

The United Nations System-Wide Strategic Document (SWSD) to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

ANNOTATED OUTLINE - 18 April

CONTEXT

The current annotated outline of the System-Wide Strategic Document (SWSD) is being shared with Member States as a work in progress, in the spirit of full transparency and to ensure that the finalization of the document is informed by early comments and feedback by the membership. This outline is to be read in the context of the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the QCPR – in particular its Section III (A), which provides an update on the overall process relating to the production by entities of the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG).

The SWSD responds to a request expressed in resolutions 71/273 and 72/279. A final version of the SWSD will be submitted to Member States in the coming weeks, for consideration by the ECOSOC. The exact date of submission and procedural steps that will ensue are currently being discussed with the President of the ECOSOC.

1. **Introduction:** A System Wide Strategic Document for an enhanced support to the 2030 Agenda
 - The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present a historical opportunity for the world to embark on a path of prosperity, sustainability and peace for all.
 - Under the current trajectory, however, the SDGs will not be met everywhere, for everyone. Their ambition, universality, interconnectedness and urgency call for a reinigorated multilateral response. The global development ecosystem is complex and varied, with the United Nations development system (UNDS) positioned as one amongst many actors that must enhance their response to the paradigm shift ushered in by the 2030 Agenda. Yet, the UNDS holds a unique position in this ecosystem, due to its universal and multilateral nature, its role as custodian and promoter of internationally agreed norms and standards, its unique ability to connect these normative mandates to operational solutions on the ground, and the breadth and depth of its expertise.
 - The UNDS must therefore be at the center of efforts to accelerate progress towards the SDGs and efforts to leaving no one behind, based and building on all mandates, and supported by a new, reinigorated coordination system.
 - However, realizing the full potential of the UN's multilateral strengths and development mandates remain a challenge. **Gaps have to be bridged and overlaps need to be managed as they otherwise continue to undermine both the effectiveness and efficiency of the renewed UNDS response.**
 - To effectively position the UNDS in support of Member States' implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the 21 December 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) made two key requests of the Secretary-General: to conduct "a system-wide outline of present functions ... with a view to identifying gaps and overlaps in coverage and providing recommendations for addressing them ... as well as options for aligning funding modalities with the functions of the United Nations

development system, to be reflected in the new strategic plans and similar planning documents of its entities”¹, and; to prepare “a system-wide strategic document translating those recommendations into concrete actions ... in order to improve their collective support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ...”².

- With respect to the first request, the *System-wide outline of the functions and capacities of the UN Development System* (the ‘Functions and Capacities Review’) identified gaps and overlaps in UN **coverage** of specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as gaps in UN “**capacity and functions**”. The review also noted UN skills gaps, including in areas such as provision of “whole of government/”whole of society” advice on how to achieve the SDGs and how to prioritize support to government efforts; capabilities to support countries on statistics and data for planning, implementation and tracking the 2030 Agenda; programming across the humanitarian-development nexus and linkages to peace in specific country contexts; engagement with the private sector for increased and better targeted development investments; and the mechanisms through which the UNDS is funded.
- This review informs the orientation of this document, which responds to the second request of the QCPR to **strengthen UNDS support to member states by articulating, in a system-wide document, concrete responses to the identified gaps and overlaps.**
- As such the SWSD:
 - ✓ Articulates, at the global level, the collective comparative advantages and identity of the UNDS, including the principles and approaches that define the UN’ development offer across all SDGs.
 - ✓ Explains how a more demand-driven, integrated, coordinated and transformative UN development offer and configuration serve to address gaps and reduce overlaps while increasing accountability.
 - ✓ Draws the substantive connections between the various strands of UN reform, including the review of regional and country level capacities, and how they fit together as a system-wide commitment to accelerating and enhancing support for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
- The SWSD is a **high-level instrument designed to set the strategic intent of the UNDS** at the global, regional and country level to best support nationally defined priorities, with the 2030 Agenda at the center, and ensure that no one is left behind in our collective efforts to reach the SDGs. It guides UN corporate and country-level development plans, programs and operations, with a focus on collective action. It does not aim at listing development mandates or at providing an exhaustive picture of all individual interventions in support of the 2030 Agenda, nor is it a an operational plan or intended to express thematic policies.
- Finally, the SWSD **does not introduce new reform elements**. Rather, it articulates how these reform elements are being designed and implemented in a coherent manner to enhance the UN’s comparative advantages and strengthen its development offer, make it more predictable and reliable, of higher quality and responsive to national needs and priorities.

¹ A/RES/71/243, Para. 9.

² A/RES/71/243, Para. 20.

2. Aligning the UN's development offer to the 2030 Agenda

- The UNDS support to countries is based on the following recognized comparative advantages:
 - ✓ Universality
 - ✓ Custodian and provider of support for the implementation of global norms, internationally agreed standards and frameworks
 - ✓ Convening power for wide range of actors
 - ✓ Expertise across SDGs and across diverse country contexts
 - ✓ Operational capabilities, and wide range of roles and implementing modalities
 - ✓ Global, regional networks and country presence, including before, during and after crises
- Recognizing that the development landscape is rapidly evolving, in each country and regions of the world, the UNDS is committed to **making these comparative advantages more effectively, predictably and collectively available for countries** contextualized to local requirements, including:
 - ✓ SDG gaps identification across the data, policy, implementation and financing dimensions (through e.g. Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support)
 - ✓ National statistical capacity, data and analytics for SDG policy formulation, adjustment, and monitoring/follow up
 - ✓ Policy options for inclusive and risk informed sustainable development and social cohesion, including through enhanced social protection mechanisms
 - ✓ Planning and budgeting for policies targeting SDG achievement and their implementation
 - ✓ Capacities and financing solutions (public and private) for SDGs
 - ✓ Identification and support to partnerships that accelerate SDG achievement, in line with internationally agreed norms and standards
 - ✓ Support to countries in engaging with UN Human Rights mechanisms to advance the 2030 Agenda in line with their commitments under international law
 - ✓ Support to national consultative mechanisms engaging civil society and development partners in the design, implementation and monitoring of national policies
- However, for support in these areas to meet the ambitions and needs of the 2030 Agenda, the collective response will need to be enhanced. Specially:
 - a) **The collective response will be more demand-driven, open and SDG-focused.**
 - The UNDS recognizes that global challenges and country needs are evolving and often evolving fast, even since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015.
 - Its response must therefore evolve accordingly, as needed, taking advantage of the range of capacities, roles and modes of implementation it can access and deploy.
 - In line with the principle of national ownership, the UNDS will pro-actively tailor its support and bring together its mandates and expertise behind nationally defined, SDG-focused priorities.

- The new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) provides the platform for this alignment. First through the Common Country Assessment (CCA) which will focus on the opportunities, challenges and options a country faces to reach the SDGs, and examine progress, gaps, opportunities and bottlenecks vis-à-vis the member state's commitment to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, international norms and standards and the principles of the UN Charter.
- It will on that basis articulate how the UNDS commits to supporting the development, implementation, and financing of national priorities.
- In this regard, shifting from an exclusive focus on funding requirements for the UN in country, UN Country Teams (UNCT) will increasingly need to help unlock the public and private financing channels needed for resources to flow at scale. The UNSDCF will also inform the mix of capacities required to respond to national development priorities and needs.
- At the global, regional, and country levels, the UNDS will also drive a more open response, whereby it explores, designs and convenes partnerships with domestic and international public, private, and civil society actors that can deliver real impact on the ground.
- Being more open requires that the UNDS' offer always be alert to changes in context and evolving needs, supportive of what other actors are doing to achieve the SDGs, and agile to adapt to new modes of collaboration.
- A more outward orientation of the UN's plans and programs is premised on the recognition that **achieving the SDGs and ensuring gaps in the UN's own response capacity are adequately filled requires multiple actors** to work together effectively and coherently.
- This also means that the UNDS entities will make **better use of the range of implementation modalities** that they have at their disposal, and tailor them to evolving needs and other actors' own contributions for a more effective overall response.
- More specifically, the **UNDS commits to examining the roles it plays in each country and prioritize them as required between any of the following:**
 - ✓ Provider of data/analytics and support to national data generation and statistical capacity in line with the Cape Town Global Action Plan
 - ✓ Provider of normative support to countries to implement commitments under international norms and standards as instrumental to achieving equitable and sustainable development results
 - ✓ Provider of integrated policy options and technical advice for achievement of each SDG, and across SDGs, in line with the overall commitment to leave no one behind, UN Charter values and international norms and standards
 - ✓ Enabler of action by others who can better fill identified gaps including by strengthening multilateral efforts for country level SDG progress
 - ✓ Provider of support to governments to access financing at scale for the SDGs
 - ✓ Service provider with clear strategies for capacity and knowledge transfer and support to national ownership

- As frameworks for cooperation, UNSDCF's will articulate these roles played by the UNCT, **including how they are prioritized as required over time**, in response to national ownership/capacity development imperatives, and the role of other partners.
- Identified roles and their expected shifts will also drive **a clearer articulation of the UNDS entities' funding models and needs to deliver on UNSDCF results**, as committed to by the UNDS in the Funding Compact.

b) The collective response will be better integrated.

- Assessments such as the CCA and other analytical products will address connections, synergies and potential trade-offs between SDGs, considering the three dimensions of sustainable development.
- Policy advice will reflect the interconnectedness of the 2030 Agenda and provide options for sequencing, convergence and integration of SDG efforts in national policy, budget and integrated financing frameworks.
- Support will strive for 'whole of response' approaches, linking data/evidence to policy options, financing models, and implementation solutions to ensure sustainability of responses.
- Better integrated also means continuing efforts to explore how the pillars of the UN system can come together even more effectively to support national and regional prevention, resilience, risk reduction efforts, recognizing that effective development is needed to address root causes of crisis.
- The UNDS will also link country level analysis to regional dimensions, to make positive use of trans-boundary and regional phenomena – and cooperation on such issues - for the achievement of the SDGs. As such, the UNDS will harness its policy and analytical resources to identify regional stresses to SDG attainment, as well as opportunities for collective action at regional level, notably opportunities for enhanced economic integration.
- Integrated support also means connecting country level efforts with the global normative and policy agenda. Hence, the UNDS entities will increase their efforts to:
 - ✓ Support member state and civil society participation in global policy debates
 - ✓ Produce and share data and analytics on global trends that affect SDG achievement globally and locally, in line with General Assembly approved indicator frameworks
 - ✓ Advocate for equitable SDG progress across the world
 - ✓ Align its operational work with international norms and standards
 - ✓ Build coalitions for SDG financing at scale, including through the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda and in line with the Secretary-General's financing strategy³
 - ✓ Consolidate and share good practice on integrated cross sector solutions at scale.

- ³ (see: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SG-Financing-Strategy_Sep2018.pdf)

- As such, the global and regional analysis, knowledge generation, policy dialogues, normative work and peer learning processes support national level efforts and contribute to strengthen national implementation, whereas national actions inform regional and global processes and contribute to forging regional common positions and is channeled into global forums and processes.

c) The collective response will be more joined up, coordinated, and cohesive.

- The UN's development offer must reflect contributions and convergence of expertise from its country level, regional and global presence, rather than having these three levels offering support in parallel or in isolation of each other. For example, all relevant UNDS entities will need to, and have the opportunity, to provide expertise for the development of the CCA.
- Global and regional capacities will be better harnessed to provide more easily accessible, predictable, joined up and reliable support to countries. Over time, the UNDS will increase its production of common analytical and policy advice where relevant.
- The full support for, and implementation of the new RC system by the entire UNDS will drive system wide efforts to address internal gaps and overlap. In particular, when gaps in UN support are identified (notably through the UNSDCF design and evaluation process), the UNDS, supported by the Development Coordination Office (DCO), will intensify efforts to mobilize capacities and partners (recognizing that different partners bring different expertise and resources to the table).
- Through the UNSDCF process, and by implementing its Management and Accountability Framework (MAF), the UNDS will also become a more cohesive partner, minimizing overlaps that create inefficiencies and undermine UN responses, as well as reducing transaction costs for governments and partners alike.

d) And the collective response will need to be more transformative.

- The 2030 Agenda requires nothing less. Hence, across all SDGs, individual and collective UNDS support will reflect four *integrating approaches*:
 - ✓ The support aims at accelerating *inclusive structural transformations* that place countries on an inclusive and equitable sustainable development trajectory, adapted to and capitalizing on far-reaching trends *such as*: new trade and financial patterns, climate change and environment sustainability, the future of jobs, and the impact of new technologies.
 - ✓ As such, the UNDS support will not be ephemeral, short-term focused; it will assist countries in developing and implementing SDG policies that are grounded in a clear-eyed understanding of future scenarios, risks and responses to long term structural trends, to help them anticipate change and build economies, societies and an environment in which people will thrive in the world of tomorrow.
 - ✓ The support includes the identification of options and implementation of actions designed to *Leave No One Behind*, as an indispensable dimension of inclusive structural transformation. Such transformations should be designed and shepherded in a way that address inequalities and their root causes (inter-generational, economic, ethnic, gender, geographic, and all grounds of discrimination prohibited by international law, etc.), with the required prevention, risk reduction mitigation and resilience approaches in place.
 - ✓ This will include engagement at the sub national level, and the support provided to local governments in translating policy into concrete deliverables for communities as well as action

- to ensure the active and meaningful participation of people in the country, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable.
 - ✓ The support offered, in its various form, from policy advice to service provision, is informed and shaped by all the relevant *internationally agreed standards and norms* which the United Nations upholds, and whose application further serves the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
 - ✓ The support looks at the *enabling environment* and what is needed to sustain inclusive structural transformations in the essential dimensions of people/leadership/human resources, institutions (for dialogue and consultation, data collection and monitoring, social protection, planning, rule of law, etc.) and partnerships.
- These approaches will be reflected in each UNSDCF, *with clear measurements*, allowing for global level aggregation of actions, achievements, and lessons learned as part of the reporting on the SWSD (in the SG report to ECOSOC and as one of the Funding Compact commitments).

3. **Aligning means to the 2030 Agenda**

- All UNDS entities must ensure they have the means and the capacities, and that the UNDS is organized accordingly, to deliver this enhanced support.
- More specifically, each UNDS entity and the UNDS as a whole, is intensifying efforts **to strengthen its own abilities and systems** in the areas of:
 - ✓ People and skills, beginning with the revamped Resident Coordinator (RC) selection and SDG certification processes;
 - ✓ Partnership, through strengthened partnership capacities, greater inter-agency collaboration, increased outreach with all relevant stakeholders including civil society, and enhanced due diligence;
 - ✓ Data and knowledge, through a new data strategy to enhance the quality, accessibility and interoperability of data flows, and a federated system of national and global data hubs.
 - ✓ SDG focused evaluations, including system wide evaluations.
- **To organize itself and innovate to address gaps, adapt the response, and accelerate delivery**, the UNDS will continue efforts to:
 - ✓ Tailor the UN's presence and collectively decide on the right configuration and mix of capacities needed for delivering reliable and quality support to national SDG efforts, notably through the UNSDCF process, the MCO and regional reviews;
 - ✓ Ensure adequate coordination coverage to a range of countries through the MCO review;
 - ✓ Experiment with new approaches for tailoring our responses and enabling SDG acceleration, notably through the implementation of the Secretary-General's strategy on new technology and the Chief Executive Board (CEB) agenda on innovation;
 - ✓ Seek greater coherence of cross-UN pillar efforts to support prevention and resilience as enablers of sustainable development objectives, including through achievement of collective outcomes, coherence between development efforts and the work undertaken by humanitarian and peacebuilding actors and greater synergies between respective planning instruments (UNSDCF, Integrated Strategic Framework, Humanitarian Response Plans).

- **In seeking efficiency gains to increase mandate delivery and address internal overlaps**, the system will focus on:
 - ✓ Consolidated back office functions for more effective and efficient delivery (through common premises and back offices, mutual recognition, etc.) and savings;
 - ✓ Collective planning approaches (through the revised UNSCDF) to identify gaps and then maximize complementarities and alignment of activities to address the identified development needs;
 - ✓ Internal accountabilities as articulated in the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) for greater collaboration and clearer responsibilities for joint results and approaches.

4. **Aligning action with intent**

- Finally, the UN will be fully **accountable** for delivering on this realignment and will **report** on the **SWSD** systematically and transparently. Accountability and reporting on the SWSD will make use of existing mechanisms, including those established by the UNDS reform.
- Notably, the SWSD will be supported by the following *two levels of accountability*:
 - ✓ *External accountability* will be ensured through the **UNSDCF** and annual reporting to programme countries as well as through the **Funding Compact**, which articulates clear commitments with targets and indicators for the alignment presented in the SWSD. The Compact also reinforces the need for Member States to enable a more effective UNDS alignment behind the 2030 Agenda by shifting funding behaviors towards more flexibility and predictability.
 - ✓ *Internal accountability* will be provided by the **MAF**, which defines roles and responsibilities for collective results, UNCT engagement with partners, alignment of UN entity development programming with UNSDCF priorities, and mutual performance assessment.
- The SWSD will also be supported by the following *two levels of reporting*:
 - ✓ At the *country level*, reporting to government will be anchored in the **UNSDCF** process, reflecting a tailored offer, clarity of role(s) and how the UN is incorporating the four integrating approaches presented in this SWSD; reporting will be supported by UN INFO; In addition, the role of the RC and UNCT will be to continuously explore ways for UN to reinforce national ownership.
 - ✓ At the *regional and global level*, monitoring progress on the SWSD implementation will be through existing mechanisms, and reporting to Member States on SWSD implementation will be included in the Secretary-General progress report on the QPCR to ECOSOC.

[END]