Evaluation Report

Evaluation of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

10 June 2020

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Office of Internal Oversight Services

INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function

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

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Summary

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

The evaluation assessed the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of UNDESA integrated programme delivery efforts, through the lens of four focus divisions during the period from 2016 to 2019.

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

UNDESA also effectively supported Member State progress towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda through its facilitation of intergovernmental decisions. UNDESA however was less effective in monitoring the utility of its research and analysis products and its capacity development work. While some concrete outcomes were identified, overall, its work in these two areas suffered from a lack of continuity and evaluation. Moreover, the Department was only in the early stage of effectively interlinking these areas of work. And, while efforts to achieve an integrated work programme had improved, the Department's planning process was not fully comprehensive nor strategic. Despite some promising trends, this was also true in the areas of interdivisional collaboration and collaboration with other UN entities.

Several foundational documents outlining the overarching UNDESA reform vision existed, but full operationalization and guidance documentation was still emerging. Furthermore, there was insufficient communication and clarity on how reform measures were being operationalized. For example, communication on UNDESA support to Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams was evolving.

OIOS makes two critical (a and e) and three important recommendations for UNDESA to:

a) Further strengthen its current yearly strategic plan to cover all major UNDESA activities to maximise the achievement of results
b) Develop a plan to further leverage the potential of ECESA and ECESA-plus
c) Fully implement steps outlined within its Strategy for Capacity Development
d) Fully implement its plan to strengthen the reach and utility of its publications
e) Develop operationalization action plans and continue to disseminate guidance for its organizational reform

I. Introduction and objective

1. The evaluation objective was to determine as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of UNDESA integrated programme delivery efforts to achieve its mandate in a manner that supported Members States during the period from 2016 to 2019.[1] The evaluation defined integrated programme delivery as the cross-fertilization and interlinkages between: functional areas (intergovernmental, research and analysis, and capacity development); thematic areas (economic, social and environmental issues); subprogrammes; and, between UNDESA and its UN partners. Given the broad and multifaceted mandate of UNDESA, OIOS-IED limited the scope of the evaluation to conduct an adequately rigorous and evidence-based exercise by identifying four "primary focus subprogrammes" which covered the breadth of UNDESA roles, functions and thematic areas in support of sustainable development.[2] The evaluation topic emerged from a programme-level risk assessment described in the evaluation inception paper produced at the outset of the evaluation.[3] The evaluation was conducted in conformity with norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations System.[4]

2. UNDESA management comments were sought on the draft report and considered in the final report. The UNDESA response is included in the Annex 1.

II. Background

Mandate

3. International economic and social cooperation has been at the core of the United Nations (UN) mandate since its creation, enshrined in the Charter of the UN, and is among the key priorities of the Organization. The various mandates of UNDESA derive from numerous resolutions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the General Assembly (GA), spanning decades.[5]

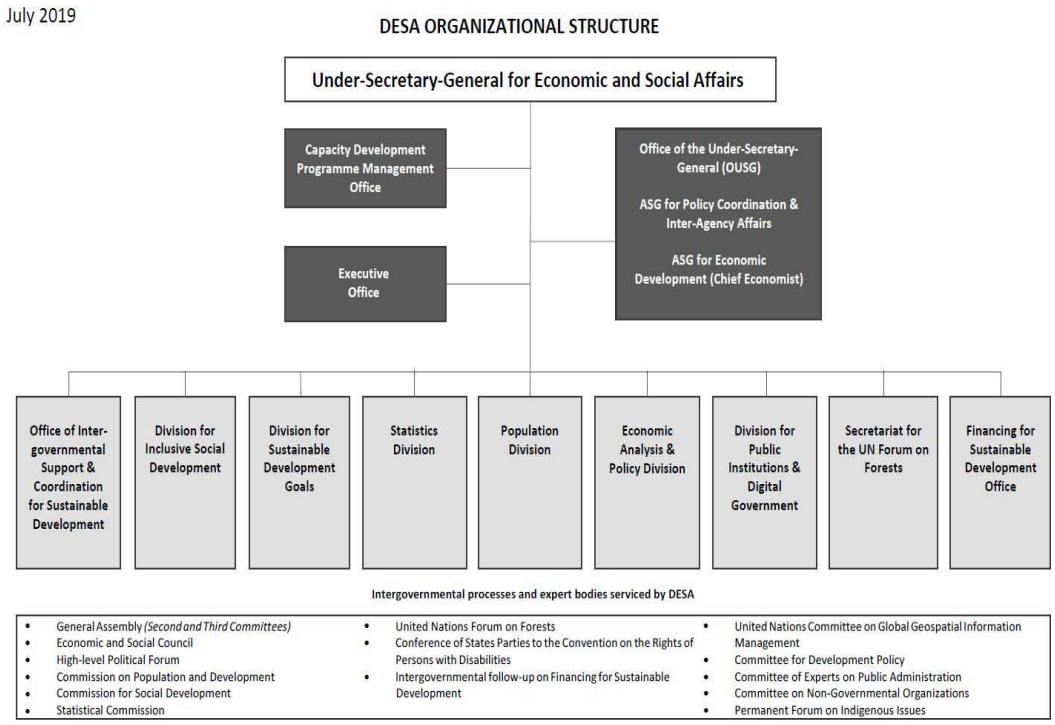
4. The overall objective of UNDESA is to support the development pillar of the United Nations Secretariat, including by ensuring international cooperation in the pursuit of sustainable development for all.[6] The Department tackles interlinked challenges in the economic, social and environmental fields while also contributing to a mutually reinforcing relationship among the three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, development and human rights. To promote more coherent, coordinated and cross-sectoral support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Department also seeks to promote strategic cooperation and partnerships within the United Nations Secretariat and with the UN development system at large, including the resident coordinator system.[7]

5. UNDESA is headed by the Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Economic and Social Affairs. The USG is accountable to the Secretary-General, whom he advises on the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental, as well as on thought leadership and emerging issues and analysis, ranging from geospatial data to financing to global mega trends such as demographic change and frontier technology. The USG is assisted by the Assistant Secretary-General

[1] While 2016-2019 was the primary evaluation period, data collection was extended to March 2020 to enable consideration of the most up-to-date UN DESA reform operationalization guidance available.
[2] Subprogrammes 2, 3, 4 and 6, respectively: social policy and development (DISD); sustainable development (DSDG); statistics (SD); development policy and analysis (EAPD). In combination, these four "primary focus" subprogrammes represent the largest share of UNDESA resources, while at the same time covering its economic, social and environmental development work.
[3] IED-19-015, 30 July 2019.
[4] United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). Norms and Standards for Evaluation, 2016.
[5] For a comprehensive list, see the Proposed strategic framework for the period 2018-2019 (A/71/6/Rev.1). Programme 7 – Economic and social affairs), under "Legislative mandates."
[6] A/74/6 (Sect.9) para. 9.1.
[7] A/74/6 (Sect.9) para. 9.154.

for Economic Development (Chief Economist), and the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs. Three offices (the Office of the USG, the Executive & Programme Support Office, and the Capacity Development Programme Management Office)[8] oversee and support the work of nine divisions/subprogrammes under the programme of work with substantive responsibility for the implementation of the Economic and Social Affairs programme of work as indicated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – UNDESA organizational structure



Source : UNDESA website[9]

Governance arrangements

6. Member States exercise corporate governance through their participation in the sessions of the Fifth Committee of the GA, and based on the reports of the Fifth Committee, the GA considers and approves the Strategic Framework and Programme Budget of the Department. Furthermore, UNDESA supports the work of the Second and Third Committees of the GA, as well as ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies.

Programme Impact Pathway

7. UNDESA Programme Impact Pathway (PIP) provides a visual roadmap summarizing the underlying programme logic of its work. It provides an overview of what the Department is seeking to achieve; how it aims to achieve it; and, under what assumptions and conditions it operates. (Annex 2)

[8] According to the budget A/74/6 (Sect 9) the OUSG is responsible for Executive Direction and Management while programme management and support are provided by the Capacity Development Programme Management
Office and the Executive Office.

[9] https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/about/organigramme.html; accessed 19 February 2020.

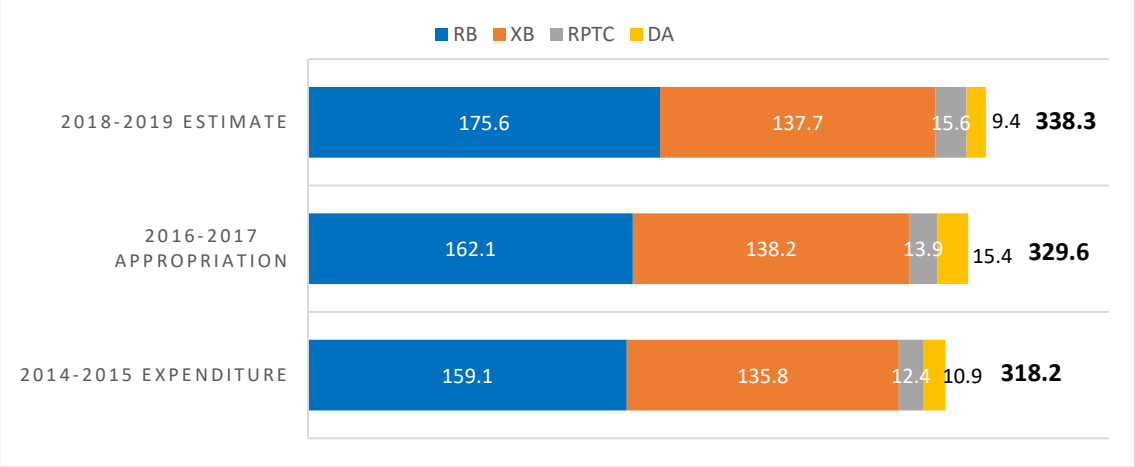
Resources

8. The UNDESA budget is resourced through four main funding streams: the regular budget (RB), extrabudgetary resources (XB), the regular programme of technical cooperation (RPTC) and the Development Account (DA). While the first two funding streams support the UNDESA overall programme of work, the regular programme of technical cooperation (RPTC) is specifically targeted to complement its work programme in support of developing countries, least developed countries, countries with economies in transition and countries emerging from conflict in capacity development efforts; specifically, in their efforts towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and other internationally agreed development goals (IADGs), as well as the outcomes of UN conferences and summits.[10]

9. The fourth funding stream – the DA – is comprised of resources to support capacity development work undertaken by various UN programmes.[11] UNDESA has overall management responsibility for this account, which was resourced at 28.4 million USD for the 2018-2019 biennium. In addition, a percentage of DA funding is utilized by UNDESA to support its programme of work, often in combination with UN Secretariat partners.

10. Figure 2 outlines the Department's budget and expenditure since 2014. UNDESA RB, XB, RPTC and DA proposed budgets for the 2018-2019 biennium totaled approximately 338.3 million USD.

Figure 2 – UNDESA funding by source, 2014-2019 (in USD millions)

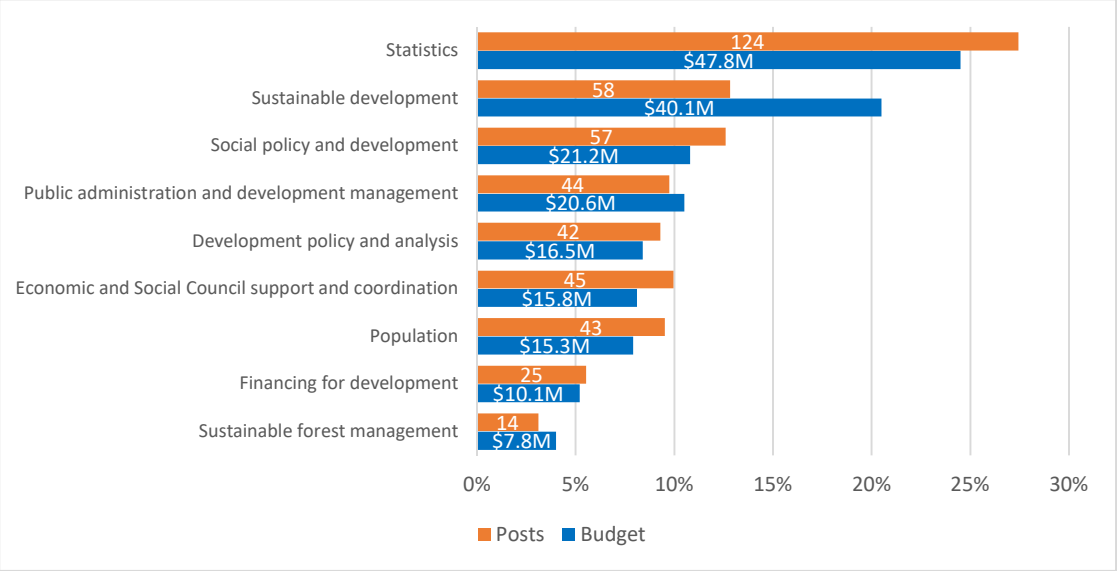


Source: A/72/6 (Sect 9), (Sect 23), (Sect 35)

11. The Statistics Division accounted for the largest proportion of the combined programme budget at 24.5 per cent and the most posts (27 per cent). This was followed by the Sustainable Development Division at 20.5 per cent (13 per cent of posts) as can be seen in Figure 3. Overall, the four-primary focus subprogrammes for the evaluation: Statistics, Sustainable development, Social policy and development, and Development policy and analysis; henceforth referred to as "focus divisions," accounted for 64 per cent of budgeted resources and 62 per cent of posts for 2018-2019.

[10] A/72/6 (Sect. 23) paragraph 23.1.
[11] UNDESA, Regional commissions, UNEP, UNODC, UN HABITAT, and UNCTAD.

Figure 3 – UNDESA post and budget allocation by subprogramme (RB, XB, RPTC), 2018-2019[12]



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

Operating Context

12. **UNDESA historic support to the development agenda and to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:** In line with decades of Member State deliberations on critical development issues, UNDESA has provided substantive support, including either as Conference Secretary-General or as the substantive Secretariat. Examples have included:

- on global sustainable development policy: Rio+20 (2012);[13]
- on global social agenda: Madrid Plan of Action (2002);[14]
- on financing for development: Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015); [15] and
- on Small Island Developing States: SAMOA Pathway (2014).[16]

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015 established a comprehensive set of universal and transformative SDGs and targets, and formalized the commitment from Member States to work tirelessly for the full implementation of this Agenda by 2030 as well as its follow up and review, including through the UN development system.[17] As the Secretariat for the SDGs, UNDESA works to support the 2030 Agenda across its different subprogrammes and divisions.[18] UNDESA carries out three main functions in support of the 2030 Agenda,[19] while ensuring complementarity and synergy among its nine subprogrammes:

I. Provides substantive support to the bodies established under the Charter of the UN dealing with development issues - including the GA, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), ECOSOC

[12] Development Account funds were not included in the analysis because subprogramme allocations were not readily available given the collaborative nature of projects, which are often undertaken by multiple partner entities.
[13] Also, Earth Summit (1992).
[14] Also, The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development (1995).
[15] Also, Monterey Consensus (2002); Doha Declaration (2008).
[16] Also, Barbados Plan of Action (1994).
[17] A/RES/70/1.
[18] Per UNDESA website (accessed 27 Feb. 2020): GA resolution 70/299 includes Secretariat mandate; UN system reference, see "What We Do."
[19] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/unsurvey/organization.html?org=UNDESA.

and related commissions, and expert bodies (**intergovernmental support, including normative work**);

II. Monitors and analyses development trends, prospects and policy issues globally (**research and analysis/ knowledge generation**); and,

III. Provides capacity development support in policy formulation and implementation, particularly in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (**capacity development support/ knowledge delivery**).

13. **UNDESA Reforms**: General Assembly resolutions 71/243 and 72/279 recognized the level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda and the need for the UN development system to be repositioned in order to meet this challenge. As stated by the Secretary-General in his report on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, "A revitalized UNDESA is critical to strengthening the interface of our normative, analytical and operational work at the regional and global levels.[20] In that context, General Assembly resolution 70/299 requested the Secretary-General to enhance UNDESA effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and internal coordination in order to support the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. (See Result E)

III. Methodology

14. The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach, comprised of:

a) Structured document reviews including: (1) normative analysis of 2018 resolutions, decisions and declarations; (2) capacity development project analysis; (3) OIOS strategic planning and reporting desk analysis; and (4) reform documentation analysis
b) Analysis of UNDESA databases and programme performance and budgetary data
c) Survey of stakeholders of Intergovernmental and Expert bodies serviced by the focus divisions[21]
d) Survey of other UNDESA stakeholders for the focus divisions, including regional economic commission (REC) counterparts, and other stakeholders familiar with UNDESA work[22]
e) Survey of UNDESA staff[23]
f) 41 UNDESA staff interviews[24]
g) 107 UNDESA stakeholder interviews including Member State representatives and UN staff working in RECs and other UN departments[25]
h) Direct observation of over 30 UNDESA supported conference sessions and meetings; including: HLPF plenary and side events; SDG and Samoa Pathway summit sessions; and, a November 2019 Global Resident Coordinator Meeting session

Limitations: Data was collected through the lenses of four "primary focus subprogrammes," which, in some instances, served as proxies for department-wide assessments. This was the main limitation. OIOS mitigated this by analyzing interlinkages with other UNDESA subprogrammes; therefore, many of the methods used had a UNDESA-wide focus. Specifically: structured document reviews (a-3) and (a-4) assessed documentation across all UNDESA subprogrammes; analysis of programme performance and budgetary data had a department-wide focus (b); all UNDESA staff were surveyed

[20] A/74/73-E/2019/14, para 164.
[21] 51 of 168 eligible respondents for a 30% response rate. Stakeholders were identified by the divisions and only included member state representatives and expert bodies members.
[22] 173 of 370 eligible respondents for a 47% response rate. Stakeholders were identified by the divisions and excluded member state representatives and expert bodies members.
[23] 365 of 529 eligible respondents for a 69% response rate.
[24] Interviews with 41 UNDESA staff: 14 senior managers and 27 other staff.
[25] 107 Interviews: [(ECA region: ECA-32; others -Uganda 14/Tanzania 8/ Ethiopia 7); (ESCAP region: ESCAP-17; others -Thailand 9/ Laos 8); ECLAC-5; ESCWA-3; ECE-2; UNHQ/EOSG-1; UNHQ/DGC-1].

(e); all division directors were interviewed; stakeholder interviewees included those with a UNDESA-wide orientation; and, direct observations were focused at the department-wide level as well.

IV. Evaluation Results

A. UNDESA demonstrated its unique added value as the global convener on development issues, including SDGs, supporting a large number of multifaceted mandates; in some other areas, UNDESA critical role was still emerging

UNDESA supported complex and multifaceted mandates – including newer SDG specific mandates and recently reformulated responsibilities related to the UN development reform

15. UNDESA supported a very large, and rapidly growing, number of distinct mandates. In the last two biennia, the number of legislative mandates supported by the four focus divisions alone increased by over 30 per cent in areas ranging from support to Least Developed countries, to support of indigenous populations and addressing inequality, to support for voluntary national review (VNR) preparation and supporting statistics.[26] In responding to this growing and multifaceted set of mandates, the Department undertook complex work to support intergovernmental processes, produce research and analysis, and provide capacity development support. Looking only at its intergovernmental support mandates, in 2018, the four focus divisions serviced the GA and ECOSOC, including 14 distinct intergovernmental processes.[27] This included servicing of the Second and Third committees of the GA, multiple commissions, as well as the recently added responsibility of supporting the HLPF with its many SDG support mandates. In addition, over 40 informal groups working on a multifaceted set of intergovernmental mandates were also supported.[28] UNDESA divisions also produced a very large number of research and analysis products; these ranged from major publications such as the *Sustainable Development Goal Report* to policy briefs, info-graphics and videos, as well as the sustainable development knowledge platform.[29] Additionally, the focus divisions supported 190 capacity development projects resourced at over 50 million USD between 2016 and 2019.[30] (See Figure 4 and Result B)

16. To add to this complexity, the organization was called upon to ensure an "ambitious transformation of UNDESA, covering most aspects of its work, which could enable the Department to fully partake in system-wide repositioning efforts and maximize its contributions to the SDGs through enhancing intergovernmental support, stronger thought leadership, more collaborative approaches and new skillsets."[31] (See Result E)

[26] A/69/6 (Prog.): 33/17/16/13 = 79; A/71/6 (Prog.); 42/17/13/29 = 101, for 29% increase factoring in only "subprogramme specific" mandates listed. Over 30% factors in additional mandates relevant to divisions which go beyond those listed at the subprogramme level, e.g. "66/288- The future we want.

[27] 14 intergovernmental processes, as per 2018-2019 budget documentation: Commission for Social Development; Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues; Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation; Statistical Commission; Committee for Development Policy; UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management; HLPF; Second committee; Third committee; Fifth committee; Committee on contributions; Open-ended working group on ageing; Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons; UN group of experts on Geographical names.

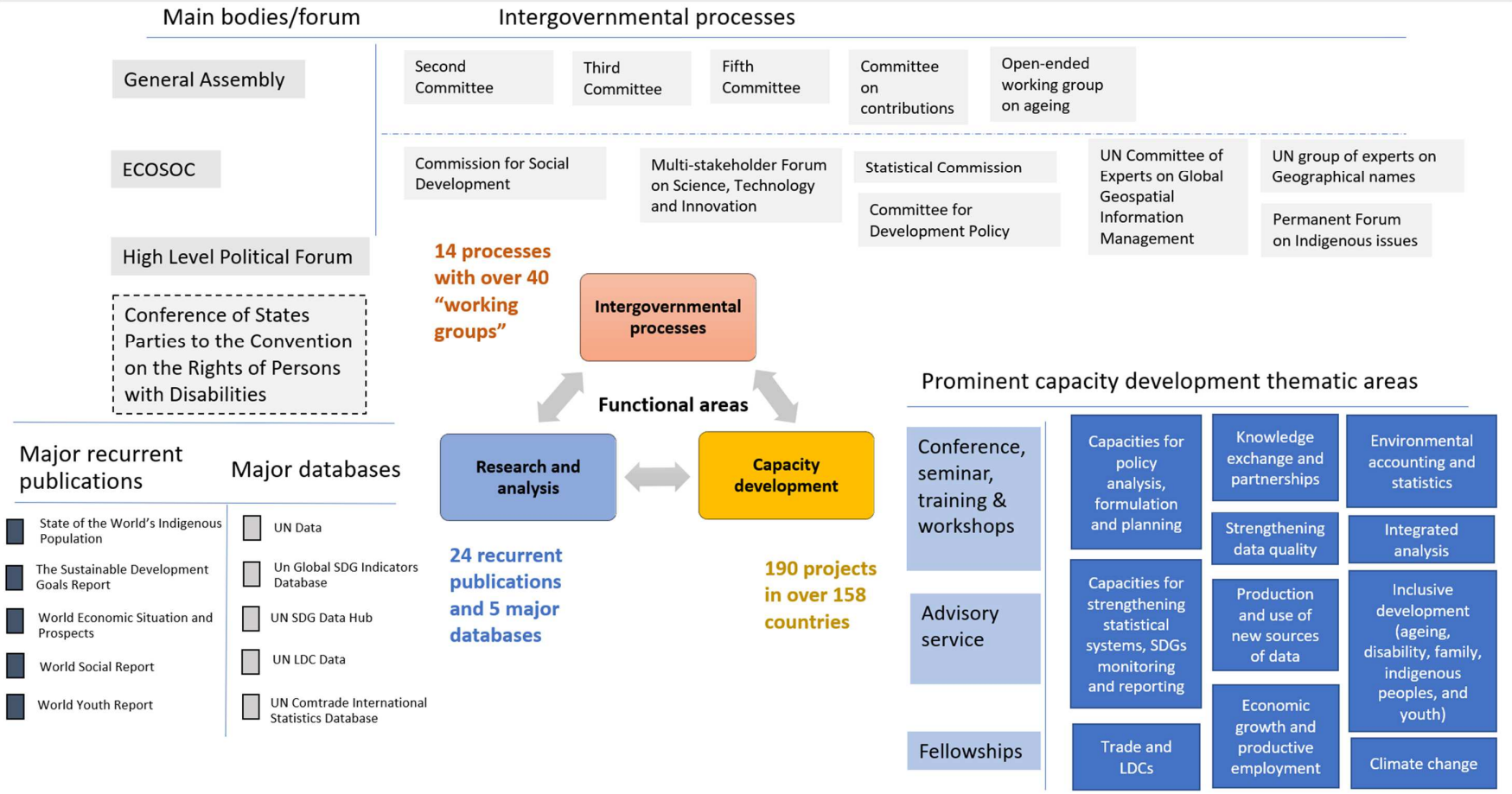
[28] Examples: Third committee "working group" associated with the agenda item implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development"; the Statistical Commission's approximately 10 working groups.

[29] UNDESA website - publications link. https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/publication

[30] OIOS capacity development analysis/ mapping.

[31] December 2018 memorandum from the SG to MSs, which provided an update of the UNDESA reform process in GA resolution 70/299.

Figure 4: UNDESA multi-faceted work across 3 functional areas



Source: OIOS analysis of UNDESA capacity development project data; A/72/6 (Sect. 9); UNDESA Highlights 2018-2019

UNDESA unique role as a global convener was well recognized, in particular, for its ability to translate globally agreed norms into action in support of Member State needs

17. Within the demanding context and across multiple Member State and UN entity stakeholder groups, UNDESA role as a global convener, including support to intergovernmental processes was consistently recognized as its key comparative advantage. Stakeholders interviewed, and survey respondents consistently rated UNDESA intergovernmental support work higher than its research and analysis and capacity development work. Over 90 per cent of stakeholder survey respondents indicated that they either "strongly agreed," (68 per cent IG and expert body stakeholders/43 per cent other stakeholders) or "somewhat agreed" (30 per cent IG and expert body stakeholders/48 per cent other stakeholders) that the facilitation and support UNDESA provided to intergovernmental and expert bodies had been in line with the priorities of those bodies.[32]

18. Related to its role as a global convenor, the majority of RECs and United Nations Country Team (UNCT) interviewees identified UNDESA primary comparative advantage as being the entity best positioned to translate globally agreed norms into specific policy options and tools in support of Member States' needs.[33] Both stakeholder survey respondents and interviewees referenced, in particular, the high relevance and quality of the Department's activities in support of statistical norm setting. For example, GA resolution 73/235 requested pertinent bodies of the UN system to support strengthening the quality and quantity of basic national statistical data on the three dimensions of sustainable development. Desk review indicated that related UNDESA statistical capacity development support projects in Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania all aligned with this resolution. Specifically, UNDESA designed projects in these countries which supported: national government work being undertaken to assess data gaps; further development of the quality of indicator data; development of environmental, climate change and gender specific national SDG statistical indicators; and, utilization of mobile devices and geospatial information. All country-level interviewees indicated that UNDESA support was well targeted to their needs and enabled their national statistical offices to strengthen existing national statistical data, thus enabling them to report more credibly on SDG progress.

19. Another distinct area where UNDESA was recognized for its work to translate global agreements into specific action in support of Member State needs was work undertaken to support countries engaged in the VNR process. In line with its VNR support mandate, in 2019 the Department helped in the preparation of 47 VNRs and utilized knowledge gained through them, and its support to prior year HLPF sessions, to better meet future Member State needs. One outcome was the addition, to subsequent HLPF sessions, of VNR lab workshops.[34] OIOS observation of several VNR labs of the 18 presented in 2019, combined with interview data, confirmed the relevance of these both for countries presenting and attending.

UNDESA relevance and unique added value to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development in support of the SDGs was emerging

20. Given the enhanced interlinked nature of the 2030 Agenda, UNDESA was called upon to further strengthen the interlinkages across thematic areas in support of the implementation of the

[32] IG/Expert Bodies survey Q 2.2 item 1 (68% + 30% = 98%); Stakeholder survey Q 24 item 1 (43% + 48% = 91%).

[33] See interim interview analysis dated 3 Feb; comparative advantage global platform node (35) by far the highest frequency. See also positive and negative comment ratio for the 3 functional areas of work.

[34] UNDESA website accessed 27 February 2020; 16 July 2018 HLPF Opening Remarks by USG: "...VNR Labs are a new innovative type of event… The aim of these 8 VNR Labs is to provide additional space and time to continue the discussion on the VNRs, and to build on the good foundation countries have laid. The VNR Labs thus respond to the call by Member States and other stakeholders that 30 minutes per country is not enough to share their experiences on ways to accelerate SDG implementation. The Labs also provide an informal platform to reflect on further strengthening the VNR process and presentations at the Forum."

SDGs. Indeed, critical across its planning documents,[35] UNDESA aimed "to [contribute to] … enhanced national implementation plans for the 2030 Agenda that give due consideration to the interlinkages and integrated nature of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals."[36] This overarching goal to perform work in a manner that promoted interlinkages across the economic, social and environmental dimensions was iterated throughout UNDESA 2016-2020 planning documents.[37] Stakeholder interviews confirmed this role as a unique characteristic and expectation of the Department, citing it as one of the key comparative advantages which UNDESA should strive toward in the context of supporting the 2030 Agenda.[38]

21. With this evolving responsibility, UNDESA sought to promote the incorporation of more than one of these dimensions. A noteworthy example cited by stakeholders included the *World Economic Situation and Prospects* (WESP), which was praised by many REC interviewees for its unique focus on incorporating more than the economic dimension into its development analyses. Two capacity development support projects, the Belt and Road project and the Climate, Land use, Energy, and Water systems (CLEWs) project were also mentioned as good examples of integrated delivery.[39] However, there were indications that UNDESA efforts to integrate the three dimensions of development more fully into its own work programme were not adequately comprehensive. Stakeholders and UNDESA staff reported that insufficient mechanisms were in place to systematically promote the integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions throughout the entire UNDESA programme of work. And, that, while the Department was in a unique position, as the key SDG global entity to do so, it had not yet achieved its full potential in this area.[40] Review of records showed that UNDESA work to explicitly define *what* supporting an integrated approach to SDG implementation across these three dimensions would mean, and how this would be operationalized, was still emerging.

22. Stakeholder interviewees indicated that UNDESA could further maximize its comparative advantage by:

- Systematically sharing first-hand knowledge of intergovernmental outcomes across the economic, social and environmental dimensions;
- Consolidating and sharing information on emerging issues from the regions so that effective practices can be replicated for greater global-level impact (global/regional public goods); and,
- Supporting and prioritizing capacity development projects that develop integrative policy approaches.

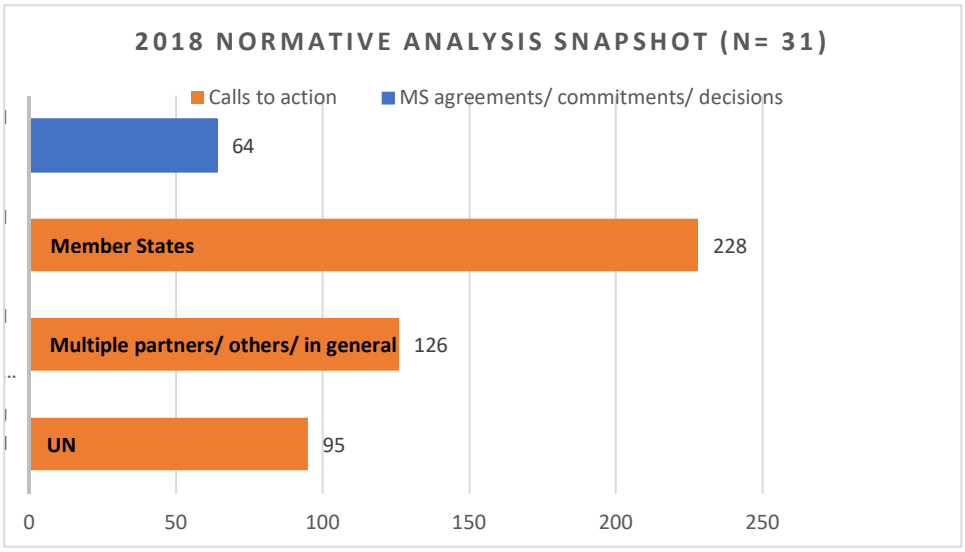
[35] Included the 2020 budget.
[36] 2020 budget Sect 9; Page 23.
[37] Multiple references to "the three critical dimensions of sustainable development." And, as early as the 2016-2017 [A/70/6 (sect. 9) 9.1]: "The overall objective of the programme is to promote and support international cooperation in the pursuit of sustainable development for all. While focused on tackling interlinked challenges in the social, economic and environmental fields, …"
[38] See interim interview analysis dated 3 Feb; comparative advantage integrator of 3 dimensions node (6).
[39] CLEWS: A capacity development project to support the formulation of sustainable development policies considering the interactions and interdependencies in the areas of climate, land use, energy and water using an integrated modeling tool; https://un-modelling.github.io/news-events/.
[40] UNDESA stakeholder and staff interview data.

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

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

23. As indicated in Result A, through its support to the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly, ECOSOC, other technical and expert bodies, including the HLPF, UNDESA effectively facilitated Member State decision-making. Analysis of all (31) resolutions, decisions[41] and declarations supported by the four focus divisions in 2018 showed that UNDESA facilitated 64 agreements, decisions, endorsements and commitments. (See Annex 3.) These led to multiple calls for action from intergovernmental bodies, which were most frequently made to Member States and to multiple partners (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Normative analysis of resolutions, decisions and declarations supported by UNDESA



Source: OIOS normative analysis of 2018 resolutions, decisions and declarations

24. By way of examples, several commitments were made in the ministerial declaration at the HLPF, through UNDESA support to the negotiations, in line with the 2030 agenda. There were recommendations and endorsements by the Committee for Development Policy related to country graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category, which relied extensively on UNDESA support. Additionally, there were multiple decisions and agreements mostly related to setting agendas and calling for action on SDG related issues. For example:

HLPF commitment:

"We will take concrete and immediate action to create the necessary enabling environment at all levels for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. We devote ourselves collectively to the

[41] Decisions in this context refer to the outcomes of sessions of technical bodies (e.g., Statistical Commission, UN GGIM).

pursuit of global sustainable development and of mutually beneficial cooperation, which can bring meaningful gains to all countries and all parts of the world." (E/HLS/2018/1); and,

Thematic decision:

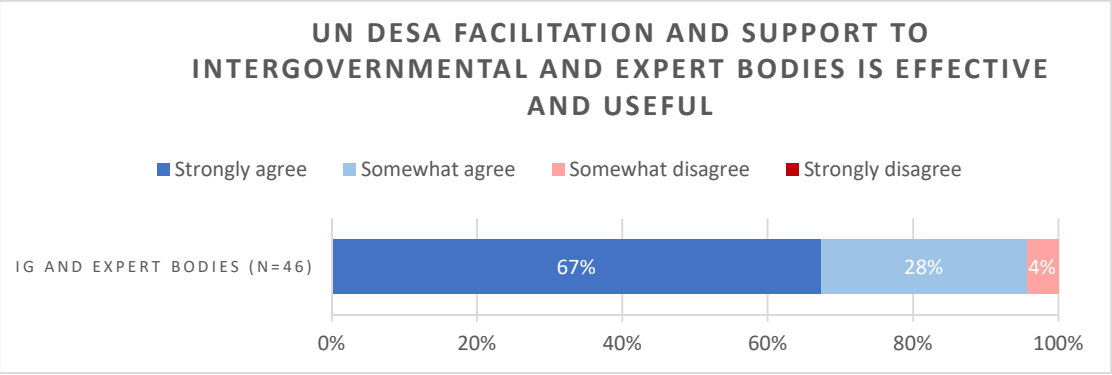
"Decides that the theme of the Third Decade (of eradication of poverty) shall be "Accelerating global actions for a world without poverty" in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (A/RES/73/246).

25. Over two-thirds of the resolutions, decisions and declarations emphasized the need for mainstreaming of gender issues, gender equality, prevention of gender violence and the need for gender-disaggregated statistics. There were also multiple calls to action (13) related to gender equality and women's empowerment.

26. As discussed above, UNDESA took on a major responsibility for supporting the HLPF, which culminated in four ministerial declarations. Building on the feedback from prior year participants and seeking to make the main events more useful, in 2019, UNDESA implemented changes to focus the discussions and make them more interactive.[42] Furthermore, and in response to feedback from Member States, UNDESA increased the number of side events as additional platforms for promoting lessons learnt and contributing to south-south and north-south peer learning; making them more engaging and inclusive.[43] Lastly, as the custodian of the data and analysis on the funding of the UN development system, UNDESA supported the development and the monitoring[44] of the Funding Compact between Member States and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, which is a key component of the reform.[45]

27. Overall, UNDESA was recognized by stakeholder survey respondents as being effective in providing facilitation to Intergovernmental and expert bodies, as seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Views of Intergovernmental and Expert bodies members on UNDESA effectiveness in supporting their bodies



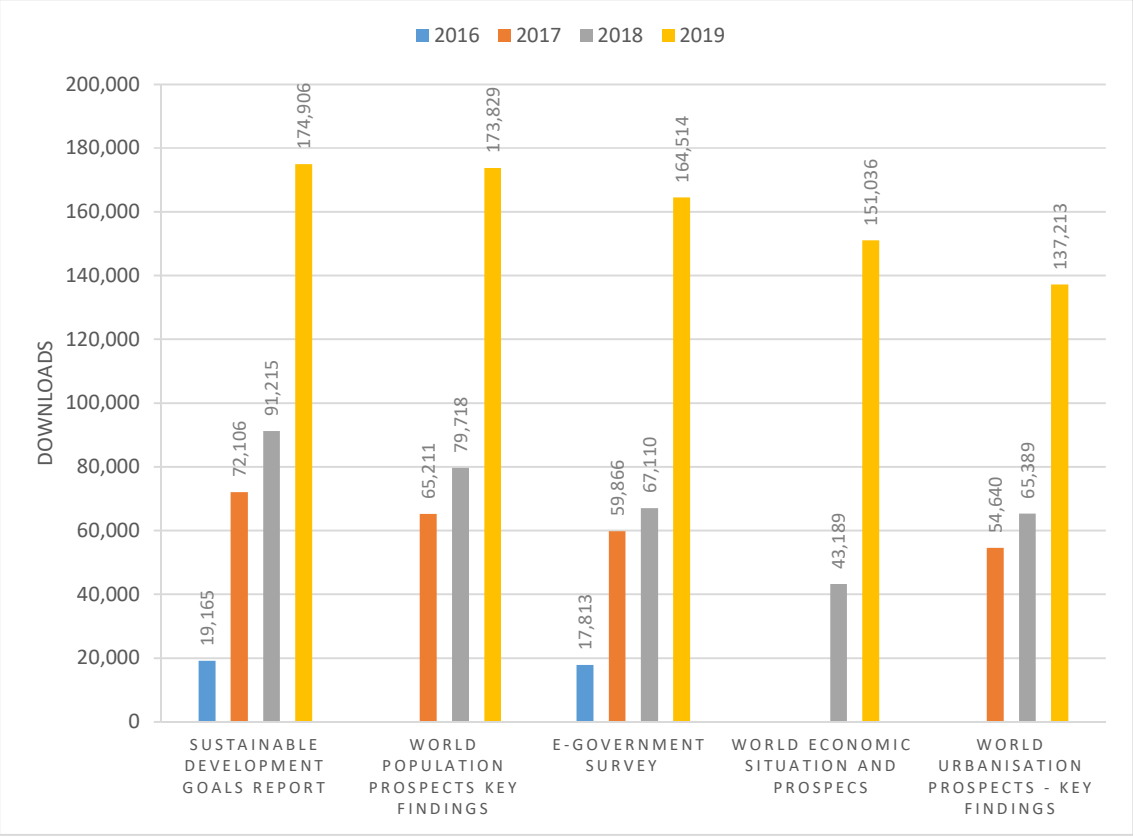
Source: OIOS Survey of Intergovernmental and Expert bodies members

[42] Through more focused guiding questions for sessions, more interactive sessions and by bringing in strong moderators.
[43] UNDESA selected discussants and participants for these sessions from different sectors, including different UN entities, civil society, private sector and multilateral financial institutions to make the events more engaging and inclusive.
[44] The first such formal update is included in the Secretary-General's report on the QCPR (section IV. A.), which will be issued during the week of 18 May 2020.
[45] A/74/73/Add.1.

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

28. Towards its overall goal to increase awareness of sustainable development, UNDESA developed and maintained databases and produced a number of major publications, whose main audience included Member States, academia, nonprofits and individuals.[46] Web analytics revealed that the following (see Figure 7) were the most downloaded major publications from the UNDESA website between 2016 and 2019. As can be seen, publication download numbers have grown since 2016, and most dramatically between 2018 and 2019. Databases for which website statistics were available, were being widely utilized (see Figure 8).

Figure 7: UNDESA Most Downloaded Publications[47]

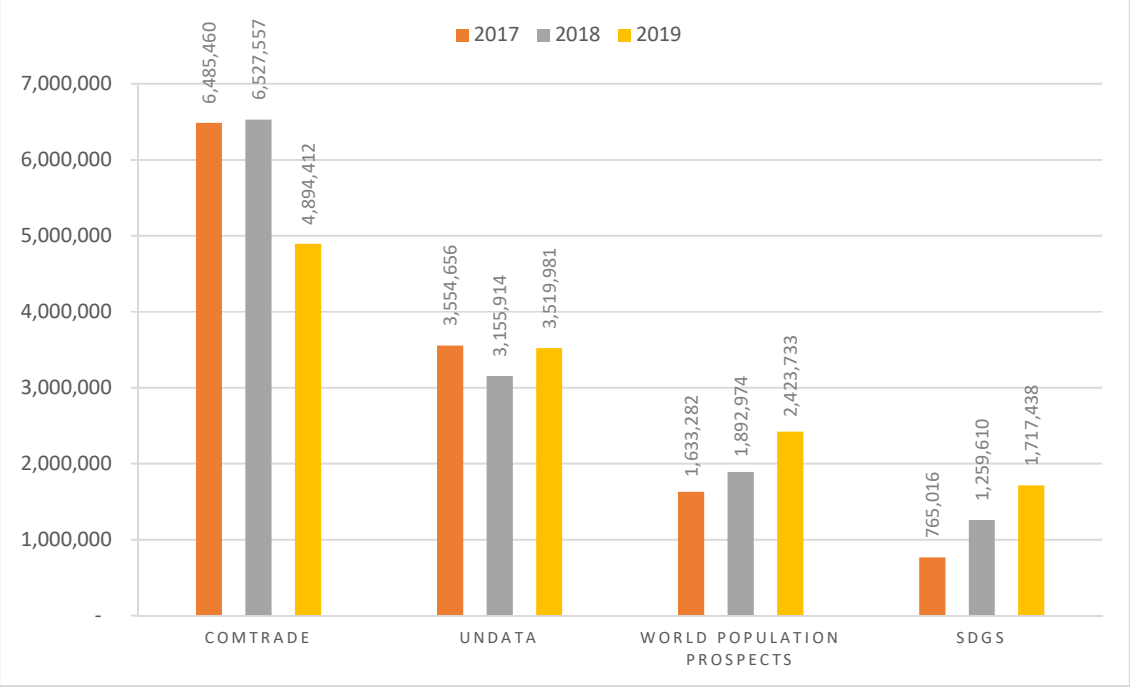


*Source: UN*DESA website statistics and social media monitoring reports – 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019.

[46] These publications were available free of charge on the UNDESA website. In addition, hard copies are available for purchase on the UN iLibrary. The Department also generates revenue from datasets and databases.

[47] The data below represents only downloads from UNDESA sites and does not include DGC or other sources.

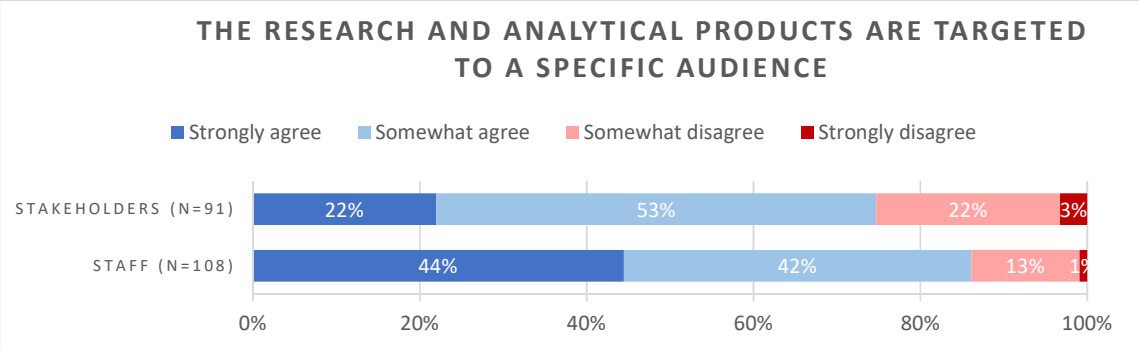
Figure 8: UNDESA Most Consulted Datasets

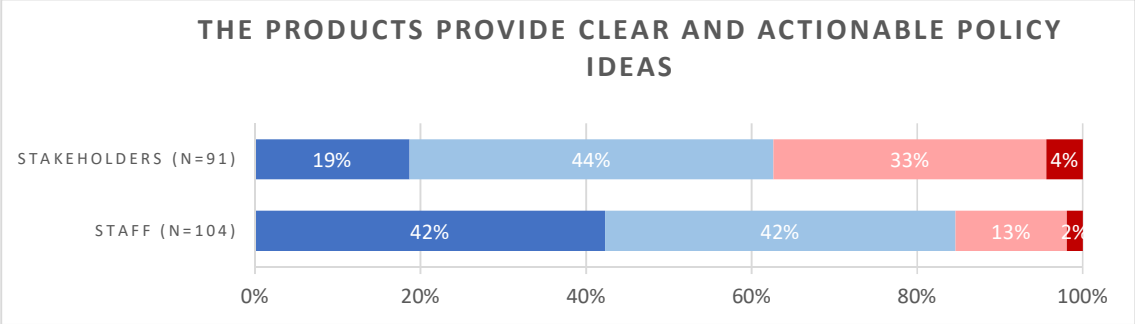


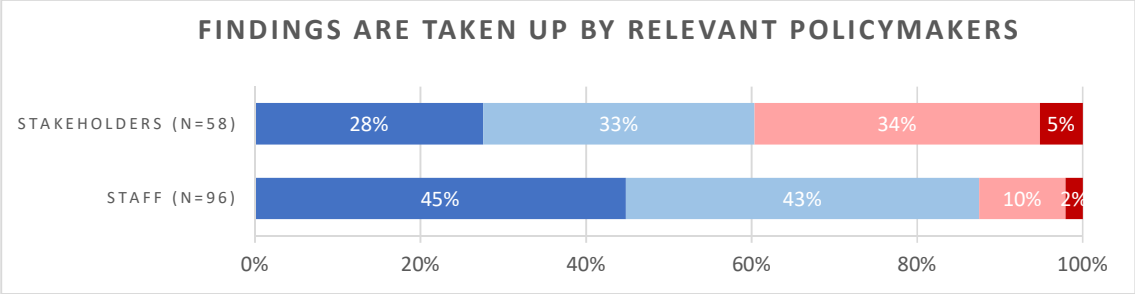
*Source: UN*DESA website analytics –2017, 2018, 2019

29. UNDESA staff and stakeholders rated research and analysis products positively overall, with staff more positive than stakeholders. Fewer of the latter agreed that UNDESA research and analytical products targeted a specific audience, provided clear and actionable policy ideas, or that their findings were taken up by relevant policymakers (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Stakeholder vs. staff views on utility aspects of publications







Source: OIOS surveys of UNDESA staff and stakeholders

30. UNDESA staff recognized that historically the Department did not put enough emphasis on promoting its outputs, and that publication impact was seldom assessed. In fact, a review of documents showed that for the last biennia for which performance data was available, while many UNDESA subprogrammes had developed indicators of achievement to track the number of times publications were accessed, there were few instances of assessing how reports were used by the intended audience. Since 2019 however, UNDESA has taken numerous promising steps to improve this, including, and not limited to, developing a biennial Strategic Communication Framework in 2019, which included extensive guidelines on launching and promoting publications.[48] The Department also planned to develop a template in 2020 for evaluating the impact of each major publication following a commissioned study that would provide recommendations to the UNDESA USG to enhance the quality, distribution, and engagement of UNDESA publications.[49]

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

31. The focus divisions helped enhance Member States' capacity through the delivery of 190 distinct projects on diverse thematic areas illustrated in Table 1. The total expenditure of these projects, over 51 million USD, represented about 8 per cent of the UNDESA-wide expenditure.[50] While the majority of these capacity development projects were supported by RPTC funding, most of the total expenditure was XB funded (Figure 10).[51] As Figure 11 shows, there was an increase in the number of projects and total expenditure for projects implemented by the focus divisions, indicating increased national capacity development support provided by the Department. In particular, there was a substantial increase in the number and expenditure of XB funded projects (from 13 in 2016 to 24 in 2019).

[48] UNDESA Strategic Communication Framework 2019-2020.
[49] EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF UNDESA PUBLICATIONS Concept Note.
[50] Using 2016-17 appropriation numbers and 2018-2019 estimates, UNDESA funding for 2016-2019 is 668.1 million USD.
[51] This includes $9.1 million XB expenditure for UN Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD), including staff costs.

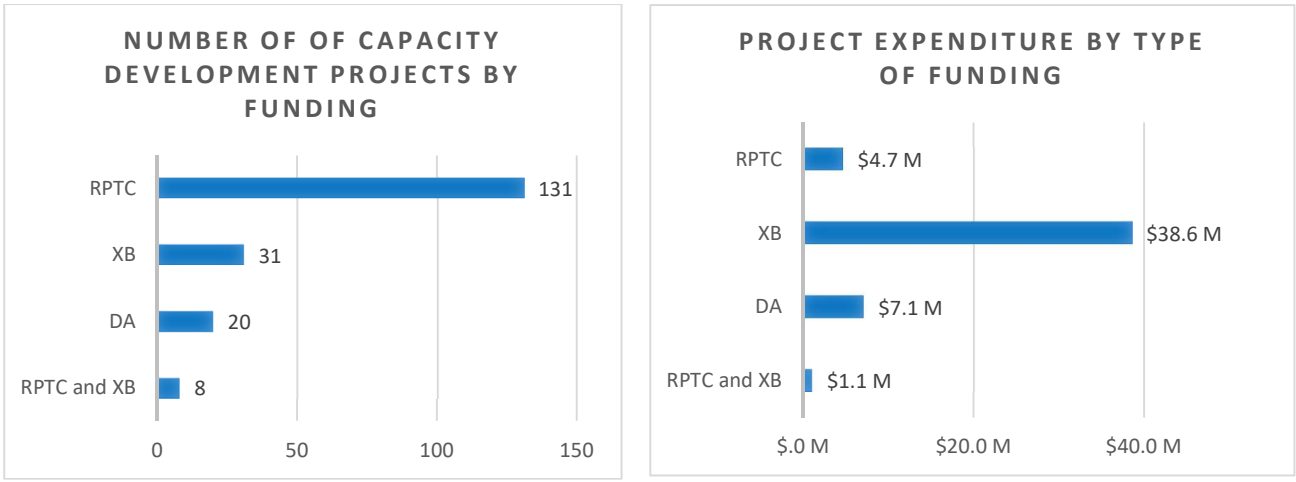
Table 1: Mapping of UNDESA capacity development projects (*)

	No. of projects (**)	Thematic areas with the greatest number of projects	Total exp. (million USD)	Thematic areas with the greatest expenditure (**)
DISD	28	1. Disability (including youth) 2. Youth development 3. Ageing/ financial cooperatives	2.0	1. Youth development 2. Disability (including youth) 3. Ageing
DSDG	37	1. National planning for SDGs 2. Climate change 3. Water management and sanitation	22.2 (***)	1. National planning for SDGs 2. Knowledge exchange, partnerships for SDGs 3. Economic growth and productive employment
EAPD	35	1. Reducing trade constraints for LDCS 2. Strengthening national capacities for policy analysis, policy formulation and knowledge exchange 3. Integrated modeling	4.1	1. Strengthening national capacities for policy analysis, policy formulation and knowledge exchange 2. Integrated modeling 3. Reducing trade constraints for LDCS
SD	89	1. Environmental accounting 2. Environment and energy statistics 3. Civil Registration and Vital Statistics 4. Modernization of production, use and dissemination of data 5. National accounts	23.0	1. Strengthening of national statistical systems 2. Environmental accounting 3. SDG monitoring and reporting 4. Strengthening data for cross-cutting issues (gender, disability) 5. Geospatial information management

(*) Note: This categorization is based on project data provided to OIOS which was then organized based on the project title, and, as necessary, a review of other project description data available. Thematic area rankings are based on relative levels of expenditure during the period Jan. 2016 - Nov. 2019.
(**) Note: The project on "strengthening the capacity of least developed countries to implement the 2030 Agenda" was not included, as it could not be assigned to just one division.
(***) Note: This includes 9.1 million USD XB expenditure for UN Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD).

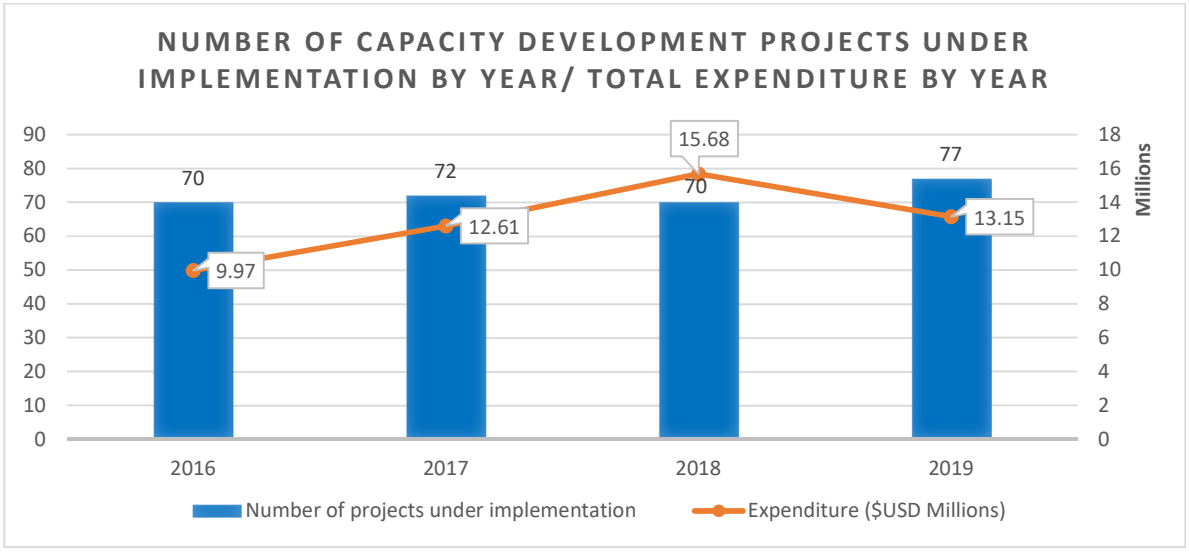
Source: OIOS analysis of UNDESA capacity development project data

Figure 10: Number of capacity development projects and expenditure by type of funding, 2016-2019[52]



Source: OIOS analysis of UNDESA capacity development project data

Figure 11: Number of capacity development projects under implementation by year/ total expenditure by year *(*)*



(*) Note: 190 projects implemented in 2016-2019 on a multi-year basis. One multi-year project would be accounted for separately in the number of annual projects under implementation.
(**) Note: 2019 data only up to November 2019.

Source: OIOS analysis of UNDESA capacity development project data

32. Assessment of a sample of UNDESA supported national capacity development projects indicated positive results. Interviews with recipients, as well as document reviews showed that UNDESA was able to influence concrete policies and programmes in different areas. For example, in

[52] In some cases, the RPTC/ XB breakdown was unavailable, thus the additional RPTC and XB category.

Tanzania, UNDESA supported the revision of the Statistics Act including regulations for the quality assurance framework for data from non-official sources. In Uganda, by using the model of national consultations and regional workshops regarding indigenous issues, UNDESA helped the government establish a national affirmative action programme. UNDESA self-reported results included assistance in the development of a government manual on one-stop registration in Cambodia and development of guidelines for youth entrepreneurship for the government of Philippines.[53] Also, through the expansion of its macro-economic forecasting model, UNDESA helped Member States improve their national capacity to analyze how to formulate policies to maximize development impacts of the Belt and Road Initiatives on achieving SDGs in seven early start countries.[54]

33. UNDESA demonstrated effective learning in its transfer of useful tools and knowledge to different countries by learning lessons from its pilot intervention countries. For example, it modified the CLEWs integrated assessment tool training. UNDESA decided to allocate additional time to explaining the modeling tool - a lesson learnt from bilateral conversations with recipients in Senegal.[55] Stakeholders interviewed in Ethiopia found the revised CLEWs training very useful and applicable to their work. There were additional examples of adaptations by UNDESA in other case study countries, where national government and partner dialogues on cooperation were also identified.

34. Despite these examples, evidence showed that the support provided was often limited in its scope or lacked continuation. For example, under an SDG Monitoring project,[56] UNDESA helped identify data gaps through baseline studies, developed the user engagement strategy and provided training on metadata issues. At the same time, the trainings were topic specific and sometimes limited to the national level which created challenges with implementation at sub-national level.[57] Other stakeholders interviewed also mentioned lack of continuous training and follow-up,[58] as well as a short-term approach towards project planning[59] as key challenges. In this regard, UNDESA faced a number of related challenges, including funding constraints, as well as the fact that their mandated role was limited to supporting country-level efforts as determined by respective governments.

35. Uneven evaluation practices hindered the measuring of capacity development results. While most of the DA account projects were evaluated, there were large XB projects completed between 2016 and 2019 with no evaluations.[60] For projects where mandated evaluations were available, guidelines issued on the management and reporting of evaluation results in 2017 were followed. The quality of DA evaluations however, varied.[61] DA project evaluation guidelines and a detailed evaluation framework were issued in 2019 to enhance the quality of DA project level evaluations.

There were examples of successful interlinkages between UNDESA functional areas of work; but they were not systematically mapped and pursued

36. Document review analysis of intergovernmental processes and bodies serviced showed that Member States often linked the intergovernmental process with capacity development support. In

[53] UNDESA, "Annual Progress Report, enhancing national capacities for unleashing full potentials of Micro-, Small- and Medium-size enterprises in achieving the SDGs in developing countries", 2019.
[54] Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Thailand. Source: Project report on strengthening national policy capacities for jointly building the Belt and Road towards the Sustainable Development Goals', September 2019.
[55] Source: Progress Report for project "Enhancing policy coherence for the SDGs through integrated assessments and institutional strengthening in Africa", undated.
[56] UNSD-DFID Project on SDG Monitoring.
[57] Stakeholder opinions from Uganda and Ethiopia.
[58] Six stakeholder interviews in total.
[59] Five stakeholder interviews in total.
[60] Geospatial Information Management Capacity Development in China and other Developing countries (phase I – 2013-2017, expenditure of $1.9 million) and Strengthening Disability Statistics in the Era of Post-2015 Development Agenda (June 2015-June 2018) (expenditure $1.5 million).
[61] As reported in the UN Development Account Evaluation Framework, 2019.

about a quarter of the resolutions/decisions/declarations (eight) reviewed, reference was made to UNDESA role in translating international agreements into viable national strategies and policies through capacity development work.[62] Member States commended UNDESA for its partnerships with government and other international players for capacity development. Interviews with staff and stakeholders indicated that interlinkages between the normative work and capacity development activities of the Department were the most developed.

37. Interlinkages between research and analysis and the intergovernmental process were also apparent. The substantive support UNDESA provided to the intergovernmental and expert bodies it served at times included producing research and analysis outputs. Additionally, content from numerous UNDESA publications was cited in reports and notes of the Secretary-General, which were referenced in outcomes of normative bodies and the HLPF.[63] However, direct references to UNDESA analytical products beyond the Secretary-General reports were more limited according to an analysis of resolutions of normative bodies serviced by the focus divisions. The analysis identified references to the flagship report on disability and development and its importance,[64] the strengthening of the science policy interface, including in the form of the Global Sustainable Development Report[65] and updating of the Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Database.[66]

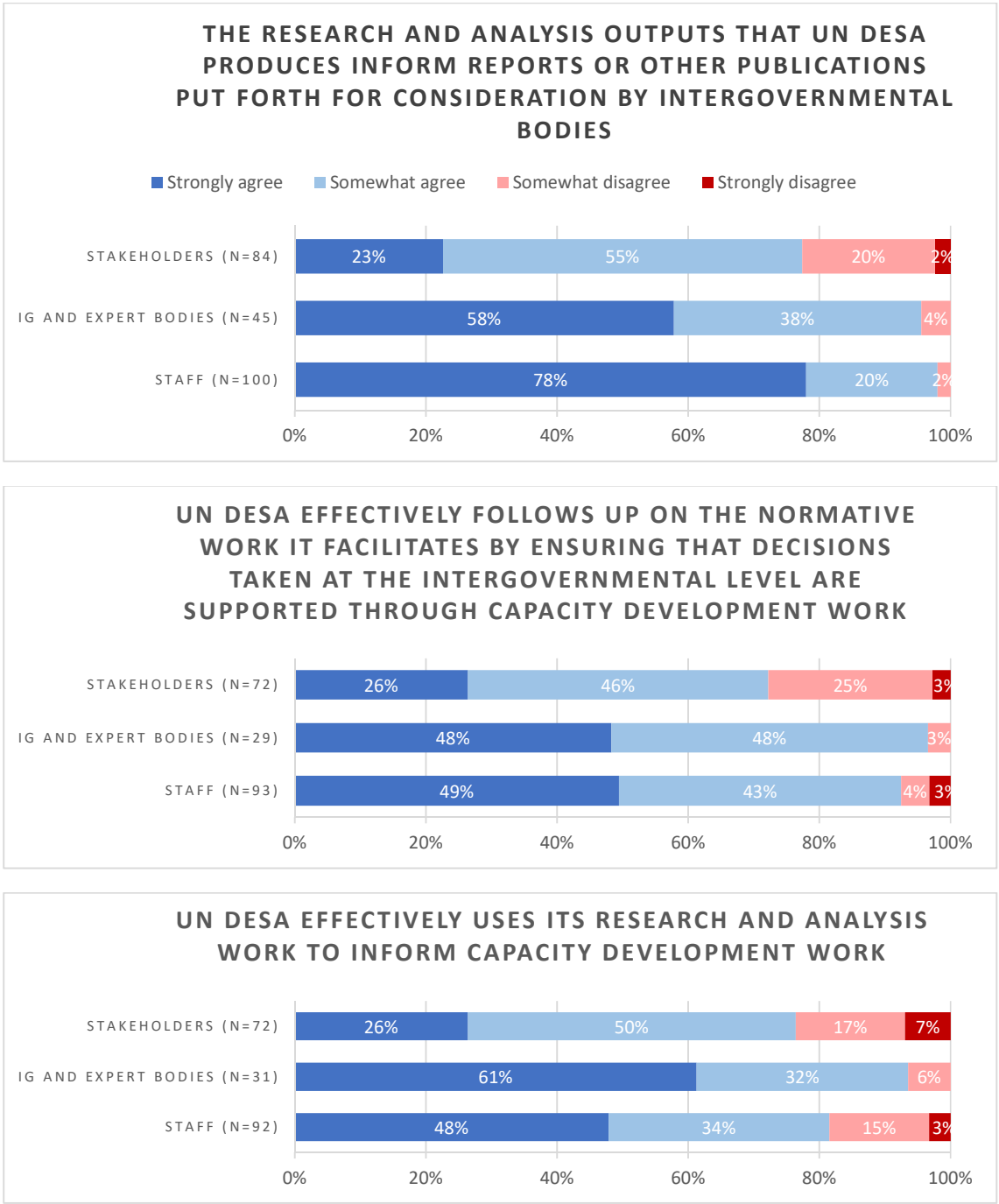
38. Interlinkages between research and analysis and capacity development were most apparent through the work of the Economic Analysis and Policy Division. An analysis of a sample of 30 capacity development projects for the focus divisions revealed explicit linkages between EAPD analytical work and its capacity development activities, especially in support of LDCs, as indicated in project documents.

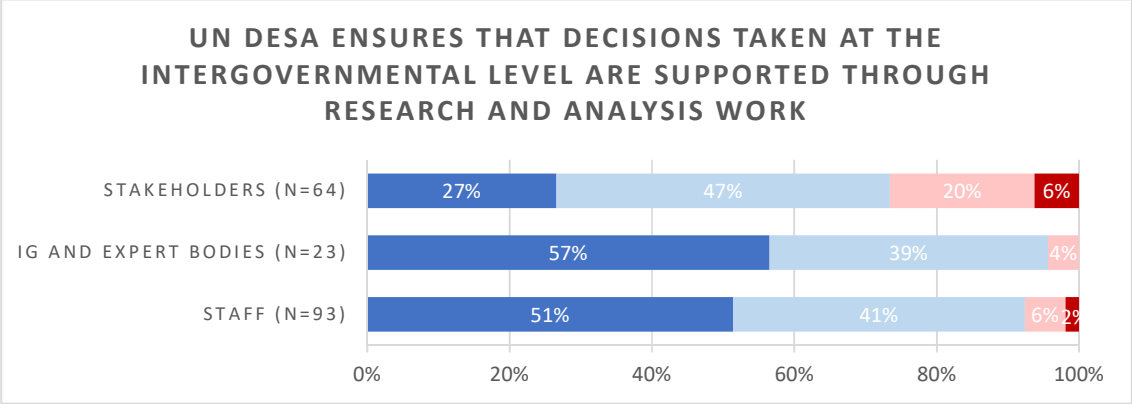
39. Despite acknowledgement of the importance of interlinkages within UNDESA budget[67] and planning documents, at the level of subprogrammes, few referenced interlinkages in their programmes of work.[68] While existing inter-divisional mechanisms at times tried to address the issue of interlinkages, departmental guidance instructing subprogrammes on how to link their substantive work across the functional areas within the current planning process was insufficient. The Department referenced few specific benchmarks, best practices, or examples of strategies to link the functional areas of work in its strategic planning framework, budget documents, or in its yearly planning exercise with UNDESA senior management. Not all subprogrammes identified concrete actions to interlink functions within the official budget or strategic framework planning documents.

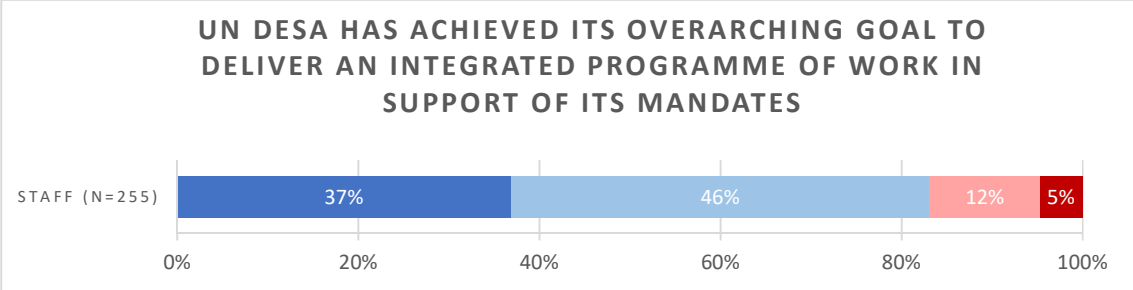
40. Nevertheless, overall, staff and various stakeholders had primarily positive views of the Department's ability to link these issues (Figure 12).

[62] This included calls for UNDESA support to national capacity building (in implementing Madrid Plan of Action, combating sand and dust storms), which was especially vital in statistics (quality of basic national statistics, compilation of national data and statistics on persons with disabilities, strengthening the link between statistics and policy, successful implementation of the United Nations Development Account project and the experience of the Natural Capital Accounting).
[63] E.g .: E/HLS/2018/1, E/RES/2018/26, A/RES/73/237, A/RES/73/253, E/RES/2018/5.
[64] A/RES/73/142.
[65] HLPF Ministerial declaration.
[66] And expressed its appreciation for the work of the Statistics Division, in cooperation with the United Nations system, for global follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the preparation of the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017 and the updating of the Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Database (report of the Statistical Commission).
[67] A/72/6 (Sect. 9), para. 9.5, A/74/6 (Sect. 9), para. 9.17.
[68] The Economic Analysis and Policy Division noted their plan to interlink their work in their stated priorities for 2017 and 2018 , whereby it was noted to "Streamline the capacity development activities to meet the demand of Member States and enhance synergies between the capacity development projects and the analytical work of the Division."

Figure 12: Staff, stakeholder and IG and expert bodies members views on interlinkages







Source: OIOS staff, stakeholders, and intergovernmental and expert body surveys

C. UNDESA efforts to achieve an integrated work programme to effectively support the 2030 Agenda improved, but the current planning process did not fully support comprehensive strategic planning

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

41. In line with formal strategic framework planning and budgeting processes established for Secretariat programmes, UN DESA mandates (Result A) were supported by subprogramme level oriented strategic plans. Given the siloed, subprogramme-focused nature of the Secretariat planning process,[69] and having large segments of UNDESA activity planning undertaken in a fragmented manner by way of three other, separate, planning processes associated with: the DA,[70] the RPTC,[71] and XB funded projects;[72] this did not result in an adequate foundation for comprehensive integrated planning of the Department's complex and multifaceted work.[73]

[69] Secretariat planning process had insufficient clarity on functional and subprogramme planning interlinkages.
[70] A/72/6 (Sect.35).
[71] A/72/6 (Sect.23).
[72] A/72/6 (Sect.9).
[73] This consisted of the Secretary-General's strategic framework document and biennium programme budget. In line with this Secretariat framework, each of the nine UNDESA divisions developed their own distinct subprogramme strategic frameworks and budgets with expected accomplishments and related indicators of achievement. A/71/6 (Prog.7) and A/72/6 (Sect.9).

42. Desk review of UNDESA strategic planning and reporting indicated that the Department was in the early stages of putting supplemental strategic planning initiatives in place. These included the following, with associated strengths and weaknesses:

a) **UNDESA division-level internal workplans** expanded on the Secretariat strategic frameworks to organize the delivery of their programme of work. The division-level work plans[74] were produced in a wide variety of formats and contained different degrees of activity level detail. For example, one division utilized an Excel spreadsheet with a list of events, dates, locations, funding sources, and staff responsible, whereas another division organized their work plan based on components by: partnership, capacity development, policy research, etc. As a result of this large degree of structural variation, these division-level work plans did not adequately support the identification of systematic opportunities for joint activities or collaboration.

b) The Department also produced **internal synopses of "Achievements and Priorities"[75] by division which were submitted to the USG on an annual basis** and presented at the first Directors' meeting in January. Related to this, some recent steps to change the process were introduced with a new approach to prioritization. In late 2019, a brainstorming among Directors on past year achievements and priorities for 2020 took place; and on this basis, the USG established a set of priorities for the department as a whole to guide each division's 2020 activities. While potentially useful for information sharing across the divisions, based on staff interviews and review of meeting minutes,[76] it was unclear how this information was being used, or planned to be used, to create activity-level comprehensive plans, or to implement activities strategically across UNDESA.

c) In 2017, the Department developed a robust strategic planning architecture with the **creation of a Capacity Development Strategy,**[77] which provided guidance for division-level capacity development project planning. The guidance outlined specific and actionable instructions to align divisional expected accomplishments to the capacity development work of UNDESA. This guidance had the advantage of being inter-divisional. This guidance also, importantly, referred to the necessity of coordinating with the UNCT and other key UN partners. While a step in the right direction, the Capacity Development Strategy guidance was limited to one functional area with no explicit linkages to the others.

43. Despite this forward movement, the combination of these steps and the Secretariat planning processes did not add up to a sufficiently integrated department-wide strategic plan. UNDESA had indicated that "strategic integration is essential to promoting a coherent and coordinated implementation process,"[78] to meet the needs of the 2030 Agenda, but this has not yet been realized at the subprogramme level. For example, each division still had separate internal programme plans and project activity documents organized based on funding source e.g. DA, RPTC, XB. There was no master comprehensive document for managers, prospective partner divisions, or other UN entity partners to view the totality of each UNDESA subprogrammes' planned activities. Desk review, triangulated with UNDESA staff and stakeholder interviews, indicated that current planning processes

[74] UNDESA internal subprogramme workplans of EAPD, DSDG, SD, and DISD submitted to OIOS (December 2019)
[75] UNDESA internal "Achievements and Priorities" for 2016-2019 of EAPD, DSDG, SD, and DISD submitted to OIOS (October 2019).
[76] UNDESA internal: Meeting of Directors of DESA dated 10 January 2019, 20 September 2019, and 4 October 2019.
[77] UNDESA internal: Strategy for Capacity Development 10 March 2017.
[78] UNDESA budget for 2018-2019: (A/72/6) -Overall orientation.

were not fully sufficient in terms of creating a foundation for fully integrated and comprehensive department-wide strategic work planning.

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

44. Developing a sufficiently integrated strategic plan to cover its complex mandates and priorities is challenging. UNDESA ability to maximize the achievement of its results continued to be hampered by:

a) **The lack of an adequate mechanism, or guidance, to support integrated planning across UNDESA subprogrammes:** While UNDESA planning documents made general reference to the necessity of integrated planning across subprogrammes, there was no formal mechanism, or guidance to support this aspiration. And, to the extent that it occurred, it often happened on an ad-hoc basis or via informal information sharing.

b) **The lack of an explicit objective to link UNDESA main functional work areas:** As highlighted in its 2016-2019 budgets,[79] interlinkages across the three main types of UNDESA activities were necessary to ensure their overall effectiveness. However, analysis showed that only one of the four focus divisions explicitly stated their intention to interlink, for example, their work in support of intergovernmental processes with their capacity development work. Additionally, desk review indicated that no formal departmental guidance existed on how to plan for interlinkages across these three functional areas, nor was there any related process in place.

c) **The absence of support for joint planning with RECs and other UN entities:** GA reform resolutions[80] and UNDESA reform documentation[81] stressed on-going work planning between UNDESA and the RECs, as well as other UN entities as critical for the delivery of a coherent UN system-wide set of activities for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, including to minimize duplication and optimize synergies. OIOS review analysis, supported by REC and country-level interviews, indicated that, while in some instances inter-agency support groups provided opportunities for joint planning,[82] there was no effective mechanism for systematic joint planning with UNDESA at the activity level, and the informal mechanisms to facilitate it were not working effectively (see Result D). Nor was there any associated guidance to support joint planning. Multiple stakeholder and staff interviewees indicated that this constituted a significant risk to the aspiration of coherent delivery of the UN work.

45. Overall the above challenges indicated that the current UNDESA planning system did not allow it to maximize results, as it lacked the all-encompassing structure necessary to: identify and communicate the full universe of planned activities; facilitate broad consultation; identify potential interlinkages across the different functional areas at the subprogramme level; promote cross-divisional collaboration; and, enable joint planning.

[79] A/70/6 (Sect.35), A/72/6 (Sect.35) and A/70/6 (Sect.23), A/72/6 (Sect.23).
[80] A/Res/72/279.
[81] Memo of the Secretary-General to Member States: Update on UNDESA Reform dated 28 December 2018.
[82] E.g. the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues, the Working Group on National Policy Dialogue and Capacity Development, within the framework of the SWAP on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; monthly teleconferences on HLPF.

D. UNDESA collaboration across its subprogrammes, and with UN system entities, has improved; however, insufficient mechanisms for coordination resulted in missed opportunities for greater coherence

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

46. Member States and UNDESA recognized the imperative for UNDESA subprogrammes to work together in an integrated manner and to collaborate with other UN entities to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.[83] Reviews of resolutions and decisions from intergovernmental processes and major forums reflect a recognition from Member States that collaboration is critical to the success of the Department in supporting the achievement of the SDGs. The importance of internal and external collaboration was also reflected in UNDESA planning documents,[84] particularly with respect to capacity development support activities. This was the most advanced in terms of planning for collaboration and cooperation among divisions, as well as with other partners, and is at the core of the UNDESA Strategy for Capacity Development.[85]

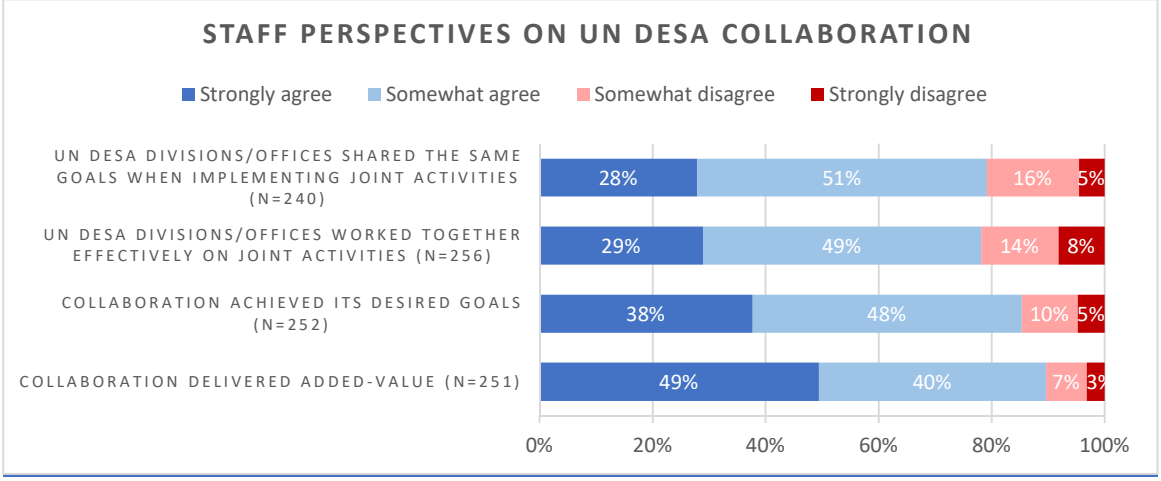
47. The 2011 OIOS evaluation of UNDESA noted that "DESA inability to achieve productive collaboration across divisions has further undermined results. The Department was not perceived to be sufficiently building on potential complementarities; divisions were perceived to compete rather than collaborate."[86] While not direct evidence of an increase in the effectiveness of UNDESA collaborations, a review of planning documents[87] revealed that each subprogramme registered at least one joint activity with another subprogramme in 2019, with some showing an increase from 2016 to 2019, suggesting that the Department has made progress in integrating its work programme compared to prior years.

48. Capacity Development Projects with inter-divisional collaboration also increased, more than doubling (four to ten) between 2016 and 2019. The official launch, through the United Nations Peace and Development trust fund, of a UNDESA-wide capacity development project involving all four focus divisions in 2018 also illustrated enhanced collaboration.[88] Feedback and input from different divisions was sought and obtained through the work of the Editorial Board as part of the approval process for publications the Department put in place in 2013, and subsequently updated in 2017. In the area of intergovernmental support, the internal restructuring and reorganization of the Department brought more effective support to the HLPFs held since 2018.[89] The support to the HLPF was established as a department-wide priority, to which all divisions contributed. Task forces at the level of senior management and working level were created, and each division provided staff members to support the HLPF in various capacities.

49. UNDESA staff surveyed were generally very or somewhat positive about collaboration between UNDESA divisions/offices, with respondents most positive about collaboration efforts delivering added value (89 per cent), and joint efforts and activities achieving their desired goals (86 per cent). (See Figure 13.)

[83] For example: A/RES/71/243 QCPR, A/RES/70/299, A/RES/71/313.
[84] A/72/6 (Sect 9), A/72/6 (Sect 23), A/72/6 (Sect 35).
[85] DESA Strategy for Capacity Development (10 March 2017).
[86] E/AC.51/2011/2.
[87] UNDESA divisions' workplans and priorities, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019.
[88] The project aims to leverage the expertise of several UNDESA divisions to assist these countries with addressing capacity gaps, challenges and recommendations that they have identified in their respective VNR for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and with formulating concrete, actionable and effective solutions to address them.
[89] According to interviews, surveys, and observation of HLPF 2019.

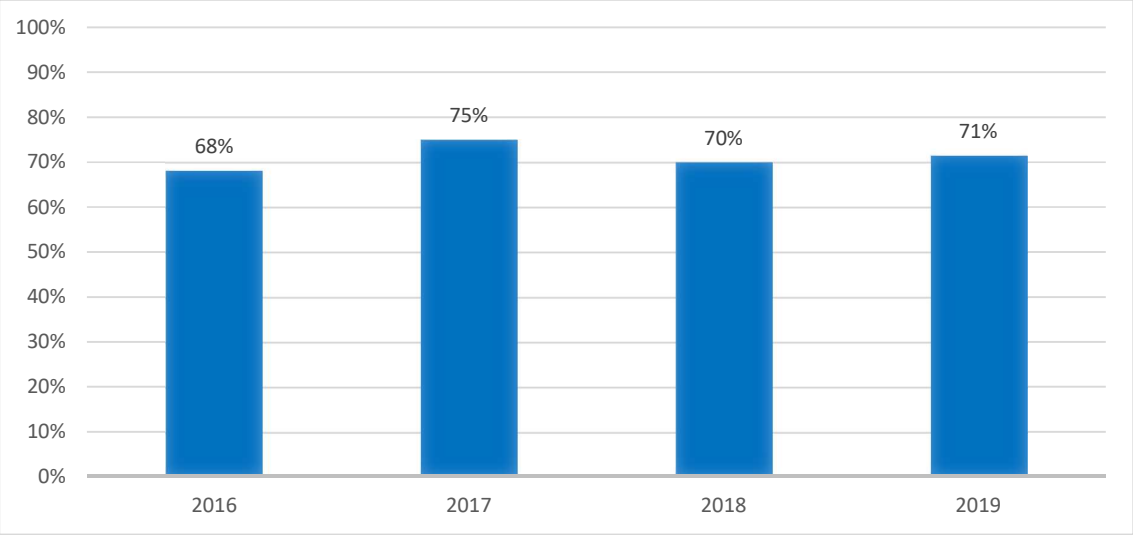
Figure 13: UN DESA staff perspectives on collaboration in UN DESA



Source: OIOS survey of UNDESA staff

50. External collaboration efforts were most visible in the area of capacity development support where approximately 70 per cent of UNDESA capacity development support projects each year included other UN entities as partners (Figure 14). The importance of collaboration was reflected in the project selection guidelines for the DA,[90] which has included a commitment to partnerships with relevant entities since the 13th tranche. Collaboration, however, was not limited to DA projects. The clear majority of XB funded projects (69 per cent or 27/39) implemented by UNDESA also included partnerships with one or multiple Secretariat or other UN entities.

Figure 14: Proportion of UNDESA capacity development project with UN entity collaboration



Source: OIOS capacity development desk review

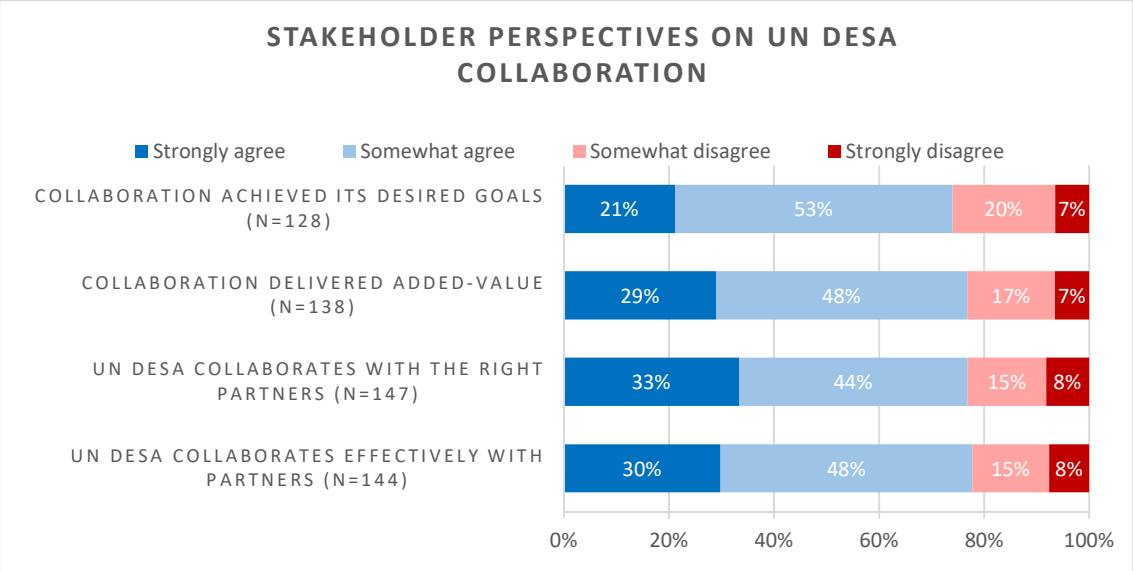
51. On research and analysis, many of the major publications produced by the Department have leveraged extensive collaborations with other UN system entities in their production. Of the four focus

[90] https://www.un.org/development/desa/da/static-guidance-public/; Also, A/74/6 (Sect. 35).

divisions, the *World Economic Situation and Prospects* report of EAPD was often identified as a good example of collaboration between UNDESA and stakeholders. The report was jointly produced by UNDESA, UNCTAD and the five RECs with input from other bodies (UN WTO, ILO). Regional launches of the report were also organized and managed by RECs. The *SDG Report,* produced by SD, was another example that leveraged extensive collaboration and input from international and regional organizations and offices, specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the UN system. In 2018, the DISD launched the *Disability and Development Report*, the first-ever UN flagship report on disability and the SDGs, which also leveraged an extensive list of collaborators within and outside the UN system for its production.[91]

52. Stakeholder perspectives on UNDESA collaboration were generally positive (Figure 15), with majorities of stakeholders surveyed positively rating UNDESA collaboration with partners (78 per cent), the ability of the Department to collaborate with the right partners (77 per cent), the added-value of collaboration (77 per cent), and the ability of collaboration efforts to achieve desired goals (74 per cent).

Figure 15: Stakeholder perspectives on collaboration with UNDESA



Source: OIOS survey of UNDESA stakeholders

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

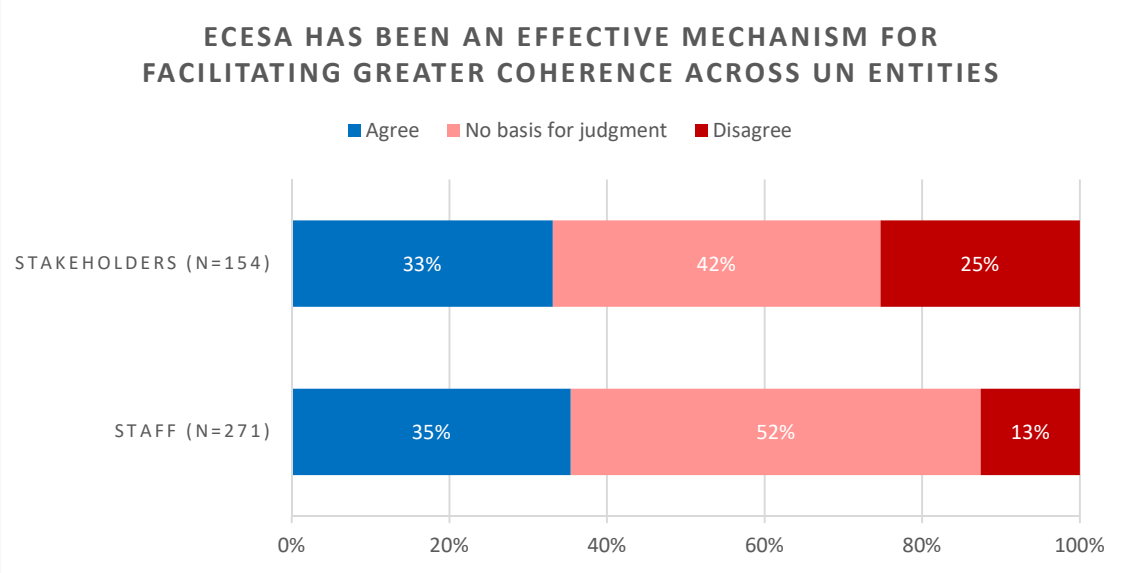
53. Despite the increased instances of collaboration within UNDESA and views that overall UNDESA collaboration was either "very effective" or "somewhat effective," interviews and analysis of internal documents revealed that collaboration between divisions often occurred on an ad hoc basis. While some inter-divisional mechanisms were in place and had positive impacts on collaboration, as referenced in Result C, the lack of an integrated and comprehensive strategic planning mechanism hampered UNDESA ability to maximize complementarities and collaboration. This translated into missed opportunities for synergies between programmes as indicated by staff, who confirmed in

[91] *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities: 2018.* United Nations, 2019.

interviews that they were not always aware of other divisions work plans, making it difficult to proactively engage and complement each other's work.[92]

54. The Executive Committee on Social Affairs (ECESA) and ECESA-plus, as primary coordination mechanisms for the UN in the economic and social fields, and for which UNDESA serves as a convener, were not sufficiently known and did not achieve their stated objectives. While ECESA was given prominence as the primary vehicle to "ensure greater coherence within the UN" and to achieve "harmonization," as well as to "strengthen linkages among UN normative, analytical and operational work," [93] by way of strategic cooperation, it was instead routinely used to engage the UN system in the preparations of intergovernmental events and reports. Furthermore, survey data suggested that ECESA was not a well-known mechanism for action and was considered to be an ineffective one. As can be seen in Figure 16, when asked if ECESA had been an effective mechanism for facilitating greater coherence across UN entities, the majority of UNDESA staff and stakeholders who responded to the surveys either had no basis for judgement or disagreed. This sentiment was largely confirmed in interviews with UNDESA stakeholders and staff.

Figure 16: Knowledge and effectiveness of ECESA



Source: OIOS surveys of UN DESA staff and stakeholders

55. As referenced in Result C, there was no effective mechanism for systematic joint planning between UNDESA and key partners such as RECs, resulting in a lost opportunity for regional synergies. UNDESA capacity development work was, in some cases, found to overlap with RECs in the area of statistics, where a large number of players presented coordination challenges.[94] Many REC interviewees expressed the need for better sharing of information with UNDESA in this area of work (as well as in other areas) to avoid duplication and perceptions of duplication at the activity level. Noting that information shared at the higher levels often did not trickle down to implementing staff, numerous examples of last-minute attempts to coordinate delivery of workshops in the same region

[92] Staff noted that the Director meetings are reporting on past activities and it could be useful to have forward-looking meeting where they share information over what is happening in the next 6 months; they noted the lack of incentives for Divisions to work together given the way resources are used; they noted that information sharing was not structured and ad hoc.
[93] A/74/6 (Sect. 9) paras. 9.12, 9.23; A/74/6 (Sect. 23), para 23.8; A/72/6 (Sect. 9), para 9.5; A/70/6 (Sect. 9)
[94]OIOS-IAD Report 2016/032, para. 30.

remained (Africa and Asia and the Pacific). Information was shared mostly at the implementation phase, but very little was shared and coordinated at the planning stages.

56. Regional stakeholders indicated they would like to see better alignment between regional entities and UNDESA, according to interviews. For example, regional stakeholders appreciated UNDESA collaboration and support to regional forums for sustainable development, while at the same time indicating they would like to see better alignment and inputs from the forums feeding into the HLPF. Similarly, regional stakeholders working on social development issues also expressed the need for strengthening collaboration and linkages between RECs and UNDESA in the intergovernmental arena,[95] in research and analysis,[96] as well as capacity development support.[97]

E. UNDESA has taken steps to implement its organization-level reform in support of the SDGs; however, its full operationalization remains a work in progress as concrete outcomes are not yet discernible

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

57. As part of the system-wide United Nations reforms,[98] and in response to Member States' call to ensure that "the Department is organized in an integrated, cohesive, coordinated and collaborative manner, so that it can support the follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Agenda at the global level …",[99] UNDESA implemented reform initiatives in three phases:

1) Phase 1 realigned the Department's work for "more impactful response to the substantive requirements of Agenda 2030," including the appointment of the new Chief Economist and some divisional reorganization.[100]
2) Phase 2 included the Secretary-General's internal review team report with recommendations presented to UNDESA and the EOSG senior management.
3) Phase 3 was launched with "UNDESA proceeding immediately to implement" six key measures:

    i. Strengthening **thought leadership** to respond to the new 2030 Agenda demands.
    ii. Enhancing **intergovernmental support** for implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
    iii. **Improving data, statistics and analysis** to inform decision-making and enhance collective accountability for results.
    iv. **Stepping up capacities to leverage financing** for the implementation of the SDGs.
    v. Contributing to the provision of **strategic and substantive support to the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system** and the new generation UNCTs.
    vi. Strengthening the strategies and mechanisms of UNDESA to **enhance external communications and strategic partnerships**, including with the private sector and academia.[101]

[95] Stakeholders noted the challenges of Member States from their region attending commission meetings and the challenges of aligning global agendas with regional ones.
[96] Stakeholders noted that UNDESA was not sufficiently participating in the global discussion on themes of inequality, unlike regional commissions. Stakeholders noted they would like to see joint work, research and strategies to influence policy.
[97] Stakeholders provided examples of training UNDESA organized, where they felt they could have been informed or even engaged.
[98] A/72/684 Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 agenda.
[99] A/Res/70/299 para.16.
[100] SG Memorandum to Member States dated 28 December 2018, including Annex I.
[101] The April 2019 QCPR reiterates UNDESA plans to implement these six key measures: A/74/73-E/2019/14 – 15 April 2019, see esp. paras 167-174.

58. In line with this, OIOS analyzed the extent of implementation of the reforms and any early outcomes. With regard to phase 1 and 2 reforms, UNDESA undertook extensive consultations which included a bottom up process to collect staff inputs on how the Department should proceed to implement Resolution 70/299, which called for the enhancement of UNDESA effectiveness. The work of multiple divisions was changed in a manner that resulted in some improved supports of the 2030 Agenda. The most prominent example was a reorganization which resulted in a single division successfully taking the lead role to organize UNDESA support to the high-level political forum in 2018. Regarding phase 3, some of the six reform measures had some effect on the OIOS results presented in this report.

59. Senior management communicated guidance on the operationalization of phase 1 and 2 reforms in a series of March 2018 memorandum to division directors which announced the re-naming of divisions, as well as structural and resource changes. However, assessed against Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) established criteria,[102] and based on a desk review,[103] as well as interviews with managers and staff, UNDESA work to operationalize phase 3 of its reform remains a work in progress. Table 2 provides the results of a desk review of all reform operationalization documentation available as of March 2020. Evidence indicated that this documentation did not add up to a robust, reform implementation plan. Specifically, they do not contain sufficient details on reform objectives; what staff are expected to do differently; and/or, how and when changes will be operationalized.[104] Furthermore, the majority of language contained in potential guidance documents reviewed was not specific enough to operationalize, thus limiting the potential impact of the reform, including its potential to promote increased support to Member States with regard to their SDG implementation efforts. On 5 February 2020, UNDESA issued further guidance to its staff which provided "an update on our efforts to support the resident coordinator system with guidelines on how the Department will implement this support moving forward." That guidance contained an additional level of detail on how one of the six key reform measures should be operationalized. It represented a positive step in UNDESA work in progress to develop holistic guidance for effective operationalization of UNDESA phase 3 reforms, and to communicate it sufficiently to staff and key stakeholders.

[102]OIOS utilized criteria adopted from the Joint Inspection Unit's recent report on change management in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2019/4). Criteria specifics: (a) Reforms follow a known plan (which outlines objectives, including what staff will be expected to do differently); (b) Timeline for implementation exists; (c) Reform is supported by clear guidance (guidance provides sufficient detail on how changes outlined will be operationalized); (d) Plan and guidance are communicated (to staff and stakeholders in a strategic manner to increase understanding and commitment to the reform process); (e) Responsibilities for everyone involved are clarified; (f) A basis for tracking and evaluating reform operationalization is established (ideally, including a theory of change that identifies key steps to be taken, results expected, risks and assumptions).

[103]Dec 2018 SG Memorandum, including Annex; 2020 Budget [A/74/6 (Sect. 9); A/74/6 (sect 23) RPTC; A/74/6 (sect 35) DA; Capacity Development Guidance; Recent Presentation @ Global Resident Coordination Meeting Nov 2019; Strategic Communication Framework 2019-2020; Highlights 2018-2019; USG annual report- achievements/ priorities for upcoming year (most recent); subprogramme-level strategic frameworks- internal work plans for subprogrammes to strategically organize the delivery of their programme of work; 5 Feb UNDESA USG Memorandum to UNDESA managers and accompanying Annexes A and B.

[104] Criteria source also: JIU/REP/2019/4.

Table 2 - Assessment of guidance for effective operationalization of UNDESA phase-3 reforms

UNDESA Reform Operationalization – possible sources of guidance:	**Does the document provide guidance related to reform objectives and operationalization?** (*)	**To what degree is the level of detail provided sufficient to be useful to support operationalization of reform?** (**)	**Does the document clarify responsibilities for those intended to be involved in the reform operationalization? (***)**	**Overall, how useful is the document <u>as detail-level guidance to staff and stakeholders</u> in support of the operationalization of UNDESA reform?**
Dec 2018 SG Memorandum, including Annex				**Minimally Useful** **A Limitation**: High level information with limited specifics
2020 Budget A/74/6 (Sect. 9)				**Minimally Useful** **A Limitation**: General references to 6 reform areas without details on "how" activities will be undertaken differently
2020 Budget A/74/6 (Sect. 23) RPTC		footnote [105]		**Minimally Useful** **A Limitation**: No articulation of specific projects/entities which will work jointly
2020 Budget A/74/6 (Sect. 35) DA		footnote [106]		**Somewhat Useful** **A Strength:** Provides information on all UN entities working jointly on each specific project
UN DESA Strategy for Capacity Development (10 Mar 2017)		footnote [107]		**Somewhat Useful** **A Strength:** Provides significant detail, however, focus does not cover other areas of UNDESA activities

[105] Example where more relevant detail is provided: Pg. 14 – UNDESA subprogramme 4: "In 2020, subprogramme 4 will organize workshops to focus on the need for accurate, reliable, comparable and disaggregated data on entrepreneurship from a gender perspective, access to physical and financial assets, intra-household power and decision-making, the nexus between gender and the environment, and poverty at the individual level to foster research, guide evidence-based policymaking and allow for effective monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of commitments over time.

[106] Example where more relevant detail is provided: Pg. 3 and 18: "Account projects are expected to work closely with the resident coordinators and United Nations country teams." And, "UNDESA will work jointly with UNEP, ESCAP and ECA and in collaboration with UNDP" on a project "to strengthen capacities of national statistical offices in North and East Africa and South Asia to produce environmental-economic accounts formulating integrated, evidence-based policy and to measure progress towards sustainable development" which "Aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals: 6.3, 6.4, 6.6, 7.2, 7.3, 8.4, 9.4, 11.6, 15.3."

[107] Related to level of relevant detail provided: This internal document has the stated purpose of being a "strategic document to frame the departmental approach for a more efficient and effective response to Member States' demand for capacity development related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and AAAA." A look at the TOC provides an indication of the level of detail covered: Section examples include: Service Delivery Model; Methodology; Partnerships; Implementation; UNDESA's role in implementation; and, UN DESA Service Lines or Areas of Work.

UN DESA Highlights 2018-2019		footnote [108]		**Somewhat Useful** **A Strength:** Impactfully organized with some information which could potentially assist stakeholders to understand activities undertaken in relation to the 6 reform key focus areas
USG annual report-achievements/ priorities for upcoming year (2019)				**Somewhat Useful** **A Strength:** Could be further utilized as vehicle to inform efforts to increase coherence across UNDESA priority activities
Subprogramme-level internal work plans to strategically organize delivery of subprogramme of work (most recent available)				**Somewhat Useful** **A Strength:** Could be further utilized as vehicle to inform efforts to increase coherence across UNDESA priority activities
Feb 2020 Memorandum from UNDESA USG to UNDESA managers, including Annexes A and B				**Somewhat Useful** **A Strength:** Provides significant detail beyond what had been developed previously on how UNDESA will support RC system **A Limitation:** Coverage limited to one reform area and distribution limited to UNDESA managers (vs. all staff and key stakeholders)

(*) **Rating scale:** [Green] - Yes, contains significant details; [Yellow] - High level information provided, operationalization details missing, and/or some related information provided indirectly; [Red] - No, contains no relevant info
(**) **Rating scale:** [Green] - Highly Useful; [Yellow] - Somewhat Useful; [Red] - Minimally Useful
(***) **Rating scale:** [Green] - Yes; [Yellow] - Somewhat; [Red] - No

Source: OIOS Reform Documentation Analysis

There was insufficient communication and shared clarity on how reform measures had been operationalized

60. Document review, as well as interview and survey data, indicated that communication related to the operationalization of reforms was very limited, and that understanding was low.[109]

61. **Communication to UNDESA staff:** Based on desk review, as well as interview and survey data, communication related to the operationalization of UNDESA phase 3 reforms was very limited. For staff, some pertinent reform operationalization information could have been gleaned from the recently released "DESA Strategic Communication Framework 2019-2020.[110] However, because its

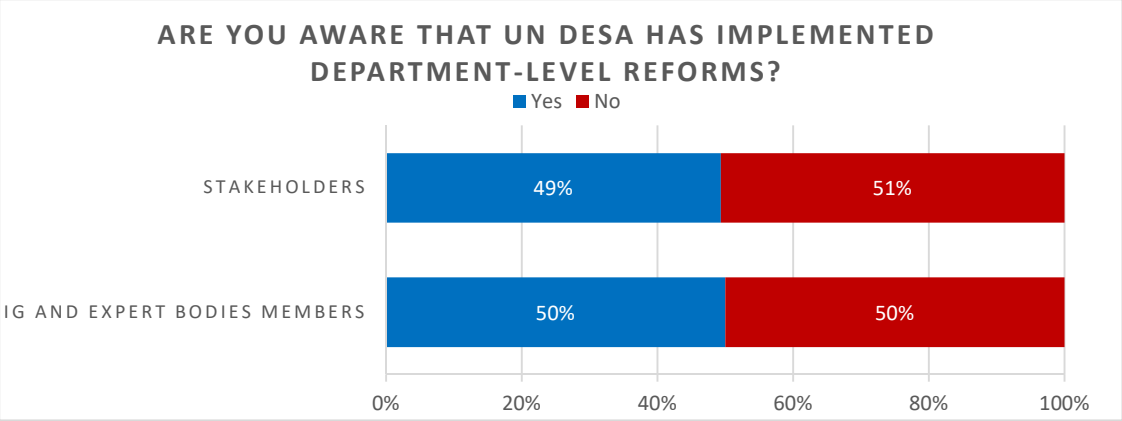
[108] Related to level of relevant detail provided: This publication provides some articulation of how UNDESA is interpreting its thought leadership role; it contains a short section on "Advancing thought leadership for sustainable development." Also, helpfully, the publication provides some information that could be utilized by prospective partners to understand how to partner with UNDESA across the 6 reform focus areas.
[109] Criteria source: JIU report related criteria.
[110] V.1 March 2019.

overarching focus was on providing guidance on integrating communication into work planning for increased visibility, it was only minimally useful as a vehicle to communicate reform operationalization expectations. Other potential sources of communication assessed were also insufficient (see Table 1 above). Staff survey data identified a related management risk; 30 per cent of staff indicated that, overall, they either "somewhat disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" that roles and responsibilities were well defined.

62. **Communication to stakeholders and clarity of the reform:** The "Highlights 2018-2019" publication was organized in a manner that enabled an understanding of the many different types of activities UNDESA undertook in support of its objectives. While not intended to dwell on the six reform areas, the publication contains a section on "Advancing thought leadership for sustainable development," which provided some articulation of how UNDESA was interpreting its thought leadership role.[111] However, there was a dearth of communication to UNDESA stakeholders on the reform. There was no guidance document shared with key stakeholders, such as REC staff, which provided specific detailed information on how UNDESA operationalized its reforms. This lack of communication created a risk to the achievement of effective partnerships, which require clarity on respective roles and shared goals.

63. While staff interviewees, and some RECs interviewees, reported having general knowledge about UNDESA reforms, many raised questions related to the specifics. Desk review indicated that UNDESA budgets contained some high-level information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/299 and provided evidence that some restructuring occurred with related job descriptions updated. At the same time, no overarching, detailed reform implementation plan existed. Survey data indicated that the current level of understanding on how phase 3 reforms were being implemented was insufficient to serve as a foundation for successful reform (Figures 17 and 18).

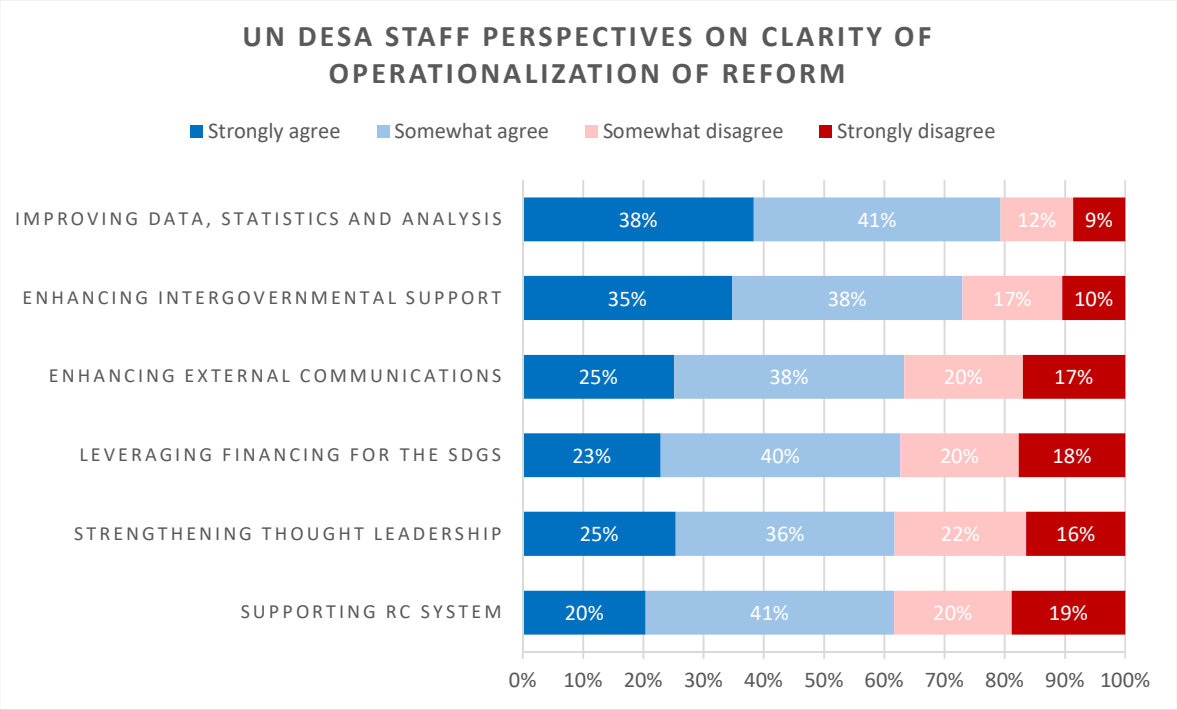
Figure 17: Degree of UN Stakeholder awareness on operationalization of UNDESA reforms



Source: OIOS survey of UNDESA stakeholders.

[111] UNDESA "Highlights 2018-2019." See 4 bullets at the beginning of this section pg. 45.

Figure 18: Degree of UNDESA Staff clarity on phase 3 reforms and their operationalization



Source: OIOS survey of UNDESA staff.

UNDESA guidance and communication on Resident Coordinators' support is still being developed

64. At the time of this evaluation, there was insufficient clarity on what UNDESA will be doing to "contribute to the provision of strategic and substantive support to the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator systems and the new generation of UNCTs." This includes what it will mean, in practice, to serve as the "the global thought leader," including how the network of economists will contribute to supporting SDG achievement, especially when the need might be beyond economic development issues.[112] UNDESA staff themselves reported having the least clarity on these two highly critical areas (Figure 18).

65. Interview and other data indicated that UNDESA had significant interaction with some resident coordinators about the VNRs. For example, webinars were organized in 2019 and 2020 with resident coordinators of VNR countries, and a dedicated session was held at their annual meeting in 2019. Additionally, UNDESA had identified entry points to provide support to the CCA process, including to SIDS and the creation of a UN Network of Data Officers and Statisticians in support of the SDGs among other initiatives.

66. Also during the November 2019 Global Resident Coordination Meeting held in New York, UNDESA facilitated a structured dialogue led by UNDESA Chief Economist and a number of other senior managers on, how the economists' network was in the process of being operationalized as a vehicle to bring expertise from across the UN to bear on critical issues. One example was going beyond measurement of progress based on GNP growth to, instead, enable measurement of social and environmental dimensions. This economist network discussion included examples of a few specific operationalization activities in the early stages. Namely, the development of a short SDG primer on economic transformation, and a "Shaping the Trends" economic network initiative. The approximately

[112] December 2018 Memorandum Annex, pg. 2 indicates that strengthening thought leadership is a category that the work of the network of economics is intended to be closely associated with.

ten resident coordinators in attendance expressed their appreciation for the dialogue opportunity, welcoming, for example, economic analysis combining the economic, social and/or environmental dimensions which might become available to factor into current CCA processes. A number of issues and questions were raised on: how the economists' network would be operationalized; the degree to which it was in place; how resident coordinators could link into the network; and, how the work of this network would factor in the economic analyses already being shared with national governments by, for example, UNDP and UNICEF. This feedback indicated that UNDESA support was still very much a work in progress in terms of operationalization. Discussion feedback also supported the continuing need for a more integrated approach to the provision of analysis and policy solutions (Result A).

V. Conclusions

67. UNDESA has a highly critical role to perform within the context of the UN system at large. The Department must effectively fulfill the broad, multifaceted mandates entrusted to it by Member States, and, simultaneously, operationalize its planned organizational reforms in support of the SDGs. To achieve its aspiration and perform a highly relevant role at the global level -including as a global thought leader- the Department must successfully partner with the five RECs, all UNCTs and other partners within and outside of the UN.

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

69. At the same time, much work remains. More proactive prioritization, further identification of interlinkages of UNDESA activities, as well as strengthened joint work planning with key partners have all become absolutely essential. To move forward, a couple of key questions must be answered by UNDESA, in consultation with its key partners:

- What, specifically, should be the capacity development support role performed by UNDESA *vis-a-vis* the similar, and potentially overlapping, roles currently being performed by RECs and UNCTs? UNDESA has the potential to bring valuable global level knowledge, however, the RECs and the UNCTs are "closer to the ground."

- In practice, what does it mean to be "the global thought leader," and how can this be effectively communicated and implemented in concert with key partners?

Without additional steps in these directions, UNDESA will be at risk of falling short of its aspirations to achieve the level of impact its management and staff members are working tirelessly to achieve.

VI. Recommendations

70. OIOS-IED makes two critical and three important recommendations, all of which have been accepted.

OIOS UNDESA Recommendation 1 (Critical) (Results A, B, C, D and E)

Building on its improvements and within the confines of its mandate, UNDESA should further **strengthen its current yearly strategic plan to cover major UNDESA activities at the subprogramme**

level. In addition to the mapping of subprogramme activities, outputs and outcomes to identify departmental priorities, the strengthened strategic planning document should include:

(a) Identification of additional concrete opportunities for joint work planning across UNDESA divisions at the activity/output level, including support to shared outcomes and expected results
(b) Identification of high priority action points for the upcoming year, in consultation with subprogrammes, RECs and other UN entities, including to support integrative approaches to SDG implementation across the economic, social and environmental dimensions; a plan for systematic sharing of this information with RECs and other UN entities should be included
(c) Identification of high priority action points for the upcoming year to support interlinkages between UNDESA functional areas

Indicator of Achievement: A strengthened strategic plan which incorporates items (a) – (c).

OIOS Recommendation 2 (Important) (Results D and E)

Given the criticality of ensuring there is effective coordination in support of the 2030 Agenda, as a convener of the ECESA, **UNDESA should further leverage ECESA's potential as a mechanism for effective coordination across Secretariat entities in the development pillar**. And upon consultation with key stakeholders, it should develop a plan to implement improvements, with clear deliverables, timelines and assessment mechanism to ensure effectiveness.

Indicator of Achievement: A proposal for strengthening the operation of ECESA and ECESA-plus; evidence that the proposal was shared, discussed with key stakeholders, including DCO, RECs and other UN entity key stakeholders and issued.

OIOS Recommendation 3 (Important) (Result B and C)

The Department should fully implement the steps outlined in the UNDESA Strategy for Capacity Development.[113] In doing so the Department should put in place additional requirements and/or mechanisms to:

[113] UNDESA Strategy for Capacity Development (March 2017) - See especially page 22. "CDO, in coordination with the divisions, will develop an Implementation Plan for this strategy, which will identify roles and responsibilities as well as associated costs of implementation. CDO will coordinate and monitor the overall implementation of the strategy in consultation with the Steering Committee for Capacity Development. CDO will collect and analyze data on implementation report for the Steering Committee's consideration and action. Key action points in this strategy, identified as requiring more detailed implementation planning and follow-up, include:
(1) Developing a communication strategy that helps generate demand for UNDESA CD support that matches the Department's CD priorities and offering;
(2) Establishing an interdivisional mechanism to promote a coherent, effective and flexible Departmental response;
(3) Developing a Departmental logical framework for the achievement of the Departmental Goals and Objectives for CD identified in the strategy;
(4) Reviewing the management of current resources, resource needs and resource mobilization options with a view to promote a more efficient and effective use; and to ensure flexible, adequate, and secure funding for CD work;
(5) Developing a Departmental resource mobilization strategy;
(6) reviewing challenges and opportunities of current and potential partnership arrangements with a view to identify good practices and develop guidance for a Departmental approach to Partnerships;
(7) Development of a plan to strengthen the M&E of CD activities;
(8) Strengthening communication with UNDG/DOCO as well as the Regional Commissions to share information and coordinate responses to Member States' demand for CD support."

(a) Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation framework of its capacity development work, including the measurement of expected outcomes
(b) Increase the coverage of evaluations to ensure that high expenditure projects, including XB, have sufficient coverage[114] based on consultation and revised agreements with the donor
(c) Ensure that lessons learned from those evaluations and related reviews are used and integrated into its planning and design phases, including fundraising to ensure continued support to countries in the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Indicator of Achievement: Improved monitoring, quality and coverage of evaluations which factors in (a) – (c).

OIOS Recommendation 4 (Important) (Result B)

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

(a) A study, which includes clear and actionable recommendations for improving the assessment of the dissemination and utility of UNDESA publications
(b) Develop a template for assessing UNDESA publications reach and utility integrating the recommendations from the study
(c) Complete periodic reviews of UNDESA publications using new guidelines, tools and sources as identified in the template for assessing the reach and utility of UNDESA publications

Indicator of Achievement: Strengthened ability to assess intended outcomes of publications as reflected in periodic reviews of UNDESA publications

OIOS Recommendation 5 (Critical) (Result E)

To maximize its effectiveness, **UNDESA should continue to develop department-level reform operationalization action plans and guidance for phase 3 of the organizational reform.** Subsequently, guidance such as those issued on 5 February 2020 by the USG,[115] should continue to be systematically communicated to both UNDESA staff and key stakeholders such as REC staff and resident coordinators. Continued steps on the Department's reform operationalization action plan and guidance should:

(a) Build on the identified modalities for the delivery of support to the resident coordinators, including the continued dissemination of concrete guidelines on the strategic and substantive support UNDESA will provide to them
(b) Build on work underway, with a concrete concept note that clearly spells out UNDESA thought leadership role, its objectives and goals, concrete actions, deliverables and mechanisms it will support to strengthen its work in this area, with an articulation of methods which UNDESA will utilize to support integrative approaches to SDG implementation across the economic, social and environmental dimensions
(c) Include further development of the UN Economists Network Concept Note into a full-fledged TOR and guidance for key stakeholders
(d) Establish monitoring indicators to track Departmental reform operationalization

[114] The Joint Inspection Unit reported a range from 0.5% to 3% of organizational expenditure for evaluation to be considered as a benchmark. Variation is expected based on differences in the purpose of evaluation function, types of evaluations undertaken, and economies of scale achieved, including as influenced by an entity's size (see JIU/REP/2014/6, para 77).
[115] 5 Feb UNDESA USG Memorandum to UNDESA managers and accompanying Annexes A and B.

(e) Continue to communicate the most pertinent related information to both UNDESA staff and key stakeholders

Indicator of Achievement: A department-level reform phase 3 operationalization plan and related guidance for staff and stakeholders that incorporates (a) – (e) and other mission critical components as identified by UNDESA.

Annex 1: UNDESA Management Response on the OIOS Evaluation of UNDESA

United Nations Nations Unies

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

TO: Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye, Under-Secretary-General
A: for Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 29 May 2020

REFERENCE: DESA-20/00993

THROUGH:
S/C DE:

FROM: LIU Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General
DE: for Economic and Social Affairs

SUBJECT: **UN DESA Management Response on the Formal Draft Report**
OBJET: **of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

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

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

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

4. UN DESA also notes the challenges identified in the evaluation report, which are opportunities to further strengthen the delivery of the Department's mandated programme of work.

5. UN DESA has reviewed the evaluation report carefully and following discussions and exchanges with the OIOS evaluation team, including on the recommendations, welcomes the findings and insights of the evaluation. As such, UN

DESA is preparing for submission to OIOS a detailed action plan, building on work already underway in response to the recommendations outlined in the evaluation report.

6. UN DESA accepts the recommendations in this evaluation report, and would like to add the following observations:

Recommendation 1: UN DESA will build on strengthening the alignment of existing strategic planning processes, taking into consideration shared subprogramme priorities, activities, deliverables, and outcomes, and including joint activities with Regional Economic Commissions (RECs) and other UN entities. These proposed actions will remain closely in line with given UN DESA mandates, including the needs and priorities of intergovernmental processes, and Secretariat-wide rules and regulations on programme planning and budget, and established channels of communication.

Recommendation 2: UN DESA will maintain a continuous dialogue with ECESA and ECESA Plus entities for improved coordination on intergovernmental processes, particularly on analytical products. Furthermore, an indicator of achievement could be expanded to include UN DESA related interagency work on the 2030 Agenda.

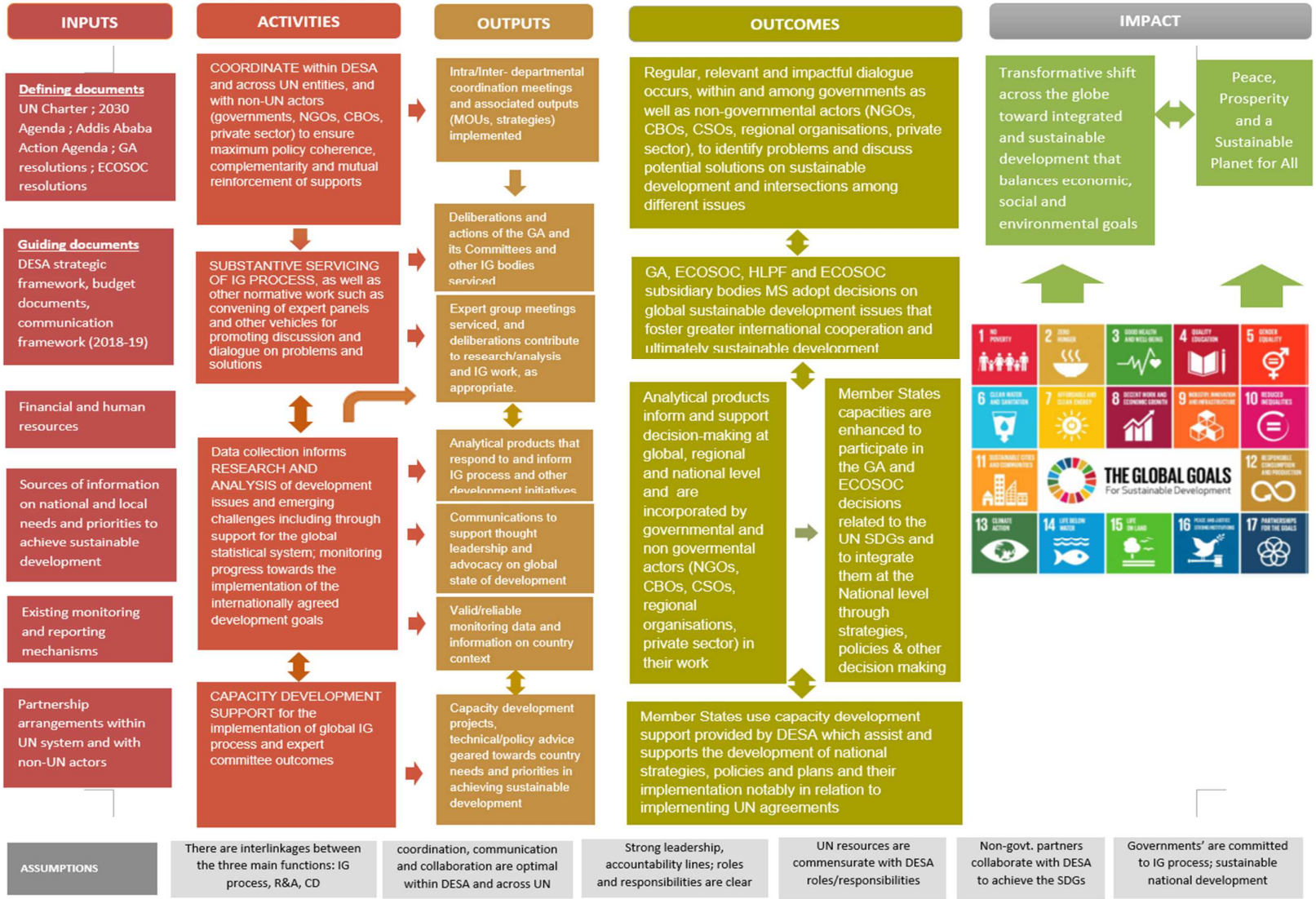
Recommendation 3: In addition to existing practice, UN DESA, through its Capacity Development Programme Management Office (CDPMO) will review and monitor the implementation of the Guidelines on the Planning and Management of Capacity Development Project Evaluations. The Department will embark on updating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

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

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

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

Annex 2: UNDESA Programme Impact Pathway (PIP)



Annex 3: Intergovernmental Process Outcomes by the focus divisions – 2018

Division		Working group/ conference/Forum
DISD	GA	**Second Committee:**
		Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (A/RES/73/246)
		Third committee:
		Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/RES/73/141)
		Follow-up to the Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family and Beyond (A/RES/73/144)
		Inclusive development for persons with disabilities (A/RES/73/142)
		Rights of indigenous people (A/RES/73/156)
		Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/RES/73/143)
	ECOSOC	Future organization and methods of work of the Commission for Social Development (E/RES/2018/3)
		Social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (E/RES/2018/4)
		Third review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002 (E/RES/2018/6)
		Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all (E/RES/2018/5)
		Decisions from the Permanent Forum on Indigenous People
	Decisions by the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	
DSDG	GA	**Second Committee**
		Agriculture technology for development(/A/RES/74/215)
		Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (A/RES/73/227)
		Follow up on Samoa Pathway (A/RES/73/228)
		Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind (A/RES/73/232)
		Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (A/RES/73/236)
		Harmony with nature (A/RES/73/235)
		Agriculture development, food security and nutrition (A/RES/73/253)
		Combating Sand and dust storms (A/RES/73/237)
		Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028 (A/RES/73/226)
		Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations (A/RES/73/229)
		Impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets (A/RES/73/17)
SD	ECOSOC	Strategic Framework on Geospatial Information and Services (E/RES/2018/14*)
		Decisions of the Statistical Commission
		Decisions of the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management
EAPD	GA	**Second committee**
		Towards a New International Economic Order (A/RES/73/240)
		Graduation of countries from the least developed country category (A/RES/73/133)
	ECOSOC	Report of the Committee for Development Policy on its twentieth session (E/RES/2018/27)
		Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 (E/RES/2018/26)
Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2018 session of the Economic and Social Council on the annual theme "From global to local: supporting sustainable and resilient societies in urban and rural communities" (E/HLS/2018/1)		