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Information Note

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

I. Introduction

This note provides an update on UNFPA engagement in the repositioning of the United Nations development system (UNDS), complementing the previous notes to the Executive Board, as reform measures are rolled out and implemented at the country, regional and global levels. The note follows the recently-adopted ECOSOC resolution on the remaining mandates of the UNDS repositioning and updates on the collaboration between UNFPA and the UNDS on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This note also contains the initial views of UNFPA towards the next cycle of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development (QCPR).

II. Moving forward on the remaining mandates of UNDS repositioning

UNFPA sees the adoption of the ECOSOC resolution -- on “progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system” – as re-confirming the direction of the reforms and providing an opportunity to reconfigure regional assets and strengthen multi-country offices (MCO) in support of the 2030 Agenda.

On the regional review, UNFPA believes that the proposed architecture for harnessing the regional assets of the UNDS will support enhanced results at country level. Building on solid structures already in place, the reform has been a valuable opportunity to further deepen collaboration and efficiency of the UN agencies at the regional level.

As part of the inter-agency group to review UNDS assets at the regional level, UNFPA helped to define the functions and governance of the new regional collaborative platforms. A “new way of working” at the regional level will centre on issue-based coalitions. Currently, UNFPA co-chairs several thematic and results groups in each region. Issue-based coalitions are demand-driven and cover topics on which multiple UN resident coordinators (RCs) and UN country teams (UNCTs) can seek regional support and guidance.

In the Africa region, to give an example, UNFPA is co-convening the coalition on ‘Strengthened integrated data and statistical systems for sustainable development’ alongside the UN Economic Commission for Africa; and the coalition on ‘Harnessing demographic dividend, gender, and youth for development’. UNFPA is also actively involved in the work of the other coalitions.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, to give another example, the issue-based coalition on gender equality led jointly by UNFPA and UN-Women has conducted a rapid assessment and held a retreat with the RCs at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, compiled and developed a repository of guidance for the RCs/UNCT.

On the multi-country offices review, UNFPA recognizes the specific challenges faced by countries covered by the MCOs, especially in times of crisis. UNFPA has been an active member of the inter-agency working group to draft a report on how the system intends to respond and implement the recommendation of the UN Secretary-General to upgrade the support to countries covered by the MCOs.

UNFPA has offered its new costing models and tools to the UN system to be scaled up and adjusted for the needs of countries covered by the MCOs. Other individual commitments include increasing physical presence in both subregions (Asia Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean), reviewing business models and resource allocations, and strengthening South-South cooperation support.

III. Collaboration with the UN system on the COVID-19 response

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, UNFPA is coordinating its efforts at the country, regional, and global levels in support of prevention, response and early recovery, working with governments, other UN agencies, civil society organizations, private-sector partners, as well as with affected groups, such as frontline health workers, young people and older persons.

At the global level, for example, UNFPA collaborates with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General on an ongoing basis to develop Secretary-General reports and briefs on COVID-19 in areas such as gender, human rights, people on the move, children, older persons and mental health. UNFPA co-authored the health pillar of the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 in collaboration with WHO, and provided contributions to the other pillars of social protection and basic services, economic recovery and multilateral collaboration.

In late July, UNFPA, in collaboration with the geographic information system company Esri, launched the [COVID-19 Population Vulnerability Dashboard](#) as an offer to the wider system. This interactive tool is intended to provide UN agencies, governments and policymakers, public health and frontline workers, as well as the general public with access to data on populations vulnerable to COVID-19 to improve and inform both preparedness and response, and to save lives. The dashboard highlights population vulnerabilities at the national and subnational levels, using data from the latest Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) census samples for 94 countries, based on key indicators such as age, older persons living alone, population density, among others. The dashboard features daily updates on COVID-19 cases and deaths, as well as global data on health sector readiness. From the onset of the pandemic, UNFPA has used existing partnerships to strengthen collaboration for the response, and engaged in proactive coalition building to bring its leadership and expertise in data to governments to contribute to and inform their COVID response action.

More broadly, UNFPA is committed to building back better at all levels. UNFPA plans to leverage new insights, renewed interest in health-sector interventions and innovations in response to the pandemic to improve post-COVID-19 operations and programming and to further inform the elaboration of the next UNFPA strategic plan (2022-2025).

Below are some examples of UNFPA work at the regional level:

In the Arab States region, the UNFPA regional office participates in the WHO regional crisis management group and sub-working groups on risk communication and community engagement; humanitarian settings and displaced populations; and supplies. UNFPA co-chairs the regional inter-agency gender theme group and its gender-based violence COVID-19 sub-working group ensuring integration of gender-based violence within the health sector and the wider socio-economic response.

UNFPA is engaged in country-specific socio-economic impact assessments, which form the basis for developing country specific medium-term UN socio-economic response plans. The Fund's particular focus is on health, social protection, basic social services and gender, to ensure no one is being left behind, especially those most vulnerable, such as persons with disabilities, older persons, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants.

The UNFPA regional office, jointly with WHO and UNICEF, is supporting the continuity of essential reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health services in the context of COVID-19. UNFPA, WHO and UNICEF have also engaged in advocacy geared toward national ministries of health to emphasize the criticality of maintaining maternal, child and reproductive health services during the pandemic to avoid excess morbidity and mortality. As part of the regional alliance for the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All, and in partnership with WHO, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNHCR and the World Organization for Family Doctors, the regional office is also developing an online training programme for primary health care providers on COVID-19 management and on how to sustain essential services.

In the Asia and Pacific region, a regional ad hoc task team on protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) was established, with dedicated emphasis on supporting inter-agency coordination on PSEA during the COVID-19 response; UNFPA was selected to co-lead. Further, UNFPA also co-leads the UNiTE working group on eliminating violence against women and the risk communication sub-group on vulnerable and marginalized populations as part of a global effort to leave no one behind.

UNFPA is also an active member of several interagency working groups, including on COVID-19, on gender in humanitarian action, and on logistics. Furthermore, UNFPA hosts the inter-agency Regional Emergency Gender-based Violence Advisor team. In June, the team reached 172 emergency responders with remote capacity-building sessions on 'gender-based violence in emergencies', delivered in collaboration with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies and World Vision International.

Through the 'kNOwVAWdata' initiative, the UNFPA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific Region, jointly with UN-Women and WHO, developed the [Data Collection on Violence against Women and COVID-19: Decision Tree](#) to guide the United Nations, national statistical offices, policymakers and researchers on how to best collect data on women's experiences of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on their access to and use of services without compromising their safety.

In the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, UNFPA continues to work with UN country teams to design joint programmes, partnerships, and to mobilize funding. In June, UNFPA started implementation of COVID-19 programmes under the Multi-Partner Trust Fund in five countries. UNFPA continues to build partnerships to ensure that no one is left behind, and has joined with

partners to reach marginalized and vulnerable groups, specifically older people, pregnant women, and those at risk of domestic abuse and violence.

In Armenia, for example, UNFPA is a partner in a \$1 million project on mitigating the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable people and communities, providing support to survivors of domestic violence as well as other vulnerable women and older persons. The project is funded through the UN Secretary-General's Recover Better Fund. As part of a project on the promotion and protection of human rights (implemented together with UNDP and UNICEF), the Fund has produced a report on the "Rapid assessment on the Government response to domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic."

In Uzbekistan, within the framework of the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, focusing on support to early recovery and inclusive service delivery for vulnerable groups affected by COVID-19, UNFPA is providing inclusive legal, psychosocial and direct support to disabled women and girls as well as gender-based violence survivors through shelters, hotlines and social media.

In the East and Southern Africa region, UNFPA is engaged in the elaboration of the UN socio-economic response plan to COVID-19, guided by the UNFPA Global Response Plan strategic priorities and accelerator interventions. The regional office is a part of the Regional Partnership Forum, which has brought together all UN agencies at the regional level, and continues to provide guidance to countries on case management, surveillance, continuity of essential services, mental health and psychosocial support, and entry points. UNFPA chairs the continuity of essential health services working group in the forum, which aims to contextualize guidance to address regional specificities in a comprehensive and coherent manner.

In Botswana, for instance, the UNFPA country office, together with WHO, UNICEF and UNAIDS, launched an assessment to track the continuity of essential sexual, reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health services in the country. The assessment was supported by the regional offices of all agencies involved; it will provide the Government and partners with actionable recommendations to address bottlenecks in service delivery.

In Namibia, UNFPA, in collaboration with UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration, conducted a rapid assessment on the availability of mental health and psychosocial support services from the government, civil society organizations and the private sector. The information is being used to develop a telephone directory for such support services nationwide.

In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, UNFPA is actively participating in UN system efforts to support national Government responses to COVID-19. Under the leadership of the Resident Coordinators, the UNFPA regional office and the country offices are collaborating on national socio-economic assessments in the region. In humanitarian situations, the humanitarian country teams are using the structure already in place to support the response to COVID-19. UNFPA actively participates in humanitarian coordination mechanisms, including the health and protection clusters, and leads or co-leads the gender-based violence sub-cluster where this has been established.

UNFPA continues its coordination efforts with regional partners, including the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/WHO, UNICEF, the Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank, UNAIDS and professional associations, such as La Federación Latinoamericana de Sociedades de Obstetricia y Ginecología, and the International Confederation of Midwives. The

objective is joint advocacy with health authorities, particularly those related to sexual and reproductive health.

In Nicaragua, for example, UNFPA is leading the interagency group on gender, human rights and interculturality, which has prepared “Recommendations for the incorporation of a gender approach in programming in relation to COVID-19.” In Guatemala, in coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN-Women, UNFPA is working to strengthen the national networks on gender and health, sexual violence, and midwives within the context of the pandemic.

In the West and Central Africa region, OHCHR now chairs weekly meetings of the Regional Directors Group aimed at coordinating the UN response to the pandemic, previously chaired by UNFPA. The UNFPA regional office is fully engaged in the UN system collective effort to save lives, protect people and build back better.

The regional office continues to participate in the regional working group on risk communications and community engagement, led by UNICEF and WHO. The group is running a media campaign to raise awareness on COVID-19 through a multilingual website. The website includes local languages spoken across the region. The group is also undertaking a social research campaign aimed at generating high-quality information and insights into how risk communication and community engagement activities could be better framed, packaged and delivered to enhance the response to COVID-19 pandemic.

IV. Advancing Common Business Operations

UNFPA continues to be a strong proponent of common back offices and currently outsources various essential operational services to partner organizations to realize efficiency gains.

As a pioneer in this area, UNFPA has shared its experience with other agencies and is continuously reviewing opportunities to increase its uptake of such services. For example, UNFPA's payroll, employee entitlements and treasury functions are undertaken by UNDP while at the country level, UNFPA uses a range of common services made available by other agencies, primarily UNDP.

To facilitate greater collaboration between agencies, a Mutual Recognition statement has now been signed by 17 entities (including UNFPA). It represents a broad consensus on adopting common or shared services relying on a service providers' policies, processes and internal control framework.

UNFPA has been entrusted to co-lead the UNSDG Task Team on Business Operations (former UNSDG Business Innovation Group) to lead system-wide efforts to advance common business operations. Considered alongside UNFPA's implementation of a new "cloud based" ERP, the organization is fully focused on ensuring the most effective and efficient delivery of its operations.

V. The 2020 QCPR

The 2020 QCPR will be an important milestone for advancing reforms. In this context, UNFPA is committed to providing and notes the importance of advancing integrated policy and programmatic support to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals during the Decade of Action against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNFPA stresses the importance of empowering women and girls as leaders and change-makers for sustainable development, building on advances made through ICPD25 and the Beijing Platform

for placing sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights on the system-wide agenda, in particular to support those most vulnerable and excluded.

Strengthening integrated approaches to data and improved collaboration across the peace, development and humanitarian nexus are also priorities for UNFPA.

VI. Conclusion

UNFPA will continue to actively engage and support the UNDS repositioning at all levels, especially in the regions and in countries covered by multi-country office arrangements. The Fund recognizes the complexity and scale of the challenges and opportunities to work effectively and coherently within and beyond the UN system to build back better. UNFPA will continue to support countries' needs and protect and uphold the rights of women, girls, young people and other marginalized and vulnerable people.
