



**Executive Board of the  
United Nations Development  
Programme, the United Nations  
Population Fund and the United  
Nations Office for Project Services**

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**Report of the annual session 2023  
(5 to 9 June 2023, New York)**

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## I. Organizational matters

1. The annual session 2023 of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS was held from 5 to 9 June 2023.
2. The Executive Board approved the agenda and workplan for its annual session 2023 (DP/2023/L.2) and approved the report of the first regular session 2023 (DP/2023/10).
3. Decisions adopted by the Executive Board at the annual session 2023 appeared in document DP/2023/25, which was available on the Executive Board website.
4. The Executive Board agreed in decision 2023/19 to the following schedule for future sessions of the Executive Board in 2023:

Second regular session 2023:            28 to 31 August 2023.

### Statement by the President of the Board

5. The President of the Board highlighted how UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS were navigating and responding to overlapping crises and improving millions of lives, exemplifying commitment and coordination with one another and other agencies. One example was the urgent mission to salvage the FSO Safer oil tanker off the coast of Yemen. The mission was the United Nations at its best, taking local action with global impacts. The Executive Board should enable agencies to do more of the same; delivering development amid recurring crises was the new norm. Further enhancing results required the convergence of operational procedures and even a joint board model beyond the three organizations. The Executive Board could also consider further engaging with the resident coordinators. Rethinking the reduction in core resources would be essential to deliver at a strategic level. New practices in reporting could include using artificial intelligence to enable rapid reviews of multiple reports.

### Joint segment

## II. Update on the implementation efforts on the repositioning of the United Nations development system

6. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management), the UNDP Director, Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy, and the UNOPS Executive Director updated the Board on collective efforts to implement General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the implementation efforts on the repositioning of the United Nations development system.
7. A group of delegations emphasized that the full commitment of all development system entities and Member States to continuing reform was critical to accelerated delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The group welcomed great strides made in coherence, cooperation and collective action at the country level. The group flagged the pivotal role of the resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator in advancing shared values and consolidating efforts across the humanitarian-development-peace continuum and urged UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS to support the leadership of the resident coordinators to bring the system together to do even more. Since collaboration on peacebuilding had been challenging, the group welcomed ways to strengthen it. There was also a need to see substantive results in the fifth year of reform, though evidence of impact was not always available.
8. The group congratulated the United Nations development system on efficiency gains of \$405 million in 2022. It expressed concern about ongoing competition for resources, calling on all three organizations to deliver based on comparative advantages, and for Member States to perform their role as well. United Nations coordination should be integrated into standard procedures. The group noted progress on the renewed management and accountability framework and stressed full implementation for efficiency and mutual accountability. The group called for fully aligning country documents with the cooperation frameworks, and for reinforcing the use of inputs from resident coordinators in performance appraisals. It emphasized consulting resident coordinators in selecting country team members so that different skills would complement each other. The reform checklist to facilitate Executive Board oversight was a welcome tool to enable easy comparison across entities and over time.

9. In response to delegations, the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) stated that UNFPA remained fully committed to advancing United Nations reform. He described UNFPA as moving from processes to results in programmes and efficiencies in operations. All country programme documents were derived from and in line with the cooperation frameworks, which UNFPA had found were helping to advance the normative part of its mandate. Regional directors routinely informed resident coordinators ahead of the appointments of UNFPA representatives. All resident coordinators could appraise UNFPA representatives; this was nearly universally done in 2022. UNFPA continued to remain active in joint programmes.

10. The UNDP Director, Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy, provided examples of collaboration with other United Nations organizations, including UN-Women on the COVID-19 pandemic socioeconomic assessments. She highlighted the new Nexus Academy, offering worldwide learning for country teams. UNDP remained the main agency contributing to the resident coordinator system, at \$10.6 million in 2022, but was concerned with lagging funding. Increased understanding of how United Nations organizations can move forward on reform could come through better guidance on the United Nations country team configuration exercise. All UNDP resident representatives were assessed against mandatory performance goals for country team results; regional directors sought feedback on resident representative performance from resident coordinators.

11. The UNOPS Executive Director underlined the specific context for the organization since its presence in countries and regions was determined by demand. UNOPS welcomed the convening power of the resident coordinators while acknowledging practical issues in having one multi-country office director who may coordinate with resident coordinators in several countries. He stressed that UNOPS remained eager to make accountability and coordination more agile and effective. While it did not have country programme documents, it was fully aligned with cooperation frameworks. Performance appraisals included the resident coordinators in compliance with the management and accountability framework.

12. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/6 on the update of the implementation efforts on the repositioning of the United Nations development system.

### III. Internal audit and investigation

13. The UNDP Officer in Charge, Office of Audit and Investigations (OAI), presented the annual report of OAI on internal audit and investigations activities in 2022 (DP/2023/12); the UNDP Director, Bureau of Management, the management response. The UNFPA Director ad interim, Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS), presented the report of OAIS on internal audit and investigation activities in 2022 (DP/FPA/2023/6), the annual report of the Oversight Advisory Committee (DP/FPA/2023/6/Add.1) and the terms of reference of the Oversight Advisory Committee. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) presented the management response. The UNOPS Director, Internal Audit and Investigations Group (IAIG), presented the annual report on internal audit and investigations activities in 2022 (DP/OPS/2023/3); the UNOPS Special Adviser to the Executive Director on Programme and Policy, the management response.

14. A group of delegations thanked the OAI, OAIS and IAIG for work critical to strengthening trust. It expressed concern that conditions to guarantee the independence and effectiveness of the internal audit function, as defined by the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), were not met; underlined regular and unrestricted engagement of audit offices with the Executive Board; and suggested additional informal sessions. It proposed that OAI and OAIS should have language in their charters on free, unrestricted, confidential access to the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and any other entity with an oversight or governing function related to the organization, and for audit and advisory committees to report to the Executive Board. It emphasized improving the quality of reports to be more analytical, address structural issues, cover proactive investigations in high-risk areas, and include trends and follow-up.

15. Delegations noted that United Nations organizations should be examples for others in strengthening their oversight and independence in line with the International Professional Practices Framework of the IIA.

#### *UNDP*

16. A group of delegations acknowledged that the allocation of resources to the OAI amid decreasing core demonstrated the commitment of UNDP to a functioning audit office. It asked about responding to the 2022 IIA external quality assessment and further improving independence and oversight.

*UNFPA*

17. A group of delegations expressed concern about the 2023 JIU finding that the UNFPA Oversight Advisory Committee was not fully independent. Delegations commended UNFPA for good practices in inter-agency coordination, resource mobilization and critical process workflows, as well as significant progress in implementing audit recommendations compared to previous years.

*UNOPS*

18. A group of delegations expressed deep concern about the IAIC opinion that major improvements were needed in governance, risk management and control processes at UNOPS. Despite significant progress in 2022, more work could be done. A delegation noted the significant imbalance between contract and regular staff.

*Responses*

19. In response to delegations, the UNDP Officer in Charge, OAI, noted that a 2022 external quality assessment confirmed the office's independence in line with IIA standards. Elements to uphold independence are built into financial rules and regulations and the charter. The assessment made 10 recommendations; OAI was taking 27 corrective actions.

20. The UNDP Director, Bureau of Management, affirmed commitment to the continued independence of the OAI. She noted that the role of the Executive Board determined the role of the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee and would decide on any changes in its terms of reference. The inter-agency implementing partner management, coordination and focal point system allowed the United Nations Children's Fund, UNDP, UNFPA and the World Food Programme to share information and learning. A UNDP team focused on the effectiveness of implementing partner management.

21. The UNFPA Director ad interim, OAI, described the restructuring of OAI as a further step towards improving its effectiveness and ensuring it was fit for purpose. OAI reaffirmed its independence and, with reference to the follow-up to the assessment it had produced on its independence, noted that it now managed its budget independently, based on a total amount approved by the Executive Director. It was independent in its reporting and determined the scope of its work based on its own risk assessments. OAI passed an IIA external assessment, affirming its independence and compliance with the applicable standards for the public sector, including as these pertained to its reporting line to the executive head of the organization.

22. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) underlined that the regular and unrestricted access of OAI to the Executive Board was clearly stated in the policies approved by the Board; likewise, OAI already had unrestricted access to the JIU. He stressed that the Oversight Advisory Committee was an independent body that advised the Executive Director, in line with the UNFPA oversight policy approved by the Executive Board; this was consistent with the approach in other agencies. It provided independent reports and had unrestricted access to the Board.

23. The UNOPS Director, IAIG, described improvement in annual reporting and learning from the Executive Board about what may be missing. On independence, the IAIG had come far but organizational culture needed time to improve. UNOPS was working on this to achieve full transparency and guarantees that necessary sanctions would be applied.

24. The UNOPS Special Adviser to the Executive Director on Programme and Policy described including the independent audit and advisory function in the charter as a major improvement that would be tested in practice. The IAIG budget was now ringfenced. UNOPS remained fully aware of the need to establish trust and improve but had made a good start. Its comprehensive response plan included dedicated workstreams on compliance, controls, culture and ethics.

25. A member of the UNDP Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee said its terms did not include hiring OAI directors or follow-up on JIU recommendations and suggested having robust discussions with management on both issues. The chair of the UNFPA Oversight Advisory Committee noted that the OAC had been involved in the appointment of the OAI director; he noted that the OAC did indeed review and discuss UNFPA implementation of JIU recommendations; and stressed that the OAC was independent and that numerous safeguards are in place to ensure independence. He added that the OAC report made available to the Board was completely independent and not subject to management review or clearance. A member of the UNOPS Advisory and Audit Committee noted that the committee's remit included advising on the hiring of the IAIG director and

reviewing JIU audit issues and stressed its independence.

26. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/7 on the reports of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS on internal audit and investigation, and management responses.

#### **IV. Ethics**

27. The UNDP Director, Ethics Office, presented a report on the activities of the UNDP Ethics Office in 2022 (DP/2023/13); the UNDP Director, Bureau for Management Services, presented the management response. The UNFPA Ethics Adviser presented a report on the activities of the UNFPA Ethics Office in 2022 (DP/FPA/2023/3); the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) presented the management response. The UNOPS Director, Ethics Office, presented the report on the activities of the UNOPS Ethics Office in 2022 (DP/OPS/2023/4); and the UNOPS Special Adviser to the Executive Director on Programme and Policy presented the management response.

28. A group of delegations emphasized that a strong organizational culture, based on ethics and integrity, provided a robust foundation for improving operational effectiveness. It noted JIU standards for analysing and assessing the independence of ethics functions and stressed closely following JIU recommendations on ethics functions and the review of whistle-blower policies and practices (JIU/REP/2018/49). It spotlighted ethics training for a strong culture of ethics; applauded the joint UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS ethics awareness month; and appreciated strengthened resources for each ethics office. It welcomed the awareness and communication strategy of the UNDP Ethics Office, the inclusive ethics framework of the UNFPA Ethics Office and the establishment of the Integrity Group at UNFPA. Noting that 2022 was a volatile year for the UNOPS Ethics Office, it appreciated efforts to update the policy on protection against retaliation, develop an awareness-raising campaign and conduct an external review of its independence.

29. A delegation commended the code of ethics at UNDP as a model and asked about the frequency of project bidders including former UNDP contract holders. Other questions related to updates on the UNOPS “Protection against Retaliation” policy and how the office had begun addressing a “culture of fear”.

30. In response to delegations, the UNDP Director, Ethics Office described continuous work and improvement and a strong emphasis on the prevention of retaliation in following up on Executive Board decision 2022/16. The Office was increasing transparency and maintaining confidentiality. Resource management presented the greatest risk of conflicts of interest; processes were geared towards identifying issues there.

31. The UNFPA Ethics Adviser described identifying barriers and needs for different personnel to speak up as the most important thing the Ethics Office could do. UNFPA had embarked on extensive efforts to build a culture of integrity and safety for all. UNFPA was building an inclusive approach to ethics by identifying and responding to the cultural and intersectional barriers to speaking up faced by personnel.

32. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) underscored the need to create trust among staff that reports would be taken seriously and followed by action. This included improved communication encouraging staff to come forward.

33. The UNOPS Director, Ethics Office, described engaging human resources, audit and legal to holistically work on the overhaul of the speak-up, whistleblowing process in line with Executive Board decision 2022/24. On the “Protection against Retaliation” policy, improvements included introducing preliminary measures, a strengthened duty of care in cases of immediate risk to safety and security, and a victim-centred approach. Addressing the culture of fear entailed ongoing engagement with personnel on speaking up and upholding core values as well as strengthening the office’s independence.

34. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/8 on the reports of the ethics offices of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, and management responses.

#### **V. Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment**

35. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management), the UNDP Director, Bureau for Management Services, and the UNOPS Director, People and Culture Group, provided updates on protection against sexual

exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, in line with Executive Board decision 2020/11.

36. A group of delegations recognized the continued efforts and achievements in updating policies and procedures, providing training, establishing focal points, building capacity and fostering inter-agency cooperation. It appreciated efforts to standardize and share assessments of implementing partners. The group noted the use of Clear-Check and the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme and the potential for exploring how the two systems could reinforce each other. Acknowledging greater awareness among staff and more country offices equipped to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, it stressed continuing results-based reporting on impact and culture change under a simplified, clearer reporting framework.

37. The UNDP Director, Bureau for Management Services, took note of more systematically evaluating all initiatives to ensure they lead to desired impacts. UNDP was tracking how many people were reporting and those not reporting and why; 96 per cent of UNDP staff believed they should report acts committed by a colleague. A standardized reporting format would help collectively determine areas of further investment.

38. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) agreed that collective learning was the way forward, along with uniform reporting. The organization's new monitoring framework collected more granular information from country and regional business units to identify good practices and enhance understanding of challenges. The UNFPA Integrity Group ensured comprehensive, coherent, integrated responses across different units

39. The UNOPS Director, People and Culture Group, considered a victim-centred approach fundamental. A pending cultural assessment would explore reporting barriers and help build trust.

40. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/9 on the joint update on the protection against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

## UNDP segment

## VI. Annual report of the UNDP Administrator

41. In his statement ([available on the UNDP website](#)), the UNDP Administrator presented his annual report for 2022 (DP/2023/14 and DP/2023/14/Corr. 1). He described extreme challenges for millions of people trying to survive and facing deep insecurity. Amid disruption, what metrics would speak to a well-performing institution? He referred to diverse expectations as part of multilateralism – and a reason not to walk away but to lean forward. UNDP was central to the United Nations; its scale was measured by 21,000 staff in 170 countries, 3,500 to 4,000 projects at any given moment, hundreds of formalized partnerships and a record \$4.8 billion in delivery in 2022. But what did that mean against the debt crisis and climate costs measured in trillions? The current moment was one where means do not align with the size of the challenges. This was not an excuse for an institution in terms of performance. But it was a call to consider how to judge performance and to examine new metrics. UNDP would welcome working with the Board on these issues.

42. He asked delegations to consider measurements such as the amount of money spent or the number of people reached. With 8 billion people, what did it mean to reach 21 million people in 12 months? Further, how could investment be correlated with return? UNDP did extensive policy work that was complex to measure; impact often emerged over a decade through a multiplier effect of capacity, policy reform and institution-building. Integrated national financing frameworks could unlock hundreds of billions if not trillions in SDG investments, but it would be difficult to document the exact return from UNDP policy advice. On efficiency, 91 cents of every UNDP dollar went to programmes. Capitals could compare that figure with those of their own bilateral and other multilateral agencies; MOPAN could look at this more closely. UNDP achieved this ratio while meeting high standards for transparency, accountability and other criteria. Other metrics included UNDP being among the most broadly financed international organizations, with 100 donors.

43. The Administrator asked if trust could indicate performance. Programme countries invested \$1.2 billion through UNDP to advance national development objectives, a remarkable expression of trust. Donors entrusted UNDP with billions and rightly asked hard questions. UNDP remained the number one partner for countries working with the international vertical funds yet calls to reduce its role would diminish the right of countries to decide whom they trust. The Administrator also asked how to judge learning. Did many evaluations and audits capture that? At UNDP, the policy hubs, accelerator labs, portfolio approach, crisis offer, gender equality strategy

and efforts to address racism and a lack of inclusion all indicated an institution that had learned how to evolve. He described the moonshots as a chance to judge UNDP for what it had delivered and what it aspired to be. If UNDP – given its size and role in the United Nations system – did not aspire at scale, then the Board should ask if UNDP was performing as it should. The Strategic Plan should raise ambition and stretch UNDP to aim for the impossible because current circumstances required that.

44. Members of the Bureau of the Board thanked the Administrator for his comprehensive overview of a year of record delivery. They appreciated achievements in mobilizing \$4.8 billion and delivering 95 per cent of planned programmatic targets. They commended impactful partnerships with the United Nations development system and expanded collaboration with international financial institutions. Amid multiple challenges, they stressed that UNDP was now more important than ever, including arresting the digital divide, developing capacities and ensuring the equitable spread of innovation. UNDP backed new development finance options and could elaborate specific strategies moving forward. Board members highlighted de-risking measures to attract the private sector and the immediate reform of international financial institutions.

45. A group of delegations expressed gratitude for the efforts of UNDP at the heart of the United Nations development system. It stressed that: eradicating poverty in all forms and dimensions should remain the organization's fundamental goal; sufficient funding would be essential in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and UNDP should maintain its role in a strengthened development system. It reiterated the importance of development aid commitments and described insufficient resources as a source of concern when challenges were more complex with potentially irreversible effects on developing countries.

46. A group of delegations noted that climate, fiscal and monetary, energy and geopolitical crises were altering lives. Developing countries were constantly making choices between firefighting and development. Development organizations should help countries respond to these dilemmas in line with national priorities, which required agility and rapid responses, inter-agency cooperation and leveraging expertise to unlock new streams of finance. Necessary tools and guidance should be in place along with an optimal level of core resources for operational capacity. Despite funding shortfalls, UNDP had delivered, including through its crisis offer, climate promise, financing frameworks and digital solutions.

47. Delegations described UNDP as offering coherent, strategic, substantive support in line with national priorities. It remained important in helping countries adapt and respond to opportunities and challenges and was pivoting and performing in a demanding global environment. Delegations appreciated efforts to rebalance development systems and address structural issues and commended specific UNDP initiatives, including the FSO Safer project, and work more broadly on sustainable finance, digitalization, climate change, biodiversity and crisis. They welcomed the People 2030 initiative, Quantum and the portfolio approach to trigger transformative, scaled-up results. They lauded the Gender Equality Strategy, stressing intersectionality and rigorous monitoring. A number of delegations expressed concern about declining core resources.

48. Delegations described development as a dynamic process requiring joint responsibility. It should be at the centre of the international agenda; and it required new thinking and partnerships, aimed at inclusion and sustainability. Delegations from middle-income countries urged attention to innovative solutions to structural inequalities. There were calls for mainstreaming human security and taking a global South-sensitive approach to development. One delegate noted that UNDP offered hope in showing how the SDGs can still be achieved.

49. In response to delegations, the UNDP Administrator noted that many developing countries were struggling with financing; UNDP remained deeply committed to this issue. It was among the first organizations to raise alarms about the debt crisis. The Sustainable Finance Hub backed efforts in 140 countries to develop project pipelines to access financing, including from capital markets. It assisted countries to develop insurance markets; lower risk premiums on borrowing; and improve taxation, including through digitalization. The expansion of BioFin, the biodiversity finance initiative, from 40 to 138 countries was an example of going to scale.

50. The Administrator said UNDP had come far on gender equality, including with UN-Women, but needed to do more in making gender integral to what the organization did everywhere all the time. Every activity should ask about the relevance or risks to gender equality. UNDP continuously monitored performance through its gender equality seal.

51. The Administrator emphasized heavy investment in risk management and regular assessments. In 2022, efficiency gains related to the United Nations development system were \$24.4 million. The organization was

intensifying work with international financial institutions. While UNDP was continuously diversifying its funding, the core resources equation was reaching its limits; without investment, something would give way.

52. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/10 on the report of the UNDP Administrator on results for 2022 and progress on the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025.

## VII. Interactive dialogue on development pathways out of crisis

53. An integrated dialogue on “development pathways out of crisis” was led by the President of the Executive Board, the UNDP Administrator, the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam, the UNDP Director, Regional Bureau for Africa, and the UNDP Director, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

54. The President highlighted the complexity of responding to a crisis when development needs are urgent. The UNDP Administrator stressed that despite some extraordinary breakthroughs, development was retreating. The great partnership that led to the SDGs was being lost without the mindset to make interdependence succeed. He called for thinking forward and imagining the United Nations as a way to engage differently.

55. The Permanent Representative of Viet Nam described a 45-year partnership with UNDP that backed people-centred development. This helped move his country out of conflict and deep poverty. Viet Nam invested quickly and comprehensively in the response to COVID-19, including through digital health care and inclusive social protection; its economy in 2022 recovered to its highest growth rate in a decade. Multiple challenges remained but it was embarking on a new inclusive, green development phase. The UNDP Director, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, offered follow-up remarks.

56. The Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo described putting people first through a comprehensive national investment in community development. Based on aspirations expressed by citizens, the programme sought to close multiple development deficits in 145 territories, including 54 supported by UNDP. It had begun to provide power, water, schools, roads and other essentials, financed by a \$1.6 billion package that combined domestic and international resources, including through the Special Drawing Rights of the International Monetary Fund. The UNDP Director, Regional Bureau for Africa, offered follow-up remarks.

57. Delegations welcomed the dialogue to learn from each other. With many populations still completely untouched by development, they stressed much work ahead. Partnerships were needed more than ever but should be adjusted and built on trust and respect. They called for boosting the scale and quality of development; taking more regional and local measures, not just national ones; grappling with the classic development model, which was flawed and resulted in high costs borne by all societies; kindling a mindset of the undeniability of interdependence; pursuing digitalization and innovation for everyone; and bringing the private sector to the table.

58. Delegations underlined improving the response to crisis through development and queried whether the international community was fit for purpose and if donors were providing the right support. Development and security policies should build on participation and inclusiveness, and seek lasting conditions for peace and security, well-being and care for entire societies. One delegation noted the mobilization around COVID-19 and suggested a similar drive for the SDGs. Delegations called for reorienting development programmes to move towards productive economies, respect for nature and a green transition as imperatives, not options; consider multiplier effects that come, for example, from green industry and financial inclusion; and foster social equity, gender equality and inclusive decision-making. Facing structural and emerging challenges would require State institutional strengthening, including robust monitoring and statistical systems; global solidarity was key.

59. In response to delegations, the President urged them to bring ideas and challenges to the SDG Summit and the Summit of the Future, including countries considered “developed” that face major development challenges in moving towards sustainable lifestyles. If they do not take this path, it would be equivalent to saying that everyone could keep pumping fossil fuels; the whole world would fall over the edge. Discussion of shared dilemmas could help find strong systemic solutions at scale. He called for looking at how UNDP and the United Nations system can do even more, and what countries need to do with and for them.

60. The UNDP Administrator appreciated many positive remarks about UNDP. He stressed it was time to reset the logic of the debate. The world still invested billions in defending national security, for instance, even as diverging development pathways posed the greatest threat. More complex, systemic solutions could be designed;

development models were flawed but could evolve; many people were doing many things right. The issue was not a lack of ideas but a lack of confidence in one another. In talking about the future, the SDGs should be at the core. Leading by example would create confidence in cooperation and investment in one another to move to a different trajectory.

## VIII. Gender equality at UNDP

61. The UNDP Associate Administrator introduced the item, and the UNDP Director, Bureau for Programme and Policy Support, presented the annual report on the implementation of the UNDP gender equality strategy, 2022-2025 (DP/2023/15).

62. A group of delegations noted that gender equality was under threat from multiple crises and rollbacks on women's and girls' rights. UNDP had a critical role in driving momentum to achieve gender equality. It welcomed the successful implementation of the cross-cutting, innovative approach in the gender equality strategy, including efforts to leverage artificial intelligence; appreciated support for women leaders, including peacebuilders and parliamentarians; and stressed the empowerment and meaningful inclusion of marginalized women, including women marginalized based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It welcomed catalytic work on financing for gender equality and encouraged collaboration on gender equality and gender mainstreaming across the United Nations.

63. Delegations emphasized that changing gender stereotypes would be essential in achieving the SDGs. They welcomed inclusive processes, such as quotas, and highlighted sharing mediation and conflict expertise with women mediator networks. They underscored social protection and care systems for economic justice and asked if the multidimensional poverty index would capture specific vulnerable groups. They recognized work on preventing gender-based violence under the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative, appreciated UNDP interactions with civil society, and endorsed investment in preparing UNDP officials to drive deep changes and apply gender policy across the board.

64. In response to delegations, the UNDP Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, said it planned to expand an artificial intelligence-based pilot on misinformation and backlash to additional countries and develop a better early warning system to understand trends and bolster prevention and response measures. These efforts were funded by core resources that allowed UNDP to keep abreast of rapid changes. UNDP was finalizing guidance on support for LGBTQI+ persons in political and electoral processes. It intended to scale up work on financing for gender equality through the integrated national financing frameworks, the SDG standards and investor maps, and the use of the gender seal certification with ministries of finance and central banks. UNDP was committed to working with UN-Women. With many actors on gender equality, UNDP had a comparative advantage in focusing on systems, institutions and finance.

65. The UNDP Director, Gender Team, said the guidance on LGBTQI+ would draw on practical examples of what works in diverse countries; the next stage would be developing a global project to address data gaps and other barriers in reaching excluded women. UNDP was part of an inter-agency task force developing guidance on intersectionality so that United Nations organizations apply a common lens. The multidimensional poverty index would capture vulnerable groups of women with indicators on time poverty, education, housing, sexual and reproductive health, access to finance, violence and political participation.

66. The Executive Board took note of the annual report on the implementation of the UNDP gender equality strategy, 2022-2025 (DP/2023/15).

## IX. UNDP country programmes and related matters

67. The UNDP Associate Administrator presented the country programme document for Chile. The UNDP Regional Director, Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, provided details from a regional perspective.

68. A delegation described the country programme document as resulting from a joint reflection aimed at addressing national and international challenges in sustainable development. The process crystallized the valuable contribution of UNDP and offered a model of collaboration that could be replicated.

69. In response to the delegation, the UNDP Regional Director, Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, thanked the Government of Chile for its trust and collaboration.

70. The Executive Board approved, in accordance with its decision 2014/7, the country programme document for Chile (DP/DCP/CHL/6).

## X. Evaluation

71. The Director, ad interim, Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) introduced the annual report on evaluation for 2022 (DP/2023/16), the evaluation of support to social protection (DP/2023/17) and the evaluation of support to access to justice (DP/2023/19). The UNDP Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, provided the management commentaries to the annual report on evaluation for 2022 and the management response to the evaluation of support to social protection (DP/2023/18). The UNDP Director, Crisis Bureau, provided the management response to the evaluation of support to access to justice (DP/2023/20).

### *Annual report on evaluation, 2022*

72. Delegations commended the IEO for improving the quality of decentralized evaluations and being innovative in its publications. They encouraged the annual report to better explain how the IEO was performing according to plan, good evaluation practices, and evaluation coverage geographically and thematically compared to the budget. They noted that financial resources aligned with evaluation policy targets.

73. In response to delegations, the IEO Director ad interim agreed to provide more details on geographical coverage in the annual report, noting that reporting reflected the country programme document cycle. The Evaluation Resource Centre provided mapping based on geography. He recognized UNDP management's commitment to funding the IEO, which received a significant increase in 2022 despite constrained core resources. Fielding senior regional advisers had begun as part of creating a global evaluation platform.

74. The UNDP Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, appreciated support for decentralized evaluation. The UNDP Chief, Effectiveness Group, indicated a 33 per cent increase in investment in decentralized evaluation over 2021.

### *Evaluation of support to social protection*

75. A group of delegations underlined how a multisectoral approach, large field presence and links to six signature solutions gave UNDP a comparative advantage in social protection. This should complement the specific mandates and technical capabilities of specialized agencies. The group expressed concern about some shortcomings. UNDP should: avoid fragmented, small-scale projects; strengthen support to low-income and least-developed countries; strengthen gender-responsive social protection; and further strengthen and fine-tune partnerships, based on comparative advantages. The group endorsed the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions and welcomed more details on progress and added value.

76. In response to delegations, the UNDP Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, agreed that avoiding fragmentation was critical. Coverage of 4 billion people without social protection would require all stakeholders. Social protection had multiple components; UNDP could position itself to help these work together, in coordination with other partners. Even the Global Accelerator could not address the scale of the problem alone; solutions would have to emerge at the national level, backed by international partnerships. With constraints on fiscal space in most developing countries, the integrated national financing frameworks could help develop a multistakeholder approach to social protection.

77. A UNDP Policy Specialist said that countries had struggled to link integrated policies with financing. UNDP had developed guidance on employment and social protection in integrated national financing frameworks.

### *Evaluation of support to access to justice*

78. A delegation stressed that the rule of law was critical to sustainable development, yet its importance had been underestimated. He urged UNDP to improve political economy analysis, increase focus on traditional mechanisms of justice, and better integrate the justice sector and other programmes to ensure a holistic approach.

79. In response to the delegation, the IEO Director ad interim affirmed that recognizing the widening gap in access to justice was important.

80. The UNDP Director, Crisis Bureau, noted that the United Nations had approved a new vision for the rule of law. Revamping coordination would enhance impacts on the ground. While continuous support was central to progress, resources had declined.

81. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/11 on UNDP evaluation.

## **XI. United Nations Capital Development Fund**

82. The UNDP Associate Administrator introduced the item and the Officer in Charge, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), and UNCDF Deputy Executive Secretary presented the report on results achieved by UNCDF in 2022 (DP/2023/22).

83. Members of the Bureau of the Board commended UNCDF for its role in innovative financial solutions, digital and financial inclusion, policies and regulations, and support for local finance mechanisms. They recognized persistent challenges in attracting private sector investment for the SDGs, especially in the least developed countries, and encouraged UNCDF to continue supporting project pipelines, enabling environments and financial instruments. They highlighted several considerations: address the lack of information on internal review processes by providing the Board with an update in the form of a briefing at the earliest opportunity; act urgently to close the serious gender parity gap in senior management; and expand cooperation with other United Nations entities and external stakeholders to amplify catalytic impacts. They expressed concern about declining core resources, to only 8 per cent of total revenue, noting this jeopardized effective implementation of the Strategic Framework, the presence of UNCDF in all 46 least developed countries, innovative financial solutions and required oversight. They urged Member States to address the decline in core resources.

84. A group of delegations highlighted the contributions of UNCDF to inclusive and sustainable economic transformation in the least developed countries, in line with the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2022-2031. UNCDF played a critical role in digitalization, local infrastructure investment and financing of small and medium-size enterprises. It had an expanding role in catalytic financing, leveraging \$600 million for sustainable development investment in 2022. The group appealed to the international community to fulfil its commitments to core resources.

85. A group of delegations affirmed the unique value of UNCDF in scaling up digital and financial products and services, investing in climate-resilient infrastructure, generating jobs and de-risking investments, among other contributions. It requested UNCDF to address its concern that almost 70 per cent of senior leadership positions were outside the least developed countries. It urged UNCDF to leverage its role as a catalytic financing entity to unlock financing for the Doha Programme of Action.

86. A group of countries requested an earlier submission of the integrated results and resources matrix and encouraged analysis of milestones in the 2023 report. It congratulated UNCDF on its high-quality evaluations, reminding Member States that such tasks depend on core funding. While recognizing that the organization's portfolio of projects inherently implied a higher risk, it highlighted concern with a non-performing loan ratio of 26 per cent and endorsed the development of an investment strategy to specify the UNCDF risk appetite. The group noted some impatience in waiting for the results of the investigation of the Executive Secretary's administrative leave in 2022 and the OAI performance audit of UNCDF. It noted that any discussion on keeping UNCDF fit for purpose depended on stability in the senior management team. It concluded that it was more than ever convinced of the organization's mandate in mobilizing finance and supporting local financial markets and systems in the least developed countries.

87. Delegations stressed that UNCDF was well placed to provide concrete solutions to mobilize private SDG finance, suggesting that the United Nations provide more of this kind of assistance. They highlighted the activities of the Last Mile Finance Trust Fund and welcomed increased engagement in biodiversity finance and sustainable food systems.

88. In response to delegations, the UNCDF Officer in Charge stated that the organization was committed to continually earning the trust of partner countries and donors. UNCDF was finalizing a gender strategy to close the institutional gender parity gap and improve gender equality outcomes in investments and programming. Declining core resources limited the capacity for necessary oversight; evaluations had very small budgets. He confirmed continued cooperation with United Nations and external shareholders; pledged to increase efforts in

line with the Doha Programme of Action; agreed that staff should be closer to least-developed countries; and affirmed the value of an investment strategy. On non-performing loans, he clarified that the 26 per cent reflected loan impairment, which was a precautionary measure to keep funds in reserve if loans do not perform. He highlighted that loans that had been impaired were not necessarily written off; no loans had been written off to date. He noted the potential to further develop innovative guarantee instruments under the Last Mile Trust Fund.

89. The UNDP Associate Administrator said that the investigation process of the Executive Secretary was ongoing. To protect the integrity of the process, the Board would be informed upon completion. She shared the concern of many delegations about the decline in core resources since UNCDF had been very innovative and deserved broad support.

90. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/12 on the report on results achieved by UNCDF in 2021.

## **XII. United Nations Volunteers**

91. The UNDP Associate Administrator introduced the item and the Executive Coordinator, United Nations Volunteers (UNV), presented UNV: annual report of the Administrator (DP/2023/23).

92. Members of the Bureau of the Board acknowledged the unique role of UNV as a system-wide service provider. The growing number of increasingly diverse volunteers testified to its resonance with people. They noted a redoubled focus on emergency action in 2022; the strategic use of the Special Voluntary Fund allowing swift, targeted deployments; and effective adaptation to an evolving global context. Board members commended commitment to gender parity; encouraged UNV to achieve gender parity across all regions, volunteer categories and deployments with United Nations partners; and urged continued support for UNV, including through the Special Voluntary Fund.

93. A group of delegations commended UNV for its demonstrated ability to respond to crises and build resilient communities. From a duty of care perspective, it looked forward to UNV continuing to review which locations are suitable for young volunteers and other volunteer groups with distinct needs. It referred to UNV as a role model for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. By streamlining processes and developing advanced digital solutions, UNV had made important progress in increasing its organizational efficiency, results that could be further enhanced. The group strongly encouraged UNV to partner with UN country teams to increase its capacity to integrate volunteerism into national strategies and development plans.

94. Delegations commended UNV as an increasingly relevant partner for United Nations country and humanitarian teams. They spotlighted that 84 per cent of volunteers now come from the global South; welcomed the marked increase of women volunteers in Africa, which until 2022 was the only remaining region not to have reached gender parity; and commended initiatives led by and empowering youth volunteers. They endorsed integrating volunteerism within the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks.

95. The UNV Executive Coordinator highlighted the importance of achieving gender parity in all regions and United Nations entities and described a drive to achieve gender balance in peacekeeping and special political missions, where the ratio of female volunteers in larger operations increased from 13 per cent in 2018 to 40 per cent in 2022. He thanked countries for enabling opportunities for volunteers with disabilities and stressed a rise in United Nations entities funding them. UNV would focus on efficiency and effectiveness measures and on upholding the duty of care for young volunteers in close collaboration with hosting United Nations entities. He underlined continued commitment to promoting volunteerism as a lifecycle phenomenon and powerful means of implementing of the 2030 Agenda per the strategic guidance of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (A/RES/75/233).

96. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/13 on United Nations Volunteers: annual report of the Administrator.

## UNFPA segment

### XIII. Statement by the UNFPA Executive Director and annual report

97. In her opening remarks ([available on the UNFPA website](#)), the UNFPA Executive Director described how COVID-19 halted decades of progress in preventing maternal deaths. However, the UNFPA drive to address the global shortage of almost a million midwives could help prevent two-thirds of maternal and newborn deaths, an investment the world cannot afford to miss. With sexual and reproductive health and rights facing intense political pushback, she urged Member States and all partners to seize opportunities for dialogue and consensus, including during the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD30). She pointed to many achievements while stressing that in too many places, sustainable development was endangered, and rights were in retreat. UNFPA remained focused on its normative work and targeting multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination. It was scaling up innovations and investing in women innovators. It continued to endeavour to meet the highest standards of transparency, accountability and oversight. She acknowledged that UNFPA needed to remain adaptive and remain open, as always, to improvement. In this regard, UNFPA welcomed the Joint Inspection Unit review of management and administration in UNFPA.

98. Leading up to ICPD30, the Executive Director said that UNFPA was brokering diverse partnerships and encouraged Member States to support the review through national consultations, regional population conferences and three global dialogues on youth, demographic diversity and the impact of technology. In humanitarian action, in many cases, without UNFPA, no one would spotlight the dire plight of women and girls or focus on their rights and choices. Needs were far outstripping resources, requiring everyone to work differently and focus on prevention and resilience. She welcomed increased humanitarian funding and appealed for continued core and more flexible other resources underlining that investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights offer huge benefits for people, economies and societies. UNFPA had made efforts to leverage significantly broader financing across other actors and financing instruments.

99. The UNFPA Regional Director for East and Southern Africa noted that the top priorities in the region were harnessing the demographic dividend and delivering on the commitments of the ICPD. A focus on adolescents and youth was imperative to ensure they become healthy, empowered and productive. UNFPA was also strengthening its institutional capacity to ensure health and social workers are able to plan, deliver and monitor quality SRHR services in emergencies.

100. Members of the Bureau commended UNFPA for the achievements on most strategic plan outcomes and urged that the organization focus on the outcomes with slower progress. Continued efforts to accelerate programmes tailored to local circumstances were especially important in helping countries reduce maternal mortality. Board members expressed concern about the growing humanitarian caseload and urged further support for UNFPA since it was often the only agency tackling gender-based violence and ensuring women can give birth safely. UNFPA continued to take a leading role in population and sustainable development by harnessing the power of data and by investing in adolescents and youth, efforts key to the SDGs. Board members commended the organization's highest income on record and encouraged Member States to meet core resource commitments. They appreciated UNFPA management's dedication to strengthening oversight and to United Nations reform.

101. A group of delegations acknowledged the commendable efforts in ending preventable maternal deaths, unmet need for family planning, and ending violence against women and girls and all harmful practices, thus accelerating progress towards the SDGs. They urged UNFPA to continue supporting developing countries according to their national needs, context and priorities. They welcomed regional dialogues to promote cooperation among governments; acknowledged the importance of developing strategic partnerships with international financial institutions; and stressed leveraging data, technology and digitalization in providing services to local communities. Ongoing efforts on population dynamics, gender equality and youth empowerment played vital roles in expediting the SDGs.

102. A group of delegations highlighted how UNFPA work was more needed than ever, with women and girls hit hardest by multiple crises, and sexual and reproductive health and rights challenged globally. Women should be empowered and seated at the table to find sustainable solutions to conflicts, poverty and health coverage. UNFPA needed to continue to be agile, fully funded and in a position to substantially accelerate work to achieve its transformative results. The group drew attention to strengthening UNFPA in addressing harmful gender and social

norms, scaling up its humanitarian response capacity, and, through ICPD30, intensifying collective efforts to make sexual and reproductive health and rights a reality for every girl and woman.

103. Delegations appreciated the clear focus on human rights and development; noted that population and gender equality are priorities in national socioeconomic development; and expressed concern about regression in maternal health. While humanitarian assistance had expanded, funding for population and development should be maintained towards universal access to services and implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. Further technical assistance and capacity-building could support more resilient national health systems; the integration of sexual and reproductive health in universal health coverage was essential. Delegations highlighted the continued response to HIV; strengthened supply chain management and ‘last mile’ assurance; and comprehensive sexuality education, as well as efforts to end child and early marriage,

104. Delegations welcomed the growing work on population data and dynamics, in line with demographic shifts, and how UNFPA was shaping a perspective on demographic change, not as a threat, but as an opportunity for a better future. They encouraged UNFPA to bring megatrends, such as demographic transformation and climate change, into ICPD30 discussions. They appreciated the determination to advance the dialogue on sexual and reproductive rights, human rights and gender equality, and noted that improved collection of population data can help oppose politicization and mitigate the negative impacts of disparate population trends. Delegations expressed concern about dependency on a few donors and suggested that UNFPA strengthen partnerships with multilateral financial institutions and the private sector.

105. In response, the UNFPA Executive Director noted that despite the high ambitions, the past year posed challenges. UNFPA stressed priorities such as improving systems, partnering better with the World Health Organization and working with communities to reduce maternal mortality. It remained focused on a rights-based approach and worked with governments, based on national ownership, local laws and culture, in looking at how to achieve scale. The Executive Director underscored UNFPA efforts to adapt to a fast-changing world; develop new tools and guidance to monitor improved humanitarian responses; work to plan ahead to meet human needs; and increase efforts to ensure better vulnerability assessments, logistics and engagement with a range of humanitarian and development players.

106. She noted that ICPD30 would offer a chance to refocus, build consensus and accelerate longstanding commitments to an agenda endorsed by Member States. It was important to build new alliances and leverage the convening power of UNFPA. She stressed three objectives for ICPD30: claim and celebrate victories; reduce polarization and misinformation; and support health and gender equality as paramount to all SDGs. UNFPA was focused on leaving no one behind, including through using data, with technology improving capacities to locate and reach people even in crises. She stressed the importance of ongoing work to inform young people about human sexuality given that information was so protective. She underlined the relevance of UNFPA in diverse contexts, demonstrated in part by work on ageing, low fertility and demographic resilience. UNFPA was diversifying funding with attention to diverse streams of development finance, including domestic resources.

107. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) noted the Humanitarian Response Division had been reorganized as part of the implementation of all 12 recommendations from a 2020 evaluation, and UNFPA had created a global emergency response team to provide immediate support in emergencies.

108. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Programme) highlighted the Sahel Women’s Empowerment and Demographic Dividend initiative, a partnership with the World Bank to provide health services and economic empowerment.

109. The UNFPA Director, Policy and Strategy Division, indicated that two outputs were partially achieved: (a) gender and social norms, and (b) population change and data. UNFPA country offices and partners faced several challenges in addressing harmful gender and social norms due to such factors as increased humanitarian and fragile situations; the pushback from some stakeholders; inadequate resources; and the COVID-19 pandemic.

110. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/14 on UNFPA: Annual report of the Executive Director.

*Joint Inspection Unit report*

111. The Vice Chair, JIU, presented the review of management and administration in the United Nations Population Fund (JIU/REP/2023/1). The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director presented the management response to the report (DP/FPA/2023/CRP.4).

112. A group of delegations noted the review's focus was useful for the pending cross-agency JIU review. They reemphasized that a separate Board for UNFPA might prove inefficient and duplicative and that Executive Board must ensure sufficient time to provide substantive guidance. They acknowledged the explanation of rules binding the Oversight Advisory Committee, welcomed the new human resources management strategy and the timely recruitment and deployment, noted that regional office locations and responsibilities could more closely align with those of other United Nations entities, and supported reporting on risks, costs and functionality issues in the information and communications technology transformation project.

113. In response, the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) noted that UNFPA was reviewing the 21 informal recommendations and would report on how it was responding to them in the context of the next Executive Director's annual report to the Board.

114. The Vice Chair, JIU, stressed the role of the Executive Board in determining the way forward on those recommendations addressed to the Board.

## **XIV. Interactive dialogue on achieving demographic resilience in a world of 8 billion**

115. An interactive dialogue on "achieving demographic resilience in a world of 8 billion" involved the President of the Executive Board; the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations; the UNFPA Executive Director; the UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa, and a demographic expert and professor from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

116. The President of the Executive Board stated that a population of 8 billion should be celebrated as evidence of advances in health, peace and economy around the world. Demography was an opportunity, not a threat to culture, power or economic prospects. It could help drive SDG achievement.

117. The UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa spoke about the region's potential demographic dividend and accelerated policies for youth. While crises complicated these efforts; some glimmers of hope came from putting women and girls at the centre of development, such as through the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend programme, built on a novel combination of World Bank loans and grants with social objectives. She noted the work with young people to mitigate crises and foster productive activities. She contested the notion that women in the region had too many children and were contributing to climate change, stressing they used minimal resources compared to people in wealthier countries.

118. The Permanent Representative of Bulgaria described the population decline in her country, which had led to a national strategy for demographic development, aimed at economic and social incentives to increase birth rates, better reproductive health and improved general health for active longer lives. Bulgaria had among the most generous maternity leaves. More could be done to ensure every person can develop their potential and in exploring internal and external migration policies, including through collaboration with other regions. She stressed that in all countries, people are the greatest source of capital.

119. The expert from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine described demography as a globally important issue, with links to many other concerns. A moment of remarkable transition offered opportunities to maximize human capital. As populations aged, older people could make productive contributions, for instance. High-quality demographic data were important to understand changing trends, including in fertility intentions, since fertility levels do not reflect individual goals. She stressed focusing on individuals because they drive macro-trends, with ample room to improve reproductive health and address workforce practices hindering childbearing. Where policy stressed health and well-being, not targets, countries could adapt successfully to future trends.

120. The UNFPA Executive Director noted that population was among the top trends shaping the world. Many fears and misconceptions persisted; however, UNFPA insisted on rejecting these and looking at the facts and demographic trends in light of the need to promote rights and choices. The world had never had 8 billion people and with it such widely diverging patterns of high and low fertility. A spirit of cooperation could bring new ideas to the table; there were many common solutions.

121. Delegations noted that every country will experience demographic change; understanding the trends and adopting policies grounded in human rights and gender equality would bring countries closer to sustainable

development. In pursuing demographic resilience, they underlined diversity and tailored approaches; the quality of lives and well-being; the role of education; and more population data collection and analysis. High-quality disaggregated population data should capture diverse experiences and drive more inclusive solutions.

122. Delegations noted that reproductive health and rights helped people to make decisions that benefit themselves and their families, and broader economies. Inflexible working hours, limited childcare services, and inadequate sexual and reproductive health care limit choices for work and family. They stressed investing in young people and improving the participation of elderly people, who were often ignored. Appreciating a positive emphasis on ageing, they asked about the scope for intergenerational solidarity.

123. Delegations stated that demographic challenges and opportunities called for strengthened multilateralism and ICPD implementation, recognizing the central role of the SDGs. ICPD30 could spotlight the continued relevance of the ICPD vision through the lens of youth, gender equality and leaving no one behind, anchoring demographic resilience in the needs, rights and aspirations of individuals.

124. A representative of the International Organization for Migration said that migration formed part of demographic resilience and more work was needed to understand its complexity. He highlighted the international remittances that migrants send home, contributing to development in many countries.

## **XV. Evaluation**

125. The UNFPA Director, Evaluation Office, introduced, in separate presentations, the annual report on the UNFPA evaluation function, 2022 (DP/FPA/2023/5), the formative evaluation of UNFPA support to population dynamics and data (DP/FPA/2023/CRP.1) and the formative evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth (DP/FPA/2023/CRP.2). Similarly, the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Programme) presented the management commentaries to the annual report on the UNFPA evaluation function (DP/FPA/2023/CRP.5), as well as the management response to the evaluation on population dynamics and data (DP/FPA/2023/CRP.7) and the management response to the evaluation on adolescents and youth (DP/FPA/2023/CRP.8).

126. On the annual report on the session on the evaluation function, a group of delegations welcomed UNFPA management's continued commitment to a strong evaluation function and lauded the excellent 2022 performance. The delegations appreciated the active support of the reform agenda and the involvement of youth in evaluations. While the decentralized evaluation system had been strengthened, further improvements were needed. It requested an assessment of the division of labour and staffing, noted the overall evaluation budget remains below guidelines and suggested adapting the funding target. It appreciated UNFPA management's continued commitment to providing the financial and human resources needed to support the evaluation function and commended the appropriate timing of the Independent Peer Review of the UNFPA Evaluation Function.

127. In response, the UNFPA Director, Evaluation Office, noted that different roles in the evaluation function were defined in the evaluation policy but that there was room to further define these. About half of the country offices had dedicated monitoring and evaluation specialists; the rest had monitoring and evaluation focal points. The peer review report had been submitted for a management response, which would be followed by a consultative process to revise the policy.

128. The Deputy Executive Director (Programme) said that the funding target could be adapted and considered in the policy revision. She noted that expenditure on evaluation tripled from 2014 to 2022 to its highest level ever. While the ratio to total expenditure was below the agreed level, in terms of economies of scale, as the income of the organization grows, the proportion of spending on evaluation will conversely decrease, even with nominal growth and additional investments. In addition, core resources expenditure on evaluation was at the upper bounds of the standard, however. She took note of the suggestion of a future evaluation of the data portal and stated that the integration of strategies in engaging with youth should also include the strategy on disabilities.

129. On the population data evaluation, one delegation highlighted the continued efforts of UNFPA to improve the evaluation capacity in humanitarian settings. It welcomed the clear messaging on the role of population data and the creation of the population data thematic fund and suggested an evaluation of the population data portal. It also encouraged UNFPA to examine the feminization of aging.

130. On the adolescents and youth evaluation, a delegation underscored that considering youth in the ICPD30 process, seeking high-impact practices for girls and young women, ensuring youth programming was gender

transformative and rights-based, and as was taking an intersectional lens to youth engagement, linking strategies on gender, youth, leaving no one behind and the UNFPA strategic plan. It expressed the need to address social and cultural norms that continued to block access to vital services.

131. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/15 on UNFPA evaluation.

## **XVI. UNFPA country programmes and related matters**

132. After the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Programme) introduced the UNFPA country programme extensions, the Executive Board took note, in accordance with its decision 2014/7, of the first one-year extension of the country programme for Namibia (DP/FPA/2023/7) and approved the fourth extension of the country programme for Libya (DP/FPA/2023/7).

### **UNOPS segment**

## **XVII. Statement by the UNOPS Executive Director and annual report**

133. In his opening address ([available on the UNOPS website](#)), the UNOPS Executive Director said that, in 2022, UNOPS responded to significant management failures and delivered meaningful results. Wide-ranging reforms included a strategic reset at the highest level, guided by a comprehensive response plan. UNOPS delivered over 900 projects worth \$3.5 billion in more than 80 countries, including supporting crisis and conflict response, climate action, good health and well-being, and efforts to fight inequalities.

134. He stressed that the focus on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs was in line with the restated Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. He described an implementation gap that UNOPS can help to bridge, with financing for development a key part of the challenge. While this was a sensitive subject, UNOPS could support partners on the demand side of financing through technical assistance and capacity-building on project preparation, tenders, awards and project management, and in bridging gaps between governments and infrastructure financiers to accelerate the implementation of infrastructure projects for sustainable, resilient, inclusive development. UNOPS would not engage in impact investments using its reserves.

135. He indicated that a key lesson from the reform journey had been the urgent need to rebuild trust. Elements included: reviewing the contractual model, strengthening the culture of ethics and the independence of the ethics function, and ensuring the independence and sufficient capacity of oversight functions. UNOPS was fully committed to refunding the \$124 million in excess reserves as of 31 December 2021; it continued engaging with many partners on this issue. By 26 June 2023, UNOPS was on track to have transferred \$27.4 million to 43 partners and to contact 185 partners representing 97 per cent of total funds. It was committed to transparent cost recovery and net-zero revenue.

136. Members of the Bureau of the Board reaffirmed the commitment of UNOPS to its crucial mandate of infrastructure, procurement and project management, and its critical role in crisis response. Neither the United Nations nor UNOPS could afford more failures like the sustainable investments in infrastructure and innovation (S3I) initiative. They highlighted the prompt implementation of the comprehensive response plan, including the online monitoring tool. They appreciated the emphasis on expanded implementation capacity in areas of expertise to accelerate the SDGs, and support for the ethics office and internal audit to foster integrity, transparency and accountability. Critical priorities were updating the cost recovery model towards net-zero revenue, distributing excess reserves, and reporting on the ongoing process of recovering S3I funds and accountability for perpetrators. Monthly updates on the implementation of the comprehensive response plan and the distribution of excess reserves should continue.

137. A group of delegations appreciated crucial UNOPS projects in many nations and welcomed a renewed focus on the implementation capacity of partners to achieve the SDGs. It commended UNOPS for addressing specific needs in the least developed and landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and countries in fragile situations. A decline in procurement from local suppliers was a concern; UNOPS should prioritize including smaller enterprises and activities enhancing local capacity. It requested attention to the specific needs of middle-income countries, and supported efforts to bridge the implementation gap in financing for development,

including through technical assistance and capacity-building related to project management services. The group emphasized geographic diversity in senior management and a plan for the transition from contractor to staff positions.

138. A group of delegations described reform as a collective effort and requested the continuation of monthly update briefings. It appreciated the restated Strategic Plan with its focus on the original mandate of providing infrastructure, procurement and project management services. It requested more clarity on programmes and projects that UNOPS would not accept and on how UNOPS would sustain its focus on a non-programmatic, demand-driven mandate. The return to net-zero revenue was a shared goal; the cost recovery model must enable this; excess reserves need to be redistributed until the net-zero system was fully effective; and redistribution should be based on the principle of proportionality.

139. Delegates called for developing a sustainable, concrete plan to tackle low personnel engagement and internal trust; urged a cautionary approach in expanding humanitarian and peacebuilding-related activities; and noted the new strategy for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming.

140. In response to delegations, the UNOPS Executive Director clarified that UNOPS would follow its Strategic Plan and remain accountable to the Board. UNOPS would not become a programmatic agency but would strive to meet real demands from Member States to fill implementation gaps. It had technical expertise and skills very relevant to project design, project management and portfolio management. Being demand-driven was the core mandate. He was not proposing a new mandate but rather to position and channel technical capacity and expertise to meet the demands of Member States and UNOPS clients and beneficiaries in relation to financing for sustainable development. This could involve acting on Member State requests to assist them in creating an enabling environment for projects; providing technical assistance and capacity-building; and supporting project selection, efficient and sustainable procurement, infrastructure planning and project management. A process of balancing staff contracts had started along with reviews of human resources processes and organizational culture. Refocusing UNOPS on the SDGs in parallel with a new results framework would provide the Board with more details on impact. The Strategic Plan addressed humanitarian support in a balanced manner and reflected the extensive work of UNOPS in fragile and conflict-affected States.

*Independent review of the UNOPS ethics function to ensure the independence and impartiality of its work*

141. The Head of the Ethics Office of the International Monetary Fund and the Head of the Ethics Office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization presented findings from an independent review of the UNOPS ethics function to ensure the independence and impartiality of its work. Their intervention was followed by a response from the UNOPS Director, Ethics Office, and a management response from the UNOPS Executive Director.

142. Delegations expressed concern based on the independent review and requested more details on attempts to rectify the independence of the office.

143. In response, the UNOPS Director, Ethics Office, stated that many recommendations had already been implemented but some are more complex and ongoing. The UNOPS Executive Director stated that all needed support was being provided to the Ethics Office to ensure it implemented the report.

144. The Executive Board adopted decision 2023/16 on the early midterm review of the UNOPS strategic plan, 2022-2025, including the annual report of the Executive Director for 2022; UNOPS strategic plan, 2022-2025, restated; decision 2023/17 on the comprehensive response plan in response to the recommendations of the two independent third-party reviews of UNOPS; and decision 2023/18 on UNOPS distribution to paying entities, including those of the United Nations system, of excess reserves accumulated after 31 December 2021.