



United Nations
Sustainable Development Group
System-Wide Evaluation Office

System-wide evaluation on progress towards a ‘new generation of United Nations Country Teams’

Summary of key findings and conclusions



May 2025

Summary

This system-wide evaluation on 'progress towards a new generation of United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs)', conducted between August 2024 and May 2025, provides lessons and insights on two key elements of the repositioning of the United Nations development system proposed by the Secretary-General in 2017, and mandated by Member States in 2018 (A/RES/72/279):

- i. **Alignment/derivation:** the status of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework as the 'most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities in each country' – i.e. that UNSDG entity programmes are 'derived from' and 'aligned with' Cooperation Frameworks
- ii. **UNCT configuration:** that UNCTs are able to (re)configure to deliver shared results in response to the priorities set out in Cooperation Frameworks

It provides independent analysis on how these reform elements have been implemented and their contribution to the wider goal of a more coherent, effective, efficient, and accountable United Nations development system.

The findings are based on the triangulation of multiple data sources, including consultation of more than 500 key informants, data collection in 21 countries, large system-wide survey datasets, and more than 1000 documents gathered from across the United Nations system at country and global levels.

The evaluation confirms that the vision for a 'new generation of UNCTs' remains highly relevant. The 2018 repositioning has resulted in many important improvements, notably more coherent analysis and planning, widespread appreciation for the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system, and increased participation of non-resident entities in UNCTs. These provide an important and necessary foundation on which to build, and there are individual examples of behaviours and approaches which match the ambitions of the reforms. But, overall, Cooperation Frameworks have not yet become the most important instrument for planning and implementation at country level. Similarly, UNCTs have not yet significantly reconfigured in line with Cooperation Framework priorities. While the United Nations development offer remains important and relevant, its collective offer and contribution has not been transformed by these elements of the repositioning. There remains a significant gap between the strategic intent and the operational reality.

Alignment/derivation: UNCT entity country programmes are broadly 'aligned' with Cooperation Frameworks, but there is little evidence that the substance of those programmes is significantly affected by the Cooperation Framework and its preparation process. 'Derivation' is a largely administrative exercise, and its compliance points and timeframes can cause friction.

'UNCT configuration exercises' conducted at country-level have expanded the engagement of non-resident entities in UNCTs. But the exercises are disconnected from entity decision points on country level resourcing, and have not created more tailored, needs-based country presences or improved the UNCT ability to deliver Cooperation Frameworks.

Cooperation Framework implementation: Collective UNCT ownership and use of the tools used to support implementation (including joint workplans, joint resource mobilization strategies and coordination structures) has been weak, limiting the potential for these tools to deliver a more

prioritized, strategic and coherent set of interventions in response to Cooperation Framework priorities.

Critical factors: The evaluation identifies critical interrelated factors that explain these findings. These relate to the limitations of the Cooperation Framework Guidance and Management and Accountability Framework (MAF); the design, analysis and planning focus of the systems established to support and monitor the implementation of the reforms; and the limited extent to which entities (at HQ, regional and country-level) have fully integrated the ambitions of the reforms within their own accountability mechanisms and incentive structures. Other factors relate to the broader enabling environment and systemic issues, including limited transparency within UNCTs; competition for funding; varying levels of programme country government engagement; the governance architecture of the development system; and donor behaviour and funding trends.

These ambitious reforms are now at a critical juncture and changes will be necessary to realise the ambition for a new generation of UNCTs set out in 2017. The evaluation conclusions identify key factors that explain the gap between strategic intent and operational reality and corresponding areas where changes are necessary to realise the vision for a new generation of UNCTs that are more coherent and effective to contribute to accelerated progress at country level, specifically: (i) accountabilities and incentives within UNSDG entities; (ii) Cooperation Framework cycle delivery; UNCT configuration and approaches to country-level presence; (iv) guidance and systems for coordination to ensure stronger delivery-focus; (v) addressing institutional obstacles and operational disincentives for collaboration; (vi) acceleration of Funding Compact commitments; and (vii) Member State oversight/coordination.

Next steps: The evaluation report, with recommendations to the UNSDG and for the information and consideration of Member States, will be published in July 2025.

Introduction

1. This evaluation on progress towards a new generation of United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs), conducted by the UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Office, has a dual purpose of accountability and learning.
2. The evaluation responds to a request by UNSDG Principals for an independent system-wide evaluation to examine two central elements of the repositioning of the United Nations development system at country level, specifically: 'good practices and opportunities for improvement on country programmes' derivation from, and alignment with, Cooperation Frameworks and UNCT configuration'.
3. The evaluation is not an assessment of progress against the entirety of the reform agenda or the overall effectiveness of the United Nations development system. Rather, the focus is the contribution of two key reform elements to the goal of a more coherent, effective, efficient, and accountable United Nations development system:
 - a. **Alignment/derivation:** the status of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework as the 'most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities in each country' – i.e. the extent to which individual UNSDG entity programmes are 'derived from' and 'aligned with' the Cooperation Framework
 - b. **UNCT configuration:** the extent to which UNCTs¹ have been able to (re)configure to deliver shared results in response to the priorities set out in the Cooperation Frameworks
4. While these processes and their outcomes are at the centre of the evaluation, the assessment of progress requires consideration of the of the wider reform agenda and the broader enabling environment.
5. The evaluation was launched in mid-2024 and is now reaching its final stages. The evaluation report, with recommendations to the UNSDG and for the information and consideration of Member States, will be published in July 2025².

Context

6. The repositioning of the United Nations development system is arguably the most comprehensive and ambitious reform effort to date, aiming to provide more coherent, accountable, and effective United Nations support to help Member States achieve the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. It was initiated by Member States in the 2014-16 'ECOSOC dialogues' and 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review resolution (QCPR - [71/243](#)), taken forward by the Secretary-General in his reports on repositioning in 2017 ([A/72/124-E/2018/3](#) & [A/72/684-E/2018/7](#)), mandated in General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) (2018), and reinforced by General Assembly resolutions on the QCPR in 2020 ([75/233](#)) and 2024 ([79/226](#)).
7. The reform package is broad, in addition to the elements at the core of this evaluation, it includes *inter alia* the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system (de-linked from UNDP and reporting to the Secretary-General), repositioning of the regional level of the development system to enhance use of its capacities and resources at country level, the creation of the Development Coordination Office at HQ level to provide support to the Resident Coordinator system and UNCTs, the [Funding Compact](#) between the UNSDG and Member States, and important system-wide efficiency initiatives. Monitoring and formal reporting to Member States

¹ On average, 19-20 resident and non-resident United Nations entities led by a Resident Coordinator.

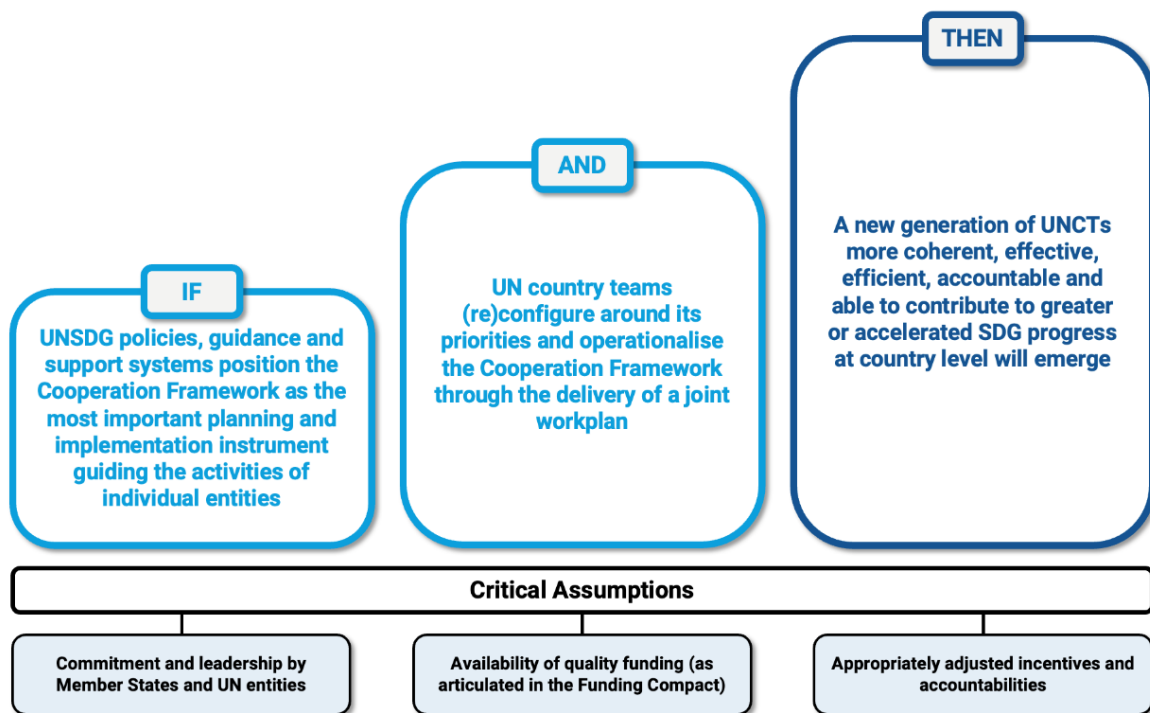
² At: <https://www.un.org/system-wide-evaluation-office/en/document-library>

on reform implementation is provided by the Secretary-General's reports on the QCPR and the UNSDG Chair's reports on the Development Coordination Office.³

Evaluation features

8. **Scope:** The evaluation is system-wide including member entities of the UNSDG and its secretariat (the Development Coordination Office) at country, regional and global levels in the period 2019 to 2025. Adhering to key principles of the [UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Policy](#) - complementarity, subsidiarity and collaboration - it builds upon the existing evaluation and oversight work of UNSDG entity evaluation functions, the United Nations Secretariat's Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and country-specific Cooperation Framework evaluations. It is focused on the collective results and system-wide issues that are not adequately addressed by these mechanisms.
9. **Analytical approach:** The evaluation took a theory-based approach, whereby the evaluation questions, data collection and analysis aims to assess progress against a theory for the realisation of 'new generation of UNCTs'. The core of this theory is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Simplified Theory of Change for a new generation of UNCTs



(Source: SWEO evaluation team)

10. The evaluation takes a system-wide lens to holistically assess how this theory holds in practice and highlights key enabling or limiting factors (both internal and external).
11. **Participatory nature:** without compromising its objectivity and independence, the evaluation was conducted in close consultation with key stakeholders and users throughout. UNSDG entities were consulted on evaluation scope and design. Primary data collection methods were participatory, prioritising and promoting inter-agency discussions. Briefings on emerging

³ [2025 Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the QCPR \(adv. unedited\)](#); [2025 Report of the Chair of the UNSDG on the Development Coordination Office \(adv. unedited\)](#)

evaluation findings provided opportunities for their validation, and workshops were held with UNSDG and Resident Coordinator system representatives to discuss appropriate and feasible recommendations. The evaluation has sought to be outward facing, connecting when relevant with ongoing UNSDG and inter-governmental processes relating to United Nations development system repositioning.

12. **Data sources:** the evaluation took a broad sampling approach. Primary and secondary data was gathered and analysed across different stakeholder groups, and at country/regional/global levels of the United Nations development system. The findings draw on:
 - a. interviews/focus group discussions with 500+ key informants (United Nations system staff and external stakeholders including programme country governments and donors) at country, regional and global levels;
 - b. country level data collection in 21 focus countries (balancing typologies and regional representation)- see Figure 2;
 - c. review of relevant documentation gathered from 21 UNCTs and all 37 UNSDG entities (including existing independent evaluations);
 - d. re-analysis of system-wide survey datasets (including the UNSDG Information Management System and annual QCPR monitoring surveys of UNSDG entities, UNCT members, Resident Coordinators and programme country governments administered by UN-DESA⁴) collected between 2021 and 2024.

Figure 2: Evaluation focus countries



(Source: SWE0 evaluation team)

Evaluation findings

Relevance and integration of key instruments

13. The evaluation finds that the [Cooperation Framework Guidance \(2019\)](#) and the [Management and Accountability Framework \(2019, updated 2021\)](#), reflect the overall strategic intent of the

⁴ Number of respondents to QCPR monitoring surveys (2024): 122 programme country governments (one per country), 32 UNSDG entity headquarters (one per entity), 1041 UNCT members, and 129 Resident Coordinators

United Nations development system repositioning. They support the ambition to further join up UNCT analysis, planning, reporting, introduce dual accountability models and focus on national priorities.

14. However, these instruments, which are the result of negotiation and agreement among UNSDG entities, lack clarity on the fundamental processes and expectations regarding country programme derivation from Cooperation Frameworks and UNCT configuration. Furthermore, as evidenced by subsequent findings, the evaluation considers that the design and execution of the repositioning has relied too heavily on the technical/administrative lever of new, inter-agency guidance, which, while necessary, is not sufficient to drive the intended change given the complexity of the United Nations development system.
15. Most UNSDG entities have taken steps to integrate elements of the Cooperation Framework guidance and the MAF in their own strategies, guidance and support systems. However, this adoption has been gradual and uneven, often amounting to parallel or additional considerations with qualification and caveats, rather than fully integrated commitments to new ways of working supported by change management strategies and approaches. This can result in cases of confusion or tension between entity-specific instruments and responsibilities and those relating to UNCT membership and the Cooperation Framework cycle.

Country programme derivation from Cooperation Frameworks

16. UNSDG entities appreciate certain aspects of the revamped and elevated programme cycle, especially strengthened Common Country Analysis (CCAs), and increasingly understand that country programming instruments should derive from the Cooperation Framework rather than *vice-versa*. Large majorities of UNCT members report that their programmes are 'derived' from (or 'aligned' with) the Cooperation Framework. However, the evaluation finds that the practice of 'derivation' is inconsistently understood, unevenly applied and, when followed, more administrative than substantive. This is primarily due to a combination of:
 - a. the weak mechanisms established by the Cooperation Framework guidance and the MAF for the demonstration of 'derivation' (limited to the verbatim use of the Cooperation Framework outcome statements);
 - b. the very broad nature of the outcome statements in Cooperation Framework documents (to which almost any programme could be reasonably judged as 'aligned'); and
 - c. the inconsistent and unclear expectation regarding the role of the Resident Coordinator in supporting or certifying entities' programme derivation from the Cooperation Framework.
17. Consequently, country programmes of UNSDG entities are broadly 'aligned' with the Cooperation Framework, but there is little evidence that the substance of those programmes is significantly affected by the Cooperation Framework and its preparation process. This finding should not be read as a suggestion that UNSDG entity programmes are misaligned with national priorities – this is not necessarily the case. However, it does suggest that Cooperation Frameworks are not delivering a more focused, prioritised, and coherent United Nations development offer at the country-level, as intended. For reasons, highlighted in subsequent findings, UNSDG entities are incentivised to develop a broad Cooperation Framework that provides space for the incorporation of all mandates, the participation of all entities and flexibility to adapt to opportunities presented by funding availability or government request.
18. Concerningly, the process of 'deriving' a UNSDG entity country programme from a Cooperation Framework has often been a source of significant friction between UNCT members and the Resident Coordinator due to the compliance points established by the guidance and MAF and

the competing timeframes between country programme document approval by governing bodies⁵ and Cooperation Framework signature by the government.

19. The evaluation did find examples of effective practices and processes that contributed to stronger ownership of the Cooperation Framework by UNCTs and more substantive alignment in programming, including the more robust and participatory Common Country Analyses (CCA) phase encouraged by the repositioning. Otherwise, strengthened alignment was often facilitated by Resident Coordinators and UNCTs stepping outside of the processes intended by the guidance and developing more flexible, context-specific approaches to analysis, strategic planning, and programming.

UNCT configuration

20. The Secretary-General's 2017 proposals and the direction given by Member States in the key resolutions asked for the improved configuration of the United Nations development system at all levels. This was largely operationalised as a key step in the Cooperation Framework development process: the 'UNCT configuration exercise' at the country level. The evaluation finds that UNCT configuration exercises may provide some useful information on entity footprints and staffing and have provided some new opportunities for the participation of non-resident entities in UNCTs. But they do not result in actionable plans and do not function as a tool to improve the UNCT's capability to deliver the Cooperation Framework. There are a number of reasons why this is the case:
 - a. the disconnect between these exercises and UNSDG entities' decisions about country presence and capacities, which are typically taken on different timeframes at regional offices of headquarters;
 - b. the limited agility of the United Nations development system to quickly reconfigure capacities at country level (including limited availability of flexible or pooled resources that may enable this);
 - c. the understandable interest of the country-level staff responsible for conducting the exercise have in retaining the existing configuration;
 - d. sensitivity regarding consultation of the government on UNCT configuration (especially in relation to normative mandates).
21. UNCT configuration exercises have, therefore, also not contributed significantly to the separate but related repositioning aims of enhancing country level access to the regionally located assets and expertise of the United Nations system and shifting the United Nations offer from project/service delivery to upstream, integrated policy advice, even where there is government demand.
22. Flexible systems to allow staff to be hosted and deployed on other entities' platforms or within the RCO exist but are little used. There are few examples of larger entities hosting, by mutual recognition, expert staff of smaller/non-resident entities.

Cooperation Framework implementation

23. Overall, the evaluation finds that UNCT ownership and use of the tools put in place to support Cooperation Framework implementation has been weak.

⁵ UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP

24. **Joint workplans:** The ‘joint workplans’ intended to operationalise the Cooperation Framework through contributions by entity-specific activities (‘sub outputs’) to the high-level Cooperation Framework outcomes, if complete, can provide a useful overview of the full United Nations footprint and a tool for coordination and communication. However, there is a lack of consistency in their scope and purpose. They are often a mere collation (often *ex-post*) of entity activities rather than coherent and strategic; they rarely drive strategic coordination; or meaningfully track progress toward achievement of strategic level outcomes.
25. **Coordination structures:** In some countries, Cooperation Framework governance/coordination structures (often ‘results groups’ under an overarching government-United Nations ‘joint-steering committee’) serve as useful spaces to maintain focus on delivery. However, overall practice indicates that results and thematic groups have limited utility because they are seen as more focused on data collation (i.e. compilation of existing activity into the joint workplan) than strategic delivery or identification of new, joint, or complementary initiatives. The strategic value of these groups and structures is further diminished when the participation of senior United Nations or government officials is limited.
26. **Monitoring, reporting, and evaluation:** UNSDG entities’ disparate results-based management metrics and systems mean that data submitted for the purposes of monitoring Cooperation Framework implementation and tracking results is problematic. The aggregation of all United Nations development activities in a country is a useful and necessary endeavour for the purposes of coordination and transparency to the government (provided through the Annual UNCT Results Report since the repositioning). However, it is associated with very high transaction costs and ‘double reporting’ by all stakeholders involved. Cooperation Framework evaluations are typically under-resourced and there is little evidence that they provide significant input into the design of new Cooperation Frameworks⁶.
27. **Joint resource mobilisation strategies:** Whilst UNCT joint resource mobilisation strategy documents mostly fulfil the requirements of the guidance, there is little evidence they contribute to financing the Cooperation Framework implementation. Joint resource mobilisation efforts by UNCTs are limited, with the exception of proposals to global pooled and vertical funds and the establishment of some country-level multi-partner trust funds (MPTFs). Such mechanisms were found to have the potential to promote greater coherence and collaboration within UNCTs, sometimes leveraging non-resident expertise, but many key informants perceived a mismatch between the transaction costs involved and the volume of funding typically available.

Factors influencing the evolution of a ‘new generation of UNCTs’

28. The evaluation findings on the practice of ‘derivation’, ‘configuration’, and Cooperation Framework implementation are explained by a wide range of factors. Some relate to the specific approaches and systems used to execute and support the repositioning of the United Nations development system. Others relate to systemic issues and the broader enabling environment that has been addressed less directly in the repositioning. These are summarised in Table 1 and elaborated below.

Table 1: Summary of key explanatory factors

Specific mechanisms and support systems	Broader enabling environment / systemic issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance / MAF in action Support systems Leadership at country level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transparency Competition

⁶ See Annual Report of the SWE0 Executive Director for further information – [E/2025/57](#)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership at HQ level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National engagement in the Cooperation Framework programme cycles • Governance architecture • Funding quality
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29. **Cooperation Framework guidance and the MAF:** Practice at the country-level shows that there are challenges in how the Cooperation Framework guidance and MAF are interpreted and used, with possible unintended effects. Despite intentions, the guidance is perceived as prescriptive, lacking flexibility for different country contexts and incentivising a focus on demonstrating compliance. The MAF articulates accountabilities, but compliance with MAF commitments is weak, and the principle of UNCT member dual accountability (to both UNSDG entity line manager and the Resident Coordinator) is largely theoretical. The roll out of the guidance and the MAF focussed, understandably, on country level changes and the responsibilities of UNCT members, with more limited and later attention to the important responsibilities of UNSDG entity regional offices and headquarters.
30. **Headquarters and regional support systems:** The Development Coordination Office's support to Cooperation Framework cycles, at headquarters and regional level, is seen as focussed on the design stages, compliance points, monitoring, and quality assurance, and less on the facilitation of meaningful implementation, horizontal and external engagement. Mechanisms for engagement between Resident Coordinators and entity regional directors to support Cooperation Framework implementation are highlighted as a gap, with the most active regional mechanisms focusing on CCA and Cooperation Framework quality assurance checklists.
31. **Resident Coordinator and UNCT member leadership:** Strengthened alignment and collaboration within the UNCT country team is frequently attributed to the leadership skills of UNCT members and Resident Coordinators rather than the tools and processes put in place to support Cooperation Framework implementation. The de-linked, impartial Resident Coordinators are especially appreciated for the entry points they provide to senior levels of government and their ability to convene donors and government and potential to shape collective agendas.
32. **HQ and regional leadership:** UNSDG entities' commitment to the reforms is weaker at headquarters and regional levels than at the country level. Practice varies across the system, with smaller and non-resident entities generally demonstrating stronger buy-in to the repositioning due to the enhanced opportunities for engagement at the country-level that it can offer to them. But, overall, UNSDG entities have not instituted the necessary incentives and accountabilities within their own structures to change behaviour and ways of working at the country level. There is confusion in relation to UNDP's global function to support the repositioning as an 'integrator', i.e. whether this means UNDP offering SDG integration to the country as a service or as an integration platform for the UNCT. In both cases the precise division of labour with the RCO would be unclear and has not been defined, seven years into the repositioning.
33. **Competition and transparency within UNCTs:** A major impediment to the realisation of a new generation of UNCTs is a competition for funding and a lack of real-time transparency over work-planning and resource mobilisation within most UNCTs. This is driven by existing incentive structures within entities, short-term and project delivery-based business models, and donor behaviour, and runs counter to the collaborative ethos envisaged by the repositioning. These dynamics impede the development of joint strategies and joint programmes and the leveraging of resources and expertise from across the United Nations system to deliver maximum and longer-term impact in response to national priorities.

34. **National engagement in Cooperation Framework cycles:** Programme country governments are highly appreciative of the strengthened ‘whole of government – whole of UN’ agreement provided by the elevated Cooperation Frameworks. However, the extent to which governments engage actively in the governance and coordination of the Cooperation Framework *cycle* (both the design *and* implementation) is a key factor in driving greater alignment and more coherent implementation of UNSDG entity activities at country level. The degree of this engagement varies significantly by country and context. At the same time, in certain contexts, the emphasis in the Cooperation Framework guidance on alignment with national/government priorities is perceived as a potential obstacle to delivery on normative mandates.
35. **Governing bodies:** The repositioning of the United Nations development system did not initiate reform of the entity-specific governing bodies. These arrangements are considered by many stakeholders to impede the extent to which UNSDG entities can fully integrate the reforms. Despite efforts by some Member States’ efforts to use their entity governing body membership to reinforce the reforms, UNSDG entity governing bodies tend to prioritise entity-specific mandates/visibility/results-attribution over system-wide results and reinforce the repositioning changes to a limited extent.
36. **Funding:** Donor behaviour and funding trends have a strong influence on the effectiveness of the reforms at country level. Donor representatives at the country-level have varying degrees of understanding of the reforms and the intended status of the Cooperation Framework. Many value the Resident Coordinator as an entry point, but few have been guided by their capitals on how to engage with the repositioned United Nations development system. Very few donors use the Cooperation Framework as a guide for funding decisions. Bilateral approaches by UNSDG entities to country level funders and *vice versa* remain the norm.
37. The repositioning recognised the key importance of funding quality and included a global Funding Compact between Member States and the UNSDG. Progress on Funding Compact commitments – particularly the availability of core, flexible and pooled funding – has been very limited⁷. Persistently high levels of earmarking continue to present a significant impediment to optimal UNCT configuration and coherent implementation of Cooperation Frameworks over multi-year periods.

Conclusions

38. The evaluation concludes that the vision for a ‘new generation of UNCTs’ remains highly relevant. Some elements of the reforms have improved the quality and coherence of UNCTs. There has been notable improvement in the inclusivity, cooperation and collaboration in joint analysis and Cooperation Framework design. The reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system is widely appreciated by UNSDG and programme country government stakeholders. There are examples of behaviours and approaches which match the ambitions and spirit of the reforms. The repositioning has made some important and necessary changes to how the United Nations development offer is organised at the country level, and many of the key foundations for a ‘new generation of UNCTs’ have been established.
39. In the areas of programme derivation from the Cooperation Framework and UNCT configuration, however, overall progress has been incremental and is far from achieving the vision of a significantly more strategic, coherent, and agile United Nations development system offer to countries. The Cooperation Framework has not yet become the ‘most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities in each country’ and UNCTs have not yet significantly ‘re-configured’ in line with Cooperation Framework priorities.

⁷ [E/2025/53/Add.1](#)

While good practices and innovative approaches exist, and the United Nations development offer remains broadly aligned with and relevant to national priorities, these central elements of the repositioning of the United Nations development system at country level cannot yet be said to have resulted in the fundamental shift to ensure the United Nations collective offer is more than the sum of its parts and provides optimal contribution to SDG progress. There remains a significant gap between the highly relevant strategic intent and the operational realities. The evaluation notes that there are a variety of reasons for this, including systemic and structural limitations. Some of these challenges were identified as critical in the Secretary-General's 2017 reform proposals (e.g. fragmented governance arrangements and funding quality)⁸.

40. While these ambitious reforms are now at a critical juncture, this assessment does not suggest that ambitions should be lowered. The response to the evaluation needs to be realistic and pragmatic to some extent, but with clear intent to further the ambitions set out in 2017 and not to erode or dilute them.
41. The evaluation conclusions identify key factors that explain the gap between strategic intent and operational reality and where attention is needed to better realise the vision for a new generation of UNCTs that are more coherent, effective, efficient, and accountable and able to contribute to greater or accelerated SDG progress at country level.

Accountability and incentives

42. The evaluation concludes that weak accountabilities and incentives for collective action are key factors limiting progress towards the vision of a new generation of UNCTs. While entities have demonstrated their adoption of reform elements to varying extents, they have not yet been fundamentally integrated into their internal accountability structures. Accountability mechanisms and incentives continue to encourage UNSDG entity staff to raise funds for, provide visibility to, and attribute results to their own entity rather than working in a more integrated manner to deliver on collective results.
43. The Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) is relevant and necessary, but not enforceable and compliance with some of its key elements remains weak, in comparison to stronger entity-specific priorities, accountabilities and incentives. The collaborative and coherent ways of working intended by the reforms, are, at all levels, frequently seen as 'extra work', or 'additional' to core responsibilities and vertical accountabilities, and considered to impose additional transaction costs and, at times, create unnecessary friction.
44. There is a need for a range of measures to better integrate the spirit and the letter of the United Nations development system repositioning, and recognition that the vision of a new generation of UNCTs cannot be achieved by the actions of UNCT members alone but requires leadership at all levels; a renewed focus on more robust accountabilities and better incentives and for a more coherent and agile United Nations development system.

Cooperation Framework cycle delivery

45. The evaluation concludes that country programmes of UNSDG entities are broadly 'aligned' with the Cooperation Framework, but that there is little evidence that the substance of these programmes is significantly affected by the Cooperation Framework and its preparation process. 'Derivation' is largely an administrative rather than substantive exercise and can be a cause of friction within UNCTs. After Cooperation Framework signature, UNCT ownership of the 'toolkit' designed to facilitate coherent implementation (including joint workplans) is typically very weak: tools, processes and coordination structures are associated with high transaction

⁸ [A/72/124-E/2018/3](#) & [A/72/684-E/2018/7](#)

costs and limited added value. Transparency and mutual accountability for collective results within UNCTs is limited and competition for resources persistent.

46. The basic phases and key principles of the Cooperation Framework cycle should be retained, in particular the strengthened common country analyses (CCAs) and strategic prioritisation in dialogue with national stakeholders. However, the delivery of Cooperation Framework priorities in practice could be strengthened through a package of mutually reinforcing adaptations which:
- a. shift the focus design, quality assurance and particular compliance points to facilitation of more coherent implementation and delivery of collective results;
 - b. improve transparency and mutual accountability within the UNCT for collective results throughout the programme cycle;
 - c. reduce transaction costs for UNCTs, enable flexibility and adaptation to context and maximize the added value of coordination; and
 - d. strengthen substantive alignment and UNCT collaboration over time through more positive incentives.

UNCT configuration

47. The evaluation concludes that the tools deployed to consider and optimise the configuration of UNCTs have had limited impact and have not led to significant changes in UNCT composition or capabilities, with the exception of improved access to UNCTs for some non-resident entities. The UNCT configuration exercises at country level have been largely ineffective, principally because UNSDG entities do not make significant decisions on resourcing at the country level or at the same time as the Cooperation Framework is designed.
48. There are also more fundamental and systemic issues which explain why the United Nations development system is not currently well placed to dynamically reconfigure capacities and expertise around the priorities of a Cooperation Framework. This is demonstrated both by the lack of progress in the regional-level reforms (i.e. the intention to significantly enhance the contributions of regionally located assets and expertise to UNCTs through Regional Collaborative Platform structures) and by the limited overall shift from project delivery to upstream policy advice.
49. A more agile, coherent, and sophisticated development offer at the country level requires a more comprehensive rethink of traditional approaches to physical presence and current UNSDG entity business models. The UNSDG may consider collectively how it can provide, with greater agility and flexibility, the required capacities at country level to respond to national priorities and context. This may require discussions on configuration to be better connected to decision-making and resource allocation, but also more creative models for physical presence at country level and more agile mobilization of expertise and capacities from across the system to respond to national priorities. Such efforts would be enabled by the redoubling of efforts to achieve system-wide efficiencies (5).

Guidance and systems for coordination

50. The evaluation concludes that the frameworks, guidance, and support systems put in place to support the repositioning of the United Nations development system do not focus sufficiently on the coherent implementation of Cooperation Frameworks. They are more focused on the design stage of the Cooperation Framework and the creation of new guidance/process, with less attention to supporting coherent delivery including by addressing existing barriers to coordination and coherence. The support systems were developed at pace, retaining some legacy functions, systems, and tools that were used prior to the reforms. Now is the time to

revisit these to better reflect evolving requirements and provide greater flexibility and responsiveness to country context.

51. Systems for coordination need to focus less on process and more on delivery, seeking to build on existing good practice. The proposed revision of the Management and Accountability Framework and Cooperation Framework guidance provide opportunities to clarify expectations. A recalibration of the development coordination function could ensure that it adds greater value to the work of UNCTs while minimizing transaction costs.

Institutional obstacles impeding effective collaboration

52. The evaluation concludes that an important constraint on the realisation of the vision for a new generation of UNCTs are the institutional obstacles within the United Nations system that impede or disincentivise collaboration and joint work. While business operations and efficiencies were not a central focus of the evaluation they emerge from the analysis as a prominent enabling or constraining factor.
53. Greater or accelerated efforts to achieve efficiencies and streamline business operations could play an important role in removing persistent institutional disincentives to collaboration and provide a stronger enabling environment for the strategic vision. Further horizontal integration or mutual recognition of services such as ICT, HR, procurement, administration, logistics and finance as well as harmonization (or interoperability) of systems that support planning, project management, monitoring and reporting may create a more conducive environment for joint programming, deployment of capacities to provide support at the country level and a more agile United Nations development system (as described in 3).

Funding

54. The evaluation confirms that, as anticipated in 2017, the quality of funding received by the United Nations development system is a critical enabler of progress towards the vision of a new generation of UNCTs. This was agreed in the 2019 Funding Compact and its 2024 update. However, progress has been limited. High levels of earmarked funding continue to limit the ability of UNCTs to respond strategically to national development priorities and increase transaction costs, fragmentation, and competition among entities. In the current context, there is significant risk that funding pressures will exacerbate competition and fragmentation. Joint and pooled funding provide incentives for innovative joint programmes, but volumes are insufficient.
55. Greater progress on Funding Compact commitments would alleviate some of the key challenges highlighted by the evaluation. While decisions on the overall volumes and quality of funding rest with funders, the evaluation considers that Member States, UNSDG entities and the Resident Coordinator System could identify targeted approaches to accelerate progress on Funding Compact commitments, in particular through dialogue and communication at the country level.

Member State governance, oversight and coordination

56. Member States have a fundamental role in guiding operational activities for development through their engagement with UNCTs as programme country governments; in their capacity as members of UNSDG entity governing bodies; and through the funding they provide (6). Consistent and coordinated programme country government engagement was found to be a key driver of UNCTs that are more accountable for coherent delivery of Cooperation Frameworks in line with national priorities. The evaluation also found that the existing governance arrangements of the United Nations development system are widely considered to present obstacles to effective oversight of system-wide performance and collective

development results (as General Assembly resolutions on the QCPR 79/226 and 75/233 and the Secretary-Generals reports on repositioning also acknowledged). Overall, the evaluation concludes that, in general, Member States have not held UNSDG entities sufficiently accountable for delivering on the vision of a 'new generation of UNCTs'. In their capacities as programme country governments and governing body members, Member States may consider how to sharpen their demand for a more coherent and integrated UNCT offer at the country level to deliver on Cooperation Framework results.



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