

Remarks to the informal ad hoc working group on the Mandate Implementation Review

ECOSOC Chamber

30 October 2025

The Knowledge Dimension of Mandate Implementation

Dear Chairs, Excellencies, and distinguished colleagues,

Thank you for this invitation to participate in these important deliberations.

As we discuss gaps in mandates and implementation, our sense of urgency must be sharpened by the atrocities unfolding in El-Fashar, Sudan. Yesterday, the World Health Organization condemned reports of killings and abduction of hundreds inside a maternity ward by the RSF.

The unfortunate reality is that human beings are impelled to making the most radical changes due to emergency. Such indeed was the necessity that impelled the creation of the UN. The world is beset by emergency, especially in Sudan and Gaza, and here in headquarters there is a budget crisis. We should use them to build the UN we need.

As you know, the reality of being a Permanent Representative is that one is constantly busy, yet often quite frustrating. You sit in the machinery built to maintain peace and protect life, yet see it falter repeatedly in real time. That helplessness is not abstract to me. It was my experience, including during Kenya's 2021–2022 term on the Security Council.

We increased our staff, had two substantive DPRs at ambassador level, and our experts tried to be present across the system. Yet we still worked seven days a week, from early morning into the night, and while I am proud of our work so much was left undone due to the weaknesses of the UN's implementation system.

My focus today however goes beyond the time constraints of delegations to the role of knowledge in implementation, especially across the peace and development nexus.

While serving as President of one of the Executive Boards, I often quipped that the UN is the world's most knowledgeable organisation, but its inability to effectively manage knowledge means that its workers seldom have what they need at the moment of decision.

An American study of knowledge workers found they spend nearly a fifth of their time searching for information. With thousands of meetings, overlapping mandates, and siloed repositories, the figure at the UN is likely higher. This is a direct financial and effectiveness tax on implementation.

Diagnosis

We face three linked failures.

First, information asymmetry. Agencies and departments meet, learn, and decide in isolation. Insights stay where they were produced. Entities cite the same mandates without a shared implementation picture.

Second, search inefficiency. Staff spend a large share of time hunting across unconnected systems. Time that should fund analysis and delivery is consumed by retrieval. Included in this are delegations with their oversight function which is consequently weakened.

Third, we suffer knowledge loss at scale. Rotation in peace operations and turnover in country teams drain institutional memory. When countries move from peacekeeping to peacebuilding, they often build initiatives such as community policing from scratch despite the UN's years of mission experience. The knowledge exists but it's too often inaccessible.

Why Past Efforts Failed

We have tried before. DPKO launched lessons-learned units. UNDP has invested in knowledge networks. Individual agencies have built repositories. Most have underperformed for three reasons. They were siloed by entity, under-resourced as side projects rather than core infrastructure, and had no accountability for usage or contribution.

What is different now is technology. AI can search across silos, surface patterns, and cut retrieval time by orders of magnitude. Recent advances in Australia demonstrate how institutions are experimenting with multi-model AI systems to deploy autonomous digital workers that perform entire workflows.

These AI systems are being tested to manage routine back-office functions, freeing human staff for analysis, judgement, and partnership building. Early evidence suggests substantial productivity gains and error reduction when standardised processes are automated, provided that oversight and ethical safeguards remain strong.

The relevance to the UN is clear. Much of its administrative and reporting work is repeatable and rule-based, while implementation decisions are human and contextual. A similar division of labour could release significant capacity across the system. Machines handle structured workflows. People focus on diplomacy, negotiation, and learning. The goal is not replacement but augmentation. The question is whether we have the discipline to deploy it with clear governance and joint ownership.

Three Moves

I propose three integrated moves. Each addresses a past failure. Together they can change how we deliver.

One. Build country knowledge infrastructure with joint ownership.

In every nexus context, establish one indexed repository that surfaces conflict analysis, political economy, program evidence, human rights reporting, and financing data to all UN actors and key partners. Joint governance between the Resident Coordinator and mission leadership ensures no single entity controls access or content standards.

The infrastructure must include an AI-enabled layer that allows queries across resolutions, SG reports, evaluations, and lessons databases. A practitioner should be able to ask what worked for demobilisation in contexts like theirs and receive design elements, contact details for implementers, and ready-to-use indicators within minutes.

Make usage visible in senior compacts. If a product is not discoverable through this system, do not ask the field to produce it. Assign executive ownership at the ASG level in each entity to ensure this is core business, not a side project.

Two. Link tacit knowledge to accountability structures.

Tacit knowledge travels through people. Establish practitioner networks connecting peace operations, special political missions, Resident Coordinator Offices, and humanitarian leads.

Name Nexus Coordinators with dual reporting to the Resident Coordinator and the relevant headquarters lead. Give them shared indicators. Sustained reduction in violence incidents around key project areas, and time to transition of specific services from mission to national systems. Budget lines must acknowledge nexus work, even if they are not joint.

Three. Rationalise reporting and measure knowledge use.

Replace bundles of low-use reports with one consolidated decision brief per context. Track open rates, references in decisions, and follow-through. Set entity-level indicators. Percentage of new programs that cite and apply evaluation lessons, and share of joint analyses actually used at decision points.

In missions and UNCTs, document hypotheses, tests, and shifts in approach. This turns experience into shared knowledge. Include knowledge contribution in performance assessments.

Commission independent audits of knowledge systems in high-burden contexts to verify gains in search time, analysis time, and decision speed. Publish the results. If they do not show a measurable return, stop. If they do, scale.

Safeguards and Governance

Centralising knowledge raises legitimate concerns about sensitive information. Keep the system on secure UN infrastructure. Default access is UN family and pre-agreed partners such as the AU. Restrict sensitive material through role-based permissions managed jointly by the Resident Coordinator and mission leadership. Member States receive consolidated products, not raw field analysis. Establish a small inter-agency board to set standards and resolve access disputes. Protect sources while making inclusion the operating principle.

Africa First

Most nexus contexts are in Africa. Use that concentration to lead. Establish an Africa HDP Nexus Knowledge Hub connecting AU structures, regional economic communities, and UN teams as the first regional pilot of this approach. Build regional learning networks around shared problems such as cross-border transhumance or urban violence.

What Changes

For a field team: less time searching, more time tailoring. When a mission planner rotates out, successors inherit a living record of decisions, why they were taken, and what they achieved.

For Member States: fewer, better products that synthesise across organs and entities. Smaller delegations enter debates with the same factual base as larger ones.

What Knowledge Cannot Fix

Knowledge management is not a substitute for political will, adequate resources, or clear mandates. It cannot resolve policy disagreements among Member States. It cannot make up for chronic underfunding. What it can do is ensure that when we have agreement and resources, we do not waste them relearning what we already know or searching for information that already exists. That is the implementation gap we can close.

The best knowledge systems fail without the right people to use them. We must hire for both excellence and inclusion. Excellence means recruiting staff with the technical skills, contextual knowledge, and judgement. Inclusion means drawing that talent from the broadest possible pool, particularly from the regions where we work. A country team without nationals in senior roles will miss context that determines whether programs succeed or fail.

Geographic and gender balance are key to operational effectiveness. When we narrow the hiring pool, we reduce the cognitive diversity that surfaces better options. When we exclude local expertise, we lose the tacit knowledge that cannot be documented. Only

people with the right mix of skills and perspectives can turn that information into sound decisions.

Make excellence and inclusion dual requirements in every recruitment. Set targets for national staff in senior positions in country operations. Track the composition of mission leadership and UNCT senior teams by region and gender. Measure performance against both dimensions. If we build infrastructure but fail to staff it well, we waste the investment.

Closing

Our problem is not a lack of knowledge. It is the inability to access and apply that knowledge when it matters. We have tried partial solutions. This time we have the sense of emergency and the technology.

The UN should be closer to knowing what it knows. In closing I ask three things. First, support piloting these approaches in 2026 with clear metrics. Second, hold the UN accountable for publishing what it learns, its success or failure. Third, if the evidence supports scaling, commit the resources to make it system-wide.

Thank you