



28 April 2020

INFORMATION NOTE

Update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system

I. Introduction

The present note provides a further update on UNFPA engagement in the repositioning of the United Nations development system (UNDS), complementing the previous notes to the Executive Board, as reform measures are rolled out fully and implemented at the country and regional level. In light of the United Nations system-wide response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this note also takes stock of the coordination between UNFPA country offices and the new resident coordinator (RC) system and United Nations country teams (UNCT).

II. UNFPA and the COVID-19 response

The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes the largest global public health crisis in a century, with daunting health, humanitarian, and socioeconomic challenges. The UNFPA [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) Pandemic Global Response Plan](#) is fully aligned with and is part of the UN Secretary-General's three-step plan to respond to COVID-19 and complements the WHO COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. UNFPA is part of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan and supports countries affected by humanitarian crises and regional refugee response plans to address COVID-19.

Under the overall leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General, UNFPA co-led, together with WHO, the drafting of the health pillar of the UNDS Response Framework focused on socio-economic impact of the crisis. The framework is a practical offer and value proposition of the UNDS to the countries in support of their socio-economic response and recovery efforts. It draws on the expertise of the entire UNDS, informed by the analysis on COVID-19, and guided by the broader Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNFPA has also been a main contributor to the social protection, social cohesion, strengthening resilience and other pillars of the framework.

We are ensuring that our interventions are not duplicative and fill real gaps in the UN response. At the global level, UNFPA contributed to the OCHA-led Global Humanitarian Response Plan, alongside other Inter-Agency Standing Committee members, which was released on 25 March 2020. The UNFPA appeal within the Global Humanitarian Response Plan is \$120 million.

UNFPA is also participating in, and a member of, the Advisory Committee of the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan and Multi-Partner Trust Fund (COVID-19 MPTF), a United Nations inter-agency financing mechanism launched by the UN Secretary-General to support low-income and middle-income programme countries in overcoming the health and development crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the pandemic evolves and expands, UNFPA will revise its overall appeal, factoring in needs and appropriate responses within its mandate and across all settings – humanitarian, fragile contexts and development. UNFPA is also tracking the appeals released by partner agencies and, where necessary, following up directly to ensure complementarity between proposed interventions.

At the country level, UNFPA works within UN country teams under the leadership of the UN resident/humanitarian coordinator and designated COVID-19 outbreak coordinator or crisis management team. Under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster system, UNFPA leads coordination of the gender-based violence area of responsibility within the protection cluster. Moreover, we are working with governments and public sector partners, private, and humanitarian sector partners to prioritize the specific needs of women and girls.

As with most crises, this pandemic has severely disrupted access to life-saving sexual and reproductive health services. It has also compromised authorities' ability to respond to gender-based violence, at a time when women and girls desperately need these services.

The UNFPA global response¹ is framed by the 2030 Agenda and is in line with the three transformative goals of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 – to end (a) preventable maternal deaths; (b) gender-based violence and harmful practices; and (c) the unmet need for family planning by 2030. Our engagement covers the continuum of preparedness, response and early recovery, with the ultimate aim of saving lives and building back better through more resilient societies and communities. Building strong health systems, empowering women and girls, promoting gender equality – all central elements of our work and of our Global Response Plan - are essential drivers of sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda.

UNFPA welcomes the strengthened resident coordinator system at all levels; the pandemic is proving to be the first major test of the system. Indications and feedback thus far are that the reform has provided a robust foundation for coordination mechanisms to facilitate timely, effective response, with an improved ability to make and maintain effective progress on normative issues and women's rights - a clear success of the reform.

III. Examples from the field: Collaboration with RCs/UNCTs on COVID-19 response

UNFPA country offices participate in national coordination mechanisms and collaborate with UN country teams under the overall guidance and leadership of the resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators, tailoring responses based on national circumstances and operational realities. The resident coordinators are leading the response, sharing information, coordinating open dialogues with different counterparts, systematizing and analysing information, and being the spokesperson for the system in coordination with the WHO. They are inclusive of the larger development community, including international and national NGOs, and have been quick to prioritize a broader humanitarian effort, including a strong emphasis on gender-based violence.

RCs are also leading 'duty of care' for staff, setting out specific measures and actions required of the UN country team, the security management team, individual UN agencies and staff members to support preparedness and effective response, including safeguarding staff members.

In **Ukraine**, the UNFPA Representative was appointed COVID-19 outbreak coordinator with specific tasks related to duty of care for UN staff and dependents. In **Tajikistan**, UNFPA is a lead agency in the Medical Doctors Group (WHO, WFP, IOM, UNAIDS, UNFPA) to support UN joint efforts on pandemic preparedness and response. In **Moldova**, together with the Resident Coordinator and WHO, UNFPA led and supported the creation of a real time monitoring data dashboard (a joint project of Esri IT company and Johns Hopkins University), which is currently being used in several countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) Pandemic UNFPA Global Response Plan](#)

In the **Asia-Pacific region**, UNFPA is actively engaged in the efforts to undertake rapid assessments of the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, together with the rest of UN country teams under the leadership of resident coordinators. These rapid assessments aim to analyse the impact to date and to inform immediate programme and humanitarian response. In **Thailand**, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNDP have jointly designed and disseminated a survey focusing on children and youth and will have the results in the next few weeks.

In **Zambia**, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO jointly mobilized resources to support the strengthening of the health system resilience, with a focus on primary health care and universal health coverage (UHC) to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The same agencies, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, advocated with the Ministry of Health to ensure that the national health sector responds to both emerging and ongoing population needs within the framework of the global guidance and following the principles underpinning the SDGs during the COVID-19 pandemic. In **South Africa**, UNFPA seconded a P4-level coordinator to the Resident Coordinator's office to support response efforts. Countries, like **Madagascar**, that are in the process of developing the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) are taking advantage of the programming process for the UNSDCF and the common country assessments to integrate the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

In **Palestine**, UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO have organized a hackathon, "*Hack the Crisis Palestine*," with young innovators to design campaigns and provide structured platforms and tools for conveying and sharing public feedback and concerns related to COVID-19 with decision makers and generate immediate solutions to the health and economic crisis. In **Egypt**, UNFPA and WHO, jointly with the Ministry of Health, launched a pregnancy and COVID-19 hotline and engaged celebrities to create and post videos on COVID-19.

In **Argentina**, UNFPA is working with WHO and the Ministry of Health to ensure that surveillance and response systems include disaggregated health-related data by age, sex, pregnancy status and disability. In the **Caribbean subregion**, UNFPA is working with UN agencies and intergovernmental/government entities to develop and disseminate advocacy materials for key and vulnerable populations. UNFPA is supporting referral pathways for gender-based violence (GBV) survivors, supporting help lines, providing support to midwives and the establishment of shelters and GBV coordination mechanisms. This is being done in coordination with UN-Women, UNDP and other partner agencies and in the context of the UN-European Union (EU) Spotlight Initiative.

As the resident coordinator offices become fully equipped with resources and staffing, we expect to have strengthened coordination mechanisms, processes and information flow within the UNCT as well as with various stakeholders. UNFPA continues to support strengthened coordination at the global, regional and country levels as now more than ever, coherent and effective UN responses, drawing on the strengths of the entire system, are critical to help countries navigate through the crisis.

IV. Results of the internal UNFPA survey on UNDS reform implementation at the country level

1. Purpose, design and methodology

In late 2019, UNFPA disseminated an internal survey to all its country offices to collect feedback on their early experiences with UNDS reform implementation. The UNDS reform implementation survey was administered to UNFPA country offices as part of the broader effort to collect feedback on their experience with the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 implementation. Overall, 112 country offices participated in the survey, which constitutes an 87% response rate.

The survey was designed to collect the experiences, challenges, bottlenecks and opportunities related to the early implementation of the ongoing UNDS reform. The results were reassuring and demonstrated good working relationships between UNFPA country offices and the resident coordinators and UN country teams.

The survey centred on several focus areas, such as the implementation of the new Management Accountability Framework (MAF), UNFPA strategic engagement and partnership with RCs and UN country teams, common country programming and reporting, common business operations, as well as UN funding and 2030 Agenda financing. The survey was designed to collect the experiences, challenges, bottlenecks and opportunities related to the early implementation of the ongoing UNDS reform.

The survey findings have fed into the midterm review of the current UNFPA strategic plan, informed the alignment of UNFPA corporate policies and procedures with UNDS reform directions, and helped to identify the kind of support country offices require from regional offices and headquarters. Remaining UNDS repositioning streams that are still under development (e.g. regional and multi-country office review) were not included in the survey.

2. Summary of findings

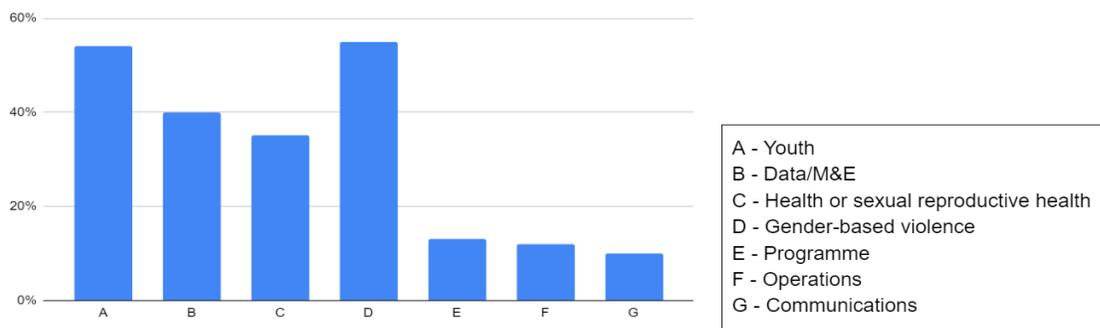
- At the country level, UNDS reform is viewed as a positive change for UNFPA and provides strategic opportunities to position the normative issues more centrally as UNFPA kickstarts the Decade of Action to deliver on the SDGs. As the organization is still in the early stages of implementation, more time is needed to assess the full extent of the impact reforms have on programmatic results;
- The changes brought by the ongoing UNDS repositioning, in particular the new UN resident coordinator system and MAF, create a more transparent and collaborative environment and potentially increase opportunities for joint programming and activities among agencies;
- The empowered role of the RCs as spokespersons for their entire UN country teams together with the additional capacity of RC offices provide greater opportunity to advocate normative issues, including on gender equality and women's empowerment, and contribute to national development and inter-agency processes;
- UNFPA country leadership is confident to engage in the development of new UNSDCF and have a clear understanding of its implications for UNFPA programmes and operations. There is, however, an urgent need for support and technical assistance, especially around funding and SDGs financing;
- Strengthened RC offices are expected to be critical in moving forward inter-agency processes, such as undertaking the common country analysis (CCA) and developing the new UNSDCF.

3. Survey analysis

a. Implementation of the new Management and Accountability Framework

- *Overall.* UNFPA work is increasingly supported by RCs as seen by their engagement on normative issues and women's rights agenda. UNFPA Representatives felt that their ability to carry forward the UNFPA mandate and implement programmes has also generally improved in terms of access to government officials, resource mobilization, and partnerships.
- *The MAF and the RC system.* The strengthened RC system is key to facilitating inter-agency work and processes, such as UNSDCF development. More time will be required for all stakeholders to fully understand the changes and implications of the new MAF. Furthermore, the transparent and collaborative environment is expected to create more opportunities for joint programming and activities among agencies. So far, RCs have been consulted in a quarter of recruitments at UNFPA country offices.
- *UNCT results groups:* UNFPA is active in UNCT Results Groups, chairing/co-chairing on youth, data, M&E and GBV. These groups are currently the main space for joint inter-agency initiatives, analysis, and dialogue on collective support to national priorities.

Inter-agency results/UNSDCF thematic groups led by UNFPA in 2019



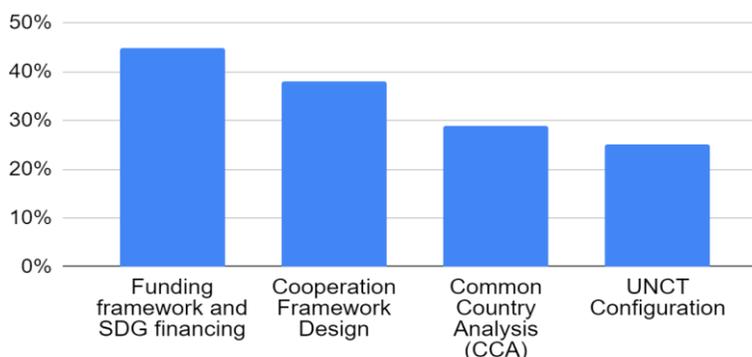
Examples from the field

- In the lead-up to the Nairobi Summit, RCs played a critical role in engaging UNCTs, governments and other stakeholders to commit to the unfinished agenda of ICPD Programme of Action.
- In a few countries, RCO, together with other UN agencies on the ground, engaged in an initial workshop for the development of a new UNFPA country programme document (CPD). This is seen as an exemplary CPD development process.
- RC and RCO participate in UNFPA staff meetings, which allows for greater understanding of UNFPA work and facilitation of their engagement on these issues with partners.

b. Common country programming and reporting

- UNFPA country leadership generally has a clear understanding of the UNSDCF implications for UNFPA programmes and operations. The new UNSDCF development process is seen as a strategic opportunity to position UNFPA issues more centrally within the UNCTs.
- Country programme document (CPD) policies and procedures need to be updated to further align with the new UNSDCF guidance. UNFPA headquarters has already updated the programming section and templates.
- There is a strong call for support and technical assistance from the UNFPA headquarters and regional offices, especially in the areas of UNSDCF funding and SDGs financing, CCA and around UNSDCF design. Smaller offices require additional staff capacity (or missions from headquarters and regional offices) during the most intensive UNSDCF development stages.

Indication of need for support in different UNSDCF development processes for COs developing CPDs in 2021/22



- Country-based staff note the importance of strategic information and good data analysis to produce the investment case/policy briefs that links key development indicators to UNFPA programme areas. As well as developing a strong value proposition around demographic diversity and the demographic dividend.
- Building strategic partnerships are critical for partners to become true advocates of the UNFPA agenda and advocate for these issues during the UNSDCF formulation.

Examples from the field

- During the formulation of the UN Pacific Strategy, UNFPA played a leading role in the CCA discussions related to the establishment of a theory of change, and results framework for the five-year UNSDCF, which covers 14 Pacific island countries and territories.

c. UNFPA and common business operations

- UNFPA benefits from long-term agreements (LTAs) signed by other UN agencies. Success stories include common premises and common services (e.g.travel agency services, security guard services, translation services and utility support services).
- There is a call to more fully operationalize the “mutual recognition” principle. Increased harmonization of financial and other operational systems, policies and procedures will be important for the implementation of the business operations strategy.

d. UN funding and SDGs financing

- UNFPA country offices are increasingly engaging in UN joint and pooled funding mechanisms and SDGs financing discussions and initiatives. There was recognition that there was room for improvement on both counts.
- The 1 per cent coordination levy makes in-country mobilization of non-core resources from the private sector more challenging and can disincentivize them.
- UNFPA can better leverage funds available through the Peacebuilding Fund, the Global Financing Facility and the SDG Fund. UNFPA headquarters and regional offices should better support country offices in developing proposals for joint initiatives.

Examples from the field

- The RC office helped to set up a trust fund for SDGs, which in turn will catalyse funding for improved social and developmental outcomes in the country where UN agencies in the country are not allowed to directly receive funds from the private sector.

V. Conclusion

UNFPA, as part of the broader UN development system, will continue to support countries to respond to the COVID-19 response and accelerate SDG implementation. The Fund recognizes the complexity and scale of the challenge ahead and remains fully committed to stay focused and do more to fully operationalize the vision of the development reform. In the times of crisis, throughout the recovery, and towards the longer view of reaching 2030 Agenda, UNFPA will continue to support countries’ needs and protect and uphold the rights of the women, girls and other marginalized and vulnerable people.