



**The benefits of the United Nations
development system reform:
an agency-specific analysis**

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the benefits of the United Nations development system (UNDS) reform from the perspective of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). By utilizing a mixed-methods approach consisting of document analysis and survey data analysis, it attempts to answer crucial questions regarding the reform outcomes. First, an analysis of 20 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) examines whether the changes introduced by the reform are reflected in the way that program countries accommodate underfinanced and under-implemented Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their sustainable development objectives. Second, through the quantitative and qualitative analysis of data from an online survey of UNIDO personnel, including those from field offices, this paper uncovers how the UNDS reform is perceived across the ranks of UNIDO. In doing so, it contributes to an estimation of the benefits of the UNDS reform beyond financial efficiency gains for UNDS member entities in general.

This research uses as a guide three selected categories of potential benefits, namely the advancement of underfunded SDGs, closer inter-agency cooperation and efficiencies. Results from the UNIDO-internal survey show that, at this early stage of UNDS reform implementation, the intangible and organizational aspects of the UNDS reform are mostly seen in a positive light at UNIDO. However, the majority of respondents do not seem to see clear efficiency gains or deem an assessment premature at this point in time. Moreover, the analysis of the UNSDCFs has revealed major gaps in the representation of SDGs. Overall, the results suggest modest benefits of the reform.

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The benefits of the United Nations development system reform: an agency-specific analysis

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I. Introduction

The most recent reform of the United Nations development system (UNDS), which was mandated in 2018 in resolution A/RES/72/279, aims to deliver effective support to countries for sustainable, equitable and accountable development under national ownership and leadership.¹ In doing so, the UNDS reform plays a key role for the United Nations development system in accelerating and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda. At the time of writing², the reform is still under implementation and remains to be fully realized, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is putting its feasibility to the test.

Given the far-reaching nature of the reform, it involves and affects all member entities of the UNDS, including the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). UNIDO has consistently seen the UNDS reform as a positive, welcome step in addressing the inclusive and sustainable industrial development (ISID) mandate and improving its impact on-ground as well as in bettering cooperation.

While the main benefit of the reform should be higher impact of UN interventions on the ground, it is not clear whether or to which degree individual UN entities can benefit from the reform endeavour for the implementation of their respective mandates. As such, this paper will analyze and assess how the UNDS reform can benefit specialized agencies such as UNIDO. The qualitative analysis will provide an insight into potential efficiency gains provided by the reform, along with highlighting certain shortcomings and challenges.

II. Background

A. The United Nations development system reform

As the biggest multilateral development actor in the world, the UNDS is responsible for assisting governments in advancing sustainable development through a range of functions, including technical assistance and humanitarian aid.³ Since the establishment of the United Nations, the UNDS has grown in size and complexity, based on a governance and funding model that is viewed by some to have scope for improvements in terms of impartial, coherent, longer-term oriented, well-integrated and effective results.⁴

¹ General Assembly, 2018

² December 2021

³ Baumann and Weinlich, 2018

⁴ Baumann und Weinlich, 2018; Browne, 2017

In 2015, the newly adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other landmark agreements like the Paris Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda raised the ambitions of the international community and thus also necessitated a revitalized UNDS. The scope of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was expanded to cover the three dimensions of sustainable development, as part of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are universal, interlinked and interdependent.⁵

The resolution on the 2016 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR) emphasized the importance of strengthening the coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of the UNDS.⁶ In June 2017, the Secretary-General presented the key findings of a review of the existing functions and capacities of the UNDS, including that “funding and staff remain highly concentrated in programmes that address a limited number of the Goals, with approximately 50 per cent of funding allocated to three Goals (Goals 2, 3 and 16)”⁷. In a follow-up report, he published a set of recommendations for a development system that is “more strategic, accountable, transparent, collaborative, efficient, effective and results-oriented”⁸. Following a series of negotiations, the UNDS reform was mandated by the General Assembly on 31 May 2018.

The UNDS reform consists of seven major, system-wide changes, which have implications for the work of all active members of the UNDS at the headquarters, regional and country levels. At the headquarters, the reconfiguration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) and the new Funding Compact provide better oversight over the implementation of the reform on the ground.⁹ At the regional level, multi-country offices further the more efficient and effective use of assets.¹⁰ And finally, at the country level, the new generation of UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and the impartial UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) system will improve collaboration and cooperation.¹¹ There are also 13 expected reform benefits from the UN Secretariat’s perspective, including those anticipated from the management reform as well as peace and security reform, ranging from accountability to simplification.¹² However, since parts of the reform are still being implemented, some experts argue that it is too soon to be able to assess actual payoffs.

Existing reports and analyses focus on different reform aspects. For instance, several reports by the Development Cooperation Office contain a review of the functioning of the Resident Coordinator system, the core aspect of the UNDS reform. Current UN assessments and related literature, however, have not delved into agency-specific analyses nor discussed the perceptions and constructive feedback from UNDS staff affected by or contributing to the reform. As the

⁵ Connolly and Roesch, 2020, p. 3

⁶ General Assembly, 2017, p. 4

⁷ General Assembly and Economic and Social Council, 2017a, p. 12

⁸ General Assembly and Economic and Social Council, 2017b, p. 6

⁹ Connolly and Roesch, 2020, p. 4

¹⁰ Connolly and Roesch, 2020, p. 4

¹¹ Connolly and Roesch, 2020, p. 4

¹² UN, 2021

reform includes major changes, including the creation of common back-offices and the relocation of different UNDS agency field offices to common premises, and as many of these initiatives are at an early stage, the actual benefits from these changes remain to be analyzed. For instance, common back-offices and the usage of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-led internal services are currently being rolled out as a result of the UNDS reform. However, a closer examination could potentially indicate that individual UNDS agencies are already operating on optimum efficiency through their independent networks and services. Progress towards common premises, for example, is also delayed and it is not certain whether the savings projected earlier could be achieved.

At this stage of the reform, it remains unclear whether or to which degree individual UN entities, and particularly smaller ones like UNIDO, can benefit from the reform in terms of efficiencies, cost avoidance, time-savings, as well as effectiveness, better cooperation and better quality of interventions. In lieu of concrete data on quantitative benefits and efficiencies, which may be difficult to obtain, a survey could provide some insights into perceived benefits and progress.

B. Potential benefits of the UNDS reform for UNIDO

UNIDO is the specialized agency of the United Nations mandated to advance inclusive and sustainable industrial development, thus aiming to improve industrial development in an inclusive and environmentally sustainable manner in the Global South. For UNIDO, three categories of potential benefits have been selected for this study that are of highest relevance from the development system reform perspective:

(a) The first key benefit category is **the advancement of Sustainable Development Goals** that were identified as “lagging behind” in the 2017 Dalberg report on the functions and capacities of the UNDS, particularly of the environmental and economic dimensions. As the only UN entity responsible for promoting inclusive and sustainable industrial development, this is of relevance to UNIDO. As part of the reform, the new generation of UNCTs – that are guided by United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) – are meant to provide better coverage for the SDGs that were previously seen as under-funded and under-implemented in the early days after the transition to the 2030 Agenda. Working closely with the UNCTs to further the SDGs related to industry and infrastructure (Goal 9) as well as water and sanitation (Goal 6), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12) and environmental protection (Goals 13, 14 and 15) should allow UNIDO to implement its mandate more effectively.

(b) A second benefit category is **closer inter-agency cooperation**, which relates to the new generation of UNCTs led by independent, impartial UN Resident Coordinators (UNRCs) as well as the upgraded Development Coordination Office. More specifically, the UNDS reform allows the UNCT entities to provide more integrated policy advice to Member States by enabling a coherent and coordinated dialogue between government, development partners and other stakeholders through the UNRC. For UNIDO, the reform could be a chance to leverage resources

and technical expertise on industrial development more effectively through closer cooperation with other development partners, and thus achieve higher impact of interventions. Among other things, the new Development Coordination Office also facilitates inter-agency cooperation in relation to joint programming for the SDGs. The effectiveness of such cooperation, however, may also be influenced by a wide range of factors, including the most urgent needs of a country as per definition in the UNSDCF.

(c) Efficiencies are among the most important benefits expected of the UNDS reform and should be quantifiable in cost- and time-savings. As such, the so-called “Efficiency Agenda” mainly relates to enhanced business operations strategies, common premises, common back-office or locally shared service centres, and location-independent global shared service centres. Moreover, the new system-wide, cross-agency evaluation regime ensures that all stakeholders have information on how efficiently the UNDS is using resources. Given that some UNDS entities with limited field presence, such as UNIDO, are constantly pursuing cost-savings and efficiencies, *inter alia* through their own centralized back-office services, there might be a mismatch between expectations and perceptions regarding this point.

Since it is not possible within the scope of this paper to analyze all UNDS reform benefits, this research uses as a guide the three selected categories of potential benefits as described above, all the while ensuring that the research remains relevant to UNIDO.

III. Research design

A. Research questions and motivation

This paper aims to find evidence of the benefits of the UNDS reform in general, and, in particular, for specialized agencies such as UNIDO. More specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions, which take into account the reform’s relevance to UNIDO, as well as to other UNDS entities:

1. What are the benefits of the UNDS reform as perceived by UNIDO personnel in the field?
2. What conditions are conducive to being able to reap the benefits of the reform?

The findings of this paper will help draw out perceived key benefits of the UNDS reform as well as its shortcomings. Being able to present concrete examples of the benefits perceived or anticipated from the reform may also help the organization respond to queries from its Member States in this regard.¹³ It will also contribute to UNIDO’s efforts in monitoring field office engagement with UNRCs and UNCTs. Moreover, the research will take into consideration the regional differences and dimensions to enable an understanding of the UNDS reform in local contexts, particularly in areas of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean,

¹³ UNIDO, 2021, p. 3

where inclusive and sustainable industrialization plays a key role in the achievement of the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

B. Data and methodology

To tackle the research questions, our study utilizes two different empirical social research methods, allowing us to classify it as mixed-methods research. It involves reviewing a selection of UNSDCFs signed by UNIDO in 2020 and conducting a survey addressed to UNIDO personnel in the field. First, we analyzed 20¹⁴ Cooperation Frameworks signed by UNIDO in 2020 for the mention of the SDGs that the Dalberg report highlighted as under-funded and / or under-implemented.¹⁵

Second, an online survey was sent to UNIDO personnel in the field in order to gather qualitative and quantitative data on the perceptions of the UNDS reform. The survey measured attitudes towards and satisfaction with the UNDS reform and perceived efficiency gains with several questions. It included statements that had to be rated on a 1-5 Likert scale as well as a set of open-ended questions where respondents could give a more detailed introduction to their opinions regarding the effect of the reform on their work at UNIDO. Finally, the survey contained some questions about the respondents' roles and experience.

Importantly, the data collected for this paper have been analyzed in the context of existing official data and documents on the UNDS reform. As such, this research utilizes an approach that triangulates data and information that has been collated through a mixed-methods approach involving both qualitative and quantitative data.

IV. Results

A. Analysis of 20 UNSDCFs

In 2017, the Dalberg report identified gaps in the coverage of SDGs related to water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12) as well as environmental protection (SDGs 13-15) mainly due to low levels of expenditure.¹⁶ From the perspective of UNIDO, the advancement of these under-implemented SDGs is one of the key benefit categories arising from the UNDS reform. Any progress towards the advancement of these SDGs is reflected in the extent to which they are represented in the UNSDCFs (formerly United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, UNDAFs), which are the UNCT's most important instrument for planning and implementation. The review of 20 UNSDCFs signed by UNIDO in 2020 for keywords related to the abovementioned SDGs, as well as for ISID and UNIDO, reveals a prioritization of different SDGs depending on the economic and financial situation in-country.

¹⁴ The 20 UNSDCFs signed by UNIDO in 2020 available for analysis included: Angola, Argentina, Bahrain, China, Colombia, Cuba, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Georgia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, North Macedonia, Paraguay, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uruguay and Uzbekistan.

¹⁵ Dalberg, 2017, p. 23

¹⁶ Dalberg, 2017, p. 23

Industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) is mentioned in 17 of 20 reviewed UNSDCFs and is a national development priority for countries that focus primarily on job creation, infrastructure, industrialization and economic transformation. This is predominantly the case in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. Countries such as Ethiopia and Kazakhstan put particular emphasis on industrial and infrastructural development. While some progress has been made towards advancing SDG 9 in these countries, several UNSDCFs note that there is room for improvement in terms of resource efficiency and resilient, climate-proofed infrastructure. Paraguay, Tunisia and Uzbekistan, on the other hand, make only limited reference to industry and infrastructure. In countries like Angola and Uruguay, SDG 9 is mainly related to the agricultural sector and agro-industry. Most UNSDCFs do not mention ISID directly, the mandate is however reflected by goals such as the promotion of industrial development (Eswatini) or the commitment to sustained income growth (Timor-Leste). The inclusivity aspect of ISID is only referenced directly in the UNSDCFs of Bahrain, Indonesia and Paraguay.

Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) is part of a national development priority in 18 of 20 UNSDCFs, with progress made towards providing equitable access to basic services in most countries. Similarly, there is a focus on raising energy efficiency and expanding renewable energy sources in an effort to further SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) in countries like Angola, China and Cuba. However, not all countries have addressed the affordability of energy access, and two countries seem to be investing into the petroleum industry, which casts doubts on whether they will manage to increase the sustainability of their energy sector.

Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) is mentioned mainly in relation to the sustainable exploitation of resources, food production and the environment. Colombia highlights the acceleration of this SDG as a main challenge and has enlisted the help of the UNCT in regard to capacity-building. In the case of several countries, the sustainability of consumption and production is planned to be reached mostly through more efficient energy use, with limited focus on implementing renewable energy production.

Given the increasing impact of climate change, environmental protection (SDGs 13–15) is mentioned in all 20 UNSDCFs, with most countries making environmental sustainability, the green economy and climate actions a strategic priority.

B. Analysis of UNIDO survey

In order to provide further insights into the benefits of the UNDS reform, a UNIDO-internal survey was conducted from September to October 2021. In total, the survey received 159 responses from a wide range of positions, including country representatives, directors and national officers, as well as experts and technical consultants, across UNIDO's country offices, project offices, regional hubs, and regional offices.¹⁷ Reflecting the overall composition of the UNIDO workforce,

¹⁷ This included non-staff personnel in the field, such as technical experts and project consultants, who were not expected to have a high level of awareness of the UNDS reform, but whose feedback was also reviewed.

the majority of respondents were consultants, technical experts and other non-permanent personnel. Over a quarter of respondents responded to have worked at UNIDO for 3-5 years, another quarter for less than one year. The composition of survey respondents is mirrored in the responses to a question on the level of awareness of the UNDS reform, where only 27% of the total sample were well aware or fully aware, comparable to the number of respondents indicating that they are member of a UNCT (26%).

The survey has thus been filtered according to three criteria: (1) full sample (all respondents), (2) higher awareness, (3) staff with representative function. Focusing on respondents that indicated higher awareness of the UNDS reform, 67 in total, the sample seems to comprise a low number of non-permanent technical personnel and a higher number of UNIDO field representatives and other permanent staff. Awareness of the UNDS reform is also increasing with years spent at UNIDO. The third sample group (representation function), 75 in total, takes a closer look at staff members that indicated to have a function representing UNIDO in the field and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, including those who are also involved in the formulation and implementation of projects.

Access to governmental partners, resource mobilization and joint projects

The bell-shaped curve of responses on the Likert-scale (1 to 5) to many of the questions, with the majority of respondents opting for the neutral value (3), reflects a neutral stance of respondents on many aspects of the UNDS reform or that it may be premature to make firm judgments at this point. This pattern is similar for all sample groups.

For instance, most respondents take a neutral stance towards the reform's effect on access to governmental counterparts and donors, with over half of respondents selecting the neutral value (3). The high awareness group sees this aspect more positively, with 24% of 55 respondents to this question saying that access has improved and 4% that it has much improved. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of respondents in both groups remain neutral regarding the reform's effect on resource mobilization, with 67% of the higher awareness group selecting the neutral value (3). Also, when it comes to the quality and effectiveness of projects and implementations as well as operational activities on the ground, most respondents in the full sample take a neutral stance.

Efficiency

While the majority of high-awareness respondents remain neutral about cost-savings for UNIDO in their area of work, the responses in all sample groups suggest that the UNDS reform could not deliver on the high expectations of cost-effectiveness to date. Only 2% (1 respondent out of 45 respondents to this question) have reported a high decrease in costs, while 27% of respondents suggest that the reform has led to decreased cost-savings or increased costs. When asked about time-savings and time-efficiencies, none of the 47 respondents perceived a high level of time-savings and 17% some time-savings, with 47% taking a neutral stance, and 36% even perceiving some form of slight time-increases in their area of work.

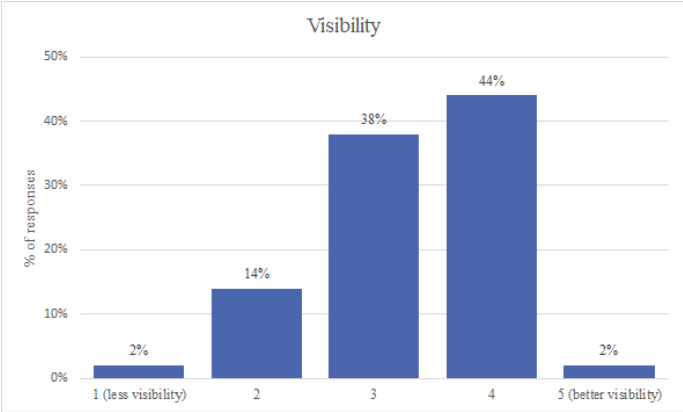
In a separate question, more than half of the representational staff respondents (25 out of 48) confirm that they have been approached in the course of the past 24-36 months to contribute to a

local cost-sharing arrangement for the UNCT and activities of the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO).

Visibility of UNIDO

A positive trend has been noted with regard to the perceived visibility of UNIDO in partner countries. The relative majority of respondents (46% of 50 respondents in the sample group with representative functions) feel that the UNDS reform has had a positive impact on the visibility of UNIDO or its mandate, including through interventions by the RC and the RC office. (see Figure I). When asked to comment on their responses, one participant indicated that the UNCT platform is providing a wider audience and that there are more opportunities to discuss UNIDO’s mandate with the RC. While some respondents feel that it is too early to tell whether UNIDO has achieved greater visibility, particularly the respondents in the full survey sample, those who indicated no change or lower visibility suggest that this is due to UNIDO’s limited presence in-country, a lack of resources (both financial and human), or the need for more guidance for project staff. Other written suggestions indicate that it should be the RC’s responsibility to prioritize smaller UN agencies in speeches and reports, and that UNIDO could achieve more visibility by acting as a united front.

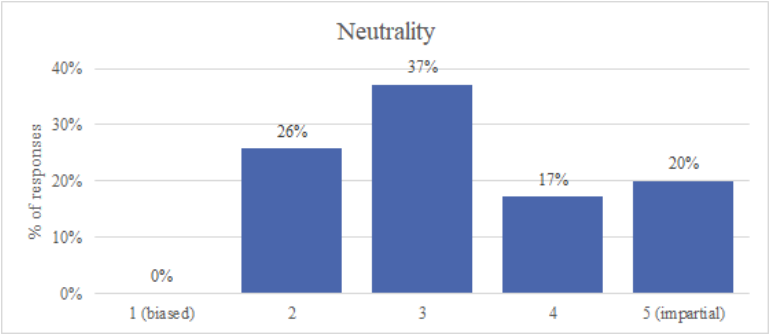
Figure I
Perceived effect of UNDS reform on visibility of UNIDO
 (50 responses; sample group with awareness of the UNDS reform >3)



Impartiality of UNRCs

The second section of the dynamic questionnaire surveyed staff with representational functions about changes introduced by the new UNRC system. Within the repositioned UNRC system, the RC plays an important role in maximizing the benefits of the UNDS reform. There are mixed responses when asked whether the UNRC, as representative of the entire UNDS, is impartial vis-à-vis her / his entity of origin. Therefore, there remains scope for the UNRCs to display greater impartiality and neutrality whilst engaging with partners such as UNIDO, even though the majority of respondents perceive them to be at least somewhat impartial (37%) or neutral (37%). (see Figure II).

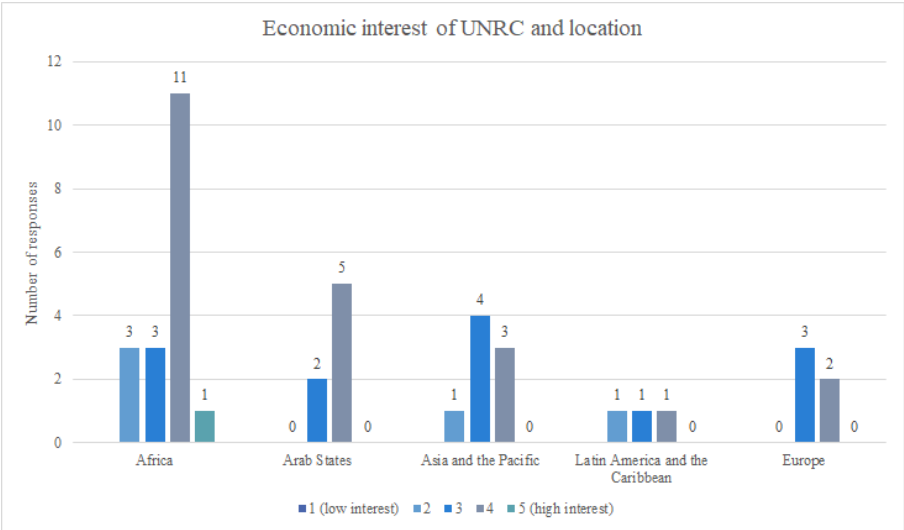
Figure II
Level of UNRC's neutrality
 (35 responses; sample of staff with representational functions)



Level of interest of UNRCs in the economic dimension

The absolute majority among representational staff reports that the UNRCs have an interest (54% of 41 respondents) or high interest (2%) in the economic dimension of the 2030 Agenda, which also coincides with UNIDO’s mandate. With the exception of respondents located in Europe and Asia and the Pacific, positive perceptions of the UNRC’s interest dominate. (see Figure III). Respondents located in lower middle income, low income and upper middle income countries were more likely to report a perceived interest in the economic agenda by the UNRC than those in high-income countries.

Figure III
Perceived economic interest of UNRC relative to location
 (41 responses; sample of staff with representational functions)



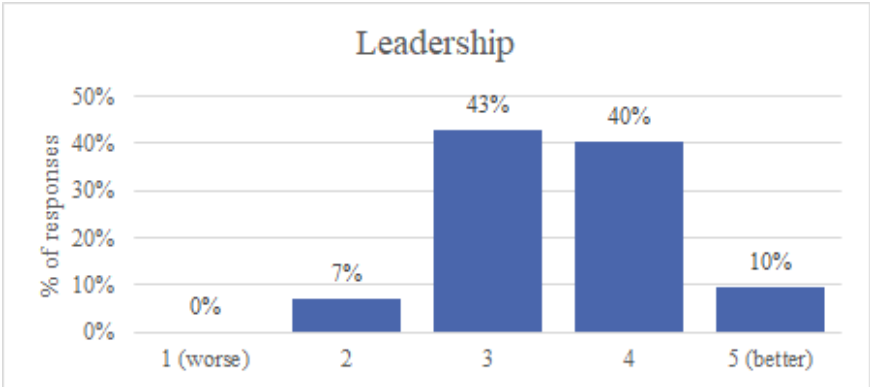
In general, the perceived level of interest of the UNRC in the ISID mandate and UNIDO’s activities is slightly positive, with 39% reporting that they perceive a moderate interest. Nonetheless, 27% perceive low or very low interest in the mandate, and no respondent thinks that

the interest in the ISID mandate is very high, signalling the need for further promotion of UNIDO’s mandate and services to the UNRCs.

Leadership and crisis management of the UNRC

Rating the leadership of UNRCs, 43% of representational staff suggest that there was no significant impact of the UNDS reform on the leadership of the UNRC and coordination among UNCT members; however, another 50% of the respondents perceive a positive trend in this area. (see Figure IV). Consequently, it can be said that the UNDS reform may have improved the leadership role of the UNRC. Similarly, the perception on crisis management, preparedness and response of the UNRCs is rather positive. In particular, 56% of 43 respondents evaluated the crisis preparedness, management and response of the UNRC / UNCT as high or very high.

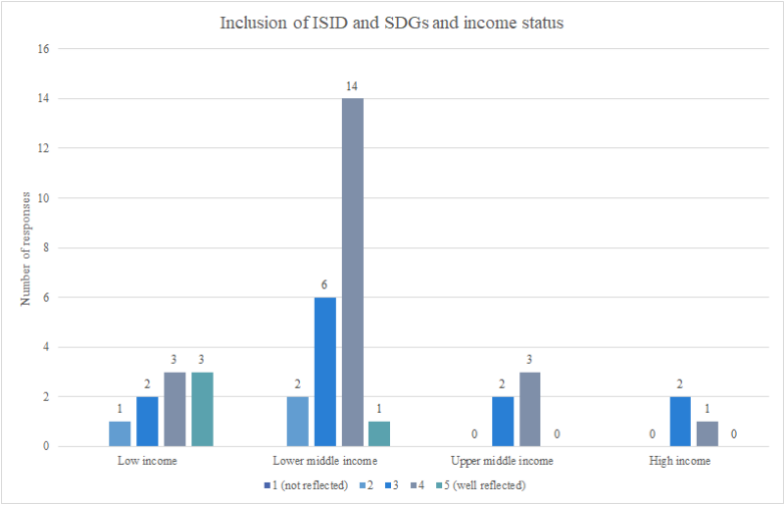
Figure IV
Perceived changes in leadership of UNRC
 (42 responses; sample of staff with representational functions)



The CCA preparation and UNSDCF drafting process

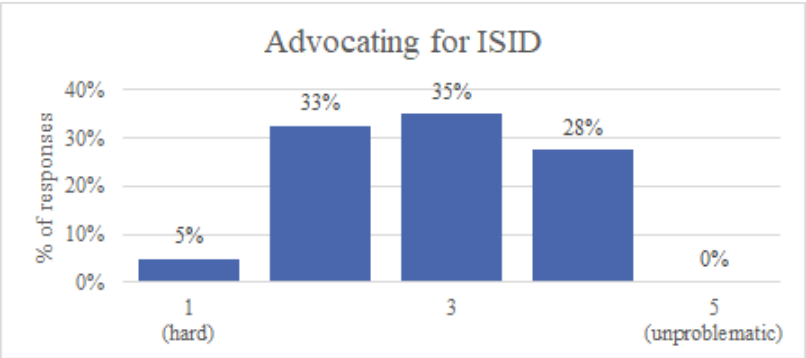
The majority of representational staff confirms that the preparation of Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and the UNSDCF drafting process have improved from the previous UNDAFs. 67% of the respondents note this positive trend. The respondents also perceive that UNIDO’s ISID mandate and the SDGs that were considered “left behind” are sufficiently represented and reflected in the CCAs and UNSDCFs. This perception is shared across all regions. Data also suggest that there may be better recognition of the ISID mandate in the CCAs and UNSDCFs of low income and lower middle income countries compared to high income countries. (see Figure V).

Figure V
Inclusion of ISID in CCAs and UNSDCFs relative to income status
 (40 responses; sample of staff with representational functions)



While the level of inclusion of the ISID mandate and the under-funded SDGs in the CCAs and UNSDCFs is generally perceived as rather positive, and irrespective of the quality of the preparation process, representational staff also confirmed to have had difficulties in advocating for the inclusion of ISID. (see Figure VI). No respondents across any of the regions describe the process as unproblematic, while 35% of 40 respondents took a neutral stance and 38% found it somewhat hard or hard. The main obstacles noted by representatives are interagency competition and stronger UN Partners, UNIDO’s own capacities and / or support from within, and knowledge of the UNRC and UNCT about UNIDO. The lack of knowledge of the UNRCs and UNCTs about UNIDO’s service offer may be an avenue for UNIDO to ensure the effective inclusion and understanding of the ISID mandate by other UN partners.

Figure VI
Advocating for ISID in CCAs and UNSDCFs
 (40 responses; sample of staff with representational functions)



V. Discussion

This paper has investigated the benefits and shortcomings of the UNDS reform from an agency-specific perspective by analyzing UNSDCF's and by gathering perceptions of a selected group of UNIDO personnel. The findings indicate that the UNDS reform may not yet fulfil the high expectations with regard to tangible material benefits such as efficiency gains and cost- and time-savings. Given the early stage of implementation, it may be premature to make sound judgments on the efficiency side of the reform.

Nevertheless, this research has also found evidence of the positive effects of the UNDS reform with regard to the role of UNRCs, closer inter-agency cooperation and the advancement of under-funded SDGs. In particular among respondents with higher awareness of the reform or those with representative functions, the prevailing view of the revitalized UN Resident Coordinator system is positive. The relative majority of survey respondents has expressed optimistic views regarding the UNRCs' leadership and crisis preparedness, the effect on UNIDO's visibility, the perceived inclusion of the ISID mandate (and the under-funded SDGs) and the formulation of projects. Further research on a broader scale is needed to investigate the best conditions for an ideal implementation of the UNDS reform; however, based on the agency-specific analysis, it seems that the levels of impartiality and interest of the UNRC in the agency's mandate, interagency competition and the capacities and support from within are important factors to being able to reap the intangible benefits mentioned above.

Finally, it is important to note that notwithstanding the more positive stance of survey respondents in many questions, very few have indicated maximum satisfaction with the reform's effects (score 5 on the 1-5 scales). In many cases, not a single respondent expressed such sentiments, which indicates that there is room for further improvement. Second, as the relative majority of respondents, including those at least somewhat familiar with the UNDS reform, have remained neutral in most questions (score 3 on the 1-5 scales), we can conclude that the reform's effects have not yet been felt widely across the UNIDO respondents.

VI. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to analyze the benefits of the UNDS reform from an agency-specific perspective. The analysis of the 20 UNSDCF's as well as the UNIDO-internal survey suggest that there is progress but still some scope for improvement in the implementation of the UNDS reform. For UNIDO, inclusion and advocacy of the ISID mandate remain significant challenges in the inter-agency work across all regions, and the efficiencies to be gained in financial and logistical aspects can be further improved.

Future work could include semi-structured interviews with selected UNIDO representatives in the field based on the responses to the open-ended questions of the survey in order to infer further benefits, as well as to elaborate on key areas based on the survey findings.

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Appendix

I. UNSDCF country table

	Industry and infrastructure (SDG 9)	Inclusive and sustainable industrial development (ISID)	Water and sanitation (SDG 6)	Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7)	Sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12)	Environmental protection (SDGs 13-15)
Angola	mentioned in relation to the agricultural sector, i.e., “agroindustry”; development of infrastructure to support livestock farming	no direct mention	important but insufficient progress made; part of outcome 1 (decentralised and integrated systems of productive and social services)	energy only briefly mentioned in relation to efficiency in the energy sector and use of renewable energy	mentioned in relation to production of non-timber related products, sustainable exploitation of forests and fish resources; direct mention of “inclusive and sustainable production” in outcome 3 (environment and resilience of the vulnerable population > UNIDO is investing 500,000.00 USD)	SDG 15 mentioned explicitly in relation to National Programme for Climate Change; capacity-building as a priority; environmental sustainability still a challenge; environmental education part of outcome 3
Argentina	SDG 9 mentioned specifically as part of strategic priority in economic dimension; creation of jobs and businesses UNIDO is contributing 4,800,000 to direct effect 1	no direct mention	lack of access to water, sanitation and energy seen as hindrance to economic activities; support and capacity building; provide assistance for producing data on access to infrastructure	mentioned as an expected change in the dimension of environmental sustainability and as a strategic line of cooperation	mentioned as an expected change and main challenge in the dimension of environmental sustainability; mentioned as a priority issue; promotion as a means to achieving sustainable	mentioned directly; green economy mentioned as strategic priority; part of the Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development (EIDS) UNIDO is contributing 6,000,000 to

	in economic dimension infrastructure mentioned in relation to access to basic and social services		and basic services		development; part of a strategic priority	direct effect 7 in environmental sustainability dimension
Bahrain	mentioned under Outcome 3 to enhance policies and regulatory frameworks, strengthen conditions for economic diversification, employment creation, rule of law, and increase resilience and innovation	mentioned briefly under mandate of UNIDO	remains key priority area for Government Programme under priorities 2 & 3 Focus on increasing water table, tackling desertification and increasing efficiency of water usage	focus on renewable, clean energy under Priority 3: Enhance the efficient use of resources and energy	considered as key part of developmental framework programme under Priorities 2 & 3 Focus on National programme to raise awareness about and promote Sustainable Consumption and Production through the development and implementation of an SCP national action plan. (SCP-NAP)	mentioned under most key priority areas of Government Programme SDG 13 mentioned as key challenger SDG
China	strong progress due to government investments in infrastructure; pursuit of innovation-based approach; room for improvement in terms of resource	no direct mention UNIDO has capacities in relation to outcomes 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6	strong progress; work is being done towards safe drinking water proportion of government spending on water as indicator of outcome 3 (healthier and	has achieved universal electrification; now focus on share of renewables (indicator of outcome 4) and increasing energy efficiency	government efforts to boost responsible consumption part of strategic priority (achieving green development) /outcome 3	mentioned in relation to climate actions and biodiversity conservation outcome 3 (healthier and more resilient environment)

	<p>efficiency and greater adoption</p> <p>part of outcome 1 > promoting integrated development of industries in rural areas</p> <p>goal: accelerated upgrading of traditional industries</p> <p>mentioned in relation to improving employment rates</p> <p>proportion of small-scale and medium and high-tech industry as indicators for outcome 1</p>		<p>more resilient environment)</p> <p>focus on strengthening sanitation measures in China's food value chain; increased access to safely managed sanitation at home and in public facilities</p>			<p>outcome 4 (greening of industry)</p>
Colombia	<p>goal to accelerate SDG 9</p> <p>UNCT needs to contribute to government's efforts to substitute illicit crops for industrial activities</p> <p>support for rural infrastructure</p>	<p>no specific mention</p> <p>UNIDO is involved in the implementation of all outcomes</p>	<p>the most significant progress was made towards this SDG according to review from 2018 as a result of investment in infrastructure</p> <p>support for water and sanitation structures; increase in quality, supply and responsible use of water</p>	<p>good progress towards this goal according to 2018 report (97.2% of homes have access to electricity)</p>	<p>acceleration of this SDG mentioned as a main challenge; government has requested support from the UN in this regard (UNCT is supporting efforts)</p> <p>one of three strategic areas prioritised by government and UN (technical assistance for the</p>	<p>part of the expected development results > Colombia will be environmentally sustainable</p> <p>focus on management of environmental liabilities</p>

			resources and basic sanitation		acceleration of SDGs related to ... sustainable production and consumption) > government institutions with capacities in that area as one of the outcomes	
Cuba	<p>shift from traditional primary industries towards services</p> <p>mentioned in relation to national development priority 2 (productive transformation) > improve efficiency in production process to satisfy demands for industry based on rational use of natural resources and ecosystems</p> <p>focus on promotion of local infrastructure; development of circular economy, use of clean technologies</p> <p>infrastructure as one of six strategic axes</p>	<p>no specific mention</p> <p>UNIDO is involved in most proposed solutions to challenges identified</p>	<p>focus on sustainable water and soil management</p> <p>mentioned in relation to national development priority 4 (human development, equity and social justice) > access to basic services</p>	<p>focus on expanding renewable sources of energy and raising energy efficiency</p> <p>change in the energy matrix > use fewer fossil fuels and switch to ecologically sustainable technologies</p>	<p>focus on strengthening the internal and external production chains with emphasis on food production as part of a strategic priority area</p> <p>promotion of sustainable consumption mentioned in relation of individual health</p>	<p>some progress made towards SDGs 13, 14 and 15 according to 2019 report</p> <p>integrated into Natural Resources and Environment axis > use of natural resources, preventing pollution, etc.</p>

	for sustainable development; investment in (resilient) infrastructure as a priority					
Eswatini	<p>mentioned in relation to priority area 1 (prosperity) > small and medium sized enterprise creation, job creation, etc.</p> <p>expected result of priority area 1: industrialisation > critical for economic transformation goal; focus on promotion of industrial development</p> <p>economic recovery and growth as well as a dynamic private sector are among highest development priorities</p> <p>climate proofed infrastructure as part of priority area 3 (planet)</p>	no direct mention	<p>national priority, but little improvement</p> <p>part of priority area 3 (planet) > water management; impacted by climate change</p> <p>discrepancies between coverage and access to sanitation services; increasing access to clean water as part of intended development results</p> <p>focal area of UN support - providing equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all citizens</p>	<p>national priority</p> <p>access to electricity as part of intended development results</p> <p>UN support to improve access to renewable sources of energy</p> <p>mentioned as part of priority area 3 (planet) > improve capacity of institutions to improve access to and use of clean, reliable and affordable energy for all</p> <p>focal area of UN support</p> <p>Rural electricity programme has increased access to clean energy somewhat (from 69% in 2014 to 78% in 2018)</p>	no direct mention	<p>SDG 13 is a national priority</p> <p>part of priority 3 (planet) > transition to environmental sustainability</p>
Ethiopia	mentioned as one of the core goals of Africa Agenda 2063	no direct mention	mentioned as one of the biggest gaps	mentioned under strategic priority 4.	mentioned under strategic priority 4.	mentioned under strategic priority 4.

	<p>and national Ten-Year Perspective Development Plan.</p> <p>areas for focus include logistics (9.1), industrialization (9.2) and the sustainability of industry (9.4).</p>		<p>focal point under strategic priority 1.</p> <p>Third key objective of the Ten-Year Perspective Development Plan - Ethiopia 2030: The Pathways to Prosperity - 3. Unconditional access to the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, clean water, basic health and education.</p>	<p>baseline performance on energy access (7.1) and efficient energy use (7.3) is weak.</p>	<p>Focus is required on the sustainability of tourism programmes (12.b)</p>	<p>Ethiopia has made good progress towards SDGs 13-15, however, progress towards improving education and awareness (SDG 13.3) is required.</p>
Georgia	<p>mentioned under Cooperation Framework Outcome 3.1 - Improved competitiveness and social responsibility of the private sector.</p>	<p>no direct mention.</p>	<p>mentioned under Cooperation Framework Outcome 5.1 and 5.2.</p> <p>UN's Special focus on climate-induced risk management, sustainable management of water resources in transboundary river basins and facilitate implementation of regional agreements on water resources and/or emergency management in South Caucasus countries.</p>	<p>mentioned under Cooperation Framework Outcome 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3</p>	<p>no direct mention</p>	<p>All mentioned in Cooperation Framework Outcome 5.</p> <p>Special focus on Climate Action through renewable energy and climate partnerships to avoid adverse effects of climate change.</p>

<p>Guatemala</p>	<p>mentioned as one of the stuck goals in Guatemala, under strategic priority 2.</p> <p>mentioned as one of the negatively affected SDGs by the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>	<p>no direct mention</p>	<p>mentioned as a high-risk SDG due to Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Guatemala is moderately improving conditions for implementation of SDG 6.</p>	<p>mentioned as stuck SDG in Guatemala.</p> <p>As Guatemala is a net importer of energy, the effect of lower oil prices has not translated into an effect adverse.</p> <p>mentioned under strategic priority 5.</p>	<p>no direct mention.</p>	<p>mentioned.</p>
<p>Indonesia</p>	<p>mentioned under Strategic Priority 2: Economic Transformation, and Outcome 2: Institutions and people contribute more effectively to advance a higher value added and inclusive economic transformation.</p> <p>Focus on National counterparts that have enhanced technical capacities to formulate and implement future strategies (Industry 4.0, circular</p>	<p>no direct mention</p>	<p>mentioned under Strategic Priority 1 - Inclusive Human Development</p> <p>Access to water and sanitation (SDG 6) right across the country has been improving although challenges such as open defecation remain.</p>	<p>mentioned under Strategic Priority 3: Climate and Disaster Resilience.</p> <p>focus on need to increase renewable energy utilisation as an important contribution to reduce CO2 emissions</p>	<p>briefly mentioned as unsustainable production and consumption patterns (SDG 12) continue to be perpetuated at the cost of the environment</p>	<p>ambitious targets have been set to meet above SDGs.</p>

	economy) that are inclusive and job rich					
Kazakhstan	mentioned under various national priorities and under Outcome 3 - Inclusive Economic Growth and Environmental Sustainability. focus on Nurly Zhol State Programme (2020-2025) for development of the transport and logistics industry.	no direct mention	mentioned under Outcome 3.1 and 3.2. progress in targets <i>on effective water management (SDGs 6.3 and 6.4)</i> and <i>sustainable use of ecosystems and biodiversity</i> will be linked to the targets on <i>employment (SDG 8.9)</i> and <i>sustainable agriculture (SDG 2.3)</i> and <i>food security (SDG 2.2)</i> through improving access to sustainable natural resources for the rural population, among them small farmers and women-owners of small agro and eco-businesses (SDG 5a)	mentioned under Thematic Area 3. focus on integration of the best available technologies to produce clean energy and reduce gas emissions and other pollutants.	mentioned as low level of coverage was found of SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production. Target to have a national action plan under Outcome 3.2.	Improvement of <i>policy coherence</i> , strengthening environmental governance mentioned as key drivers of these SDGs.
Mexico	mentioned under work area 3 - Green Economy and Climate Change	no direct mention	mentioned under work area 3 - Green Economy and Climate Change	mentioned	no direct mention.	mentioned.

North Macedonia	no direct mention	no direct mention	mentioned under Outcome 3 - Healthy Environment and briefly in Outcome 4 - Good Governance.	mentioned under Outcome 3 - Healthy Environment. Reform Package 4 addresses said SDG.	no direct mention	mentioned under Strategic Priority 2. focus on capacity building of local communities to develop low-emission solutions.
Paraguay	mentioned, but not elaborated on. Industrialization is only discussed in relation to food processing and natural resources	inclusive economic development is emphasized, including inclusive industrial development	mentioned	mentioned	mentioned	mentioned
Timor-Leste	mentioned	no focus on it in particular. Inclusivity is reserved for institutional and social care systems. However, there is intention to “promote sustained income growth”	mentioned	mentioned, but the country is also focused on building a petroleum industry	not mentioned, apart from the desire for higher energy efficiency	mentioned
Tunisia	not mentioned	inclusivity is emphasized, but not in relation to industrial development	mentioned	mentioned only in relation to similar SDGs, not as a goal by itself	mentioned, but is not a central goal	mentioned
Turkmenistan	mentioned, it is in a clear focus	mentioned, but little elaboration on the inclusivity aspect	mentioned, but not elaborated on (especially not the sanitation aspect)	mentioned, but the report also focuses on the development of oil and gas industries	not mentioned, apart from vague references to resource efficiency	mentioned, but mostly in the form increasing the efficiency of resource & energy use
Uruguay	mentioned (concrete	mentioned, but mostly only in relation to	mentioned	mentioned briefly	mentioned	mentioned briefly

	references to agro-industry)	social protection				
Uzbekistan	barely mentioned, not elaborated at all	not mentioned, inclusivity is only discussed in relation to social protection & education	mentioned	mentioned	mentioned	mentioned

II. Survey questionnaire

Introduction

Dear survey participant,

We, three research fellows of the Regional Academy on the United Nations (RAUN), are preparing an analysis of the benefits of the ongoing UN development system reform, particularly from the viewpoint of specialized agencies such as UNIDO, and would like to invite you to participate in an online survey on this matter.

Responding to this online survey is quick. Depending on your choices, the response to clickable items takes only between 3 to 10 minutes. Additional comments in the text boxes are much appreciated.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Any information that you provide will be kept confidential, and will not be used in any way that can identify you. All questionnaire responses will be kept in a secured environment.

The study coordinator, Márton Vegh (veghmarton@gmail.com), will be happy to answer any further questions you might have about the study. The study is undertaken with the support of ODG/SPQ, please feel free to also contact odg-strategy@unido.org.

Kind regards,
Shivraj Jagtap, Márton Vegh and Claudia Wiesinger

Questions for all participants

1. Please indicate your gender.
2. How many years have you worked at UNIDO?
3. Which type of UNIDO office do you work in?

4. Where are you located?
5. What is your job position?
6. Which of the following options best describes your job function?
7. Are you representing UNIDO in a UN country team (UNCT)?
8. To what degree are you aware of the changes introduced by the “repositioning of the UN development system” / UNDS reform initiated in 2018?
9. How do you perceive the effect of the UN development system reform on your access to government counterparts, bilateral partners and donors? How has this access developed for you in the course of the past three years?
10. How do you perceive the effect of the UN development system reform on your resource mobilization efforts? Did it make it generally easier or more difficult?
11. How do you perceive the effect of the UN development system reform on your resource mobilization efforts for larger projects?
12. In your area of work, how have joint programmes and projects of UNIDO with other UNCT members or UN partners changed (in terms of number/volume/impact and the mobilization of joint resources) in the past three years?
13. How do you assess the overall effect of the repositioned UN development system on the quality and effectiveness of UNIDO projects, implementation and operations on the ground?
14. How do you assess the effect of the repositioned UN development system on your efforts in the identification and formulation of UNIDO projects?
15. How do you assess the effect of the repositioned UN development system on cost-savings for UNIDO in your area of work?
16. How do you assess the effect of the repositioned UN development system on time-savings and efficiencies for UNIDO in your area of work?
17. How do you assess the effect of the repositioned UN development system on the visibility of UNIDO, or the external communication and advocacy of the UNIDO mandate or interventions by the resident coordinator office?

Questions for those who selected function (2) project identification / formulation / implementation

18. To which degree do you see the majority of your programmes, projects, technical interventions as part of the “bigger picture” of the UN work on the ground when compared to three years ago?

Questions for those who selected functions (1) representation and (3) both

18. How do you rate the neutrality of UNRCs, as representative of the entire UN development system, and the impartiality vis-à-vis her/his entity of origin?
19. How do you rate the level of interest of the UNRC in the economic dimension of the 2030 Agenda?
20. How do you rate the level of interest (and knowledge) of the UNRC in the ISID mandate and the services offered by UNIDO?
21. How do you rate the leadership of the UNRC: what was the effect on the overall work of UNCTs and coordination among UNCT members?
22. How do you rate crisis management, preparedness, and response of the UNRC/UNCT? (Not only in view of the COVID-19 pandemic but also any other possible recent events)
23. How do you rate the level of knowledge and interest of partners in the UN country team (UNCT) in the ISID mandate and working with UNIDO?
24. What is your general perception of the drafting process of common country analyses (CCAs) and cooperation frameworks (UNSDCFs) when compared to the former UNDAFs?
25. Do you believe that the ISID mandate (and the SDGs that are considered to be left behind, such as SDGs 6, 7, 9, 12, 13-15) are well reflected in the CCA / UNSDCF?
26. Was it hard to advocate for the inclusion of the ISID mandate in CCAs and/or UNSDCFs?
27. In case it was difficult (4 or 5 in your response to the question above), what were the main obstacles in your view?
28. Have you been approached in the course of the past 24-36 months to contribute (financially or staff resources) to a local cost-sharing arrangement for the UN country team, activities of the resident coordinator office (RCO), UN day celebrations, etc.?

29. Which of the following local administrative services... (1) have you outsourced for implementation by a UNCT partner in the past, (2) would you find useful to outsource in the future, (3) cannot be outsourced?

The benefits of the United Nations development system reform: an agency-specific analysis

Shivraj Jagtap, Márton Vegh and Claudia Wiesinger

“... a United Nations development system that is more strategic, accountable, transparent, collaborative, efficient, effective and results-oriented”

General Assembly resolution 71/243

The United Nations development system (UNDS) reform

- mandated by General Assembly resolution 72/279 on 31 May 2018, together with resolution 71/243
- cognizant that the paradigm shift of the 2030 Agenda requires the coherent and integrated support of the entire development community
- aspiring to ensure a responsive UNDS that delivers better results for people and planet
- based on three key principles: reinforcing national ownership, developing country-contextual responses, and ensuring the effective delivery of development results on the ground
- welcomed alike by Member States and UNDS member entities, such as UNIDO

Methodology

To approach the question of reform benefits for UNIDO, against the background of the limited data available, this study applies a mixed-methods approach, including (i) the review of 20 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and (ii) a survey of UNIDO personnel in the field to gather perceptions on the reform.

Introduction

The ongoing UNDS reform is seen by many as the most far-reaching reform of the UNDS in decades and has received much praise for its ambition to raise effectiveness and create efficiencies.

The repositioning of UN Resident Coordinators, making them impartial and independent, as well as a new generation of UN Country Teams that align their work around more strategic and needs-based country support plans, so-called Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), are among the key elements of this reform. Expectations are also high regarding cost-savings and efficiencies, i.a. through improved common business operations on the ground (e.g. joint back-office support or services provided by one UN entity for another) and the relocation of UNDS field offices to common premises.

While the UNDS reform is meant to mainly benefit partner countries, UNDS entities such as UNIDO are often asked what the benefits for the Organization and its specific mandate may be. In an attempt to provide an answer, this paper focuses on three potential benefits:

- Advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals in a more balanced manner
- Closer inter-agency cooperation and joint support to Member States
- Efficiencies

Some positive benefits emerging

Results from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)-internal survey present a mixed picture of perceptions regarding the reform with overall positive tendencies. Early results indicate a rather optimistic view of the revitalized UN Resident Coordinator system and inter-agency cooperation. The majority of respondents also viewed the UNDS reform as having a positive impact on the visibility of UNIDO and its mandate.

The preparatory process of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) is perceived to have improved compared to the previous system of UNDAFs. Despite the improved preparatory process, UNIDO staff still found it rather difficult to advocate for the inclusion of the UNIDO mandate in the UNSDCFs. The main obstacles observed in this regard included inter-agency competition and stronger UN partners, UNIDO's own capacities, and the knowledge of UNRCs about UNIDO. Notwithstanding the challenges of advocating for the mandate of inclusive and sustainable industrial development in UNSDCFs, two thirds of respondents believe that the UNIDO mandate and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the economic and environmental dimensions were rather well reflected.

For UNIDO, this is a positive finding, as the Organization has been actively promoting the SDGs that a 2017 report of the UN Secretary-General found as under-funded and lagging behind in coverage (SDGs 6, 7, 9, 12-15). The review of 20 UNSDCFs signed by UNIDO in 2020, as part of this study, seems to indicate that these SDGs are being increasingly reflected. Given the increasing impact of climate change, environmental sustainability, green economy, and climate action have become a strategic priority in all reviewed UNSDCFs.

The study found that the UNDS reform may not yet fulfil the high expectations with regard to tangible material benefits, such as efficiency gains and cost- and time-savings, with individual respondents even reporting increased efforts in some areas. Given the early stage of implementation, it may be premature to make sound judgments on the efficiency side of the UNDS reform.

Policy recommendations for consideration

- The study authors view that more may still need to be done by the UNDS and its entities to advance the SDGs that are considered left behind, to ensure a more balanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda according to country needs, and building on the evidence of economic transformation being a driver of development.
- In response to the observation that the level of knowledge about UNIDO, one of the smaller development entities in the system, may be a challenge, the authors recommend to strengthen efforts to inform UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams about the services provided by UNIDO.
- With a view to the efficiency gains expected from the reform, the authors take note of the related literature that points to initial investments needed, and recommend to also give due consideration to the specific circumstances of individual UNDS entities that vary in terms of their size and presence on the ground.

This policy brief is based on the RAUN paper “The benefits of the United Nations development system reform: an agency specific analysis”. The paper is available on ra-un.org.