Achieving Sustainable Partnership in the UN: Cooperation among UN organisations in the Framework of the SDGs

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Vienna, 15th January 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank Billy Batware, Gabriel Weibl and Alberto Medina for their guidance and very helpful suggestions.
ABSTRACT

The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) introduced a new way to conduct international affairs on achieving global peace and prosperity by focusing on partnerships. Despite the high interconnectedness of the SDGs, which links mandates and activities of different United Nations’ (UN) agencies making a strong case for enhanced inter-agency cooperation, only few studies provide input on this issue. The research at hand partly closes this gap by studying literature on cooperation, collaboration and partnerships and considering recent UN policy and reform documents. Empirically, a thematic analysis of guided interviews (N = 12) and an online survey (N = 17) were conducted. As success factors of inter-agency cooperation, communications with and choice of partners, and resources were identified, restricted by limited funding, lack of personnel and clear strategies. In this regard, the impact of the 2015 introduced SDGs was identified as low, although representing a great visual tool. Discussing the results in light of scholarly and UN literature including the current UN Development System Reform, concrete recommendations, helpful to overcome challenges of inter-agency cooperation are given. By doing so, the research project seeks to contribute to a broader scientific discussion in achieving sustainable partnerships in the UN.

Keywords: cooperation, collaboration, partnership, working together, United Nations, UN, inter-agency cooperation, Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) introduced a new way to conduct international affairs on achieving global peace and prosperity by focusing on partnerships. Despite the high interconnectedness of the SDGs, which links mandates and activities of different United Nations’ (UN) agencies making a strong case for enhanced inter-agency cooperation, only few studies provide input on this issue.

After 2015, the UN has evidently increased its efforts for achieving sustainability. Linking the SDGs to the UN Development System (UNDS), the Dalberg report (2017) highlighted the comprehensive and integrated approach of the 2030 Agenda while it also pointed out that joint programmes only account for a small percentage of UNDS activities, mainly restricted by funding. To support the implementation of the Agenda 2030, the UN Development System Reform objectives aim to improve cooperation at the regional and global level and to ensure sustainable funding. Cooperation is an imperative prerequisite for achieving sustainable development leaving no one behind, confirming the view that cooperation among UN organisations catalyses action with complex transnational issues.

This research focuses on the current situation of inter-agency cooperation and its flaws and strengths considering also the role of the SDGs. It first defines the three terms; cooperation, collaboration and partnership, and it brings into focus their main objective, which was defined as working together to achieve a common goal.

A mixed-methods study combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques was applied. Therefore, the data collection consisted of two main parts: a thematic analysis of guided interviews with UN staff ($N = 12$) in 11 cases and an online survey ($N = 17$) on cooperation and the SDGs.

The key findings of the research are:

- The impact of the SDGs on inter-agency cooperation was identified as low, although representing a great visual tool.
- When asked on cooperation, interviewees responded very positively. They identified the benefits using the following words: “enriching”, “better working” and “part of a team”.
- A key factor for succeeding when cooperating is having enough funds. This will allow the UN staff in charge of projects and programmes to look for more action space and, hence, look for partners. If the funds, on the contrary, are limited, UN staff will only focus on delivering the initial objectives.
- Among participants there was a strong consensus that fundraising and human resources were the biggest constraints for cooperation within the UN system.
- The SDGs, according to the interviewees, have helped to provide a "united vision", "common goals" and "common language" for all people working in development cooperation.

Discussing the results in light of scholarly and UN literature as well as the current UN Development System Reform, this research provides concrete recommendations for the different actors involved that can help overcoming challenges of inter-agency cooperation. It also names current policies and
strategies in place from institutions such as the UN itself and the European Union. In short, the SDGs were not identified as a driving factor for enhancing inter-agency cooperation, nevertheless, they can serve as a tool to map the efforts and to relate the aims and impacts of the agencies’ own work to other agencies’ actions. To improve inter-agency cooperation, the availability of funds is crucial, which can be improved by receiving more funds and introducing joint or pooled funds; therefore, enabling to have enough personnel and time as well as incentives to enter into partnerships. When partnering, the clear formulation of needs, goals, responsibilities and tasks is of high importance. Moreover, monitoring and evaluation of collaborations is recommended to observe progress, to identify restrictions, learning processes and good practices, which can then be shared among the UN agencies. Comparing these needs to the current UNDS reform, it can be concluded, that the reform seems to be a promising change and beneficial for UN cooperation on the ground by reducing competition, allowing better coordination, stabilising funding and pointing more toward joint implementation. Nonetheless, it has to be kept in mind that the change of mindsets and ways of working will take time.
“In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.”

Charles Darwin

"The key to further enhancing UN’s effectiveness is attitude: cooperation instead of duplication, sharing instead of competing, and collective responsibility instead of circumstantial individual interests"

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCA</td>
<td>Common Country Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
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<td>CSSPS</td>
<td>Cross-Sector Partnerships</td>
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<td>DaO</td>
<td>Delivering as One</td>
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<td>DCO</td>
<td>Development Coordination Office</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization</td>
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<td>GSSC</td>
<td>Global Shared Service Centre</td>
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<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
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<td>ICAT</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking</td>
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<td>IAEA</td>
<td>International Atomic Energy Agency</td>
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<td>IEU</td>
<td>Independent Evaluation Unit</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<td>IPCC</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change</td>
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<td>JEU</td>
<td>Joint Environment Unit</td>
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<td>MAF</td>
<td>Management and Accountability Framework</td>
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<td>MCO</td>
<td>Multi-Country Office</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
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<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<td>MS</td>
<td>Member States</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>OCHA</td>
<td>Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<td>QCPR</td>
<td>Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review</td>
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<td>RAUN</td>
<td>Regional Academy on the United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>Resident Coordinator</td>
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<td>RCO</td>
<td>Resident Coordinator Office</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>SG</td>
<td>Secretary General</td>
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<td>SOPs</td>
<td>Standard Operating Procedures</td>
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VII
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>SPIA</td>
<td>Strategic Planning and Inter-Agency Affairs Unit</td>
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<td>SWSD</td>
<td>System-Wide Strategic Document</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>UNCT</td>
<td>United Nations Country Coordinator</td>
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<td>UNDAF</td>
<td>United Nations Development Assistance Framework</td>
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<td>UNDESA</td>
<td>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNDS</td>
<td>United Nations Development System</td>
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<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Programme</td>
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<td>UNFCCC</td>
<td>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIDO</td>
<td>United Nations Industrial Development Organization</td>
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<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>United Nations Development Fund for Women</td>
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<td>UNODC</td>
<td>United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime</td>
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<td>UNSDG</td>
<td>United Nations Sustainable Development Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCO</td>
<td>World Customs Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHIO</td>
<td>Wisconsin Health Information Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>WMO</td>
<td>World Meteorological Organization</td>
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Achieving Sustainable Partnership in the UN: Cooperation among UN organisations in the Framework of the SDGs

SCHNITZLER, SEIFERT, TATAJE GONZÁLES

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in Resolution A/70/1 (United Nations General Assembly, 2015), serve as benchmarks for the Member States of the United Nations (UN) to achieve sustainability for the people and the planet by 2030, with the pledge to leave no one behind. The SDGs are strongly interrelated; to achieve a specific goal, interaction with other goals is highly desired, often necessary. This interaction also allows efforts on one goal to contribute to other goals (UNODC Guidance Note, 2018). In the framework of the recent multiple crises, such as climate change, the refugee crisis, biodiversity extinction, humanity faces the greatest challenges of its time (von Weizsäcker & Wijkman, 2018). Working with like-minded partners in a global partnership for sustainable development through cooperation, collaboration and partnerships is needed (United Nations General Assembly, 2015; UNODC, Guidance Note, 2018) and might have never before been more important for the UN. In fact, the role of sustainable cooperation is an imperative prerequisite for achieving the SDGs, confirming the view that cooperation among UN organisations catalyses in coping with complex transnational issues. Nevertheless, scholars like Biermann (2015) and Hüther (2017) state that there is a general lack of cooperation which is not new and is not only present in the UN system, but it is a global governance problem; it is becoming more visible since the number of international organisations has significantly increased and their missions overlap. Currently, the SDGs are greatly supportive as a toolkit for agencies and national governments to have a goal at the end of the path (Nature Sustainability, 2018). Moreover, the necessity of common action is widely emphasised. However, when it comes to the UN agencies, are they fully benefiting from their wealth of knowledge and expertise? And what needs to be done to increase cooperation?

To answer these questions and others related to it, this research paper focuses on the challenges of inter-agency cooperation within the UN agencies in the framework of the SDGs. In the interest of readability, the term “UN agency” is used in this paper for specialised UN agencies as well as UN funds, programmes, organisations and departments of the UN Secretariat. Our work underlines the importance of creating cooperation mechanisms among UN organisations. Consequently, the relevant issue is not only what builds cooperation and partnerships in general, but also, what stimulates individuals and communities to participate actively in projects and processes guiding to an as-yet hardly discernible sustainable future. Therefore, the authors believe there is a need for identifying the factors that make cooperation effective. This paper is structured as follows. First, we define the basic concepts of working together and then go through an overview of the UN efforts in setting up cooperation as an important milestone. Second, the research methods will be described, followed by data analysis. Third, the results will be presented, leading to the discussion comparing the findings to scholarly and UN literature. Finally, recommendations to strengthen UN inter-agency cooperation and to avoid restrictive factors will be given.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The following theoretical framework provides a background research on cooperation, collaboration and partnership through the years and gives perspectives on how it has evolved and by which common base those concepts are unified. Additionally, we have included a literature review on recent UN resolutions, reports and reforms which aim to improve cooperation among UN agencies at the country and regional level.

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

This first part deals with the definition of cooperation, collaboration and partnership; especially among agencies and international organisations and cooperation in the context of sustainable development. The main characteristics of each concept are depicted in Fig. 1.

2.1.1. Cooperation

The word ‘cooperation’ is defined by the McMillan dictionary (2019) as “a situation in which people or organisations work together to achieve a result that will benefit all of them”. In the context of human behaviour in a work situation, West, Tjosvold, & Smith (2003) defined cooperation as “people have strong relationships where they work together well so that they succeed in their tasks”. Cooperation becomes a result of collaboration. When cooperating people believe their goals are positively related; therefore, the results in the relationships are characterised by positive regard, openness, and productivity. However, when they perceive their goals as competitive, they conclude that they are better off when others act ineffectively. The result will be restricted information and resource exchange. When it comes to cooperation among organisations, other factors are also included. Biermann (2015) in an attempt to measure levels of cooperation classifies cooperation as follows: “Cooperation is strong when partners engage in joint decision-making on major issues, often involving ambitious projects with shared responsibility and division of labour. Cooperation is moderate when partners engage in joint decision-making but exclude essential issues. Cooperation of this level experiences ups and downs such as serious delays in decision-making. Cooperation is minimal when joint decisions are rare or non-existent and cooperation is largely confined to occasional representation in joint meetings and inconsistent sharing of basic information. Cooperation is absent when partners who would profit from cooperation forego cooperation in favour of unilateralism.” Furthermore, Rhinard & Sundelius (2016) state that cooperation involves actors pursuing their own interests through collaborative means. Cooperation, nonetheless, takes place within some forms of institutions: set of rules, procedures and principles that structure behaviour and shape interests. The institutional design to be considered shall include the following: institutions must be willing to go under ongoing and long interactions; they must be “fit for purpose”, meaning flexible enough to keep “delivering” under new and unexpected circumstances; and they must facilitate practical implementation by delegating.
2.1.2. Collaboration

According to the McMillan dictionary (2019), collaboration is defined as “the process of working with someone to produce something”. Salignac et al. (2019) collects also some definitions: “an overarching structure that can take multiple forms (Larsen, 2017); a stage on a continuum of inter-organisational connections (Hrelja, Pettersson, & Westerdahl, 2016); a cross-sectoral working arrangement (Guarneros-Meza, Downe, & Martin, 2018); and a relational system in which stakeholders pool resources to meet objectives they cannot meet on their own” (Stout, Bartels, & Love, 2018). They argue that collaboration nowadays is something intrinsic to public or private institutions and both should make efforts to be flexible to collaborate and to measure their “health” when collaborating to do it efficiently. Academics and non-academics in a variety of educational settings have been using collaborative approaches to teach and assess people for a long time (Dillenbourg, 1999; Franz et al., 2012; Hmelo-Silver, 2013). In recent years, educators and policy makers have identified the ability to collaborate as an important outcome in its own right rather than merely a means to an end. In detail, collaboration is also seen as joint problem solving (Akhilesh, 2017). Roschelle and Teasley give a definition of collaboration more specific by stating that it is a “mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve a problem together,” (as cited in Dillenbourg et al., 1996, p. 2). Successful collaboration, however, builds on shared learning objectives and the appreciation of different opinions or approaches (Barth, 2015; Hmelo-Silver, 2013; Vidyasagar & Hatti, 2018). Schnitzler (2019) highlighted that it is important to build up an atmosphere of collaboration, i.e. sufficient time for collaboration, action, reflection and integration or to pursue a process of inquiry driven by needs, questions and goals.

2.1.3. Partnership

The definition given by the McMillan dictionary (2019) is “a relationship between two or more people, groups, or countries involved in an activity together”. Literature on partnership for sustainability started in the mid-1990s and although it supported cooperation, it also called for a clear definition of sustainability. Literature shows that partnership was practiced under different names such as “public-private partnerships” (LaFrance & Lehmann, 2005), “global action networks” (Waddell, 2003), “global public policy network” (Reinicke, 1999), “cross-sector partnerships to address social issues (CSSPs)” (Selsky & Parker, 2005) or “self-governing network” (Stoker, 1998). Among the benefits of partnership are mentioned on the one hand more financial help for NGOs, expertise and knowledge of the partner, creative and innovative solutions and image of the institution (“eco-marketing reason”). On the other hand, the risks are avoidance of responsibility, losing legitimacy when not working on their expertise area, cultural differences, and partnerships outcomes being insecure. In theory, partnerships do not have a formal political power; but in practice the partner with most resources will probably acquire more power and each partner will try to achieve the largest profit. Van Huijstee, Francken, & Leroy (2007) came up with a list of success factors for intersectoral partnerships: choice of subjects, goals and partners; among others being listed. Ijsselmuiden, Duale & Nehinda (2004) also gave some principles of good partnerships which covered mainly communication, resources and monitoring. Furthermore, an interesting theory came from Biermann, Man-san Chan, & Pattberg (2007), who argued that multi-stakeholder partnerships are successful if they fill the gap of implementation coming from national governments. Florini & Pauli (2018) pointed out that partnerships create public as well as private value.
2.1.4. Working Together

Hord (1981) stated that both cooperation and collaboration are often used interchangeably in describing the efforts of two institutions in working together. He claimed that in cooperation, two individuals or organisations reach some mutual agreement, but their work together does not progress beyond this level; whereas in collaboration, a mode of joint planning, joint implementation and joint evaluation will be developed between individuals or organisations (Fig. 1). Likewise, Carnwell & Carson (2005) examined the terms partnership and collaboration more in depth coming to the conclusion that nowadays both terms are being used distinctively and they refer to working together. However, collaboration refers to the interactions between different professional groups and partnership is the result after the participation of the different parties. In this paper, although the topic was cooperation, we included the three terms, cooperation, collaboration and partnership, and brought into focus their main objective, which was defined as follows: working together to achieve a common goal. With the unifying fundament of working together and in line with Le et al. (2018), those three terms are used synonymously and interchangeably (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. The main definitions for cooperation, collaboration and partnership are found in the three main circles, the common concepts are in the shaded areas and the keywords of the terms next to the circles. This has been taken from the literature cited above. The unifying fundament of these three terms is “working together”. Author’s illustration with quotes from sources cited in the literature review.

2.1.5. United Nations Literature

UN efforts that enhance inter-agency cooperation after the introduction of the SDGs

In the last five years there have been important resolutions accepted by the General Assembly, that strongly suggest a shift in business as usual is taking place. In these, we have identified that development
cooperation is a crucial topic. The following documents provide an overview of UN efforts to enhance cooperation. In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations General Assembly; 2015) introduced not only the 17 SDGs but also made clear that to achieve sustainability, a multi-stakeholder approach was necessary. “The Agenda, including the SDGs, can be met within the framework of a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development, (...)” (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, p. 10).

In fact, specifically, SDG 17 which is “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” highlights partnerships as important vehicles for mobilising and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources. It also encourages the public, private and civil society to partner and to further build upon the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships. This approach was taken after the questioned results on the MDGs. For in-depth information on the MDGs, see Annex I. Ideally, the progress in achieving one goal is reinforcing the progress on reaching other goals (UNODC Guidance Note, 2018). Despite the positive, synergistic relationships, also trade-offs occur, where progress on one goal impedes progress on another (Pradhan, Costa, Rybski, Lucht, & Kropp, 2017). Therefore, the goals and targets have to be viewed from different perspectives and interdependence among the UN agencies needs to be recognised (UNODC Guidance Note, 2018).

Linking the SDGs to the UN Development System (UNDS), the Dalberg report (2017) highlighted the comprehensive and integrated approach of the 2030 Agenda. Further, the authors of the Dalberg report stated, that although the UNDS could contribute to the Agenda 2030, also reforms were needed. Zooming into inter-agency cooperation, the report summarises that even though there is joint planning at country level, integration often does not take place. Joint programmes only account for a small percentage of UNDS activities, mainly restricted by funding. Despite the interrelation of the SDGs, also for knowledge creation the entities work mostly on their own. The coordination mechanisms on global, regional and country level were described as loose. Therefore, it was concluded that achieving sustainable partnerships included joint planning rather than simply grouping independent activities, linking activities to a clear results framework, pooling funding as well as introducing common work-plans.

In accordance with this, to support the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the addressing of the Sustainable Development Goals at country level, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/72/279 in May 2018, resulting in the UN Development System Reform by the Secretary General. The main objective of this reform is to set development at the core of the UN work plan, using the 2030 Agenda as the path. The SDGs are the reference and the ultimate objective of the reform. Among its many proposed changes – reinvigorating the role of the Resident Coordinator system and clearer accountability –, it seeks to improve cooperation at the regional and global level and to ensure sustainable funding. Funding has contributed for long to the fragmented approach of the UNDS. Therefore, a change in funding towards more predictable and flexible resources as well as core funding and pooled funding gained more attention (UNSDG, 2019a). The upgraded role of the Resident Coordinators, who drive collaboration at country level, makes them supportive of delivering better results on the ground. Moreover, they lead the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), which is the core inter-agency mechanism in a country for the issues of coordination and decision making (UNSDG, 2019b). UNCTs deliver shared results, inter alia using the redesigned United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), which was renamed to United Nations Development
Cooperation Framework, now serving as a central instrument for UN development activities. In detail, the new Cooperation Framework is designed to help identify gaps in SDG coverage and solutions as how these challenges can be tackled. Parts of the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) will also support cohesiveness (SWSD, 2019). In addition, the cited System Wide Strategic Document (SWSD) is intended to support the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and a Common Country Analysis (CCA) works as a core analytical function. Fig. 2 depicts the main elements of the UNDS reform.

**Earlier Initiatives**

Looking at earlier initiatives, progress can be observed and lessons for inter-agency cooperation can be learned, for example from the Delivering as One (DaO) initiative. Based on the motivation to improve coherence of the UN system at field level, the Resident Coordinator System and frameworks such as UNDAF have been introduced in the 70ies and 90ies. The next step was the introduction of DaO in 2007. The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to deliver across mandates, sectors and institutional boundaries were signed by the Secretary General and 18 heads of UN agencies and compromise five pillars: “One Leader, One Programme, One Budgetary Framework, Operating as One, and Communicating as One” (UNSDG, n.d.-a). So far, 56 countries have requested to adopt the approach (UNSDG, n.d.-b).

Fig. 2. The components of the UN Development System, all working towards delivery on the SDGs are depicted (Helge Osttveiten, 2019).
Results from the Report on Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) Monitoring Survey of Programme Country Governments in 2015 (UN DESA, 2016), which also compared DaO countries and non-DaO countries show the following: in general, the UN was in many issues the favoured programme partner, especially for “global challenges requiring common action”. Nevertheless, closer cooperation and division of labour among the UN agencies were requested by the countries. Competition among UN agencies and unfavourable effects associated with it were reported. UN joint funding mechanisms (e.g. One UN funds) were considered to lead to greater UN coherence and efficiency, especially by DaO countries. Similar results were found for UN joint programming.

Importance of inter-agency cooperation

In spite of considerable efforts on the SDGs, current publications (Nature Sustainability, 2018), the current Sustainable Development Goals Report (United Nations, 2019) and a report called “The Future is now - Science for Achieving Sustainable Development” conducted by the Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General (2019) indicate that despite progress in critical areas, the overall progress towards the attainment of the SDGs is slow and the countries are far from reaching the goals by 2030. For the further development towards the success of the Agenda 2030, the latter report emphasises the importance of cooperation among various partners, including the UN agencies and therefore also inter-agency cooperation. The high relevance of cooperation can, inter alia, be observed in the evaluation reports, for example those of the UNODC, where a section on cooperation, partnership and in some cases even inter-agency cooperation can be found in most reports of the last seven years. A recent meta-analysis of the evaluation reports of 2015 and 2016, conducted by the Independent Evaluation Unit (UNODC-IEU, 2017), reported an increased number of references on cooperation and coordination, compared to the previous report of 2011 to 2014 (UNODC-IEU, 2015). In addition to strengthen cooperation with CSOs and Member States, the meta-analysis from 2015 suggests strengthening UNODC’s inter-agency collaboration. To improve, e.g. the widely varying quality of cooperation with internal and external partners, mechanisms of cooperation should be reconsidered, good practices reproduced and standardisation taken into account. The meta-analysis of 2017 further elaborates that closer inter-agency cooperation is recommended, as it would avoid duplication, make sharing of costs possible and strengthen synergies.

2.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS & HYPOTHESES

Facing the above-mentioned challenges and based on the introduced literature on cooperation, especially among UN agencies, we have developed the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Which factors, practices and innovative approaches are supportive of inter-agency cooperation and which of them tend to be restrictive?

Research Question 2: How did the introduction of the SDGs affect inter-agency cooperation within UN agencies?
On the basis of the theoretical framework and the research questions proposed, three hypotheses have been suggested as follows:

**Hypothesis I:** Different factors, practices and innovative approaches have a positive or negative influence on the success of inter-agency cooperation.

**Hypothesis II:** The introduction of the SDGs did not have a positive influence between the UN agencies because there are other issues that need to be solved first, such as competition for funding.

**Hypothesis III:** The introduction of the SDGs has a positive influence on UN inter-agency cooperation because it inter-relates the tasks of staff working within the UN. When people believe their goals are positively related; the results are characterised by positive regard, openness, and productivity.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. METHODS AND CASE STUDIES

To gain a broader picture for answering our research questions, a mixed-methods study combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques was applied. Therefore, the data collection consisted of two main parts: guided interviews with 12 UN employees in 11 cases and an online survey on cooperation and the role of the SDGs. Afterwards, the results of these two were compared to the findings of the literature review. The main focus was on the SDGs related primarily to the UNODC which are SDG 3, 10, 11, 15, 16, and, of course, 17; moreover, due to the nature of the projects and programmes we have revised and also focused on SDG 2, 4, 5, 8, and 10. Based on the above-mentioned literature review, we have gained the first insights into the topic and its core themes and factors of influence. Therefore, suitable indicators to quantify and assess cooperation in the projects have been found in different sources. Thomson, Perry, & Miller (2007) and Marek, Brock, & Savla (2015) suggested possible sets of indicators. Combining and optimising those two sets, Salignac, Marjolin, Noone, & Carey (2019) published a list of 28 indicators, covering a manageable amount of critical points, which were used to formulate the questions for the interviews and online survey to the UN staff. Suitable projects and agencies have been identified through the literature review. The preselection of projects or programmes was made after the following criteria:

- involvement of two or more UN agencies,
- existing inter-agency cooperation,
- projects / programmes still running and
- the online availability of a reasonable amount of information, such as contact points.

Based on these criteria, the following cases were chosen and the UN staff responsible were contacted and requested to participate in interviews and later on in an online survey. Following the interviewees’ recommendations during the course of the research, several other suggested UN staff were contacted. As a result, UN staff working on the following projects, networks, centres and units were interviewed: Environmental Emergencies (JEU); GLO.ACT; Joint Programme on Drug Dependence Treatment
and Care; Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT); UN Network on Migration; Global Programme for Combating Wildlife and Forest Crime; Finance, Technology and Capacity-building programme (UNFCCC); Strategic Planning and Inter-Agency Affairs Unit (SPIA; UNODC); UNODC Division for Management: Change Management and Business Transformation (UN-Secretariat); Global Shared Service Centre (GSSC; UNICEF); Strategic Planning and Coordination Division (ODG/SPQ/SPC; UNIDO). A more detailed list of the project details can be found in Annex II.

3.2. GUIDED INTERVIEWS

Guided, semi-structured interviews with 12 UN employees in 11 cases were conducted to get a comprehensive understanding of the cooperation within the selected cases and the impact of the SDGs. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to gain deeper insights by allowing flexible answers and follow-up questions, while still ensuring comparability between the different case studies (Bryman, 2012). The interview followed a questionnaire and lasted on average about 45 minutes. Following Bryman (2012), we developed an interview guide (Annex III), which relied on important factors to assess cooperation, taken from the indicator set by Salignac, Marjolin, Noone, & Carey (2019). The questions focused on the role of the SDGs, cooperation between UN agencies and personal experiences of the UN staff. After the final selection of the projects, UN staff still working on projects, which were implemented in cooperation with other UN agencies, were identified. Assessment reports, contact details and other information were collected from the databases of the UN agencies. The first approach to contact the UN staff was to send a one-page letter. The selection of interview mode (face-to-face or Skype), interview leader and the participation of interviewers was mainly determined by the location and availability at the time of the appointment. The interviews were conducted between 29 August 2019 and 07 November 2019. The interviewees were made aware that their names are kept private due to the sensibility of the content. The response rate was above 70% and the willingness of the contacted UN staff was high, only four did not reply or agree. The openness of the participants seemed to be relatively good and in the course of the interviews, there were also critical statements on different topics. Our interview partners were in general very communicative and informative. Most of the interviews were conducted by at least two of our group members, which improved the quality of the interview by reducing errors and missing important points.

3.3. ONLINE SURVEY

For the online survey (Annex IV) the one-page letter was sent to a new set of participants, whereby the target group consisted of UN staff, who have worked or were still working on a project with inter-agency cooperation. To increase the willingness to participate, we asked the already interviewed UN employees to spread the invitation among their colleagues. Therefore, the exact number of people who received the request could not be determined. In total, the final sample consisted of 17 completed

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1 The citations of statements, relevant parts of the transcripts and other content, which will be published, were sent back to the respective interviewee to be approved. These are personal statements which do not reflect the position of the respective agency.
surveys from various UN agencies. The online survey was created on freeonlinesurveys.com and aimed to broaden our perceptions and reduce the possibility of subjective bias of our interviewees by adding a quantitative approach to the interviews. The change in projects with the implementation of the SDGs as well a selected set of indicators for measuring and assessing cooperation were rated by the participants using 10-point Likert scales from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The selected set of indicators (taken from Salignac, Marjolin, Noone, & Carey, 2019) can be found as part of the online survey in Annex IV. Moreover, factors influencing successful working together had to be ranked by importance. The survey was completed by open questions on changes of inter-agency cooperation with the Agenda 2030, on supportive and restrictive factors on cooperation and on the personal opinion what could be improved in the future. The survey took on average approximately ten minutes to complete.

3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

After the separate analysis, more thoroughly described below, collected and analysed data sets of the interviews and the online survey were interrelated with another, seeking to identify factors that are supportive or restrictive of inter-agency partnership (Research Question 1). Moreover, information on the effect of the introduction of the SDGs on inter-agency cooperation was outlined based on the collected data (Research Question 2). Best-practices and gaps were identified, whereby it had to be considered that those two terms were highly context-dependent and challenges and demands of assessed projects may vary. The thorough description of the data analysis of the two parts is as follows:

3.4.1. Guided Interviews

The collected data was classified in themes that focus on working together in terms of good practices and difficulties, for a clear and compelling story. The analysis and interpretation followed a thematic analysis, based on the work of Braun & Clarke (2006). Six essential phases of the analysis are listed by the authors: (I) familiarising with the data, (II) generating initial codes, (III) searching for themes, (IV) reviewing themes, (V) defining and naming themes and (VI) producing the report. The selected method is flexible and allows to summarise the data, generate unanticipated insights and find the overarching themes while still being easy to learn and conduct, even without prior experience. Moreover, the results of the analysis promise be used for the formulation of policy recommendations (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 38) at the end of our research. Following the six phases of thematic analysis, the interviews were transcribed, partly with the help of online tools, whereby manual correction was necessary. After familiarising with the data, the transcripts were coded (example of coding: Fig. 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[00:18:01.550] - Interviewee: The SDGs have helped a lot because we can map our activities on the SDGs and due to their interrelations, the links of our activities to other SDGs, So, they really can serve as a tool to visualise our efforts.</td>
<td>SDGs for mapping activities tool to visualise efforts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3. Example of a coded paragraph of a transcribed interview. This piece of transcript was freely invented by the authors. The highlighted part served as help for the coding and extraction of the relevant information by making it visibly accessible.
To ensure inter-rater consistency and consensus on the procedure and to guarantee a common coding standard within the researchers, a randomly selected interview was coded by all three team members and the coding was discussed afterwards. The codes of all interviews were then put together and sorted into potential overarching themes, which then were depicted with the help of a mind-map - the initial thematic map. After these steps, which correspond to phase I, II and III, we continued with phases IV, V and IV, which entailed the identification of fewer themes in a cyclic review and refinement process. The result was the final thematic map (Fig. 4), depicting the main themes identified in the interviews.

3.4.2. Online Survey

The data collected with the online survey was described and analysed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The former was analysed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 26 (SPSS 26). For the latter, the main messages of the responses to open questions were extracted for the discussion. Moreover, descriptive statistics were produced and outliers (e.g. high numbers, low numbers, or unique perspectives) were identified and discussed. The collected data of the two parts was cross-examined, seeking to identify factors that are supportive or restrictive of inter-agency partnership. Moreover, information on the development of inter-agency cooperation after the implementation of the SDGs was outlined based on the collected data.

3.5. LIMITATIONS

The main challenges and limitations of this research were the availability of public data, representativeness of the case studies, the permission and willingness to participate in the interview or the survey and the conduction of the interviews. First, public data such as evaluation reports, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and other documents often contained only short paragraphs on cooperation and collaboration, hindering the identification of inter-agency cooperation and internal communication as well as personal factors. Also, the initially planned content analysis could not be conducted due to the limited availability of suitable documents. Second, despite careful selection, this study is not representative of all projects and collaborations, but it offers an insight into several context-dependent case studies and a qualitative analysis of the perceptions of inter-agency cooperation of UN employees. Generalisation to all cases should therefore be avoided. To gain deeper insights in those non-official processes, the interviews were conducted. Third, it was assumed that UN procedures for disclosure of information diminished the possibility or willingness to participate, as an application for clearance would have been necessary. This represented a clear limitation, discouraged participation and was especially reflected in the low response rate in the online survey. Limited time resources and tight schedules were considered as reasons for declining participation. Fourth, when conducting the interviews with the UN staff, it could not be taken for granted, that questions concerning sensitive or critical issues, were answered without any bias, to avoid possible negative consequences for the interviewees. These challenges were resolved by guaranteeing the confidentiality of the data and anonymity of personal information shared, i.e. by using pseudonyms in the reports. Finally, further factors that possibly affected the data collection were related to the time in which the interviews were conducted (i.e.: after a hard-working day) and the performance of the interviewers; however, this cannot be quantified.
4. RESULTS

The obtained data from the interviews and the online survey were analysed as described in the methods above. Detailed results of both collections are given in this chapter and then compared.

4.1. RESULTS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The final thematic map (Fig. 4), developed following Braun & Clarke (2006), depicts the whole range of themes which came up in the course of all transcribed and coded interviews. These themes and factors were visually contextualised by showing their interrelations.

![Fig. 4. Final thematic map showing the overarching themes based on the coding of the transcribed interviews, following Brown & Clarke (2006). Factors restrictive of cooperation are highlighted in red and those in green depict supportive factors. The stakeholders are depicted in blue. Other colours were used for other processes of factors, for example those which can be supportive or restrictive, depending on the context.](image)

Therefore, also colour coding was used to highlight restrictive (red) and supportive impact (green) on working together. Blue was chosen for stakeholders, such as the United Nations in its entirety, UN staff, Member States and the agencies (in the broader sense of the term as described in the introduction). All Sustainable Development Goals as a whole are represented by the logo and added to the success factors, as the majority of comments were positive and supportive of cooperation. The goals serve as a strong link between the UN agencies and the Member States. For the sake of visual accessibility, a second thematic map, focusing specifically on inter-agency cooperation was created (Fig. 5). The same colours as for the previous figure were used to depict constraints and success factors for working together.
4.1.1. Cooperation in the UN

When asked on cooperation, interviewees responded very positively. They identified the benefits using the following words: “enriching”, “better working” and “part of a team”. According to the interviewees, a very meaningful part when agencies cooperate is that the expertise can be shared and that the impact of the project or programme is greater. They said that “we cannot pretend to be experts in every area.” Some interviewees mentioned that there is a trade-off from cooperating, which is the complexity and the use of more resources; however, the impact of joining efforts was in the end more valuable. There were some statements indicating that the topic cooperation in the UN –delivering as one or delivering collectively– is a challenge that is still open, and that the UN is failing to tackle. It was also stated that Member States had also asked to provide better coordination.

4.1.2. Supportive of Cooperation

According to the interview results, the key factor for succeeding when cooperating is having enough funds. This will allow the UN staff in charge of projects and programmes to look for more action space and, hence, look for partners. If the funds, on the contrary, are limited, UN staff will only focus on delivering the initial objectives and will not engage on extra-activities. One of the interviewees added that successful fundraising means that there is credibility from the Member States in the programme or project and that the Member States are aware of the benefits of having two specialised agencies working together for a target population (Fig. 6).
Fig. 6. Circle progress bar that identifies the main factors for an agency to achieve a successful cooperation approach according to the conducted interviews following the thematic analysis.

Some participants stated that the re-engagement of partners and the (new or re-)engagement of local partners was a decisive factor for successful cooperation. This leads to the "trust in partners" which was named as well as positive. Another common factor named was the launch of the Agenda 2030. There was a consensus that the Agenda has united parts of the UN that used to operate on their own. Regular communication with partner agencies was also named as a factor leading to success and to trust, agencies and partners in the ground engage in the planning and have access to information. Once communication is not an issue anymore, joint working plans and deliverables are to be introduced. Regarding monitoring, information collected is rather limited. Monitoring mechanisms were reported to be in set up in several cases. The aims were for example to monitor how quickly responses to requests of Members States or the UN system or to which extent recommendations are accepted. Agencies also stated that they have an internal monitoring system linking their activities to the SDGs. It was also repeatedly mentioned that SDGs are used as monitoring tools. Evaluation functions were as well reported, conducted as self-evaluation and/or by the UN Evaluation Group. Effectiveness of the projects and the achievement of the SDGs were part of these evaluations.

4.1.3. Constraints on cooperation

Among participants there was a strong consensus that fundraising and human resources were the biggest constraints for cooperation within the UN system, resulting in high levels of competition between agencies and limiting the willingness of people to invest time in looking for ways to cooperate. As a result of competition, gaps and overlaps of information occur. There are duplicated efforts for certain areas since it is known that funds are available, many new agencies are born, and the other way around. There are huge gaps for totally unaddressed areas creating isolation of agencies as well as siloing of knowledge and capacity to tackle certain issues. Another factor named by a few - and related to the aforementioned factors - is that space for development assistance is shrinking, resulting again in competition (Fig. 7). Furthermore, we found repeatedly that the fact that agencies (not all, but most of them) received voluntary contributions from the Member States, having no fixed budget, limited initiatives of UN staff to organise plans for cooperating. Funding was identified as a factor that limits the projects’ scope and deployment locations.
Some interviewees added that a framework for sustainable development cooperation is missing within the UN system, a clear plan and a logical division, which can provide an understanding of tasks and allow for more accountability. Additionally, it was stated that less bureaucracy can improve cooperation: different structural processes of UN agencies become burdensome when sharing information and resources. In this context, United Nations policy documents such as the UNDS reform, the DaO initiative, the Dalberg report, MAF and UNDAF were brought up, as these were considered to alleviate some of the listed constraints. Additionally, some participants also mentioned that sometimes the legislation of certain Member States can be an impediment to start projects on the ground.

4.1.4. Bivalent factors

From the interviews some factors were identified as success factor but also as constraints, depending on how they were managed. This list includes funding, communication between agencies, location of the offices and the mandate of the agencies given by the Member States. When it comes to funding, when there is a fixed budget people are able to invest in cooperation, when there is no funding, agencies will compete for it. Communication, or more specifically, the willingness of people to communicate and engage themselves in meetings or calls, will conditionate the results of programmes and projects creating synergies or not. The locations of offices have the same effect. It depends on the human relations, on the coordination at the regional level and on the administrative procedures of each agency. Finally, the mandate given by the Member States plays a decisive role since it limits or fosters actions initiated by the agencies.

4.1.5. Changes after the introduction of the SDGs

The results from the interviews in the area of the performance of the SDGs were mostly positive. The SDGs, according to the interviewees, have helped to provide a "united vision", “common goals" and "common language" for all people working in development cooperation. They were also described as a "fantastic set of goals" since they made people realise how to deliver assistance jointly. A common aspect among the participants was that they were aware of the SDGs they contributed to, and, they related other SDGs to this one. This fits to the opinion of some participants that the greatest benefit of the SDGs is that it has changed the mentality of the people. In short, they have raised awareness and understanding for a broad and cross-cutting nature issue. There was, however, a group that stated that there have been no real changes after the introduction of the SDGs, as they did not really change
the nature of the agencies’ work and their work “fits under this SDGs anyway.” The same holds true when it comes to cooperation because there has always been cooperation and because the SDGs do not provide a coordination framework, which is what it is missing. In the same direction, a couple of interviewees said that the SDGs are only used “to satisfy the paper” or as a “visual” tool. A very small group said that the SDGs had yet not been fully embedded, so it is hard to say if it has provided for more cooperation or not.

4.2. RESULTS FROM THE ONLINE-SURVEY

Regarding the use of the online survey, an empirical study was designed. In total, 17 participants of the following UN agencies and organisations completed the survey: UN Evaluation Group, UNIDO, UNODC, FAO, UNICEF, IAEA, UNEP and OCHA. The change in projects with the implementation of the SDGs as well a selected set of indicators measuring and assessing cooperation were rated by the participants using 10-point Likert scales from “strongly disagree” (0 points) to “strongly agree” (10 points), depicted in Tab. 1 and more detailed in Annex V.

Tab. 1. The 17 respondents were asked to indicate their agreement to the following statements from “strongly disagree” (0 points) to “strongly agree” (10 points). The questions are grouped into four covered dimensions. Number of valid answers (N), mean values and standard deviation (SD) are shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shared goals and resources</th>
<th>Common goals formulated together with partnering institutions</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>7.19</th>
<th>2.32</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separate funding for coordinating your collaboration's activities</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have access from your partners to the data you need.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Able to get the skills/expertise/specialisation to address goals</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feel it worthwhile to stay and work within the collaboration</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared authority and accountability</td>
<td>All partners participate in the decision-making process</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared indicators/methods/evaluation systems for shared goals</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have a system to assess the partner’s needs and resources.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitor and share its findings among the partners</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.71</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partners feel ownership in the results/products of their work</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication, adaptive capacity and effectiveness</td>
<td>Communication between the partners</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exchange different viewpoints to find alternative solutions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration members trust one another.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achieve own objectives and expected results better than alone</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>SDGs improved the extent of inter-agency cooperation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the mean values were located around six, indicating that basic needs for working together are met. The strongest approval was found for the exchange of different viewpoints to find alternative solutions, formulating common goals, trust among partners and achieve own objectives and results better than alone. Least agreement was detected for having an assessment system for partners’ needs and resources, followed by having separate funding and access to the partners’ data. In the open
questions, “joint programmes”, “inter-agency programmatic approaches”, “dedicated donor funding that requires inter-agency submissions” were the mentioned aspects that bring successful results for inter-agency cooperation. The specified constraints were “lack of field offices”, “HR capacity and time” (inter-agency cooperation takes more time to design, implement and evaluate) or the “competition for funds”. Furthermore, the “strengthened enforcement of agency mandate to avoid overlaps”, “stabilise agency funding to stop competition and ensure long term commitment” and “focusing on developing more integrated approaches” were stated to ensure constant improvements and consolidation for inter-agency cooperation. It was observed that funding was a topic concerning success factors and restrictive factors, as well as in the respondents’ recommendations on future cooperation.

Another task of the online survey included placing factors for successfully working together according to its importance (Fig. 8). In this task, the most important points were having a clear definition of the addressed issues, as well as of the areas of responsibility and a system that assesses the partner’s needs. The lowest ranking was observed for formal and informal communication with partners and being located closely to the partners. A remarkable difference from the first six elements to the last five elements, which mainly concerned personal factors and communication, can be observed. For the first, top ranked variables, the rankings match the above-mentioned results of the assessment of the collaborations, which in both cases were ranked as relevant: interactively understanding the issues that have to be addressed, including each partner’s responsibilities, finally leading to shared goals. Even though the exchange of viewpoints and the formulation of common goals were highly rated as existent in the collaborations, communication itself was ranked low. From the more personal factors, trust and the feeling of ownership were of importance in the assessment as well as in the rankings.

![Bar chart](image)

Fig. 8. Participants (N = 15) were asked to order the following eleven elements according to their importance for working together successfully. The graph depicts the mean rank for every element, with 1 being the most important and 11 the least important.
The fourth dimension covered the SDGs. On Ø 6.46 points were responded that the implementation of the 17 SDGs improved the extent of cooperation within different UN agencies. The answers from the open questions can be summarised as follows: except for two cases in which it was stated that cooperation already worked well before 2015 and that the SDGs do not directly contribute to inter-agency cooperation; 6 out of 11 respondents indicated that by visualising and mapping (joint) efforts or serving as a framework, the SDGs could contribute to inter-agency partnerships. If some of the projects have been started after 2015, 83.33% of the participants answered that one or more of the 17 SDGs have been included in the planning and realisation of the project. For the other 16.67%, this was not applicable.

4.3. GUIDED INTERVIEWS VERSUS ONLINE SURVEY

Comparing the results from the guided interviews, we observe some differences and similarities. For the guided interviews, “funding”, “human resources” and “trust in partners” were the most frequently named supportive factors to cooperation. In the online survey, however, “common goals”, “feel it worthwhile to stay and work within the collaboration”, “collaboration members trust one another” and “achieve own objectives and expected results better than alone” were ranked as the most important. In the online survey, participants recognise that for a successful collaboration, “clear definition of the addressed issues” and “clear understanding of each partner’s areas of responsibility” are necessary; while in the interviews, among the participants there was a consensus that these two issues were present in almost all forms of cooperation in which they have entered. Regarding the SDGs, in the interviews they represented a positive factor for enhancing cooperation by providing a framework to map development assistance, nevertheless they have not radically changed cooperation in the UN. In the online surveys, SDGs receive Ø 6.46 points in the question if SDGs improved cooperation. Both results present a strong case for stating that the SDGs were not a determining factor in improving cooperation.

5. DISCUSSION

The collected data from the interviews and online surveys concerning the importance of cooperation pointed towards the same direction: working together is beneficial at UN as well as personal level (Fig. 9). Moreover, the results represented a broad variety of experiences and viewpoints on UN inter-agency cooperation in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. Having this diversity of perspectives in mind, the main topics and factors that were predominantly mentioned by the participants, are discussed in the light of the literature.
Cooperation is important

"The idea is that we feel that we are part of the same team, no matter where we are."

They have a huge mandate on (…). Our mandate is on (…). So we collaborate in the areas where those two things really come together and where they have expertise that we don’t."

"(…) you could see the perspective of all different agents but in the end it is a very good document because it encompasses all the different points of view of the U.N and it is very balanced."

"(…) the process of working together (…) has been quite enriching because you see that each agency that is participating is really adding maybe its own perspective or expertise. So in the end I think the final product that you have is quite comprehensive and good (…)."

"So we cannot pretend to be experts in every area. That’s why it’s very important for this global cooperation."

"They have their experts, we have our experts and we literally do it simultaneously together; so it’s a very smooth process. (…)"

Fig. 9. Quotes on the importance of cooperation, taken from the guided interviews. These are personal statements in response to specific questions on cooperation and the SDGs. These quotes do not necessarily reflect the position of the respective agency or the authors.

5.1. SUCCESS FACTORS OF COOPERATION

West, Tjosvold, & Smith (2003) stated that, when cooperating, people believe their goals are positively related; therefore, the results in the relationships are characterised by positive regard, openness, and productivity. This definition presents the SDGs as a strong case for enhancing cooperation, since the SDGs are common goals for the whole UN system. In the course of the interviews, it was also noticed that all participants were very familiar with the SDGs, with how the SDGs that are related to the mandate of their agencies and those who are related to the project they are working on. This, however, since UN staff agrees that the SDGs has not really changed cooperation, could be seen as the starting foot.

A comprehensive list of principles of good partnerships were given by IJsselmuiden, Duale & Nchinda (2004) which include the communication, resources and monitoring. According to the open questions, regular communication during which information was shared was fundamental and it allowed to create a bond among the partners. On the other hand, people themselves, if unwilling to stay in touch, become a strong barrier for all partners and stops synergies. Similarly, funding was considered as the most relevant factor for a successful partnership since it allows UN staff to invest time in setting new partnerships and because it ensures the continuation of the programme. The importance of monitoring was ranked in the midfield in the online survey and interviewees agreed that it is one of the basics of partnerships, which matched these principles. Monitoring the progress and success of the work, also linking it to the SDGs, which themselves were used as monitoring tools in some cases. In this context self- and external evaluation were reported, whereby effectiveness and the attainment of the SDGs were part of these evaluations. Regarding the results of our both sources of information, communication was definitely a decisive factor. Van Huijstee, Francken, & Leroy (2007) named choice of partners as success factors for intersectoral partnerships. Even though, among the interviews and online surveys, negative experiences were not shared, there is a couple of successful stories in which the choice of partner was a decisive factor for the success of the programme when it comes to results and getting more funds. The main reason behind was that the mandate of the agencies was
complimentary. Both agencies had the expertise on the issue, the contacts on the ground and the funds needed for the implementation of the programme. It is safe to say that the right choice of a partner can result in a chain of positive factors adding up. Likewise, when cooperation has taken place and it has been successful, it builds for future working together, avoiding burdensome formal procedures. Along the interviews and according to the points given in the online survey, participants considered “joint decision-making on major issues”, “shared responsibility” and “division of labour” – also named as successful factors by Biermann (2015) – as very important to maintain a healthy cooperation. Among the participants, voices were divided. All interviewees agreed that the UN has a framework upon which partnerships are created and this includes the division of tasks and decision-making; however, there was also a consensus that for initiating new partnerships, this framework was missing.

Rhinard & Sundelius (2016) identified as necessary for a successful cooperation “set of rules, procedures and principles that structure behaviour and shape interests”; however, even though the UN has a set of procedures, it seems that it has to be updated to keep up with the new challenges. Rhinard & Sundelius (2016) state that “institutions must be willing to go under ongoing and long interactions; they must be “fit for purpose”, meaning flexible enough to keep “delivering under new and unexpected circumstances”; so it reaffirms that (1) the UN has to be flexible to keep delivering and (2) that the people involved have to be willing to run an extra mile for cooperating. Furthermore, Pattberg & Widerberg (2016) identified nine criteria of success for multi-stakeholder partnerships, these were encountered in several responses of the interviews and the online survey. The most present topics related to this were sustained funding and goal setting. The former is claimed to be especially important for partnerships with multiple stakeholders, which is comparable to an inter-agency cooperation working with member states. The latter suggests setting goals in a collaborative process for coherence and to avoid fragmentation. Also, a common vision and goal setting with a clear problem definition and clear measurable goals were stated. These goals should also be in line with other frameworks such as the SDGs to reduce the risk of fragmentation. In our opinion this points twice towards the importance and function of the SDGs: first, the SDGs can serve as this required common vision and goals, although some interviewees stated that on project level the goals and indicators SDGs are not sufficient. Second, if the SDGs themselves are the basis for common goals, formulated for the partnership, the mapping of these goals will automatically be consistent with the goals of the SDGs and thus limit the possibility of fragmentation.

5.2. RESTRICTIONS ON COOPERATION

Funding and therefore lack of (human) resources was identified as the main constraint for cooperation. This was reported in the interviews as well as in the online survey repeatedly. In line with scholars, the limited availability leads to weakness or absence of working together. The willingness and ability to cooperate decreases. Moreover, in several cases, a clear plan, logical division of work and defined responsibilities are absent. Le et al. (2018), Hord (1981) and Carnwell & Carson (2005) as well as the above-mentioned literature suggest, that for successful working together, the conduction of joint planning, implementation and evaluation are necessary.

West, Tjosvold, & Smith (2003) stated that the perception of goals being competitive will lead to the conclusion that people’s own goals are better achieved when the others are ineffective. Restricted information and resource exchange are the consequence. Although the SDGs here can work as the
common goal or vision, for the agencies the first and most urgent priority is the funding, as it is the basis for their work. This also matches Biermann’s (2015) statement that cooperation is absent when it is more profitable not to cooperate and unilateralism is chosen. To help agencies to work towards a common goal on all levels, the SDGs could serve as a common goal and vision for a sustainable world as well as for organising the agency’s work. Agencies could therefore pursue their own interests by cooperating, matching Rhinard & Sundelius (2016) and also definitions of collaboration (McMillan dictionary, 2019; Salignac et al., 2019), which also can include that stakeholder pool resources to meet objectives that are only to be met together (Stout, Bartels, & Love, 2018) and engage in joint problem solving (Akhilesh, 2017). Limited funding for cooperative activities and partly, therefore, limited human resources inhibit this process. While a considerable amount of the principles of good partnership by IJsselmuiden, Duale & Nchinda (2004) are well served in our cases, some are not. In existing inter-agency projects, the “101 of project planning,” as one interviewee called it, seemed to be covered more or less sufficient: a well-defined and manageable focus; good communication; good preparation of the internal environments; constant monitoring and evaluations using appropriate indicators and support to national and regional strategies. The last two principles could especially be supported by the SDGs. Nonetheless, restrictions can be observed especially in the following two principles: the optimisation of local resources and consistent donor investment policies. Again, the availability of funding is crucial, but limited. Van Huijstee, Francken, & Leroy (2007) listed success factors for intersectoral partnerships including the choice of partners and goals among others. The selection of partners was often indicated by the interviewees as being relatively clear, since there are often only a few big players or known partners from previous projects. With the choice of partner and also the common goals being more obvious, the mandates and responsibilities of each agency were reported as not so clear. Insecurities about the division of tasks as well as gaps and overlaps in the work occurred. It was further stated in the interviews that UN bureaucracy as well as differences structural processes within agencies complicated inter-agency cooperation. In this context the role of the Member States needs a closer investigation. First and obvious, financial contributions of the MS are crucial for the realisation of a project and puts them into a position of power. Moreover, the agencies depend on the conditions and mandate given by the countries, which itself depends on the country’s laws and goals and on the already existing bonds with the UN and its agencies. Considering the reported gaps and overlaps in the agency’s work, stabilised funding that ensures the capacity and (human) resources to enable these joint processes is needed. Further, for successful inter-agency cooperation, the Member States play an important role due to their voluntary financial contributions and conditions on the ground.

5.3. AFTER THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SDGS

The impression on the impact of the SDGs seems to be mixed: questions on the role of the SDGs and changes with their implementation in 2015, some interviewees indicated that the SDGs can be a good tool to visualise and map their own work and serve as the bigger picture to bring everything more in one direction (see also Fig. 10). Therefore, it could be interpreted that the SDGs do not only serve as a light at the end of the path for national governments (Nature Sustainability, 2018) but also for UN agencies, at least to some extent. The SDGs provide UN staff with a common vision, that is crucial for cooperation (West, Tjosvold & Smith, 2003). UN staff identities with the SDGs and understand
their cross-cutting nature. Therefore, we argue that an environment in which people have common objectives serves as the perfect pool for future collaboration. Similar conclusions on the importance of goals, as which the SDGs were interpreted, could be drawn when comparing the results to other different forms of partnerships presented in scholarly literature such as Carnwell & Carson (2005), IJsselmuiden, Duale & Nchinda (2004), Rhinard & Sundelius (2016), Pattberg & Widerberg (2016), Van Huijstee, Francken, & Leroy (2007), West, Tjosvold, & Smith (2003). As Prescott & Stibbe (2015) stated the global, single issue perspective of the MDGs needs to be exchanged for a more local and integrated perspective for the SDGs. For detailed information on the topic see Annex I. A holistic system approach, considering local contexts, which are more tangible could bring the nature of partnerships toward local networks, collaborating towards the SDGs. Also, the interrelation of single projects with other topics may thereby be discovered and highlighted, which seems to be in line with the aims of the 2030 Agenda (UNODC, Guidance Note, 2018).

Fig. 10. Quotes on the introduction of the SDGs, taken from the guided interviews. These are personal statements in response to specific questions on cooperation and the SDGs. These quotes do not necessarily reflect the position of the respective agency or the authors.

Nevertheless, also before 2015 the agencies had their goals and targets framed under certain working practices, which “fit under this SDGs anyway.” In this regard the SDGs seemed to bring less innovations. There was also the opinion, that cooperation has already been existent and has not changed with the SDGs or that the implementation of the SDGs is still in progress. Despite some consistencies and patterns among our interviewees, there is not always a clear and unequivocal opinion on the importance of different aspects of cooperation or the function of the SDGs. This divergence could be rooted in the previous experiences of the interview partners, coming from different backgrounds and projects, hierarchy levels and positions. It was a recurring statement in the interviews, that the SDGs are strongly interrelated, which is in line with Pradhan et al. (2017), who also stated that the attainment of the SDGs depends on the use of synergies among them but also on the discussion
of trade-offs to change current strategies to avoid complications with negatively related goals. However, these trade-offs between among the goals were hardly discussed in the interviews. This could be due to the interview’s strong focus on cooperation, since working together might be less popular between partners with conflicting goals.

5.4. UN POLICY DOCUMENTS AND REFORMS

In summary, the current UNDS reform process initiatives and policy documents, which aim to improve the delivery of the United Nations and contribute to the attainment of the SDGs, are also contributing to inter-agency cooperation and partnership. Looking at the interviewees’ work practices, the main constraints for inter-agency cooperation identified in this research are being tackled by these changes and could indirectly help to alleviate the impact of these constraints, leading to facilitate inter-agency cooperation and therefore reducing competition. Nevertheless, the reform will take time until the changes have reached all levels and minds. For a more in-depth discussion of inter-agency cooperation in this regard, see Annex VI.

6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

After combining UN and scholarly literature and screening the content of the interviews as well as online survey, a series of recommendations to bring projects that deliver real impacts on the ground has been collected, which is hereby presented.

General recommendations

- The current challenges can only be solved by looking at the big picture: seeing the interrelations between challenges and having holistic view. In this, the SDGs facilitate a bigger picture behind each agencies’ mandate and connecting problems to possible actors.
- The UN should work as one institution. By doing so, overlapping, hurtful competition for funds and unwillingness to cooperate from agencies will be avoided. There has been some successful initiatives that are worth to follow such as the Cluster Approach, the meetings of the United Nations Country Teams or the UN System Meetings organised by the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) and the Regional UN Sustainable Development Group (R-UNSDG). The missing piece of the puzzle for these platforms is to have a team that can develop standards under which all agencies involved can work, paving the way for the next step after sharing good practices.
- Increase funds to UN agencies specifically for increasing inter-agency cooperation. Create a clear and consistent framework for identifying collaboration partners on common goals, which involves recognition of the time and resources that are needed, establishment of specific funds for those efforts.
- Increase awareness of Member States (but also project and programmes heads) of the workload and success that cooperation can be responsible for.
- **Stabilise agency funding** to stop competition and ensure long term commitment. This can be achieved by moving to funding channels that promote collective outcomes, such as pooled funding. An example could be the inter-agency Cluster Approach that coordinates efforts and development within the UN system. Good practices for pooled funding can found in the Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity, supporting coherence at different levels and accessing multi donor funding mechanisms such as the Multi-Donor trust funds (e.g. the pooled Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda), used at global, regional and country level for financing joint cluster activities. Similarly, a trust fund for technical cooperation and regular head of agencies coordination meeting on this topic could help. Additionally, at the EU level, there is a system called "shared management" in which the funds are destined to a European Structural and Investment Funds which will be then destined to projects.

- In depth **research and identification of gaps of the UN mechanisms** to overcome the limitations of suboptimal funding and propose a practicable change.

- Strengthen enforcement and (re)specify **agency mandates** to avoid overlaps; grant agencies **sufficient independence** so that they choose their partners, instead of choosing them by means of political decisions.

- Following the SG’s efficiency target based on Resolution 67/226 and 71/243 it is recommendable that the **Common Back Office (CBO)** and **Common Premises (CP)** that serve for more effective delivery and minimising operational costs, increasing effectiveness of shared resources and unifying the presence of the UN are implemented in more countries.

- **Focus on collective planning approaches and intensify collective action** to cover gaps and then maximise complementarities and alignment of activities to address the identified development needs.

- **Use frameworks such as the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF)** to work in unity of purpose, for greater collaboration and clearer responsibilities for joint results. Generate consensus and efficiency across agencies through a binding organisational code of conduct to all UN agencies. Generate a base template and common guidelines for working in partnership for all UN agencies to find synergies and to advance cooperation.

- **Create a common procedure for agencies when starting a partnership.** Bureaucracy procedures can discourage the willingness of UN staff to engage in partnerships. After a partnership has been established, create **compatible interoperability standards** by using SAPs, such as UMOJA which is widely used among the UN agencies. A goal should be the aggregation and sharing of data as well as common approaches to keeping the data up to date.

- **Intermediaries and brokers** can serve as critical ‘glue’ between partners, by bringing them together and supporting effective collaboration. The Resident Coordinator as highest-ranking representative of the UN system in the country should strengthen and consolidate this role to connect the agencies.

- Within partnerships, **establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate partnership learning** and otherwise undetected innovations. Exchange these experiences and lessons learned.

- Use a **common language**, this is essential to ensure that goal directed activities are aligned throughout agencies. For example, the SDGs have been a huge help in creating a shared goal throughout the UN system, which is necessary for allocation of budget and organisational agenda planning within each individual organisation of the UN.
UN agencies and UN staff

- Agencies should focus on developing more integrated approaches, particularly at programme level. Therefore, shifting from a project-level approach to a programme-level one integrating more functions and, subsequently, opening spaces for joint cooperation.

- **Strengthen collaboration with the office of the UN Resident Coordinator** facilitates the work of UN agencies in securing meetings and channelling correspondence to high level government officials.

- Improve within UN staff the common understanding of targets, properly split responsibilities and take time and mutual input to plan the project. Often projects encounter difficulties because they were implemented within a very short period of time.

- Clearly define the addressed issues and have a clear understanding of each partner's areas of responsibility. Develop detailed work plans for UN staff to properly identify its tasks. Closer ties between the project implementation teams, incentives for cooperation, and clearly defined results. Best practices such as CPV/S28 (UNODC Cape Verde, 2012) reported that the identification of needs, adjustments to it and coordination of efforts in regular meetings helped to reduce duplication and to deliver better results. Also, joint interdepartmental workshops, can provide a better understanding of roles and responsibilities as well as interdependencies between institutions. Moreover, they served as a platform for networking and coordination, which is comparable to XAS/S69 (UNODC Vienna, 2017). The strategic plan of an agency does not necessarily fit country programmes; therefore, the programme draft should be coordinated with all actors on the ground.

- Prior to starting a project, a joint analysis of the circumstances on the ground should be conducted, for example the Common Country Analysis (CCA). Focus on strategic analysis including oversight of UN country programming, representation of non-resident agencies, support to national coordination, shared operational support services, crisis management, external communication and joint resource mobilisation.

- Create a common format to report on partnerships activities. Interviewees reported that a great amount of time was spent doing reporting for the donors.

- Increase efforts in the identification of partners in regions or thematic areas since standards are not applied consistently. Additionally, internal and external cooperation can be strengthened by e.g.: investing in research and mapping exercises to identify existing initiatives and potential partners and institutionalising long-term sustainable cooperation with the donor community and national partners.

- Closer coordination and planning with other UN and international agencies, donors, recipient governments, CSOs, academia and other potential partners to avoid duplication and increase efficiency. Moreover, the increase of internal cooperation between global programmes and field projects/programmes is crucial.

- Publicise the successful programmes or projects with multi/bi-laterals partners and explain how they came about, for example in the database mentioned above.

- Include inter-agency cooperation in staff members and agencies’ performance appraisal to stop competition for funding.
7. CONCLUSION

In light of implementing a set of ambitious Sustainable Development Goals with the Agenda 2030, the 75-year-old United Nations faces pressing challenges of the 21st century and the need of developing itself further. Given the size of the UN and its numerous diverse agencies, a vital necessity arises for coordinating their efforts and combining their expertise for sustainable inter-agency cooperation.

Answering *Research Question 1* and verifying *Hypothesis I*, factors that are supportive and restrictive of inter-agency cooperation were identified. When comparing our qualitative and quantitative results to scholarly and UN literature many basic principles and needs for cooperation are met. The following decisive factors were identified: goals positively related, communication between partners, resources, monitoring, choice of partner and joint decision-making and planning. One of the factors often reported as a crucial restriction was funding and linked to it, lack of (human) resources. In the absence of sufficient time and financial resources, unwillingness of working together could be observed. Further, gaps and overlaps, the absence of a clear framework, coordination of responsibilities and mandates, were reported as restrictive.

Regarding *Research Question 2* and its correspondent *Hypothesis II*, which states that the introduction of the SDGs did not have a positive influence on cooperation between the UN agencies because there are other issues that need to be solved first, our results are mixed. Cooperation among the UN agencies has not significantly changed after the introduction of the SDGs. They are perceived by the UN staff members as a very positive set of tools and most of them are well acquainted with them; however, there are other factors considered decisive for supporting cooperation. The most urgent constraint seems to be the overlapping of work in certain field areas which causes competition for funding. In addition, internal procedures constrain staff to engage in cooperation, apart from the fact that they do not have the time and the funding for engaging in cooperation projects.

For the *Hypothesis III* and the second part of *Research Question 2*, even though the introduction of the SDGs did not really change how business is done within the UN, the SDGs did become a very positive factor that motivated UN staff to work together, to realise that they all have a common goal and to see themselves as part of one “united” United Nations. According to West, Tjosvold, & Smith’s (2003) theory that results improve greatly when workers see their goals related, we agree that this is the case for the UN staff members, but that we stand now in the initial phase – only 4 years since the SDGs were introduced – and major results are to be identified in the success of the projects on the ground and in how the MS will have achieved their targets by 2030.

The current UN Development System reform, aiming to improve UN delivery and progress towards the success of the Agenda 2030, tackles the major restrictions on inter-agency cooperation that were identified in this research. Reforming the UNDS therefore seems a promising change and beneficial for UN cooperation on the ground by reducing competition, better coordination, stabilising funding and pointing more toward joint working. Nonetheless, it has to be kept in mind that the change of mindsets and ways of working will take time.

Further research regarding inter-agency cooperation could include UN internal documents such as reports to the donors or internal correspondence, reporting on the results of partnerships. Moreover, it could also include research on the results of the reform of the UNDS and the achievement of the 17 Goals by the Member States – especially in the light of definite changes for inter-agency
cooperation. This research foremostly covers the perspective of the UN agencies’ personnel and their insights working in the headquarters. Therefore, the research project sought to contribute to a broader scientific discussion in achieving sustainable partnerships in the UN. Future research in the countries at the level of implementation and especially from the Member State perspective could add valuable knowledge. Moreover, a particular focus should be placed on UN funding mechanisms and ways to identify and overcome current gaps in these processes, as funding constituted a main restriction for successfully working together within the United Nations.
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ANNEXES

ANNEX I

From the MDGs to the SDGs

Looking even further back in the UN history, the United Nations Millennium Declaration (United Nations, 2000) introduced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight development goals to be met in 2015, agreed to by all the world’s countries and all the world’s leading development institutions. As the full discussion of this process and the following transition to the SDGs would exceed the scope of this paper, the main factors concerning inter-agency cooperation are highlighted. Considering the change from the MDGs to the SDGs and the existing cooperation initiatives, it is safe to say that the UN is changing its organisation design towards a collaborative one in which agencies do not compete but rather share resources. Prescott & Stibbe (2015) described that the focus of collaboration needs to abandon the global, single issue perspective of the MDGs to reach a more local and integrated perspective for the SDGs. A holistic system approach is needed while still taking into account local contexts, which are more tangible. The nature of partnerships might therefore change from centralised and top-down towards local networks with similar aims and have several options for connecting and working together (Fig. 1) and finally contribute to the attainment of the SDGs.

Fig. 1. The interconnection of collaborative efforts allows different options for integration among them (Prescott & Stibbe, 2015)

Prescott & Stibbe (2015, p. 4) further argue, that not only the attainment of SDG 17, which has a target on multi-stakeholder partnership, but all of the SDGs “necessarily require the involvement of, and significant collaboration across, all societal sectors.” Despite the described change in the nature of partnerships, Biermann et al. (2007) already highlighted the necessity of multi-stakeholder partnerships for achieving the MDGs. A similar effort was made by a more recent work by Pattberg & Widerberg (2016), who identify nine criteria of success for multi-stakeholder partnerships: partners, leadership, goal setting,
funding, process management, monitoring, reporting, evaluation, meta-governance, context of and fit to the problem structure. Multi-stakeholder partnerships, defined as “institutionalized transboundary interactions between public and private actors, which aim at the provision of collective goods” (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016, p. 2), therefore seem to be relevant in the MDG and SDG era. As these nine criteria of success also concern the agencies as part of the partnerships, they could also be transferred to the context of inter-agency cooperation within the United Nations and their consistency with our results and UN efforts on inter-agency cooperation will be part of the discussion.

ANNEX II

List of the projects and networks, excluding centres and units of the interviewees, showing project duration, cooperating agencies and SDGs envisaged.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Agencies</th>
<th>SDGs</th>
<th>Link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Emergencies (JEU)</td>
<td>2012 - up to date</td>
<td>UNEP, OCHA</td>
<td>no specific SDGs</td>
<td>[<a href="https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/Documents/Environment%20in%20Hum%20Acti">https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/Documents/Environment%20in%20Hum%20Acti</a> on.pdf](<a href="https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/Documents/Environment%20in%20Hum%20Acti">https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/Documents/Environment%20in%20Hum%20Acti</a> on.pdf)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of the networks, centres and units of the interviewees, excluding the projects, showing main agency, cooperating agencies and SDGs envisaged.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Main Agency</th>
<th>Agencies convened</th>
<th>SDGs</th>
<th>Link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Planning and Inter-Agency Affairs Unit (SPIA)</td>
<td>UNODC</td>
<td>UNODC, UNDP, Peacebuilding Support Office, Executive Office of the SG, UN Habitat and UNICEF, etc.</td>
<td>no specific SDGs</td>
<td><a href="https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2017/August/unodc-continues-to-support-field-offices-in-sustainable-development-goals-implementation.html">https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2017/August/unodc-continues-to-support-field-offices-in-sustainable-development-goals-implementation.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN/UNODC Division for Management: Change Management and Business Transformation</td>
<td>UN-</td>
<td>UN-</td>
<td>no specific SDGs</td>
<td><a href="https://www.unov.org/unov/en/div_management.html">https://www.unov.org/unov/en/div_management.html</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANNEX III

Interview Guide

Name & Project:

Thank you for your time and participation, we appreciate this very much!

The main topic of this conversation will be the UN inter-agency cooperation in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the next 30 minutes we will mainly be talking about your current project, but if anything, else from other projects/experiences comes to your mind, please let us know (i.e. think of the best/worst cases). We remind you that the information provided will only be used for our research project and your name will be kept private.

General questions

1. Could you please summarise your range of tasks in this project in one or two sentences and your position within the agency?
2. Please mention the name of the UN agencies with which you mainly worked together in the aforementioned project and the level of the staff.

Partnerships and Cooperation

3. How was this inter-agency cooperation established?
4. If you think of the project, how was the cooperation/collaboration with other UN agencies?
5. What are the criteria and key indicators for success for partners’ selection considered within the programmes?
6. What are the specific constraints of your agency to an expanded delivery through inter-agency cooperation (in terms of planning processes, delineation of accountabilities for delivery, resource mobilisation etc.) and how would you expect from the inter-agency cooperation to overcome such constraints?
7. Were partners able and/or willing to provide their financial, HR contributions and/or in-kind contributions? And how important was this for the cooperation/collaboration?
8. Did the programmes generate new partnerships and if yes, with whom and why?
9. What have been the key challenges to ensure MS’s full participation and engagement in combating TIP and SOM (to be edited for individual projects)?

Shared goals

10. Were you told the common goals of the programme?
11. And also, the goals your agency was supposed to achieve through cooperation?

Communication

12. How was the communication between the agencies and employees/project managers? How and to what extent did you exchange data, knowledge and other resources?
13. How was the communication between Field/Regional Offices and the Programme management?
Assessment

14. Did you have any shared indicators/methods/evaluation system?
15. In your personal experience, what are the crucial factors to promote and keep up cooperation?
16. In the view of cooperation/collaboration, what could be improved in this project or in future projects?

Effectiveness

17. To what extent have the programmes achieved their objectives and expected results (outcomes and outputs)?
18. To what extent have the activities and outputs benefited from the expertise and cooperation with other relevant international/regional institutions and CSOs?

Behaviour after the implementation of the SDGs

19. The Sustainable Development Goals and its indicators represent a great toolbox for countries to address the global challenges, especially SDG 17 when it comes to partnership. To what extent do you agree with this statement, and what are the views (or of your agency) in this regard?
20. After the introduction of the SDGs. Presumably, there have been different degrees of effectiveness and success in working together. In your experience, what should be done to ensure constant improvements and consolidation within inter-agency cooperation/partnership?
21. Thanks to frequent contact, the effectiveness of inter-agency cooperation is much higher at the Headquarters level (Geneva, Vienna, Rome) than at the regional or national levels. What are the views of cooperating agencies in this regard? What could be done to enhance the effectiveness of the inter-agency cooperation at other levels?
22. Do you think cooperation between civil-society and UN agencies has improved after the implementation of the SDGs? Which past good practices would you highlight?
23. Fundraising is crucial for all the agencies, How do you assess the current state of inter-agency cooperation on resource mobilisation, and what concrete steps should be envisaged? How do you see the role of the SDGs in the competition among agencies for attracting funds from donors?
24. Finally, is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much again for your participation! It is very helpful for us.

ANNEX IV

Online Survey: Your collaboration experience

Dear participant,

We would like to invite you to participate in an online survey on the UN inter-agency cooperation in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To gain a valuable insight into your project, we would like to ask you to fill this questionnaire, which will not take more than 10 minutes. We remind you that the information provided will be only used for our research project. The results of our research will be published on the RAUN homepage (www.ra-un.org) in spring 2020.

Please feel also free to share this survey with your colleagues.
Thank you in advance.

Best regards,
Carolina Tataje, Marcel Seifert & Tobias Schnitzler

If you have any questions or concerns please contact us:
1. Please state the name of the project/program/agency/network you are currently employed? (open question)

Please answer the following questions according to your own experience in projects/programmes/etc. you have worked in or you are currently working in.

Dimension: Shared goals and resources

2. Common goals are formulated together with the partnering institutions?
3. When cooperating with other UN agencies, do you have separate funding for coordinating your collaboration’s activities?
4. You have access from your partners to the data you need.
5. By working together with other UN agencies, you manage to get the skills/expertise/specialisation to address the goals of the collaboration.
6. In your experience, does your organisation feel it worthwhile to stay and work within the collaboration?

Dimension: Shared authority and accountability

7. According to your experience, do all partners participate in the decision-making process?
8. Do you have shared indicators/methods/evaluation systems in place by which progress towards shared goals is measured?
9. The collaborations have a system to regularly assess the partner’s needs and resources.
10. Does the collaboration monitor and share its findings among the partners?
11. Do partners feel ownership in the results/products of their work?

Dimension: Communication, Adaptive Capacity and Effectiveness

12. How is the communication between the partners?
13. In your experience cooperating with other UN agencies, are you able to exchange different viewpoints to find alternative solutions?
14. Collaboration members trust one another.
15. Does your organisation achieve its own objectives and expected results (outcomes and outputs) better working with partner organisations than working alone?
16. From your personal view, please rate the importance of the following items for successfully working together

- Clear definition of the addressed issues
- A system to regularly assess partner’s needs
- Clear understanding of each partner’s the area of responsibility
- Monitoring and sharing of findings
- Feeling ownership of the own work
- Trust in other partners
- Own personal factors and motivations
- Other’s personal factors and motivations
- Being located close to the partner(s) (e.g. in the same UN-Headquarter)
- Formal communication with partner(s)
- Informal communication with partners(s)
17. In the light of your experience, which are the initiatives that bring successful results for inter-agency cooperation/collaboration/partnership? (open question with three text boxes to answer)
18. What are the specific constraints for your agency to an expanded delivery through inter-agency cooperation/collaboration? (open question with three text boxes to answer)
19. In the light of your experience, what should be done to ensure constant improvements and consolidation for inter-agency cooperation/collaboration/partnership? (open question)

Dimension: SDGs

20. If some of your projects have been started after 2015: have one or more of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals been included in the planning and realisation of the project? If yes, how? (open question)
21. In your personal opinion: do you think the implementation of the 17 SDGs did improve the extend of cooperation/collaboration/within different UN agencies?
22. After the introduction of the SDGs, presumably, there have been different degrees of effectiveness and success in working together. In your experience, what could the SDGs contribute to ensure constant improvements and consolidation within inter-agency cooperation/partnership? (open question)
23. Is there anything more you want to add or to tell us? Please feel free to add your comments (open question)

Thank you for your participation, it is very much appreciated! If you have any questions or concerns please contact us: Marcel Seifert, +43(0)664/7821087, marcel.seifert@hotmail.com or our supervisor Billy Batware, billy.batware@un.org, UNODC.

ANNEX V

The first dimension covered shared goals and resources. Regarding the formulation of common goals with the partnering institution, the average was 7.19 points. When cooperating with other agencies, Ø 5.50 points were answered that they have separate funding. Furthermore, Ø 6.00 points were outlined that they have access from partners to the data. Taking the management of skills/expertise/specialisation to address the goals of the collaboration into consideration, the responses were in Ø 6.13 points. In addition, Ø 7.13 points were answered that their organisation feels it worth to stay and work within the collaboration.

The second dimension covered shared authority and accountability. On Ø 6.35 points were reported that all partners participate in the decision-making process. Furthermore, Ø 6.88 points were given that the use of shared indicators/methods/evaluation systems by which progress towards shared goals is measured. Ø 4.94 points were answered that the collaborations have a system to regularly assess the partner’s needs and resources. Ø 6.71 points were responded that the collaboration monitor and share its findings among the partners. In addition, Ø 6.69 points were given that they feel ownership in the results/products of their work.

The third dimension covered communication, adaptive capacity and effectiveness. The participants rated the communication between partners with Ø 6.69 points. The ability to exchange different viewpoints to find alternative solutions was reported with Ø 7.69 points. Moreover, Ø 7.00 points were answered that collaboration members trust one another. It is also important to mention that Ø 7.00 points were stated that their organisation achieve its own objectives and expected results better working with partner organisations than working alone.
ANNEX VI

UN POLICY DOCUMENTS AND REFORMS

Along the interviews, participants mentioned that the UN needs a reform or be given a new framework when it comes to cooperating. Many said that the framework was outdated and that administrative procedures were a limitation given the differences within the agencies. Good practices were identified from the results of the QCPR Monitoring Survey (UN DESA, 2016), where it could be observed that UN joint funding mechanisms (e.g. One UN funds) and UN joint programming could lead to greater UN coherence and efficiency. With this, the unfavourable effects of competition could be resolved to a certain degree. Furthermore, UN literature (Dalberg 2017; SWSD, 2019; UNSDG, 2019a, 2019b) proves that the UN is trying to tackle the issue. The UNDS reform seeks to facilitate active collaboration and generating efficiencies across agencies and tackles the main constraints reported by UN staff in the survey: (1) not enough availability of staff due to funding, (2) competition, (3) different structural processes of agencies, (4) clear understanding of each partner’s area of responsibility and (5) a system to regularly assess partner’s needs. Taking inter-agency cooperation into consideration, the above-mentioned reports summarise that even though there is joint planning at country level, integration often does not take place. In addition, to improve this, the reinvigoration of the Role of the Resident Coordinator could help to have clear decisions on the ground and improve collaboration between agencies, both also supporting the delivery of better results for the countries. This change matches the work of Prescott & Stibbe (2015), who argue for a more local and integrated perspective for the SDGs and a holistic approach considering local contexts. The Dalberg report (2017) states that the coordination mechanisms on global, regional and country level are loose. Therefore, for achieving sustainable partnerships, joint planning rather than simply grouping independent activities is necessary. The interviewee’s call for a clear framework would also be answered with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which contributes to identify gaps in SDG coverage and possible improvements. While the interviewees reported that the interrelations of the SDGs could help to find synergies and serve as a tool for mapping their activities, Dalberg (2017) reported that despite the interrelation of the SDGs, the entities work mostly on their own. Changes in funding towards more predictable and less competitive (pooled) funding procedures, which was claimed to be one main constraint of cooperation in our survey, could beneficial for inter-agency cooperation. The indicated need for common analytical tools and frameworks is tackled with the Common Country Analysis (CCA), Management and Accountability Framework (MAF), System Wide Strategic Documents (SWSD), which support the implementation of the Agenda 2030. Even though the aforementioned documents pointed out the clear effort of the United Nations to improve its functioning in areas such as coordination, accountability and structural processes, on the ground the effects of these reforms are not yet experienced in accordance to the interviewees’ feedback. Depending on their level and their field of work, some had deep knowledge on this UN policy reform but others did not mention it. This lets us draw the conclusion that this reform is still being implemented and has not reached all levels. Moreover, it was also stated that mindsets will have to change, which will take some time.