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Programme questions: evaluation

Thematic evaluation of United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) determined, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of Secretariat support to Member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It covered 55 United Nations Secretariat entities and focused on two immediate outcomes: (a) responsiveness to Member State needs; and (b) strengthened Member State capacity. It employed a mixed-method approach, including staff and stakeholder surveys, interviews, direct observation, secondary data analyses, including Sustainable Development Goal databases, and content analysis of key documents.

While Secretariat support to Member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has been provided in regions of greatest need and areas of comparative advantage, the Secretariat is not optimally placed to provide the further support needed to accelerate progress towards achieving the Goals by 2030. Secretariat strategies, structures and tools have not always been adequate, and there has been unmet demand by Member States for more support in achieving the Goals.

The Secretariat lacked sufficient coherence in its delivery of Sustainable Development Goal support work. There is no Secretariat-wide action plan that links the specific contributions of different entities to the Goals and anticipates and mitigates against potential duplication and gaps. All stakeholders surveyed perceived insufficient Secretariat coherence as the top impediment to advancing Secretariat support for the achievement of the Goals. Secretariat fragmentation has been particularly notable with regard to data systems.

* Reissued for technical reasons on 11 May 2023.

** [E/AC.51/2023/1](#).



When provided, Sustainable Development Goal support to Member States has been of generally good quality and well aligned with national development priorities. Feedback from both providers and users of Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support on the quality of that support has been positive overall. Secretariat support has strengthened the capacities of Member States, although their statistical capacity is still lagging and there is a need for more capacity-building in that area.

OIOS made one important recommendation to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to include a specific focus and actual inclusion of the Secretariat's support to Member States in achieving their nationally defined priorities, as part of the United Nations system-wide commitment to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the context of the 2024 Member State conduct of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of United Nations system operational activities.

OIOS made one important recommendation to each Secretariat entity to clearly, distinctly and specifically articulate in their internal strategic plans and workplans how they will support host Governments in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

OIOS made one important recommendation to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to take the lead on addressing issues of data interoperability.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of the evaluation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of United Nations Secretariat support to Member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The evaluation assessed (a) the responsiveness of the Secretariat to Member State needs; and (b) the contribution of the Secretariat to strengthened Member State capacity.

2. The evaluation conforms with the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards. The management response of entities included in the evaluation scope are provided in annex II to the present report.

II. Background

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

3. The 2015 United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda resulted in the adoption by the General Assembly of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,¹ a development framework combining “a supremely ambitious and transformational vision” with accompanying guiding principles, overarching commitments and means of implementation (resolution 70/1). This universal agenda is to be viewed as a coherent whole and pledges that no one will be left behind (ibid., preamble and para. 4).

4. The 2030 Agenda is comprised of 17 interrelated, integrated and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals (see figure I), which are owned by Member States. While the Goals articulate what Member States pledge to achieve, the 2030 Agenda articulates why and how they intend to achieve them.

Figure I
Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable Development Goal					
	No poverty		Affordable and clean energy		Climate action
	Zero hunger		Decent work and economic growth		Life below water
	Good health and well-being		Industry, innovation and infrastructure		Life on land
	Quality education		Reduced inequalities		Peace, justice and strong institutions
	Gender equality		Sustainable cities and communities		Partnerships for the Goals
	Clean water and sanitation		Responsible consumption and production		

¹ The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic derailed progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

United Nations Secretariat support for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

5. The Secretariat has an important role to play in supporting Member States towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda highlighted the important role and comparative advantage of an adequately resourced, relevant, coherent, efficient and effective United Nations system in supporting the achievement of the Goals and, towards that end, the importance of system-wide strategic planning, implementation and reporting (*ibid.*, paras. 46 and 88). With 75 entities (offices, departments, programmes and missions) covering all pillars (development, peace and security and humanitarian and human rights) of United Nations work, the Secretariat constitutes a significant part of the system.

6. The roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat relating to the Sustainable Development Goals vary depending on each entity's mandates and can be defined as supporting:

(a) Implementation of the Goals (including through normative support and thought leadership);

(b) Monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Goals.

7. The Secretary-General has stressed that the United Nations should be well-positioned to advise and provide or broker technical support to Governments across all areas of sustainable development (A/72/124-E/2018/3, para. 52). The United Nations Sustainable Development Group incorporates Secretariat entities and shapes and guides development action from the global to the local levels; Secretariat support is provided within this larger framework. In 2019, the Secretary-General proposed changes to the United Nations development system, with the Secretariat-specific roles defined as follows:

(a) At the global level, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs supports the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development and would enhance its effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and internal coordination to provide support to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda (General Assembly resolution 70/299, para. 16);

(b) At the regional level, as co-chairs of the regional collaborative platforms,² the regional commissions would be the lead voice of the United Nations in exchanging best practices and conducting follow-up and review of regional progress on the 2030 Agenda;

(c) At the country level, a reformed and independent resident coordinator system and more coordinated and coherent United Nations country teams would focus on planning and aligning programmes with nationally defined plans and priorities within the Sustainable Development Goal framework.

8. In his 2021 report "Our Common Agenda" (A/75/982), and building on management reform, the Secretary-General called for adapting the United Nations to a new era, including proposals regarding more coherence, participatory approaches and a reduction in complexity. The Secretary-General also prioritized the need for a

² The regional collaborative platform unites all United Nations entities working on sustainable development to ensure full coordination of regional assets. See <https://unsdg.un.org/un-in-action/regional-level#:~:text=At%20the%20regional%20level%2C%20the,specific%20needs%20of%20each%20region.>

United Nations fit for a new era, with an appetite to push the 2030 Agenda forward, and for finding a “productive space”³ within which it can work.

III. Scope and methodology

9. The evaluation covered the period from 1 January 2019 to mid-2022 and included 55 Secretariat entities in its scope, as listed in annex I to the present report.⁴ The evaluation assessed the adequacy and appropriateness of the current architecture and processes for providing support to Governments in accelerating their progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and assessed the responsiveness of the Secretariat to Member State needs and its contributions to strengthened Member State capacity.

10. While appreciating that Secretariat support is delivered as part of an integrated United Nations system-wide framework as envisioned by the 2030 Agenda, the evaluation did not focus on the entire United Nations system but rather on the 55 Secretariat entities. OIOS acknowledges that while it targeted its Member State survey and interview questions on the Secretariat only, some respondents and interviewees may not have been fully able to distinguish Secretariat support from wider system support.

11. The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach for data collection and analyses, comprising the following:

(a) Surveys of:

(i) All evaluation focal points from the 55 entities included in the scope, to determine their strategies, structures, workplans and tools for supporting Member States;⁵

(ii) The United Nations Economists’ Network, to ascertain how the work of the United Nations is contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;⁶

(iii) All 193 Member States, to gauge their needs for and satisfaction with Secretariat support (these surveys were supplemented with five Member State interviews at United Nations headquarters missions);⁷

(iv) All 130 resident coordinators, to obtain their perspectives on support at the country level;⁸

(b) Development of theory of change and mapping of Secretariat support, to determine the current structures and processes in place for Sustainable Development Goal support, including the identification of possible gaps and duplications;

³ “Productive space” refers to the existence of a strong enabling environment in which the United Nations is able to undertake its Sustainable Development Goal support activities.

⁴ The OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division did not evaluate entities in the management pillar and 10 entities did not designate an evaluation focal point.

⁵ Response rate: 98 per cent (54 of 55). Survey launch period: June–August 2022.

⁶ Response rate: 64 per cent among resident coordinator office economists (70 of 110). Survey launch period: July 2022.

⁷ Response rate: 21 per cent (40 of 193). Survey launch period: June–August 2022. Given the low response rate, the data from this survey were triangulated with other data sources. The five interviews conducted were with Guatemala, Liberia, Malawi, Tajikistan and Togo; these countries were selected for in-person interviews through purposive sampling to ensure diverse geographic coverage and development status.

⁸ Response rate: 84 per cent (109 of 130). Survey launch period: June–July 2022.

(c) Four country case studies, to provide a more in-depth and context-specific assessment of Secretariat support. The four countries are the Gambia, Guyana, Malawi and Nepal.⁹ Interviews were conducted in all four countries (remotely in the Gambia and Nepal) and included a total of 33 United Nations staff, 34 government partners and 15 external stakeholders such as civil society organizations and donors. In all four case-study countries, the assessment focused on the support provided by Secretariat entities, many of which are small in size and non-resident;

(d) Direct observation of six meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development held in July 2022, including voluntary national review presentations for 11 different countries;

(e) Secondary data analysis of quadrennial comprehensive policy review survey data; the UN-Info platform; the Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Data Platform; the Statistics Division Sustainable Development Goal application programming interface; and Our World in Data;

(f) Content analysis of Secretariat entity budget fascicles and workplans; reports of the Secretary-General on the United Nations sustainable development system; and voluntary national reviews.

IV. Evaluation results

A. While the Secretariat has provided Sustainable Development Goal support to Member States in regions of greatest need and in areas of comparative advantage, it is not optimally placed to provide the further support needed to accelerate progress towards achievement of the Goals by 2030

The Secretariat has provided support where the need is the greatest

12. Support by the Secretariat towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals has been focused primarily on sub-Saharan Africa, the region identified in the 2019–2022 reports of the Secretary-General on sustainable development¹⁰ as lagging behind most in meeting the Goals. Fifty-four Secretariat entities surveyed indicated that requests for, and support provided in response to, Member States' requests have largely been matched, with sub-Saharan countries, primarily the least developed countries, receiving the most support.¹¹ In addition, United Nations system-wide quadrennial comprehensive policy review data indicated that contributing countries prioritized least developed countries, which received 40 per cent of overall funding (see [A/77/69-E/2022/47](#)). The support provided has often been in response to emerging needs of the host Government, as illustrated in the examples taken from the four case-study countries (see box 1). As one government partner interviewed in Malawi noted: "The challenge in a developing country is how

⁹ In consultation with evaluation focal points, OIOS selected four case-study countries through purposive sampling to ensure diverse geographic coverage and status in achieving the Goals and minimal burden on country teams. Malawi and Nepal are least developed countries and landlocked developing countries; the Gambia is a least developed country; and Guyana is a small island developing State.

¹⁰ Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/>, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/>, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/> and <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/>.

¹¹ Achievement of programmes of action for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States is necessary for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

quickly the United Nations can offer its support when emerging issues fall under Sustainable Development Goals.”

Box 1

The Secretariat responded to Sustainable Development Goal support needs in four case-study countries

Guyana (Goal 13)

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction supported Guyana in aligning its national disaster risk reduction strategy with target E of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, which was particularly critical given that persistent disasters have threatened to increase vulnerabilities and derail development.

Malawi (Goals 11 and 13)

The Resident Coordinator Office and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs supported the host Government following Tropical Storm Ana in Malawi by supporting the immediate needs of displaced families, helping them to rebuild their homes and livelihoods and reducing their risk of future disasters.

Nepal (cross-cutting)

The Resident Coordinator Office contributed to meeting needs, as it coordinated the development and humanitarian cluster groups during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) emergency. In addition, the Resident Coordinator Office contributed on issues such as green recovery, inclusive development, social inclusion and federalism, as it coordinated and co-chaired the international development partner group.

The Gambia (Goal 13)

The United Nations Environment Programme contributed to strengthening climate services and early warning systems in the Gambia for climate-resilient development and adaptation to climate change.

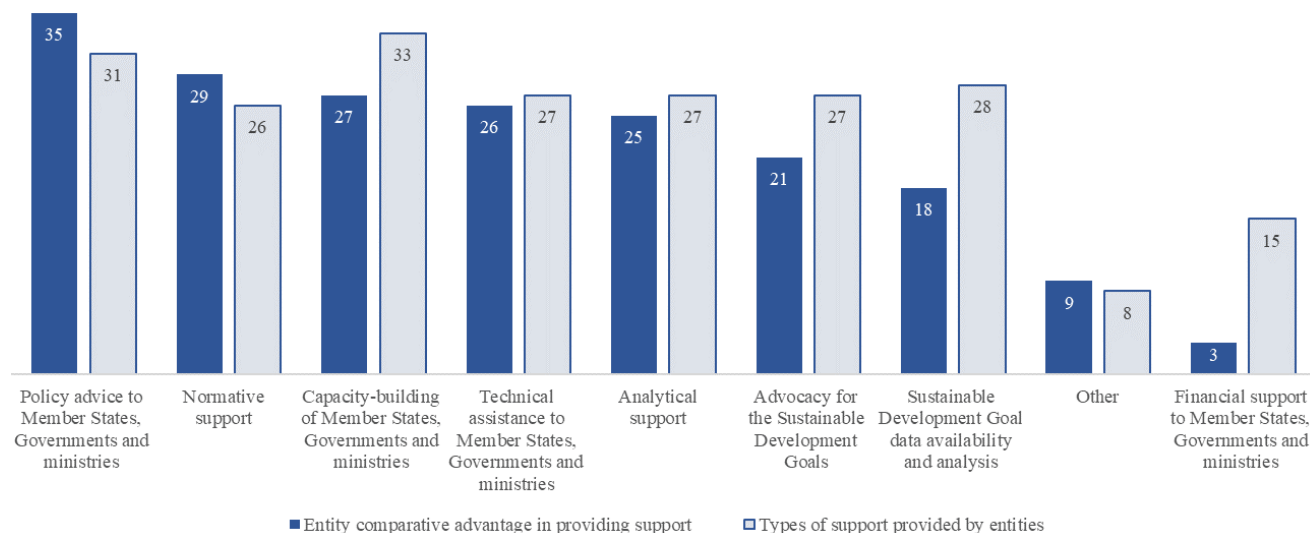
13. There has been less specific focus on landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. During the sessions of the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development on the theme “Small island developing States: building back better in vulnerable situations”, Member States recognized landlocked developing countries and small island developing States as hotspots of high human vulnerability. Overall, they received less focus with regard to Sustainable Development Goal support; the lower level of support to landlocked developing countries was highlighted by the Joint Inspection Unit in its review of United Nations system support for landlocked developing countries to implement the Vienna Programme of Action ([JIU/REP/2021/2](#)).

Secretariat entities have provided support that primarily harnessed their respective comparative advantage and mandates

14. As in shown in figure III, with the exception of financial support, Secretariat support was largely aligned with the respective comparative advantages of the Secretariat entities providing it. Focal points provided specific examples of how they harnessed their comparative advantage and mandate, including support for statistics,

advocacy and normative work related to the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, several entities reported that their comparative advantage was their ability to link the outcomes of intergovernmental processes to the country level and to raise awareness around and promote the Goals.

Figure II
United Nations Secretariat types of Sustainable Development Goal support aligned with comparative advantages



Source: OIOS Secretariat survey.

15. In all four case-study countries, there was evidence of alignment between Secretariat comparative advantages and the support provided. Both staff and government partners interviewed generally agreed that Secretariat entities focused on their mandated comparative advantage when providing support, as illustrated in the four examples in box 2.

Box 2

Secretariat entities harnessed their comparative advantages when providing Sustainable Development Goal support in the four case-study countries

Guyana

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights engaged the host Government on supporting efforts to reform the country's constitutional commissions, including on women and gender equality, as part of support to the achievement of Goals 5 and 16.

Malawi

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime provided technical assistance to the host Government to prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute cases related to human trafficking, terrorism and other organized crime as part of support to the achievement of Goal 16.

Nepal

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme provided technical support on mainstreaming the concept of “leave no one behind” in national urban policies and programmes, as part of support to the achievement of Goals 6 and 11. The Office for Disarmament Affairs also provided technical guidance on how to integrate arms control into national sustainable development in support of the achievement of Goal 16.

The Gambia

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Justice on the universal periodic review as part of support to the achievement of Goals 10 and 16.

Despite these efforts, Secretariat strategies, structures and tools for Sustainable Development Goal support have not always been adequate

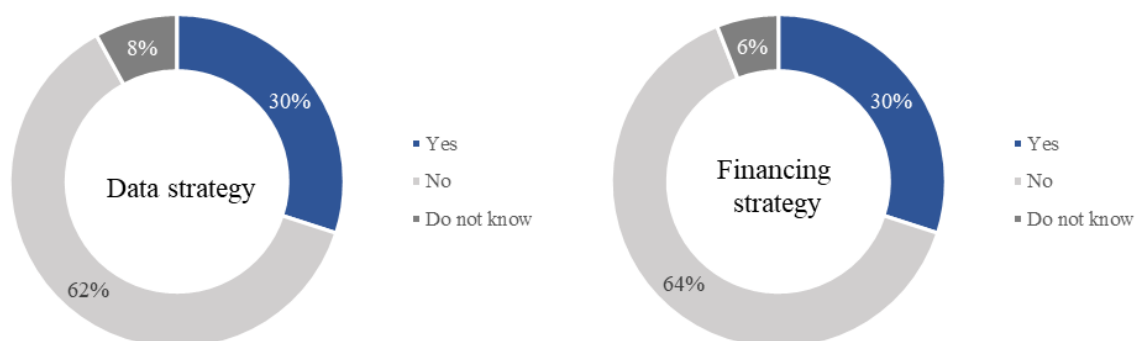
16. Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support has lacked sufficient strategic focus. Government partners interviewed in the four case-study countries and headquarters missions, as well as government representatives attending the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development, pointed to the need for more strategic orientation in the Secretariat’s Sustainable Development Goal support. The Secretariat survey revealed that there were no entity-specific strategies specifically targeted for supporting Member States in achieving the Goals: while 19 entities stated that they had a specific Sustainable Development Goal strategy, only 10 provided a document, and a structured review of those documents indicated that none constituted a Sustainable Development Goal strategy.¹² Furthermore, 15 entities surveyed volunteered that there was a need for more strategic planning of the Sustainable Development Goal support of their respective entities.

17. In addition, less than half of Secretariat entities reported having a Sustainable Development Goal data support or financing support strategy,¹³ as in shown in figure III. Of the United Nations economists surveyed, almost half (46 per cent) rated Secretariat support to Member States with financing strategies for sustainable development poorly. Also, several government partners interviewed in the four case-study countries highlighted the need for more financial and data support, reinforcing the need for a more strategic approach in those areas. A government partner interviewed in Malawi shared a common view in stating that there were delays in the financial support process.

¹² While the survey did not define “Sustainable Development Goal strategy”, OIOS used the following definition in making its assessment: “a dedicated and discreet plan of action that identifies key priorities around specific Goal(s) and explicitly links activities to achievement of the Goals”.

¹³ The survey defined “data strategy” as “a dedicated and discreet document with a plan of action for supporting Member States in data collection and monitoring for the Sustainable Development Goals” and “financing strategy” as “a dedicated and discreet document with a plan of action for supporting Member States in mobilizing resources”. Secretariat entities play a critical role in supporting Member States in finance mobilization for sustainable development.

Figure III
Most Secretariat entities do not have a Sustainable Development Goal data or financing strategy



Source: OIOS Secretariat survey.

18. While a majority of Secretariat entities surveyed (44 of 54) reported mainstreaming Sustainable Development Goals in their respective work programmes, fewer had specific processes and tools in place to support Member States, as shown in figure IV.

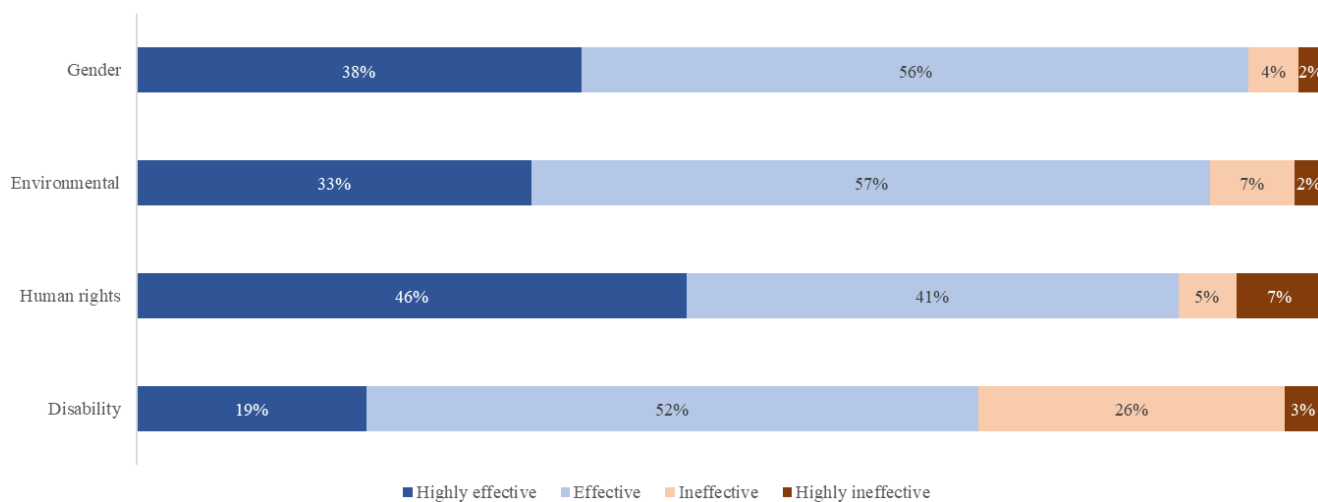
Figure IV
Secretariat entities have various Sustainable Development Goal support processes and tools



Source: OIOS Secretariat survey, N=54.

19. As shown in figure V, a majority of Secretariat entities surveyed reported having mainstreamed gender, human rights, disability and environmental issues in their Sustainable Development Goal support activities. United Nations staff interviewed in all four case-study countries provided specific examples of those issues having been mainstreamed in their work.

Figure V
United Nations Secretariat entities reported being effective in mainstreaming gender, human rights, disability and environmental issues through their Sustainable Development Goal support

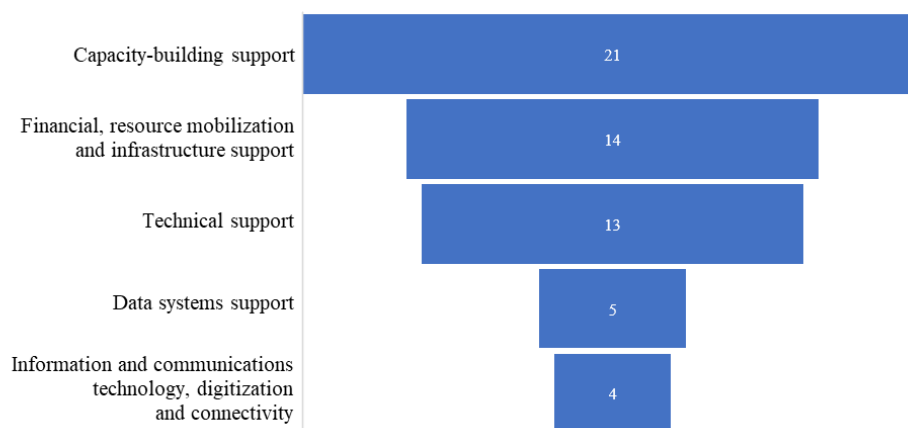


Source: OIOS Secretariat survey.

There has been unmet Member State demand for Sustainable Development Goal support

20. Feedback from government partners interviewed in the four case-study countries as well as headquarters missions revealed that there had been unmet demand by Member States for more Sustainable Development Goal support. Figure VI shows that feedback from government representatives interviewed at permanent missions and at the country level indicated demand for more support in several different areas. A government partner interviewed in Guyana shared a common view in stating that “We would like capacity-building and identifying gaps in skill sets, what skills we have versus what we need, so that we can create a plan on how to fill those gaps”.

Figure VI
Member States identified five main areas for additional Sustainable Development Goal support



Source: Government partner interviews in case-study countries and headquarters, N=34.

21. Observations of 2022 high-level political forum meetings also identified the need for greater support in innovative financing for development and climate change and data issues. This demand was exemplified in two Member State declarations. One stated the need for further support for countries graduating from least developed country status to gain access to concessional financing that was desperately needed to survive the climate emergency, to improve their long-term national planning. Another highlighted the need for timely and granular data beyond official statistics for identifying those who were left behind and addressing data gaps.

22. Respondents to the Secretariat and United Nations Economists' Network surveys also highlighted substantial Member State needs in capacity-building and policy advice. Some Secretariat entities indicated that capacity-building, with an emphasis on countries in special situations, alongside more specialized and/or integrated policy advice was needed. In addition, United Nations economists identified capacity-building, policy advice and/or technical support as the top three types of support needed to support the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

23. Capturing the extent and nature of the demand for Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support was challenging. There was no central repository to track requests and responses for that support, and only 10 Secretariat entities reported having their own repository to capture demand. One Secretariat entity reported that if it could proactively identify Member States that would like assistance, it could be asked to provide guidance on how to support them by planning ahead specific resources (staff, funding) to respond to their request.

B. The Secretariat lacked sufficient coherence in its delivery of Sustainable Development Goal support work

There has been no Secretariat-wide strategy to facilitate coherence within Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support work¹⁴

24. The lack of a Secretariat-wide Sustainable Development Goal support strategy was first identified in the 2019 OIOS evaluation of United Nations entities' preparedness, policy coherence, and early results associated with their support to Sustainable Development Goals. In the evaluation, it was noted that a more fully integrated system-wide approach – one that cultivated complementarities, promoted synergies and harvested respective strengths – was critical if the Organization was to act cohesively in delivering the support Member States needed to honour their 2030 Agenda commitments.¹⁵ Since then, no further progress has been made: there is no Secretariat-wide action plan that links the specific contributions of different entities to the Sustainable Development Goals and anticipates and mitigates against potential duplications and gaps. While a July 2019 system-wide strategic document¹⁶ supported the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it lacked an overall theory of change for Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support work and did not identify and link specific activities and outputs with outcomes. Other organizational strategic documents have touched on some but not all needed components of a Secretariat-wide Sustainable Development Goal support strategy. These include the report of the Secretary-General "Our Common Agenda",¹⁷ in which the Secretary-General prioritized a United

¹⁴ OIOS defines coherence as "the extent to which the whole of United Nations support is aligned with country-level needs and priorities and is delivered in an integrated, coordinated and complementary fashion across pillars and sectors and consistent with the goals of the 2030 Agenda".

¹⁵ OIOS evaluation IED-19-001, para. 64. All recommendations were implemented.

¹⁶ Available at <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/SWSD-UNSDG-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁷ See General Assembly resolution 76/6.

Nations fit for a new era and made recommendations to Governments for their consideration and decision to enable a forward agenda; the strategy of the Secretary-General for financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2018–2021), which focused on opportunities to scale investments in the Goals; and the Secretary-General's data strategy, which envisioned a United Nations data ecosystem to unlock the Organization's full data potential.

Insufficient coherence was consistently identified by all stakeholders as the primary obstacle to better Sustainable Development Goal support

25. Insufficient Secretariat coherence was the most frequently identified impediment to advancing Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support among all stakeholders surveyed. Secretariat focal points, resident coordinators and United Nations economists all volunteered that increased coherence was the main way in which Secretariat support for the achievement of the Goals could be strengthened. Furthermore, a review of 38 Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal workplans showed that only 25 workplans discussed partnerships with United Nations entities and 19 workplans discussed partnerships with other development partners: the omission of a reference to partnerships created a risk of missed opportunities for identifying possible synergies and coordination within the Secretariat and with others.

While country-level programming coherence has improved with the United Nations development system reform, including with Secretariat entities increasingly included in cooperation frameworks, there was still a risk of duplication in Sustainable Development Goal support activities, and linkages between the country, regional and global levels have not been consistently strong

26. While development system reform has resulted in greater programming coherence at the country level, including the programming of Sustainable Development Goal-specific support, it has not equally enhanced the coherence of programme delivery. In its 2021 evaluation on the contribution of the resident coordinator system to country-level programming coherence ([E/AC.51/2022/2](#)), OIOS noted that improved programming coherence had been increasing. In 2020 and 2021, the proportion of resident coordinators and United Nations country team members reporting the positive impact of the United Nations reform on reducing programmatic gaps had increased by 19 and 17 percentage points, respectively. Similarly, in the same years, the proportion of resident coordinators and United Nations country teams reporting the positive impact of the United Nations reform on reducing overlaps had increased by 16 and 18 percentage points, respectively. However, in the evaluation, it was also reported that reform had yet to result in fully coordinated delivery of operational activities. Inconsistent joint workplans and/or duplication were noted in all six case-study countries in that evaluation.

27. United Nations staff interviewed in the four case-study countries mentioned that there was greater coherence at the programme planning stage, through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, than at the implementation stage of programme delivery in their respective countries. However, staff interviewed in Malawi and Guyana did note the COVID-19 response as a positive exception and first real test of development reform; in that response, coherence around implementation was also reportedly achieved across entities operating at the global, regional and country levels.

28. Insufficient coherence of Sustainable Development Goal support work has led to potential duplication of efforts. Some of the United Nations economists surveyed volunteered that risks of potential duplication of support work needed to be addressed and underlined the importance of using the resident coordinator office as a first point

of contact for planning and leadership. Furthermore, nearly half of the resident coordinators surveyed (48 per cent) stated that the Secretariat was ineffective in reducing duplications in Sustainable Development Goal support activities. In addition, nearly half of the government partners interviewed (16 of 34) stated that there was some duplication in the Sustainable Development Goal support provided to their respective countries. Lastly, the 2021–2022 OIOS evaluations of the five regional commissions, namely, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (E/AC.51/2022/7), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific,¹⁸ the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,¹⁹ the Economic Commission for Africa (E/AC.51/2022/12) and the Economic Commission for Europe,²⁰ referenced actual or potential duplication between the Sustainable Development Goal support of regional commissions with that of other Secretariat entities.²¹

29. Insufficient coherence between global, regional and national Sustainable Development Goal support work was also evident. Resident coordinator office staff interviewed in the four case-study countries provided several examples of weak linkages, including:

- (a) Direct communication between host Governments and entities operating at the regional and global levels, thus bypassing the resident coordinator offices;
- (b) Selection of Member States for participation in regional and global programmes and without adequate consultation with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks of the respective host Governments;
- (c) Sustainable Development Goal support designed at the regional level lacking adequate specificity for the country context.

United Nations staff interviewed in the four case-study countries further elaborated on the weak linkages in Sustainable Development Goal support among Secretariat entities operating at different levels and noted an overemphasis on pushing individual entity agendas. In addition, United Nations economists surveyed assessed Secretariat networks and platforms to be less effective when facilitating exchanges between rather than within regions, as shown in figure VII. Furthermore, in three of the four case studies, government partners interviewed requested further cross-pollination and support on South-South learning and exchange.

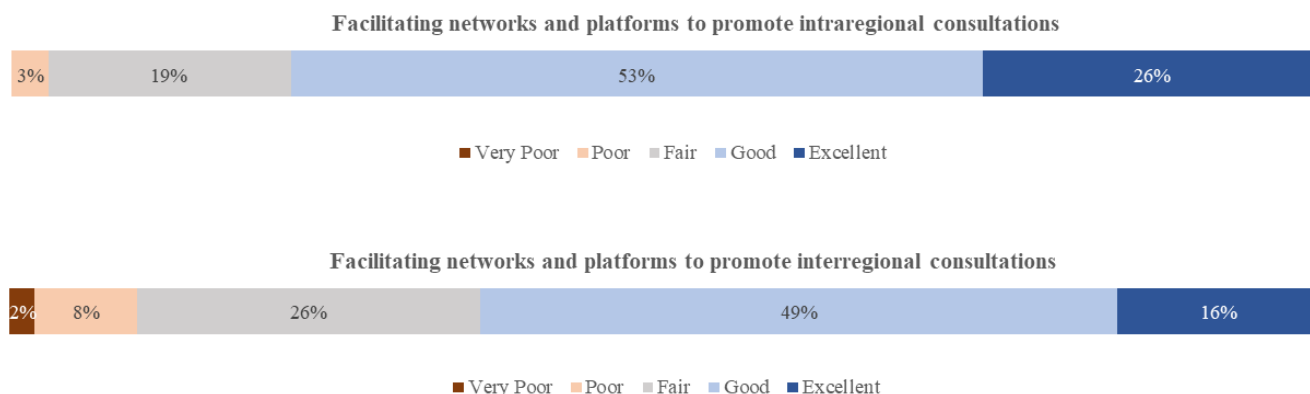
¹⁸ OIOS evaluation IED-22-010.

¹⁹ OIOS evaluation IED-22-001.

²⁰ The OIOS evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe was ongoing at the time of the present evaluation.

²¹ The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reported good experience coordinating capacity-building efforts with regional commissions and other Secretariat entities in joint United Nations Development Account projects for Goals 5 and 16.

Figure VII

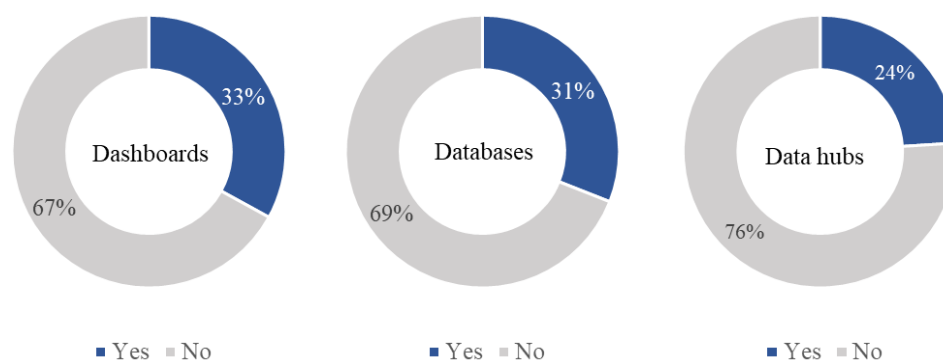
The Secretariat was assessed as more effective in intraregional than interregional consultations

Source: United Nations Economists' Network survey.

Secretariat fragmentation has been particularly notable with regard to data systems

30. Several Secretariat entities have developed independent Sustainable Development Goal data dissemination tools even though not all of them have produced or collected Sustainable Development Goal data from Member States. Twenty-five Secretariat entities had one or more online data-related Sustainable Development Goal tools, as shown in figure VIII.²²

Figure VIII

25 Secretariat entities had online data-related Sustainable Development Goal support tools

Source: OIOS Secretariat survey.

31. Figure IX shows that 11 Secretariat entities were (co-)custodians²³ for one or more Sustainable Development Goal indicators in the global framework. All Sustainable Development Goal indicator custodians report data on the Goals to the Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Data Platform in a globally

²² Data-related online tools for Sustainable Development Goal support included dashboards (online tools enabling users to visualize data in various interactive ways); databases (online platforms giving users access to data); and data hubs (online platforms enabling users to provide, manage and access data).

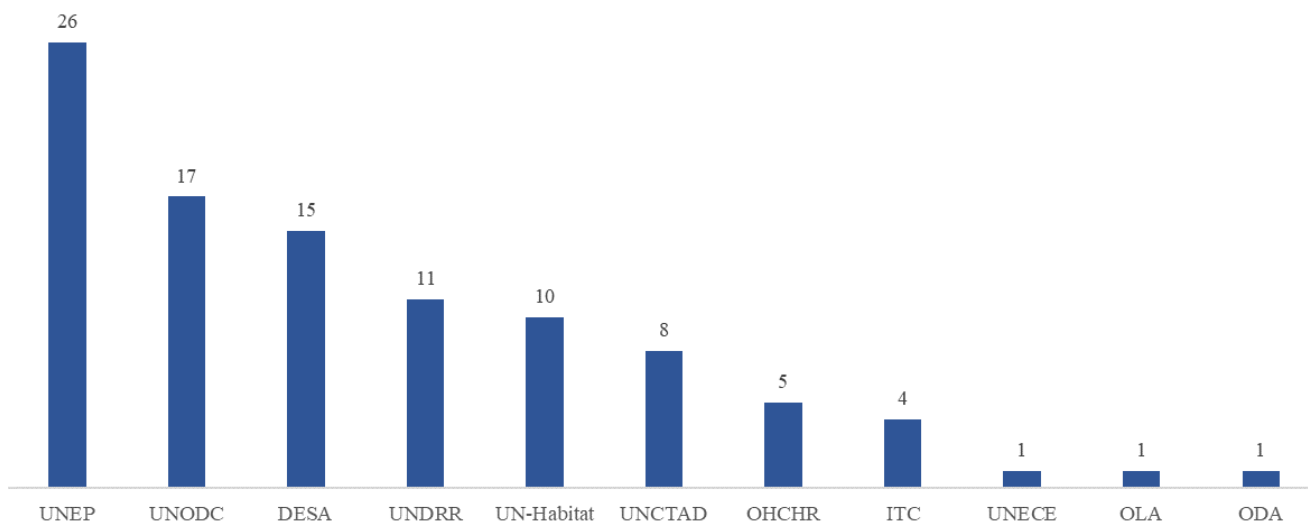
²³ Sustainable Development Goal indicator custodians or co-custodians are responsible for the indicator's methodological development, data compilation and data dissemination.

coordinated effort and based on agreed standards and methods. The fact that some entities had data tools but not the custodian responsibility for indicators presented the risk of a proliferation and duplication of data systems and inefficient use of resources in establishing stand-alone data products.²⁴

Figure IX

11 Secretariat entities, mostly from the development pillar, are formal (co-)custodians for one or more Sustainable Development Goal indicators

Number of Sustainable Development Goal indicators with United Nations Secretariat entities as (co-)custodians, by entity



Source: OIOS secondary analysis of the Sustainable Development Goal metadata repository.

Abbreviations: DESA, Department of Economic and Social Affairs; ITC, International Trade Centre; ODA, Office for Disarmament Affairs; OHCHR, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; OLA, Office of Legal Affairs; UNCTAD, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; UNDRR, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction; UNECE, Economic Commission for Europe; UNEP, United Nations Environment Programme; UN-Habitat, United Nations Human Settlements Programme; UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

32. A preliminary assessment of the examples of data products shared by evaluation focal points, including dashboards, databases and data hubs, also raised concerns around data interoperability between them. For example, some data products were not expressed in formats that enabled machine-to-human or machine-to-machine access and use, with data being unavailable for bulk downloads. There were also no automatically established links between independently managed data systems, limiting data traceability across platforms. The fragmentation between Secretariat data systems was not aligned with the indivisible and interlinked nature of the Sustainable Development Goals, risking duplications, errors and loss in data quality. This was specifically noted by a government partner interviewed in Malawi, who stressed that a large portion of United Nations data platforms were stand-alone and that there were overlaps between them. The Secretariat has lacked a federated data governance framework and architecture to facilitate data integration, interconnection between decentralized data hubs and coherent sharing and interchange of information across multiple data systems, as envisioned in the Secretary-General's data strategy.

²⁴ The Department of Economic and Social Affairs noted that there were entities without Sustainable Development Goal custodianship that did important data-related work to inform the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. UNCTAD noted that regional commissions disseminated regional Sustainable Development Goal data.

33. Nevertheless, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has undertaken several steps to improve data interoperability, including:

(a) Developing Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange-based formats for Sustainable Development Goal indicators and improving interoperability for Sustainable Development Goal data and metadata through the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators working group on Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange;

(b) Establishing the global Open Sustainable Development Goal Data Hub to facilitate the integration of internationally and nationally owned data hubs for the Goals;

(c) Undertaking the modernization of the United Nations data platform, as endorsed by the Statistical Commission, to reposition it as a global network of autonomous, authoritative data hubs of national, regional and international organizations.

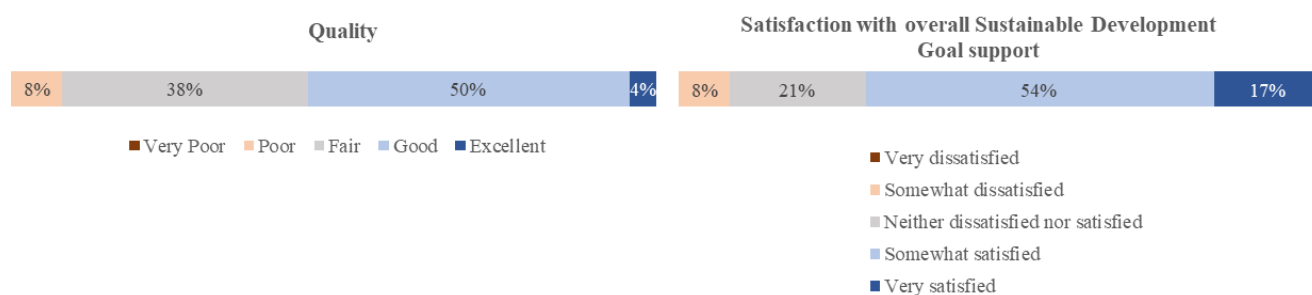
C. When provided, Sustainable Development Goal support to Member States has been of generally good quality and well aligned with national development priorities

The overall quality of Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support has been rated highly

34. Feedback from both providers and users of Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support on the quality of that support has been positive overall. Member States rated the support they had received highly, as shown in figures X and XI. Government partners in the four case studies stated that Secretariat support had been catalytic and had instigated broader change within limited resources. Lastly, most government partners in the case-study countries and permanent missions (25 of 34) expressed general satisfaction with the support received. Some noted that, following the development system reform, the resident coordinator office had facilitated the provision of more specialized, integrated support tailored to their specific needs and contexts.

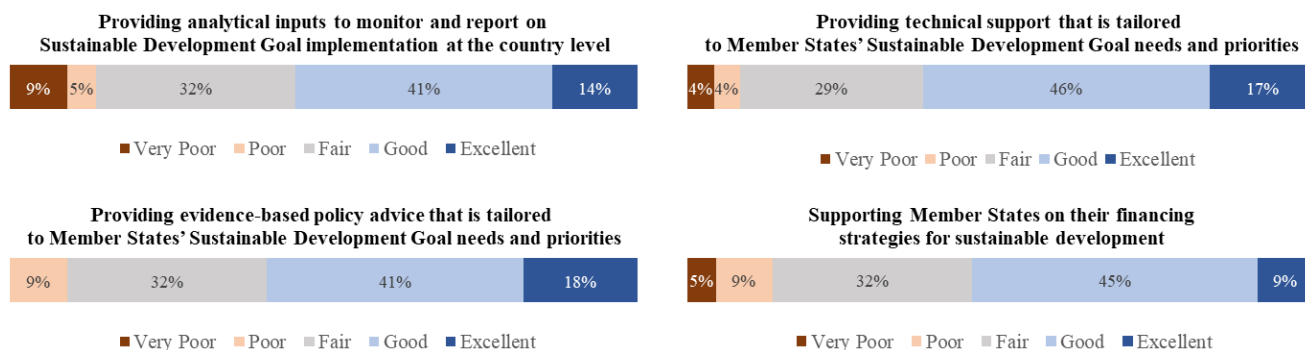
Figure X

Member States rated the overall quality of Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support highly



Source: Member State survey.

Figure XI

Member States were satisfied with different types of support received

Source: Member State survey.

35. Other stakeholders also rated Sustainable Development Goal support positively. Most United Nations economists (70 per cent) rated overall technical support and targeted capacity-building of Member State needs as excellent or good. Further, in the region where Sustainable Development Goal support is needed the most, namely, sub-Saharan Africa, most of the resident coordinators surveyed (51 per cent) reported the support provided by Secretariat to be excellent or good. More specifically, more than half of the resident coordinators surveyed rated overall Sustainable Development Goal support on technical assistance (79 per cent) and capacity-building (71 per cent) as highly effective or effective. Capacity-building is discussed further in result D below.

At the country level, Sustainable Development Goal support has generally aligned with national development priorities

36. In all four case-study countries, United Nations staff, government partners and other stakeholders reported that Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support had aligned with national development priorities. Examples showcasing that alignment are provided in box 3. In addition, United Nations system-wide quadrennial comprehensive policy review data (see [A/77/69-E/2022/47](#)) revealed that support activities in African countries (97 per cent), landlocked developing countries (92 per cent) and least developed countries (91 per cent) were as aligned with national development needs as the global average (92 per cent); however, in the case of small island developing States, the alignment was lower (81 per cent).

Box 3

Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support was aligned with national development priorities in the four case-study countries

Guyana (Goal 17)

In line with Guyana's National Development Strategy 2017, which included a priority on the computerization process for financial matters, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development supported a comprehensive customs modernization programme to enhance the performance of Guyana's external trade sector and its contribution to growth and development. It supported the host Government in providing an efficient service to the trading community.

Malawi (Goals 1, 5 and 13)

In line with the priorities set in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III 2017–2022, which prioritized agriculture, water development and climate change management, the United Nations Environment Programme supported the localization of environment and natural resource management, poverty reduction and gender equality at the district level through poverty-environment action for the Sustainable Development Goals project. It supported the host Government in mainstreaming the poverty-environment dimension in national policies and budget processes.

Nepal (Goal 17)

In line with priorities established in Nepal’s Fifteenth Plan (Fiscal Year 2019/20–2023/24), which included a national commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the Resident Coordinator Office leveraged the competencies of United Nations agencies at the national and subnational levels through the Sustainable Development Goal Joint Fund programme “Reorienting public finance for Sustainable Development Goal acceleration and leveraging additional resources in Nepal”. It assisted the host Government in developing an integrated financing framework to reorient public resources towards the Goals.

The Gambia (Goal 16)

In line with priorities set in The Gambia National Development Plan (2018–2021), which included a priority on restoring good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime supported the host Government by strengthening the capacities of law enforcement officers to combat trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.

37. Some United Nations economists also noted the general alignment between Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support and host Government development needs. They volunteered that the top three most effective areas of support were assistance with voluntary national review, policy advice and technical assistance. Some United Nations economists also noted that the Secretariat, through the resident coordinator office, supported Member States in aligning their national development plans with the Goals. In Malawi and the Gambia, some government partners also discussed the alignment of Sustainable Development Goal support with Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, which is a regional development framework.

D. Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support has strengthened Member State capacities, although their statistical capacity is still lagging

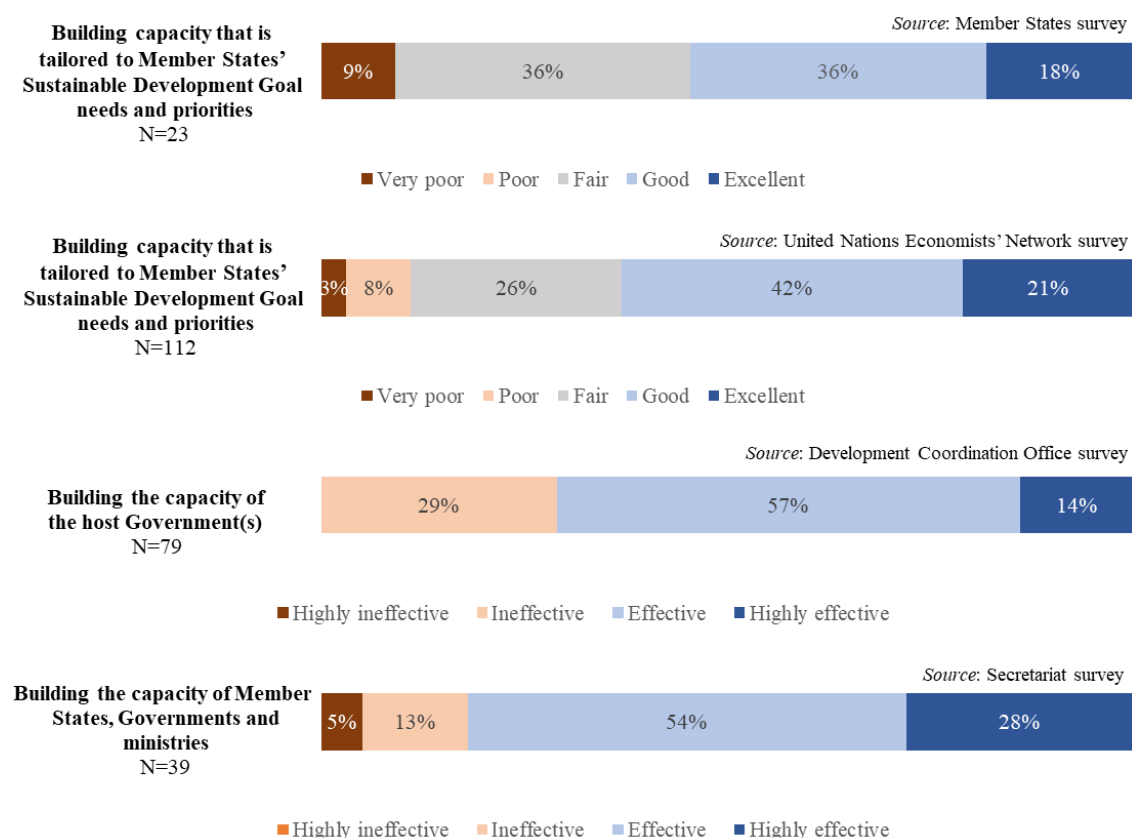
The Secretariat has provided high-quality and well-targeted support that has strengthened Member State capacities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

38. Capacity-building, emphasized in Sustainable Development Goal target 17.9 and defined as “developing and strengthening the skills, abilities and processes of Member States for Sustainable Development Goal implementation”, represented the bulk of Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support as reported in the

Secretariat survey. On the supply side, 33 of 54 entities surveyed, including 13 of 16 in the development pillar, reported engagement in capacity-building. Among the Secretariat workplans reviewed, capacity-building was the second most common support type after technical/financial support. On the demand side, capacity-building was the main type of Sustainable Development Goal support received from Secretariat entities among both the Member States surveyed and the government partners interviewed in the four case-study countries.

39. Member States and United Nations staff surveyed assessed the Secretariat as effective and well targeted in enhancing Member State capacities, as shown in figure XII.

Figure XII
Secretariat capacity-building was assessed to be high quality



Sources: Member States survey, United Nations Economists' Network Survey, Development Coordination Office survey and Secretariat survey.

Most government partners in the four case-study countries and headquarters missions (84 per cent) noted overall satisfaction with the quality of Secretariat capacity-building activities. Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support was reported to have strengthened Member States' capacities in multiple areas of work in the four case-study countries, as shown in the table below.

Secretariat entities engaged in capacity-building in the four case-study countries

<i>Capacity-building area</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Case-study country</i>	<i>Secretariat entity</i>
Ecosystem management and biodiversity	Goal 15	Malawi	United Nations Environment Programme
Integrated markets and the African Continental Free Trade Area	Goals 1 and 8	Malawi, the Gambia	Economic Commission for Africa
Innovation, digital government and public service delivery for sustainable development	Goal 17	Guyana	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Integrated customs management system	Goal 17	Guyana	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
Peacebuilding initiatives and electoral processes	Goal 16	The Gambia	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Resident Coordinator Office
Human rights responses to smuggling of migrants	Goal 16	The Gambia	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
City-wide inclusive sanitation and green and clean technologies for house and building constructions	Goals 6 and 11	Nepal	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
Tools for implementing key global instruments on small arms and weapons control	Goals 5 and 16	Nepal	Office for Disarmament Affairs
Use of space technology and applications in support of the full disaster management cycle	All Goals, mainly Goals 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 11 and 13	Nepal	Office for Outer Space Affairs

A focus on enhancing capacity in individuals rather than institutions has, however, limited the sustainability of the results of this support

40. The sustainability of capacity-building, namely, around individual capacity-building, was volunteered as a concern by government partners and United Nations staff interviewed in three of the four case-study countries. Government partners distinguished between institutional and individual capacity-building, underlining an unmet need for further investments in systems, infrastructure and information and communications technology to strengthen institutional capacity. As two illustrative examples, one government partner interviewed in Guyana referred to the public sector's loss of human capital to "the booming private sector" in the country, where the gross domestic product grew by 44 per cent in 2020; similarly, one donor partner interviewed in Malawi highlighted minimal salaries as a challenge in the "very small public sector with a capacity far away from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals".

Capacity-building support around statistics, which is of critical importance, has been less satisfactory

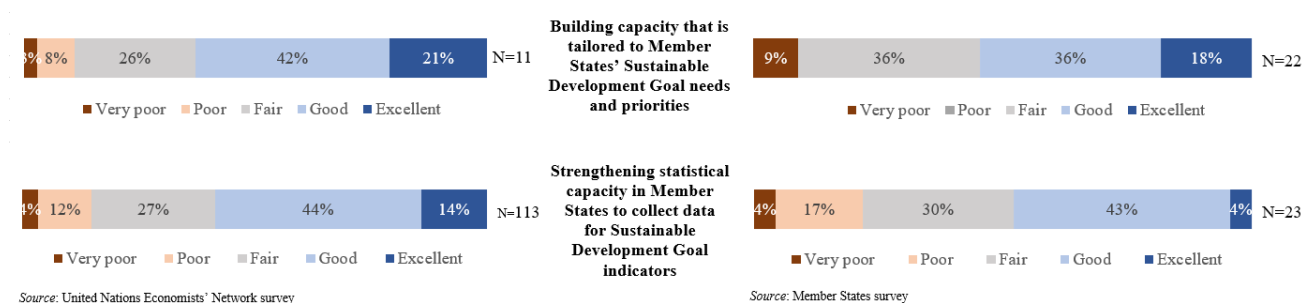
41. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda reinforced the critical need for strengthened statistical capacities of Member States when the global framework quadrupled its scope from 60 indicators to 248 indicators²⁵ to measure, monitor and report on the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, respectively. The ensuing unprecedented rate of innovation in the data landscape called for a strengthening of national statistical system abilities to leverage innovative data collection sources, technologies and methods for streamlined production and dissemination of official statistics. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the environment in which statistical authorities operated and further strained their capacities, pausing data collection activities conducted face-to-face.

42. Within the overall areas of Secretariat Sustainable Development Goal support, statistical capacity-building, emphasized in Goal target 17.18 and defined as “developing and strengthening the skills, abilities and processes of national statistical systems to measure, monitor and report on the Goals in an accurate, reliable and timely manner”, was reported as a significant area of focus in the Secretariat survey. Most entities surveyed (28 of 54) reported engagement in supporting Member States in Sustainable Development Goal data availability and analysis.²⁶

43. Statistical capacity-building was rated to be less satisfactory than capacity-building overall, as shown in figure XIII. Furthermore, in the session “Messages from the Regions” of the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development, Member States across all regions expressed the specific need for more data support to meet the 2030 Agenda.

Figure XIII

Statistical capacity-building was assessed to be less effective compared with capacity-building overall



Source: United Nations Economists' Network survey

Source: Member States survey

Sources: Member States survey and United Nations Economists' Network survey.

National statistical systems do not meet the critical data needs for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring and reporting

44. Despite the efforts noted above, insufficient statistical capacity of Member States has resulted in Sustainable Development Goal data gaps, as was particularly noted by several of the United Nations economists surveyed. Data availability was consistently reported as a limitation in the voluntary national review presentations at the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development observed in July 2022. Moreover, the secondary analysis of the Global Sustainable Development Goal

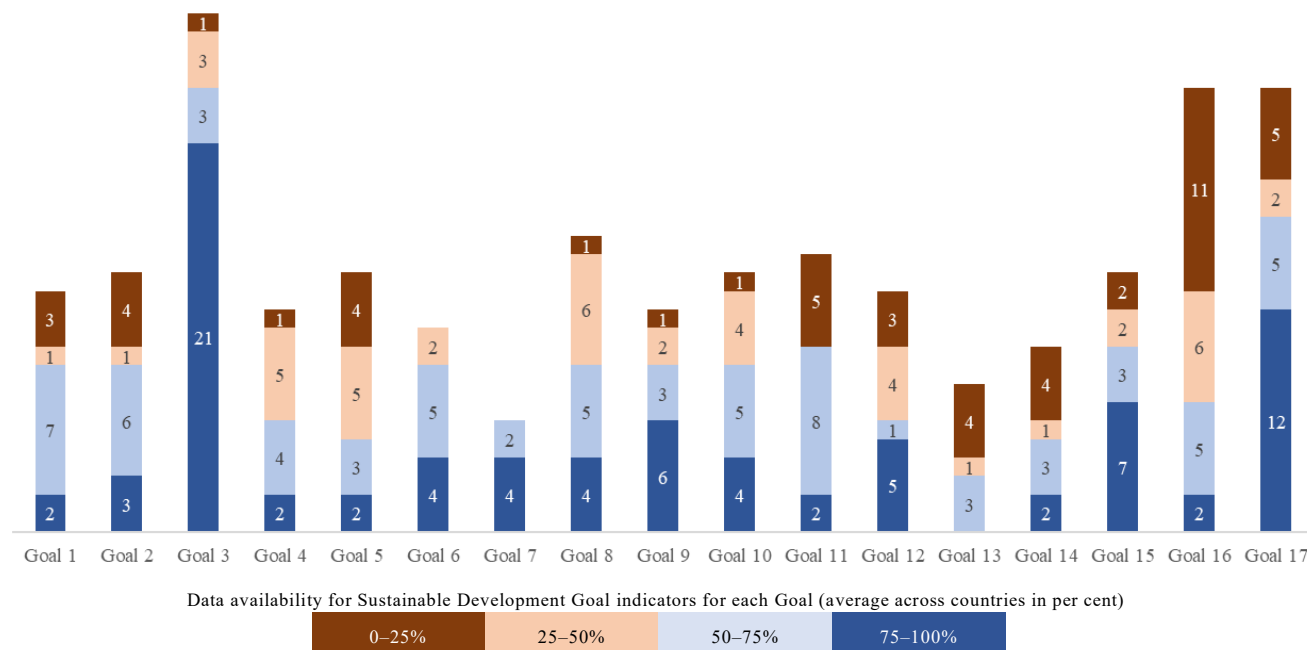
²⁵ Of these 248, 231 are unique indicators and 13 apply to multiple targets.

²⁶ The Department of Economic and Social Affairs reported that the United Nations statistical community had supported national statistical systems since 2015.

Indicators Data Platform highlighted a generally low percentage of Member States with available data across the global Sustainable Development Goal indicator framework: less than 25 per cent of Member States had available data for 50 Goal indicators, as shown in figure XIV. In particular, Member States lacked data for a higher proportion of indicators under Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, where Secretariat entities were the (co-)custodians for the majority of indicators. Goal 16 consists of survey-based indicators relating to crime, corruption, illicit flows, governance and institutional capacity, which are new and challenging to measure.²⁷

Figure XIV

There were large gaps in national statistical Sustainable Development Goal data collection



Source: OIOS analysis of the Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Data Platform.

45. The data gaps of Member States were more prominent across the set of 88 Goal indicators for which Secretariat entities were custodians or co-custodians. There were two possible reasons for this. First, there could have been differences with regard to data availability between the Goal indicators with or without Secretariat custodianship when the global indicator framework was adopted. For example, the environment-related Goal indicators, which usually had the United Nations Environment Programme as the (co-)custodian entity, had a higher proportion of tier-III status indicators²⁸ (50 per cent) at the outset in 2016 than all other Goal indicators (28 per cent). Second, the Secretariat entities had a smaller operational space in which to undertake statistical capacity-building activities compared with specialized agencies and funds with a country presence.

46. Disaggregated Sustainable Development Goal data availability, which is indispensable for the principle of leaving no one behind, was even scarcer. According to the secondary analysis of the Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

²⁷ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported having partnered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to launch an initiative to address the lack of data on Goal 16.

²⁸ Sustainable Development Goal indicators with tier-III status had no internationally established methodology or standards.

Data Platform, among the 76 indicators for which data could be disaggregated by sex,²⁹ Member States reported disaggregated data for just 48 of them. Similarly, among the 17 Goal indicators for which data could be disaggregated by disability status, Member States reported disaggregated data for only four.

47. With only seven years left to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, this significant lack of data to assess progress and target sustainable development investments hampers the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Without knowing where things are now, Member States may not know where they need to go, and more specifically, the Secretariat may not know what it needs to prioritize to be more fit for purpose in supporting Member States in reaching their goals within the next seven years.

V. Recommendations

48. OIOS makes one important recommendation to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, one important recommendation to all Secretariat entities and one important recommendation to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Recommendation 1 (results A, B and D)

49. As part of the United Nations system-wide commitment to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in the context of the 2024 Member State conduct of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of United Nations system operational activities, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General should include a specific focus on and actual inclusion of the Secretariat's support, including the peace and security pillar, to Member States in achieving their nationally defined priorities, with the 2030 Agenda at the centre.

Consideration should also be given to the feasibility of expanding Umoja to capture data on the amount and type of support to the Sustainable Development Goals being provided through the assessed budgets. This could expand upon the existing Sustainable Development Goal tagging capability in the Secretariat's integrated planning, management and reporting system. To avoid duplication and ensure progress towards system-wide interoperability, such an initiative should be fully aligned with the reporting tool of the United Nations development system (UN-Info) and the recently adopted United Nations Sustainable Development Goal output indicator framework, which captures the United Nations development system's contributions to the Goals at the national level.

Indicator of achievement: Enhanced focus on and actual inclusion of Secretariat support in the United Nations system-wide commitment to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in the context of the upcoming 2024 quadrennial comprehensive policy review

Recommendation 2 (results A and B)

50. Each Secretariat entity should clearly, distinctly and specifically articulate in its internal strategic plans and workplans how it will support host Governments in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This should align with the overarching United Nations development system framework and integrate existing system-wide processes on data and reporting. This would include:

²⁹ Asian Development Bank and United Nations Statistics Division, *Practical Guidebook on Data Disaggregation for the Sustainable Development Goals* (May 2021).

(a) Specific linkages between its programmatic budget, workplan, activities and outputs, including consideration of tools and processes identified as missing in the present evaluation and how these will support the 2030 development agenda;

(b) Reporting on results achieved with Sustainable Development Goal support activities in its annual results;

(c) Identification of possible synergies and coordination with other Secretariat entities.

Indicator of achievement: Clear and distinct sections in entity-level strategic plans, programme budgets and workplans on Sustainable Development Goal support activities and results

Recommendation 3 (results B and D)

51. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs should take the lead on addressing issues of data interoperability.

Given the mandate accorded to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/5](#) on the coordination of the work of the entire United Nations statistical system and the Department's leading role in implementing the United Nations data initiative, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should address issues around the proliferation of and overinvestment in individual Sustainable Development Goal databases, and data gaps, as well as the interoperability between existing Secretariat data systems. This should include:

(a) A mapping exercise of Secretariat-wide Sustainable Development Goal data portals and databases, as well as the capacity for data engineering, analysis, visualization and data science;

(b) Concrete steps to reduce or streamline the Secretariat-wide data portals, in particular across the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional economic commissions, while ensuring that stakeholders can receive region-specific insights;

(c) An annual stocktake of efforts to close Sustainable Development Goal data gaps for indicators for which United Nations Secretariat entities act as custodians and take measures to address remaining gaps as appropriate;

(d) An independently developed and Department of Economic and Social Affairs-maintained federated data infrastructure for Sustainable Development Goal-related statistics across United Nations Secretariat entities, based on interoperability standards to enhance efficiency in Sustainable Development Goal statistics compilation, management, dissemination and access, while reducing the existing duplication of efforts, for the purpose of producing Secretariat-wide Sustainable Development Goal statistics outputs and maximizing the use of data assets as envisioned in the Secretary-General's data strategy.

Indicator of achievement: Mapping exercise completed and more integrated and coherent Sustainable Development Goal data infrastructure

Annex I

List of the 55 entities involved in the thematic evaluation

1. United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti
2. Development Coordination Office
3. Department of Economic and Social Affairs
4. Department of Peace Operations
5. Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
6. Economic Commission for Africa
7. Economic Commission for Europe
8. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
9. Executive Office of the Secretary-General
10. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
11. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
12. Global Compact Office
13. International Trade Centre
14. United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
15. United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
16. United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
17. United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
18. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
19. Office of Counter-Terrorism
20. Office for Disarmament Affairs
21. Office on Drugs and Crime
22. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
23. Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
24. Office of Legal Affairs
25. Office for Outer Space Affairs
26. Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa
27. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region
28. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa
29. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar
30. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria
31. Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate

32. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
33. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict
34. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children
35. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
36. United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
37. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
38. United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
39. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
40. United Nations Environment Programme
41. United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus
42. United Nations Human Settlements Programme
43. United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
44. United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei
45. United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
46. United Nations Mission in South Sudan
47. United Nations Office to the African Union
48. United Nations Office for Partnerships
49. United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
50. United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia
51. Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon
52. United Nations Support Mission in Libya
53. United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia
54. United Nations Support Office in Somalia
55. United Nations Truce Supervision Organization

Annex II*

Comments received from entities on the draft report

Executive Office of the Secretary-General

I am writing in response to your Note dated 25 January 2023 regarding the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Executive Office of the Secretary-General has reviewed the draft report. We welcome its emphasis on maximizing the contribution of the United Nations Secretariat to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We are pleased to inform you that we will be accepting the first recommendation set forth in the draft report. In its implementation, we will be guided by intergovernmental mandates and thus seek to ensure its follow-up in accordance with paragraph 15 (j) of General Assembly resolution [74/251](#) which requests the inclusion, by relevant programmes and subprogrammes in accordance with their specific related intergovernmental mandates, of concrete information regarding contributions to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals when preparing the proposed programme plan and programme performance documents. We will also work with relevant Departments and Offices to ensure follow-up through existing system-wide reporting under the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and in the context of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of United Nations system operational activities.

With regard to paragraph 49 of the report, we would request that consideration be given to replacing the term “regular budget” with “assessed budgets”. Further, given that the regular budget largely covers programmes, we would suggest that consideration be given to clarifying the reference to “projects” funded by the regular budget. On the suggestion to expand upon the existing SDG tagging capability in the Secretariat’s Umoja – Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting (Umoja-IPMR) system that is currently being used for extrabudgetary funded projects, we would suggest that this matter be discussed with the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC). DMSPC would be best placed to indicate the applicability and feasibility of expanding the existing SDG tagging capability to assessed funding. The latter Department will work with the Development Coordination Office on this matter.

The Executive Office further wishes to stress that the General Assembly has provided guidance to the Secretariat on how the support to the SDGs by Secretariat entities should be reflected and structured in budget documents. Currently, as per the guidance of the General Assembly, support to respective SDGs, and efforts by governments to achieve SDGs, are included in the strategies and results of the programme plans of the (350) subprogrammes across all Departments, as determined by the respective programme managers. The General Assembly has also requested that strategies and results reflect all mandated areas of work of each of the subprogrammes.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from entities. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee. Four entities, namely, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia, stated that recommendation 2 was not relevant to them given their mandates.

We further wish to note that the General Assembly to date has not requested the Secretariat to reflect the contributions of the peacekeeping missions to the SDGs. The results-based frameworks are currently drafted to reflect the mandates given by the Security Council to individual missions. However, given the link with Goal 16, the Secretariat could explore the possibility of more clearly reporting expenditures and programmatic support for Goal 16 where relevant to the mission's mandate. DMSPC will be able to provide further comments on recommendation 2 of the report, as well as on the more technical elements related to recommendation 1.

An action plan is under development and will be shared with your office in the coming weeks, further to engagement with relevant Departments and Offices.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Office of Internal Oversight Services for its engagement during the preparation of this report and look forward to seeing action being taken on its recommendations in the coming period.

Development Coordination Office

Our informal comments on the findings and recommendations were integrated into the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG) feedback provided to you.

As for the report, I'm pleased to confirm DCO's concurrence with recommendation #2 of the report.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

With reference to your memo of 25 January 2023, conveying the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the Thematic evaluation of United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals, I acknowledge the importance of this evaluation and extend my appreciation to OIOS for its findings and recommendations.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) has reviewed the evaluation report and following discussions and exchanges with the OIOS evaluation team, including on the recommendations, welcomes the findings and insights of the evaluation. As such, UN DESA is preparing an action plan, building on work already under way in response to the recommendations outlined in the evaluation report.

UN DESA accepts the recommendations outlined in the report and would like to add the following observations for the recommendations relevant to our Department:

Recommendation 2: UN DESA will continue to ensure that its strategic plans and workplans, including its annual programme plan and budget and UN DESA Plan of Action, will support host governments in achieving the SDGs in accordance with its mandates. UN DESA will also continue to follow established Secretariat-wide mechanisms to report on results achieved with SDG support activities and ensure coordination with other Secretariat entities as appropriate.

Recommendation 3: UN DESA will take a lead on the implementation of this recommendation on addressing issues of data interoperability among existing Secretariat data systems, to the extent that resources are able to support. UN DESA will continue to map Secretariat-wide SDG data portals and databases and take further steps to streamline Secretariat-wide data portals. The Department will also take additional measures through the IAEG-SDGs to close SDG data gaps for indicators where United Nations (UN) Secretariat entities act as custodian and continue to work towards a DESA-maintained federated data infrastructure for SDG-related statistics.

To conclude, I wish to acknowledge the OIOS project team for their professionalism, excellent collaboration, and valuable time in guiding us throughout

this process. With the findings of this evaluation, UN DESA will continue to enhance its role in supporting host governments in achieving the SDGs and to take the lead on maintaining an integrated and coherent SDG data infrastructure for the UN Secretariat.

Department of Peace Operations

The Department of Peace Operations (DPO) accepts recommendation 2, while noting that the specific modalities of its implementation will have to be adapted to the mandate of the department and its strategic, programmatic and work plans and may similarly not apply to some of the peacekeeping operations it oversees.

United Nations peacekeeping operations are an important tool for the Organization to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and, in some aspects and settings, 5 (gender equity). Several peacekeeping operations are explicitly mandated to undertake activities directly related to Sustainable Development Goal 16, including the promotion of the rule of law at the national level and “ensuring equal access to justice” (target 16.3), the development of “effective, accountable and transparent institutions” (target 16.6), and to strengthen national institutions “to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime” (target 16.A). Furthermore, practically all peacekeeping operations contribute to efforts to “significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates” in host countries (target 16.1). Several missions also undertake activities related to Sustainable Development Goal 5, including efforts by host countries to “end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls” (target 5.1), “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls” (target 5.2) and the adoption and strengthening of “sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” (target 5.C). In the implementation of such activities, partnerships are always established with national authorities and international stakeholders, including other United Nations Department, Agencies, Funds and Programmes (and duplication of effort avoided).

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the primary role of DPO is to provide political and executive direction, as well as technical and substantive guidance and backstopping, to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Those missions are mandated by resolutions of the Security Council and the Secretariat reports, as such, to this legislative body on the implementation of their mandates. From a budgetary and financial perspective, the Secretariat also reports to, and has financial and human resources allocated by, the General Assembly. It is critical for DPO and peacekeeping operations to fully comply with such mandates and reporting mechanisms.

While peacekeeping operations will overall contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 16, many of them have no direct mandate to contribute to specific targets under that goal. This also limits their capacity, and that of the department, to “align with the overarching UN development system framework and integrate existing system-wide processes on data and reporting” called for under recommendation 2. Similarly, due to its mandate, most functions and activities of DPO do not directly “support host governments in achieving the SDGs”. With these important caveats in mind, DPO will seek to best reflect in its strategic and programmatic documents, and work plans for relevant offices, its contributions to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

Reference is made to your memorandum (OIOS-2023-00117) of 25 January 2023 transmitting the draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the

Thematic evaluation of United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals. Thank you as usual for undertaking a consultative process and for incorporating our comments that had been submitted on the earlier draft of the report.

As noted in the report, the respective roles and responsibilities of Secretariat entities vary depending on each entity's mandate. While not a formal custodian for any Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), much of DPPA's support to United Nations Member States directly supports their achievement of SDGs – particularly Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, but also Goal 5: Gender Equality and Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals. We are aware that achieving Agenda 2030 remains a particular challenge for those countries facing serious peace and security challenges. Even prior to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which further exacerbated tensions and inequality, only 18 per cent of countries affected by conflict or facing humanitarian crises were on track to achieve the SDGs. Investing in prevention is one of the most cost-effective ways to secure development gains. Moving forward, and in cooperation with partners including regional and subregional organizations as relevant, DPPA remains committed to supporting Member States in addressing peace and security challenges to better facilitate progress towards the SDGs.

Having reviewed the evaluation and its recommendations, I am pleased to inform you that DPPA will accept the relevant recommendation for our Department (Recommendation 2). Accordingly, please find attached an action plan to implement the recommendation.**

Economic Commission for Africa

I would like to acknowledge receipt of the OIOS Draft report on the Thematic Evaluation of Secretariat entities' contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals. We have taken note of the content of the report and we accept the recommendations.

Economic Commission for Europe

I refer to your memorandum dated 25 January 2023, transmitting the formal draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the Thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) appreciates the continuous efforts of OIOS to make recommendations on how the Secretariat can better position itself to provide the further support needed to accelerate progress for achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030.

At ECE, we believe that we have made notable progress in recent years to be fit for purpose and better support our member States in achieving the SDGs including through strengthened coherence with other UN secretariat and UN system entities at the global, regional and country levels.

Within existing resources, since 2019, ECE has been co-leading the Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia, contributing to minimize overlap and duplication of efforts between the UN regional assets, and has strengthened its support to the UN Country Teams in the programme countries of the ECE region within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

ECE accepts recommendation 2 addressed to all Secretariat entities but would recall that the format of the proposed programme budget shall comply with General Assembly resolution [77/267](#) and is therefore beyond the strict purview of ECE. At the

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Commission level, the secretariat will continue to present annually its report on technical cooperation activities structured by SDG and covering all funding sources.

I take this opportunity to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Report and for the ongoing constructive engagement between our respective offices.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

I am pleased to send you ECLAC's management response to the above-mentioned evaluation report.

ECLAC welcomes this comprehensive report, which provides evidence supporting the relevance, effectiveness and coherence of the work undertaken by the Secretariat of the United Nations in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

We accept the recommendation number 2 of the report, which is the recommendation applicable to ECLAC, reflecting our strong commitment to support member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the attainment of the SDGs.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for this report and welcome the recommendations it contains, and to thank OIOS for the collaborative approach in this evaluation.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

With reference to your memo dated 25 January 2023, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) appreciates the opportunity to provide a formal response to the findings and recommendations of the above-mentioned draft evaluation report.

In this report OIOS found that there were no entity-specific strategies specifically targeted for supporting Member States with the achievement of the SDGs. However, following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, ESCAP member States developed a regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda that provides a clear strategy for ESCAP and other UN entities for supporting member States in that endeavour. This road map identifies key priorities around specific SDG thematic areas and explicitly links activities with the SDGs. The road map also informs the development of ESCAP's Proposed programme plan and budget. ESCAP also recalls the key finding of the 2019 OIOS evaluation of the United Nations entities' preparedness, policy coherence, and early results associated with their support to SDGs confirming that the regional commissions, including ESCAP, have taken positive steps to effectively meet their key SDG support roles and made it a dominant strategic driver.

On recommendation #2 addressed to each Secretariat entity, ESCAP recognizes the importance of having a clear, distinct, and specific articulation in strategic plans and work plans on SDG support for governments. ESCAP's existing strategic plans and processes, including the regional road map and secretariat-wide programme plan, could address the requirements of this recommendation.

ESCAP expresses its reservation on paragraph 28 of the current report, referencing the OIOS Evaluation of subprogramme 4: Environment and Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, as evidence in support of a statement on actual or potential duplication on SDG support provided by different Secretariat entities. To the contrary, this report highlights the synergies the subprogramme created with Secretariat entities particularly to avoid overlap and duplication in knowledge products (para. 43).

Furthermore, and in response to the findings in paragraph 29 of the report, ESCAP wishes to stress that its mandate is to promote regional cooperation among its member States. ESCAP's work at the country-level is undertaken only as part of regional or multi-country projects implemented at the specific request of member States. ESCAP coordinates its work through the Regional Collaborative Platform and its Issue-based Coalitions at the regional level and the United Nations Resident Coordinators at the country levels.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) articulates “specific linkages between its programmatic budget, workplan, activities and outputs, including consideration of tools and processes” which pertain to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in its annual Programme Plan and Budget documents (both at the programme and subprogramme levels, and following the format endorsed by Member States) as well as various reports, including the Arab Sustainable Development Report and regional contributions to the system-wide reporting on results achieved.

ESCWA also wishes to underscore its ongoing engagement and leadership in coordinating SDG-related efforts through the Regional Coordination Platform and the various subsidiary Issue-based Coalitions, as well as leading interagency efforts in organizing the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and its various knowledge products and preparatory meetings.

In addition, ESCWA supports its member States with Voluntary National Reviews and has been implementing several regional projects related to statistics and data (which served as a basis for several national common country assessments (CCAs) and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), development financing (including debt-swap for climate change) and developed several interactive policy tools in support of evidence-based decision-making at the national level.

Going forward and recognizing the opportunity to better articulate its contribution to SDG-related support for its member States, ESCWA will update its strategic document specific to SDG action and support.

International Trade Centre

The International Trade Centre (ITC) accepts recommendation 2.

United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) as a peacekeeping mission is the only UN entity present in Western Sahara, wherein Western Sahara is considered by the Organization as a non-self-governing territory (i.e., not a Country/no Government).

We have a very specific mandate and do not conduct any development or operational activities to support “*national Government*” in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic

This is [to] acknowledge receipt of your interoffice memorandum dated 25 January 2023 on the above-mentioned subject.

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) concurs with the findings of report and accepts recommendation contained in it. MINUSCA will transmit the recommendation action plan in due course.

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

Overview: MINUSMA's work helps Mali significantly with efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16: '*Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies*'. As an integrated mission, MINUSMA also recognizes the importance of coordinating with other UN entities, secretariat and non-secretariat. Nonetheless, the core mission of this peace operation is what is decided by the Security Council in the mandate resolution, not SDG attainment.

The SDGs are multi-year commitments that national governments need to translate into multi-year development plans. UN Country Team members each develop their multi-year country programmes and indicators to support the national plan, which they discuss and agree with the national authorities.

Peace Operations: The objectives, approval, the process, and time periods are different for UN peace operations (peacekeeping operations and special political missions) such as MINUSMA. The UN Security Council sets the mandate, including the objectives and critical workstreams, without the requirement of government approval. Achievement of the mandate requires working with multiple parties, including but not limited to the government. Mandates are year-long for most missions, though they may be less. Mission budgets cover the mandated period.

Governance: The peacekeeping mission objectives are aligned with the development agenda, but they are not synonymous with it: they are to support the achievement of peace, as defined by the Security Council. Attempting to merge DPO and peacekeeping reporting to the Security Council and General Assembly with SDG reporting to ECOSOC will create confusion and interfere with the governance structures of the organization. The Member States have established a specific set of institutions to oversee peace operations, the Security Council, the General Assembly, and specialist committees within the GA (Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), 5th Committee, and C-34 Committee).

	<i>SDG support via UN Agency</i>	<i>Peace Operations</i>
Key document and approval	Agency/Fund/Programme agrees and signs Country Programme Document with the Government	UN Security Council passes a resolution
Time Period	Multi-year	One year or less for most
Objectives	SDG achievement	Peace and stabilization as determined by the Security Council in the mandate resolution, often in support of a multi-party peace agreement
Budget	Voluntary contributions, multi-year	Assessed contributions, General Assembly approval and oversight, for length of mandate (normally one year or less)
Oversight bodies	Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)	Security Council and General Assembly (including ACABQ, 5th Committee and C-34 Committee)

In summary, while MINUSMA's work helps Mali significantly with efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16 (just, peaceful, inclusive societies), the core mission of MINUSMA is what is decided by the Security Council in the mandate resolution, not SDG attainment. The Mission does not feel that it is applicable to it to have additional reporting requirements in its internal strategic plans, workplans, and budgets to articulate how it will support the host government in achieving the SDGs.

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Based on your clarifications, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) accepts the recommendation, noting that it has been at the forefront of ensuring that all humanitarian action to the extent possible and within its mandate protects and advances development gains. Specifically, OCHA has committed in its current Strategic Plan to respond to the needs of those caught in humanitarian emergencies and the most at-risk to humanitarian emergencies and recurring crisis. It is unequivocally committed to reducing harm, vulnerability, inequality, discrimination, and exclusion as a critical step towards achieving the SDGs. It is equally committed to ensuring within its mandate complementarity between humanitarian frameworks and development programming at the country level and engaging in close collaboration with development actors, so as to reinforce their sustainable development endeavours and preserve development gains.

At the same time, as a non-implementing humanitarian coordination entity, which is also not a United Nations development system (UNDS) member, OCHA does not directly provide programming for the implementation of any specific sustainable development goal and as such will not be able to have a distinct programme budget and workplan for this, as the achievement of specific SDGs is outside of its mandate. This has been acknowledged by the DMSPC and the UN Controller on several occasions and in particular, with regards to our interface with UMOJA extension 2/IPMR.

Thank you once again for this important piece of work. We look forward to continuing to support this collective endeavour.

Office of Counter-Terrorism

The Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) welcomes the evaluation report of the Office of Internal Oversight (OIOS) on the Thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) shared with heads of Secretariat entity on 25 January 2023 and has the pleasure to transmit the UNOCT's Action Plan in Appendix I.**

We are pleased to note OIOS findings that SDG support, when provided by UN Secretariat entities, to Member States has been of generally good quality, well aligned with national development priorities, and contributed to strengthening Member State capacities. We thank you also for pointing opportunities for improvement, specifically in the areas of development of Secretariat-wide action plan, strategies, structures and tools, and ensuring sufficient coherence in the delivery of SDG support by Secretariat entities.

This management response relates to recommendation 2 of the OIOS subject report, that requests that each Secretariat entity should clearly, distinctly, and specifically articulate in their internal strategic plans and workplans how they will support host governments in achieving the SDGs. UNOCT accepts this recommendation and proposes a plan with specific actions and a target date for completion of this recommendation in Appendix I (Recommendation Action Plan).**

** On file with the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

We thank you for this important study that covered 55 United Nations Secretariat entities and provided valuable insights on the current state of Secretariat support to Member States in achieving sustainable development goals and opportunities for further development to ensure Secretariat entities remain responsive to Member States' needs.

We stand ready to continue to engage as necessary.

Office for Disarmament Affairs

I would like to refer to the inter-office memo from OIOS dated 25 January 2023, regarding the draft report on the thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals.

On behalf of the Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA), I am pleased to hereby confirm that ODA has no further comments on the draft report and therefore would accept the recommendations contained therein.

Please find attached the recommendation action plan template, which includes relevant ODA inputs.**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank OIOS for its consolidated efforts to report the UN Secretariat-wide support to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Office on Drugs and Crime

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) would like to extend its gratitude to the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for the opportunity to provide a management response to the above-mentioned report. UNODC fully acknowledges the importance of this evaluation and values the consultative and transparent approach throughout the evaluation process.

UNODC appreciates the focus of this Secretariat-wide evaluation on support provided to Member States in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where we work together with United Nations system partners to contribute to Member States' efforts in meeting the SDGs through our five thematic areas of work. Note is taken that UNODC's work was highlighted in multiple case studies, including in Malawi, and UNODC's active engagement in human-rights responses to smuggling of migrants in The Gambia, thereby contributing to SDG 16. These are, evidently, just two examples out of a large number of initiatives which provide direct support to Member States for implementing the SDGs, of which further information can be found in the UNODC annual results-based report on implementation of the UNODC Strategy 2021–2025¹ which highlights best practices of results achieved in support of the SDGs, as well as in the SDGs pages on the UNODC website.²

In addition, all independent evaluations conducted of UNODC's work include a focus on the SDGs, thereby offering insights at the project and programme levels through individual evaluations,³ as well as the more aggregate level through meta-syntheses.⁴ UNODC's evaluation management application, Unite Evaluations, allows tracking of SDGs in evaluation results.

** On file with the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

¹ Addressing and countering the world drug problem; preventing and countering organized crime; preventing and countering corruption and economic crime; preventing and countering terrorism; crime prevention and criminal justice www.unodc.org/missions/en/annual-report/2021-results-based-progress-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-unodc-strategy-2021-2025.html.

² www.unodc.org/unodc/en/sustainable-development-goals/index.html.

³ www.unodc.org/evaluation.

⁴ www.unodc.org/unodc/en/evaluation/Evaluation-based-knowledge-products.html.

UNODC has carefully studied the report, in particular its findings and recommendations, and accepts recommendation 2, which is directed at all entities. It should be noted that UNODC has already implemented a large extent of this recommendation. Reference to the 2030 Agenda, and specifically how UNODC intends to support Member States in achieving the SDGs, is clearly spelled out in the UNODC Strategy 2021–2025, the programme plan and budget, and relevant divisional workplans. UNODC has a specific data collection process for 17 specific SDG indicators, has developed methodological standards to support Member States in reporting against these indicators, and provides technical assistance to States, in close cooperation with relevant UN entities. Further, UNODC contributes to system-wide data collection and reporting processes related to the SDGs, led by DESA, and as part of the UN Development System.

The link to the SDGs is further reflected in each UNODC project and programme, as can be seen in the Secretariat’s “projects.un.org” portal. Recently, with the introduction of the Secretariat-wide Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting (IPMR) tool in Umoja, where it is possible to tag projects against SDGs and link this to information on project expenditure, reporting on SDG support to Member States will become much more targeted and precise, possibly opening opportunities for more synergies between Secretariat entities.

UNODC would welcome a Secretariat-wide action plan for more integrated, strategic and specialized support to Member States to provide a much-needed push towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, in line with Our Common Agenda and the Secretary-General’s Data Strategy and stands ready to contribute to these efforts.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

In response to your memorandum of 25 January 2023, I am pleased to provide herewith the response of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to the Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals.

First, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to you and your staff for the spirit of consultation throughout the process, including the data collection, circulation for inputs and the consideration to our comments on the draft report.

We welcome the report which provides valuable insights for the continued strengthening of the work of the United Nations Secretariat supporting Member States towards achievement of the SDGs.

We appreciate the attention paid to our comments made on the role of UNSDCF as the main vehicle for country-level planning and implementation and the role of secretariat entities in UN Country Teams support to implement the SDGs at the country-level.

The Office agrees and is committed to the implementation of the recommendation made to each Secretariat entity to clearly, distinctly and specifically articulate in their internal strategic plans and workplans how they will support host governments in achieving the SDGs. Please note that this recommendation would benefit from the guidance of the Programme Planning and Budget Division in New York, on how to reflect the entities support to SDG activities in the programme plan.

Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

The Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS) concurs with the findings and recommendations, including recommendation N.2.

Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa

Reference is made to your memo of 25 January 2023 (OIOS-2023-00117) transmitting the draft report of OIOS the evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals.

My Office (OSAA) has reviewed the draft report and notes that Recommendation 1 is aimed at the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Recommendation 2 is aimed at all Secretariat entities, and Recommendation 3 is aimed at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that OSAA accepts Recommendation 2. Furthermore, I would like to take the opportunity to inform you that OSAA has already started to specify in the strategic plan and annual workplans its contributions not only to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but also the African Union Agenda 2063.

The Strategic Agenda of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa comprises six cluster areas (financing for development; sustainable development for durable peace; human capital; science, technology and innovation; industrialization and free trade; and energy and climate). These clusters represent key areas for action with a multiplying impact on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The development of OSAA's annual workplans in line with this Strategic Agenda implies that all activities implemented and funded through the regular budget or voluntary contributions contribute to one or several strategic goals and, through them, to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Aspirations.

The deployment of the Umoja Integrated Planning, Monitoring and Reporting tool in OSAA as part of a pilot programme encompassing both regular budget and voluntary contributions is expected to result in a detailed analysis of funds invested in and results achieved that contribute to the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063's Goals and Aspirations.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Demetra Arapakos and Ms. Enika Bushi for their professionalism, commitment and efforts to contribute to enhancing and streamlining United Nations' support for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa

I have copied senior management and we have noted the findings as none of the countries chosen for case studies fall under our purview. However we concur with the recommendations.

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar

I have gone through the report and the recommendations, and confirm that there is no additional comments from our side. Specifically on the Recommendation 2, we are not in a position to be able to develop a strategy to support the host government as the credentials is deferred and we are not in a position to engage with any entities claiming their authority as the government nor support their efforts in achieving

SDGs. Nonetheless, we understand that our situation is extremely unique and believe that the recommendation text should stay as is for the overwhelming majority of the missions.

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria

As requested, I have the pleasure to submit to you our formal non-acceptance of the recommendations in OIOS's draft report "Thematic evaluation of United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals".

The overall objective of the evaluation was to determine, the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of UN Secretariat support to Member States in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Your evaluation assessed two immediate outcomes: (a) the responsiveness of the Secretariat to Member State needs and (b) the contribution of the Secretariat to strengthened Member State capacity.

The draft report made an important recommendation to all evaluated Secretariat entities, namely, to clearly, distinctly and specifically articulate in their internal strategic plans and workplans how they will support host governments in achieving the SDGs.

The urgent need for a comprehensive political solution to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic in line with Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#) is more critical than ever. The Syrian people remain trapped in a profound humanitarian, political, military, security, economic and human rights crisis of great complexity and almost unimaginable scale.

My Office engages with Syrian and international stakeholders in an effort to resolve this tragic conflict. While I agree with you on the importance of a well-articulated strategic plans and workplans, supporting the government of the Syrian Arab Republic in achieving the SDGs is not part of my Office's role, and therefore OIOS's recommendation does not apply to my Office.

Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate

On behalf of Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) Jane Connors, the UN Victims' Rights Advocate, I would like to confirm that she concurs with the contents of both documents, including recommendation 2 which is applicable to all entities, and will develop and forward an action plan shortly.

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Please be informed that I as focal point have reviewed the contents of both the report and the recommended action plan. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG CAAC) concurs with the contents of both documents, including recommendation 2 which is applicable to all entities, and will develop and forward an action plan shortly.**

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

I have been instructed to send this message in confirmation and acknowledgement of the receipt of the draft Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) report on SDGs and to concur with the recommendations (particularly on #2, which is applicable to our office).

** On file with the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

With reference to the Interoffice Memorandum of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals (memo dated 25 January 2023/ Reference OIOS-2023-00117), we would like to acknowledge the receipt of the draft evaluation report and we would like to inform you that the Mission agrees with the recommendations contained in the report. Of specific relevance to the field Missions is the Recommendation 2 requiring strategic plans, workplans and budget of entities to articulate support to SDGs activities and results. It must however be noted that in case of the field Missions operating in context of countries with non-constitutional change of power and governed by unrecognized regimes, supporting national authorities in achievement of SDGs is not plausible. Political and integrated Missions will nevertheless continue to articulate their support to SDGS through implementation of their mandate, touching on various aspects of SDGs. This is implemented specifically through support to the rule of law, protection of human Rights and provisions of integrated support to the UN Resident Coordinator System and operations of the UN System Agencies, Funds and Programs in such settings.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and I remain grateful to you and the Office of Internal Oversight Services for your continued support to the SDGs.

United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

Reference is made to the memorandum of 25 January 2023, in which your Office sought comments and a formal response on the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) is pleased to receive the draft report and would like to congratulate your Office for the thorough assessment that is critical in supporting Secretariat entities to accelerate progress for achieving the goals by 2030. Following the review of the draft report and its recommendations action plan, UNAMI is equally pleased to communicate that it accepts the recommendation 2 (A and B) directed at all entities, inclusive of UNAMI. As per your request, a detailed response to this recommendation is provided in the attached action plan,** in which the Mission commits to strengthen the reference made to SDGs in its strategic plans and work plans.

Should you need additional information on the Mission's work and progress towards achieving the SDGs and its programmatic support, do not hesitate to reach out to my Office.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) wishes to express its appreciation to OIOS for the efforts in undertaking this evaluation and welcomes the findings and recommendations of the report that will be used to strengthen the on-going efforts to enhance its work and role in supporting Member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. At the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda, the UN system must take strong measures to ensure efficient support to Member States. UNCTAD, as a co-custodian and partner of nine SDG indicators, plays a central role particularly in supporting least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as mandated by its

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Bridgetown Covenant. Here within, I note UNCTAD's management response to the report.

Regarding Recommendation 2, UNCTAD accepts the Recommendation. In doing so, UNCTAD wishes to highlight a number of ways in which it currently integrates SDGs into its programming and reporting. Firstly, UNCTAD's proposed programme plan for 2024 aims to ensure greater coordinated statistical capacity development and support to Member States in achieving the SDGs, through a newly established cross-cutting stand-alone Statistics Service. UNCTAD produces annually the SDG Pulse (<https://sdgpulse.unctad.org/>) which is a publication reporting progress towards SDG indicators relevant for UNCTAD's mandate, including nine SDG indicators for which UNCTAD is a co-custodian or partner. The 'UNCTAD In Action' section provides data to showcase UNCTAD's projects and other efforts in support of achieving the SDGs. Second, as part of its technical cooperation activities funded through extrabudgetary resources, UNCTAD already tracks on IPMR how these activities are linked back to the SDGs.

UNCTAD also would like to note that being integral part of the United Nations Secretariat, it is required to adhere to and follows programme planning and budget rules, guidelines and templates, set by the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, and by extension by the General Assembly. As such, UNCTAD can only include information surrounding contributions and linkages to SDGs if the programme budget template allows and mandates for it.

I also note with concern the reported insufficient support by the UN system to many countries in vulnerable situations, and the insufficient statistical capacity support to Member States which call for increased investment in data and capacity to meet the 2030 Agenda. This capacity would be key to informing policies and enabling corrective actions before 2030. Member States have requested for stronger support in measuring critical SDG indicators in several areas, most recently on SDG indicators on additional sources of financing for sustainable development and South-South cooperation ([A/RES/77/185](#)) and illicit financial flows ([A/RES/77/154](#)), the latter being part of SDG 16 highlighted as a major gap in SDG reporting. Whilst new strategies and improved systems as proposed by this evaluation will undoubtedly enhance the quality and visibility of data relating to SDG progress, there remains much to do to meet the 2023 Agenda.

United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) management agrees with the draft report as shared by Ms. Enika. Within its limited mandate scope, UNDOF positively contributes within our operations to SDG goals with its limited budget for environmental and other improvements.

UNDOF also looks forward to contribute positively for Intra regional cooperation as mentioned in the draft report.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

Thank you for the possibility to review the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the Thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) accepts recommendation 2 that is addressed to all UN entities and shares UNDRR's contribution to the recommendation action plan in the annex. UNDRR confirms its commitment to supporting the implementation of the recommendation action plan.

United Nations Environment Programme

I would hereby wish to confirm UNEP's concurrence with the findings and recommendations included in the Draft Thematic Evaluation report.

United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus

I refer to your interoffice memorandum, reference # OIOS-2023-00117, dated 25 January 2023 requesting a formal management response on the Draft Report on the Thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Please note that the mission accepts recommendation #2 which is assigned to all entities. The Mission's plan of action for this recommendation is attached.**

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) accepts the important recommendation to each Secretariat entity to "clearly, distinctly and specifically articulate in their internal strategic plans and workplans how they will support host governments in achieving the SDGs".

The completed recommendation action plan will be submitted to your office by the stipulated deadline.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the OIOS for the services rendered to UN-Habitat.

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

Reference is made to your subject memorandum dated 25 January 2023. Please find enclosed to this memorandum, a formal management response providing UNIFIL's actions taken to implement recommendation 2 A and B together with Quick Impact Projects annual report that supports achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.**

United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo

I am pleased to receive the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat's support to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) agrees with the evaluation findings and recommendations which highlight the good quality of the UN Secretariat's support to Member States in achieving the SOGs and the need for greater coherence in delivering this support.

UNMIK further acknowledges the recommendation in paragraph 50 of the report and confirms its commitment to articulate in its internal strategic planning documents and work plans how the Mission intends to support local authorities in Kosovo in achieving the SDGs. The applicable part of the action plan will be completed and shared with your office accordingly.**

I wish to express my gratitude to OIOS for providing UNMIK the opportunity to participate in the evaluation study and review the draft report.

** On file with the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

United Nations Office for Partnerships

The United Nations Office for Partnerships has reviewed the above draft OIOS report and concurs with its findings and recommendations.

United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

Thank you for your memo dated 25 January 2023 in which you transmitted, for our review and response, the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Thematic evaluation of the United Nations Secretariat support to the Sustainable Development Goals.

I am pleased to confirm UNOWAS' acceptance of the report and its recommendations.

As requested, we will submit the completed recommendation action plan template within two weeks of delivery of this management response letter.**

I wish to thank you for our fruitful collaboration and look forward to continuing to strengthen ties with OIOS with a view to further enhancing our evaluation culture.

United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia

I would like to reconfirm our acceptance of the recommendations. However, due to the regional mandate of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) (we cover 5 countries) the recommendation 2 would be applied *mutatis mutandis* to our activities, so it does not read in our context that UNRCCA will support only Turkmenistan (as our Office host country) in achieving SDGs. Our programmatic and strategic documents provide support to all 5 states of Central Asia in SDGs, supplementing the country-specific efforts of the other UN agencies and not duplicating them.

Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon

As focal point, I reviewed the contents of both the report and the recommended action plan. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) concurs with the contents of both documents, including recommendation 2 which is applicable to all entities, and will develop and forward an action plan shortly.

Kindly note that UNSCOL has already a reference to the SDG #16, 17 and 5 in its workplan and works closely with the United Nations country team (UNCT) to streamline advocacy efforts and guide joint implementation when feasible through UNSCOL's leadership of the UNCT Peace and Governance Results Group. This does not involve a budget consideration for UNSCOL as we do not implement projects. However, our leadership of the Results Group enables 1- joint advocacy efforts on SDGs through the political mandate as well as the UNSDCF; and 2- strategic guidance to the UNCT on areas related to UNSCOL's mandate.

United Nations Support Office in Somalia

Further to your memorandum reference OIOS-2023-00117 dated 25 January 2023, please find attached the UNSOS response to the subject evaluation. 2. We thank you for your continued support.

UNSOS is mandated by the UN Security Council to provide logistics support to the African Union Transmission Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and the United Nations

** On file with the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM). UNSOS is not mandated to support the host government in achieving the SDGs.

UNSOS suggests that the role that Peace Support Operations are expected to play in the effort to achieve SDGs be more clearly outlined.

United Nations Truce Supervision Organization

I as focal point have reviewed the contents of both the report and the recommended action plan. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) concurs with the contents of both documents, including recommendation 2 which is applicable to all entities, and will develop and forward an action plan shortly.
