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

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31 August to 4 September 2020, New York

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Organizational matters

**Report of the annual session 2020
(3 to 5 June 2020, New York)**

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I. Organizational matters

1. The annual session 2020 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 3 to 5 June 2020.
2. The Executive Board approved the agenda and workplan for its annual session 2020 (DP/2020/L.2), as orally amended, and approved the report of the first regular session 2020 (DP/2020/6).
3. Decisions adopted by the Executive Board at the annual session 2020 appeared in document DP/2020/19, which was available on the [Executive Board website](#).
4. The Executive Board agreed in decision 2020/9 to the following schedule for future sessions of the Executive Board in 2020:

Second regular session 2020: 31 August to 4 September 2020.

Statement by the President of the Board

5. In his opening remarks, the President of the Executive Board expressed thanks to the Board for choosing to pursue its important work, despite the challenges of working and meeting virtually during the COVID-19 crisis. He highlighted the strong cooperation of Bureau and Board members, the secretariat, and the management and staff of the organizations, who came together and allowed the Board to continue to provide its oversight and guidance. He was especially inspired by the organizations' efficient, effective coordination at country level, pursuing United Nations reform and culling important lessons from the COVID-19 crisis. Those lessons, and the issues that arose from them, would be taken up by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in 2020, which would assess and allow the organizations to examine their effectiveness and efficiency in a new light, while the scheduled evaluation processes would enable closer assessment of results. In drafting the decisions for the session, the Board took an innovative approach, beginning the process early and ensuring the same level of inputs and outcomes that took place in normal Board settings. The President expressed his solidarity with all countries and peoples that had suffered during the COVID-19 crisis and stressed the importance of the session's joint segment, calling on the organizations to focus on the practicalities at country level when providing joint updates on COVID-19 to the Board.

Joint segment

II. Joint update on the UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS response to the COVID-19 crisis in the context of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system

6. In their statements to the Board, the UNDP Administrator, the UNFPA Executive Director, and the UNOPS Executive Director in turn reflected on the challenges and lessons learned the United Nations development system encountered in its collective efforts to ensure an integrated system-wide response to the COVID-19 pandemic within the larger context of continued implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system.

7. The UNDP Administrator reflected on the enabling factors and main challenges that came to light in efforts to devise an effective response to COVID-19. He highlighted in particular the flexibility, agility, speed, innovation and ability of the United Nations development system and UNDP to re-programme resources in responding to the crisis and in maintaining business

continuity. United Nations system organizations were able to complement each other's work through, for example, procurement, while continuing to pursue integrated system-wide approaches. For its part, UNDP had quickly established a COVID-19 Rapid Response Facility that complemented the United Nations Framework for the Immediate Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19, which rallied country teams around the leadership of the resident coordinators and served as a first validation of United Nations reform. As of June 2020, UNDP had published 63 country-level socioeconomic assessments and five regional assessments from across the globe. Core and flexible funding remained a critical enabling factor that gave UNDP and other United Nations organizations the flexibility and agility to respond and provide on-demand support. Similarly, pooled funding and trust funds, such as the Global United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, incentivized joint efforts across the system.

8. The UNFPA Executive Director underscored how COVID-19 had devastatingly brought to the fore inequalities and vulnerabilities that needed to be urgently addressed to achieve the vision of the ICPD programme of action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UNFPA, together with its United Nations development system partners, had been at the forefront of efforts to achieve that vision; COVID-19 had galvanized the United Nations for adolescent girls, pregnant women, and frontline health workers. The resident coordinators were proving to be leaders and interlocutors for the United Nations system. That coordinated response was tremendously important in ensuring the health and safety of women and girls. UNFPA had estimated that the pandemic could result in millions more cases of gender-based violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and unintended pregnancy. With a global presence, UNFPA was working with country teams to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights through scaled-up, re-purposed joint initiatives and mechanisms during crisis. That included leveraging partnerships with international financial institutions, the private sector and civil society. Multi-year core funding was needed to support rapid responses that saved lives. To build back better and reach the Goals, there was a need to go much further to advance gender equality and women's rights. The next quadrennial comprehensive policy review presented an opportunity for Member States to provide guidance on the types of integrated policy and programmatic support the United Nations system should provide to countries to accelerate implementation of the Goals within the COVID-19 context.

9. The UNOPS Executive Director stated that the organization had quickly set up a COVID-19 task force to respond to the crisis. UNOPS contribution to addressing COVID-19 was project-based, and it had joined forces with other United Nations organizations, working with ministries of health under resident coordinators' leadership to build and equip isolation centres. It was collaborating with the international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank, supporting Governments in their COVID-19 response, providing medical equipment, protective supplies and vehicles. Total support had already reached \$50 million. The UNOPS multi-country office business model allowed it to ensure cost-efficient service delivery, which it expanded and contracted according to demand. UNOPS supported small island developing states (SIDS) with funding through the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund and through the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation. System-wide approaches, critical to making the United Nations better prepared to respond to crises, required working closer with the private sector to combine resources, innovation and skills, for which UNOPS had a key facilitating role. As part of its COVID-19 response, UNOPS focused on financing sustainable infrastructure, as COVID-19 highlighted that such investments were key to achieving the Goals and helping countries cope with crises.

10. In overall comments, Board members commended the organizations and the United Nations system for their collaborative efforts and welcomed the enhanced coordinated action in delivering on joint commitments for the Sustainable Development Goals and improving United Nations efficiency and effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its level of impact on all countries demonstrated how existing efforts had to ensure no one was left behind. An integrated response to strengthen resilience and address the risks and underlying causes of conflict was critical. The

collective response had to be conflict-sensitive and grounded in human rights-based approaches and sustainably deliver COVID-19 responses that were collaborative and innovative and that minimized overlap and duplication.

11. A cross-regional group of delegations, welcoming the Secretary-General's push to link reform implementation to the COVID-19 response, underscored the need to reinforce and deliver on joint commitments, including strengthening universal health coverage and establishing mechanisms to prevent future pandemics and bolster emergency planning and preparedness. They urged the organizations to work together through their comparative advantages and with multilateral actors to fully implement the Strategic Preparedness Response Plan, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan, and the United Nations Framework for the Immediate Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19. They stressed resident coordinators' critical role in facilitating and ensuring coordinated, harmonized country team responses that safeguarded progress towards the Goals, and they encouraged inter-agency coordination, using joint proposals through coordinated funding mechanisms. They pointed to the need to revisit emergency actions to address the COVID-19 crisis within longer-term plans focused on strengthening the global supply chain for medicine, vaccines and medical equipment. The group highlighted that recovery measures had to strengthen resilience and sustainability through effective policies that included gender perspectives and investments that contributed to realizing the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. They requested continuity of essential health services, including for sexual and reproductive health, and stressed the importance of ensuring that internationally recognized human rights, including the right to health, were respected, protected and progressively realized during the COVID-19 crisis. They sought the continuation of joint conflict-sensitive programming based on shared risk and needs assessments, along with reprioritization of programmes and resources in consultation with donors and programme countries. They commended the resilience and commitment of United Nations development and humanitarian workers who assisted vulnerable populations and attempted to reach the furthest behind first. They called on the organizations to ensure their actions and behaviours remained grounded in respect for human rights, gender equality and the responsibility 'to do no harm', in line with the Secretary General's Call to Action for Human Rights, including upholding commitments and international standards to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse.

12. Another group of delegations called on UNDP and UNFPA to scale up implementation of their Funding Compact commitments and pursue in-depth discussions on how the midterm reviews of their strategic plans could help them operate effectively, deliver programme results and meet programme countries' needs. They welcomed progress in achieving greater transparency and accountability and were encouraged by the strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and the international financial institutions in the COVID-19 response. They called on UNDP and UNFPA to continue pursuing targets related to joint programming and requested more effective collaboration among them and with other stakeholders and partners to achieve programme delivery with real impact at country level. They welcomed the UNFPA update on how it included system-wide collaboration and results in the performance review of country and regional office representatives and encouraged UNDP and UNFPA to continue putting forward strong candidates for the resident coordinator pool. In referring to the Secretary-General's 2020 report on implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (A/75/79), the group urged the organizations to coordinate and ensure all country and regional team members received consistent messaging and support for reforms and strengthen the consistency of guidance from the executive leadership of United Nations Sustainable Development Group to their country representatives. They urged UNDP and UNFPA to continue to support resident coordinators and country teams in leveraging non-resident agencies' knowledge and expertise and called on UNDP and UNFPA to continue ongoing efforts to realize efficiencies, increase investments in programme activities and deliver results in programme countries. They were pleased that UNFPA had reflected its System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (SWAP) 2.0 compliance in its integrated

results and resources framework and welcomed its commitment to develop strategies to address climate change and leave no one behind, as well as its plans to evaluate its use of the human rights-based approach. They encouraged UNDP to follow that example and to make all programmes conflict-sensitive, given that Goal 16 continued to lag.

13. In other interventions, delegations urged that any COVID-19 vaccine be considered a public good and made accessible to all countries, regardless of level of development. They encouraged continued COVID-19 integrated support to developing countries, alongside adoption of best practices and solutions that could be taken to scale, and reiterated the need for accelerated, coordinated approaches that bolstered supply chains, improved prevention, preparedness and resilience, and reinforced strong partnerships. There was a call for the immediate mobilization of resources for the Health in Africa Fund to the required amount of \$15 billion.

14. In response, the UNOPS Executive Director underscored the value of United Nations system-wide cooperation and partnerships with all stakeholders. UNOPS sought to build on its comparative advantages when working with partners and pursued a differentiated approach to development solutions based on country-driven demand and context. It was committed to working with and supporting resident coordinators and endeavoured to add value to country teams, bringing its expertise in efficiency and rapid response within its mandated areas of procurement and infrastructure. Key in those efforts was ensuring the United Nations system was prepared to deliver and ensure the long-term social, economic recovery together with partners.

15. The UNFPA Executive Director reiterated the importance of gender when pursuing rights and inclusion and highlighted the Fund's work with older persons and ageing populations hit hardest by COVID-19. She reinforced that gender action had to include groups that experienced structural inequality, such as older persons, people living with disabilities and indigenous peoples, and address issues of empowerment. UNFPA was repurposing programme funds to ensure equitable distribution of contraceptives, medicine, health services and supplies to the last mile. The Fund, in collaboration with United Nations organizations, had mobilized additional resources for sexual and reproductive health medicine and services, emergency interagency reproductive health kits, and personal protective equipment. At country level, UNFPA was working with stakeholders in developing joint proposals for potential donors in response to evolving country needs to speed up delivery. On protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, UNFPA had significantly contributed to inter-agency collaboration and taken the lead on several activities. She pointed out that resident coordinators had been designated feedback providers in the UNFPA performance appraisal system even before of resolution 72/279. And UNFPA representatives were part of resident coordinator and country team assessments, in line with the new resident coordinator performance mechanism. She highlighted that joint funding constituted the Fund's largest funding source.

16. The UNDP Administrator highlighted that UNDP delivered its COVID-19-related activities through intense, consistent system-wide coordination and integration, including through its role in country teams. The United Nations system was collaborating actively at all levels, including to address the socioeconomic response, in the face of an enormous challenge to deliver practical, actionable, quickly available services to countries. That included efforts to elaborate and develop integrated national financing frameworks, critical tools allowing countries to gauge their potential scope of support from international partners, investors and the United Nations system. UNDP was actively collaborating with UNFPA and UN-Women, building on the gender dimensions integral to its Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, signature solutions and commitments under SWAP. Expressing concern over statements regarding UNDP climate change work, he underscored the immense investment UNDP had already brought to the United Nations system's climate work, its leadership in supporting the system-wide Climate Promise during the Climate Action Summit 2019, its support to least developed countries (LDCs), and wider climate-focused approach. He reiterated UNDP concerns that the rigid definitional parameters of 'joint programming' did not make it possible to capture the true level of UNDP joint programming; UNDP was working with the United Nations Development Cooperation Office to rectify that discrepancy. UNDP support to

reform had been consistent, systematic and objectively documented in successive reports. It was evidenced in the high numbers of its seconded staff to the resident coordinator system (close to half of the existing cadre of resident coordinators, including a high number of women and candidates from the South), a testimony to its commitment to diversity and the success of the resident coordinator system more broadly. As part of the system-wide response, UNDP offered much needed infrastructure, capability and presence on the ground in the face of enormous country-level needs, which only underscored the importance of having the means to deliver. The Administrator stressed the close attention UNDP senior management had paid to United Nations reform throughout 2019 and in ensuring effective, regular communication to field leadership on the matter, through webinars, dedicated information sessions, and periodical communications from headquarters.

17. The Executive Board took note of the joint update on the UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS response to COVID-19 crisis in the context 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

18. The Executive Board discussion of the joint item on the reports of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS on internal audit and investigation activities in 2019, and the management responses, was as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic rescheduled to take place at the second regular session in September 2020.

IV. Ethics

19. The Executive Board discussion of the joint item on the reports of the ethics offices of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS activities for 2019, and the management responses, was as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic rescheduled to take place at the second regular session in September 2020.

UNDP segment

V. Interactive dialogue with the UNDP Administrator and midterm review of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, including the annual report of the Administrator for 2019

VI. Financial, budgetary and administrative matters

VII. Gender equality in UNDP

20. In his statement ([available on the Executive Board website](#)), the Administrator, UNDP, reflected on UNDP progress – including in the context of the COVID-19 crisis – as reflected in the midterm review of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, including his annual report for 2019 (DP/2020/8). In the plan's first two years, UNDP had demonstrated its effectiveness in helping countries reduce poverty and inequality and tackle climate change, for example, redoubling support to countries to advance progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals as a key part of the United Nations development system response. The ambitious agenda to make UNDP reform-ready and future-focused was well underway and progress on track. The midterm review had substantiated that the full value of results achieved across the signature solutions was being unlocked through integrated, whole-of-society approaches to development complexities at scale, as embodied in #NextGenUNDP.

21. In the plan's first two years, UNDP had helped governments use multidimensional poverty indices to address a new generation of inequalities. As a trusted partner, it supported stronger human rights and rule of law systems in over 70 countries and worked to prevent violent extremism. It promoted closer collaboration between humanitarian, development and peace actors and demonstrated the benefits of an integrated approach in fragile contexts. The UNDP nature-climate portfolio included helping countries access \$1 billion in vertical funds and working with SIDS on integrated solutions to drive the blue economy, digital transformation and climate action. It had helped ensure that 1.4 million women-headed households (and 1.2 million in rural areas) gained access to clean, affordable energy, and was actively promoting solar energy in health facilities and helping countries undertake a green energy transition. UNDP had worked with countries to tackle gender-based violence, further integrate gender into environmental policies, and strengthen women's leadership in natural resource management. Going forward, UNDP would continue to invigorate efforts to enhance women's leadership in crisis prevention and recovery and intensify efforts to promote women's agency, upending patriarchal social norms, strengthening inclusive institutions, and ensuring a digital transformation that worked for everyone.

22. On corporate efficiency and effectiveness, UNDP had balanced its books for three consecutive years, streamlined 150 business processes, and invested in business model improvements, reining in costs and increasing productivity, representing approximately \$240 million in additional resources for development in 2018-2019. UNDP had invested in a talented, diverse, results-focused workforce through its People for 2030 strategy. Its senior leadership positions globally were gender-balanced and geographically diverse. It maintained gender parity among staff, though parity in middle management and among staff in programme countries needed improvement. UNDP had performed well on the United Nations System-wide Action Plan (SWAP) 2.0 and was a high scorer in the 2020 global health 50/50 gender and health index. It had improved its working culture through concrete actions to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

23. UNDP remained the single largest United Nations contributor to the resident coordinator system and the operational backbone of the United Nations development system, providing payroll, travel and procurement services to entities across the United Nations development system, with its services to the resident coordinator system rated at 4.2 out of 5 stars. UNDP had set up accelerator labs in more than 70 countries and the Sustainable Development Goals Finance Sector Hub to bring coherence and scale to its financing work, including with United Nations partners and the European Union to advance integrated national financing frameworks. UNDP was working with the private sector and investors through Sustainable Development Goals investment tool known as 'SDG Impact'.

24. The UNDP digital strategy was testing new programmes in the field while enhancing organizational digital literacy. A month before the annual session 2020, UNDP had launched a new information technology strategy to help accelerate its digital transformation. In response to demand, UNDP was moving from a project to a portfolio-based approach, designed to deliver whole-of-society solutions.

25. The Administrator underscored that the COVID-19 crisis was a litmus test for the United Nations development system's commitment to deliver better, quicker and more effectively. As part of UNDP efforts to help countries prepare, respond and recover, UNDP would focus on four main areas identified based on partners' demand: *governance* – building a new social contract; *social protection* – uprooting inequalities; *a green economy* – restoring the balance between people and planet; and *digital disruption and innovation* – closing the internet access gap and investing in digitalization and innovation architecture. UNDP would redouble its efforts to deliver development results at speed and scale, including by raising the ambition level of nearly all its development results targets. And its COVID-19 response would be a gravitational feature of the rest of this strategic plan period and, alongside climate change, would be key in defining the context for the next plan.

26. A group of delegations reiterated its endorsement of the UNDP core mandate to support national efforts to achieve the Goals in line with national priorities. Noting the potential reverse in development gains, exacerbation of inequalities, and disproportionate impact on the vulnerable due to COVID-19, the group underscored UNDP flexibility – as part of a system-wide response to help developing countries deal with the human aspects of the response and to recover in a more resilient way. Stressing the overarching objective to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions, the group called for continued use of integrated approaches and collective action and urged UNDP to play a central role in assisting developing countries to strengthen its policies and institutional capacities. They called on UNDP to continue to coordinate its development work within the United Nations system, while considering the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Recognizing progress implementing the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, they urged UNDP to build on lessons learned in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. They reaffirmed the importance of sufficient, predictable core resources as key to achieving the 2030 Agenda and responding to changing development conditions. They stressed the need for countries to meet their official development assistance commitments. The group underscored the importance of South-South cooperation and the role of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, stressing that South-South cooperation was not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation.

27. A second group of delegations from the least developed countries concurred that COVID-19 had exacerbated pre-existing challenges and would negatively impact development gains in developing countries, especially in LDCs. They recognized the need for a flexible, responsive United Nations system able to address emerging challenges. They looked forward to scaled-up UNDP support to LDCs, especially considering COVID-19, to ensure LDCs were not left behind. UNDP would have to provide additional focus to LDCs to address poverty and build resilience, as they were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. UNDP needed to reorient its business model to contribute to building better, greener and resilient societies after COVID-19. The group reiterated the importance of United Nations reform and commended UNDP for undertaking various reform measures to make itself fit for purpose. They looked forward to continued coordination vertically and horizontally within UNDP and among United Nations system organizations and noted that the focus of the strategic plan was still highly relevant in the post-COVID 19 context.

28. A third group of delegations from the small island developing states underscored the central role of UNDP in the COVID-19 crisis in connecting countries to resources and acting as the anchor for implementation of development-focused recovery with poverty alleviation at its centre. The SIDS continued to call on the international community to promote operational and financial solutions to manage external shocks and address the multiplicity of complex environmental challenges they faced. They called on UNDP to address the negative effects of SIDS designation as middle and high-income countries so they could access World Bank and International Monetary Fund relief efforts. That should be accompanied by an upward trend in core-funded activities allowing UNDP the flexibility and rapidity to respond to countries' needs. And as part of United Nations reform and the Funding Compact, UNDP should continue to broaden its funding base through new partnerships and pursue new directions in resource mobilization while ensuring transparency and accountability. They called on UNDP to ensure gender balance and regional representations within its recruitment processes and to be prepared to rapidly respond to natural disasters in SIDS regions.

29. A fourth group of delegations highlighted development setbacks resulting from COVID-19, including by referring to 2020 UNDP report, *COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis, Envisioning the Recovery*, which the group said showed a decline in human development for the first time since the concept of human development had been introduced in 1990. The group

encouraged UNDP to continue to collaborate with development partners in and beyond the United Nations system to ensure a strategic, prioritized, catalytic global response. Effective actions had to be tailored to specific contexts and consider the comparative advantages of United Nations organizations and other multilateral actors, for which strong UNDP leadership and coordination was essential. They strongly supported the UNDP lead technical role in the United Nations socioeconomic response and recovery efforts and its unique position to advance the system-wide efforts to help countries build back better and greener. A broad development agenda remained fundamental, as did effectively managing the crisis's short and long-term socioeconomic effects, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable. That included strengthening human rights and democracy, gender equality, climate action, opportunities for decent work, social protection and education, and maintaining free trade and free flow of goods. Success demanded close dialogue with people and communities to ensure social cohesion and sustainability.

30. A fifth group of delegations welcomed the positive results on gender and strong UNDP commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. As lead agency for the socioeconomic response, UNDP should work to shift towards more transformative interventions that address structural barriers. UNDP COVID-19-related activities should be informed by gender analysis, use data disaggregated by gender, and prioritize protection and support to the most vulnerable. Gender equality and women's empowerment required system-wide approaches and collaboration to halt deepening inequalities resulting from the pandemic and rising levels of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. The group looked forward to a continuing trend toward gender-responsive staff performance management, as well as more offices using gender equality strategies. They encouraged UNDP and Member States to take action to reach the gender equality strategy's funding targets and looked forward to a steep increase in the number of country offices reporting on promoting women's leadership in crisis recovery mechanisms and on gender indicators.

31. A sixth group of delegations reasserted that the common chapter was developed based on the principle that the 2030 Agenda was the overarching framework to guide work across the United Nations development system. They stressed that the 2016 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and General Assembly resolution 72/279 stated that United Nations development system entities should reflect their contributions to the 2030 Agenda in their strategic plans, and they urged that the common chapter provide a clear outline for the organizations to undertake integrated approaches toward achievement of the Goals in the context of United Nations reform. Operationalizing the common chapter remained a priority. They supported ongoing United Nations system efforts to concretely formulate integrated, collaborative, reformed results as part of system-wide comprehensive support at country level. They sought clarity on where synergies lay and how they were being leveraged for coordinated, efficient country teams to support resident coordinators.

32. In other interventions, individual delegations stressed the need to reprioritize short and long-term actions as part of an integrated, whole-of-society approach to maintain development gains in the context of COVID-19. There was strong support for UNDP priority assistance to the most fragile states, especially in Africa; leadership on the climate front and biodiversity conservation; continued critical support to the resident coordinator system, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis; and the central UNDP role in helping to align financing flows for the pandemic response and 2030 Agenda. While some delegations recognized the continued UNDP commitment to United Nations development system reform, concern was however raised that United Nations organizations could show greater commitment to the reform agenda. There was a renewed call to realize universal health coverage in view of COVID-19's impact on fragile health systems and as part of increased focus on human security. UNDP should use its integrated approach to help countries build social safety nets

and strengthen governments' crisis management capacities. There was a call for UNDP to tackle the root causes of inequalities, including on gender, and use its digital strategy to redress inequalities. There was interest in enhanced UNDP partnerships with the international financial institutions on grant and loan implementation, its dialogue on debt restructuring based on vulnerability, and use of a budget marker to ensure traceability and transparency of COVID-19 expenditures.

33. In response, the Administrator reiterated the UNDP commitment to helping countries manage the pandemic through integrated, whole-of-society, people-centred solutions focused on poverty eradication and identifying the most vulnerable. Gender disaggregated data was key in those efforts, alongside digital technologies to track gender-focused data. On the funding front, UNDP had met 95 per cent of its strategic plan core funding target and had tentatively reversed a decade long trend of declining core, which led to more targeted, effective delivery. Lack of guaranteed funding and core contributions, however, meant UNDP remained vulnerable. He noted that 60 per cent of UNDP programme resources was dedicated to LDCs, underscoring its commitment to prioritizing LDC needs, including through the Green Climate Fund. In 2019, UNDP had begun developing its climate finance offer focused on the blue economy, climate change and digital transformation, with targeted investments in the SIDS, whose middle-income status remained a challenge – use of the per capita gross domestic product threshold consistently proved unrealistic in capturing countries' vulnerability. Forty-six per cent of UNDP expenditures was dedicated to its work in crisis settings, underlining its commitment to working in the most difficult contexts, engagement in the Rapid Response Facility, and deployment of accelerator labs in crisis-afflicted countries. In responding to the COVID-19 crisis, UNDP was guided by the Goals and the 2030 Agenda, as it enhanced its work on governance, social protection, the green economy, and digital disruption and innovation in response to growing country demand. The digital operating universe and digitalization were changing how UNDP functioned and delivered through, for example, digital finance. UNDP was working with the United Nations Capital Development Fund on the digital dimension to finance and development that was helping countries develop digital infrastructure. UNDP continued to play a critical role in implementing United Nations development reform and in driving a coordinated system-wide response, in particular through its support to the resident coordinator system. While integral to the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, the common chapter was foremost an accountability tool through which the four organizations reported on their commitments. In all those areas, UNDP remained the trusted partner of governments, with a vast country-level presence able to work with countries on the most difficult development challenges.

34. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Special Advisor to the Administrator reaffirmed the UNDP two-pronged approach to simultaneously address countries' short and long-term development challenges. The UNDP impact assessment had shown that the contraction of fiscal, political and civic space at country level was impeding recovery efforts. As a result, UNDP was working to ensure countries had more development finance and liquidity, promoting national adoption of integrated national financing frameworks, which were especially beneficial to low and middle-income countries; second, UNDP was investing in digitalization to fast-track acceleration of recovery, which had proven useful in tracking COVID-19.

35. The Director, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, highlighted that in LDCs UNDP was concentrating its demand-driven COVID-19 response on socioeconomic recovery, specifically with regard to *employment*, supporting micro and small enterprises to access finance and reconnect to supply chains severed due to the pandemic; *social protection* in the wake of job losses; *digital expansion* to deliver services and facilitate health and energy access; and *natural resources and renewable energy*, bringing climate and nature-based responses to the recovery efforts.

36. The Director, Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, highlighted that the COVID-19 crisis was bringing to the fore and exacerbating national structural inadequacies and challenges, such as inequalities and citizens' lack of trust in the effectiveness of governance. The UNDP response was focused on vulnerable groups, the pandemic's social costs, and health-related challenges. That included working to broaden the registries for cash and in-kind transfers, bridging the knowledge gap to understand how social and mobility patterns were exacerbating the vulnerabilities of certain groups, and monitoring the effectiveness of health care measures, including strengthening governments' COVID-19 response and capacity. In those efforts, UNDP was working closely with the World Bank and the private sector as well.

37. The Director, Regional Bureau for Africa, underscored the immediate socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa, which had exacerbated pre-existing Ebola-related conditions and set back recovery from other health-related pandemics, all of which required urgent attention. The pandemic offered an opportunity to address the widespread lack of social protection schemes by setting up national, inclusive systems. Another opportunity lay within the African free trade area by creating a new lifeline of production in goods and services, especially those related to pandemics.

38. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/4 on the midterm review of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, including the annual report of the Administrator for 2019.

39. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/5 on the midterm review of the UNDP integrated resources plan and integrated budget, 2018-2021.

40. The Executive Board took note of the annual report on the implementation of the UNDP gender equality strategy, 2018-2021 (DP/2020/11).

VIII. Human Development Report

41. The Director, Human Development Report Office, presented an oral report on the *Human Development Report 2020* consultations, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/264, within the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

42. Delegations welcomed the report's theme of expanding human freedoms in balance with the planet, which was aligned with the human security approach. In interventions, they expressed concern with the reported regression in human development, reflected in the human development index, which amounted to a human security crisis. Clarification was sought on how the potential blurring of country categories and loss of development gains, due to COVID-19, might impact the analyses and matrices used in the report, especially regarding issues such as health care and debt relief. For over 30 years, the report's data and analyses had helped countries rethink their interventions and policy areas and mobilize partnerships and expertise in creating a multidimensional approach to human development and poverty eradication through the lenses of inequality and vulnerability. In that light, delegations looked forward to seeing that approach applied in the voluntary national reviews and country programmes. They encouraged the office to deploy technology in an accessible way through mobile applications to ensure its continued digital presence. There sought to know with whom the office was coordinating within the United Nations system to gather information from country teams for use in impact analyses, in particular for socioeconomic analyses.

43. The Director, Human Development Report Office, said the report's theme spoke to the interconnectedness of human, climate and biodiversity challenges, as attested by COVID-19 transmission. The office's work in 2020 focused on UNDP leadership in the context of the United Nations Framework for the Immediate Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19, which had informed the choice of indicators and analysis and was linked to country-level assessments

through the resident coordinators system. The reported regression in human development was based on three components used to estimate the pandemic's effect on standards of living, health and education. The findings showed an unprecedented shock in real time to human development, owing to the pandemic's simultaneous impact in all three sectors globally. The office quickly mobilized to gather evidence and provide information that helped to inform the socioeconomic recovery response. Human security was crucial in the response and would be central to the subsequent report in 2021. At national level, regarding voluntary national reviews, the office encouraged the use of national human development reports to help in thinking about recovery. The office was actively investing in digital transformation and use of mobile applications, while recognizing that many people across the world lacked Internet connectivity.

44. The Executive Board took note of the update by the secretariat on consultations on the *Human Development Report*.

IX. UNDP country programmes and related matters

45. The Associate Administrator, UNDP, provided an overview of the country programme documents and the country programme extensions up for Board approval. In turn, the Director, Regional Bureau for Africa, presented the country programme documents for Ethiopia and South Africa, as well as the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Algeria, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

46. The Executive Board approved, in accordance with its decision 2014/7, the country programme document for Ethiopia (DP/DCP/ETH/4) and the country programme document for South Africa (DP/DCP/ZAF/3).

47. The Executive Board took note of the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Algeria, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, as approved by the Administrator, and presented in document DP/2020/12.

X. Evaluation

48. The Executive Board discussion of this UNDP item on the annual report on evaluation 2019 was as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic rescheduled to take place at the second regular session in September 2020.

XI. United Nations Volunteers

49. The Executive Board discussion of this item on the annual report of the UNDP Administrator on United Nations Volunteers was as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic rescheduled to take place at the second regular session in September 2020.

XII. United Nations Capital Development Fund

50. The Executive Board discussion of this item on the midterm review of the United Nations Capital Development Fund Strategic Framework, 2018-2021, including the annual report on results achieved in 2019, was as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic rescheduled for the second regular session in September 2020.

UNFPA segment

XIII. Statement by the Executive Director and annual report

XIV. Financial, budgetary and administrative matters

51. In her statement, the Executive Director underscored how, with the Board's support and counsel, UNFPA had sharpened its purpose with a results orientation that propelled its mandate forward during the Decade of Action on the Sustainable Development Goals. Together with its partners, the Fund was mobilizing the resources and political will to help enable women to determine their own paths and girls to transform their lives. That was what was proven to happen when women and girls had access to sexual and reproductive health and could exercise their reproductive rights. UNFPA staff and partners were focused on the three transformative results: zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths, and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices. UNFPA efforts were based on high-quality population data to ensure no woman or girl was left behind. The results speak for themselves, as evidenced in her report on the implementation of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 (DP/FPA/2020/4, Part I). As part of its commitment to maximum transparency and accountability, UNFPA was making its country-level strategic plan results publicly available on its online results portal, and a subsequent publication detailing UNFPA work in 150 countries in 2019, including new initiatives to collect data, increase the visibility of vulnerable populations, promote the adoption of new laws and policies to secure the rights and choices for marginalized women and young people, and drive achievements in SIDS.

52. Noting the transparent and consultative process of the midterm review process, she highlighted that the review had validated the Fund's strategic direction and confirmed that UNFPA was on track towards achieving its strategic plan results. The review focused on how to ensure continued progress; the "what" – or results in terms of goal, outcome, and outputs – remained as relevant as ever to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) programme of action. Going forward, UNFPA was stepping up efforts to address demands for quality population data and would invest in further understanding and developing strategies for population ageing, low fertility, climate change and mental health in humanitarian settings. The midterm review showed that the UNFPA humanitarian office was successfully meeting the ever-growing need for sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence services, including mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings. In 2019, UNFPA humanitarian assistance had reached over 19 million people in 64 countries. UNFPA had laid the foundation for the next strategic plan, and looked forward to another consultative process, tailored to country objectives and based on lessons learned, including experiences from the COVID-19 response.

53. For its part, the midterm review of the integrated budget, 2018-2021 (DP/FPA/2020/5) focused on making the right investments to allow UNFPA to scale up and accelerate implementation over the remaining two years of the strategic plan. The Executive Director outlined the ways in which prudent and strategic investments could strengthen UNFPA capacities in advocacy, resource mobilization and risk management, and bolster investments in the capacities of the LDCs, which benefitted from the largest proportion of total resources. The majority of integrated budget resources, \$3.2 billion or around 82 per cent, would go to directly to programmes; UNFPA would increase investment in evaluation and oversight functions, as a priority.

54. The Executive Director underscored that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated inequalities that likely affected women and girls the most. For every six-month period of COVID-19 lockdown, more than 47 million women could lose access to contraception; UNFPA-projected seven million unintended pregnancies; and 31 million additional cases of gender-based violence. UNFPA had focused its COVID-19 response on strengthening health-care systems to help 'build

back better' under the framework of an integrated United Nations response and had launched the revised UNFPA Global COVID-19 Response Plan. The funding requirement for the global COVID-19 response to year end 2020 was now estimated at \$370 million. Already \$93.5 million had been mobilized, allocated or repurposed. Quality, multi-year core was more important than ever. Core funding gave UNFPA the ability to support rapid responses that saved lives and allowed it to address immediate needs on the ground. She urged Member States' flexibility on funding and requested that Board members raise awareness of the unique value of the United Nations system in responding to COVID-19. She drew attention to the revised UNFPA global COVID-19 response plan, which was aligned with the humanitarian, health and socioeconomic pillars of the United Nations system response. As of June 2020, 85 per cent of core contributions projected for 2020 had been recorded. She appealed to all Member States to prioritize early payment of core for 2021. During the Decade of Action, more than 1,250 stakeholder commitments had come out of Nairobi.

55. A group of delegations welcomed the move to enhance collaboration among United Nations organizations and national partners. Noting that the framework for the operationalization and evaluation of the common chapter was a work in progress, they recognized that undertaking an early evaluation of the common chapter might have been premature. They stressed that the common chapter provided an outline for UNFPA to take an integrated approach to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which was critical to the success of United Nations reform. They underscored that the operationalization of the common chapter was a priority and had to be considered within the broader context of the United Nations development system. They supported ongoing United Nations efforts to formulate how the sum of its individual parts added up to comprehensive system support to Member States and sought clarity on where synergies lay and how they were being leveraged for a coordinated, efficient country team and resident coordinator response.

56. A second group of delegations welcomed the Fund's quick adaptation and response to the COVID-19 crisis, underscoring the importance of adequate, predictable core funding to ensure operational continuity and effectiveness. They welcomed the strong results reported in the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, expressed appreciation for the increased focus on climate change, and looked forward to the forthcoming climate change strategy. They were pleased that UNFPA was making innovation a core programme strategy and taking a more outward-looking approach to innovation; they stressed the importance of close collaboration and alignment with the United Nations system-wide innovation agenda. They called on UNFPA to find a balance between its key functions and the need to respond to emerging challenges, and they encouraged the Fund to maintain focus on its core mandate. They recognized UNFPA initiatives in sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response during the pandemic, notably in humanitarian settings, and in guaranteeing access to high-quality sexual and reproductive health services in fragile contexts. They encouraged further inclusion of the rights of persons with disabilities in all UNFPA activities, and highlighted implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and the Inter-agency Standing Committee Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. They welcomed the Fund's youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education, which contributed to adolescent girls' school attendance and active participation in society, both vital for realization of their rights.

57. A third group of delegations welcomed United Nations system coordination efforts throughout the COVID-19 crisis, as well as UNFPA continuous provision of essential services and its advances in addressing the concerns of women, elderly, children and people with disabilities. They urged UNFPA to continue to implement critical programmes in SIDS, including the Caribbean subregion, particularly programmes that addressed gender-based violence, substance abuse, high levels of unemployment, sexual education and other vital needs, including post and prenatal care. They appealed to UNFPA to allocate additional core resources to SIDS

regional and country offices, an appeal they extended to donor countries. They called for regional hubs to be established in locations where life-saving and essential products and services were no longer available.

58. A fourth group of delegations, referring to the report of the Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS) on UNFPA internal audit and investigation activities in 2019 (DP/FPA/2020/6) – the Board had decided to postpone formal discussions on the report until the second regular session 2020 – welcomed the continued OAIS focus on governance effectiveness, internal controls, and investigations into allegations of wrongdoing. They underscored that OAIS should continue to enjoy organizational independence and operate free from interference in determining and performing the full scope of its work and in reporting results to the Board, in accordance with decisions 2015/2 and 2015/13. They noted that in 2019 there were 112 new investigation cases, similar to 2018, and that the caseload had exceeded the regular staffing capacity of OAIS and could not have been absorbed by engaging investigation consultants. They expected UNFPA to remedy the recurrent capacity shortage to avoid exposure to operational and other forms of organizational risks, especially since fraud, financial irregularity, workplace harassment and abuse of authority constituted a majority of cases.

59. In individual statements, delegations underscored countries' need for timely access to fair, transparent, essential medical supplies, new diagnostics and medication. They expressed appreciation for UNFPA work in middle income countries and highlighted the need for increased support in the wake of national emergencies, including natural disasters. They sought clarity on how long-term increases in emergency response plans would affect UNFPA operations overall. They emphasized the need to end gender-based violence and harmful practices to achieve the 2030 Agenda and urged UNFPA continue to provide updates on the implementation of commitments made at the Nairobi Summit. There was a request for clarification on what UNFPA was doing to establish safe spaces for women survivors of gender-based violence in humanitarian settings. They urged UNFPA to continue its focus on international goals while respecting national leadership and ownership. Delegations underscored that upholding sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights was an essential part of realizing human rights. They supported UNFPA efforts to secure the supply of contraceptives where needed most in fighting harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and gender-based violence and in abolishing child marriage. They supported UNFPA humanitarian action and encouraged it to continue strengthening its humanitarian programming and investments. They recognized the Fund's role in supporting national and regional Spotlight Initiative programmes. They requested clarity on how UNFPA planned to bridge funding gaps.

60. In response, the Executive Director reiterated that UNFPA prioritized its work with partners to provide timely access to family planning services in locations where women needed it most. She reiterated UNFPA work in concert with country teams and local partners to bridge broken supply and logistic chains and improve timely access to sexual and reproductive health services. UNFPA staff enhanced country support through South-South and cross-regional cooperation, and with the resident and humanitarian coordinators; delegations encouraged UNFPA country representatives to establish new partnerships that enabled stakeholders to build back better. Measures UNFPA had put in place prior to COVID-19 had helped it move swiftly for young people. One of the biggest UNFPA priorities was expanding access for all people with the aim of leaving no one behind. UNFPA worked closely with Governments to actively protect the girl child, including by ending of female genital mutilation. UNFPA had swiftly published several technical guidance notes and briefs on gender-based violence, youth, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, national censuses, and safe spaces, for use at country level. In response to the pandemic's intensification of inequities, including in the area of supplies, UNFPA was able to lean on pre-existing relationships to deliver the maternal health, medication and personal protective equipment that women health-care workers needed.

61. Making investments in data systems to better monitor and assess results and achievements helped countries identify and reach furthest behind populations so targeted policies and programmes could be implemented. She stressed the need for additional investments in data and monitoring that respected human rights and privacy and outlined how data helped secure commitments for sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and accelerated unfinished business under the ICPD programme of action. She highlighted that the alignment of programmes with country priorities happened in concert with in-country partners in the spirit of United Nations reform. The payoff had resulted in greater agility to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reaffirming the importance of rapidly costing responses when asking for assistance, she stated that UNFPA depended on pre-existing partnerships, consultants, clear strategies, workplans and budgets able to effect change in the immediate and long term. UNFPA had increased funding to independent oversight functions and fully respected the independence of OAS and the need to assure that principle held. UNFPA strongly maintained a zero-tolerance policy for any form of sexual or other type of wrongdoing, along with commitments to fair due process.

62. The Deputy Executive Director ad interim (Programme) said UNFPA was moving forward within the context of the midterm review to step up its climate response. UNFPA had established working groups and task forces to explore strategies and develop ways in which to move forward as an organization and with external partners. UNFPA was drafting emergency responses to the COVID-19 crisis that were informed by partnerships that predated the pandemic. UNFPA was therefore expanding those responses across through the Spotlight Initiative and with other partners to explore existing initiatives, in gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and maternal health, through a COVID-19 lens.

63. The Deputy Executive Director, ad interim (Management), noted the ways in which UNFPA was working within the United Nations Sustainable Development Group framework and how UNFPA support for the implementation of the Goals through the three transformative results was guided by the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021. He stressed the importance of data collection and analysis and drew attention to the several ways in which UNFPA was collecting and disaggregating data in and across its programmes.

64. The Director, Technical Division, explained that UNFPA had been monitoring the impact of census data on successful operations, but noted that there were several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean where the process had been postponed. Regarding flexible programming for child marriage and female genital mutilation, and in response to modifications to Spotlight Initiative efforts in countries, he outlined that revised activities were being informed by 'big data' to yield sustainable results. That had resulted in greater investments in the Spotlight Initiative, which benefitted collaborating organizations working on programmes to mitigate the adverse impact of COVID-19 on young girls and women, particularly in Africa.

65. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/6 on the midterm review and progress report on the implementation of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021: Report of the Executive Director.

66. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/7 on the midterm review of the UNFPA integrated budget, 2018-2021.

XV. UNFPA country programmes and related matters

67. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director, ad interim (Programme), provided an overview of the two country programmes presented for Board approval, followed by the acting UNFPA Regional Director, East and Southern Africa, who presented the country programmes for Ethiopia and South Africa for 2020-2025.

68. The Executive Board reviewed and approved, in accordance with its decision 2014/7, the country programmes documents for Ethiopia (DP/FPA/CPD/ETH/9) and South Africa (DP/FPA/CPD/ZAF/5).

XVI. Evaluation

69. The Executive Board discussion of the UNFPA item on evaluation was as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic rescheduled to take place at the second regular session in September 2020.

UNOPS segment

XVII. Statement by the Executive Director and annual report

70. In her opening address, the Executive Director, UNOPS, said UNOPS had become more robust and strategically focused, with solid growth and successful management of its assets, focused on delivering value for partners, as reflected in her annual report (DP/OPS/2020/4) and the review of the UNOPS operational reserve (DP/OPS/2020/CRP.1). UNOPS had experienced a yearly increase in demand for services; in 2019, it recorded total delivery of \$2.3 billion. Despite challenges in fragile, conflict settings, UNOPS had been able to operate within a remarkably low margin of 1 per cent annually and put risk management at the centre of its work. As annual delivery rose, fees continued to fall. With improved effectiveness and cost-efficiency, UNOPS was delivering more for less. As a project-based organization, UNOPS sought to manage operations well and respond effectively when and where needed, even more so in a post-COVID-19 environment. In 2019, UNOPS registered a ratio of 20 per cent of net assets to revenue and undertook a desk review of net assets and reserves of United Nations organizations. Though it had not received core funding or assessed contributions, UNOPS figures were substantially lower than those of other United Nations organizations.

71. The COVID-19 crisis had placed renewed emphasis on prevention and resilience, especially in health care. In 2019, UNOPS had established solid, strategic partnerships in the health-related areas of infrastructure and procurement, including setting up solar power energy systems in health centres and stocking medicines in hospitals and health centres through transparent, efficient procurement processes, helping to improve health services for the most underserved and vulnerable. UNOPS managed the Access to Health Fund, worth some \$215 million in contributions. UNOPS rapid response to COVID-19 had, among other interventions, included ensuring hospitals had intensive care unit equipment, delivering crucial medical supplies, raising awareness, and ensuring prisoners' access to health services. UNOPS had refocused to mitigate the pandemic's negative socioeconomic impact, helping governments provide support to the most vulnerable through rapid cash transfers, rehabilitating rural roads to connect vulnerable communities with essential services, and empowering women. Looking ahead, UNOPS would focus on inequalities that had rendered communities vulnerable, helping to implement programmes that enhanced communities' resilience. As countries moved to recover, UNOPS would prioritize strengthening infrastructure and re-establishing supply chains to make them more inclusive, sustainable and resilient. Approximately 80 per cent of new UNOPS engagements in 2020 addressed long-term socioeconomic recovery. UNOPS was committed to implementing its Sustainable Infrastructure Impact Investments (S3I) initiative and would continue to create sustainable infrastructure ecosystems to achieve global and national development goals.

72. A group of delegations welcomed UNOPS performance in implementing the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, and continued progress in initiating social impact investment activities. They welcomed the results and reporting that showed how UNOPS had delivered on its mandate as a service provider for the United Nations system, complied with internal quality assurance procedures, and handled relations with external partners. They reiterated their request that future

reports address setbacks and risks, including how UNOPS handled them, especially important given its operations in high-risk settings. They recognized UNOPS contributions to United Nations work on peace, security and development and welcomed its ability to respond to new global situations based on its solid financial position, presence, competence and capacities. They acknowledged UNOPS systems for cross-cutting sustainability elements, such as human rights, gender equality, environment and anti-corruption, and commended its sustainability reporting in line with the Global Reporting Initiative, leadership in innovation and technical support, and commitment to climate neutrality. They welcomed UNOPS improvements in gender parity among personnel and encouraged it to continue to achieve gender parity targets set 2019. They welcomed UNOPS achievements in delivering more for less and in net assets, but expressed concern that the threshold for the minimum reserve was potentially low compared to operational risk; they welcomed the proposal to review the level of the minimum operational reserve, while noting that recent growth and increased risk levels might demand a higher minimum reserve threshold. They recognized UNOPS commitment to United Nations reform and called on UNOPS to apply the coordination levy to projects receiving tightly earmarked contributions. They asked UNOPS to transparently provide further information on its definitions and detailed guidance for when and how it applied the coordination levy, including barriers experienced. And they encouraged all United Nations organizations to engage in supporting the system in administrating levies.

73. A second group sought details on how countries welcomed the lower costs for services and encouraged UNOPS to ensure smaller countries could benefit from its services in the absence of large-scale projects, including through the S3I initiative. They welcomed the UNOPS initiative to engage with SIDS on affordable housing. In that regard, they recognized that UNOPS innovation played an important role in developing such projects, thanks to UNOPS prudent financial management. They supported UNOPS approach to ensure healthy growth in its net assets and liabilities and to use a portion of that money to encourage new development projects in developing countries. They expected that continued UNOPS growth in its net assets would allow it to secure more funding and engage more closely with the private sector.

74. In other comments, delegations drew attention to UNOPS important work in the areas of sustainable infrastructure, sustainable procurement and supply chain management through efficient, effective and transparent processes. They called on UNOPS to continue its work under rigorous oversight mechanisms. They commended UNOPS for using its expertise to address COVID-19-related areas, especially regarding health care systems, procurement of medical supplies, and water and sanitation. Delegations highlighted UNOPS work in building resilience to climate change and to reduce climate-related disaster risk and welcomed its work in conflict-affected countries to enhance the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. There was a request for clarification on how UNOPS would connect innovative entrepreneurial issues to development needs at the national and community level.

75. In response, the Executive Director reiterated that the newly established senior leadership team allowed for stronger strategic focus and ensured growth along with quality, flexible delivery around the world. UNOPS remained a trusted partnership that pursued open, transparent dialogue with partners to find the right solutions. Its strong financial situation and net assets management had allowed UNOPS to ensure a rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic and address the socioeconomic recovery, underpinned by a prevention approach. With transparency as a guiding principle, UNOPS had set up a client board in 2020 to push the organization to continuously perform better through open dialogue with partners, the outcome of which would be reflected in the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021. Overall, UNOPS had been working to broaden its partnerships and funding base, especially urgent in light of COVID-19. And it was actively pursuing gender parity among staff, including when recruiting senior leadership globally. UNOPS was ready to share best practices in support of United Nations reform, including through the principle of mutual recognition, as part of system-wide efforts to work together more efficiently and effectively.

76. The Chief Financial Officer and Director of Administration said UNOPS was monitoring its progress on gender parity closely. It had reached just over 44.3 per cent of gender parity and was therefore in line with its targets, with the aim of achieving 47 per cent by December 2020. Though COVID-19 had caused a slowdown in recruitment in early 2020, delaying progress, UNOPS was confident it would achieve its target once the pandemic subsided. UNOPS had in place several initiatives to address that issue and was working closely with country offices to ensure field-focused outreach.

77. The Director, Regional Portfolios, said that in its COVID-19 response UNOPS was active in all regions, supporting countries and communities, especially those hit hardest, with a focus on long-term socioeconomic recovery. UNOPS was active in over 70 countries across the globe and had secured some \$270 million for COVID-19-related assistance, with a pipeline of some \$650 million, 50 per cent of which was in procurement for laboratory equipment, testing kits, and medical supplies. UNOPS was delivering a variety of human resources services and rehabilitating hospital and health centre infrastructure. In those efforts, gender mainstreaming in programmes and gender parity among staff remained, along with health and safety, key guiding principles.

78. The Chief Executive, UNOPS Sustainable Infrastructure Impact Investments initiative, reaffirmed UNOPS commitment to assisting SIDS through programmes based on portfolios rather than individual investments, in the areas of affordable housing, renewable energy and health infrastructure. UNOPS had set up S3I initiative hubs in three locations, including in Japan, and was quickly expanding several others in different countries. The hubs served to capitalize on the expertise of institutions and entrepreneurs in hub-based countries to address development challenges in programme countries, using successful best practices, based on which country-tailored technical solutions were in turn applied to programme country challenges.

79. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/8 on the annual report of the UNOPS Executive Director.
