

Proposals for a New Generation of UNCTs – Explanatory Note –

1. Current status

The UN development system currently counts 130 UN country teams¹ (UNCTs) serving a total of 164 programme countries and territories. On average, each UNCT has 18 UN entities, of which 13 are resident entities.

UNDP, UNICEF and WHO are the UN entities with broadest UNCT membership, being resident members of all 130 UNCTs. They are followed by UNFPA (in 126 UNCTs), FAO (121), UNESCO (114), ILO (111), UNHCR (102), UN Women (101), UNAIDS (98) and WFP (92), although in some instances, these entities operate as non-resident members.

Membership of a UNCT does not necessarily involve full country presence in the form of a formally accredited representative, a stand-alone country office or a full country programme. Non-resident entities are predominantly normative and specialised agencies, which often operate mixed models of country presence. UNESCO, for example, is a member of 114 UNCTs, although only resident in 54 of these countries.

Currently, there is no systematic approach to determining UN country presence to ensure that the right mix of capacities and expertise is available to host governments to meet their needs and objectives.

2. Proposals for a new generation of UNCTs

In outlining his vision for a repositioned UNDS that delivers on the 2030 Agenda, the Secretary-general has called for a new generation of UNCTs to be more responsive and able to lead the UN's integrated and impactful contributions at country level.

This new generation of UNCTs would rely on the adoption of a modular approach to UNCT configuration, where country presence is demand-driven and tailored to national priorities, ensuring governments access to the UN's expertise in a more consistent and efficient manner.

A modular approach would allow more tailored response to any country context, with a priority focus on poverty reduction and vulnerable countries - in particular, African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States – and special attention to countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.

It would also help reinvigorate the UNCT support to middle-income countries, including through enhanced capacity for policy support in priority areas and support to the mobilization of relevant means of implementation. The Secretary-General's proposal would also seek to ensure that the UNDS is available to provide support on demand to high-income countries, as they engage in the universal 2030 Agenda.

To operationalize this vision, the Secretary-General has proposed establishing indicative criteria to be adopted by UNDS entities and host-governments on a country-by-country basis. The application of these criteria is expected to lead to a new configuration of UNCTs that encourages the use of shared resources

¹ Currently, there are 129 UN resident coordinators leading 130 UN country teams worldwide, with one UN resident coordinator covering two countries in this capacity, the UN resident coordinator for El Salvador and Belize.

and teamed-up capacities at country level through greater use of common back offices, joint representation, co-hosting and co-location arrangements, for policy, programme and operations.

The proposed steps for the application of the indicative criteria for country presence is outlined in the Secretary-General's December report. This phased approach is to be driven by an assessment of UN entities' comparative advantages against national priorities, as expressed in a well-defined UNDAF, as well as on the application of quantitative criteria to evaluate whether individual entity country-level work requires full country presence to deliver on its objectives.

The underlying principle behind the Secretary-General proposal is that the UN country presence for sustainable development should respond to specific demands for support from host governments in line of national priorities and needs. It should therefore rest on a robust UNDAF that is *'repositioned and strengthened as the single most-important UN planning tool in all countries, with tangible implications for guiding UN support and presence' development and implementation process*.

The new generation of UN country teams would draw on strengthened regional economic commissions and regional UNDG teams for additional technical capacities to support national efforts.

3. Implications of implementing the SG's proposals for UNCTs

Implementing the Secretary General's vision for the next generation of UNCTs would need to take into account the following considerations:

✓ **Underlying objective behind country presence proposals**

The underlying objective for a new generation of UNCTs is to move to a demand-driven, context specific model of country presence. A reconfigured UN presence does not necessarily mean less presence. It means tailored, more relevant and therefore higher quality presence of the UN in country, ensuring that entities on the ground each bring added value, capacity and skill sets required to address that country's needs. It moves away from a representation-based model and from a 'one-size-fits-all countries in a given category' approach. The overall goal of reconfiguring UN country presence is to provide better, more efficient and higher quality support for SDG implementation.

✓ **Adoption of next generation of UNCTs model by UNDS entities**

Decisions on country presence are taken at the individual entity level, reflecting the needs for support from the UN expressed by host governments through the UNDAF process and the preparation of entity-specific country programmes. Implementation of the Secretary-general's proposal for a new generation of UNCTs will therefore require support to these proposals, including the guiding indicative criteria for country presence, by individual entities of the UNDS and respective host governments.

✓ **Operational guidelines for country presence**

The UNDG will develop operational guidelines that provide more detailed guidance to UN entities, Resident Coordinators and UNCTs on how the proposed approach for UNDS country presence and related criteria to be applied in-country.

✓ **Strengthening the UNDAF**

UNDAFs are currently conceived as strategic, medium-term results frameworks that describe the collective vision and response of the UN system to national development priorities and results. They say little about how UNCT entities will operate at the country level to achieve these objectives. The UNDG will therefore need to develop and incorporate new steps and methodologies into the UNDAF design process that help UNCTs determine in a collective manner, and in close dialogue with host governments, the

capacities needed to implement UNDAF programmes in support of national priorities. This would provide the basis for clearer decision-making over UNCT country configuration.

New UNDAF guidance would also need to incorporate steps to address the regional dimensions relevant to country priorities, with more systematic contributions of the regional economic commissions to the common assessment and analysis that inform the design of the UNDAF.

✓ **Alternative country presence options**

Realizing the Secretary-general's vision for a new generation of UNCTs will in some cases also require exploring alternative options for country presence, such as hosting arrangements in RCOs, joint representation agreements with other UNCT members or co-location with other larger entities. These arrangements will build on existing agreements for cost-sharing and co-location amongst entities and should also allow for smaller and normative UN entities to continue effectively implementing their mandates at country level. The UNDG and the larger entities in the UN development system will have to develop a menu of options for such possible alternative arrangements that also draw out the different costing implications.

✓ **Updated standard operating procedures and accountability framework for UNCTs**

The SG's vision for a new generation of UNCTs is not limited only to UN entity's physical presence in country. It also relates to how UNCT members work together for more effective delivery on the 2030 Agenda at country level under the leadership of an impartial, independent and empowered resident coordinator.

Making this happen will require reviewing interagency accountability frameworks and operational procedures to reflect the new authorities proposed for resident coordinators and the new dual reporting obligations proposed for UNCT members. It will also entail updating other relevant UNDG operational guidance currently governing the work of UNCTs.

✓ **Role of UN Secretariat entities in UNCTs**

UN Secretariat entities have significant expertise to offer to Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In some cases, they are already members of several UNCTs – such as UNEP, UNODC and UN Habitat – as resident or non-resident entities. Resident coordinators, through their RCOs, should be able to draw on the expertise of these entities, including those with only a global or regional presence. It is not expected that these entities establish new or further country presence.

✓ **Multi Country Offices**

Multi Country Offices (MCOs) face very specific circumstances and geographical contexts and therefore require a dedicated focus with regards to UN country presence. The demand-driven model for the determination of UN country presence aims to address this issue by ensuring a cost-effective support package to countries covered by MCOs to maximize the UN development system's contributions to sustainable development in these countries.

Going forward, MCO arrangements will be reviewed and tailored appropriately to specific MCO situations, in close consultation with concerned countries. In doing so, it will be critical to explore how linkages between MCO UNCTs and non-resident entities, including the Regional Economic Commissions, can be further strengthened to ensure enhanced support to these countries, particularly in the Pacific and in the Caribbean. Having more robust RC Offices, with a minimum of 5 substantive officers, should also significantly increase the UN's capacity to provide better policy and programmatic support. It will also be important not to over-extend country coverage of MCOs. In this respect, a limit could be considered on the maximum number of countries to be covered by a single resident coordinator, UNCT and RCO, based on region and country context.

✓ **UNCT configuration and Strategic Plans**

Strategic Plans of the UN entities are designed to provide a global, strategic-level focus for each entity. They are the tool through which Executive Boards prioritize the focus of the various agencies according to their mandates. They are therefore not intended to determine the precise country-level programming focus or presence. This is the role of the UNDAF and country-based programme documents. At this level, the relationship will therefore remain unchanged.

In some cases, agency Strategic Plans may need to be revised by their governing bodies to ensure they are aligned to the repositioning of the UN development system and incorporate the relevant aspects of the Secretary-general's proposals for UNCT configuration.