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Population Fund and the United
Nations Office for Project Services**

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Organizational matters

**Report of the annual session 2021
(7 to 11 June 2021, New York)**

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I. Organizational matters

1. The annual session 2021 of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS was held virtually on an exceptional basis as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, from 7 to 11 June 2021.
2. The Executive Board approved the agenda and workplan for its annual session 2021 (DP/2021/L.2) and approved the report of the first regular session 2021 (DP/2021/12).
3. Decisions adopted by the Executive Board at the annual session 2021 appeared in document DP/2021/27, which was available on the [Executive Board website](#).
4. The Executive Board agreed in decision 2021/13 to the following schedule for future sessions of the Executive Board in 2021:

Second regular session 2021: 30 August to 3 September 2021.

Statement by the President of the Board

5. The President of the Board said 2021 was a critical year when United Nations organizations were developing new strategic plans, 2022-2025, as they continued to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. The organizations needed to build on work to date, factoring in the pandemic's impact and creatively realign to meet new challenges, needs and expectations while operating with limited financial resources. The Bureau's objective was to provide room for strategic, inclusive, transparent and fruitful consultations and to cooperate and coordinate with other executive boards. The joint meeting demonstrated how the organizations were implementing the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system 2020 ([A/RES/75/233](#)) and United Nations reform amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Such cooperation needed further strengthening, including via joint decision-making on issues of common interest. The COVID-19 pandemic was a game changer and with less than 10 years remaining to 2030, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals remained the top priority.

Joint segment

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

6. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management), the Director, Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy, UNDP, and the General Counsel and Director, New York Liaison Office, UNOPS, updated the Board, using country examples, on their collective and individual organizational efforts to implement General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system within the context of the quadrennial review 2020.
7. Overall, delegations underscored the pandemic's disproportionate impact on developing countries and special role of the United Nations development system in addressing the socioeconomic and health impacts, including ensuring vaccination access and distribution through greater coordination, coherence, flexibility, and a strengthened resident coordinator system.
8. A group of delegations stressed the need to implement the 2020 quadrennial review and reflect its principles in the strategic plans, 2022-2025. They commended the organizations'

collective response to the pandemic's socioeconomic and health impacts and stressed the United Nations system's role in promoting sustainable, inclusive recovery, including through climate and biodiversity preservation. COVID-19 recovery was an opportunity to make the global economy more resilient, inclusive, sustainable. The United Nations system should develop environment-responsive, human rights-based, gender-responsive approaches in their strategic plans and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction commitments. Mainstreaming climate and environment in development cooperation was an opportunity to showcase an integrated United Nations at country level.

9. Other delegations said the repositioned United Nations development system, through the independent, empowered resident coordinator system, was a tool for tailoring the system-wide response to country-specific needs, driving rapid, resilient, inclusive global recovery. It was further stressed that mutual accountability between resident coordinators and United Nations organizations should be balanced, ensuring effective delivery. Harmonizing the integrated results and resources frameworks, where appropriate, remained crucial, as did strengthening core resources and designing innovative business models. Coordination costs should not affect programme resources, a situation the resident coordinator system review should address. Welcoming UNDP technical leadership in socioeconomic response plans, delegations sought details on plans to achieve objectives amid rising resource constraints. They encouraged the organizations to explore cost-saving options and sought examples of how United Nations reform helped free up resources, avoid duplication, and contribute to 2030 Agenda implementation.

10. In response, the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) said UNFPA was aligning its new strategic plan with the 2020 quadrennial review, working to mainstream human rights and gender equality, and strengthen efforts to address climate and biodiversity aspects in its mandate, integrating them as crosscutting themes in its strategic plan, 2022-2025. At country level, UNFPA focused on bolstering national capacities through data research and policy advice so national responses to climate and biodiversity preservation reflected their impact on women's sexual and reproductive health and promotion of gender equality. Reducing the Fund's climate footprint at country level was integral to its approach to climate change. All UNFPA programmes were in line with UNSDCF and national priorities, as reflected in common results reporting.

11. The Director, Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy, UNDP, said the repositioning exercise helped advance United Nations coherence at country level. Best practices showcased the collective action and incentives that rallied United Nations entities around common goals, rooted in mutual accountability and inclusive leadership under resident coordinators. UNDP was leading preparations for the twenty-sixth United Nations Climate Change Conference 2021, guiding nationally determined contributions in 118 countries and integrating climate/biodiversity in national planning/budgets. Internally, UNDP was reducing its footprint through its Greening the Blue initiative. On business operations, the United Nations development system had seen a 57 per cent increase in efficiency gains in 2019-2020, and UNDP had redirected \$355 million of cost-savings from internal transformations into programming in 2018-2020. UNDP supported interagency efforts through the Business and Innovation Group.

12. The General Counsel and Director, New York Liaison Office, UNOPS, said as a demand-driven, largely non-resident organization, UNOPS worked through country teams and multi-country offices, following events at country level and stepping in as needed. UNOPS welcomed the Board's integrated approach in the run-up to adopting the strategic plans, 2022-2025, allowing for discussions on common issues to emerge. Focusing on the resident coordinator system and UNSDCF development had helped to centre the organizations' work at country and local levels

and better reflected country priorities in the new strategic plans. This shift had prompted UNOPS to seek greater convergence with system-wide efforts, especially at country level.

13. The Executive Board took note of the update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system

III. Internal audit and investigation

14. The Director, Office of Audit and Investigations (OAI), UNDP, presented the annual report of OAI on internal audit and investigations activities in 2020 (DP/2021/14); the Director, Bureau of Management, UNDP, provided the management response. The Director, Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS), UNFPA, presented the report of OAIS on internal audit and investigation activities in 2020 (DP/FPA/2021/6 and annexes), the opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the UNFPA framework of governance, risk management and control (DP/FPA/2021/6/Add.1), and the annual report of the Oversight Advisory Committee (DP/FPA/2021/6/Add.2). The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) presented the management response (DP/FPA/2021/CRP.6). The Director, Internal Audit and Investigations Group (IAIG), UNOPS, presented the annual report on internal audit and investigations activities in 2020 (DP/OPS/2021/); the General Counsel and Director, New York Liaison Office, UNOPS, provided the management response.

UNDP

15. A group of delegations, pleased with harmonization efforts, said audit and investigation reporting should provide the Board with descriptions of work and insights/analysis on wider implications of audit and investigation findings. They looked forward to the results of the audit working group and details of what to expect going forward. They requested information on UNDP vertical fund portfolios and audits – noting that the Green Climate Fund (GEF) audit was complete, the review by the financial advisory firm, BDO, of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) portfolio was underway, and regular audits of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria were taking place – which helped to identify UNDP strengths and weaknesses in implementing projects financed through vertical funds. They sought clarity on whether there would be changes to the macro approach to vertical fund management given recurrent audit issues.

16. Other delegations commended UNDP for increased implementation rates despite the pandemic and for not having long-outstanding recommendations for the first time in 10 years. Given recurrent areas of concern – including programme/project management, procurement, financial management, harmonized approach to cash transfers compliance, governance, human resources, and travel management – UNDP was encouraged to continue to address weaknesses and underlying issues. Noting the 44 per cent decrease in new allegations and low level of financial loss due to fraud, they sought details on the dynamics behind the almost halving of fraud allegations in 2020. They encouraged UNDP to work with other United Nations organizations to harmonize audit and investigation definitions/reporting. A delegation requested clarity on UNDP actions to address the reported insufficient global approach to support country offices, given donor concerns on UNDP oversight of and participation in GEF projects.

UNFPA

17. Delegations appreciated OAIS oversight work and commended UNFPA for improvements in in-country supply chain management, especially in the COVID-19 context. There was support for continued strengthening of procurement policies and procedures at local level, and recognition of progress implementing audit recommendations compared to previous years. UNFPA was urged

to address the continuous accumulation of outstanding investigations and bolster its commitment to zero tolerance on corruption through adequate financial and personnel resources. While additional posts in the audit function were welcomed, it was noted they might be insufficient to address the growing, ever more complex investigation caseload. There was concern that, of the audits finalized in 2020, 74 per cent were rated as ‘needing major improvement’. None were rated to be ‘effective’. Given the situation’s unsustainability, there was a request for management’s view of measures needed to bring rapid, positive change.

UNOPS

18. UNOPS was commended for taking a vigorous victim-centred approach to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. Details were sought on steps it was taking to ensure a more robust, effective approach to vendor compliance in its procurement rules and procedures.

19. In response, the Director, Bureau of Management, UNDP, said audits related to the UNDP vertical fund portfolio had contributed to strengthening programme management/delivery. UNDP remained committed to addressing audit recommendations in a timely manner and had implemented 70 per cent of GEF-related audit recommendations. The remainder were expected on time before end 2021. Examples included the new anti-money laundering policy, measures to counter financing of terrorism, new standard operating procedures for vertical fund programming, and new requirements for country-level follow-up actions for risk assessments. UNDP was setting up systems, such as the new enterprise risk planning (ERP), to address recurring areas of concern.

20. The Director, OAI, UNDP, reiterated UNDP commitment to interagency harmonization while highlighting that harmonizing audit reporting across organizations with different governance structures was challenging. The audit offices were working to streamline their work and expand their ability to generate insights. Regarding GEF, OAI welcomed how UNDP management addressed audit-identified risks. Despite OAI concerns, roughly 70 per cent of recommendations had been implemented. The main challenge was making the changes sustainable in the UNDP portfolio. Oversight of implementing partners constituted an opportunity to rethink UNDP institutional oversight architecture to make it robust, sustainable and reliable. Financial loss varied year to year. In 2019, it was significant. That was not the case in 2020 and 2021 would be different. UNDP was able to address allegations of financial misconduct as they arose. OAI conducted tests of GEF-funded projects through country office audits, which offered broader understanding of issues identified in the GEF portfolio.

21. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) underlined the Fund’s commitment to harmonized interagency processes and close monitoring of UNFPA implementation of audit recommendations through the Audit Monitoring Committee. The new ERP system would help monitor procurement processes. UNFPA was working to address the accumulation of outstanding investigations by increasing resources in the next integrated budget, despite the need for a prudent budget approach. That included more resources for the OAI’s investigative function, including three additional posts. UNFPA remained committed to zero tolerance for fraud and corruption.

22. The Director, OAI, UNFPA, complemented the statement on harmonization of the internal audit function by OAI Director, UNDP. For the investigation function, the funds and programmes were working to harmonize definitions and find common ground to the extent possible, despite different legal frameworks. Regarding the nine audits it concluded in 2020, OAI focused on high-risk country offices, which, given their profile, were more prone to issues. Of the 166 auditable business units, OAI conducted a full audit of six country offices. Further, OAI concluded audits of two regions using the remote audit modality (focusing on transactions), each report covering 20-25 country and regional offices, and the financial audit of one major

programme in one country. The new ERP system would foster easier, more comprehensive access to information, allowing better identification of issues. She recalled that the overall opinion on the UNFPA governance, risk management and control framework remained ‘some improvement needed’. OASIS based its opinion taking a broad approach, starting with work it performed, including audits concluded in 2020, and those controls the robustness of which OASIS could test.

23. The General Counsel and Director, New York Liaison Office, UNOPS, said UNOPS had set up stronger preventive measures and stepped up its responses to compliance and procurement fraud. IAIG was working with teams globally to detect fraud or collusion in procurement. There had been a significant rise in identification of potential cases and processing of vendors through UNOPS vendor review committees. Further, management and operations’ emphasis on risks helped focus on areas of vendor fraud and corrupt practices in a manner relevant to markets where UNOPS was sourcing goods and services. UNOPS regularly updated its procurement manual to reflect such processes, making them more effective and efficient. UNOPS had strengthened its due diligence mechanisms as part of its selection processes, helping to identify problems early on.

24. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/11 on internal audit and investigation: reports of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS on internal audit and investigation, and management responses.

IV. Ethics

25. The Director, UNDP Ethics Office, the Director, UNFPA Ethics Office, and the Director, UNOPS Ethics and Compliance Office presented their respective reports: the activities of the UNDP Ethics Office in 2020 (DP/2021/15), the UNFPA report of the Ethics Office 2020 (DP/FPA/2021/7), and the activities of the UNOPS Ethics and Compliance Office in 2020 (DP/OPS/2021/3). These were followed by the management responses delivered by the Director, Bureau for Management Services, UNDP, the Deputy Executive Director (Management), UNFPA, and the General Counsel and Director, New York Liaison Office, UNOPS.

26. In two interventions, delegations commended UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS for their valuable contributions to promoting and fostering a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability and urged the ethics offices and management to take steps to ensure that culture continued to grow and flourish. They recognized the increased requests for advisory services in UNFPA and UNDP as a positive sign and sought information on how the three ethics offices were seeking to measure such services, including around operational risks and other types of activities.

UNDP

27. The UNDP Ethics Office was commended for its participation in the UNDP Task Force on Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and the UNDP Administrator for establishing the UNDP Team on Racism and Discrimination. Clarity was sought on whether the Office for Human Resources had responded to the UNDP request regarding UNDP-issued contract holders and authorities on dispute resolution, and whether the Ethics Office received GEF-related complaints in 2020. Noting that UNDP had no financial disclosure programme verification in 2020, a delegation sought clarity as to why that was the case and what plans UNDP had to resume the exercise in 2021.

UNFPA

28. Delegations commended UNFPA for the high number of staff trained in 2020 despite COVID-19 and welcomed the number of allegations of retaliation remained stable. They appreciated UNFPA efforts to partner and conduct training/outreach with United Nations

organizations and sought information on where the ethics offices saw opportunities for greater collaboration, to what extent collaboration was taking place, what the challenges and benefits were, particularly in outreach, awareness-raising and training at country level, and who were the hardest to reach.

UNOPS

29. Delegations commended UNOPS for supporting a grassroots programme to celebrate diversity at UNOPS and address important questions arising from global movements against discrimination. They recognized the external independent review of UNOPS protection against retaliation and supported its conclusions and sought details on who conducted the review.

30. In response, the Director, UNDP Ethics Office, said the office had received no specific GEF-related retaliation complaints, though an individual who had worked on GEF-related projects had followed up on a particular matter indirectly related to GEF. He confirmed that in 2021 the office would undertake the financial disclosure verification exercise, which it had suspended in 2020 during the pandemic. In addition, it had instituted a follow-up exercise for every filer who had indicated having no assets in excess of \$10,000. And despite challenges in their differing approaches/policies, the office would continue to pursue ever greater harmonization with the ethics offices of the other United Nations organizations.

31. The Director, UNFPA Ethics Office, said UNFPA partnered with United Nations organizations, including the Secretariat. UNFPA had incorporated and updated the content of the United Nations Ethics Office online learning programmes; it was collaborating on outreach materials and benefitted from the review of financial disclosure programmes. The colocation of United Nations offices at country level offered an opportunity for greater collaboration for in-country training. As local staff members were hardest to reach, UNFPA sought to reach them through its online presence, a top priority going forward.

32. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) said the Fund supported interagency coordination of training and affirmed the increased number of cases was a positive sign, reflecting greater trust among staff in Ethics Office tools.

33. The Director, UNOPS Ethics and Compliance Office, said the external independent review was conducted by the international law firm Allen & Overy on a pro bono basis. The office fully supported collaboration among the organizations' ethics offices to share experiences and harmonize practices. She said case numbers did not provide a clear picture of the office's workload since they did not take into account time-intensive activities. The balance of work could be ascertained by noting the emphasis placed on certain activities in the annual report on ethics. The office was exploring ways to present such data in the future.

34. The General Counsel and Director, New York Liaison Office, UNOPS, said a major challenge was reaching beyond United Nations organizations to implementing partners and contractors. This was especially of concern regarding sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. To address this challenge, UNOPS had put together a task force that tackled legal, ethics, human resources and investigations together.

35. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/12 on the reports of the ethics offices of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS.

V. Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment

36. The Deputy Executive Director (Management), UNFPA, the Director, Bureau of Management, UNDP, and the General Counsel and Director, New York Liaison Office, UNOPS, provided oral updates on their organizations' protection against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, including within the COVID-19 pandemic context.

37. A cross-regional group commended UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS for their commitment to promoting a safe working environment for staff, tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and assisting vulnerable populations during the pandemic. The group pointed to four areas for improvement.

- (a) *Addressing root causes and raising awareness.* They welcomed investments in staff capacity-building and stressed the need to build awareness of power differentials and inequalities between victims and perpetrators. Local communities had to become aware of their rights, mechanisms for reporting complaints, and support available to survivors, a goal that outreach and country-level plans should reflect.
- (b) *Mitigating risk.* They recognized staff efforts to deliver during the pandemic and called for robust processes and strategies to identify, prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment risks, including harmonizing tools to assess implementing partners' capacity and working with relevant stakeholders.
- (c) *Ensuring country-level response and interagency collaboration.* They recognized efforts to embed safeguards in operations and appreciated UNFPA work as the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) champion to build a roster of trained experts for deployment to humanitarian and development settings. They looked forward to the UNFPA review of the humanitarian system response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.
- (d) *Supporting survivors and reporting.* They commended the commitment to a survivor-centred approach prioritizing rights and needs and strengthening community-based reporting mechanisms, stressing the role of monitoring and evaluation. It was important to ensure allegations were reported through the Secretary-General's online mechanism and provide prompt, confidential reporting to Member States on the status of allegations and actions taken to address them.

38. A delegation called for a redoubling of prevention, reporting and accountability as part of the pandemic response. Risk analysis and mitigation deserved more attention. The organizations needed to strengthen prevention/response policies and follow-up of reported incidents. Tools introduced to prevent rehiring staff perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment were welcome, as was increased transparency in reporting allegations and facilitating accountability at national level. But greater oversight and accountability were needed across humanitarian and development programmes and headquarters. Experiences from the Democratic Republic of Congo and UNDP and UNOPS Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessments could help address systems-level change.

39. In response, the Deputy Executive Director (Management), UNFPA, said the Fund attached great importance to addressing root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment through practical initiatives, including management training and the external IASC review. On risk mitigation, UNFPA had operationalized the common implementing partner assessment tool

and was leading an interagency pilot in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to harmonize assessments for shared partners. Internally, UNFPA pursued culture change and ever-greater inclusivity and integrity while working to ensure sufficient funding and human resources to meet the challenge.

40. The Director, Bureau of Management, UNDP, said UNDP was working on awareness-building, focal point training, and power differential dynamics. It had a comprehensive programme and action plan for culture change and worked via its gender-based violence programme to address root causes of harassment, including collaboration with humanitarian organizations. Internally, UNDP had a comprehensive diversity and inclusion programme. It leveraged existing institutional budget funding, covering internal work and investigations, and programme budget funding, including gender-based violence mechanisms and legal support through rule of law programmes.

41. The General Counsel and Director, New York Liaison Office, UNOPS, said UNOPS pursued a top-down approach to culture change, beginning with the Executive Director as champion of its speak-up campaign. Its change agenda permeated UNOPS systems, competency framework and staff assessments, which channelled into its leadership programme. UNOPS had a centralized reporting network for allegations led by IAIG who were trained to meet the Secretary-General's criteria. IAIG worked with United Nations organizations to deliver interagency training of focal points to ensure timely reporting, including at country level. UNOPS was working to expand resources in this area, hiring senior staff to respond to grievances/investigations and improve processes, grounded in a victim-centred approach.

42. The Executive Board took note of the update on protection against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

UNDP segment

VI. Interactive dialogue with the UNDP Administrator and annual report

43. In his statement ([available on the Executive Board website](#)), the Administrator, UNDP, said global human development had tumbled backwards for the first time in thirty years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite an effective vaccine, COVID-19 variants and surges demonstrated the pandemic continued to be a development emergency, while vaccine inequity was creating a new gulf between wealthy and poor. As the pandemic and its socioeconomic impacts expanded, local and global actors collaborated in an unprecedented way. The United Nations system helped to reorganize global supply chains, dismantle barriers to getting government services online, protect jobs, keep people out of poverty, and race to find a vaccine. The Administrator addressed two main topics: UNDP performance against the current Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, including progress in tackling COVID-19, and what to expect in the new strategic plan, 2022-2025.

44. First, the Administrator said progress against the strategic plan, 2018-2021, though slowed, was still on track. UNDP quickly moved to repurpose core and non-core resources, enabling country offices to take swift action. Some original plans, however, were postponed or adjusted as government priorities shifted to crisis mitigation. UNDP continued to make progress on integrated support to pursue the Goals, agile financing, organizational learning, accountability and transparency. The Goals had compelled UNDP to enhance its ability to solve large, systemic challenges, working through a repositioned United Nations development system, as it launched the COVID-19 Data Futures Platform, delivered customized Sustainable Development Goals

integration support, promoted finance for the Goals, fostered mechanisms to address debt, and helped countries develop integrated national financing frameworks (INFFs).

45. Second, with a balanced budget for the fourth consecutive year, increased productivity, and reduced costs, UNDP continued to do more with less. But to meet countries' needs and challenges going forward, agile financing would be crucial, especially given current UNDP dependency on highly earmarked resources. Without sufficient, flexible, predictable financing, UNDP would increasingly struggle to deliver on Member States ambitions, ensure a safe, inclusive working environment, and meet the highest standards of oversight and accountability.

46. Third, UNDP was committed to constant learning, change and renewal – central to *#NextGenUNDP*. The organization was stepping up its performance on social protection, its gender work was strong and growing, while it was taking action to promote women's leadership in conflict zones. Transparency and accountability were at the heart of its work, as testified in the 2020 Aid Transparency Index rating as the most transparent United Nations organization as well as its fifteenth consecutive unqualified audit opinion in 2019.

47. Within the reshaped United Nations development system, UNDP would scale up and accelerate progress toward the Goals. Its ambition was to help millions escape multidimensional poverty, support access to clean energy by investing in distributed renewable energy, and promote investment of public expenditure and private capital in the Goals. The new strategic plan, 2022-2025, would support countries in three major directions of change focused on poverty eradication: (a) structural transformation (transition to green inclusive, digital economies and societies); (b) leaving no one behind (a rights-based approach centred on human agency and development); and (c) building resilience (strengthening systems to respond to different risks).

48. UNDP would use integrated solutions that addressed systems-as-a-whole and built institutional resilience and dynamic capabilities, as it concentrated on its six signature solutions through three accelerators: strategic innovation, digitalization, and development financing. To bolster its capacities, UNDP would invest in six areas in its business model: people, knowledge, risk management, funding (a new funding model), operational excellence, and impact measurement. Those investments would generate the country office of the future. Partnerships, especially through the United Nations development system, would be integral to those efforts.

49. A group of delegations said reform was an opportunity to make the United Nations fit-for-purpose to deliver solutions to programme countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda. UNDP had shown technology and innovation were key and, in implementing the 2020 quadrennial review, UNDP should build on lessons from its socioeconomic response to the pandemic. UNDP was encouraged to continue to align planning/programming with United Nations organizations in consultation with Governments to respond to country needs. Results frameworks/budgets should describe common objectives, targets and outcomes, respecting each organization's mandates. Cross-pillar coherence and coordination remained the basic principles and avoiding diversion of resources from development. UNDP should focus on: (a) reversing the rising trend of poverty and hunger; (b) ensuring affordable and reliable COVID-19 vaccines for everyone, everywhere; (c) tackling adverse impacts of climate change, especially for adaptation and resilience building; (d) bridging the digital divide; and (e) investing in gender equality, children and youth.

50. A second group said eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions was an indispensable requirement for sustainable development that demanded cross-cutting approaches espoused in the 2030 Agenda. UNDP had a crucial role helping countries build back better and overcome the socioeconomic challenges the pandemic had worsened. The new strategic plan, 2022-2025, should refine that role in a renewed multilateralism, recognizing national ownership,

the UNDP integrator role, and normative and operational responsibilities, underpinned by strong oversight, accountability and transparency. The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) should receive the support and capacities to perform its normative and coordination functions. Given ongoing imbalance between core and non-core resources, UNDP should work to meet official development assistance (ODA) commitments and pursue predictability and availability of core resources. Support to domestic mobilization of resources, when requested by programme countries, had to be additional to, not a replacement for, efforts requested in the 2020 quadrennial review to ensure funding quantity and quality.

51. The third group recognized UNDP agility in crises to mobilize financing, enact digital transformation, and utilize its accelerator labs to bolster initiatives. They recognized the breadth of UNDP operations across the three pillars and six signature solutions to make systemic changes and structural transformations to help countries achieve the Goals. UNDP commitment to climate action was robust, forward-looking and its unique support and leadership for accountable, inclusive, democratic governance continued to be core. Noting the stronger UNDP ability to integrate gender perspectives, more attention to women's leadership in crisis settings was needed. UNDP was encouraged to increase analysis in annual reporting, including on development trends and its contribution to change. In the new strategic plan, UNDP was urged to: (a) strengthen its partnerships in humanitarian-development-peace settings through joint analysis/planning for collective outcomes; (b) respond to areas in 2020 internal evaluations; and (c) pursue its integrator role and transformation to deliver on the Goals.

52. In individual interventions, UNDP was encouraged to pursue its transformation by linking its operational portfolio with whole-of-government policy advice, making it more responsive to country needs. UNDP assistance in transforming public services, maintaining business continuity through digitalization, and promoting equitable, sustainable vaccine roll-out were timely and valuable. Delegations stressed that non-discriminatory access to the COVID-19 vaccines was a human right and countries subjected to sanctions merited special attention. COVID-19 recovery efforts should prioritize challenges on the ground rather than country categorizations, staying focused on achieving the Goals, including promoting universal and equal access to health care and women's participation. Continued UNDP partnerships with the international financial institutions was key to promote the INFFs. The proposed 'SDG Push' initiative was a positive step, one UNDP should pursue to focus on the most vulnerable, especially in least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing States (SIDS), and conflict-affected countries.

53. In response, the Administrator said the new strategic plan, 2022-2025, would unify the various priorities of the 2020 quadrennial review. UNDP was collaborating with UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in designing IRRFs and reviewing the broader results architecture, out of which had emerged a new alignment among the organizations and joint priority setting rooted in comparative strengths. UNDP would continue globally to be a strong advocate not only for the Goals but to help countries leverage opportunities to achieve them. As a staunch supporter of multilateralism, UNDP advocated for early action through the international community in response to emergencies, including COVID-19, for which the resources to solve the vaccine distribution issue were available, including by rethinking debt. UNDP was committed to reform, the resident coordinator review process, and refining accountability, complementarity and coordination through the revamped resident coordinator system.

54. In its pursuit of ever greater effectiveness in climate action, governance and gender equality, UNDP culled the lessons of internal evaluations and looked outward to innovation and institutional reimagination. In its work, UNDP acted both as leader and amplifier of the United Nations system response to different challenges, working as the backbone and a shortcut for

partners to access expertise. Governance was foremost about helping countries address the challenges of faltering social contracts, rule of law, political unrest and underlying issues of inequality and the right to development. It was the foundation for building consensus and identifying policy priorities, grounded in the norms and values Member States had endorsed. Anti-corruption initiatives, such as the UNDP anti-money laundering policy, were part of work the Board had requested, though the investment implications were sometimes beyond the UNDP business model's capacity to report and be held accountable. UNDP was reviewing its business model to address such challenges and would implement its management action plan with new policies, built on independent audits, to ensure effective, innovative anti-corruption work.

55. During the pandemic, UNDP worked with UNOSSC leading as a South-South cooperation broker helping countries share effective responses. UNDP was committed to tackling the special situation of LDCs and SIDS through its SIDS offer and the multidimensional vulnerability index and its connection to graduation. This work also addressed the concerns of middle-income countries and the rethinking of country categorizations. UNDP climate action likewise sought to help countries meet their energy needs and the world community to decarbonize the global economy through integrated biodiversity, nature solutions. UNDP promoted digitalization and built digital ecosystems that helped transform economies to reap the benefits of a whole-of-government approach. Gender would remain a distinct signature solution vital to all areas of UNDP work, along with climate and digitalization. UNDP was reviewing its gender strategy to foster more impactful programming and advance gender parity internally. It was actively tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and systemic racism through programming and corporately.

56. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/4 on the cumulative review of the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, and annual report of the Administrator for 2020.

VII. Gender equality at UNDP

57. The Associate Administrator, UNDP, opened the item and the Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP, presented the annual report on the implementation of the UNDP gender strategy, 2018-2021 (DP/2021/17).

58. A group of delegations commended UNDP for its commitment to and performance on gender equality and women's empowerment. They welcomed the annual report's country-level results and encouraged UNDP to analyse lessons/achievements to inform the direction of the new gender equality strategy. The new strategy should address root causes of gender inequality, capturing lessons from evaluations of UNDP work. They commended work to identify the role of social norms and how they lead to stagnation towards gender equality. UNDP was encouraged to match those findings with transformative actions that sought to change structures and address power dynamics, including discrimination faced by girls and women with disabilities. UNDP was encouraged to continue to partner within and beyond the United Nations system, including women's rights organizations, to better address the needs of populations in countries. They welcomed the UNDP-UN-Women Global Gender Response Tracker and called for its lessons to be shared to help shape better, more sustainable recovery efforts.

59. Other delegations supported UNDP actions on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and rising gender-based violence rates during the pandemic. They welcomed holistic efforts that included developing action plans on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, including risk analysis, mitigation and victim support. They encouraged the UNDP-UN-Women collaboration to ensure robust cross-agency action and coordinated efforts, including on sex disaggregated data. More innovative approaches were

needed to ensure women participated as leaders and decision-makers in recovery efforts and future preparedness. They welcomed the UNDP management action plan to address the audit findings on UNDP gender equality and women's empowerment work on results reporting.

60. In response, the Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP, said UNDP was meta-analysing lessons from the gender equality strategy to inform the new strategy and working with Governments to devise whole-of-society approaches and multistakeholder dialogues, including with women's organizations. UNDP focused on strengthening its gender capacity and expanding work on gender norms and gender-response tracking to address root causes and power imbalances. UNDP was keen to announce the setting up of the global gender policy observatory to buttress data, analytics and innovation in 2021-2022. It continued to pursue its zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and would increase funding to gender-focused initiatives in the new gender equality strategy.

61. The Director of Gender, UNDP, underscored that in developing its new gender equality strategy UNDP would undertake a multistakeholder consultation process that addressed gender power imbalances and intersectionalities, focused on transformation.

62. The Executive Board took note of the annual report on the implementation of the UNDP gender strategy, 2018-2021.

VIII. UNDP country programmes and related matters

63. The Associate Administrator, UNDP, provided an overview of the country programme documents for Argentina and Armenia and presented the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for the Central African Republic, Chad, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mongolia, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia, the third three-month extension of the country programme for Madagascar, and the fifth, six-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic. In turn, the regional directors for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and Latin America and the Caribbean presented the country programme documents for Argentina and Armenia.

64. Regarding the CPD for Armenia, the exchange between the delegations of Armenia and Azerbaijan are provided in the following links: (a) [statement](#) by Armenia; and (b) [statement](#) by Azerbaijan.

65. The Executive Board approved, in accordance with its decision 2014/7, the country programme document for Argentina ([DP/DCP/ARG/4](#)) and the country programme document for Armenia ([DP/DCP/ARM/5](#)).

66. The Executive Board took note of the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for the Central African Republic, Chad, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mongolia, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia, as approved by the Administrator, as presented in document [DP/2021/18](#).

67. The Executive Board approved the third three-month extension of the country programme for Madagascar, presented in document [DP/2021/18](#), and the fifth, six-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic ([DP/2021/18/Add.1](#)).

IX. Evaluation

68. The Director, Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), UNDP, presented the annual report on evaluation, 2020 (DP/2021/19), the evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 (DP/2021/20), and the third joint Global Environment Facility (GEF)-UNDP evaluation of the Small Grants Programme (DP/2021/22). The Director, Bureau for Programme and Policy Support, UNDP, provided the management commentaries to the annual report on evaluation, and the management responses to the evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 (DP/2021/21) and the third joint GEF-UNDP evaluation of the Small Grants Programme (DP/2021/23).

Annual report on evaluation, 2020, and evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021

69. Delegations highlighted the valuable IEO contribution to quality, timely evaluations supporting oversight and learning so UNDP could better respond to COVID-19 and support organizational learning and evaluation capacities. Despite the pandemic's impact on its ability to conduct evaluations, IEO adjusted the scope and methodology of evaluations to offset data collection challenges. There was a request for information on how rapid independent country programme reviews bridged data gaps and their usefulness for thematic evaluations. A delegation raised concern that a high number of evaluations, in particular decentralized evaluations, did not receive a satisfactory quality level. UNDP should aim for 'satisfactory' or 'highly satisfactory' ratings and seek agreement on the qualification and presentation of results on the quality of decentralized evaluations. Details were sought on UNDP actions to address concerns over reduced and imbalanced evaluation coverage of project portfolios. And there was a request for clarity on whether management accepted recommendation 1 that in the new strategic plan UNDP should better define its roles, especially within the new United Nations system environment, and better focus its work on areas of strength and comparative advantage. They asked how management would address the finding that UNDP work to develop integrated, innovative development solutions was falling behind its role as project implementer and how it would address the evaluation's finding that results-based management, monitoring, reporting and learning remained key areas for improvement and the related evaluation recommendation.

70. In response, the Director, IEO, UNDP, said despite COVID-19 IEO completed 15 country programme evaluations using remote data collection, in addition to thematic evaluations. Following its assessment, IEO identified local 'communities and governments' as benefitting least from remote data collection, due to connectivity issues, which IEO sought to overcome working through national research institutes and think-tanks. IEO engaged in evaluation capacity-building of national evaluation systems through the global evaluation initiative to improve use of evidence to inform policies at country level to recover from COVID 19. IEO was working with UNDP management to improve the quality of UNDP decentralized evaluations and agree on uniform presentations of quality assessment results of decentralized evaluations to the Board. He drew attention to ambiguous language in the management response to the evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, regarding acceptance or not of some recommendations (1 and 5).

71. The Director, Bureau for Programme and Policy Support, UNDP, clarified that UNDP partially accepted recommendation 1 on the evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021. The focus of the strategic plan, 2022-2025, would be achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Goals, including poverty eradication, structural transformation, governance, and raising ambitions. Country-level COVID-19 recovery was central to that, rooted in United Nations organizations' comparative strengths. Agreeing with recommendation 2, UNDP would pursue digitalization and innovation as two enablers of the new strategic plan. UNDP sought to hone its results tools and capacities, working with stakeholders to become ever more accountable. Management was committed to working with country offices to improve evaluation completion numbers/dates,

quality, and expenditure levels. Despite improvements needed in evaluation qualification levels, UNDP was experiencing a positive trend overall, as it pursued its funding target for evaluation.

Third joint GEF-UNDP evaluation of the Small Grants Programme

72. A delegation recognized the contribution of the Small Grant Programme in supporting local actions, particularly among indigenous peoples and grassroots communities. The delegation noted that while it was good to expand access to the Small Grant Programme, it would not support framing it in terms of universal access, as that implied guarantee of funding regardless of merit or potential operational constraints. Small grants were critical to ensuring community autonomy, leadership, and economic opportunities while supporting indigenous resource management.

73. In response, the Director, Bureau for Programme and Policy Support, UNDP, said UNDP was committed to scaling up the Small Grants Programme. UNDP was working with the Small Grants Programme to improve access by eligible countries and, despite resource constraints, was upgrading its policy of approval for access, focused on disadvantaged groups, including indigenous peoples and people with disabilities.

74. The Director, Nature, Climate and Energy, UNDP, highlighted that country access to the Small Grants Programme was done through capacity assessments, which the GEF Council had to appraise before acceptance.

75. The Director, Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP, said the delegation's comments were in line with the evaluation's recommendations to strengthen the governance of the Small Grants Programme at global and national levels and upgrade the policy on criteria for selectivity as part of future GEF Council discussions.

76. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/5 on UNDP evaluation.

X. United Nations Capital Development Fund

77. The Associate Administrator, UNDP, introduced the item and the Executive Director, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), presented the results achieved by UNCDF in 2020 (DP/2021/24) and the cumulative review of the UNCDF strategic framework, 2018-2021.

78. A group of delegations commended UNCDF transformative work in least developed countries (LDCs) responding to COVID-19 through grants to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and local governments. UNCDF innovative financing mechanisms required full United Nations system support and strong partnerships with public and private sectors at national level. UNCDF should consolidate its expertise and leadership, including at subnational level, and pursue women's empowerment through the LDC Investment Platform, making women's economic empowerment central to digital financial solutions in LDCs. UNCDF should continue to deploy blended finance instruments for sustainable development, especially through the BUILD Fund and International Municipal Investment Fund.

79. A second group from the LDCs welcomed UNCDF financial inclusion work in LDCs through e-commerce and digital financing, especially in responding to COVID-19. UNCDF should scale up innovative solutions in digital healthcare, drawing on good practices at national level. The UNCDF bottom-up approach was welcomed, as was its work with local communities, municipalities, and SMEs to extend sustainable development benefits to those furthest behind. They welcomed UNCDF closing of the gender digital divide and mainstreaming gender-

responsive approaches in national development processes using gender-disaggregated data. They commended its successes in fiscal decentralization, local governance, capacity-building, and climate-resilient infrastructure financing and called on UNCDF to expand solutions to other LDCs and pursue tailored support for graduating and graduated countries.

80. A third group of delegations said UNCDF should be the entry point for United Nations system work in financial instruments and innovations with public and private entities, taking advantage of and learning from the Fund's rich expertise in innovative finance. UNCDF was encouraged to continue working in 'last mile' settings where financing sources were scarce or unavailable. They welcomed the LDC Investment Platform offering professional capacity to deploy loans and guarantees to last mile investments in LDCs and address the financing gap faced by SME infrastructure projects. They recognized UNCDF support to female-led businesses in LDCs, the integration of climate and environment in the strategic framework, 2022-2025, and encouraged UNCDF to collaborate with United Nations entities in the resident coordinator system.

81. In other interventions, there was a request for details on how UNCDF would support LDCs after graduation, how it addressed the special challenges of fragile LDCs, and what contribution it could make to integrated national financing frameworks, especially in digital finance. Across the board, delegations called on countries to consider increasing funding to UNCDF core resources to ensure it delivered on its mandate.

82. In response, the Executive Director, UNCDF, said the Fund was working with Governments to define country investment pipelines. It had strengthened its country managers and directed staff to take up a 'one UNCDF' when engaging with Governments, prioritizing country needs and collaboration with resident coordinators and UNDP resident representatives. On blended finance funds, UNCDF catalysed private capital by creating two impact investing funds: the International Municipal Investment Fund, in partnership with global investor and asset manager Meridiam to raise funding and invest in municipal projects and local development in cities and municipalities; and the BUILD Fund, in partnership with Bamboo Capital Partners, to invest in SMEs in LDCs, working with donors to ensure risk protection and mitigation, as part of its mandate to support the Fifth United Nations Conference on the LDCs. UNCDF was upscaling digital solutions through its new digital strategy to channel household and individual micro-savings into infrastructure investments at local level. This initiative promoted women's economic empowerment in partnership with Governments and the Generation Equality Forum, focused on economic justice and rights and women's access to financial resources. UNCDF worked with UNDP on INFFs through a joint digital offering training staff on digital solutions and supporting local governments to implement them. The two collaborated in designing instruments for LDC graduation, including enhancing credit ratings allowing access to markets while UNCDF continued to support LDCs through and after graduation. UNCDF collaborated with the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund to invest in local economic development and institutional strengthening in fragile and conflict-affected states, using guarantee instruments that opened the door for third-party investments.

83. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/6 on the United Nations Capital Development Fund.

XI. United Nations Volunteers

84. The Associate Administrator, UNDP, introduced the item and the Executive Coordinator, United Nations Volunteers (UNV), presented UNV: Report of the Administrator (DP/2021/25).

85. A group of delegations welcomed UNV achieving almost all its targets, demonstrating its potential to deliver in crises such as COVID-19 and its unique blending of ideas and experiences. The United Nations system should build on UNV work and mainstream good practices to catalyse rapid, inclusive, resilient recovery and ensure safe, affordable vaccines for everyone, everywhere, including through COVAX roll-out. Stronger multi-stakeholder partnerships were needed to strengthen the UN-Volunteers network and expand United Nations promotion of UN-Volunteers. UNV was crucial in bringing the United Nations closer to local communities; digital education was an area where UNV could contribute significantly. UNV successfully ensured diversity and inclusion in recruitment, including increased numbers of UN-Volunteers from various nationalities, backgrounds, and skills. It was alone among United Nations entities with a majority women workforce, mostly from the South, and created opportunities for volunteers with disabilities. UNV helped increase the number of women participating in peacebuilding dialogues, strengthened women's capacities, and empowered local communities. UNV should create innovative platforms to maximize volunteers' knowledge, skills and entrepreneurship in its next strategic framework.

86. Across the board, delegations said volunteerism was the core of a people-centred approach to achieving the 2030 Agenda. UN-Volunteers were instrumental to reform at country level and in dealing with humanitarian crises, and volunteerism was key to South-South cooperation, supporting local knowledge-sharing and innovation. Offering a powerful means to address SIDS' challenges, UNV should leverage its system-wide support to advance SAMOA Pathway priorities. The Special Voluntary Fund (SVF) supported system-wide action to COVID-19 and enabled UNV to flexibly, strategically and efficiently allocate resources for delivery. Delegations called on Member States to consider contributing to the SVF and encouraged UNV to continue to diversify its donor base. UNV made tremendous progress in gender equality, inclusion and digital transformation and should continue to spearhead digital volunteering, diversifying and expanding UNV talent pools. Welcoming UNV role in developing national volunteering programmes, they called on UNV to continue to ensure full understanding of duty-of-care responsibilities in agreements with host agencies. They commended UNV commitment to United Nations coordination mechanisms and collaboration with resident coordinator offices. There was a call for the General Assembly to announce an international year of volunteerism for development.

87. In response, the Associate Administrator, UNDP, said the UNV decentralized footprint was a major asset that provided last-mile connectedness with people on the ground, crucial for any development pathway. She commended UNV for achieving gender parity among staff and volunteer workforce and called on system-wide scaling up of such UNV successes.

88. The Executive Coordinator, UNV, said UNV would continue prioritizing local-level action to build back better and pursue SDG achievement. Collaborative models emerging within the volunteer community pointed to blending of volunteer action between national and international volunteers, and country-level and online volunteers, as future priorities. He encouraged Member States to consider contributing to UNV, especially through the SVF, an important vehicle to innovate and trailblaze new spheres of volunteer action. UN-Volunteers would continue to backstop resident coordinator offices. Capacity constraints in resident coordinator offices and agency-sponsored programmes continued to benefit from the online volunteering platform during COVID-19, especially to address socioeconomic impacts. UNV support to country teams was reflected in stronger references to local volunteer action in UNSDCF's; UNV had earmarked resources for the SVF to support joint United Nations COVID-19 responses. UNV would continue working with UNDP and United Nations system to contribute to reform at local level, including by expanding its support for multi-country offices in SIDS. Likewise, it would continue to close the gender gap, focusing on countries/regions where disparities persisted. Despite a positive evaluation, UNV was redoubling efforts to ensure persons with disabilities benefitted from and

contributed to United Nations work. UNV took seriously its duty-of-care shared responsibility with host entities of UN-Volunteers, which had also demonstrated their commitment throughout COVID-19. Past international years of volunteers had made significant contributions to volunteering at the global and national levels. They also bolstered UNV partnerships with local communities, which remains a top UNV priority.

89. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/7 on United Nations Volunteers: Report of the Administrator.

UNFPA segment

XII. Statement by the UNFPA Executive Director and annual report†

90. In her opening remarks ([available on the UNFPA website](#)), the UNFPA Executive Director said COVID-19 was testing the bounds of global solidarity and commitments to multilateralism, even as it had shown no one was safe until everyone was. UNFPA had foreseen the pandemic's consequences: surge in domestic violence, spikes in child marriage, teenage pregnancy, female genital mutilation, pregnancy-related complications and death. It feared pandemic-related disruptions would slow progress on ending gender-based violence and female genital mutilation and cause millions of child marriages. UNFPA rose to the challenge, together with partners and programme countries, ensuring health workers received personal protective equipment and COVID-related training, delivering sexual and reproductive health services, strategically prepositioning and monitoring stocks of contraceptives and life-saving supplies, and ensuring access to mental health and psychosocial support to girls and women subjected to violence.

91. The Fund's swift pandemic response underscored the results of the strategic plan, 2018-2021, and pointed to five lessons for the strategic plan, 2022-2025: (a) *solidarity was survival*, as UNFPA stepped up international solidarity, including through official development assistance (ODA) commitments and equitable access to vaccines; (b) *functioning health systems were essential to larger freedoms and development ambitions*, underscoring the need for an integrated approach to health, economic, social, humanitarian, peace interventions; (c) *accelerating progress*, since even impressive gains were fragile and achieving the three transformative results demanded resilience; (d) *achieving a strong core resources base*, for UNFPA agility and responsiveness emerged from the flexibilities early payment of core resources afforded; and (e) *gender equality and empowerment of women and girls were key to every development goal*.

92. The strategic plan, 2022-2025, would be a global 'call to action' to achieve the three zeros. UNFPA would contribute to pursuing resilience, building on its comparative advantages as a public health agency within the United Nations system. In 2020, joint programming, operations and funding rose as part of system-wide responses to the pandemic; pooled funding accounted for 27 per cent of total non-core resources. But ODA reductions, due to slowed economies, risked hampering collective efforts. And while ODA remained vital, increasing flows of public and private domestic and international finance were essential to bridge the investment gap and achieve the three zeros. For its part, UNFPA fully achieved all four outputs and realized operational efficiency gains of \$8.3 million in 2020. However, the importance of core resources and multi-year funding could not be overstated.

93. UNFPA continued to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance in more than 60 countries. The Executive Director saw first-hand the critical need for such essential services during her humanitarian missions, where she heard harrowing stories of desperation, sexual violence and exploitation. Yet the women she met were emboldened to call for a greater voice in decision-

making related to their safety and protection. At global level, UNFPA was implementing a strategy to improve the quality, availability and delivery of humanitarian supplies and a new approach to gender-based violence, and it was strengthening humanitarian data capacity and human resources, including for its surge response.

94. UNFPA had strengthened its independent oversight activities, with investments growing at a higher rate than overall income projections. The new integrated budget included a substantially increased investment in the investigation function. UNFPA obtained an unqualified external audit opinion in 2020 and achieved a 96 per cent implementation rate for internal audit recommendations. It continued to invest in fraud prevention, detection and ‘second-line-of-defence’ controls and introduced mitigation measures for risks stemming from additional flexibilities to address the pandemic. The Fund was strengthening its capacities for protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, including in the humanitarian sector, as Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) champion, and through a roster of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment experts for rapid deployment. UNFPA led efforts to harmonize system-wide approaches to implementing partner sexual exploitation and abuse and continued to look at every allegation and respond in a prompt, structured, effective manner, putting prevention at the centre of its efforts.

95. Delegations acknowledged UNFPA frontline work ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights services for all throughout the pandemic. They recognized its unique role advancing implementation of the International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and long-term global efforts to reduce maternal mortality and promote sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. They welcomed progress against the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, and integration in the strategic plan, 2022-2025, of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights for all and alignment with the 2020 quadrennial review. They urged UNFPA to pursue harmonized, efficient, robust policies and programmatic and corporate approaches, including joint programming; explore partnerships with international financial institutions to share data, analysis, and financing for the Goals; and continue to ensure gender equality, diversity, disability inclusion, climate action, biodiversity and environment were at the centre of all activities. They appreciated the Fund’s greater contribution to system-wide results, coordination and coherence through joint programming, addressing gender-based violence and reproductive health and reproductive rights in all settings.

96. A group of delegations commended UNFPA for sounding the alarm on the pandemic-related spike in gender-based violence and need for gender-disaggregated data to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable. They welcomed that the three transformative results remained central to the strategic plan, 2022-2025, and encouraged UNFPA to continue leading efforts to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, harmonizing efforts with the United Nations entities. They commended the Fund’s ability, despite finite resources, to prioritize investments, while recalling the importance of the Funding Compact and sufficient, predictable core resources as key to achieving the 2030 Agenda. They acknowledged UNFPA work costing the achievement of the three zeros and helping countries mainstream budgeting. Improved UNFPA collaboration with United Nations organizations at country level had led to better use of resources and better results, including better integration of human rights and more diverse partnerships.

97. Another group of delegations said UNFPA played a key role responding ensuring continuity of sexual and reproductive health services, addressing gender-based violence and harmful practices, and safeguarding the supply of contraceptives and reproductive health commodities. The COVID-19 response had to follow a human rights-based approach, reflecting the voices of marginalized groups, and pursue adaptive programming and universal health coverage. UNFPA

focus on high-quality disaggregated data as a basis for tailor-made solutions was appreciated, crucial to ensuring an inclusive, gender-transformative global COVID-19 response. A strong vision, rooted in human rights, had to guide planning and strategic considerations, focused on the three zeros. The group called on UNFPA to: (a) strengthen its response to underlying conditions causing vulnerability, particularly among women and girls, and undertake stronger preventive gender-based violence efforts together with partners; (b) safeguard its normative role, including through better monitoring; (c) step up recognition of youth as champions of the Goals and devise plans to mobilize youth systematically, including to bridge the digital divide; and (d) mobilize adequate, predictable, sustainable, flexible core funding to safeguard the continuity of UNFPA activities and timely delivery of programmes.

98. In individual interventions, delegations commended UNFPA for integrating climate in programming and family planning in disaster risk reduction and climate response strategies, and for contributing to the Greening the Blue initiative. UNFPA was encouraged to continue embedding United Nations reforms in its work and deploy resources to maximum effect, including by increasing data systems' interoperability. The reclassification of earmarked resources should reflect limits developing countries faced due to indebtedness. The strategic investment mechanism to mobilize public and private resources was constructive but it was unclear how UNFPA would reap its benefits and protect core resources. UNFPA should ensure the strategic plan, 2022-2025, addressed the special needs of MICs, using disaggregated data, and increase its support to SIDS. They welcomed the output on population changes/data in the new plan, reflecting ageing, low fertility and climate. They appreciated UNFPA strengthening of national capacities to conduct censuses and gather/analyse data and demographic statistics, and support to advance national gender-equality efforts and work with youth to foster resilience and engagement. Multilateralism and adjusting activities to national priorities were crucial. UNFPA was cautioned against using non-consensual terms to which some delegations did not ascribe.

99. In response, the UNFPA Executive Director said the ICPD Programme of Action remained the bedrock of the new strategic plan, 2022-2025, grounded in the principle of 'leaving no one behind' and focused on accelerating the three zeros. The Programme of Action recognized the links between population, sustainable development and climate, and centrality of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights to empowerment and collective sustainability. UNFPA had integrated climate throughout its comprehensive sexuality education programming so that holistic age-appropriate, culturally sensitive education included the relationship between climate change and sexual and reproductive health outcomes. UNFPA was working with Governments to strengthen national early-warning systems for humanitarian and development crises and to transform norms, laws and mindsets.

100. Gender-based violence and femicide represented the most difficult challenges of the three zeros. UNFPA was working to close the funding gap to achieve the three zeros for the entire sector. In 2021, UNFPA was co-leading the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and was a core contributor to the strategic implementation of Youth 2030. Internally, the My Body, My Life, My World initiative accelerated and expanded UNFPA engagement with youth. To bridge the digital divide, UNFPA pursued outreach and advocacy at local levels through its risk communication and community engagement initiative, including the #youthagainstCOVID campaign. In response to the global humanitarian evaluation, UNFPA was finalizing a new disability and inclusion strategy.

101. UNFPA was engaged with international financial institutions, the World Bank, and development and regional banks, to reach underserved populations in MICs, including through South-South and triangular cooperation. It also addressed the most vulnerable in LDCs and SIDS, taking a unified view to strengthening national health and early-warning systems and

prepositioning with United Nations organizations. UNFPA worked through interagency initiatives to improve vulnerability assessments and study population/health data through the lens of climate fragility. UNFPA remained committed to United Nations reform and continued to lead on business operations reform together with the United Nations Development Coordination Office. Over a quarter of UNFPA funding came through joint and pooled sources, which had grown almost two-fold since 2018.

102. In the new strategic plan, UNFPA would strengthen its normative role in policy advocacy, data generation, analytics, and strategic communication, including promoting data systems interoperability. Its new strategic communication strategy would strengthen the Fund's commitment to protect, promote and evolve. By strengthening its normative role, UNFPA helped to give a voice to the voiceless. Through its lifecycle approach, the UNFPA global programme on aging and low fertility supported Governments with population policy advice and fostered intergenerational solidarity. Looking ahead, UNFPA was focused on leveraging innovation, being adaptive and imaginative, replicating what worked, and sharing best practices.

103. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/8 on implementation of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2018-2021: Report of the Executive Director.

XIII. Evaluation

104. The Director, Evaluation Office, UNFPA, presented his annual report on the evaluation function, 2020 (DP/FPA/2021/3) and the Deputy Executive Director (Programme) presented the management response to the report (DP/FPA/2021/CRP.3).

Annual report on the evaluation function, 2020: Report of the Executive Director

105. A group of delegations commended the Evaluation Office for adapting the evaluation function to COVID-19 and mitigating its impact on evaluations. They welcomed the office's excellent performance, achieving almost all targets of its key performance indicators, and its strengthening of decentralized evaluations resulting in a high implementation rate of good-quality evaluations. They welcomed progress implementing management responses and supported planned actions to enhance implementation of centralized evaluation recommendations. They stressed the centrality of the evaluation function in implementing strategic plans and evidence-based decision-making. They also welcomed UNFPA work with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to refresh the 2020 quadrennial review monitoring and reporting framework, and continuous innovation in gender equality and women's empowerment, especially mainstreaming them in all thematic areas. They appreciated the steady increase of the UNFPA evaluation expenditure ratio closer to the total programme expenditure defined in the evaluation policy and commended the Evaluation Office for supporting the independent system-wide evaluation mechanism and contributing to drafting the system-wide evaluation policy.

106. In response, the Director, Evaluation Office, UNFPA, assured the Board of the office's continued commitment to strengthening the evaluation function. Defining projections of the future expenditure ratio was difficult because the percentage depended on UNFPA future income. In absolute terms, there would be an increase in expenditure, continuing the positive trend.

107. The Director, Policy and Strategy Division, UNFPA, reassured Board members that UNFPA continued to strengthen and innovate its independent oversight and assurance activities with investments growing at a higher rate than overall income projections. That was the case even during recent austerity periods when UNFPA sought to safeguard budgets for the independent

functions. UNFPA had established a financial ring-fencing mechanism to ensure funding for country programme evaluations where only limited resources were available. UNFPA was committed to ensuring sufficient resources for the evaluation function; the new institutional budget would reflect this.

Evaluation of the UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment

108. The Evaluation Advisor, Evaluation Office, UNFPA, presented the evaluation of the UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment (DP/FPA/2019/CRP.8). The Deputy Executive Director (Programme) presented the management commentaries to the report (DP/FPA/2019/CRP.9).

109. A group of delegations commended UNFPA commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment as fundamental to its mandate and application across all development, humanitarian and peace efforts and at global, regional and country levels. They appreciated the heightened importance of gender-transformative approaches, UNFPA leadership in response to and prevention of gender-based violence, promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and response to and prevention of harmful practices. They recognized the importance of UNFPA cooperation with partners such as UNICEF and UN-Women and noted that integrated intersectional programming on gender equality was necessary to accelerate work across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. They looked forward to improved UNFPA work on social normative change and its incorporation throughout the strategic plan, 2022-2025. They called on UNFPA to strengthen its work to address barriers and inequality of access to sexual and reproductive health services and ensure follow-up to metrics in Goal indicator 5.6.1. Prioritizing gender equality demanded sufficient human and financial resources and more core resources; UNFPA should maintain key gender and gender-based violence expertise in UNFPA staff positions at all levels.

110. A delegation encouraged UNFPA to address gender-based violence as a standalone objective, integrated into family planning, reproductive and maternal health, in humanitarian and development settings. UNFPA should strengthen its capacity to provide gender-based violence prevention and response and sexual and reproductive health leadership, coordination and programming across contexts, including a survivor perspective. UNFPA should seek to better understand how gender norms and inequalities exacerbated the impacts of shocks and stressors. In future evaluations, UNFPA should explore evaluation methods that enable safe, secure data collection for the most vulnerable.

111. In response, the Director, Sexual and Reproductive Health Branch, UNFPA, said UNFPA was scaling up its prevention efforts to address the root causes of gender-based violence and lack of bodily autonomy. It was strengthening its approaches to transform harmful stereotypes into more positive versions of masculinity focused on men and boys. That included strengthening comprehensive sexuality education for social norms and service delivery through early intervention strategies, gender-transformative rights-based measures and a lifecycle approach. UNFPA collaborated with UNICEF and UN-Women through the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All. The strategic plan, 2022-2025, would focus on strengthening women's decision-making, reflect how to improve interagency cooperation on gender issues in the COVID-19 context, underscore women as agents-of-change, and promote women's and girls' voices in disaster, climate, resilience strategies, building on the Fund's normative role.

112. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/9 on UNFPA evaluation.

XIV. UNFPA country programmes and related matters

113. The Deputy Executive Director (Programme) provided an overview of the country programme document for Armenia, as well as the third, three-month extension of the country programme for Madagascar and the fifth, six-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic. In turn, the UNFPA Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia provided details from the regional perspective.

114. Member States provided supportive statements to the country programmes and extensions.

115. Regarding the CPD for Armenia, the exchange between the delegations of Armenia and Azerbaijan are provided in the following links: (a) [statement](#) by Armenia; and (b) [statement](#) by Azerbaijan.

116. The Board approved, in accordance with decision 2014/7, the country programme document for Armenia (DP/FPA/CPD/ARM/4/Rev.1). It also approved the third, three-month extension of the country programme for Madagascar and the fifth, six-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, as contained in document DP/FPA/2021/3.

UNOPS segment

XV. Statement by the UNOPS Executive Director and annual report

117. In her address ([available on the UNOPS website](#)), the UNOPS Executive Director presented her annual report (DP/OPS/2021/4), commenting that 2020 was a time of resilience and unity. UNOPS was quick to adapt to the new reality using state-of-the-art technology to address the COVID-19 crisis. UNOPS would continue to provide efficient procurement of medical supplies and equipment, strengthen the infrastructure of health systems, assist in vaccination roll-out programmes, and play its part in the collective task to put the world back on track towards the Goals. The United Nations needed to do more with limited resources and UNOPS stood ready to bring its efficient, effective practices to support partners. In 2020, UNOPS global project delivery exceeded \$2.2 billion, a major achievement considering COVID-19 disruptions. Almost \$900 million dollars' worth of new agreements were signed to combat COVID-19. That included work to restore basic services, mitigate health and socioeconomic impacts, and engage with United Nations partners to respond to natural disasters.

118. Throughout its Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, UNOPS focused on adding value to the 2030 Agenda through effective, cost-efficient solutions, building new strategic partnerships, better understanding partners' needs, accessing new funding sources to address mutual challenges. In 2020, UNOPS signed new agreements that exceeded \$10 billion. This step-change reflected the trust and confidence partners had in its capacity to deliver quality services, even under extraordinary circumstances. In the strategic plan, 2022-2025, UNOPS aimed to build on its achievements, supporting partners to achieve the Goals. Guided by the 2030 Agenda, UNOPS would support countries in developing their capacity and resource base, focused on quality infrastructure, improved public procurement, and its Sustainable Infrastructure Impact Investments (S3i) initiative.

119. Moving forward, UNOPS continued to simplify, streamline and scale its processes, developing information technology systems to enable efficiency, agility and flexibility as it continued to manage its assets and finances responsibly. UNOPS was committed to reform and engaged United Nations partners in accordance with its unique non-programmatic implementation mandate and self-financing business model. UNOPS multi-country office approach allowed it to

serve countries with a limited footprint. Its nurturing of speak-up culture and zero-tolerance on sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment was another indication of its investment in reform. UNOPS had made notable progress mainstreaming gender in projects but needed to step up efforts to close the gap. Within its workforce, gender equity remained a key priority. Internally, UNOPS had reached gender parity with women representing 49 per cent of its workforce. In 2021, UNOPS would widen its approach to ensure a broader, more diverse, inclusive model.

120. A group of delegations welcomed the significant rise in UNOPS service delivery during the pandemic, highlighting partners' trust in UNOPS and its role enhancing infrastructure investment and fast-tracking sustainable recovery. UNOPS made notable contributions to strengthening the capacity of national health infrastructure, delivering medical supplies, laboratory equipment, lifesaving medicines. UNOPS engagements in climate vulnerable countries should focus on building infrastructure to withstand climatic shocks, using the 2030 Agenda and Paris Climate Agreement as blueprints for a new sustainable infrastructure investment. UNOPS was encouraged to work with stakeholders in countries to promote gender-responsive infrastructure design and build national capacities in digital education infrastructure, making it a priority in the next strategic plan. UNOPS should seek to tailor its work to complement the priorities set by national Governments.

121. A group of delegations said UNOPS comparative advantage in infrastructure building helped least developed countries achieve their development priorities. UNOPS should leverage its experience to mitigate infrastructure gaps in LDCs, especially in education and health, help LDCs build sustainable infrastructure and technology, and ensure rapid recovery and resilience against climate emergencies and shocks through climate, disaster-focused investment decisions. UNOPS was encouraged to use its multi-stakeholder partnerships to help start-up businesses expand creative solutions in digital infrastructure and knowledge to reap the benefits of information and frontier technologies. They called on UNOPS to support LDCs in mainstreaming gender and youth priorities in investment decisions to ensure accelerated socioeconomic mobility for women and youth. UNOPS was encouraged to assist graduating and graduated LDCs facing high back-sliding risks due to the pandemic by strengthening infrastructure to ensure sustainable graduation and resilience against current and future shocks.

122. A third group of delegations sought details on the risks and challenges of implementing activities in 2020, given that a majority of 2020 results indicators in the sustainable implementation framework showed a decline compared to 2019. They acknowledged UNOPS contributions enabling the United Nations to deliver peace, security and development and recognized its efforts to establish follow-up systems for crosscutting sustainability elements. They commended UNOPS for its sustainability reporting in line with the Global Reporting Initiative, demonstrating its leadership in innovation and technical support to partners, and welcomed its commitment to United Nations reform and the direction set in the 2020 quadrennial review.

123. Other delegations welcomed the pivotal role the S3i initiative could play in boosting green recovery, impact technology and entrepreneurship, as it undertook socially responsible projects globally. They welcomed the creation of the UNOPS Client Board as a framework to discuss operational matters and opportunities to strengthen collaborative efforts, including interagency coordination. They sought clarity on why UNOPS business volume with United Nations organizations remained stagnant while it expanded with outside partners. UNOPS management was encouraged to update and improve the organization's framework of governance, risk management, and control to keep pace with the expanding volume and scope of UNOPS work.

124. In response, the Executive Director said UNOPS was using the lessons of its rapid pandemic response to inform its new strategic plan. Complimentary ways of working with United Nations

system partners, including through aligned reporting standards, continued to be key. UNOPS would deepen its strengths in health and fragile settings in the new strategic plan, focused on quality infrastructure, in line with nationally defined priorities, including in SIDS. As official development assistance was insufficient, UNOPS made the S3i initiative one of the main priorities of the new plan given its growth opportunities in health, affordable homes and energy, through efficient and effective business operations. Prevention was a key driver of UNOPS work and, as a demand-driven organization, UNOPS strived to be transparent and financially viable. UNOPS would continue to pursue gender parity internally and mainstream gender throughout its activities. For many countries, procurement was an important part of gross national product; UNOPS supported Governments through capacity-building to ensure public procurement added value to national priorities, assured transparency and fought corruption. UNOPS used its procurement expertise to better coordinate with United Nations organizations.

125. The Director, Implementation Practices and Standards, UNOPS, said UNOPS had developed an evidence-based infrastructure framework as an integrated approach to planning, implementing, and managing national infrastructure. The framework helped Governments move away from traditional silo-based planning to interdependent infrastructure systems. COVID-19 highlighted the importance and vulnerability of digital infrastructure, so UNOPS was helping Governments learn from the pandemic to ensure resilience in infrastructure systems. Evidence-based planning helped Governments and decision-makers achieve national development plans with better knowledge of demographic, economic, and climate change risks, key for Paris Agreement commitments. UNOPS welcomed the outcome of the 2021 Multilateral Organisation Performance Network appraisal of UNOPS as an example of successful country-level implementation. In response, UNOPS would work to better align its reporting with UNSDCF's and specific SDG outputs, working with partners to determine its tangible contributions.

126. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/10 on the annual report of the Executive Director.
