**Executive Board of the
United Nations Development
Programme, the United Nations
Population Fund and the
United Nations Office for
Project Services**

Distr.: General
4 March 2021

Original: English

Annual session 2021
7 to 11 June 2021, New York
Item 9 of the provisional agenda
Evaluation

Evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018 – 2021

Executive summary

Contents

I. Introduction

1.   Towards the end of every UNDP strategic planning period, the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office evaluates what the organization intended to do, what has transpired and where there may be room for improvement. At this juncture, the evaluation looks back on an organization whose way of working across 170 countries has shifted over the past three years in response to changes to the United Nations development system. At the same time, the new administration brought a new vision for the work of UNDP, signalling a change in philosophy and changes to the design and delivery of substantive, programmatic and operational approaches. Much of what the administration planted through the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 has taken root and UNDP has demonstrated a new dynamism, especially in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This evaluation asserts that based on the evidence at this early juncture, UNDP is moving in the right direction, even as it notes that for some new initiatives, it is too early to assess results while others have room for improvement.

2.   The evaluation sees an organization striving to support partner Governments facing severe health-related, social and economic upheaval due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It observes an organization creating sophisticated strategies and techniques to mitigate and adapt to a rapidly changing climate, as brush fires rage, floods ravage and arid fields lie fallow. It evaluates the UNDP Strategic Plan at the start of a decade of concerted action to achieve global Sustainable Development Goals, with progress buffeted not only by the pandemic but also the headwinds of nationalism, protectionism, conflict and rising inequality. The times are indeed challenging, yet ripe with opportunity, for an organization such as UNDP that has worked for over 50 years to help nations strive, cooperate and develop.

3.   The evaluation is part of the multi-year evaluation plan of the Independent Evaluation Office. The scope of the evaluation covers the period from January 2018 to December 2020. The evaluation takes into account the midterm review shared with the Executive Board at the annual session 2020 (DP/2020/8) but does not repeat its analysis of the performance of UNDP. Across the pages of this evaluation report, the evaluation team has sought to identify the most significant aspects of the context within which UNDP provides support, its vision of how it can best be of service and the progress it is making towards the achievement of its objectives. The evaluation also considers the extent to which the changes introduced to operationalize the Strategic Plan are helping the organization to adapt and respond to changes in context.

4.   The evaluation provides an overarching set of conclusions on the work of UNDP under its current Strategic Plan and posits recommendations to further refine the work of UNDP, to make it more 'fit for purpose' in service to global sustainable development.

II. Context

5.   The global development context in which UNDP drafted and is implementing its Strategic Plan includes three pivotal events steering the course of international development support. These are the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals; the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and the reforms of the United Nations system, with its work on development, management and peace and security all in flux.

6.   The decade of action to achieve the Goals was launched in 2019 with an urgent call to all actors to dramatically increase the pace and scale of implementation efforts. What was already a herculean task with 17 Goals has become even more daunting as the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelms health systems, strains societies and devastates economies. Prior progress is now under threat, and achievement of the 2030 Agenda faces even greater challenges, with poverty, food insecurity, deterioration of the natural environment and persistent inequalities all exacerbated by the pandemic.

7. For UNDP and other United Nations organizations, this is also a time of reform of the United Nations system and the delinking of the resident coordinator function from UNDP. Spearheaded by Member States through the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, and championed by the Secretary-General, the reforms seek to reposition the United Nations development system as a stronger, more cohesive, better defined and more accountable collective entity, with capacities, skill sets and resources better aligned to the 2030 Agenda and a 'new way of working'.

8. The vision of the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 is to help countries to achieve sustainable development by eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, accelerate structural transformations for sustainable development and build resilience to crises and shocks, framed in the form of three development settings communicated as outcomes: (a) eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions; (b) accelerate structural transformation for sustainable development; and (c) build resilience to shocks and crises. Within these development settings, six signature solutions are identified to: (a) keep people out of poverty; (b) strengthen effective, inclusive and accountable governance; (c) enhance national prevention and recovery capacities for resilient societies; (d) promote nature-based solutions for a sustainable planet; (e) close the energy gap; and (f) strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. These solutions are meant to be flexible to meet the unique challenges and demands faced in the 170 countries where UNDP operates and commits to contribute to 27 development outputs.

9. Two development platforms were introduced during this strategic planning period to aid delivery. A global development advisory and implementation services platform and country support platforms comprise a new set of mechanisms combining systems, services, knowledge and skills. In addition, the Strategic Plan further articulates two streams of work, a performance stream and an innovation stream, aimed at adapting ways of working and promoting an integrated service offer.

10. Integration is at the heart of the Strategic Plan, understood and presented in complementary ways: (a) through integrated approaches; (b) through the integrator role; and (c) through the integration of tools and capacity-strengthening for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

11. The Strategic Plan was designed to be 'reform ready', which means retaining flexibility to support future reforms (that had not yet been finalized) and to adapt as needed to deliver on promised UNDP commitments. United Nations reform and the delinking of the resident coordination function set in motion the recruitment of 127 UNDP resident representatives, along with a realignment of staff capacities in country offices. Financing the new resident coordinator configuration entailed a doubling of the UNDP cost-sharing contribution to the United Nations system, from $5.14 million in 2018 to $10.3 million in 2020.

12. The UNDP response to COVID-19 continues to align closely to the initial strategies of the United Nations system, including the Secretary-General's call to action in the report, "Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-economic Impacts of COVID-19". The body of work in support of the UNDP COVID-19 response is considerable and expanding, including two detailed organizational strategies and regional strategies developed by the regional bureaux. The integrated response has guided country offices to work in coordination with United Nations country team counterparts to develop initial short- to medium-term socioeconomic impact assessments that consider the various impacts of COVID-19 on national economies and key sectors. The impact assessments informed subsequent national socioeconomic response plans led by the resident coordinators. UNDP issued a recovery plan in June 2020 building on the experience of the preceding three months and an understanding of growing needs. The plan, "Beyond Recovery: Towards 2030", elaborates and focuses the UNDP COVID-19 response around four areas: (a) governance; (b) social protection; (c) green economy; and (d) digital disruption.

13. UNDP spent $16.09 billion between 2018 and 2020, of which $13.52 billion on programming, with 75 per cent linked to the signature solutions for poverty and governance, and less than 3 per cent each to the signature solutions for energy and gender.

III. Findings

Finding 1. Clarity of vision and conceptual framework

14. The Strategic Plan is recognized across the organization as an aspirational and flexible instrument that set UNDP in the right direction to support countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, to implement the reform of the United Nations development system and to respond to the COVID-19 emergency. However, concepts underpinning integration, development settings, signature solutions, platforms, performance and innovation streams still call for more clarity to evolve and take shape.

Finding 2. Adaptation and contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals

15. UNDP was swift to adapt its capabilities to support United Nations development system reform, putting in place a new generation of senior leaders in country offices and continuing to be a major contributor of financing, technical capacity and operational support services to the resident coordinator system. Delinking the coordination functions from UNDP has not been easy and challenges remain in repositioning UNDP in the space of the humanitarian-peace and development nexus.

Finding 3. UNDP strength and relevance

16. UNDP has made relevant contributions to development results within the three broad development settings and signature solutions stipulated in the Strategic Plan. Overall, stakeholder perceptions of UNDP relevance remain favourable, especially in the areas of gender, governance and environment, but less so in poverty reduction and energy. UNDP is most appreciated for its traditional roles providing programme and project implementation, capacity development and technical expertise, and not yet for the new offers contained in the Strategic Plan of integrated and innovative development solutions.

Finding 4. Key current challenges and areas for improvement

17. Despite continued improvements, results-based management, monitoring and reporting, and learning from successes and failures remain key areas for improvement.

Finding 5. UNDP contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals

18. UNDP has contributed to all Sustainable Development Goals, but over 50 per cent of total programme expenditure was related to Goal 1 (poverty reduction) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), which are also areas of key comparative strength for UNDP in alignment with the vision of the Strategic Plan. While UNDP has supported integrated approaches to achieving the Goals with a large menu of tools, inadequate corporate reporting makes it unclear which of these effectively helped to accelerate progress towards each Goal, and to what extent.

Finding 6. Gender equality and women's empowerment

19. The Strategic Plan promoted the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment as a key accelerator of development results. UNDP now has the opportunity to more clearly articulate how gender-integration approaches can deliver more gender-transformative results[1] in all areas of development to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable

_____

[1] The Independent Evaluation Office Gender Results Effectiveness Scale defines gender-transformative results as results that contributed to changes in norms, cultural values, power structures and the roots of gender inequalities and discrimination.

Develop Goals. Key constraints continue to be the lack of adequate financial and human resources.

Finding 7. The principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

20. While it remains a challenge to the entire development community to systemically and effectively operationalize the key principles of the 2030 Agenda, UNDP has made concerted efforts to promote collaborative partnerships to support and finance the Sustainable Development Goals, to more systemically integrate approaches for more balanced consideration of economic, social and environmental dimensions and to mainstream the principle of leaving no one behind. UNDP is well positioned to increase its focus, though leadership and contributions to inclusiveness and sustainability.

Finding 8. Innovation agenda

21. The elevation of innovation in the Strategic Plan has been followed by important investments in growing existing capabilities and mainstreaming of innovation efforts across the organization. Important steps have been taken to set up a better enabling environment for innovation. UNDP has yet to sufficiently adapt its rules and procedures to fully leverage innovative programming, partnerships and financing opportunities.

Finding 9. Accelerator labs

22. While still at an early stage to consider results, the implementation of the accelerator lab network is generating greater exposure for social innovation techniques and digital technologies at country level, and setting the basis for more participatory, contextualized and integrated approaches to understanding development challenges and implementing solutions.

Finding 10. Measuring and scaling innovation

23. There is a wealth of innovations surfacing with great potential to transform the work of UNDP. Nevertheless, UNDP capacity to identify emergent innovations across its portfolios and support their growth and scaling is constrained by limited risk appetite, a lack of stakeholder support, inadequate financial resources, insufficient flexibility in the rules and regulations, and shortcomings in its monitoring and evaluation and knowledge management functions. The process through which demonstrated techniques and tools are integrated and scaled into service offers is ad hoc and not sufficiently institutionalized to respond to the decentralized nature of UNDP.

Finding 11. Digital transformation

24. The UNDP digital strategy has emerged as an important and timely enabler of the Strategic Plan, contributing to innovation. Digital initiatives are increasingly taking shape, gaining speed in support of the COVID-19 response and helping UNDP to develop its capabilities to meet growing demands in the digital development agenda.

Finding 12. Global support platforms/Global Policy Network

25. The Global Policy Network represents an improvement over previous UNDP policy support. It offers good potential for increased efficiencies in the deployment of expertise within the organization. The need remains for a more coherent approach to capacity mapping, mobility and flexible contracting modalities, as well as the completion of the network's infrastructure, dismantling of regional barriers and greater involvement of global policy centres, other United Nations agencies and research and academic institutions.

Finding 13. Country support platforms

26. Country support platforms are valued for their potential to spur innovation and integration at country level. These platforms have created space for multi-stakeholder engagement and experimentation. Insufficient attention has been paid to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of platforms, as well as the measurement of their performance and results. The

roll-out of country support platforms has lacked a strong business plan and conceptual framework, with limited guidance and practical support for country offices.

Finding 14. Management and the UNDP operational backbone

27. Measures put in place during this strategic plan period have helped to reduce UNDP management costs, balance the budget, streamline processes and procedures, improve client orientation and reduce the carbon footprint of UNDP global operations. In addition, changes made possible by harnessing new technologies and rethinking capabilities for business effectiveness and efficiency have advanced the means for UNDP to improve its agility, flexibility and client satisfaction.

Finding 15. People management and capabilities

28. UNDP launched its "People 2030" strategy, offering a comprehensive people management plan to addresses human resource management challenges and to strengthen workforce capabilities. The strategy has been further articulated through a "people learning and development strategy" in 2020. The organization has yet to make the tools for these strategies fully functional, and work is needed to more clearly identify risks, mitigation strategies and measures to adequately assess the development of capabilities.

Finding 16. Organizational culture

29. The nimbleness, flexibility and innovation of UNDP are impeded by a risk-averse organizational culture. The tendency towards conflict avoidance, where poor performance and behaviour are not consistently reported and addressed, hinders learning and opportunities to improve results.

Finding 17. UNDP funding flows and trends

30. Despite the challenging financial context, UNDP has sustained a stable influx of other (non-core) resources and managed to increase regular (core) resources with agile mobilization and repurposing of funds to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The financing aspect of the UNDP business model continues to adapt, and more attention is being paid to further diversification of funding sources. The changes in composition of income show how UNDP has tried to be flexible, laying the groundwork for how this could be examined more closely in the next strategic plan.

IV. Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Strategic Plan vision and conceptual framework

31. The UNDP Strategic Plan is appreciated for its forward-looking integrated vision and flexibility, despite the need for more conceptual clarity and operational guidance. The Strategic Plan has contributed to improvements in development results but the aspirational visions for integration and an innovative business model are not yet fully evident at country level. The transformation envisaged in the Strategic Plan requires more time, greater capabilities and more flexible management and financial models.

Conclusion 2. The role of UNDP in the United Nations development system and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

32. The recent changes brought about through the reform of the United Nations development system compel UNDP to reposition itself with a more clearly articulated and focused value-added proposition, based on its comparative strengths, to help countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP is especially well positioned to contribute to poverty eradication and promotion of good governance, and also highly valued in its work in support of gender equality, environmental protection and building resilience to social, economic and

environmental shocks and conflict, especially when this work is implemented in an integrated fashion with a focus on sustainable development principles.

Conclusion 3. The UNDP contribution to countries for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

33. The strengths and positioning of UNDP in relation to integration of the Goals have become gradually more evident, yet inadequate monitoring and reporting of contributions to each individual Goal make it difficult to discern whether and to what extent the tools and support offered have been effective in achieving results and accelerating progress towards the Goals.

Conclusion 4. Gender equality as an accelerator of the Sustainable Development Goals

34. The Strategic Plan's approach to further integrate gender equality and women's empowerment has proven to be a key accelerator of development results. UNDP has gradually moved away from counting beneficiaries by sex to engaging in more gender-responsive approaches that address the different needs of men and women. Its contribution to systemic and sustainable transformation is still limited by insufficient financial and human resource allocations and attention to promote sustainable behaviour change.

Conclusion 5. Innovation and digital transformation

35. The Strategic Plan signalled a timely shift for UNDP innovation work, moving it from the margins to the heart of the organization. Investments in the accelerator lab network and the digital strategy illustrate efforts to renew the UNDP programmatic offer with innovation and are strengthening country offices' capabilities to innovate. More effective innovation management will depend on improvements to UNDP knowledge management systems, stakeholder interest, financial resources and a more deliberate approach to scaling up successes.

Conclusion 6. Platforms

36. The global and country support platforms established through the Strategic Plan are helping to expand the expertise available at UNDP regional hubs and country offices, gradually enabling the organization to better utilize and deploy its assets and capabilities to manage more context-specific and iterative and experimental approaches to problem solving for sustainable development.

Conclusion 7. Performance monitoring, reporting and learning

37. The UNDP performance monitoring and results reporting systems continue to improve. There have been efforts to strengthen the integrated results and resources framework of the Strategic Plan and the broader monitoring and reporting system, including the introduction of machine learning for analysis. Yet gaps remain which hinder accurate reporting for results-based management. UNDP systems for performance monitoring and results reporting are still not fit for results-based management and accurate reporting. The quality of the results framework, indicators used and data collected and reported is problematic. Limited attention is being paid beyond capturing lessons learned. UNDP has yet to ensure the use of the captured lessons to improve results, catalyse and scale up success and innovation and accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Conclusion 8. Management and operational backbone to the United Nations development system

38. UNDP has improved its management and operations, showing determination to be a more client-oriented operational service provider committed to improving people management, learning and development, streamlining processes and procedures and expanding investments in digital and technological innovation. Despite significant progress, operational and administrative shortcomings remain, including limited agility and flexibility for adaptive

management and funding. Flatter decision-making structures will be needed to respond to fast-evolving development challenges.

Conclusion 9. Funding

39. UNDP has sustained relatively stable resources during challenging financial times, even as it faces increasing pressure to find innovative ways to fund its work and partner with non-traditional donors. Unless UNDP is able to move away from the projectized nature of its funding model and find more effective, predictable and flexible ways to fund integrated country programming, it will be difficult to resource the systemic transformation needed for the integrated approaches and solutions highlighted in the Strategic Plan.

Conclusion 10. COVID-19 response

40. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted programmes in many countries, but also presented opportunities that UNDP has capitalized on to leverage resources and capabilities in support of Member States' preparedness and response strategies. There remains space for UNDP to further leverage its thought leadership on human development approaches to help development partners be bold and think differently, beyond the COVID-19 response and the 2030 Agenda; and build forward better, more equitably and sustainably.

V. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The UNDP role and value proposition. In the next strategic plan, UNDP should better define its role and value proposition in support of the 2030 Agenda and the COVID-19 pandemic response, with attention to the organization's altered position at the country level following the reform of the United Nations development system; and should anchor its work on its most recognized comparative strengths, with particular focus on principles of inclusiveness and sustainability to build forward better with attention to leaving no one behind.

41. While actively collaborating with other United Nations agencies in support of all the Sustainable Development Goals where logical and efficient, the organization should strive to be a development innovator, making better use of new mechanisms to promote integrated development solutions with a focus on the Goals where it has comparative strengths. Such focus does not mean that UNDP will not contribute to most, if not all, of the other Goals; given the integrated nature of the Goals, the broad contribution of UNDP is inevitable. Particular attention should be ensured to integrate the sustainability lens and the principle of leaving no one behind as catalysts for achieving the Goals. Furthermore, the focus of the next strategic plan should be on supporting the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, not only to help with recovery but to reset development pathways for a green future, with equality and resilience to build forward better.

42. UNDP should: (a) pay renewed attention to reducing poverty and inequalities and strengthening social protection; (b) promote the transition to a green economy, leveraging its successful work done on environment and natural resource management; and (c) strengthen inclusive democratic institutions, especially through digital transformation. This should be done in support of more resilient societies with a broader focus on shocks, the climate emergency, conflicts and future of work with foresight and complexity scenario systems thinking. In addition, UNDP should better foster the triple humanitarian-development-peace nexus to address inequalities with a rights-based, evidence-informed and human-centred approach, stressing the importance of ensuring systemic and transformative results that are socioeconomically and environmentally long lasting.

43. UNDP is not alone in its integration work, as this function should be a shared responsibility with United Nations country teams and other development partners. However, UNDP with its universal presence and global network should strategically position itself to be at the forefront of integrated solutions, serving as a catalyst, helping to accelerate achievement of the

Sustainable Development Goals and fostering more innovative ways of working, including through 'whole-of-government, whole-of-society and whole-of United Nations' approaches. In this process, UNDP will need to better monitor and evaluate its contributions, tools and offers for the Goals, and ensure more adequate stakeholder mapping to effectively work across complex systems, understanding and recognizing the comparative strengths of different players to 'connect the dots' across development issues. Actions should include networked solutions that bring diverse stakeholders and partnerships focusing on specific Goals to codesign and implement resilient systems that can adapt quickly to changes in different areas and absorb shocks, to ensure resilience and sustainability. All that will require the next strategic plan to bring greater clarity of concepts such as integrated approaches, Sustainable Development Goal integration and integrator roles. It will also be necessary to have more specific guidance for delivery mechanisms, alternative financing modalities and adapted flexible business models to help operationalize the systemic transformation envisioned for this decade of action.

Recommendation 2: Innovations. To meet the increasing demands driven by the change in context brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP work on innovation should prioritize support to partner countries on digital transformation, address administrative bottlenecks that hinder innovation, ensure improvements to knowledge management systems and develop a more deliberate approach to tracking and scaling successful innovations that can accelerate results towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

44. To help change the risk-averse organizational culture and ensure that innovation can be accelerated, it is particularly important that UNDP be bold in proactively addressing remaining administrative bottlenecks that limit experimentation, learning and private sector engagement. To optimize return on investments and accelerate results, UNDP should take steps to ensure dynamic alignment between its organizational policies and the evolving innovation agenda to formalize support for scaling-up of demonstrated successful solutions and practices into its mainstream ways of working. In this regard, clear communicable norms and evidence benchmarks to support measurement and transparent decision-making about scaling-up are required to support the participation of all business units.

45. Building on its comparative advantages, UNDP should focus its attention on social and digital innovation and help country offices and the national Governments that they support to navigate some of the complex emerging challenges and opportunities associated with private sector engagement, the use of new technologies and implications of new working methods. Furthermore, it will be important to prioritize the formalization of distinct support models to ensure that digital opportunities are harnessed across UNDP country offices, taking into account the various contexts in which UNDP operates.

Recommendation 3: Gender equality and women's empowerment as a Sustainable Development Goal accelerator. UNDP should further articulate how to expand and achieve the concrete benefits of integrating gender equality and women's empowerment as a catalytic development accelerator for the 2030 Agenda and the Goals. The Gender Seal process should be recommended to all offices, with efforts to increase financial investment in gender across all areas. UNDP should more adequately equip the organization with staff specialized in gender who are able to implement systems that focus on gender-responsive and transformative results.

46. In the next strategic plan, UNDP needs to further articulate how to achieve the concrete benefits of integrating gender equality and women's empowerment as a development accelerator. This will also provide a clearer value proposition to donors on the unique value added by UNDP on gender to accelerate progress towards the Goals. With a systemic approach, all UNDP programmes should undergo a Gender Results Effectiveness Scale analysis at the design, implementation and evaluation phases to help UNDP achieve more responsive and transformative gender results. More systemic approaches for transformation will require UNDP to meet or even exceed its commitment to allocate 15 per cent of programme resources for

initiatives that have gender equality and /or the empowerment of women as their primary and explicit objective. In this regard, the accuracy of the gender marker should be strengthened. More guidance is required for country offices to share a common understanding of how to use the marker more strategically. The marker assigned at the design stage should, if needed, be adjusted during the implementation stage. There should be stronger quality assurance processes in place at both the country office and regional levels to ensure proper use of the Gender Results Effectiveness Scale and the gender marker.

47. Given its proven catalytic potential, UNDP should require that all offices engage in the Gender Equality Seal process and make efforts to scale up the use of the seal not just in the private sector but also in government. This will require increased staff capacity for gender equality and women's empowerment at all levels, with adequate contractual arrangements for gender specialists. At the same time, it will be important to deepen the mainstreaming of the gender perspective across all teams instead of continuing the current overreliance on gender focal points. Further efforts towards gender parity should evolve to focus on improving working conditions for women. For instance, more attention should be given to the dimensions of unpaid care, a need illustrated strongly by the COVID-19 pandemic, while also augmenting UNDP human resources policy by aligning paternity leave for fathers and maternity/paternity leave for same-sex parents with current maternity leave provisions. These policy shifts can help support the transformation of roles within the household, which also impacts gender equality in the workplace.

Recommendation 4: Global Policy Network and country support platforms. UNDP should make more effective use of its Global Policy Network to improve mobility of expertise, with greater programming rigour through well-defined targets, milestones and effectiveness measures. In addition, a more comprehensive and strategic approach should be promoted for the establishment of country support platforms, by advancing their conceptual framework and criteria for assessment and by providing mechanisms for practical support and guidance to promote portfolio- and systems-based approaches.

48. UNDP should improve the deployment of internal expertise across regions and strengthen incentives to facilitate the mobility of policy advisers from one region to another. It should make better use of the expertise residing in country offices, by creating systems and incentives, making sure that the mobility policy reaches national officers. Global policy centres should be more effectively connected to the Global Policy Network infrastructure, ensuring that the network becomes a conduit that brings policy centres closer to the regional hubs and country offices. Likewise, options should be explored for fostering closer synergies between the policy network infrastructure and the other systems for financial and human resource management. UNDP should sharpen its key Global Policy Network tools by improving guidance and the flow of information, and the creation of incentives for better use of the system.

49. For country support platforms to achieve desired results, UNDP should establish a comprehensive package of support for country offices which includes practical guidance, advisory and technical support and provision for in-country coaching, if needed. This should include incentives for the involvement of regional hubs, global policy centres and other United Nations agencies with the support platforms at the country level. The platforms will need to be supported by a comprehensive system for monitoring their performance and results at the country and global levels through the annual reporting mechanism and the integrated results and resources framework. The sustainability of existing country support platforms should be consistently assessed based on good practices, and country offices should be required to have adequate sustainability plans in place for their platforms that are vetted by the regional and global support teams. Country support platforms should be tied more closely to the regional bureaux and be coordinated through them. Finally, an effective interface is needed for the interaction between the Global Policy Network and the country support platforms. As a

foundation for this interface, it will be necessary to improve the awareness and knowledge of country offices and their partners about the platforms and the network.

Recommendation 5: Results-based management and learning. UNDP should holistically redesign its entire results and performance monitoring and reporting framework and system, with (a) indicators better aligned to the timeliness and utility of data and methods that can help more credibly measure results; (b) more ambitious milestones; and (c) greater focus and guidance for consistently capturing and promoting learning for country offices to improve results and accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

50. Monitoring and reporting should be augmented with the country programme as the unit of analysis. The organization should monitor and report on how many country programmes have met their annual milestones and country programme results for those completing cycles, while tracking those which have not. While one system reporting on aggregate corporate-level data will still be required, attention needs to be given towards making it more useful for individual countries to learn from each other and improve results. Lessons should be shared and the information used to reprioritize support and resources to countries where efforts have fallen short of targets. Such an approach would align with the rationale of the Strategic Plan based on development settings and would constitute a more robust way to assess the performance of the organization and help countries to achieve and/or improve results.

51. In addition, UNDP should work with intermediate outcomes that can be more credibly linked to its interventions using more adequate indicators and targets, supported with robust monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. The indicators of the integrated results and resources framework will need to be redesigned to give the right attention to country-level reporting, and to the efficiency and effectiveness of country offices' delivery of programmes and results. An improved results assessment and reporting system should be designed to integrate with the new enterprise resource planning system and the wide range of existing dashboards, tools and instruments, including audits, evaluations and corporate surveys. This will require additional human resources, personnel with the right capacities on monitoring and reporting and investments in new ways to measure progress against signature areas of work. Furthermore, UNDP can more rigorously measure and report on its concrete contributions to each of the Sustainable Development Goals it commits to. The forthcoming revision of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group handbook on results-based management and the new quadrennial comprehensive policy review present an opportunity for UNDP to engage in system-wide discussions to develop a results-based management framework that helps organizations and programmes countries learn and accelerate results towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recommendation 6: Management and operations. To deliver fully on the promise in the Strategic Plan to evolve and innovate its business model, UNDP should fully operationalize adaptive management, additional funding models and financing capabilities to support systems transformation for countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This should address constraints to the funding of integrated programmes, portfolios, platforms and innovation and allow the organization to move away from operating mainly with projectized funding.

52. It will be important for UNDP to recommit to timelines and prioritize the completion of key management and operations workstreams that were delayed even before the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that the right enabling operational systems, policies, processes and staff mindsets are in alignment to secure the timely deployment of adequate human and financial resources. This is particularly important for the clustering of operational services, given the financial and other benefits that will accrue to UNDP and partners on completion. The proposed clustering of human resources, finance and procurement services should be completed in all regions as quickly as reasonably practicable, and the risk of further delays mitigated. The continued attention of senior management and the Office of Human Resources is essential if

the completion of the clustering process is to be concluded without further delay and in a way that secures the full benefits for the organization in all regions.

53. In time to allow for submission along with the new strategic plan, UNDP should engage in structured discussions with the Executive Board about different approaches to the allocation of resources which better reflect the complexity, vulnerability, risk and uncertainty of different development settings. This should address constraints to the funding of integrated programmes, portfolios, platforms and innovation and allow the organization to move away from mainly operating with projectized funding. Greater attention from central and regional bureaux should be given to partnerships that would allow donors to align their funding to specific country programmes, country support platforms and accelerator labs with strategic interest in particular national needs and contexts. Furthermore, it will be important to strengthen UNDP results-based budgeting capabilities, beyond the review of the integrated results and resources framework and particularly at the country level, concretely linking resources to a more adequate level of intermediate results that can measure the value for money of UNDP contributions to results.

Recommendation 7: People management and capabilities. In recognition that the main asset of UNDP is its workforce, the organization should timely deliver on its "People for 2030" and learning and development strategies that can improve staff capabilities for systems thinking and transformation; reward high-performance that is results-focused; and enable an innovative culture within the organization.

54. The UNDP Office of Human Resources should have direct representation at the Executive Office or at least within the Organizational Performance Group, with the Director being a full member, ensuring that every organizational decision is informed directly by the "people perspective" and to help address the risk-averse and conflict-avoidance organizational culture. Management, working closely with the cohort of next generation leadership, human resource business partners, "people champions" and the Global Policy Network, needs to ensure the right resources and capabilities, including improved policies and tools to support a cultural change, and talent management to better hold people accountable for their performance and behaviour. There should be clearer linkages between performance and results and between career opportunities and development.

55. An additional learning and development offer for programmatic and technical areas needs to be implemented to enhance the knowledge and skills of programme staff to respond to crises, such as COVID-19, to further adapt to digital needs and help countries to work with foresight, complexity and uncertainty to recover from crisis, building forward better. Thus, it is imperative that more reliable learning assessment methodologies be applied to measure how learning and development initiatives enhance capacities and impact the delivery of results, with lessons learned documented and used to inform course corrections, future investment and policy decisions.

_____