

## INFORMATION NOTE

### on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system



UNFPA Executive Board  
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## INTRODUCTION

This information note provides a further update on how UNFPA has continued to support and implement the repositioning of the United Nations Development System (UNDS), including in the context of the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, complementing the previous information notes to the Executive Board.

### 1. Update on the implementation of UNDS reforms

Three years into the UNDS repositioning, UNFPA continues to be fully committed to the reforms and actively supports its implementation. At the global level, UNFPA plays an active role in multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) processes. As a co-chair of the UNSDG Business Innovation Group (BIG) and Gender Equality Task Team, UNFPA supports the roll-out of the common back offices, the mainstreaming of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across the system and the development of updated guidance on joint programming. UNFPA is also a part of the Joint Steering Committee on Humanitarian-Development Collaboration, which provides coordination between humanitarian, development and peace pillars of work.

At the regional level, UNFPA actively engages in regional collaborative platforms and co-leads numerous issue-based coalitions, increasing coherence and coordinated support to United Nations country teams (UNCTs). To facilitate the implementation of the multi-country office (MCO) review recommendations, UNFPA was entrusted to coordinate a system-wide offer for strengthened policy and technical support for countries serviced by MCOs. Through consultations in the Asia and the Pacific and the Latin America and Caribbean regions, entities identified ways to better leverage existing UN system-wide policy and technical capacities, including the regional assets, for more coherent and integrated support to the small island developing States (SIDS). The upcoming development of multi-country cooperation frameworks in both the Caribbean and the Pacific provides a critical opportunity to establish effective mechanisms and modes of engagement to increase UN system-wide policy and technical support to countries serviced by MCOs and leverage strategic partnerships and innovative financing to ensure the UN system is well resourced to support countries serviced by MCOs.

At the country-level, UNFPA, together with UNDP and UNICEF, participates in a large number of UN joint programmes at the country level (214 in 2020), evidenced by increased funding received from the UN joint and pooled funds, which has nearly doubled over the past two years, from \$164 million in 2018 to \$270 million in 2020.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Increased resident coordinator (RC) engagement on normative issues, including human rights and women's rights.
- Common business operations leading to efficiency gains at country-level.
- Increased participation in joint programming and more resources from pooled funding.
- Strengthening leadership and physical presence in MCOs.
- Increased support to UNCTs through active engagement and leadership in Issue-based Coalitions.
- Reforms leading to improved collective UN support to achieve national development priorities.

UNFPA also continues to coordinate its efforts at the country, regional, and global levels in support of prevention, response and early recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, UNFPA co-leads the system-wide monitoring and reporting mechanism on the socio-economic response related to health, gender-based violence and youth.

To assess the ongoing implementation of UNDS reform, UNFPA launched its second internal survey on the implementation of the reforms in April 2021, to collect experiences, challenges, bottlenecks and opportunities. The survey was administered to country offices as well as multi-country and regional offices, with a total of 88 UNFPA country and multi-country offices responding, representing a response rate of 72 per cent, and all 6 UNFPA regional offices participating in the survey.

The survey findings indicate the assessments among the respondents that UNDS reform, in general, enables UNFPA to more effectively undertake its work and facilitate increased coordination, cooperation, and coherence among UNDS entities at country and regional levels. The repositioned UNDS is seen to have led to an improved collective United Nations support to achieve national development goals, led by independent resident coordinators (RCs). The vast majority of UNFPA country offices reported that the reforms resulted in an effective socio-economic response to the pandemic and an integrated SDG policy support to countries. More detailed findings from the survey are included in the following sections.

## **2. Resident coordinator system**

Over the past year, the independent and empowered RC system and the new generation of UNCTs have been put to the test to respond more effectively and coherently to the pandemic. The survey findings confirmed that RCs effectively coordinated the UN socio-economic response efforts and that RCs supported UNFPA participation in the development and implementation of national COVID-19 socio-economic response frameworks (94%). In Turkey, for example, the RC Office established a well-coordinated COVID-19 working group and facilitated an inclusive process for developing the joint COVID-19 assessment and response plan, which fully integrated issues of gender equality and sexual and reproductive health. Through the joint COVID-19 response plan in Turkey, and under the RC leadership, UNFPA, together with WHO and UNHCR, was able to raise funds for a multi-partner trust fund (MPTF) on COVID-19.

Country offices reported that the RC system has been successful in strengthening collaboration among UNCT members (89%), leading to improved coordination at the country level. Additionally, in contexts where RCs lead and coordinate the humanitarian response efforts, RCs have been effective in facilitating the linkage between humanitarian and development programming for enhanced and sustainable impact (90%).

Compared to the first UNFPA internal survey on UNDS reform implementation in 2019, offices reported an increase in RC engagement on normative issues, including concerning human rights and women's rights; RC support to UNFPA-specific mandate areas; as well as the ability of RCs and RCOs to facilitate inter-agency work. There is also a clear increase in the proportion of RCs that provided feedback on the performance of UNFPA representatives, from 58 per cent in 2019 to 73 per cent in 2021. The same was true with the proportion of UNFPA representatives that provided feedback to the performance of RCs, up from 71 per cent in 2019 to 92 per cent in 2021.

## **3. Common business operations**

Implementing common business operations is a critical step to enable joint work and generate efficiencies that can be redeployed into programmes. The implementation of common business operations at the country level continues to yield efficiencies for UNFPA, with 73 per cent of country offices reporting that they have experienced some form of efficiency gains. Mutual recognition practices generated efficiencies by allowing entities to use or rely on another entity's policies, procedures, system contracts and related operational mechanism for the implementation of activities without further evaluation checks or approvals.

Several country offices reported that joint procurement, joint audits and the utilization of other entities' long-term agreements with service providers have led to significant efficiencies. In South Sudan, for example, joint audits have resulted in a 30 per cent cost reduction in audit fees for the UNFPA country office, while in Albania, the UNCT was able to save \$160,000 in 2020 through the common use of these long-term service agreements. In the Republic of Congo, due to common business operations efforts, joint logistics have been organized for the transport of medical equipment and supplies to the most remote areas of the country. The use of joint procurement and long-term service agreements was particularly impactful as UNFPA country offices support COVID-19 response efforts.

Overall, 92 per cent of UNFPA country offices have or are currently engaged in the implementation of the UNCTs business operations strategies. However, despite increasing efficiencies at the country level, 66 per cent of country offices reported that the implementation of common business operations has not yet resulted in cost savings. Country offices reported that remote working arrangements, brought on by the pandemic, have slowed progress in the full operationalization of common business operations strategies. UNFPA will continue to monitor the cost savings resulting from these efforts as more UNCTs begin to fully operationalize business operations strategies.

#### **4. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework**

The vast majority of UNFPA country offices (90%) believe that the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) is an important tool for integrated UN system responses to eliminate preventable maternal mortality, unmet need for family planning as well as gender-based violence and harmful practices. Among those that have participated in the development of cooperation frameworks, 77 per cent agreed that the development or implementation of the cooperation framework led to increased UNFPA participation in joint programming. Going forward, increased efforts will be required at regional and global levels to support UNFPA country offices in the development of UNSDCF funding and financing framework and theories of change.

All new UNFPA country programmes developed after the adoption of the new UNSDCF guidance are fully aligned with the cooperation frameworks. The Fund also integrated the United Nations system-wide planning, monitoring and reporting platform (UN INFO) in the new corporate performance management and reporting system.

#### **5. Multi-country office review**

Reinforcing support in multi-country office settings is a key component of the ongoing UNDS reform, and critical to ensuring that the UNDS more effectively supports countries and territories serviced by MCOs, with a particular focus on small island developing States (SIDS), including in the context of the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UNFPA has made progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the MCO review. The Fund is strengthening its leadership and physical presence in the Pacific, with the establishment of assistant representative positions in Samoa and Tonga, as well as a new UN presence in the North Pacific. Based on the internal survey, there is still a need for further progress in the implementation of the MCO review recommendations. For example, not all MCOs have established priority theme groups specific to the needs of SIDS; and effective support mechanisms from regional assets, including regional economic and social commissions and regional issue-based coalitions, have yet to materialize in some contexts, according to the UNFPA survey's findings.

##### **1. Regional Reform**

Newly-established regional collaborative platforms, including issue-based coalitions, have been increasingly responding to the specific needs of UNCTs and have led to increased coordination among UN entities at the regional level. UNFPA regional offices perceive issue-based coalitions as effective mechanisms for supporting the work of UNCTs, with the majority of regional offices reporting that respective issue-based coalitions have supported UNCTs in COVID-19 socio-

economic response and recovery efforts. UNFPA co-leads several issue-based coalitions on gender equality and human rights, data and statistics, and youth.

UNFPA regional offices reported increased collaboration with regional economic and social commissions and that the repositioning of regional assets created opportunities for accelerated implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. They also reported that RCs had confirmed that UNFPA country programme documents aligned fully with the respective cooperation frameworks. UNFPA regional directors have been invited to appraise the performance of RCs, as articulated in the UN system Management and Accountability Framework.

## **2. 2020 QCPR and integrated SDG policy support and implementation**

At its core, the UNDS reform is about advancing sustainable development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The 2020 QCPR provides clear guidance to the UNDS on priorities over the next four years, to advance the achievement of the SDGs during the Decade of Action. The QCPR is clear on the need for the UNDS to leverage the reforms to ensure balanced and integrated approaches, following each entity's mandate and bearing in mind their comparative advantages.

To ensure its effective contribution to the people-centred, gender-sensitive and rights-based achievement of sustainable development, UNFPA will fully align its work with the 2020 QCPR. The fund is a part of a small core technical working group that will be involved in day-to-day inputs and feedback on the various steps of the development of the new QCPR monitoring and reporting framework, organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs in its role as custodian of the QCPR, under the overall guidance of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. UNFPA will also ensure that its strategic plan for 2022-2025 fully aligns with the QCPR, including by incorporating the agreed indicators of the new QCPR monitoring framework into the integrated results and resources framework of the new strategic plan.

Based on the internal survey, UNFPA country offices overwhelmingly agreed that the reforms are leading to improved collective UN support to achieve national development priorities (85%) and that UNFPA is well-positioned to contribute to SDG integrated policy support and implementation (97%). UNFPA country offices are actively engaging in SDG follow-up and reviews, with 81 per cent reporting being involved in the voluntary national review process and 61 per cent indicating involvement in national SDG reporting and national SDG consultations, respectively.

In line with the 2020 QCPR, country offices have indicated as most critical entry points for UNFPA on integrated SDG implementation at the country-level the following – gender/gender-based violence (96%); health/sexual and reproductive health (93%); population dynamics (90%); youth (87%); and data (84%). As UNFPA finalizes its strategic plan for 2022-2025, the Fund will continue to take advantage of opportunities to support increased integrated SDG policy support and implementation, in line with the 2020 QCPR.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of the UNFPA internal survey on UNDS reform implementation has provided the Fund with a good basis to integrate lessons learned into system-wide guidance, including within the context of the ongoing revision of the management and accountability framework and the review of the RC system.

UNFPA also intends to utilize the survey results to more clearly understand the lessons from its contributions to an integrated and coordinated COVID-19 response and determine how the Fund can take good practices to scale. This is particularly important as UNFPA seeks to contribute to the full implementation of the new QCPR and respond more effectively and coherently to the specific needs of countries, in particular to those in special situations. Learning from the good practices of the COVID-19 response efforts, UNFPA can enhance its engagement in integrated SDG implementation, through gender equality and gender-based violence, health and sexual and reproductive health, population dynamics, data and youth as entry points.