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Programme questions: evaluation

Evaluation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs supports the development pillar of the Secretariat, including by ensuring international cooperation in the pursuit of sustainable development for all. It does that by: (a) providing substantive support to the bodies dealing with development issues, namely, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and its related functional commissions and expert bodies; (b) monitoring and analysing development trends, prospects and policy issues globally; and (c) providing support for capacity development in policy formulation and implementation, in particular by supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In the present evaluation, the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of Department-integrated programme delivery efforts are assessed through the lens of four focus divisions during the period from 2016 to 2019.

The Department supported a large number of multifaceted mandates and demonstrated its unique added value as the global convener on development issues, including the Goals, through its technical expertise in support of global intergovernmental deliberations, as well as its ability to translate globally agreed norms into outputs that supported Member State needs.

The Department also effectively supported Member State progress towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda through its facilitation of intergovernmental decisions. However, the Department was less effective at monitoring the utility of its research and analysis products and its capacity development work. While some specific outcomes were identified, overall, the Department's work in those two areas suffered from a lack of continuity and evaluation. Moreover, the Department was only

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

** E/AC.51/2021/1.



in the early stage of effectively interlinking those areas of work. In addition, while efforts to achieve an integrated work programme had improved, the Department's planning process was not fully comprehensive or strategic. Notwithstanding promising trends, that was also true in the areas of interdivisional collaboration and collaboration with other United Nations entities.

Several foundational documents outlining the Department's overarching reform vision existed, but full operationalization and guidance documentation was still emerging. Furthermore, there was insufficient communication and clarity on how reform measures were being operationalized. For example, communication on the Department's support for resident coordinators and United Nations country teams was still evolving.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services makes the following two critical recommendations, (a) and (e), as well as three important recommendations, to the Department:

- (a) Further strengthen current yearly strategic plan to cover all major Department activities in order to maximize the achievement of results;
- (b) Develop a plan to further leverage the potential of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs Plus;
- (c) Fully implement the steps outlined within its strategy for capacity development;
- (d) Fully implement its plan to strengthen the reach and utility of its publications;
- (e) Develop operationalization action plans and continue to disseminate guidance for its organizational reform.

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I. Introduction and objective

1. The objective of the present evaluation was to determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the integrated programme delivery efforts of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to achieve its mandate to support Members States during the period from 2016 to 2020. In the evaluation, integrated programme delivery is defined as the cross-fertilization and interlinkages among functional areas (intergovernmental, research and analysis and capacity development), thematic areas (economic, social and environmental issues) and subprogrammes, as well as among the Department and its United Nations partners. Given the Department's broad and multifaceted mandate, the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) limited the scope of the evaluation in order to conduct an adequately rigorous and evidence-based exercise by identifying four primary focus subprogrammes¹ that covered the breadth of Department functions in support of sustainable development. The evaluation topic emerged from a programme-level risk assessment described in the evaluation inception paper and was conducted in conformity with norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations system.

2. The comments of the Department's management on the draft report were sought and considered in the final report (see annex I).

II. Background

Mandate

3. Enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, international economic and social cooperation has been at the core of the Organization's mandate since its creation and is among its key priorities. The Department's mandates are derived from numerous Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly resolutions, spanning decades.

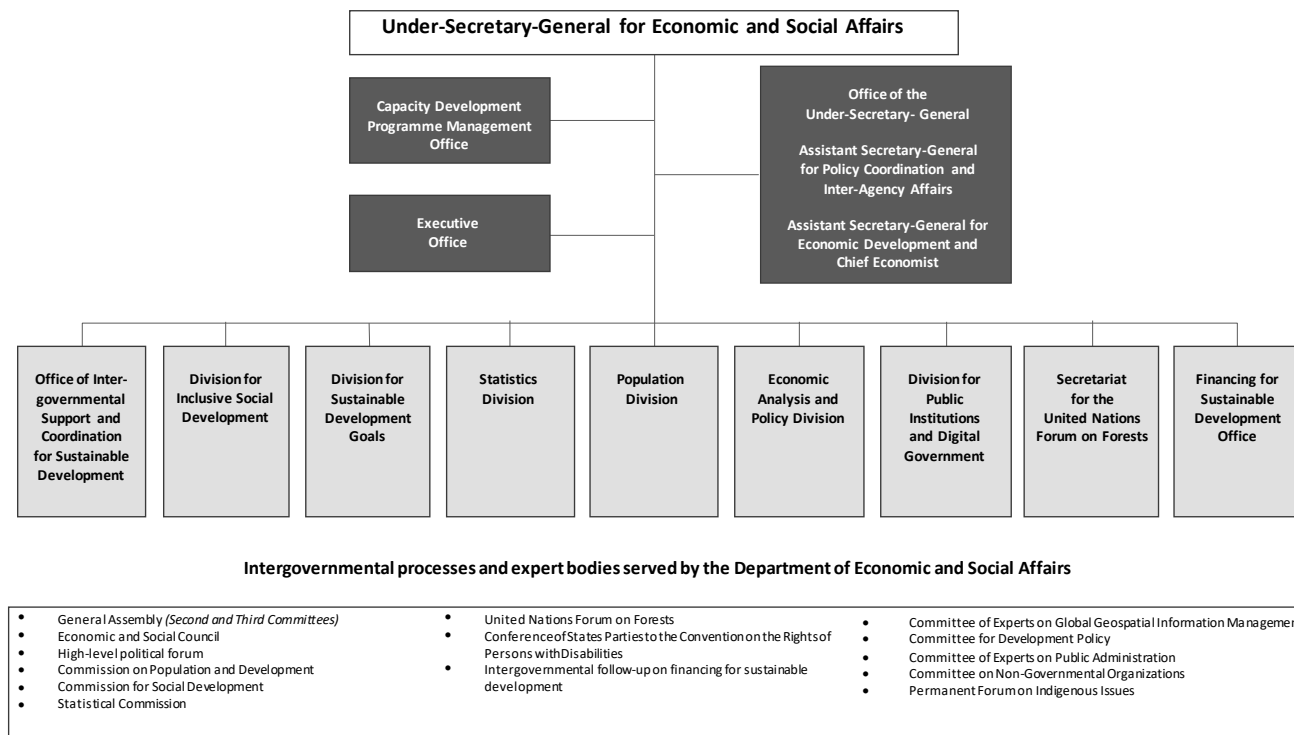
4. The Department's overall objective is to support the development pillar of the Secretariat, including by ensuring international cooperation in the pursuit of sustainable development for all. The Department tackles interlinked challenges in the economic, social and environmental fields while contributing to a mutually reinforcing relationship among the three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, development and human rights. To promote more coherent, coordinated and cross-sectoral support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Department seeks to promote strategic cooperation and partnerships within the Secretariat and with the United Nations development system at large, including the resident coordinator system.²

5. The Under-Secretary-General of the Department is accountable to the Secretary-General, whom he advises on the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental, as well as on thought leadership and a range of emerging issues and analysis. The Under-Secretary-General is assisted by the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and Chief Economist and the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs. In figure I, an overview of the organizational structure as at July 2019 is provided, including the nine divisions with substantive responsibility for the implementation of the Department's work programme.

¹ The Division for Inclusive Social Development, the Division for Sustainable Development Goals, the Statistics Division and the Economic Analysis and Policy Division. For more information, see figure I.

² A/74/6 (Sect. 9), para. 9.154.

Figure I
Organizational structure of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as at July 2019



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs website.

Governance arrangements

6. Member States exercise corporate governance through their participation in the sessions of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly and, on the basis of reports, the Assembly considers and approves the Department's strategic framework and programme budget. The Department supports the work of the Second and Third Committees of the Assembly, as well as the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies.

Resources

7. The Department's budget is resourced through four funding streams: the regular budget, extrabudgetary resources, the regular programme of technical cooperation and the United Nations Development Account. While the first two streams support the Department's overall programme of work, the regular programme of technical cooperation is specifically targeted to complement its work in support of developing countries, least developed countries, countries with economies in transition and countries emerging from conflict in capacity development, specifically in their efforts towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals, as well as the outcomes of United Nations conferences and summits.

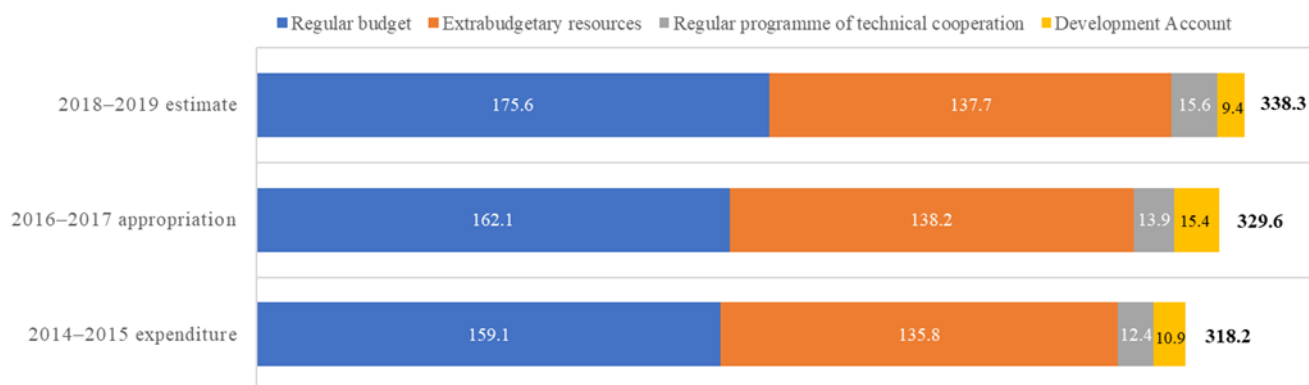
8. The Development Account stream is composed of resources to support capacity development work undertaken by various United Nations programmes. The Department has overall management responsibility for the account, which was resourced at \$28.4 million for the biennium 2018–2019. In addition, a percentage of

Development Account funding is utilized by the Department to support its programme of work, often in combination with Secretariat partners.

9. Figure II outlines the Department's budget and expenditure for the period 2014 to 2019. The Department's regular budget, extrabudgetary resources, regular programme of technical cooperation and Development Account proposed budgets for the biennium 2018–2019 totalled approximately \$338.3 million.

Figure II
Department of Economic and Social Affairs funding by source, 2014–2019

(Millions of United States dollars)

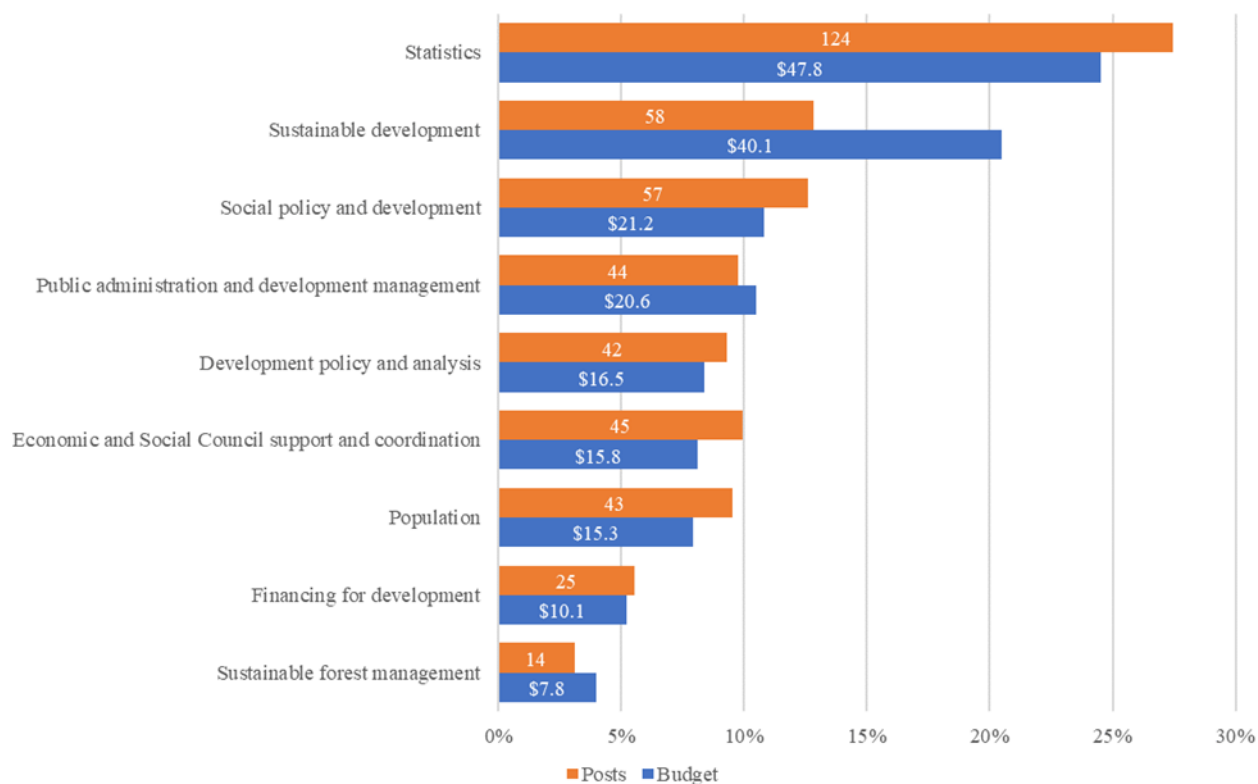


Source: A/72/6 (Sect. 9), A/72/6 (Sect. 23) and A/72/6 (Sect. 35).

10. The Statistics Division accounted for the largest proportion of the combined programme budget, at 24.5 per cent of the budget and the most posts (27 per cent), followed by the Sustainable Development Division, at 20.5 per cent of the budget and 13 per cent of posts (see figure III). Overall, the four primary focus subprogrammes, or focus divisions (statistics, sustainable development, social policy and development, and development policy and analysis), being evaluated accounted for 64 per cent of budgeted resources and 62 per cent of posts in 2018–2019.

Figure III
Department of Economic and Social Affairs post and budget allocation by subprogramme (regular budget, extrabudgetary resources and regular programme of technical cooperation), 2018–2019

(Millions of United States dollars)



Source: A/72/6 (Sect. 9) and A/72/6 (Sect. 23).

Operating context

11. **Department historic support for the United Nations development agenda and the 2030 Agenda.** In line with decades of Member State deliberations on critical development issues, it has provided substantive support, including either as conference Secretary-General or as a substantive secretariat. Examples have included the following:

(a) On global sustainable development policy: the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 2012;

(b) On the global social agenda: the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002;

(c) On financing for development: the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, 2015;

(d) On small island developing States: SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, 2014.

12. Through the 2030 Agenda, adopted in September 2015, a comprehensive set of universal and transformative Sustainable Development Goals and targets was established, and the commitment of Member States to work towards its full implementation, including through the United Nations development system, was

formalized.³ As the secretariat for the Goals, the Department carries out the following main functions in support of the 2030 Agenda⁴ while ensuring complementarity and synergy among its nine subprogrammes:

(a) Providing substantive support to the bodies established under the Charter of the United Nations that deal with development issues, including the General Assembly, the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the Economic and Social Council and related commissions and expert bodies (intergovernmental support, including normative work);

(b) Monitoring and analysing development trends, prospects and policy issues globally (research and analysis and knowledge generation);

(c) Providing capacity development support in policy formulation and implementation, in particular in the context of implementation of the Goals (capacity development support and knowledge delivery).

13. **Department reforms.** In General Assembly resolutions [71/243](#) and [72/279](#), the level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda, and the need for the United Nations development system to be repositioned in order to meet that challenge, were recognized. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General on implementation of Assembly resolution [71/243](#) on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2019, a revitalized Department is critical to strengthening the interface of the Organization's normative, analytical and operational work at the regional and global levels.⁵ In that context, in Assembly resolution [70/299](#), the Secretary-General was requested to enhance the Department's effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and internal coordination in order to support follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

III. Methodology

14. The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach, composed of the following:

(a) Structured document reviews, including (i) normative analysis of 2018 resolutions, decisions and declarations; (ii) capacity development project analysis; (iii) strategic planning and reporting desk analysis; and (iv) reform documentation analysis;

(b) An analysis of the Department's databases, programme performance and budgetary data;

(c) A survey of stakeholders of intergovernmental and expert bodies served by focus divisions;

(d) A survey of other Department stakeholders, including regional economic commission counterparts and other stakeholders;

(e) A survey of Department staff;

(f) Interviews of 41 Department staff;

(g) Interviews of 107 Department stakeholders, including Member State representatives and United Nations staff working in regional economic commissions, and other United Nations departments;

³ See General Assembly resolution [70/1](#).

⁴ For more information, see www.un.org/en/desa/what-we-do and General Assembly resolution [70/299](#).

⁵ [A/74/73-E/2019/14](#), para. 164.

(h) Direct observation of more than 30 Department-supported conference sessions and meetings, including the high-level political forum on sustainable development plenary and side events, summit sessions on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Samoa Pathway and a session of the global resident coordinator meeting held in November 2019.

15. **Limitations.** Some data were collected through the lenses of four primary focus subprogrammes, which served as proxies for Department-wide assessments. OIOS mitigated the limitation by analysing interlinkages with other Department subprogrammes. Other data collection and analysis had a Department-wide focus: structured document reviews (strategic planning and reporting desk analysis, as well as reform documentation analysis), analysis of programme performance and budgetary data, Department surveys, division director interviews, stakeholder interviewees and direct observation.

IV. Evaluation results

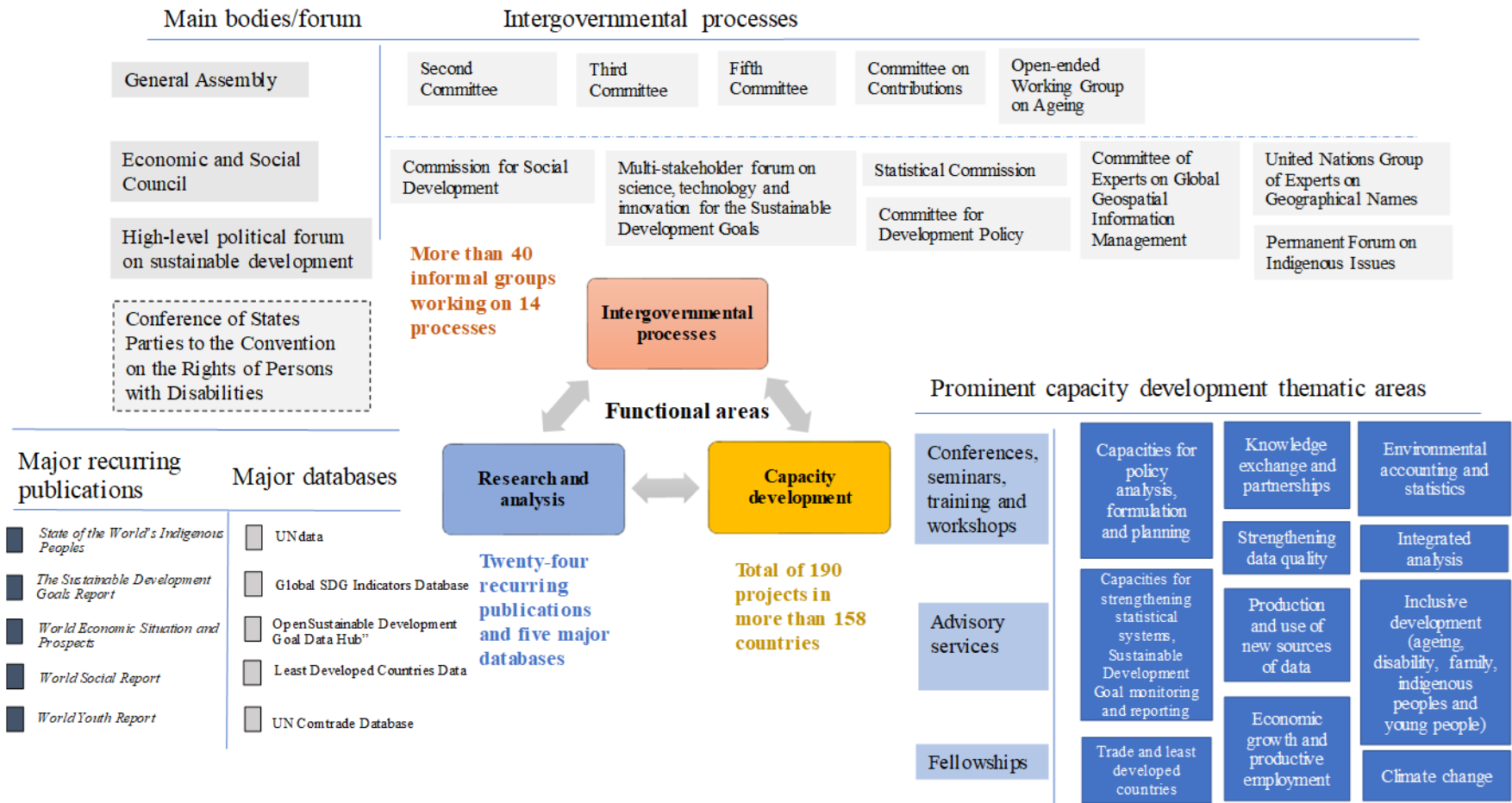
A. **The Department of Economic and Social Affairs demonstrated its unique added value as the global convener on development issues, including the Sustainable Development Goals; in some other areas, the Department's critical role was still emerging**

The Department supported complex and multifaceted mandates – including newer Sustainable Development Goal mandates and recently reformulated responsibilities related to the United Nations development reform

16. The Department supported a very large, and rapidly growing, number of distinct mandates. In the past two bienniums, the number of legislative mandates supported by the four focus divisions increased by more than 30 per cent in a wide range of areas. Examples included support for least developed countries, addressing inequality, support for voluntary national review preparation and statistical support. In responding to the multifaceted set of mandates, the Department undertook complex work to support intergovernmental processes, produce research and analysis and provide capacity development support. Taking into account only the Department's intergovernmental support, in 2018, the four focus divisions served the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and 14 distinct intergovernmental processes, including those of the Second and Third Committees of the Assembly and multiple commissions, as well as the recently added responsibility of supporting the high-level political forum on sustainable development, with its many Sustainable Development Goal support mandates. In addition, the Department supported more than 40 informal groups working on a multifaceted set of intergovernmental mandates. The Department's divisions produced many research and analysis products, which ranged from major publications, such as *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*, to policy briefs, infographics and videos to the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. The focus divisions supported 190 capacity development projects, resourced at more than \$50 million, between 2016 and 2019 (see figure IV and result B).

17. To add to the complexity, the Organization was called upon to ensure an ambitious transformation of the Department, covering most aspects of its work, which could enable the Department to fully partake in system-wide repositioning efforts and maximize contributions to the Goals through the enhancement of intergovernmental support, stronger thought leadership, more collaborative approaches and new skill sets (see [A/74/6 \(Sect. 9\)](#)).

10/40 Figure IV
Department of Economic and Social Affairs multifaceted work across three functional areas



Source: OIOS analysis: Department capacity development data; A/72/6 (Sect. 9); and Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Highlights 2018–2019*.

The Department's unique role as a global convener was well recognized for its ability to translate globally agreed norms into action in support of Member State needs

18. Within the demanding context, and across multiple stakeholder groups, the Department's role as a global convener was consistently recognized as its key comparative advantage. Stakeholders interviewed and survey respondents consistently rated the Department's intergovernmental support work higher than its research and analysis and capacity development work. More than 90 per cent of stakeholder survey respondents indicated that they either strongly agreed (68 per cent of intergovernmental and expert body stakeholders and 43 per cent of other stakeholders) or agreed somewhat (30 per cent of intergovernmental and expert body stakeholders and 48 per cent of other stakeholders) that the facilitation and support that the Department had provided to intergovernmental and expert bodies had been in line with the priorities of those bodies.

19. Related to the Department's role as a global convener, most regional economic commissions and United Nations country team interviewees identified its primary comparative advantage as being best positioned to translate globally agreed norms into specific policy options and tools to support Member States' needs. Both stakeholder survey respondents and interviewees referred to the relevance and high quality of the Department's activities in support of statistical norm setting. For example, in General Assembly resolution [73/235](#), it was requested that pertinent bodies of the United Nations system support strengthening national statistical data on the three dimensions of sustainable development. Desk review indicated that Department statistical capacity development projects in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda all aligned with the resolution. The Department's projects supported national Government work on data gap assessment; indicator data quality improvement; development of environmental, climate change and gender-specific national Sustainable Development Goal statistical indicators; and utilization of mobile devices and geospatial information. All country-level interviewees indicated that the Department's support had been well targeted to their needs and had enabled their national statistical offices to strengthen existing national statistical data, enabling them to report more credibly on progress on the Goals.

20. Another distinct area in which the Department was recognized for translating global agreements into specific action was work undertaken to support countries engaged in the voluntary national review processes. In 2019, the Department helped with the preparation of 47 voluntary national reviews and utilized knowledge gained through them, and in prior sessions of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to better meet future Member State needs. One outcome was the addition to subsequent high-level political forum sessions of voluntary national review lab workshops. OIOS observation of several such workshops in 2019, combined with interviews, confirmed their relevance for countries presenting and attending.

The Department's relevance and unique added value to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development in support of the Sustainable Development Goals was emerging

21. Given the enhanced interlinked nature of the 2030 Agenda, the Department was called upon to further strengthen the interlinkages across thematic areas in support of the implementation of the Goals. The overarching goal to perform work in a manner that promoted interlinkages across the economic, social and environmental dimensions was repeated throughout the Department's planning documents in the period 2016–2020. Stakeholder interviews confirmed that role as a unique

characteristic and expectation of the Department, citing it as one of the key comparative advantages that the Department should strive for in the context of supporting the 2030 Agenda.

22. To meet the responsibility, the Department sought to promote the incorporation of more than one thematic dimension into its work. A noteworthy example cited by stakeholders was *World Economic Situation and Prospects*, which was praised by many regional economic commissions for its focus on incorporating more than the economic dimension into its development analyses. Two capacity development support projects, the Belt and Road Initiative and the climate, land, energy and water systems project, were cited as good examples of integrated delivery. While the Department was in a unique position, as the Sustainable Development Goals global entity, to integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions into its work programme, a review of records showed that the Department's work to explicitly define what supporting an integrated approach to Goal implementation across the three dimensions would mean and how it would be operationalized was still emerging.

23. Stakeholders interviewed suggested that the Department could further maximize its comparative advantage by doing the following:

(a) Systematically sharing first-hand knowledge of intergovernmental outcomes across the economic, social and environmental dimensions;

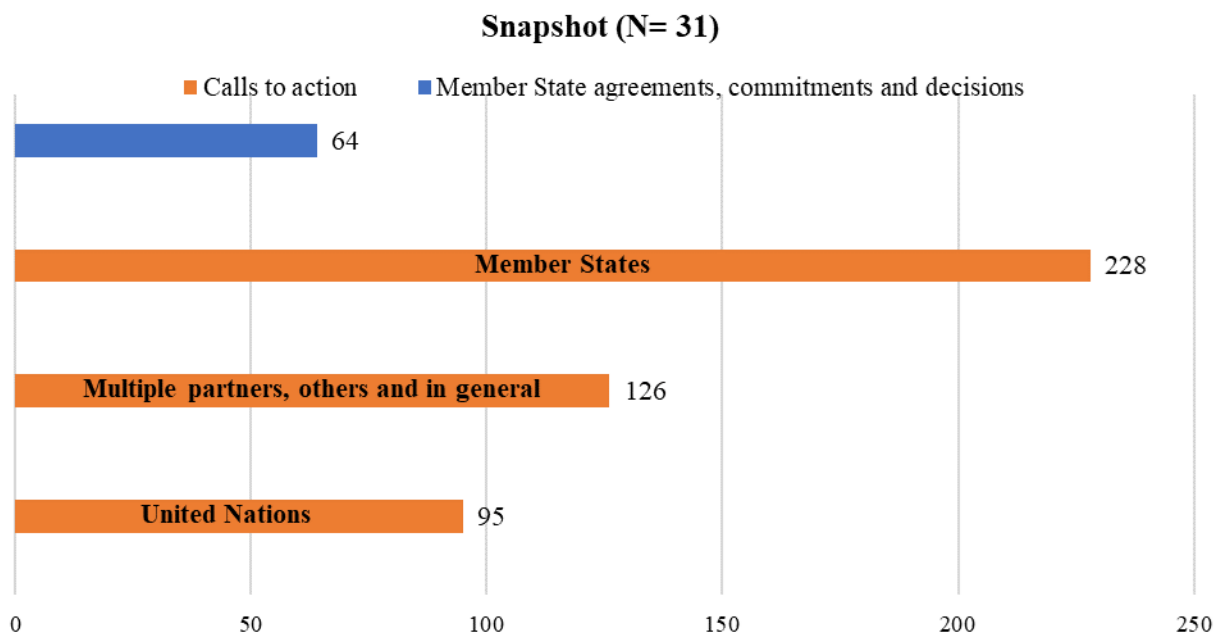
(b) Consolidating and sharing information on emerging issues from the regions so that effective practices could be replicated for greater global-level impact (global and regional public goods).

B. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs effectively supported Member State progress towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda through its facilitation of intergovernmental decisions; however, on research and analysis, capacity development and interlinkages across all three functional areas, results were less clear

The Department supported intergovernmental processes, facilitating consensus building and concrete resolutions in support of the 2030 Agenda

24. As indicated in result A, through the support that it provided to intergovernmental and technical and expert bodies, the Department effectively facilitated Member State decision-making. Analysis of all 31 resolutions, decisions and declarations supported by the four focus divisions in 2018 showed that the Department had facilitated 64 Member State agreements, decisions, endorsements and commitments (see annex II), leading to multiple calls for action from intergovernmental bodies, which were most frequently made to Member States and multiple partners (see figure V). Notably, in more than two thirds of the resolutions, decisions and declarations, the need to mainstream gender issues and gender equality and to prevent gender violence, as well as the need for gender-disaggregated statistics, was emphasized.

Figure V
Normative analysis of resolutions, decisions and declarations supported by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018



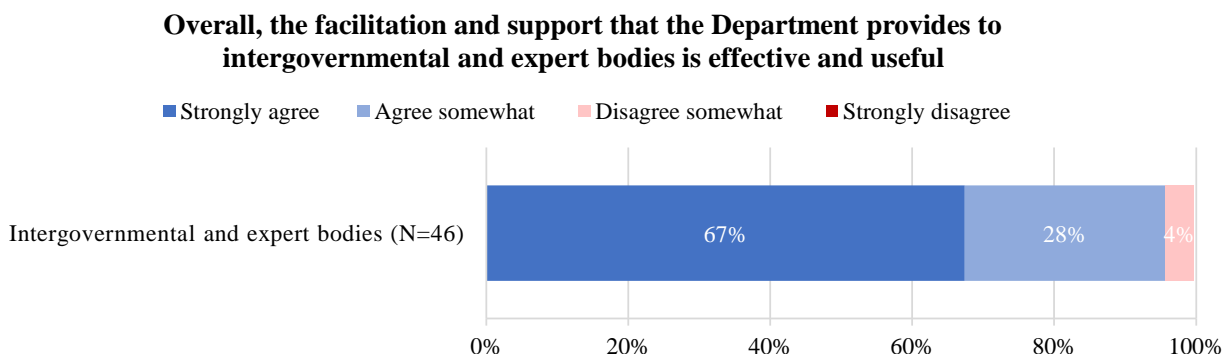
Source: Resolutions, decisions and declarations, 2018.

25. The Department took major responsibility for supporting the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which culminated in four ministerial declarations. Building on feedback from prior years' participants, and seeking to make main events more useful, in 2019, the Department implemented changes to better focus discussions and increase interactions. Furthermore, in response to feedback from Member States, the Department increased the number of side events to provide additional, more engaging platforms for peer-focused lesson learning. Lastly, as custodian of the data on, and analysis of, the funding of the United Nations development system, the Department supported the development and monitoring of the funding compact between Member States and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, a key reform component.

26. Overall, stakeholder survey respondents rated the Department as effective at providing facilitation to intergovernmental and expert bodies (see figure VI).

Figure VI

Views of members of intergovernmental and expert bodies on the effectiveness of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in supporting their bodies

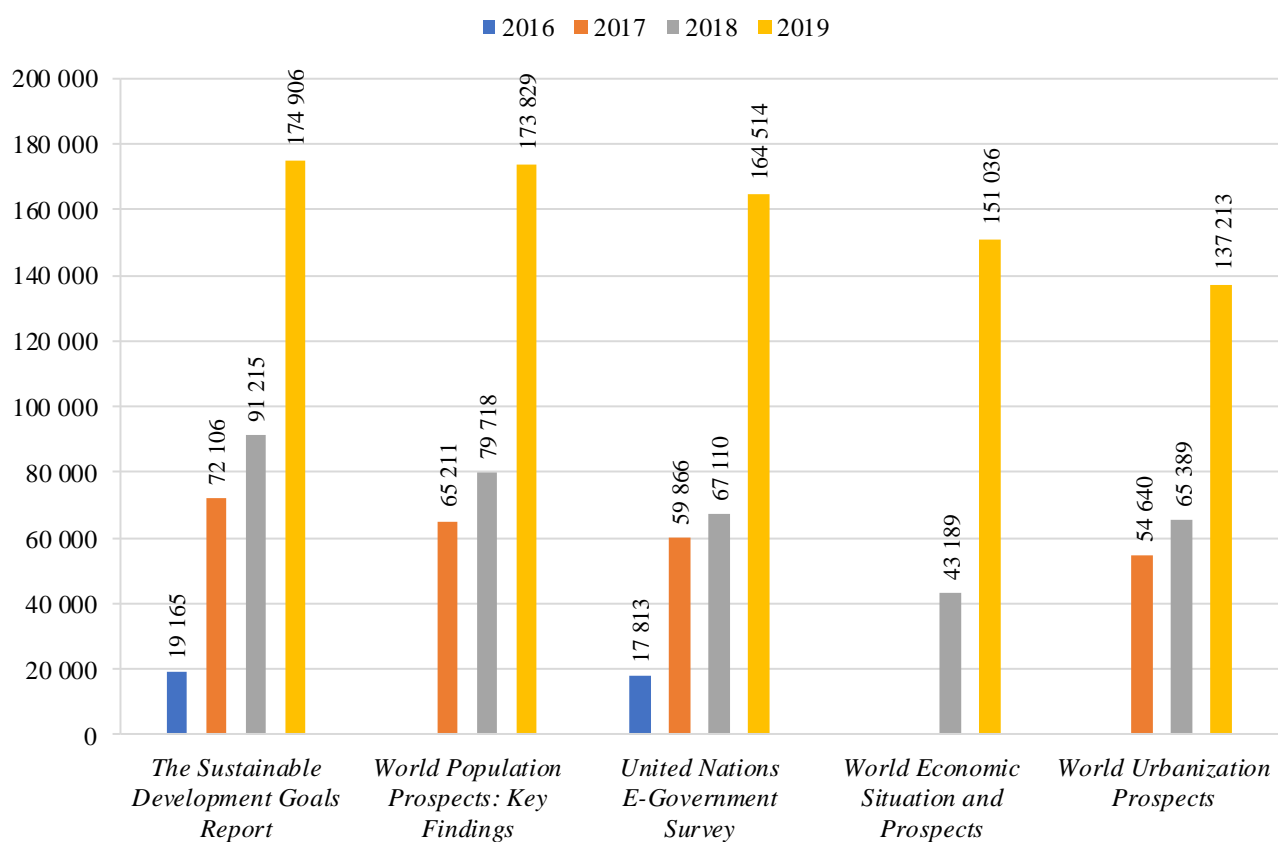


Source: Survey of members of intergovernmental and expert bodies.

The Department increased its efforts to enhance the visibility of its research and analytical work; however, the lack of data on usage of its research and analysis products made outcome assessment difficult

27. To meet its overall goal of increasing awareness of sustainable development, the Department developed and maintained databases and produced several major publications, whose main audience included Member States, academia, non-profit organizations and individuals. Web analytics revealed the most downloaded major publications from the Department's website in the period from 2016 to 2019 (see figure VII). The number of publications downloaded has grown since 2016, most dramatically between 2018 and 2019. Databases for which website statistics were available were widely utilized (see figure VIII).

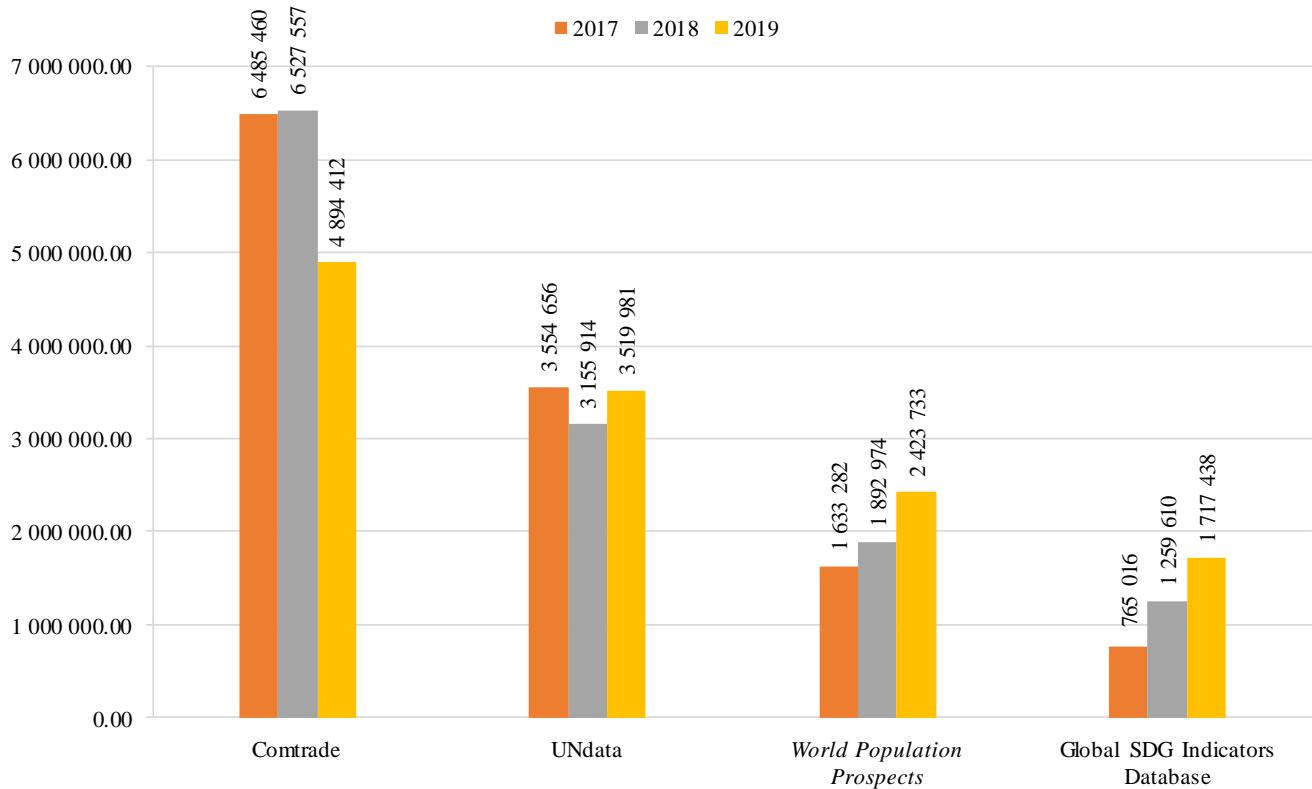
Figure VII
Most downloaded Department of Economic and Social Affairs publications⁶



Source: Department website statistics and social media reports, 2016–2019.

⁶ On the basis of downloads from the Department's website.

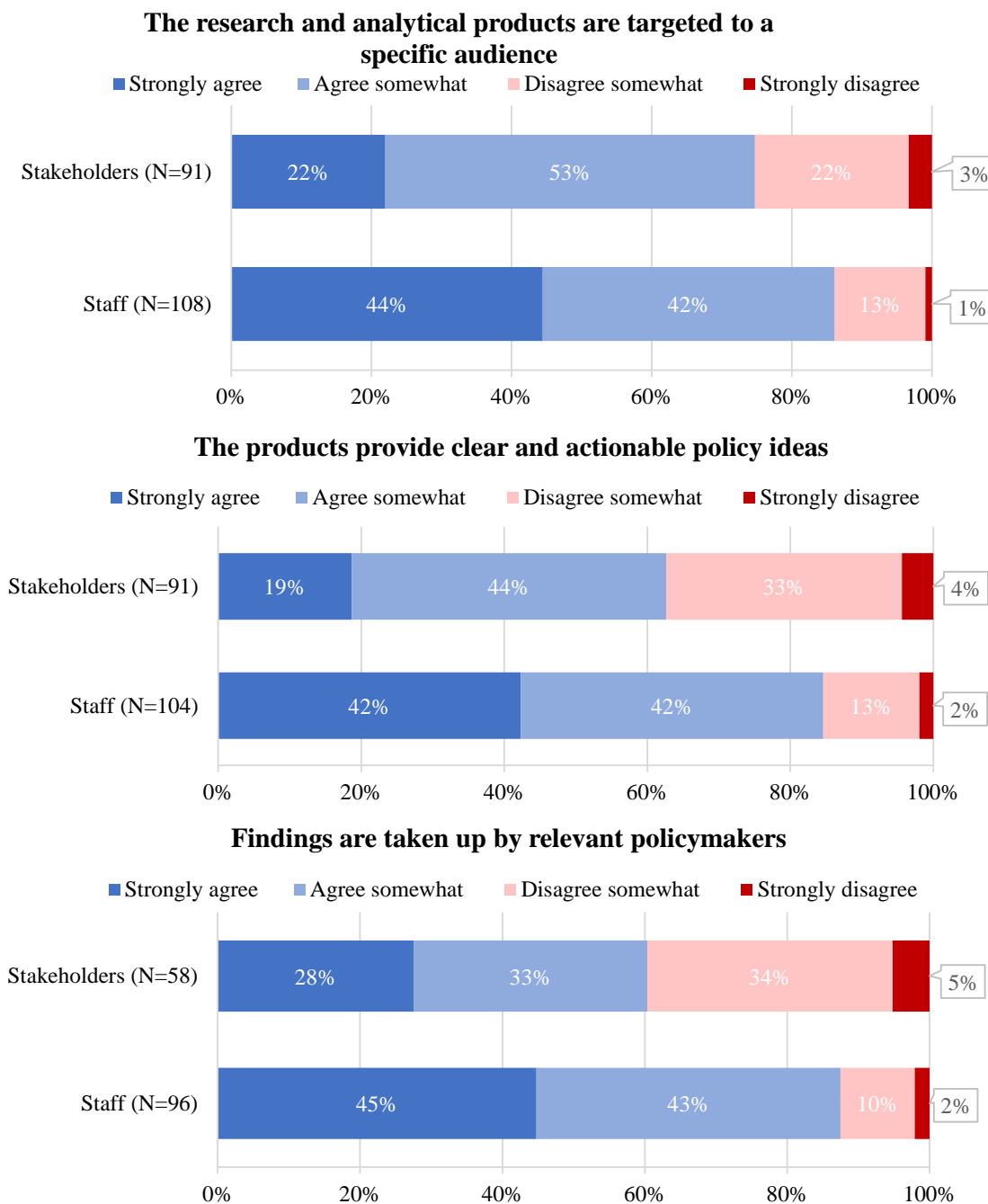
Figure VIII
Most consulted Department of Economic and Social Affairs databases



Source: Department website analytics, 2017–2019.

28. Overall, the Department's staff and stakeholders rated research and analysis products positively, with staff more positive in their ratings than stakeholders. Fewer stakeholders agreed that the Department's research and analytical products were targeted to a specific audience and provided clear and actionable policy ideas, or that their findings were taken up by relevant policymakers (see figure IX).

Figure IX
Stakeholder versus staff views on utility aspects of publications



Source: Staff and stakeholder survey.

29. Staff recognized that, historically, the Department had not sufficiently emphasized the promotion of its outputs and that the impact of its publications had seldom been assessed. A review of documents showed that, while many of the Department’s subprogrammes had developed indicators of achievement to track the number of times that publications had been accessed, few assessments had been made of the way in which reports were used by the intended audience. Since 2019, however,

the Department has taken numerous promising steps to improve the lack of promotion, including by developing a biennial strategic communication framework in 2019, which included extensive guidelines on launching and promoting publications. The Department planned to develop a template in 2020 for evaluating the impact of each major publication, following a commissioned study providing recommendations to the Under-Secretary-General of the Department on how to enhance the quality, distribution and engagement of the Department's publications.

While the Department supported national capacity development, its effectiveness was hindered by lack of continuity and systematic evaluation of its assistance

30. The focus divisions helped to enhance Member States' capacity through the delivery of 190 distinct projects related to diverse thematic areas (see table 1).

Table 1
Mapping of Department of Economic and Social Affairs capacity development projects⁷

	<i>Number of projects^a</i>	<i>Thematic areas with greatest number of projects</i>	<i>Total expenditure (millions of United States dollars)</i>	<i>Thematic areas with greatest expenditure^a</i>
Division for Inclusive Social Development	28	1. Disability (including youth) 2. Youth development 3. Ageing/financial cooperatives	2.0	1. Youth development 2. Disability (including youth) 3. Ageing
Division for Sustainable Development Goals	37	1. National planning for the Sustainable Development Goals 2. Climate change 3. Water management and sanitation	22.2 ^b	1. National planning for the Sustainable Development Goals 2. Knowledge exchange and partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals 3. Economic growth and productive employment
Economic Analysis and Policy Division	35	1. Reducing trade constraints for least developed countries 2. Strengthening national capacities for policy analysis, policy formulation and knowledge exchange 3. Integrated modelling	4.1	1. Strengthening national capacities for policy analysis, policy formulation and knowledge exchange 2. Integrated modelling 3. Reducing trade constraints for least developed countries

⁷ Categorization based on Department data. Thematic rankings based on relative expenditure levels from January 2016–November 2019.

	Number of projects ^a	Thematic areas with greatest number of projects	Total expenditure (millions of United States dollars)	Thematic areas with greatest expenditure ^a
Statistics Division	89	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Environmental accounting 2. Environment and energy statistics 3. Civil registration and vital statistics 4. Modernization of production, use and dissemination of data 5. National accounts 	23.0	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthening national statistical systems 2. Environmental accounting 3. Sustainable Development Goal monitoring and reporting 4. Strengthening data for cross-cutting issues (gender and disability) 5. Geospatial information management

Source: Document review.

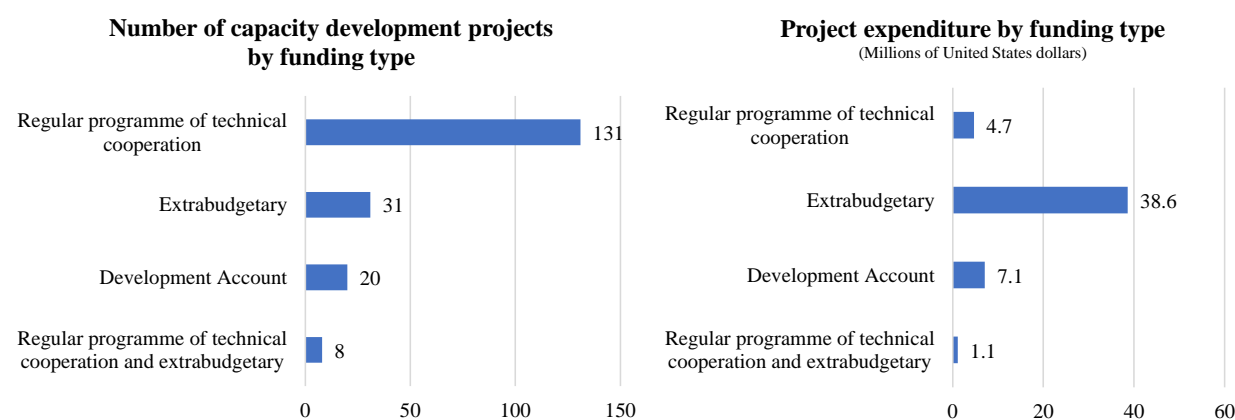
^a “Strengthening the capacity of least developed countries to implement the 2030 Agenda” project not included because it could not be assigned to just one division.

^b Includes a \$9.1 million extrabudgetary resources expenditure for the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development.

31. The total expenditure of the projects, more than \$51 million, represented about 8 per cent of Department-wide expenditure (see figure X).⁸ As shown in figure XI, the number of projects and the total expenditure for projects implemented by the focus divisions increased, indicating increased national capacity development support provided by the Department.

Figure X

Number of capacity development projects and project expenditure by funding type, 2016–2019⁹



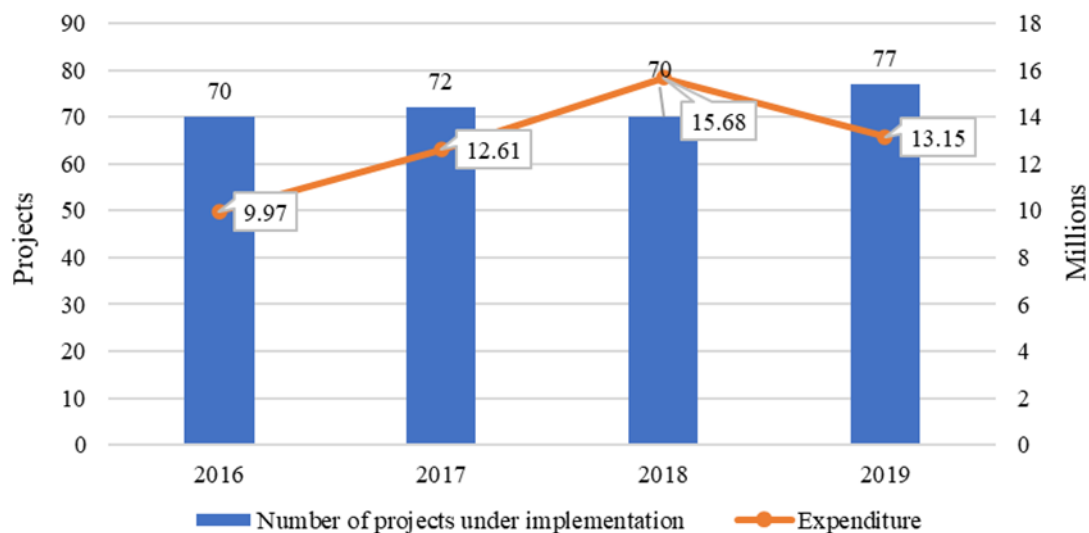
Source: Document review.

⁸ 2016–2017 appropriation and 2018–2019 estimates. Department funding in 2016–2019 was \$668.1 million.

⁹ An additional regular programme of technical cooperation/extrabudgetary resources category for which an individual breakdown was not available.

Figure XI
Number of capacity development projects under implementation by year/total expenditure by year¹⁰

(Millions of United States dollars)



Source: Document review.

32. Assessment of a sample of the Department's capacity development projects indicated positive results. Interviews with recipients and document reviews showed that the Department was able to influence specific policies and programmes in various areas. For example, in Tanzania, the Department supported the revision of the Statistics Act, including regulations for the quality assurance framework for data from non-official sources. In Uganda, through national indigenous issue consultation and regional workshops, the Department helped the Government to establish a national affirmative action programme. Through the expansion of its macroeconomic forecasting model, the Department enhanced Member States' national capacity to formulate policies to maximize the impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative on achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal in seven early start countries. In addition, the Department demonstrated effective transfer of proven tools and useful knowledge to different countries based on lessons learned in pilot intervention countries (e.g., it modified climate, land, energy and water systems integrated assessment tool training and decided to allocate additional time to explaining the modelling tool). Additional examples of adaptations by the Department can be found in other case study countries.

33. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned examples, evidence showed that the support provided was often limited in its scope or lacked continuity. For example, under a Sustainable Development Goals monitoring project, the Department helped to identify data gaps through baseline studies, developed user engagement strategies and provided training on metadata issues. However, the trainings were topic-specific and sometimes limited to the national level, which created challenges for implementation at the subnational level. Other stakeholders interviewed also mentioned a lack of continuous training and follow-up and a short-term approach to project planning. In this regard, the Department faced several related challenges,

¹⁰ In 2016–2019, 190 projects were implemented on a multi-year basis. Data for 2019 are for January to November.

including funding constraints, as well as a mandated role limited to supporting country-level efforts as determined by respective governments.

34. Uneven evaluation practices hindered the measuring of capacity development results. While most of the Development Account projects were evaluated, there were large extrabudgetary resources projects completed between 2016 and 2019 with no evaluations. For projects where mandated evaluations were available, guidelines issued on the management and reporting of evaluation results in 2017 were followed. The quality of Development Account evaluations varied, however. Development Account project evaluation guidelines and a detailed evaluation framework were issued in 2019 to enhance the quality of Development Account project evaluations.

Examples of successful interlinkages between the Department's functional areas of work were not systematically mapped and pursued

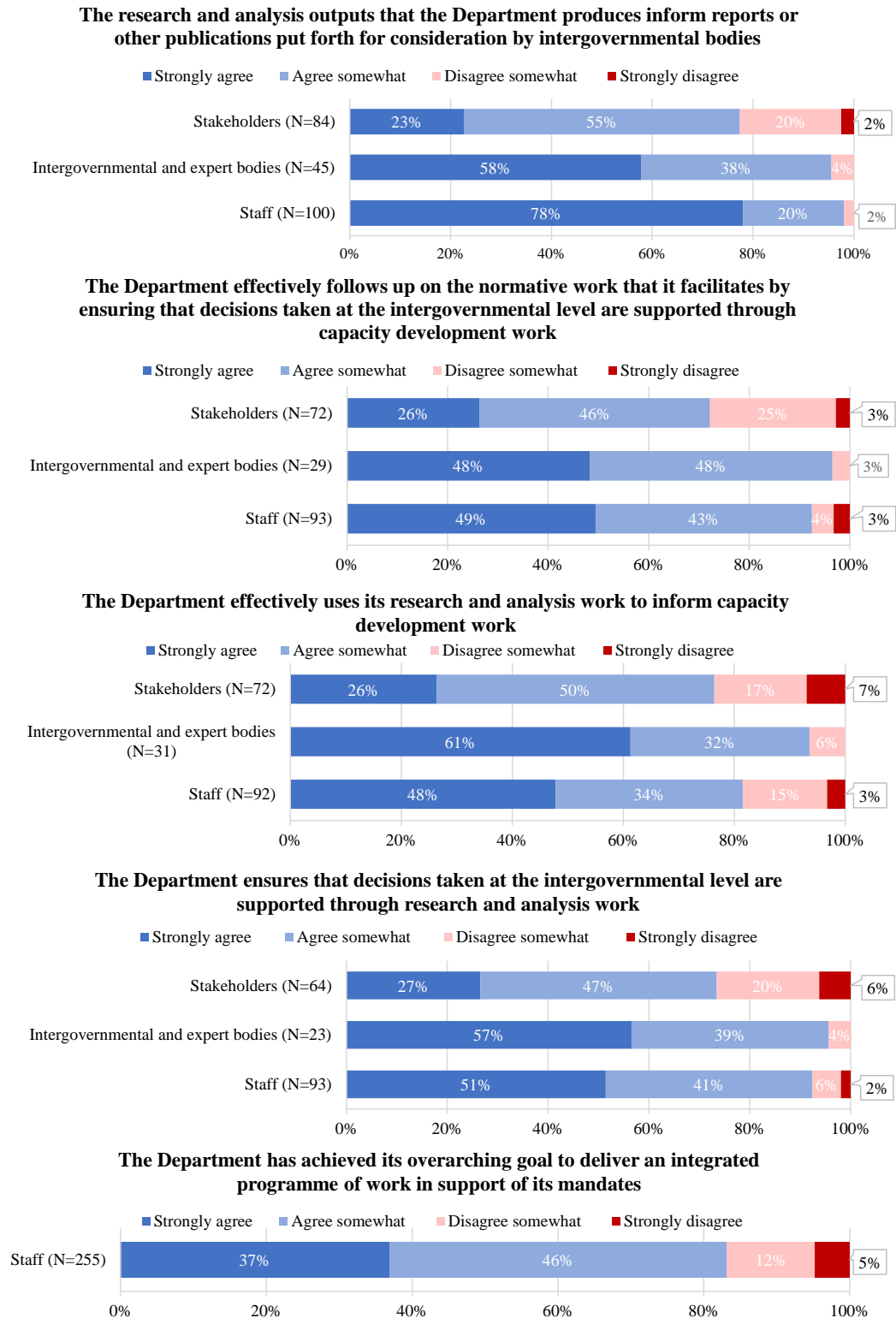
35. Document review, as well as interviews with staff and stakeholders, indicated that interlinkages between the Department's normative work and capacity development activities were the most developed. In the eight resolutions, decisions and declarations reviewed, about a quarter thereof, reference was made to the Department's role in translating international agreements into viable national strategies and policies through capacity development work.

36. Interlinkages between research and analysis and the intergovernmental process were also apparent. For example, content from many of the Department's publications was cited in reports and notes of the Secretary-General, which were referred to in outcomes of normative bodies and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. However, an analysis of resolutions of normative bodies served by the focus divisions showed that direct references to the Department's analytical products beyond the reports of the Secretary-General were limited.

37. Interlinkages between research and analysis and capacity development were most apparent in the work of the Economic Analysis and Policy Division. An analysis of a sample of 30 capacity development projects revealed explicit linkages between the Division's analytical work and its capacity development activities, in particular in support of least developed countries.

38. Notwithstanding the acknowledgement of the importance of interlinkages between the Department's budget and planning documents, few subprogrammes referred to interlinkages in their programmes of work. The Department referenced few specific benchmarks, best practices or examples of strategies to link functional areas of work in its strategic planning framework, budget documents or yearly senior management planning exercise. Nevertheless, overall, staff and various stakeholders had primarily positive views of the Department's ability to link these issues (see figure XII).

Figure XII
Staff, stakeholder and intergovernmental and expert body member views on interlinkages



Source: Staff and stakeholder surveys.

C. The efforts of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to achieve an integrated work programme to effectively support the 2030 Agenda improved, but the current planning process did not fully support comprehensive strategic planning

The Department had a variety of separate work planning processes reflecting its complex streams of work; however, the lack of a comprehensive strategic planning mechanism hindered subprogrammes' ability to effectively interlink their functional work

39. In line with formal Secretariat strategic framework planning and budgeting processes, the Department's mandates were supported by subprogramme-level-oriented strategic plans. The siloed nature of the Secretariat planning process, including the fact that large segments of the Department's activity planning were undertaken in the context of the three separate processes associated with projects funded by the Development Account,¹¹ the regular programme of technical cooperation¹² and extrabudgetary resources,¹³ contributed to an inadequate foundation for comprehensive integrated planning of the Department's complex and multifaceted work.¹⁴

40. Desk review of the Department's strategic planning and reporting indicated that it was in the early stages of putting supplemental strategic planning initiatives in place. They were multifaceted and included division-level internal workplans; internal synopses of achievements and priorities by division, which were submitted to the Under-Secretary-General of the Department on an annual basis; and a newly created Department-wide capacity development strategy.

41. Notwithstanding the forward movement, the combination of the above-mentioned steps and Secretariat planning processes did not add up to a sufficiently integrated Department-wide plan. The Department had indicated that strategic integration was essential to promoting a coherent and coordinated implementation process¹⁵ in advancing the 2030 Agenda, but that has not yet been realized. For example, each division still had separate internal programme plans and project activity documents organized based on funding source, such as the Development Account, the regular programme of technical cooperation and extrabudgetary resources. There was no master comprehensive document for managers, prospective partner divisions or other United Nations entity partners to view the totality of each Department subprogramme's planned activities.

The lack of an integrated and comprehensive strategic planning mechanism hampered the Department's ability to maximize the achievement of results

42. Developing a sufficiently integrated strategic plan to cover complex mandates and priorities is challenging. The Department's ability to maximize the achievement of its results continued to be hampered by the following:

(a) **A lack of an adequate mechanism, or guidance, to support integrated planning across the Department's subprogrammes.** While the Department's planning documents made general reference to the necessity of integrated planning across subprogrammes, there was no formal mechanism, or guidance, to support this aspiration. When it occurred, it often happened on an ad hoc basis or informally;

¹¹ See A/72/6 (Sect. 35).

¹² See A/72/6 (Sect. 23).

¹³ See A/72/6 (Sect. 9).

¹⁴ In accordance with the Secretariat framework, each division developed a separate subprogramme strategic framework. See A/71/6 (Prog. 7) and A/72/6 (Sect. 9).

¹⁵ A/72/6 (Sect. 9), para. 9.5.

(b) **A lack of an explicit objective to link the Department's main functional work areas.** As highlighted in the Department's 2016–2019 budgets, interlinkages across its three main types of activities were necessary to ensure their overall effectiveness. However, analysis showed that only one of the four focus divisions explicitly stated its intention to link, for example, its work in support of intergovernmental processes with its capacity development work. In addition, desk review indicated that no formal departmental guidance existed on how to plan for interlinkages across these three functional areas, nor was there any related process in place;

(c) **An absence of support for joint planning with regional economic commissions and other United Nations entities.** In General Assembly resolutions on reform,¹⁶ as well as the Department's documentation, it was stressed that ongoing work planning between the Department and the regional economic commissions, as well as work planning between the Department and all other United Nations entities, was critical for the delivery of coherent United Nations system-wide activities and achievement of the 2030 Agenda, minimizing duplication and optimizing synergies. OIOS analysis, supported by regional economic commission and country-level interviews, indicated that, while in some instances inter-agency support groups provided opportunities for joint planning, there was no effective mechanism or guidance to support systematic joint planning with the Department at the activity level. In addition, the informal mechanisms to facilitate joint planning were not working effectively (see result D). Multiple stakeholder and staff interviewees indicated that that lack constituted a significant risk to the aspiration of coherent delivery of United Nations work.

Overall, the Department's above-mentioned planning system challenges had an adverse impact on the Department's ability to maximize its results.

D. The collaboration of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs across its subprogrammes, and with United Nations system entities, has improved; however, insufficient mechanisms for coordination resulted in missed opportunities for greater coherence

There were promising trends of collaboration internally, as well as with other United Nations entities

43. Reviews of resolutions and decisions originating from intergovernmental processes and major forums indicate Member State recognition that collaboration is critical to the Department's success in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁷ The importance of internal and external collaboration was also reflected in the Department's planning documents, in particular with respect to capacity development support activities and strategies.

44. In a previous OIOS evaluation of the Department, it was noted that it was not perceived to be building on potential complementarities sufficiently; divisions were perceived to compete rather than collaborate.¹⁸ Current review of planning documents revealed that each subprogramme registered at least one joint activity with another subprogramme in 2019, with some showing an increase from 2016 to 2019, suggesting progress in integrating its work programme compared with in prior years. Capacity development projects with interdivisional collaboration, a key focus of the Department's strategy for capacity development, increased from 4 to 10 between 2016

¹⁶ See, for example, resolution [72/279](#).

¹⁷ See, for example, General Assembly resolutions [70/299](#), [71/243](#) and [71/313](#).

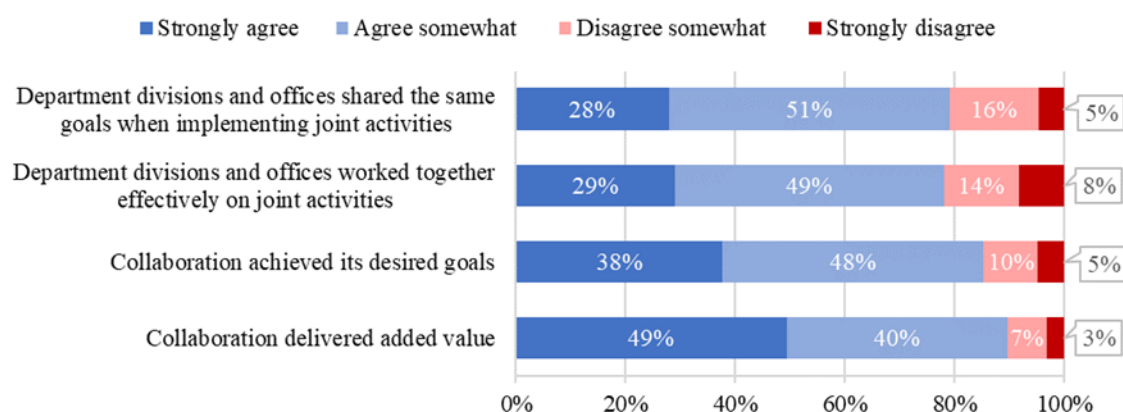
¹⁸ [E/AC.51/2011/2](#), para. 63.

and 2019. The official launch, through the United Nations peace and development trust fund, of a Department-wide capacity development project involving all four focus divisions in 2018 illustrated enhanced collaboration. In the area of intergovernmental support, the high-level political forum on sustainable development support was established as a Department-wide priority, to which all divisions contributed. Task forces at the senior management and working levels were created, and each division's staff members supported the high-level political forum in various capacities.

45. Department staff surveyed were generally positive about collaboration among the Department's divisions and offices, with respondents most positive about collaboration efforts delivering added value (89 per cent), and joint efforts and activities achieving their desired goals (86 per cent) (see figure XIII).

Figure XIII

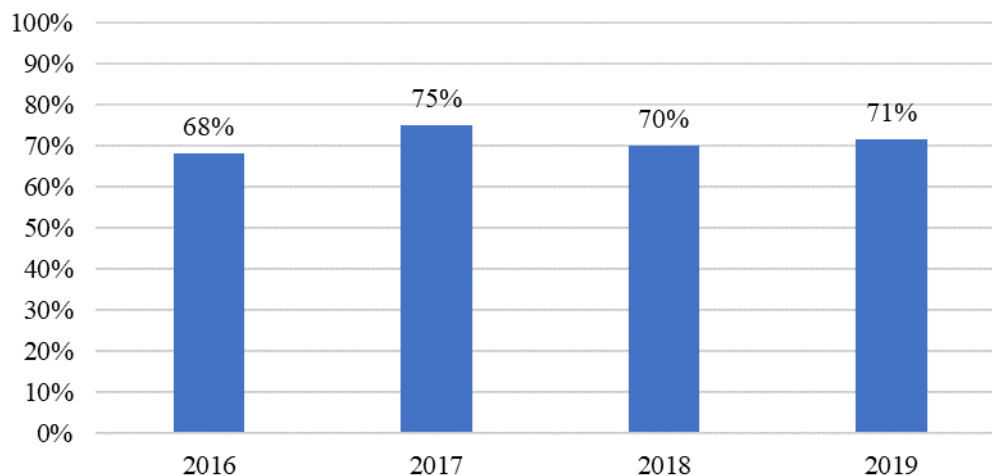
Department of Economic and Social Affairs staff perspectives on collaboration in the Department



Source: Staff survey.

46. External collaboration efforts were most visible in the area of capacity development support, in which approximately 70 per cent of the Department's capacity development projects each year included other United Nations entities as partners (see figure XIV). The importance of collaboration was reflected in the Development Account project selection guidelines, which included a commitment to partnerships with relevant entities since the thirteenth tranche. Collaboration, however, was not limited to Development Account projects. The clear majority of Department extrabudgetary resource-funded projects (27 of 39, or 69 per cent) included partnerships with one or more United Nations entities.

Figure XIV
Proportion of Department of Economic and Social Affairs capacity development projects with United Nations entity collaboration

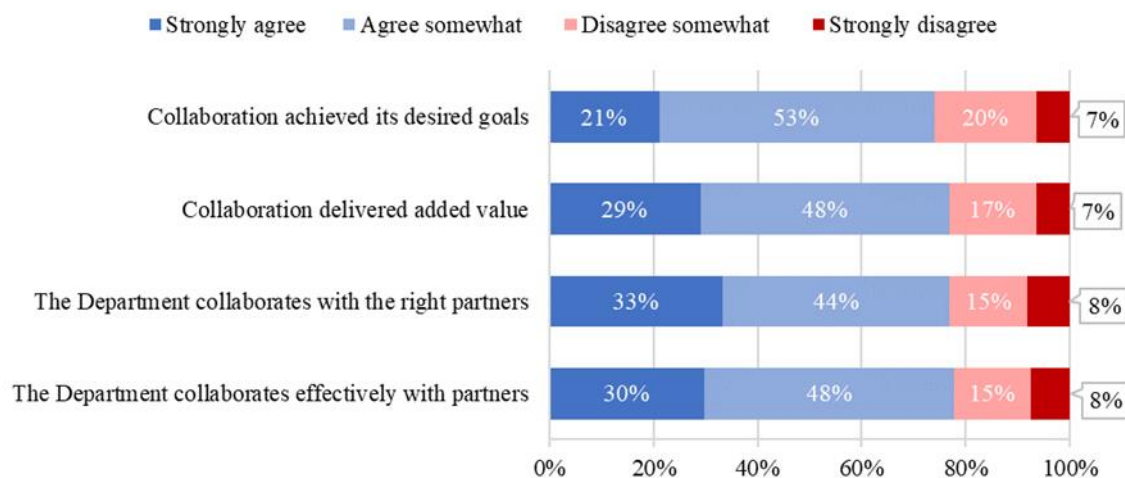


Source: Document review.

47. With regard to research and analysis, many of the major publications produced by the Department leveraged extensive collaborations with other United Nations system entities. The publication *World Economic Situation and Prospects* was often identified as a good example of collaboration between the Department and stakeholders. The report was jointly produced by the Department, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the five regional economic commissions with input from the World Trade Organization and the International Labour Organization. Regional launches of the report were organized and managed by regional economic commissions. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report* was another example of a publication that leveraged extensive collaboration and input from United Nations system entities. In 2018, the Division for Inclusive Social Development launched its *Disability and Development Report*, the first United Nations flagship report on disability and the Sustainable Development Goals, which leveraged an extensive list of collaborators within and outside the United Nations system.

48. Stakeholder perspectives on the Department's collaboration were generally positive (see figure XV), with most stakeholders giving positive ratings to the Department's collaboration with partners (78 per cent), its ability to collaborate with the appropriate partners (77 per cent), the added value of collaboration (77 per cent) and the ability of collaboration efforts to achieve desired goals (74 per cent).

Figure XV
Stakeholder perspectives on collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs



Source: Stakeholder survey.

A lack of effective mechanisms for collaboration within the Department, and with the broader United Nations system, limited the coherence of its work and the impact of its efforts

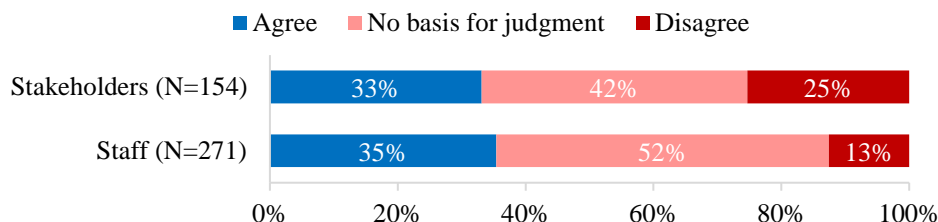
49. Notwithstanding the increase in the amount of effective collaboration within the Department, interviews and analysis of internal documents revealed that interdivisional collaboration was often ad hoc. While some interdivisional mechanisms were in place, with positive collaboration impacts, the lack of an integrated strategic planning mechanism hampered the Department's ability to maximize complementarities and collaboration. This translated into missed opportunities for synergies between programmes, as indicated by staff, who confirmed in interviews that they were not always aware of other divisions' workplans, making it difficult to proactively engage and complement each other's work.

50. The Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs Plus, as primary United Nations coordination mechanisms in the economic and social fields, for which the Department serves as convener, were not sufficiently known and did not achieve their stated objectives. While the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs was given prominence as the primary vehicle to ensure greater coherence within the United Nations and to achieve harmonization, as well as to strengthen the linkages among United Nations normative, analytical and operational work,¹⁹ it was instead routinely used to engage the United Nations system in the preparation of intergovernmental events and reports. Furthermore, survey data indicated that it was not a well-known mechanism for action and was considered to be ineffective (see figure XVI).

¹⁹ A/74/6 (Sect. 9), paras. 9.12 and 9.23; A/74/6 (Sect. 23), para. 23.8; A/72/6 (Sect. 9), para. 9.5; and A/70/6 (Sect. 9).

Figure XVI
Knowledge and effectiveness of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs

The Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs has been an effective mechanism for facilitating greater coherence across United Nations entities



Source: Staff and stakeholder survey.

51. As noted in result C, there was no effective mechanism for systematic joint planning between the Department and key partners such as regional economic commissions, resulting in lost opportunities for regional synergies. The Department's capacity development work was sometimes found to overlap with regional economic commissions in the area of statistics, where many players presented coordination challenges. Many regional economic commission interviewees expressed the need for better sharing of the Department's capacity development projects and other information at the planning stages to avoid unintended overlap at the activity level. Because information shared at the higher levels often did not trickle down to implementing staff, numerous last-minute attempts were made in Africa and Asia and the Pacific to coordinate delivery of workshops in the same region.

52. Regional stakeholder interviewees indicated that they would like to see better alignment between regional entities and the Department. For example, they appreciated the Department's collaboration and support for regional forums for sustainable development while indicating that they hoped to see better alignment and inputs from the forums feeding into the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Similarly, regional stakeholders working on social development issues expressed the need to strengthen collaboration and linkages between regional economic commissions and the Department in all functional areas.

E. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has taken steps to implement its organization-level reform in support of the Sustainable Development Goals; however, its full operationalization remains a work in progress as concrete outcomes are not yet discernible

While several foundational documents outlining the Department's overarching reform vision exist, full operationalization and guidance documentation was still emerging

53. As part of system-wide United Nations reforms, and in response to Member States' request to ensure that the Department was organized in an integrated, cohesive, coordinated and collaborative manner so that it could support the follow-up and

review of the 2030 Agenda at the global level,²⁰ the Department sought to implement reform initiatives in the following phases:

(a) Phase 1, in which the Department's work was realigned for more impactful response to the substantive requirements of the 2030 Agenda, including the appointment of a new Chief Economist and divisional reorganization;

(b) Phase 2, which included recommendations made in the report of the internal review team on Department reform, with recommendations presented to the Department and senior management in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General;

(c) Phase 3, launched with the Department proceeding immediately to implement actions in the following key areas:

(i) Thought leadership;

(ii) Enhancements to intergovernmental support;

(iii) Improvements to data, statistics and analysis;

(iv) Stepping up capacities to leverage financing;

(v) Strategic and substantive support for the reinvigorated resident coordinator system;

(vi) Enhancements to external communication and strategic partnerships.

54. OIOS analysed the extent of reform implementation, including any early outcomes. Regarding phase 1 and 2 reforms, after extensive internal consultations, the Department was reorganized. The most prominent change was having a single division successfully taking the lead role to organize the Department's support for the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2018. Regarding phase 3, some of the six reform measures had some effect on the OIOS results presented in the present report.

55. Senior management communicated guidance on the operationalization of phase 1 and 2 reforms in a series of memorandums to division directors in March 2018, renaming divisions and announcing structural and resource changes. However, assessed against Joint Inspection Unit established criteria,²¹ and based on desk review and interviews with staff, the Department's work to operationalize phase 3 remains a work in progress. Table 2 provides the results of a desk review of all reform operationalization documentation available as at March 2020. Evidence reviewed showed that that documentation did not translate into a robust reform implementation plan. Insufficient details were provided on reform objectives, what staff were expected to do differently and/or how and when changes would be operationalized. The Department issued further guidance to its staff in February 2020 that provided an update on its efforts to support the resident coordinator system. That guidance contained an additional level of detail on how one of the six key reform measures should be operationalized. It represented a positive step in the Department's work in progress to develop holistic guidance for the effective operationalization and communication of the Department's phase 3 reforms.

²⁰ See General Assembly resolution [70/299](#), para. 16. See also [A/74/73-E/2019/14](#), paras. 165–175.

²¹ See [JIU/REP/2019/4](#).

Table 2
Assessment of guidance for the effective operationalization of Department of Economic and Social Affairs phase 3 reforms

<i>Department reform operationalization guidance</i>	<i>Does the document provide guidance related to reform objectives and operationalization?</i>	<i>To what degree is the level of detail provided sufficient to support the operationalization of reform?</i>	<i>Does the document clarify responsibilities for those to be involved in the reform operationalization?</i>	<i>Overall, how useful is the document as detailed guidance for staff and stakeholders in support of the operationalization of Department reform?</i>
Memorandum of the Secretary-General, including annex, December 2018	High-level information provided; operationalization details missing	Minimally useful	No	Minimally useful
2020 budget, A/74/6 (Sect. 9)	High-level information provided; operationalization details missing	Minimally useful	No	Minimally useful
2020 budget, A/74/6 (Sect. 23) , regular programme of technical cooperation	High-level information provided; operationalization details missing	Somewhat useful	No	Minimally useful
2020 budget, A/74/6 (Sect. 35) , Development Account	High-level information provided; operationalization details missing	Somewhat useful	Somewhat	Somewhat useful
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Strategy for Capacity Development, 10 March 2017	Yes, contains significant details	Somewhat useful	Somewhat	Somewhat useful
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <i>Highlights 2018–2019</i>	High-level information provided; operationalization details missing	Somewhat useful	Somewhat	Somewhat useful
Annual report of the Under-Secretary-General on achievements and priorities for the upcoming year (2019)	High-level information provided; operationalization details missing	Somewhat useful	Somewhat	Somewhat useful
Subprogramme-level internal work plans to strategically organize delivery of subprogramme of work (most recent available)	High-level information provided; operationalization details missing	Somewhat useful	Somewhat	Somewhat useful

<i>Department reform operationalization guidance</i>	<i>Does the document provide guidance related to reform objectives and operationalization?</i>	<i>To what degree is the level of detail provided sufficient to support the operationalization of reform?</i>	<i>Does the document clarify responsibilities for those to be involved in the reform operationalization?</i>	<i>Overall, how useful is the document as detailed guidance for staff and stakeholders in support of the operationalization of Department reform?</i>
Memorandum of the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to Department managers, including annexes A and B, February 2020	High-level information provided; operationalization details missing	Highly useful	Somewhat	Somewhat useful

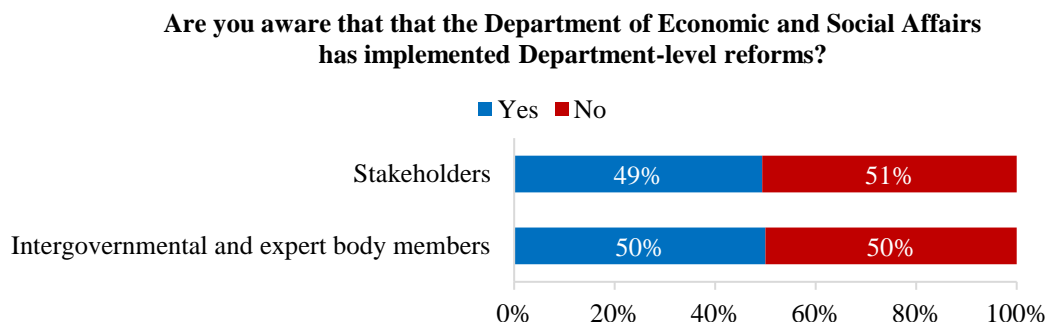
Source: Document review.

There was insufficient communication and clarity on the operationalization of reform measures

56. Document review (see table 2), interviews and survey data indicated that communication related to the operationalization of the Department's phase 3 reforms was limited and that understanding among staff and stakeholders was low; 30 per cent of staff surveyed either disagreed somewhat or strongly disagreed that roles and responsibilities were well defined. Regarding stakeholders, while the publication entitled *Highlights 2018–2019* included the section entitled "Advancing thought leadership for sustainable development", in which the Department's thought leadership role was articulated to some extent, overall, there was a dearth of communication with the Department's stakeholders on the reform. No guidance document was shared with key stakeholders, such as regional economic commission staff, providing specific detailed information on how the Department operationalized its reforms. The lack of communication created a risk to the achievement of effective partnerships, which require clarity on respective roles and shared goals.

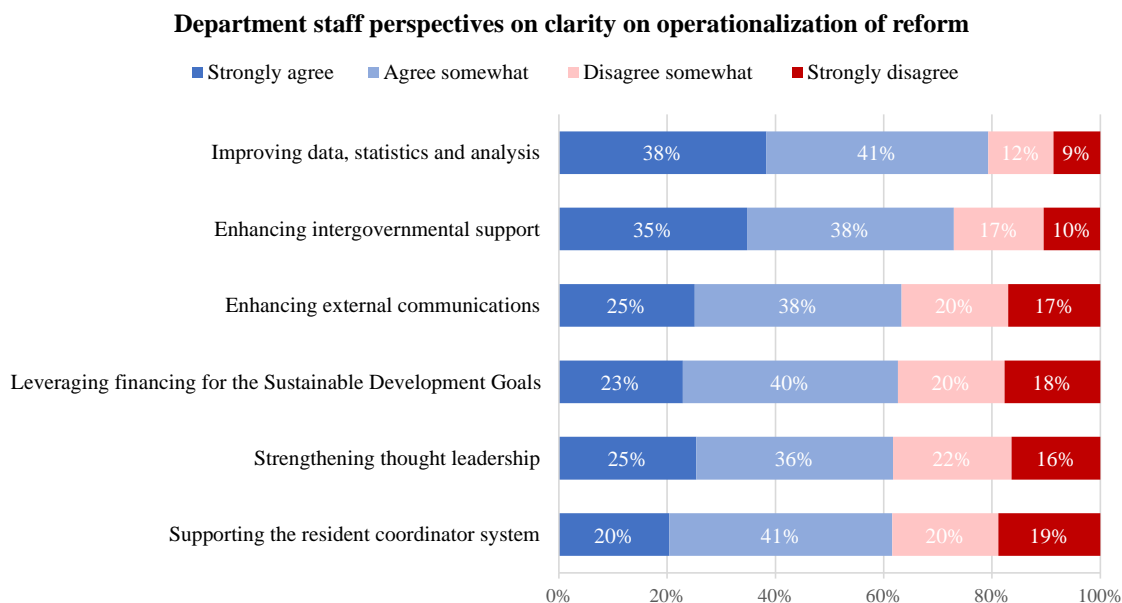
57. While staff interviewees and some regional economic commissions interviewees reported having general knowledge about the Department's reforms, many raised questions related to the specifics thereof. Desk review indicated that no overarching, detailed reform implementation plan existed. Survey data indicated that the current level of understanding of how phase 3 reforms had been implemented was insufficient for their successful realization (see figures XVII and XVIII).

Figure XVII
Degree of United Nations stakeholder awareness of operationalization of Department of Economic and Social Affairs reforms



Source: Stakeholder survey.

Figure XVIII
Degree of Department of Economic and Social Affairs staff clarity on phase 3 reforms and their operationalization



Source: Staff survey.

The Department’s guidance and communication on resident coordinator support is still being developed

58. At the time of the present evaluation, there was insufficient clarity on what the Department would be doing to contribute to the provision of strategic and substantive support to the reinvigorated resident coordinator system and the new generation of United Nations country teams. This includes what it would mean, in practice, to serve as the global thought leader, including how the United Nations Economists’ Network would contribute to supporting achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Department staff themselves reported having the least clarity on the two highly critical areas (see figure XVIII).

59. Interviews and other evidence indicated that the Department had significant interaction with some Resident Coordinators on voluntary national reviews. The Department organized webinars with Resident Coordinators of voluntary national review countries in the period 2019 to 2020, and a dedicated session was held at their annual meeting in 2019. Other activities in support of resident coordinators and United Nations country teams were in earlier stages. The Department had identified entry points to provide support to the common country assessment process, including with regard to small island developing States, and to the creation of a United Nations network of data officers and statisticians in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. During a global resident coordinator meeting, held in New York in November 2019, the Department facilitated a structured dialogue led by the Department's Chief Economist and a number of other senior managers on how the United Nations Economists' Network was in the process of being operationalized as a vehicle to bring expertise from across the United Nations to bear on critical issues. The Economists' Network discussion included examples of a few specific operationalization activities in their early stages, including the development of a short Sustainable Development Goals primer on economic transformation and an economic network initiative, the publication entitled *Report of the United Nations Economist Network for the United Nations 75th Anniversary: Shaping the Trends of Our Time*. The approximately 10 Resident Coordinators in attendance expressed their appreciation for the dialogue, welcoming, for example, economic analysis combining the economic, social and/or environmental dimensions that might become available to factor into common country assessment processes. Several questions were raised: whether the network was in place; how resident coordinators could connect to it; and how its work would factor into the economic analyses already being shared with national Governments by, for example, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund. The feedback indicated that the Department's support was still a work in progress.

V. Conclusions

60. The Department has a highly critical role to play within the context of the United Nations system at large. It must effectively fulfil the broad, multifaceted mandates entrusted to it by Member States and, simultaneously, operationalize its planned organizational reforms in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve its aspiration and perform a highly relevant role, including as a global thought leader, the Department must successfully partner with the five regional economic commissions, all United Nations country teams and other partners within and outside the United Nations.

61. The Department has demonstrated its unique added value as the global convener on development issues, including the Sustainable Development Goals, by supporting many multifaceted mandates and through its emerging ability to translate globally agreed norms into action in support of Member State needs. It has implemented a wide range of activities across all three of its functional areas. This has included steps to support the advancement of the 2030 Agenda by providing leadership on the integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions in support of Member States' initiatives regarding achievement of the Goals.

62. Much work remains to be done, however. More proactive prioritization and further identification of interlinkages of the Department's activities, as well as strengthened joint work planning with key partners, have all become essential. For

the Department to move forward, it must answer the following key questions in consultation with its key partners:

(a) What, specifically, should the capacity development support role played by the Department be vis-à-vis the similar, and potentially overlapping, roles currently being played by regional economic commissions and United Nations country teams? The Department has the potential to provide valuable global-level knowledge; however, the commissions and the country teams are closer to the ground;

(b) In practice, what does it mean to be the global thought leader? How can that role be effectively communicated and implemented in concert with key partners?

Without additional steps taken in the above-mentioned areas, the Department will be at risk of falling short of its aspiration to achieve the level of impact that its management and staff members are working tirelessly to achieve.

VI. Recommendations

63. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of OIOS makes two critical and three important recommendations, which the Department has accepted.

Recommendation 1 (critical) (results A, B, C, D and E)

64. Building on its improvements, and within the confines of its mandate, the Department should further strengthen its current yearly strategic plan to cover major Department activities at the subprogramme level. In addition to the mapping of subprogramme activities, outputs and outcomes to identify departmental priorities, the strengthened strategic planning document should include identification of:

(a) Additional concrete opportunities for joint work planning across the Department's divisions at the activity/output level, including support for shared outcomes and expected results;

(b) High-priority action points for the upcoming year, in consultation with subprogrammes, regional economic commissions and other United Nations entities, including to support integrative approaches to Sustainable Development Goal implementation across the economic, social and environmental dimensions and a plan for the systematic sharing of that information with regional economic commissions and other United Nations entities;

(c) High-priority action points for the upcoming year to support interlinkages among the Department's functional areas.

Indicator of achievement: a strengthened strategic plan that incorporates items (a) to (c) above

Recommendation 2 (important) (results D and E)

65. Given the criticality of effective coordination in support of the 2030 Agenda, as the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs convener, the Department should further leverage the potential of the Executive Committee as a mechanism for effective coordination across Secretariat entities in the development pillar. Upon consultation with key stakeholders, it should develop a plan to implement improvements that includes clear deliverables, timelines and an assessment mechanism.

Indicators of achievement: a proposal for strengthening the operation of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs Plus; evidence that the proposal was shared and discussed with key stakeholders, including the Development Cooperation Office, regional economic commissions and other United Nations stakeholders, and issued

Recommendation 3 (important) (results B and C)

66. The Department should fully implement the steps outlined in its strategy for capacity development. It should put in place additional requirements and/or mechanisms to:

(a) Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation framework of its capacity development work, including the measurement of expected outcomes;

(b) Increase the coverage of evaluations to ensure that high-expenditure projects, including extrabudgetary resources, have sufficient coverage²² based on consultation and revised agreements with the donors;

(c) Ensure that lessons learned from those evaluations and related reviews are used and integrated into its planning and design phases, including fundraising to ensure continued support for countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Indicator of achievement: improved monitoring, quality and coverage of evaluations, factoring in items (a) to (c) above

Recommendation 4 (important) (result B)

67. The Department should continue to strengthen the assessment of intended outcomes, including through the strengthening of the dissemination and utility of its research and analysis outputs. It should strengthen the reach and utility of its publications through:

(a) A study that includes clear and actionable recommendations for improving the assessment of the dissemination and utility of the Department's publications;

(b) Developing a template for assessing the reach and utility of the Department's publications that integrates the recommendations from the study;

(c) Completing periodic reviews of the Department's publications using new guidelines, tools and sources, as identified in the template for assessing the reach and utility of the Department's publications.

Indicator of achievement: strengthened ability to assess intended outcomes of publications

Recommendation 5 (critical) (result E)

68. The Department should continue to develop Department-level reform operationalization action plans and guidance for phase 3 of the organizational reform. Subsequently, guidance from the Under-Secretary-General should continue to be systematically communicated to the Department's staff and key stakeholders. Continued steps to operationalize the Department's reform should:

(a) Build on the identified modalities for the delivery of support to the resident coordinators, including the continued dissemination of concrete guidelines on the strategic and substantive support that the Department will provide;

²² In document [JIU/REP/2014/6](#), para. 77, a range of funding between 0.5 per cent to 3 per cent of organizational expenditure for evaluation was reported.

(b) Build on work under way, with a concept note that clearly spells out the Department's thought leadership role, objectives and goals and the concrete actions, deliverables and mechanisms that it will support to strengthen its work in this area, articulating the methods that it will utilize to support integrative approaches to Sustainable Development Goal implementation across economic, social and environmental dimensions;

(c) Include further development of the concept note of the United Nations Economists' Network in full-fledged terms of reference and guidance for key stakeholders;

(d) Establish monitoring indicators to track the operationalization of departmental reform;

(e) Continue to communicate the most pertinent related information to the Department's staff and key stakeholders.

Indicators of achievement: Department-level reform phase 3 operationalization plan; related staff and stakeholder guidance incorporating items (a) to (e) above

(Signed) Fatoumata **Ndiaye**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
March 2021

Annex I***Comments received from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

I write with reference to your memo of 8 May 2020, conveying the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the Evaluation of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The Department recognizes the importance of this evaluation and extends its appreciation to OIOS for its detailed findings and recommendations.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs welcomes the report's recognition of some of the Department's key strengths, highlighting its comparative advantages in supporting Member States, and maximising contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals and other existing mandates. As such, it must be underscored that the Department's programme of work continues to be guided by priorities of Member States, including mandates arising from the outcome of intergovernmental processes and the related thematic and policy reviews of global development issues.

The evaluation identified that among its key strengths, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (a) demonstrated its unique added value as the global convener on development issues, including Sustainable Development Goals, supporting a large number of multifaceted mandates; (b) effectively supported Member State progress towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda through its facilitation of intergovernmental decisions; (c) improved efforts to achieve an integrated work programme to effectively support the 2030 Agenda; (d) improved collaboration across the Department's subprogrammes, and with United Nations System entities; and, (e) advanced actions and took steps to implement reform of the Department in support of the 2030 Agenda.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs also notes the challenges identified in the evaluation report, which are opportunities to further strengthen the delivery of the Department's mandated programme of work.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has reviewed the evaluation report carefully and following discussions and exchanges with the OIOS evaluation team, including on the recommendations, welcomes the findings and insights of the evaluation. As such, the Department is preparing for submission to OIOS a detailed action plan, building on work already in response to the recommendations outlined in the evaluation report.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs accepts the recommendations in this evaluation report, and would like to add the following observations:

Recommendation 1: The Department of Economic and Social Affairs will build on strengthening the alignment of existing strategic planning processes, taking into consideration shared subprogramme priorities, activities, deliverables, and outcomes, and including joint activities with regional economic commissions and other United Nations entities. These proposed actions will remain closely in line with given Department mandates, including the needs and priorities of intergovernmental processes, and Secretariat-wide rules and regulations on programme planning and budget, and established channels of communication.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

Recommendation 2: The Department of Economic and Social Affairs will maintain a continuous dialogue with the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs Plus entities for improved coordination on intergovernmental processes, particularly on analytical products. Furthermore, an indicator of achievement could be expanded to include Department-related interagency work on the 2030 Agenda.

Recommendation 3: In addition to existing practice, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Capacity Development Programme Management Office will review and monitor the implementation of the Guidelines on the Planning and Management of Capacity Development Project Evaluations. The Department will embark on updating the guidelines to include improved monitoring, quality, and coverage of evaluations. The Department will also consider any other measures as necessary in due course.

Recommendation 4: The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is already undertaking an evaluation on the impact of its publications. This process will also strengthen the Department's ability to assess intended outcomes of its publications, involving various key stakeholders.

Recommendations 5: The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has already made significant strides in the implementation of its reform. Its 2020 Fascicle outlines the implementation of the reform, with the Department entering 2020 equipped with new approaches and revitalized structures. The Department will continue to provide update reports on reform implementation to the Secretary-General. In 2021, the implementation of Department reform will have matured, allowing time for a meaningful assessment and to explore ways for further improvements.

To conclude, I wish to acknowledge particularly Mr. Juan Carlos Pena, Ms. Ellen Vinkey and the rest of the OIOS project team. We are very appreciative of their professionalism, excellent collaboration, and valuable time in guiding us throughout this process. With the findings of this evaluation, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs will continue to strengthen its unique role in the development arena, including in the areas of intergovernmental support and thought leadership in key global policy issues.

Annex II

Intergovernmental process outcomes by focus division, 2018

<i>Division</i>	<i>Working group/conference/forum</i>	
Division for Inclusive Social Development	General Assembly	Second Committee Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (General Assembly resolution 73/246)
		Third Committee Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (General Assembly resolution 73/141) Follow-up to the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond (General Assembly resolution 73/144) Inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities (General Assembly resolution 73/142) Rights of indigenous peoples (General Assembly resolution 73/156) Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (General Assembly resolution 73/143)
	Economic and Social Council	Future organization and methods of work of the Commission for Social Development (Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/3) Social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/4) Third review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002 (Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/6) Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all (Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/5) Decisions from the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Decisions by the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
		Second Committee Agricultural technology for sustainable development (General Assembly resolution 74/215) Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 73/227)

<i>Division</i>		<i>Working group/conference/forum</i>
		<p>Follow-up to and implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (General Assembly resolution 73/228)</p> <p>Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind (General Assembly resolution 73/232)</p> <p>Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (General Assembly resolution 73/236)</p> <p>Harmony with Nature (General Assembly resolution 73/235)</p> <p>Agriculture development, food security and nutrition (General Assembly resolution 73/253)</p> <p>Combating sand and dust storms (General Assembly resolution 73/237)</p> <p>Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028 (General Assembly resolution 73/226)</p> <p>Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations (General Assembly resolution 73/229)</p> <p>Impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets (General Assembly resolution 73/17)</p>
Statistics Division	Economic and Social Council	<p>Strategic Framework on Geospatial Information and Services for Disasters (Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/14)</p> <p>Decisions of the Statistical Commission</p> <p>Decisions of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management</p>
Economic Analysis and Policy Division	General Assembly	Second Committee
		<p>Towards a New International Economic Order (General Assembly resolution 73/240)</p> <p>Graduation of countries from the least developed country category (General Assembly resolution 73/133)</p>
	Economic and Social Council	<p>Report of the Committee for Development Policy on its twentieth session (Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/27)</p> <p>Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 (Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/26)</p>
		<p>Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2018 session of the Economic and Social Council on the annual theme “From global to local: supporting sustainable and resilient societies in urban and rural communities” (E/HLS/2018/1)</p>