



16 August 2019

Information note

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

UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women are pleased to provide their respective Executive Boards with a further update on our engagement in the repositioning of the United Nations development system (UNDS). We remain fully committed to the UNDS reform and to jointly drive all its remaining workstreams forward in close coordination with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General and with the support of the United Nations Development Coordination Office (DCO) and the Transition Team.

This note complements the earlier information notes presented to the Executive Board in the first regular and the annual sessions in 2019. It provides an update on recent developments since June 2019. Additionally, it includes a mapping of regional assets and capacities, as requested by the Executive Board in decision 2019/15.

1. Introduction

The UNDS reform is progressing from conceptualization to implementation in order to guide the system's transformation to better support countries to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Gearing up for the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, UNFPA has capitalized on the UNDS repositioning to better deliver for the people it serves and become a stronger, more effective and efficient organization.

The reform is not an end in itself; achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a promise the international community cannot break. This promise cannot be realized if we do not reach the goals laid out in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action - adopted 25 years ago in Cairo, Egypt, in 1994. To accelerate the achievement, the Governments of Kenya and Denmark, together with UNFPA, will convene in a summit on ICPD25 from 12 to 14 November 2019 in Nairobi, Republic of Kenya. The summit intends to galvanize change and mobilize leadership in addressing persistent and emerging challenges related to the ICPD Programme of Action. The summit will bring many UNDS entities together, alongside with governments, the private sector, civil society, faith-based organizations and other stakeholders to commit to finally implementing the full ICPD Programme of Action.

Guided by the Member States deliberations at the recent ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment and the agreed resolution (E/2019/L21), UNFPA is reviewing its internal processes and systems to make necessary changes and adjustments to facilitate the transformation. Work is underway to internalize the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) guidance, Management and Accountability System at the country level, Secretary-General's Funding Compact and Coordination Levy. UNFPA will remain closely engaged in implementing other ongoing and interconnected UNDS repositioning streams.



A detailed internal UNDS reform implementation plan will guide UNFPA in the coming months and at all levels, monitor progress and ensure engagement, accountability and ownership by various business units in the organization.

2. Supporting the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system

The reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system plays a critical coordination role to ensure a more coherent United Nations collective response at the country level. UNFPA is therefore proactively partnering with, and supporting, the Resident Coordinators in leading the United Nations country teams to conduct integrated analyses, joint planning and implementation processes to deliver collective results. UNFPA values Resident Coordinators in many countries such as:

- Champions for UNFPA priorities, e.g. promoting “She Decides” at the political levels and supporting UNFPA-led initiatives on health education in schools to empower girls.
- Advocates for UNFPA mandate, e.g. promoting UNFPA participation in joint resource mobilization efforts, joint programmes, and often leading negotiations with the governments to co-finance Demographic and Health Surveys.
- Supporters of UNFPA important role in UNSDCF and joint workplans, enhancing UNFPA engagement and in many instances leadership role in the joint thematic groups as well as the implementation of the Common Chapter of Strategic Plans of UNDP, UNICEF, UN-Women and UNFPA.

As a prerequisite for successful and mutually beneficial partnerships, UNFPA is investing in staff skills and capacities. In the approximately 30 countries where UNFPA does not have an international representative, the senior national professional officer positions will be strengthened and empowered to take the role of “heads of offices”, supported by country directors, usually situated in a neighbouring country. The move will strengthen UNFPA programmatic and management capacities, visibility and accountability for results. Most importantly, it will promote stronger substantive partnerships with the new Resident Coordinator system and the United Nations country teams, but also with governments and all stakeholders.

UNFPA will integrate the SDGs certification training, or “SDGs Primer” in our internal training curriculum, such as in the Managers’ Certification programme, for more collaborative and joined-up inter-agency approaches at all levels. We also support and encourage UNFPA staff who have aspirations of becoming the Resident Coordinators through tailored training, development and coaching plans.

UNFPA has paid its contribution to the funding of the Resident Coordinator system in a timely manner and operationalized the 1 per cent levy on all tightly earmarked non-core contributions. While almost all donors have opted for the agency-administered option, it is worth to note that the administration and tracking of the levy is process-heavy and therefore not cost-neutral. In close coordination with other UNDS entities, UNFPA monitors and will report on the additional transaction and administration costs associated with the levy to the Executive Board.

3. Strengthening system-wide analysis, planning and reporting

The new UNSDCF guidance has been issued and the work is underway to develop the companion pieces. UNFPA moved swiftly to internalize the new guidance and held discussions among its representatives, country directors, heads of offices and regional programme advisors. A series of webinars have been conducted to familiarize staff with the new guidance and discuss alignment with UNFPA country programming process. In June 2019, UNFPA organized a UNSDCF workshop at its headquarters to build a community of practice in all regions, develop regional support plans, compile UNSDCF resource/toolbox and establish a global consulting group for UNSDCF roll-out countries. The work is also underway to review relevant internal policies,



procedures and processes, particularly those related to planning, monitoring, evaluating and reporting to create an enabling environment for UNSDCF development and implementation by the country offices.

Strengthening results-based management (RBM) remains a high priority for UNFPA. The organization has recently rolled out an “RBM Seal” corporate certification to recognize good performance of country offices, supporting national partners to accelerate progress towards achievement of the ICPD agenda and the SDGs. As an effective driver of positive change across the organization, the certification empowers managers and provides motivation and incentives to accelerate the institutionalization of RBM in the organization. The initiative is currently piloted in 12 countries.

4. Strengthening joint implementation/support to the Sustainable Development Goals

In the current era of reform, UNFPA is working with its partners to pioneer new solutions, deliver better together and enhance financing for transformative results. This work involves a costing and financing initiative for sexual and reproductive health and rights that will support efforts to fill the tremendous financing gap for the Sustainable Development Goals. With just 11 years left to the 2030 deadline, it is time for urgent action and ambitious financing commitments, based on the best available evidence and data.

Expanding the evidence base and bringing more financial arguments are the timeliest investments to scale up programmes and operations to reach the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In 2019, UNFPA started the costing of ending gender-based violence, ending preventable maternal deaths and ending female-genital mutilation and child marriage. It supports the Fund’s commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 17 targets on strengthening domestic resource mobilization, implementing the resource mobilization commitments of the developed countries and mobilizing additional financial resources for developing countries. UNFPA implements this initiative in partnership with the John Hopkins University, the University of Victoria and the University of Washington.

UNFPA is also working with countries and the United Nations system to build stronger population data systems that can reach the furthest behind, a foremost priority of the ICPD that the entire 2030 Agenda depends on. The Population Data Platform (PDP) will allow planners to identify and map where needs are greatest and where interventions need to be targeted to reach those furthest behind. By enabling the combination of different sources of data, such as census and surveys, the platform can help highlight, for example, which districts in a country have the highest rates of child marriage, or where the demand for contraceptives outstrips supply.

More than 95 SDG indicators require population data for their measurement. While the platform is designed to advance the Fund’s work with Governments in key areas of the UNFPA mandate, it also offers value in supporting shared United Nations system work and planning in countries, including as part of common country assessments.

5. Efficiencies through shared business operations and premises

UNFPA is an integral part of an inter-agency project team formed in the fall of 2018 under UNSDG Business Innovation Group (BIG) to deliver on the ambitious targets set in the Secretary-General’s report. Representing UN-Women and UNESCO in the project team, UNFPA provides the perspective of both a medium-sized organization and an intended recipient of common back office services. The group is currently finalizing costing and client satisfaction principles as the necessary prerequisites to common back offices and global shared service centres. The agreed principles will be further operationalized during the design of back office



configurations, whether at country (location-dependent services) or regional and global levels (location-independent services availed through Global Shared Service Centres).

The work on the consolidation of common back offices is by far the most challenging among the six targets set by the Secretary-General. Hence, the BIG project team currently collects baseline data in six pilot countries, Albania, Botswana, Jordan, Laos, Senegal and Vietnam, with country visits taking place until August 2019. The objective is to understand costs by each function and activity across all entities, in order to identify potential consolidation opportunities within each typological profile. Based on an agreement amongst participating entities that a clear business case exists, possible common back offices configurations will be jointly identified and proposed by the end of 2019, and piloting of these will be conducted in 2020.

On the common premises, existing system-wide data suggests that approximately 16 per cent of United Nations premises were being shared by two or more entities as of 2017. UNFPA, however, already shares 72 per cent of its premises with other United Nations agencies, which exceeds General Assembly resolution 72/279 target of 50 per cent common premises.

The changes proposed are transformative – to consolidate back office functions across over 30 different United Nations entities, each with its own idiosyncrasies which have evolved over time as separate and distinct systems, platforms, processes and ways of working. To generate targeted efficiencies, however, will take time. Moreover, many of the gains to be made will not be cashable or transferable for other uses, particularly for agencies who receive mostly earmarked funding. Other gains will be one-off (i.e. any staff costs saved in year one will simply not be budgeted again in year two and beyond, resulting in only a one-year savings) or only realized incrementally. While efficiencies are undoubtedly an aim of the entire UNDS reform, it is important not to lose sight of the other overarching goal – more effective service delivery resulting from more resources being available and directed to core programmes.

6. Review of agency assets at country and regional level

UNFPA is committed to the ongoing review to optimize and restructure the United Nations regional assets. Regional offices of UNFPA and other funds and programmes are playing an important role to support the effective delivery of results at the country level and to provide technical assistance to the United Nations country teams (UNCTs). The funds and programmes at the regional level act as a transmission mechanism to influence the Resident Coordinators/UNCTs, providing advice on how to integrate the standards and resolutions into a programmatic framework with a theory of change and a results-based management perspective. The regional level does not only look at “cross or trans-border” issues, it also looks at the patterns of how certain challenges emerge with similar configuration, country by country. Regional offices, as part of the regional UNSDG team, also play an important role as a troubleshooting and dispute resolution mechanism for UNCTs.

The UNDS at the regional level has an incredibly rich set of partners and networks. Convening them takes different forms and shapes. The partnering, networking and convening space created and maintained by UNFPA at the regional level has an enormous potential for enhanced south-south and triangular cooperation.

Despite our commonalities, the UNDS at the regional level remains a very diverse and decentralized structure. It is a structure that has evolved organically over time, and has gone through different transformations. Hence, leveraging regional assets should build on the things that are already working well, and should not become process-heavy. UNFPA will actively engage in the development of region-specific roll-out plans for new collaborative platforms with an aim to amplify the work of all agencies and facilitate more coordinated support to the country offices, also through enhanced partnership with the United Nations Regional Economic Commissions.



7. Funding Compact

Driving sustainable financing for SDGs

The UNSDG, under the new working arrangements, has developed common strategic priorities to facilitate a step change in the quality and impact of United Nations support at the country level. The resources needed to implement the ambitious 2030 Agenda are substantial; this requires shifting from funding individual projects to financing transformative change. To this extent, UNFPA is preparing itself to face the challenges of the new financing landscape and take advantage of the new opportunities that this is creating.

In line with the ambitious requirements set up by Agenda 2030, and the achievement of the Strategic Plan's three transformative results, UNFPA is focusing on:

- (a) Building new partnerships, both with public and private institutions to be better prepared to attract non-official development assistance funding and create new platforms for impact-investing in the key areas of its mandate;
- (b) Assessing clear funding needs, gaps and projections, using rigorous and updated financial information;
- (c) Aligning resources with programmatic needs, creating appropriate funding windows in order to decrease transaction costs, fragmentation and volatility and responding in an integrated, flexible and dynamic way to national priorities;
- (d) Demonstrating and giving visibility to the results achieved, including through UNFPA digital instruments and platforms, improving real-time data access and enhancing visibility for donors and partners and accountability of spending;
- (e) Mapping out relevant capacities, including development finance literacy, and creating platforms to cross-fertilize information and innovation and put limited resources to best use across the organization.

The UNSDG Strategic Financing Results Group (SFRG), co-chaired by UNCTAD and UNFPA, aims to serve as a platform to help optimize the degree to which the United Nations can leverage its funding instruments, and current spending can mobilize additional finance and leverage new financing partners and modalities to help Member States meet the ambitious SDG financing requirements. UNFPA also serves as a co-penholder with the Development Cooperation Office to develop the “Financing the SDGs and Funding the Cooperation Framework” companion piece to the UNSDCF guidance.

Funding Compact with Member States

The Funding Compact is finalized and includes commitments, indicators, baselines and targets for both Member States and UNDS. UNFPA individually is already meeting or exceeding many UNDS commitments and will continue to fully engage in system-wide efforts at the country, regional and global levels.

8. Independent System-Wide Evaluation

The UNFPA Evaluation Office is fully engaged with the evaluation offices of other United Nations entities. Under the umbrella of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), UNFPA is an active member of the UNEG Task Force for Independent System-Wide Evaluations (ISWE), whose purpose it is to develop an updated policy to institutionalize those types of evaluations.



UNFPA is also an active member of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Group, whose purpose is to implement and deliver independent system-wide evaluations in the humanitarian field. The UNFPA Evaluation Office is co-leading two system-wide evaluations: one on the United Nations System response to the drought in Ethiopia, and one on the United Nations system support to gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian settings.

UNFPA commitment to system-wide and joint evaluations is demonstrated by the fact that 50 percent of centralized evaluations planned for 2019/2020 are either system-wide or joint, including the joint UNDP/UNICEF/UNFPA/UN-Women evaluation of the common chapter of the strategic plans. UNFPA already uploaded all centralized evaluations produced to the UNEG Evaluation Database.

9. Conclusion

Together with UNDP, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women and the wider UNDS system, UNFPA reiterates its full commitment to the implementation of the UNDS reform. UNFPA will continue to demonstrate this support and leadership in concrete terms to accelerate the implementation of the reforms at all levels within and outside the organization. Imagining the world we want is not enough. It is time to be bold and do what is right. The ongoing UNDS repositioning presents opportunities and has direct implications for UNFPA, some of which are still partly unknown at this stage and others which we are currently adapting in our workflows and processes.

For UNFPA to respond to the challenge of realizing the ICPD agenda by 2030, an evidence-based approach and continued collaboration is necessary. By understanding that change and adaptation are elements of organizational culture and an integral part of its business, UNFPA will be able to drive change before change is brought upon the organization.

The Fund is developing its structures, systems and organizational culture to become a much more adaptive organization anchored in the field-oriented ambition of the three transformative results of the Strategic Plan.

The wider changes outlined above offer an enabling opportunity for the Fund to become an even more coordinated, integrated, results-oriented, agile and innovative organization. This, in turn, will help UNFPA engage more partners, generate greater commitment and galvanize the global movement needed to fulfil the ICPD Programme of Action and achieve the SDGs.
