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report of the Administrator for 2020**

*Executive summary*

The year 2020 was one of development emergency. When the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic hit, UNDP moved online so that it could continue working, including as the United Nations technical lead on the socioeconomic response. UNDP rapidly deployed technical support and resources to help its partners do the same. Investments in the #NextGenUNDP made since 2018 – including the “People for 2030” strategy, the digital strategy and Accelerator Labs Network – made a more coherent, scaled response possible. Progress against the Strategic Plan slowed in 2020 but did not move off track. By focusing on the urgent *and* the important, UNDP kept the Sustainable Development Goals as its compass. Rapid analysis, innovative responses and new ideas were tabled, including on establishing a temporary basic income, creating digital platforms, mobilizing climate ambition and measuring human development progress for people and planet. Productivity was up, costs were down and funding trended in a positive direction, although limited flexible funding continued to be a constraint.



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## I. Introduction

1. The year 2020 was one of development emergency. For the first time in 30 years, global human development was projected to decline. Governments and development partners everywhere struggled to stop the spread of COVID-19; respond to the unprecedented socioeconomic crisis it created; and stand up to new and age-old assaults on human rights and gender equality, on social cohesion and the rule of law. The climate crisis deepened, despite a temporary dip in carbon emissions as the world hit “pause”. In this context, the Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals began in the eye of a perfect storm.
2. The year 2020 was also when people demonstrated what is possible. The world now faces a choice: to let COVID-19 be the tipping point that leads to transformation for people and the planet, where the Goals are achieved and no one is left behind, or not. Creating choices in the face of urgent and important decisions was a #NextGenUNDP goal in 2020, and it successfully pushed boundaries of how the organization thinks, delivers, invests and manages.

## II. The UNDP COVID-19 response

3. In 2020, UNDP focused on the urgent and the important by launching a rapid response to COVID-19. Its two offers – “Prepare, Respond, Recover”, launched in March, followed by “Beyond Recovery, Towards 2030” in June – and their accompanying rapid financing frameworks – the Rapid Response Facility and Rapid Financing Facility – helped drive a fast, scaled and coherent corporate response, while keeping the focus on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
4. When COVID-19 hit, UNDP mobilized or reallocated nearly \$1 billion to assist partners in over 170 countries and territories. It leveraged its digital investments to move online in just six days, so that it could keep working and help others to do the same. Its efforts delivered concrete local results – helping Governments and health systems to keep functioning, getting cash, food and basic services to those in need and protecting jobs and livelihoods – while contributing to global efforts to build forward better.
5. As the virus and lockdowns spread, UNDP helped more than 6,700 government entities across 82 countries to keep working; 81 per cent were subnational entities. Over 5,300 community-based organizations received UNDP support to fight both the pandemic and its “shadows”: domestic violence, human right abuses, racism, xenophobia, stigma and other forms of discrimination.
6. By March 2020, the new UNDP Rapid Response Facility had allocated funding to 110 countries, at a time when very few resources were available locally. Leveraging its partnership with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, UNDP delivered \$200 million in personal protective and medical equipment and diagnostics to 107 countries and trained nearly 280,000 health-care workers in rapid pandemic response.
7. Cash transfer programmes directly benefited 1.8 million people. Nearly 900,000 jobs were protected. Almost 1.2 million informal workers and 56,900 private sector companies – mostly micro, small and medium-sized enterprises – were supported. Three million people – half of them women – gained access to critical water and sanitation services and 788,000 people benefited from psychosocial support.
8. As the United Nations technical lead on its socioeconomic response, UNDP led – together with United Nations country teams and resident coordinators – the development of 144 socioeconomic impact assessments across 97 countries, generating data to guide decision-making and ensure that support reached vulnerable groups. UNDP worked with partners including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to prepare 119 socioeconomic response plans. With the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the European Union, UNDP helped to

develop integrated national financing frameworks in 62 countries, aligning COVID-19 related funding with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. These interventions – made possible through multiple partnerships – are helping to guide public policy decisions in a time of unprecedented complexity.

9. Tabling a range of original research, UNDP demonstrated how ambitious, feasible investments across governance, social protection, green recovery and digitalization – the four integrated areas of the second UNDP COVID-19 response offer – could have lasting impact, including lifting 146 million people out of extreme poverty by 2030. This and other primary research suggested that while the next frontier for human development is complex and uncertain, it can be navigated with agility, innovation and an ambitious architecture of interconnected policy interventions and political choices.

### III. The Strategic Plan: overall progress

10. With the pandemic in focus, progress against the Strategic Plan slowed but did not move off track. The plan was designed to enable UNDP to respond to countries' long-term goals and urgent needs in times of crisis. Its unprecedented work in response to COVID-19, across three development settings and through six signature solutions, is therefore part of the Strategic Plan's commitments. Indeed, #NextGenUNDP institutional and financial investments during this Strategic Plan period, such as the "People for 2030" strategy, the UNDP digital strategy, the Global Policy Network, the Accelerator Labs Network and the Crisis Bureau, made it possible to offer a more coherent, rapid response.

11. In 2020, UNDP worked with United Nations partners on specific COVID-19-related indicators and included eight to measure against. Of 33 Strategic Plan outputs, progress remained on track for 21, slowed for 11 and faltered on one. While repurposing regular (core) resources enabled country offices to take agile actions in response to the pandemic, some original plans – including on disaster risk reduction, national development planning and economic growth – were postponed or adjusted as Governments shifted towards crisis mitigation. A review of where UNDP did not meet planned targets is ongoing.

12. Against outcome 1, to advance poverty eradication, UNDP support since 2018 helped 35 million people to access the basics they need for a dignified life – like water, food, housing and health care. Some 27 million people gained access to financial services. Across 57 countries, 73 million acres of protected areas, the equivalent of 60 Grand Canyon National Parks, were managed more sustainably. UNDP spent \$5.6 billion – 41 per cent of its programme expenditure since 2018.

13. Against outcome 2, UNDP accelerated structural transformations for sustainable development. Since 2018, 16 million people in 32 countries gained access to justice. A total of 118 countries are now part of the UNDP Climate Promise, designed to drive ambitious action towards a just, green transition. UNDP spent \$4.1 billion – 31 per cent of its programme expenditure since 2018.

14. Under outcome 3, UNDP worked to strengthen resilience to shocks and crisis. Nine of its 10 largest country programmes are in crisis settings. In 2020, 3 million people, 43 per cent of them women, across 27 crisis-affected countries got a job or improved their livelihoods. UNDP supported 34 countries on preventing violent extremism and over one third of all countries on tackling hate speech. UNDP spent \$2.9 billion – 22 per cent of its programme expenditure since 2018.

15. Across the three outcome settings, poverty, inequality and marginalization resulted in a highly differentiated impact of COVID-19, reinforcing the importance of the ability of UNDP to work across development contexts in an integrated way so that no one is left behind, as the Strategic Plan is designed to do.

## IV. Observations on #NextGenUNDP results

### A. The Sustainable Development Goals compel UNDP to be better at helping to solve big, systemic challenges. UNDP is getting there.

16. The Goals are at the heart of everything UNDP does. When UNDP speaks of “SDG integration”, it can mean two, connected things. The first is its core role in helping Governments to plan and pursue their development trajectories. Since 2018, UNDP has worked with over half of all countries in the world to integrate the Goals into their development plans, strengthening capacities – including on data – to monitor and report on progress. The UNDP technical lead role on socioeconomic impact assessments was reported by a majority of UNDP country offices in 2020 as an illustration of the integrator role in action.

17. The unprecedented disruption during 2020 gave new urgency to the second, emergent side of what UNDP means by “SDG integration”, which is its focus on systemic change. In 2020, for example, UNDP launched the COVID-19 Data Futures Platform to aid countries’ strategic decision-making. It delivered customized support to tackle systemic issues: depopulation in Serbia; shifting the economic base from extractives to knowledge in Uruguay; reviving the Aral Sea region of Uzbekistan. It focused on finance, not just on the quantum of development resources available, but on the way investments flow and are prioritized.

18. Since 2018 and including through its Finance Sector Hub, UNDP supported Governments and the private sector to finance the Goals. Through investor mapping, 200 investment opportunities were identified in 15 countries, with each country involved expected to mobilize approximately \$50 million towards the Goals. The Tax Inspectors Without Borders programme, a joint effort by UNDP and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, helped 45 countries to collect over half a billion dollars in revenue in five years.

19. UNDP developed global decision-making standards for private equity funds through the flagship “SDG Impact” initiative; commenced work with 12 countries on debt instruments including debt-for-nature swaps; worked with the Government of Indonesia on its \$3.2 billion Sovereign and Retail Green Sukuk (bonds); and with the Government of Mexico to issue the world’s first Sovereign Sustainable Development Goal Bond. The United Nations Capital Development Programme (UNCDF) supported over 500 local governments in 42 countries to enhance subnational financial systems and, with UNDP, facilitated the Secretary-General’s Task Force on Digital Financing of the Sustainable Development Goals. Recommendations from its report, *People’s Money*, are now being implemented.

20. The integrated national financing frameworks of 60 countries were funded through the United Nations Joint SDG Fund, managed by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office. UNDP deepened its engagement in international policy on development financing, and was invited by the G20 to serve as the secretariat for the G20 Sustainable Finance Working Group, co-chaired by China and United States.

### B. Agility saw UNDP through the COVID-19 crisis, and agility needs investment and flexible funding.

21. UNDP demonstrated its agility through the rapidity and scale of its response to COVID-19. Its support helped 82 countries to keep functioning remotely and provide basic and social services. It leveraged its Global Fund partnership, crisis management expertise and strong ties with local governments and community-level organizations to get help where it was most needed. UNDP reduced the time it takes to approve procurement decisions by one quarter through an audit-reviewed process. One of the most-reported challenges from country offices in 2020 was the delay in procurement of supplies due to limited and interrupted supply chains.

22. Its early investments – in terms of financing and analysis – leveraged additional funding: in Haiti, UNDP leveraged Rapid Response Facility investments to mobilize \$2 million for pandemic

planning in prisons. In Libya, with funds from the facility and the Government of Japan, UNDP supported additional government capacity to draft and coordinate the national COVID-19 strategy. In Sri Lanka, UNDP assessments of the pandemic's impact on tourism informed a recovery road map that is now the basis of a four-year plan to transform the sector.

23. That first injection of support was followed, midyear, by a second. Within 16 weeks of launching the Rapid Response Facility, 129 proposals worth \$105 million were approved. In many countries, these funds are being used to develop programmes with the potential to scale. UNDP support to the Supreme Court of Bangladesh to establish virtual courts to process bail applications, for example, helped to train over 1,000 judges, lawyers and court officials, contributing to a 12 per cent reduction in the prison population in just three months.

24. An after-action review of its COVID-19 operational response highlighted how UNDP can be more agile in aligning resources to emerging priorities. It flagged challenges, including the need to improve adaptive management, employee recognition systems and procurement policies and systems.

25. It recommended “reimagining” the UNDP workplace to focus less on “location” and more on the “enabling environment” necessary for people to work well. “Political will to drive organizational change” was considered as the most impactful factor of the UNDP COVID-19 response.

26. Over 10 per cent of the nearly \$1 billion in UNDP funding for COVID-19 was regular resources, thanks to UNDP #PartnersAtCore. For UNDP to be increasingly agile across different development landscapes, and as it pursues long-term and systemic change, flexible and predictable resources will be critical.

### **C. UNDP is as strong as its people – and they continued to deliver under pressure.**

27. From 2018, through the People for 2030 strategy, UNDP stepped up efforts to attract, retain and develop top talent to help countries progress towards the Goals. Results in 2020 suggest that this investment is delivering returns: UNDP teams achieved \$4.5 billion in programme delivery, the second highest rate in six years.

28. They did so with a clear sense of purpose: the 2020 Global Staff Survey showed that 83 per cent of respondents are “highly motivated”, up 3 per cent since 2018. Eighty-eight per cent see their work as closely aligned with the Strategic Plan – an important strength for long-term success because it means that UNDP teams are pulling in the same direction.

29. By the end of 2020, 84 per cent of the recommendations of the People for 2030 strategy had been implemented, including the introduction of an improved performance management system, a new mobility policy and a new career management framework. UNDP was rated in the top 5 per cent of all organizations in the 2020 Global Health 50/50 Report.

30. The disruption of 2020 highlighted areas where UNDP can improve – including around staff well-being and mental health, and inclusion and anti-racism. For example, in 2020, organization-wide deliberations began on how UNDP can become an actively anti-racist organization. A set of recommendations is now under implementation. To better source diverse talent, UNDP launched an entry-level programme for recent graduates, expanded its first African Young Women Leaders Fellowship Programme, introduced a stipend for all interns and continued to deploy United Nations Volunteers through the UNDP-United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Talent Programme for Young Professionals with Disabilities.

31. Over 60 per cent of country offices have been awarded the UNDP Gender Equality Seal: seven received a bronze seal, 17, a silver and seven, a gold since 2018. UNDP achieved balanced representation of men and women across the Executive Group, resident representatives and deputy resident representatives. Equality remains a challenge at senior professional levels, and

the implementation of policies and practices around career management and flexible work need to be further enhanced. Both are part of the action plan now under development.

32. The UNDP commitment to a safe, inclusive working environment includes its commitment to tackling all forms of discrimination and harassment, including all forms of sexual misconduct. The number of people reporting an experience of harassment, discrimination or abuse of authority through the Global Staff Survey remained about the same from 2018 to 2020. Creating an environment free from any kind of harassment and discrimination continues to be a corporate priority, as reflected in the 2021-2022 strategy on the prevention of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse.

**D. The UNDP budget is balanced, productivity is up and costs are down, which means more development impact.**

33. In 2017, UNDP identified and acted on management priorities to improve financial stability, efficiency and accountability. The impact of the resulting systemic investments is becoming clear, though there is more to do. In 2020, UNDP achieved a balanced budget for the fourth year in a row – a solid foundation from which to deliver more results. Regular resources reached the highest volume since 2016, with a 13 per cent increase over 2019 – a positive direction that should continue until the targets of the Secretary-General’s funding compact have been met.

34. As a result of intensive efforts to strengthen institutional performance, enhance efficiencies and reduce costs, UNDP generated an estimated \$355 million in additional resources for development in 2018-2020 compared to 2014-2017. Additional investments are under way, including a major initiative to cluster finance, human resources and procurement business processes for greater efficiency and to better manage risks. The UNDP Global Shared Service Centres in Copenhagen and Kuala Lumpur improved the management of nearly 500 country office bank accounts and nearly 64,000 vendors, processing over 26,000 transactions in a way that improves efficiency and mitigates risk.

35. The UNDP digital journey delivered early results: already in 2019, a new travel request system halved processing times and saved 109,000 staff hours. A new Atlas mobile app enabled managers to approve transactions directly from their smartphones – a modest innovation that would prove its worth as UNDP shifted operations online in 2020.

36. In 2019, ambitious “greening” targets were set to reduce emissions from operations by a quarter by 2025 and by half by 2030; an environmental management tool was created to track progress; and the “Greening UNDP Moonshot” facility was launched to drive internal innovation. This resulted in a 6 per cent reduction of the organization’s electricity carbon footprint, which will save \$420,000 per year. In 2020, the electronic signature solution DocuSign was rolled out saving the equivalent of 5 million sheets of paper and reducing UNDP CO2 emissions by 154 metric tons.

37. Notwithstanding the management costs of United Nations development system reform and the upheaval wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNDP management efficiency ratio improved from 2019 to 2020. The organization is on track to meet its four-year target of 7.3 per cent, meaning that over the life of this plan, programme delivery has increased and related institutional expenditures have decreased.

**E. UNDP is committed to transparency, accountability, continued learning and improvement.**

38. In 2020, UNDP was again rated by the Aid Transparency Index as the most transparent of United Nations agencies. It received its fifteenth consecutive unqualified audit opinion, for 2019, from the United Nations Board of Auditors. For the first time in 10 years, UNDP closed all audit recommendations outstanding for more than 18 months. Its performance was rated as the highest among the implementing agencies for the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the



Montreal Protocol. All of its Global Fund grants were rated as “exceeding expectations”, “meeting expectations” or “adequate”.

39. UNDP continues to strengthen internal oversight control systems. It will not tolerate any conduct that undermines its credibility, trust or ability to perform its mission in support of programme countries and the 2030 Agenda. Following the audit of UNDP management of Global Environment Facility (GEF) resources by the Office of Audit and Investigations, and the independent review of the GEF-funded “Russia Standard and Labels” project, UNDP took comprehensive action, completing half of the management actions by March 2021. A dedicated unit has been established in the Executive Office to provide further oversight on corporate performance.

40. UNDP continues to address evaluation findings. A 2020 review of all evaluations by the Independent Evaluation Office highlighted what worked well – including the ability of UNDP to bolster local capacities, protect the rights of vulnerable groups in middle-income countries and restore services and infrastructure and foster social cohesion in crisis contexts; and what needs more work, including fragmented interventions that affect the ability to go to scale, the short-term, limited scale of employment interventions, a tendency to work with the private sector as funders rather than investors, and challenges related to results-based and knowledge management.

41. UNDP is taking steps to address these and other challenges. In 2020, for example, UNDP trained 800 staff in the Managing Successful Programmes certification and raised awareness and use of social and environmental standards, leading to the introduction in 2021 of a new policy and refined screening procedures to better identify risks. UNDP enhanced its performance analytics, applying machine learning to better analyse reporting from country offices. More information is set out in the management response to the evaluation of the Strategic Plan.

42. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, 249 decentralized evaluations were completed in 2020. According to a review of 172 of them by the Independent Evaluation Office, quality is improving: 88 per cent were rated “satisfactory” and “moderately satisfactory”, a 10 per cent increase since 2019.

43. The Ethics Office continued to play an essential role in promoting ethical standards and culture, providing personnel with the tools and knowledge necessary to align their conduct with the organization’s values and expectations. It received its highest-ever number of requests for ethics advice in 2020, up 67 per cent since 2015, an indication of the successful mainstreaming of ethics throughout UNDP.

#### **F. UNDP turned around its performance on social protection, just when it was most needed.**

44. The UNDP performance on social protection steadily improved since 2018 as a result of deliberate interventions, going from “red” to “green” in its results framework. In 2020, UNDP supported 82 countries from India to Nigeria to top up or expand social assistance programmes, with a focus on the poorest and newly vulnerable groups, including informal, self-employed, domestic and unpaid care workers, people with disabilities, migrants and internally displaced populations.

45. In Kazakhstan, an online portal was created to provide social services information to over 690,000 people with disabilities. In Cambodia, UNDP helped to roll out the first social protection cash transfer for everyone living below the national poverty line, reaching over 670,000 households. New research undertaken with the International Labour Organization (ILO) analysed social protection for informal workers in seven African countries to inform future interventions.

46. UNDP created new partnerships and pushed the boundaries of the social protection debate. The Insurance and Risk Finance Facility, launched in partnership with the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Insurance Development

Forum, was designed to catalyse new insurance products and services. UNDP research on temporary basic income, published in July as part of the organization's new "Development Futures" research series, estimated the cost of a minimum guaranteed income for vulnerable people in 132 developing countries, an example of the ambitious policy options from UNDP to help build forward better from COVID-19.

**G. UNDP gender work is strong and growing, but in crisis and conflict zones, women's leadership needs more attention.**

47. UNDP has been successful in focusing on women over the current Strategic Plan period: they were the primary beneficiaries in 2020, and 63 per cent of 3,000 partners surveyed for the partnership survey recognized UNDP as doing "a great deal" on gender. Since 2018, UNDP doubled its partnerships to address discriminatory gender and social norms, and to advance gender-responsive social protection. In 2020, it rapidly expanded support to tackle gender-based violence, working with 80 countries.

48. However, its results on women's leadership and participation for crisis prevention and recovery faltered in 2020, going from "amber" to "red" in the results framework. This affirms findings of the Independent Evaluation Office. Some conflict-affected countries, Côte d'Ivoire and Somalia, for example, have adopted quotas for women in politics with UNDP support. But more is needed. Analysis is under way to understand why this milestone was missed, including to inform the next UNDP gender equality strategy. More information is available in the annual report on the implementation of the gender equality strategy, 2018-2021.

**H. The UNDP Climate Promise offers clarity of purpose on a global scale, connecting the dots between projects and partners.**

49. UNDP prioritized nature and climate action through the programming, research and advocacy undertaken during this Strategic Plan period. The thirtieth-anniversary edition of the Human Development Report argued that "the next frontier" for human development is a world where people and planet live in balance. By the report's count, not one country is ready for it yet.

50. Enter the Climate Promise. With 118 countries and 35 partners and investors now on board, the initiative was designed to "connect the dots" between climate-related projects and partners for more scaled, strategic and systemic impact. The Climate Promise represents the world's largest offer on enhancing nationally determined contributions. With its support, 25 countries have submitted enhanced contributions and over 60 countries are linking the enhanced contributions with COVID-19 recovery efforts, in line with the Secretary-General's "recover better" principles.

51. The Climate Promise demonstrates that UNDP can deliver on an ambitious, global scale and it has inspired similar approaches in other areas. The UNDP offer for small island developing States, for example, was launched in 2020, covering climate, digitalization and the blue economy.

52. Half of Climate Promise countries are linking their nationally determined contributions with green recovery strategies, including through UNDP support, although country office data highlighted scope to increase synergies between UNDP climate work and the socioeconomic response to COVID-19. Looking ahead, increasingly integrated approaches, including to drive a green energy transition, will be a priority.

**I. UNDP stabilization work is helping to change approaches from "delivering aid" to "ending need".**

53. With more than 50 per cent of its expenditure and 9 of its 10 largest country programmes in fragile and crisis contexts, UNDP is a significant partner in connecting the work of humanitarian, development and peace actors. In 2020, for example, UNDP helped 1.1 million Yemeni people to get access to clean water and 250,000 to basic sanitation. The equivalent of over 400 football fields of land was cleared of explosives, enabling humanitarian aid to reach those in most need and freeing the land for productive uses like farming.

54. At the same time, UNDP remained the lead United Nations organization for stabilization in Iraq and Libya. Its approach, which was also tested in the Lake Chad basin and, since 2018, is being further adapted as part of the UNDP integrated offer on the Sahel, aims to deliver immediate benefits – including through rehabilitating infrastructure and basic services – to build confidence between people and State authorities and strengthen social cohesion.

55. In Iraq, for example, the pandemic was not the only reason students missed school in 2020; many campuses were severely damaged during the conflict with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. To date, through the UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilization and with contributions of over \$1.04 billion, 564 destroyed schools have been rehabilitated. In total, 4.6 million people have returned to 31 towns and districts.

56. The growing body of UNDP experience, lessons and results in stabilization may be valuable in advancing new, more integrated ways for humanitarian, development and peace actors to work together.

**J. As digitalization disrupts every realm of human endeavour, e-governance permeates the work of UNDP.**

57. By the end of 2020 – over half a million Zoom and Microsoft Teams calls later – UNDP had helped authorities across 82 countries to move essential public services and business continuity online. With UNDP support, for example, the National Congress of Honduras held its first-ever virtual session; the Madagascar COVID-19 Operational Command Centre connected with its regional hubs; and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Dominica, as well as Kosovo,<sup>1</sup> are working on broad digital transformation plans.

58. Through its governance portfolio, which fostered a surge of innovation and digitalization from the beginning of this plan period, UNDP scaled up digital investments. In India, for example, UNDP work on the smart vaccine logistics system, eVIN, supported supply chain management and temperature monitoring for 28,500 vaccine storage facilities across all states, and trained 50,000 health-care staff in its use. Similar work is under way in Indonesia and Malawi.

59. In Uganda, UNCDF and SafeBoda, a ride-hailing app, connected 520 market vendors and 18,000 drivers to 50,000 customers per day, helping them to stay in business through pandemic lockdowns. The UNV online volunteering service posted over 2,000 assignments and received over 85,000 applications, illustrative of the ability of UNV to support the United Nations and its partners even in the most restricted environments.

60. When UNDP launched its digital strategy in 2019, no one anticipated just how important digital technologies would become within a few months. Looking forward, a focus on closing the digital divide and creating new regulatory frameworks will be essential for an inclusive digital transformation.

**K. Innovation is now mainstream. The challenge is to go from making waves to turning the tide.**

61. UNDP made important investments in innovation during this period, including the Accelerator Labs Network, supported by the Governments of Germany, Qatar and others and now covering 115 countries. It and investments like the UNDP digital strategy are beginning to trigger a “cultural economy of scale” – helping to shift mindsets from projects to portfolios, from experimentation to transformation.

62. This was aided in a shift in the approach of the UNDP Innovation Facility, supported by the Government of Denmark since 2014. An evaluation of its first five years showed that every dollar

<sup>1</sup> All references to Kosovo in this report should be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

it invested raised an additional 67 cents in local resources. The evaluation recommended raising the bar from experimentation to system transformation. As a result, nine country-specific “deep demonstrations” are under way.

63. UNDP worked with new partners to engage new audiences. Consider the gaming community, with 2.5 billion players worldwide. In India, UNDP supported the development of online games to tackle COVID-19 misinformation, which were then expanded, in local languages, to Cabo Verde, Kuwait, Morocco and Timor-Leste. The UNDP “Mission 1.5” game put players in the role of climate decision maker, delivering the largest-ever public climate poll and uncovering powerful value-driven data in the process.

64. Innovation was driven by a surge of “e-everything” in 2020: from accelerating the reach of telemedicine in Indonesia and Libya, to creating digital identification for migrants in Turkey, to expanding social protection platforms in Belize, to fighting “fake news” in Guinea-Bissau.

65. Looking ahead, UNDP should continue to codify its ability to intervene in complexity, accelerate systems change and advocate for the space to fail in a multilateral space trending towards payment for results.

#### **L. Calls to measure development differently start at home**

66. For years, development experts have argued the importance of “measuring what matters”, but the narrow adherence to gross domestic product as a singular measure of a country’s prospects still dominates. In this Strategic Plan period, however, UNDP significantly intensified pioneering efforts to change this practice, designing and advocating for more holistic but workable metrics that go “beyond income” so that people can better understand – and make better decisions about – human and planetary well-being.

67. UNDP work in this area includes the Multidimensional Poverty Index, the Gender Social Norms Index, the experimental Planetary Pressures-Adjusted Human Development Index, which adds countries’ material footprint and carbon emissions to the Human Development Index, and the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index – still in development – which goes beyond income to better reflect the risks faced by small island developing States and other developing countries. In the next strategic plan period, it will be important that their insights permeate UNDP tracking of its own contribution to development progress.

### **V. Signature solutions**

68. Through its three development settings and six signature solutions, UNDP is able to tackle the most complex, integrated problems from different angles, always with the Sustainable Development Goals in mind.

#### **Poverty**

69. With UNDP support since 2018, 35 million people around the world gained access to basic services, including health services. As the pandemic laid inequalities bare, UNDP prioritized leaving no one behind. In El Salvador, for example, vulnerable homes were identified using the multidimensional poverty tool developed by UNDP and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative.

70. As technical lead of the United Nations socioeconomic response, UNDP helped to prepare socioeconomic analysis and response plans, and launched the COVID-19 Data Futures Platform. The UNDP temporary basic income simulator, for example, shows how much it would cost to lift vulnerable people out of poverty in each of 132 countries.

71. Indeed, UNDP significantly stepped up its analysis, research and advocacy on the fight against poverty and inequality. Four reports launched in 2020, the Gender Social Norms Index, temporary basic income report, Human Development Report 2020 and *COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis, Envisioning the Recovery*, brought compelling data and

insight to global policymakers and the public, reinforcing the case for investing in multilateralism. Media mentions increased by 43.5 per cent from 2019.

72. The UNDP global inclusive business platform, Business Call to Action, also stepped up, helping 33 million low-income people to improve their livelihoods and earn money, 102 million to access health care and 13 million to have improved access to clean energy.

### **Governance**

73. In 2020, the largest share of UNDP development investment – 36 per cent – focused on strengthening inclusive, effective and accountable governance. UNDP responded rapidly to the need for national and local e-governance systems to ensure the continuity of essential public services. It supported eight countries in strengthening national identity management systems for the equitable roll-out of social protection.

74. UNDP supported the work of one third of all parliaments in the world in 2020 and, with the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division and others, supported 46 Member States on elections. As a result, people from Bolivia to Vanuatu were able to exercise their right to vote in spite of the pandemic. Through election preparations in Niger, 6 million people attained civil status through mobile court hearings and over 740,000 people were registered to vote, 55 per cent of them women.

75. Through its support to human rights and anti-corruption institutions, UNDP helped government systems to be more transparent, accountable and responsive. In Angola and Zambia, through the Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law system, new operating procedures were developed and law enforcement officers were trained online on how to uphold human rights standards in policing during a state of emergency.

76. In the Republic of the Congo, UNDP trained 100 journalists on women and children's rights and on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, to enhance their capacity to work with international human rights instruments. UNDP worked with countries including Albania and Kyrgyzstan to meet a growing demand for free legal aid. In Fiji, it worked with the European Union to establish an electronic case management and e-filing system for the courts.

77. As “information pollution” spread, UNDP received an upsurge in requests for support, rapidly developed policy guidance and worked with countries including Cambodia, Chile, Panama, Lebanon, Samoa, Sierra Leone and Ukraine to strengthen national responses.

### **Resilience**

78. From 2018, UNDP worked closely with other development, humanitarian and peace actors to help societies tackle development emergencies, prevent problems from escalating and build resilience to navigate the challenges yet to come. Forty countries in crisis contexts had stronger rule of law and human rights systems. Social cohesion was built into 79 per cent of countries' COVID-19 socioeconomic response plans. In 2020, 3 million people – 43 per cent women – across 27 crisis-affected countries got a job or improved their livelihoods.

79. Some 50,000 people affected by cyclones Idai and Kenneth in Mozambique were able to produce and buy sufficient food. In the Syrian Arab Republic, UNDP helped to create 9,000 emergency jobs and helped 180,000 people to access solar lighting. In Turkey, nearly 3,000 Syrian refugees and host community members found jobs as a result of UNDP interventions. As found by the evaluation of UNDP support to the Syrian refugee crisis response, undertaken in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UNDP contribution “enabled transforming the international discourse on protracted refugee crises by adding a development and resilience approach to humanitarian response.”

80. In Yemen, where war has set human development back by 21 years according to 2019 UNDP research, 1.43 million people had better access to justice after the rehabilitation of justice institutions, courts and police stations.

81. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, following the mediation efforts of civil society and local government supported by UNDP, young people formerly involved in conflict were nearly 40 per cent more likely to want to pursue vocational training or employment, and 15 per cent more likely to want to go to school. UNDP built new partnerships, including with the United Nations University, in Chad, Iraq and Nigeria, to examine why people exit armed conflict and how to support their transition to civilian life; and took new approaches to building reconciliation and reintegration into peace agreements in Central African Republic, Colombia, the Philippines, Sudan and South Sudan.

82. UNDP did none of this alone: it worked with the Peacebuilding Support Office on strengthening core government functions; with partners including the Department of Peacebuilding Affairs and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on climate-related security risks; with the Department of Peace Operations as co-lead of the Global Focal Point for Rule of Law; and with ILO, the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR on solutions for the record number of people forced from their homes, including as a result of climate change.

### **Environment**

83. The COVID-19 pandemic is the latest crisis facing the world, but unless humans release their grip on nature, it will not be the last. That was a central message of the 2020 Human Development Report, which argued that while no country has achieved very high human development without putting immense strain on the planet, this could be the first generation to do so.

84. Finding balance between people and the planet is a thread that runs through all UNDP work. UNDP partnered with environment and climate vertical funds – including the GEF, Green Climate Fund and Adaptation Fund – and with United Nations agencies to promote an inclusive green economy, leveraging its \$1.9 billion climate portfolio across 150 countries. On average, 35 per cent of the budgets of each Latin American and Caribbean country involved in the Climate Promise will focus on gender-responsive work.

85. From 2018, UNDP and its partners created more ways to align and crowd-in funding and ideas. UNDP helped to mobilize finance to benefit over 19 million people. Some 22 million acres of forest in 58 countries were managed more sustainably in 2020. UNDP, with UNEP, UNCDF and the Governments of Germany, Morocco and Sweden, launched the Global Fund for Coral Reefs to mobilize \$500 million for conservation and reef-dependent communities. The UNDP Ocean Innovation Challenge focused on reducing marine plastics.

86. At the same time, work continued on the ground – from ridge to reef – to tackle the climate-nature crisis. In Bhutan, support from UNDP and GEF helped 56,000 farmers and family members to adapt to climate change. In Liberia, through its Green Commodities Programme, 5,000 hectares of high conservation value and high-carbon stock areas were patrolled and monitored, and the national strategy for oil palm updated. In Comoros, programmes co-managed with communities nearly tripled fish catches, while support for the law on protected areas led to the creation of the National Parks Agency, illustrative of the integrated UNDP approach across signature solutions.

### **Energy**

87. UNDP worked hard to create better energy choices and to derisk the political, social and economic paths to taking them. By 2020, the UNDP portfolio had a CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction potential of 290 million tons, the equivalent of taking over 63 million cars off the road for a year.

88. UNDP programming and research set out policy options. Its 2019 Arab Future Energy Index Report analysed the steps that delivered a tenfold increase in solar and wind power capacities in

the Middle East and North Africa in the past decade. Through its policy derisking approach, UNDP advised countries on large-scale, clean energy investments. With the Government of Tunisia, UNDP modelling identified over \$500 million worth of savings over 20 years in solar and wind energy investments.

89. From Turkmenistan to Sao Tome and Principe, UNDP supported countries' preparation of new national energy policies and strategies. In Armenia, UNDP and the European Investment Bank supported regulatory changes to increase the energy efficiency of buildings. With UNDP support, Egypt introduced electric public buses in Cairo, part of a programme to increase private investment in low-carbon transport.

90. UNDP sought out partnerships, including through the Climate Investment Platform with the International Renewable Energy Agency, Sustainable Energy for All, the Green Climate Fund and the Climate Promise; and focused on closing the energy gap, helping over 5 million households to gain access to clean, affordable energy since 2018. In communities affected by conflict, including in Somalia and Yemen, energy access was re-established for almost 350,000 crisis-affected people.

### **Gender**

91. Throughout 2020, women were on the front lines of the COVID-19 response, making up to 70 per cent of health workers globally. But they have been systematically excluded from the decision-making processes on how to address the pandemic's impacts. As of March 2021, only eight countries have a 50-50 gender balance in their COVID-19 task forces.

92. This insight was made possible by the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, developed by UNDP and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Alongside the UNDP 2020 Gender Social Norms Index, this is an example of the UNDP commitment to shattering the glass ceiling of gender inequality, in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.

93. Results achieved in 2020 were built on a strong base; since 2017, for example, the percentage of all voters registered through UNDP electoral support who are women increased from 47 to 50 per cent. The UNDP Gender Equality Seal for the Private Sector expanded, supporting more than 1,000 companies in 16 countries, impacting 1.7 million workers. UNDP and UN-Women worked together in over 100 countries.

## **VI. Partners and resources**

### **A reformed United Nations in action**

94. COVID-19 hit two years into intense reforms of the United Nations development system. The Board of Auditors noted the strong UNDP commitment to and engagement in all inter-agency workstreams related to the reform. It recognized that reform was highly complex, that it affected UNDP disproportionately, and that UNDP completed 97.8 per cent of the myriad legal, financial and human resource steps required to delink the resident coordinator system.

95. The pandemic response was a litmus test for the reformed systems, and they largely delivered. As the socioeconomic technical lead, for example, UNDP worked as part of a critical triad, with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the World Health Organization (WHO), and more closely than ever with its development system counterparts. It co-led the development and implementation of socioeconomic assessments and contributed to developing and costing response plans.

96. The pandemic also tested UNDP operations service delivery. In 2020, UNDP administered \$131.3 million on behalf of the resident coordinator system. UNDP services were given 4.19 out of 5 stars in terms of client satisfaction through the new resident coordinator system portal.

Seventy-three per cent of respondents to a survey by UNDP and the Development Coordination Office considered UNDP services as “satisfactory” or “very satisfactory”.

97. Since 2019, recruitment and contract management have been among the largest undertakings on behalf of the system. Tight deadlines were met across 130 offices with a completion rate of 115 per cent, despite pandemic-related challenges.

98. Beyond the process of reform, 2018 saw intensified collaboration with sister entities: according to the Independent Evaluation Office annual report, UNDP agreements with UNEP to advance national adaptation plans, its role in the Global Focal Point for Rule of Law and the new Framework of Action with ILO are good examples of UNDP cooperation within the system. The partnership between UNDP and UNHCR was “significant in bringing a resilience perspective to the Syrian refugee crisis response,” according to the report.

99. Existing partnership were deepened from 2018, including with the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Telecommunication Union. With the United Nations Children’s Fund, an expanded collaboration framework on COVID-19 now guides joint initiatives, including on financing, youth empowerment in Asia and the Pacific, and establishing a human capital development funding facility in Africa. Looking ahead, UNDP will work closely with WHO and others to support equity, resilience and sustainability in COVID-19 vaccination programmes.

#### **The power of partnerships**

100. Indeed, in the face of the greatest pandemic of a generation, 2020 was all about partnerships, reflecting the significant diversification of actors in the development space. UNDP leveraged its Global Fund portfolio to deliver health-systems support and intensified collaboration with international financial institutions in its socioeconomic role. It deepened engagement with private sector partners like Microsoft, DHL, PwC, the International Chamber of Commerce and the United Nations Global Compact, creating the COVID-19 Private Sector Global Facility to support 100,000 small and medium-sized enterprises.

101. UNDP encouraged new partners to join existing initiatives, adding Gucci and Cartier to the partnership roster of the Lion’s Share Fund. UNDP and Samsung Electronics focused on individual giving and engaged young leaders through the Samsung Global Goals app, installed on over 100 million smartphones. In Chile, UNDP worked with the Government and over 900 private sector companies including Falabella and Banco Pichincha on the Huella Chile initiative to tackle the country’s carbon footprint. In Ecuador, UNDP and the Green Climate Fund are working with Lavazza on deforestation-free coffee. Since 2019, the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation and UNDP Global Thinkers initiative brought perspectives of over 250 institutions of the Global South to the development of the Human Development Report.

102. Moving forward, UNDP will continue to review its policies to facilitate strategic, innovative non-State partnerships. For example, following on from evaluation recommendations, UNDP will develop a private sector engagement strategy for the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to the Syrian crisis.

103. According to analysis of country office reporting, trusted government and community-based partnerships were among the “most significant” UNDP assets in sourcing solutions when the pandemic hit. The Accelerator Labs Network, while still at an early stage, “is setting the basis for a more participatory and contextualized approach to development,” according to the Independent Evaluation Office.

104. In the 2020 UNDP partnership survey, 80 per cent of over 3,100 partners surveyed across 140 countries see UNDP as a valued partner. Seventy-five per cent of respondents believe that UNDP advocates a common United Nations position on important development issues and 71 per cent see UNDP as providing integrated development solutions with other stakeholders.



## Financing the future: #PartnersAtCore

105. UNDP results were possible because of the strong support of government partners: donor Governments, net contributing Governments and programme country Governments. The UNDP #PartnersAtCore campaign illustrated its commitment to greater visibility for results achieved with flexible funding.

106. UNDP saw growth in funding from 2018, which speaks to growing confidence in its ability to deliver results. In 2020, contributions to regular (core) resources increased 13 per cent over 2019, other (non-core) resources by 16 per cent and government cost sharing by 43 per cent. That means that over one fifth of the UNDP resource base was invested by programme countries. The period 2018 to 2020 saw a year-on-year increase in investment through thematic funding windows. Seven Member States increased contributions to regular resources in 2020: Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Israel, Japan and the United States. Eleven Member States had multi-year agreements for regular resources in place in 2020, up from six in 2018.

107. At \$1.5 billion, capitalization of the Multi-Partner Trust Fund portfolios was the highest ever in 2020. New financing mechanisms were introduced, such as the Secretary-General's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Trust Fund, while others grew, including the United Nations Partnership for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Central African Forest Initiative. Trust funds managed by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation fast-tracked COVID-19 support to 31 countries.

108. UNDP increased its engagement in and income from United Nations inter-agency pooled funds as a participating United Nations organization by 77 per cent from 2019, an illustration of the UNDP commitment to partnership. Such collaboration was made easier by the Executive Board's approval of the harmonized cost-recovery policy, enabling Member States to compare the costs of working with different funds and programmes. In previous years, a significant portion of pooled funding came through UNDP as a management agent of humanitarian funds. This function shifted to OCHA in 2020, resulting in a dip in the Strategic Plan indicator related to pooled funding in 2020.

109. These numbers paint a positive picture, but the UNDP financial base is still tenuous. According to the Independent Evaluation Office, the dependency of UNDP on voluntary and highly-earmarked resources continues to challenge its ability to respond to development needs, particularly in areas other than climate change and natural resources management. Limited flexible funding outside projects constrains UNDP capacity to develop more integrated responses and leverage systemic change.

110. With the pace of global economic recovery pointing to a difficult period ahead for multilateral funding, UNDP calls on all Member States to avoid taking short-term decisions that would redirect official development assistance away from sustaining hard-earned development gains.

## VII. The way forward

111. UNDP experience and results since 2018 – including through a uniquely demanding 2020 – offer lessons for how it can further improve through the next strategic plan. Building stronger linkages across signature solutions and leveraging innovation, digitalization and development financing to enable systemic solutions will help to scale up and accelerate progress. More flexible funding will allow UNDP to align resources to emerging priorities and deliver integrated responses. Continuing business-model improvements will help UNDP become more agile and anticipatory in the face of uncertainty. A strategic plan that responds to these lessons will help to build a future-ready UNDP, better equipped to continue its support to countries' progress towards the 2030 Agenda.