted for four of the five main barriers identified by RC and UNCT survey respondents; the fifth barrier (not pictured) related to the lack of incentives to work more collectively (Figure D3).

Figure D3: RC and UNCT survey respondents equally identified the top barriers to more coherent programme delivery as being related to funding arrangements in the UN system

Greatest barriers to more coherent programming and policy advice

RCs (n = 82) UNCT (n = 949)

40.   The following specific examples of how funding arrangements undermined the coherence of programmes were noted in the six case study countries:

a) **Competition between UN agencies for funding:** Government officials, UNCT members, RCs and RCO staff interviewed in nearly all case study countries reported competition for funds as having hindered joint work, diverting attention from CF implementation and/or hindering coherence overall. In one example, the RCO connected a non-resident and resident agency on similar work, only for discussions to stop once they realized they were applying for funds from the same donor.

b) **Lack of available pooled funding:** While pooled funding was seen in most case study countries as an enabling factor for coherence, some UNCT members and RCs were critical of the small amounts available. A 2021 assessment of the UN COVID response similarly identified the low level of resources available for the COVID Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) as a critical issue.[26]

c) **Earmarked funding and bilateral relationships between donors and UN agencies:** In all case study countries, bilateral donor relationships were perceived to have undermined coherence, with ministries and bilateral donor agencies continuing to engage UN agencies without involvement of the RC. For example, in one country, donor insistence on funding a separate nutrition strategy undermined work done on a wider nutrition strategy for

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[26] Early lessons and Evaluability of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF. April 2021, pg.vii

government that had been developed through a coordinated process. This issue of bilateral funding undermining coherence was highlighted in multiple reviews, including the 2021 MOPAN assessment.[27]

d) **Disincentives for seeking joint project funding:** UNCT and RCO staff interviewed described significant disincentives for conducting and seeking funding for joint projects. Applications for pooled funding were cumbersome, varied across funds and were unpredictable. In most cases the RCO had helped to organize applications, though were not always successful. The governance mechanisms for joint projects also differed between UN agencies, adding the burden of a high volume of meetings and developing different agreements between agencies.

The reporting burden on participating UNCT agencies introduced with the reform was perceived as heavy

41.   The reporting requirements introduced with reform were also perceived by some UNCT members to be a significant burden, as illustrated in a common view of UNCT members in the adjacent quote. Examples of heavy reporting requirements included: duplicative reporting to DCO via the RC and to their regional and global headquarters on the same information; use of separate indicators to assess performance on common issues requested by their HQs and by the RC; involvement in joint programmes adding to reporting burden; and lack of feedback on how their reporting to the RC and DCO had been used. The 2021 MOPAN assessment also found that separate corporate systems required UN staff to manage multiple duplicative

> *"We're not just reporting to the office of the RC but we're also reporting to our different regional offices and sub-regional offices and of course to headquarters. We keep reporting the same information to different people through different platforms and through different mechanisms. The amount of reporting is overwhelming."* UNCT member

processes under UNDAFs and warned against repeating this issue under the new CFs.[28] Nevertheless, in two case study countries with CFs, UNCT members noted that they worked within RCO structures to improve management of their reporting burden. For example, in one country, UNCT members had agreed with the RCO to align agency indicators in the result group's joint reporting framework and, in another country, several UNCT members noted that use of UN INFO has been helpful for reporting and they expect this to improve over time. In both cases, the creation of interagency monitoring and evaluation working groups was seen as helpful.

E.   Enabled by reform planning tools and RC leadership, cross-cutting issues have been addressed across UN country-level programming but have not yet been systematically operationalized

Gender and human rights, and to a lesser extent disability and the environment, have been integrated into UN country-level programming

42.   Since the reform, cross-cutting issues have been well integrated into UN country-level programming. RCs, UNCT members and government officials interviewed across all six case studies widely agreed that gender, human rights, environmental and disability considerations have been mainstreamed across programming, with some highlighting this as a particularly successful area of reform. Analysis or consultation on gender was referenced in all 48 of the CFs and UNDAFs reviewed; human rights and environment were referenced in 47 documents and disability in 41 documents. Further, a majority of RCs and UNCT members surveyed (52 per cent or more) agreed that cross-

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[27] MOPAN - Is This Time Different? UNDS Reform. June 2021. Pg. 83
[28] MOPAN - Is This Time Different? UNDS Reform. June 2021. Pg.48.

cutting principles were well mainstreamed in country programming, with UNCT members from CF countries more likely to provide higher ratings than those from UNDAF countries.

43. In the six case study countries, positive examples of effective mainstreaming were noted where the RC took a particularly active role. RC-led initiatives to ensure the integration of cross-cutting issues included:

- Establishing thematic groups on gender and disability to support result groups;

- Forming gender, human rights and disability inclusion inter-agency groups to support the CF, including cross-cutting issues in needs assessments and proposals;

- Working with agencies on gender disaggregated data; and

- Encouraging UNCT joint advocacy on cross-cutting issues.

44. Gender was considered more widely than disability inclusion and environmental issues in the six case study countries. Disability and the environment were discussed in 4 of the 14 meetings observed, compared to gender being discussed in 10 and human rights in 6. Further, there was less reference to analysis and/or consultation on disability in all planning instruments reviewed, as noted above in paragraph 42. That said, UNCT members in several countries described ad hoc initiatives focused on disability and the environment, including assistance for women with disabilities, a project on the green economy and environmental considerations around farming and a national disability mapping exercise.

However, challenges were faced with operationalizing cross-cutting issues at the project level

45. Despite enhanced integration in UN programming, the RC and RCO staff, UNCT members and government officials interviewed in the case study countries noted challenges in moving from mainstreaming theory to practice, citing the difficulty of ensuring that cross-cutting issues were operationalized in programmes at the delivery stage. The three key challenges in that regard were:

a) **Agency capacity and focus:** In three case study countries, RCO and UNCT staff interviewed noted the importance of adequate agency capacity and focus on addressing cross-cutting issues. For example, one UNCT member noted that the RC is able to advocate for issues within the UNCT but cannot require agencies to include these issues in their own country programming.

b) **Lack of RCO capacity***:* In two case study countries, the RCs and RCO staff reported having limited capacity to support mainstreaming of each cross-cutting issue at the delivery stage. In these examples, UNCT members, the government and CSOs were concerned about the limited extent of coordination around these issues, owing potentially to a lack of RCO resources to coordinate.

c) **Political sensitivity**: In two case study countries, challenges were identified with advancing sensitive agendas, such as human rights and gender, in non-democratic and/or highly politicized contexts. For example, in one case study country, human rights was perceived as a politically sensitive issue, resulting in a strategic focus on gender, which was seen as more acceptable. In another case study country, gender equality issues had backtracked due to gathering little traction in a highly politicized and non-democratic context.

V. Conclusion

46.   All parts of the UN system must be given credit for the significant progress made on the reform of the RC system. Since the reform was introduced in January 2019, and even with the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, many important features have already been implemented. With a new architecture and independent RC that is generally well understood and established, the tools and processes introduced over the past two-and-a-half years have taken hold and are leading to more coherent programme planning that is better aligned to country needs and priorities. Mindsets and behaviours in the UNCT, while not yet fully transformed, are also evolving towards greater collaboration for achieving country-level objectives and broader overall impact.

47.   Nevertheless, the next significant phase of the reform – operationalizing coordinated and integrated delivery of policy advice and programmes – will need critical change from across UNDS entities and donors in order to be successful. While respecting individual entity mandates and accountability to governing bodies, corporate systems must be further adapted to the larger reform. Parallel agency programming to the main CF and a perceived lack of incentives to reduce the gap between these parallel tracks, have made it difficult to develop and implement joint work plans. Continued donor earmarking and bilateral approaches to working with UN agencies have compounded these challenges.

VI. Recommendations

48.   OIOS-IED makes four important recommendations to DCO.

Recommendation 1 (Results B and D)

49.   To address the challenges created by disparate UN entity programme requirements, governance, parallel programming tracks and reporting lines on implementing JWPs, **DCO, in its Secretariat capacity, should support the Chair of the UNSDG to provide UN system governing bodies with the relevant information and tools to facilitate their oversight role in order to improve country-level coherence and implementation of joint workplans, as requested by Member States in Resolution A/RES/76/4.**

Indicators of achievement: Organized discussions within UNSDG; timeline to implement A/RES/76/4 and Funding Compact commitments; reporting to governing bodies on steps taken

Recommendation 2 (Results B and C)

50.   To address some of the issues identified with translating coherent programme planning into coordinated programme delivery and integrated policy advice, **DCO should strengthen its knowledge sharing efforts by identifying, synthesizing and disseminating good practices for coherent country programmes and integrated policy advice**.

This recommendation should build upon the already planned DCO-led capacity development and knowledge series open to all RCs and UNCT members. DCO may seek to identify good practices from the RC community of practice, its own good practice database, regional collaborative platforms and other communication fora. Good practices around engagement of non-resident agencies in programme delivery and policy advice should in particular be captured and shared to further promote their integration into UNCTs and country programming.

Indicators of achievement: DCO staff tasked with synthesizing and disseminating good practices; active dissemination of at least three good practices each for coherent programme delivery and integrated policy advice to all RCOs

Recommendation 3 (Results B, C and D)

54**.**   To address the perceived increased burden of reporting amongst UNCT members, **DCO should undertake a review of UNCT collective reporting requirements, including those emanating from the RCO and DCO, in order to identify possible overlaps and opportunities for streamlining among RCO/DCO and agency reporting processes, in order to: a) inform UNSDG deliberations on ways to simplify results reporting requirements, and b) encourage UNDS entities to further invest in and fully utilize UN INFO.**

Indicators of achievement: Completed review exercise, which includes the identification of opportunities for reducing duplicative reporting

Recommendation 4 (Result E)

55**.**   To address challenges faced with operationalizing cross-cutting issues at project level, **DCO should develop an action plan for supporting RCOs in operationalizing existing guidance on mainstreaming cross-cutting issues in the areas of gender, human rights, disability, the environment and climate change.** In doing so, DCO may wish to consider the following options:

- The establishment of roving advisors from regional offices to provide further expertise and guidance at the country-level;
- The recruitment of dedicated advisors on specific issues as needed, such as disability inclusion, in the DCO New York office whose functions would include capacity building of other staff (including any advisors at regional level) and responding to requests from RCOs;
- Continuation of the partnership with UN Women on establishing Gender Coordinators and or supporting gender results groups;
- Continuation of the partnership with OHCHR on establishing regional Human Rights Advisors; and
- The further engagement of existing issue-based coalitions, peer support groups and individual UN entities at regional level to support RCOs as needed.

Indicators of achievement: Completed action plan with specific steps and target dates for assisting RCOs with operationalizing guidance on mainstreaming key issues

Annex I: Theory of Change for the RC System at Country Level

INPUTS

Mandate, Resolutions and guiding documents (70/1; 71/243; 72/279; A/75/6; SWSD; MAF); supporting frameworks; SG strategies

Human resources (Country level: total of 130 RC posts covering 162 countries; RCOs staffed with five specialist staff members)

Financial resources (Global: $281.8m in 2021)

ACTIVITY AREAS

Engage, convene and coordinate all UN resident and non-resident actors in planning and operationalizing an integrated UN development, peace and security, and humanitarian response

Engage with UN regional bodies for knowledge sharing, capacity development and common approaches

Engage and advise host governments on integrated policy solutions

Engage, convene and coordinate with key external (non-UN) development stakeholders at the country level

Mobilize resources and manage funding mechanisms at the country level

Conduct periodic monitoring and reporting of CF results progress

Establish and manage Business Operations Strategy

OUTPUTS

Cooperation Framework (informed by Common Country Analysis, and inclusive of M&E plan and governance structures)

Joint Workplans

Strategic partnerships with external (non-UN) development stakeholders

CF Funding Framework(s)/ strategy

UNINFO data sets; annual UN Country Results Report; CF Evaluations

Common business operations strategy and services (BOS; CP; CBO)

ENHANCED COHERENCE, COORDINATION AND COOPERATION AMONG UN AND NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS.

IMMEDIATE TERM OUTCOMES

Reduced programming gaps and overlaps

Improved integrated UN policy advice to host governments

More coordinated UN operational activities for development

Informed and effective cross-border and sub-regional responses

Greater credibility for UN with host governments through increased engagement, accountability and transparency

Enhanced operational and financial efficiency

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

The capacity of host governments to achieve SDGs is enhanced

UN operational activities for development are more effective

Host governments design national policies and programmes aligned to priorities for SDGs

Host governments implement national policies and programmes aligned to priorities for SDGs

IMPACT

SDGs achieved leaving no one behind

People's lives are impacted positively

Annex II: Evaluand Management Response

In the present annex, OIOS sets out the full text of comments received from the United Nations Development Coordination Office in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee. The comments have been produced as received.

United Nations · Nations Unies

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM · MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

TO: Mr. (Eddie) Yee Woo Guo, Director,
A: Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 17 December 2021

REFERENCE:

THROUGH:
S/C DE:

FROM: Mr. Robert Piper, Assistant Secretary-General for
DE: Development Coordination

SUBJECT: Response to the Draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of the
OBJET: Resident Coordinator System contribution to country-level programme coherence

1. I am pleased to welcome the findings of the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the Resident Coordinator System contribution to country-level programme coherence. I am particularly glad to acknowledge the draft report's finding that UN country-level programming coherence has been largely achieved, and am convinced that the report will help us to further strengthen these efforts, in line with the ambition articulated by UN Member States through GA resolution 72/279.

2. Having reviewed the report, I am pleased to inform you that we will be accepting all four recommendations set forth in the draft report. As requested, we have developed a management response to the draft report. The document includes explicit indication of acceptance of each recommendation and our plan of action with an associated timetable for implementing them.

3. Specifically, to support the Chair of the UNSDG in facilitating the oversight role of UN system governing bodies (Recommendation 1), among other actions, we plan to develop a UNDS reform checklist for the UNSDG entities, to report annually to their governing bodies. Knowledge sharing of good practices will be strengthened (Recommendation 2) through peer support groups exchanges, Communities of Practice exchanges, dissemination of good practices through a variety of channels, and enhanced DCO knowledge management. DCO will commission a review of collective entity reporting requirements to identify overlaps and opportunities for streamlining with agency-specific reporting requirements. Also, as mandated by the UNSDG, DCO will coordinate with members, an implementation plan for reporting on system-wide results, to be implemented in the period 2022-2024 (Recommendation 3). Finally, we anticipate developing an Action Plan for supporting RCOs in operationalizing existing guidance on mainstreaming cross-cutting issues in country level programming and processes, taking into account the options tabled by OIOS (Recommendation 4).

4. I take this opportunity to welcome the report's insights, including the identification, in the six case study countries, of UN agencies' funding arrangements as

a main barrier to improved coherence in delivering country-level programmes and integrated policy advice (Paragraphs 40 and 41). Recognizing that Member States do have a role to play in incentivizing programme coherence, the report notes "funding competition, lack of pooled funding, donor earmarking and bilateral funding arrangements between host government departments and UN agencies have undermined delivery of coherent operational activities and policy advice" (page 21). The UN Development Coordination Office looks forward to working in partnership with all stakeholders to address these issues, as foreseen also in the UN Funding Compact.

5.   Please let me thank you and your office for undertaking a consultative process and a strong cooperative approach. This is another very positive contribution to our work.

cc: Ms. Michelle Gyles-McDonnough, Director, Sustainable Development Unit, Executive Office of the Secretary-General