System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Socio-economic Response to COVID-19

Final Report

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Finally, our thanks to the Resident Coordinators and the staff of the Resident Coordinators Office in each of the eight countries serving as case studies for this evaluation. Without their strong support and enthusiastic participation, the evaluation would not have been possible.

Preface

This system-wide evaluation report assesses the effectiveness of the United Nations Development System's (UNDS) Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19. As the first UNDS system-wide evaluation, this report provides stakeholders with an overarching perspective that allows a look at the UNDS as a whole and assesses the extent to which it has been able to collectively bring its strengths and capacities to bear for countries in their recovery towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Taking a system-wide lens, the evaluation confirms with evidence important achievements of the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. The results indicate that very large numbers of vulnerable people benefited from the UNDS response to COVID-19. It finds progress in the UNDS's fundamental collective commitment to realise the shared norms and values of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Human Rights, Leave No-One Behind and Disability Inclusion.

As the UN Development Reform had just been completed when the pandemic started, this report provides an analysis of how the UNDS reforms have enabled and respectively constrained that response. The progress in UNDS reform, especially the empowerment of the Resident Coordinators and strengthened Resident Coordinators Offices, helped advance the speed and coherence of the UNDS socio-economic response to COVID-19. The UN reform induced evolution and improvement in development planning processes at country level. The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks developed and agreed between the UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and national governments have continued to improve in coherence and alignment with national needs and priorities – including by more visibly prioritizing environmental sustainability and action on climate change. At the same time, the evaluation finds areas where UNDS reform must be strengthened to benefit fully from the investments in the UNDS reforms.

The achievements in the context of the COVID-19 response can provide a pointer for a stronger and more coherent UNDS contribution to accelerated progress toward the SDGs. This would require, however, that some of the most important challenges identified by the evaluation are addressed. These include: a persistent country level competitive environment for resources among UNDS entities; issues of accountability for collective results and the need for full operationalization of the Management Accountability Framework; the requirement for acceleration of UNDS reforms at regional level to support progress at the country level; and, the need to develop stronger models and approaches for ensuring coherence between the UNDS entities and International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

This evaluation report was possible due to hard work by the evaluation team, quality assurance panel, evaluation reference group and contributions from many stakeholders who have been listed in the acknowledgments. It is our hope that the evaluation findings and recommendations will be truly impactful in helping the UNDS work more coherently as a system to support member states in accelerating progress to SDGs during the decade of action.

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Acronyms

AoI	Area of Investigation
BBB	Build Back Better
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CF	Cooperation Framework
CMT	Crisis Management Team
CO	Country Office
COP 26	26th Conference of the Parties
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease-2019
COVID-19 MPTF	COVID-19 Response and Recover Multi-Partner Trust Fund
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
DSG	UN Deputy Secretary-General
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
ERF	Economic Recovery Fund
ERP	Economic Recovery Progamme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GE	Gender Equality
GHRP	Global Humanitarian Response Plan
GTT	Gender Task Team
HDPG	Humanitarian Development Partners Group
HOA	Heads of Agency
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Rights
IBC	Issues-Based Coalition
IFI	International Financial Institution
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning
LMI	Low-Middle Income Country
LNOB	Leave no one behind
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
MSRP	Multi-Sector Response Plan
MTNDP	Medium-Term National Development Plan
NCD	Non-communicable diseases
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NST	National Strategy for Transformation

OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
QAERP	Quick-Acting Economic Response Plan
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCP	Regional Collaborative Platform
RC/HC	Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator
REC	Regional Economic Commission
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
RG	Result Group
RO	Regional Office
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEF	Socio-Economic Framework
SEIA	Socio-Economic Impact Assessment
SERP	Socio-Economic Response Plan
SP	Strategic Plan
SPRP	Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan
SWE	System-Wide Evaluation
ToR	Terms of Reference
UMIC	Upper Middle-Income Country
UN	United Nations
UN DCO	United Nations Development Coordination Office
UN HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Program
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCG	United Nations Communication Group
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNCT-SWAP	UN Country Team System-wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNINFO	UN Information webpage

UNMSDF	UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework
UNPSD	United Nations Partnership for Sustainable Development
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNSDG	UN Sustainable Development Group
UNST	UN Sub-Regional Team
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization

Executive Summary

Introduction

The System-Wide Evaluation (SWE) of the UNDS Socio-economic Response to COVID-19 was conducted for the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG) of the United Nations under the guidance and management of the Senior Coordinator for SWE. It builds on experience gained during the Early Lessons and Evaluability Study of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) carried out from October 2020 to April 2021. The report benefits from the application of a system-wide lens to assess the effectiveness of the UNDS response to COVID 19 over an extended time frame.

Purpose and Focus of the System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Response

The evaluation serves to provide an assessment of the UNDS socio-economic response to COVID-19, supported by an analysis of how UNDS reforms have enabled and/or constrained that response. It also provides an assessment of how well the UNDS response has integrated action on the core UN values of Human Rights, Gender Equality, Inclusion (including persons with disabilities) and Leave No-One Behind (HR/GE/LNOB). Finally, by addressing the socio-economic response from 2020 to mid-2022, the evaluation was able to identify barriers and recommend changes which can better position the UNDS to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and the realization of Agenda 2030.

The evaluation is of direct interest to senior managers in the UN, including heads of agencies, all member states and the general public. It identifies important lessons not only for responding to future global development emergencies, but for building on achievements during the pandemic to accelerate progress toward the SDGs through cohesive and coherent UNDS support to national stakeholders. While the scope of the evaluation is global, its primary focus is the coherence and strategic focus of the UNDS response at country level. The evaluation was designed and carried out in full recognition of the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity which guide the operation of the SWE function. It builds on and complements the work of UN entity evaluation offices.

Evaluation Evidence

The evaluation draws on wide ranging sources of evidence. These include interviews with key stakeholders at global and regional level and field-based case studies in eight countries (Argentina, Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Indonesia, Jordan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan). In addition, the evaluation examined completed agency-level evaluations of the COVID-19 response carried out by United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) members as well as select UNDS entity Strategic Plans. Finally, the evaluation included a structured document review of evaluative and analytical reports, guidance and quantitative results reports regarding the UNDS response to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19.

Evaluation Findings

Relevance of the UN Framework

COVID-19 presented the world with a deep and serious development crisis as identified by the Secretary-General in early 2020. The evaluation confirmed the deepening challenge that the pandemic presented to the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030. In all eight case study

countries, the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 were particularly dire for the most vulnerable groups identified in the *UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to COVID-19.* The pandemic, and the lockdowns and public health measures taken in response, especially impacted women and girls, self-employed and informal workers, migrant workers, refugees and other at-risk populations identified in the UN Framework. The evolution of the pandemic confirmed the relevance of the five pillars of action of the UN Framework: Health First; Protecting People; Economic Response and Recovery; Macroeconomic Response; and Social Cohesion and Community Resilience. Facilitated by flexible guidance from the Development Cooperation Office (DCO), UN Country Teams (UNCTs) were able to organize their response at country level around the five pillars of the Framework while maintaining alignment with national needs and priorities.

The Immediate Response

In the immediate period of emergency response to COVID-19 (January to March 2020), UNCTs gained crucial experience in taking rapid collective action under the coordination and leadership of Residence Coordinators (RC) supported by Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) staff. This facilitated a rapid transition to collective analysis and planning through Socio-Economic Impact Assessments (SEIAs) and the development of Socio-Economic Response Plans (SERPs). Leadership and coordination by the RC and RCO also helped UNCTs to maintain a safe operational presence and meet UN obligations of duty of care to staff during this critical time period.

Added Value of Socio-Economic Response Plans and the role of UNDS Reforms

The evaluation confirmed the added value of the SERPs in supporting a more cohesive and focused UNDS response to COVID-19 in closer alignment with national response plans and priorities. The UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 has contributed to results in critical areas including: the maintenance of health services; enhanced, targeted and expanded social protection programmes; efforts to combat Gender-Based Violence (GBV); employment support for the most vulnerable groups; and, food security and sustainable agriculture.

Throughout the pandemic, UNDS reform actions aimed at strengthening the role of the empowered and independent RC have helped to support collaborative planning processes for a coherent response. These have combined in most countries with inclusive processes for developing SERPs (including moves toward deeper integration of agencies without a physical presence) to contribute to more coherent United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (CF) which are better aligned with national needs and priorities. In most case study countries, there is a demonstrable link from the SERP to priorities and targeted results in the CF. The RC and the RCO have also played an important role in the effective operation of platforms developed to coordinate development support at country level.

Notwithstanding the progress made toward more coherence and collaboration in policy engagement and programme planning, there are continuing barriers limiting progress, especially issues of accountability. Individual agency priorities remain a determining factor in programme planning and performance appraisal while messaging in UNDS entity Strategy Plans often lacks specific reference to advancing collective action. In addition, some elements of the UNDS reform process continue to lag with detrimental effects on the coherence of the UNCT response including:

variable and/or lack of understanding within and beyond the UNCT of the UNDP "integrator" role at the country level; absence of a mechanism for enforcing full compliance with the Management Accountability Framework (MAF) at UNCT and regional levels; and limited progress in aligning UN entity business operations so that administrative systems support joint programming.

Engaging with International Financial Institutions (IFI)

Engaging effectively with IFIs, including the IMF, World Bank and Regional Development Banks, for the purpose of coordinating and ensuring coherence in policy engagement, advocacy and programming remains a challenge for most UNCTs as well as the national offices of IFIs. UNCTs in many countries are searching for mechanisms and approaches to ensure more consistent and meaningful IFI engagement.

Pursuing Human Rights, Gender Equality, Inclusion and Leaving No-One Behind

UNCT entities have shown strong ownership of the guiding principles of Human Rights, Gender Equality, Inclusion, and Leave No-One Behind (HR/GE/LNOB), though continuous work is needed for full operationalization of these principles. A focus on vulnerable groups, including women, refugees, youth, older people, people with disabilities and migrant workers has been evidenced in key planning documents. RCs have also played a leadership role in advocacy for HR/GE/LNOB and Inclusion during the pandemic. This has helped UNCTs to successfully highlight key vulnerabilities and engage with governments to ensure that national responses address the needs of vulnerable populations.

The strength of response at the country level is related to capacities and architecture for HR/GE/LNOB and Inclusion across the UNCT: examples include the presence of a Human Rights Advisor in some RCOs and the establishment of empowered interagency groups as well as the presence of key entities with coordination mandates. The use of accountability tools and metrics such as mandatory markers, targets and gender equality, youth and disability scorecards have positively contributed to efforts to advance HR/GE/LNOB and disability inclusion in the response to the pandemic. While demonstrating progress over time, the need remains to accelerate efforts to meet standards and improve results.

Ensuring a More Equitable and Environmentally Sustainable Recovery

Ensuring a strong focus on a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery, including action to address climate change, has been a challenge for UNCTs. Host government priorities were often focused on the immediate response phase and the need to promote employment and strengthen social protection. As a result, some SERPs have not addressed the environmental impacts of COVID-19 or provided high visibility to efforts to promote an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery. However, UNCTs are turning their attention to engagement on environmental sustainability and climate change with encouragement from RCs supported by high-level messaging. UNCTs have also taken advantage of CF development processes to better address these priorities in the new-generation CFs.

Pooled Funding Mechanisms

Pooled funds have played important roles in enabling a more rapid and focused response to the pandemic at the country level. While they faced challenges with regard to being under-capitalized, the funds reviewed (the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the Joint SDG Fund and the Spotlight Initiative Fund) demonstrated the overall utility of pooled funding mechanisms in supporting a more cohesive response. Funds have been valued by participating organizations as a mechanism for engaging in innovative programming. They have also facilitated new partnerships among UNCT entities which may have lasting impacts on collaboration. In addition, in some case study countries there is evidence that programmes supported by pooled funds have been able to influence and leverage much larger investments by bilateral development partners and development banks.

Participating entities note that limited resources available through pooled funds have resulted in limited visibility among national governments and development partners in some contexts. Project allocations under pooled funds remain small in relation to the level of effort required to successfully propose, implement and report on joint programmes. This reflects, to some extent, a failure of the development partners to meet their commitments under the Funding Compact. Regardless, the resource requirement for UNCT entities to identify opportunities, engage in joint planning, submit proposals and implement programmes using pooled funds is often not commensurate with the resulting financial resources.

Global and Regional Dimensions of the Response

The framework for reporting results of the SERPs at the country level **(**through indicators agreed and pre-defined at the headquarters level and uploaded to the COVID-19 portal on UNINFO) represents a pioneering effort to promote system-wide accountability and transparency. However, rolling out and sustaining the framework has been a challenge for DCO, for participating agencies at the headquarters level, and, especially, for UNCTs. The resulting challenges in maintaining data quality and consistency across 121 countries will need to be addressed in the ongoing development of the common output indicators for the UNDS contribution to the SDGs.

Ongoing reforms at regional level hold the promise of improved support to UNCTs from regional UN bodies. At the same time, key informants noted that there is a general lag between the pace of UNDS reforms at country and regional level, including adherence to the MAF. UNDS entity Regional Offices and UN Regional Economic Commissions have not fully conveyed to UNCTs the value of their support. They also often find it difficult to respond in a timely way to the expressed needs and demands of UNCT entities.

UN Entity Strategic Plans developed during the pandemic have emphasized the need for increased joint programming and collaboration. However, this is most often seen as specific, tailored joint programming between selected UN entities. As a consequence, commitments to collective action and accountability across the UNDS at country level are often lacking. UN entities have not been consistent in their commitment to support the strengthened RC system and new-generation UNCTs as defined in QCPR resolution 75/233.

Conclusions

1. The depth and scale of the crisis presented by COVID-19 in early 2020 and the resulting persistent challenges to the SDGs fully justify the Secretary-General's declaration of a development emergency and appeal for a global response in March 2020 (UN 2020b). The deep and unequal socio-economic impacts foreseen at that time also provided a strong rationale for the UN Framework and the SERPs.

2. The UN Framework has proven to be an effective instrument for guiding a coherent UNDS response at country level through SEIA and SERP development adapted to national contexts, although the three-pillar structure of the overall UN response to COVID-19 presented challenges to UNCTs to integrate planning across all three pillars (health, humanitarian and development). Nonetheless, the SERPs have provided important added value to the process of planning the UNDS response at country level. The positive evolution of processes for CCAs and CFs should provide a sufficiently agile and robust framework to respond to future development emergencies without the need for parallel planning frameworks and reporting mechanisms.

3. On-going UNDS reforms helped to establish necessary pre-conditions for a coherent and effective UNDS response to socio-economic impacts of the crisis, helping to drive success in maintaining UNCT operations and meeting duty of care to employees and their families during the early phase of the crisis. This, in turn, helped create the conditions for a more effective socio-economic response as embodied in the SERPs and CFs.

   In addition, progress in the reforms was crucial to enabling a coherent UNDS response at country level. However, impediments remain to joint action and a coherent UNCT approach to an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery arising from the competitive environment for resource mobilization and ongoing issues of selective accountability under the MAF. There are also continuing challenges in achieving full coherence and coordination between UNCTs and IFIs at country level. Continued progress in UNDS reforms at global, regional and country level is required to achieve a cohesive UNCT focus at country level in support of the SDGs through CFs.

4. Pooled funding mechanisms, including the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF, the Spotlight Initiative and the Joint SDG Fund, have provided a valuable mechanism for engaging in new areas of programming and collaborative partnerships by UNCT entities at country level. Challenges remain in relation to the levels of funding provided to pooled funds and the full realization of the Funding Compact, as well as the need for improved administrative rules and processes.

5. The UNDS response at country level has been characterized by a strong commitment to Gender Equality, Human Rights, Leaving No-one Behind and Inclusion (including for persons with disabilities) as reflected in the programming, policy engagement and advocacy, though continued work remains for full joint operationalization of these principles. Tailored accountability tools and metrics applied to programming to ensure effective incorporation of these normative UN values have played an important role in fostering collective accountability while demonstrating a need for accelerated efforts to meet standards.

6. Many SERPs did not provide a high level of visibility to measures to support a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery and to address the challenge of climate change. However, recent CCAs and CFs have demonstrated a heightened ability to address these issues with related priorities, goals and targets. Programme support to achieve these goals is largely in the early phases of implementation.

7. UNCTs have used the experience of developing and implementing SERPs to learn valuable lessons regarding effective collaboration for a coherent offer of support to national efforts for socio-economic development and progress toward the SDGs. Important lessons have also been learned from efforts to develop and implement a robust and relevant result monitoring and reporting framework for the SERPs that are especially applicable to efforts to develop common indicators for UNDS support to achieving the SDGs.

Recommendations

These recommendations are intended to strengthen the coherence and effectiveness of UNDS support to an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery and to the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030. Each recommendation is supported by a brief statement of its rationale and expected benefits. It is intended that DCO will be responsible for preparation of the management response.

1. **DCO should continue to support efforts to advance the UNDS reform process with particular emphasis on the Cooperation Framework as an instrument for collective planning, programming and accountability in support of accelerating progress toward the SDGs. This should include strengthening aspects of reform that may not yet have reached their full potential but have been found to enhance the coherence of UNDS support including measures to:**
    a. **Address issues and weaknesses in the application of the MAF, including the absence of a mechanism to ensure compliance by UNCT entities at country and regional level;**
    b. **Fully define, identify and communicate the expected complementarities between the UNDP "integrator function" at country level and the coordination and leadership role of the RC;**
    c. **Clarify and strengthen processes for ensuring coordination and coherence between UNCTs and IFIs at country level;**
    d. **Accelerate UNDS reforms at a regional level to achieve a more coordinated regional and sub-regional response and to better support UNCTs;**
    e. **Conduct a review and move forward with efforts to harmonize administrative and operational systems among entities for flexible joint programming.**
    f. **Reinforce progress in the pursuit of equity in line with UN normative values (HR/GE/LNOB/Inclusion) by monitoring and reporting on advances in the use of markers, targets and other accountability mechanisms as well as strengthening supporting architecture to accelerate progress toward standards.**

Rationale and Benefits

The evaluation found that the experience of developing and implementing the SERPs has made an important contribution to a more coherent UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework that is in line with national needs and priorities and focused on the SDGs. The extent that these improvements can be sustained is dependent on continued progress in implementing UNDS reforms. The primary benefit will be to avoid a loss of momentum in the continuing effort to strengthen the coherence of UNCTs as they work to contribute to a more equitable and sustainable recovery and support achievement of the SDGs.

2. **DCO and participating entities should cooperate in the process of developing common output indicators to be used to assess the collective contribution of the UNDS to advancing progress toward the SDGs to ensure that:**
    a. **The agreed common indicators for support to the SDGs are robust enough to provide accountability for the UNDS response to a global crisis;**
    b. **Common indicators and data elements required to construct them are developed in consultation with UNCT entity staff (with and without a physical presence) at the country level and vetted at UNCT level prior to publication to ensure that the data required is available from reliable sources and accessible within the required time frame;**
    c. **Responsibilities for data collection, quality assurance, and reporting at UNCT and headquarters level are made explicit and consistent across the system;**
    d. **Incentives for UNCTs to invest the time and resources to gather, compile and report on the indicators and to ensure the quality of uploaded data are identified and validated with UNCT entities.**

Rationale and Benefits

The results monitoring and reporting framework developed and implemented for the SERPs was an important, and pioneering effort to arrive at a common set of meaningful results indicators, gathered and shared through UNINFO in a timely and transparent way. However, it is essential that the indicator framework being developed to monitor the UNDS contribution to the SDGs responds effectively to challenges encountered by UNCTs in data gathering and reporting. The primary benefit will be negating the need to develop a customized results monitoring and reporting framework to track the UNDS response to any large-scale development emergencies that may arise in the future.

3. **The DCO should examine how to further strengthen the potential and impact of pooled funds for accelerated implementation of the SDGs and a more effective response to development emergencies. This includes measures:**
    a. **To work with member states in intergovernmental discussion on how to ensure that contributions to pooled funds align with commitments under the Funding Compact;**
    b. **To ensure streamlined procedures and formats across global thematic funds to decrease the administrative and other burdens on UNCTs;**

c. **To support the RC/RCO in helping UNCTs to strategically access and employ pooled funds (as well as monitoring and evaluation of pooled funds;**
d. **To examine potential measures to facilitate funding of country-specific pooled funds aimed at responding to development emergencies and accelerating progress to the SDGs.**

Rationale and Benefits

The evaluation has found that pooled funds have made an important contribution to a coherent and focused UNDS response to COVID-19 but they continue to face the challenge of under-capitalization. It is important that the UNDS and development partners address the problem of under-capitalized pooled funds if their full potential is to be realized. The primary benefit from this recommendation would be the potential for more rapid and more substantial resource flows from pooled funds to funded projects along with better levels of capitalization of the funds themselves.

4. UNDS entities should prepare a supplement to their Strategic Plans to reinforce messaging on necessary action to advance progress in response to UN General Assembly resolutions on UNDS reform.

Rationale and Benefits

There remains a wide diversity and sometimes lack of uptake of the QCPR resolutions on UNDS reform in the Strategic Plans/Frameworks reviewed for this evaluation. By incorporating QCPR provisions on system collaboration and reform in a more substantive/comprehensive manner, UN entities can visibly reinforce their commitment to the reform and thus help enable effective collaboration within UNCTs.

5. The SWE Office, in consultation with UNSDG, should undertake an evaluation of UNDS efforts to support an environmentally sustainable recovery and address climate change. This forward-looking evaluation should aim to identify important contributing factors which will allow UNCTs to more effectively support national efforts to ensure a greener, more equitable recovery, including as appropriate, the use of accountability mechanisms and markers similar to those which have proven effective in supporting UNDS actions on GE/HR/LNOB and disability inclusion. This will build on the priorities for action on environment and climate currently expressed in many CFs.

Rationale and Benefits

There is a compelling need for a formative SWE of UNCT efforts to support countries as they engage in addressing the reality of pursuing an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery – including action on adapting and mitigating climate change. As a formative evaluation, the SWE would focus on identifying and validating emerging good practices at a country and system-wide level and sharing those practices across agencies and countries. The resulting report would also be useful to the UNDS as a whole, to RCs and RCOs and to UNCTs as they further develop programmes on climate change adaptation and mitigation to give programmatic expression to this priority in emerging CFs.

6. DCO should develop specific guidance to be implemented by RCs and supported by UNCTS to maintain and further extend the participation and contribution of UNCT entities without a physical presence at country level in processes for analysis and planning including the CCA and CF as well as pooled funds and other forms of joint programming where appropriate. This will lead to a more comprehensive offer of services by the UNCT which incorporate the experience and expertise of all members.

Rationale and Benefits

Small UNCT entities and those without a physical presence at country level are able to bring to bear specialized expertise in country analysis and in identifying and reaching the most vulnerable as well as effective programming in their areas of competence. By ensuring the continued, substantive and meaningful participation of smaller UNCT members and those without a physical presence, UNDS can contribute to a stronger and more coherent offer of support to the SDGs at country level. The primary benefit of this recommendation will be a more comprehensive offer of service by UNCTs which is responsive to national needs and priority and which reflects the specialized expertise of the system as a whole.

1. Introduction

Note to the Reader: Evaluating the UNDS response to COVID-19 from a System-Wide Perspective

This is the third and final installment in a series of reports with the goal of assessing the effectiveness of the United Nations Development System response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 prepared for the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG) of the United Nations under the guidance and management of the Senior Coordinator for System-Wide Evaluation (SWE). The process of assessment began during the early months of the pandemic and has been almost continuous since then. The resulting three reports are:

- The report of the Early Lessons and Evaluability of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF (April 2021)
- The Interim Report: System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Response to COVID-19 (March 2022)
- The Final Report: System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Response to COVID-19 (September 2022).

Both the Early Lessons study of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF and the System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Response to COVID-19 carried out case studies at country level. For the former, seven country case studies were carried out from December 2020 to February 2021 (Cambodia, Guatemala, Kosovo, Malawi, Maldives, Moldova, Sao Tome and Principe). Eight country case studies were undertaken for the interim and final report of this evaluation from January to June 2022 (Argentina, Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Indonesia, Jordan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan). For both studies, case study results were supported by reviews of global and regional documents and data bases and interviews with key stakeholders at global and regional level.

In addition, both the Early Lessons study of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF and the SWE of the UNDS response to COVID-19 were able to draw on related studies and evaluations carried out by other bodies in the UN system including the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

This report benefits from a unique perspective of inquiry and assessment into the UNDS response to COVID-19 from early 2020 to June 2022, all with the continuous application of a system-wide lens.

1.1. Background: The UNDS Response to COVID-19

In March 2020, the UN Secretary-General issued a call with framing guidance for a global response to COVID-19: *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*. The report called for a global partnership to achieve three major objectives (UN 2020b, pp. 16-19):

1. Suppress transmission to stop the pandemic and save lives;
2. Address social, economic and multi-dimensional impacts;
3. Implement sustainable solutions to cope with the impacts of the crisis.

The Secretary-General placed special emphasis on the need for national solidarity, including fostering inclusion and human rights in order to achieve leaving no one behind (LNOB), while insisting that young people and women/girls must have a face and a voice in the response (UN 2020b, p.5). Early in the pandemic, the Secretary-General warned that COVID-19 was deepening existing inequalities and having devastating social and economic consequences for women and girls, threatening to reverse progress made toward greater equality.

As directed by the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) Chair, the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) and UNDP led a task team to develop the *UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to COVID-19* (henceforth the UN Framework). The Framework established the overarching structure of the UNDS response to be addressed at country level by socio-economic response plans (SERPs). An essential element of the UN Framework was the identification of five pillars of the UNDS response (UN 2020c, pp.11-31).

1. **Health First**: Protecting health systems and services during the crisis
2. **Protecting People**: Social protection and basic services
3. **Economic Response and Recovery**: Protecting jobs, small and medium enterprises, and vulnerable workers in the informal economy
4. **Macroeconomic Response** and Multilateral Collaboration
5. **Social Cohesion and Community Resilience**

The over-riding objective of the UNDS response to COVID-19 has been to support countries and societies in addressing the socio-economic fallout of the crisis, especially for the most vulnerable. To that end, and in line with ongoing reform, the UNDS aimed to leverage the full breadth of the system's capacities and draw on the strength of multilateral norms and values for an integrated package of support.

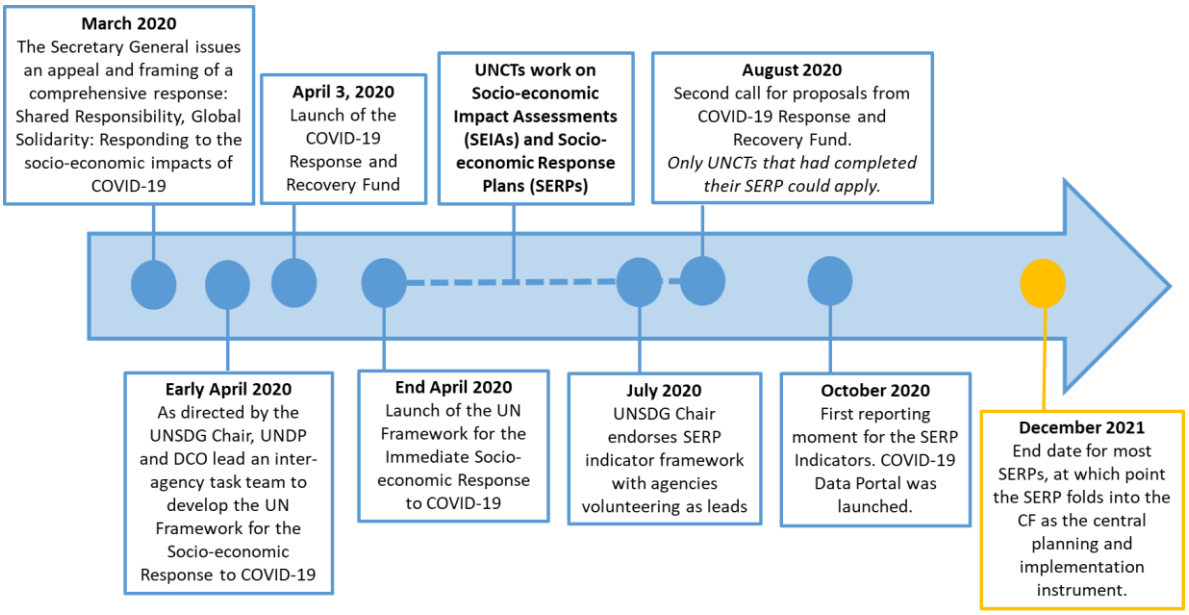
Formulated under the UN Framework and tailored to national priorities in the form of country-specific SERPs and associated *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks* (CF) (or the equivalent programming framework in use by the UNCT), the UNDS response had a dual purpose. While focused on stemming the immediate impacts of the pandemic, UNDS support also sought to define entry points for a more equitable recovery, oriented towards sustainable development as formulated in the 2030 Agenda. Key UN values such as Human Rights, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Inclusion (including persons with disabilities), and Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) were to form an integral part of the UNDS response.

The UNDS response has been taking place in a highly dynamic and complex setting, which the evaluation recognizes. The uncertainty of the pandemic's course, its unprecedented economic and social disruption, and the uneven and inequitable vaccine response have all required continuous adaptation. While it was clear early on that the pandemic would set back efforts to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the extent of these setbacks is still emerging.

At the same time, UN structures at country and regional levels were in the midst of major changes when the pandemic began. Responding to reform demands to meet the requirements of the 2030 Agenda, the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator (RC) system was being established, and UN country teams (UNCTs) were reorganizing the way they worked together. UNCTs were aiming to improve their supported countries to achieve the SDGs, through greater coherence and integrated approaches across sectors and organizations. The pandemic itself presented a test of the UNDS reforms, with its demand for cross-mandate action across the socio-economic spectrum.

Figure 1 presents a timeline of key events in the development and implementation of the UNDS response to COVID 19. It illustrates the inter-connected nature of the response as it encompasses the development of the UN Framework and the concurrent launch and implementation of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF). It also encompasses the development and implementation of the SERP results indicator framework with data uploaded to the COVID-19 Data Portal of UNINFO. Finally, Figure 1 ends in late 2021 when the SERPs were subsumed into CFs as the main planning instrument for UNDS support to the SDGs at country level.

Figure 1: Timeline of Major Events in the UNDS Response to COVID-19



1.2. The System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Response: Purpose and Scope

With its system-wide perspective, the evaluation of the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 serves the essential function of providing an assessment of the UNDS response, supported by an analysis of how UNDS reforms have enabled and/or constrained that response.[1]

It also provides an assessment of how well the UNDS response has integrated action on the core UN values of Human Rights, Gender Equality, Inclusion (including persons with disabilities) and LNOB. Finally, by addressing the socio-economic response from 2020 to mid-2022, the evaluation is able to identify barriers and recommended changes which can better position the UNDS to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and the realization of Agenda 2030.

The evaluation is of direct interest to senior managers in the UN, including heads of agencies, all member states and the general public. The evaluation identifies important lessons not only for responding to future global development emergencies but for building on achievements during the pandemic to accelerate progress toward the SDGs through cohesive and coherent UNDS support to national stakeholders.

[1]Terms of Reference accessible at https://unsdg.un.org/resources/terms-reference-system-wide-evaluation-unds-response-covid-19

The results of the *Early Lessons and Evaluability Study of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF* and the *Interim Report* of this evaluation were referred to as important evidence in the report of the Secretary-General on QCPR implementation in 2021 (Early Lessons and Evaluability) and 2022 (Interim Report).

While the scope of the evaluation is global, its primary focus is the **coherence and strategic focus of the UNDS response at country level**.

The coherence of the UNDS response at country level represents perhaps the most important of the criteria applied by this evaluation. In doing so, the evaluation used the definition of coherence developed by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC). In accordance with that definition, the evaluation examined the internal alignment and synergy of actions within the UNDS family at country level and the external alignment and synergy of UNDS actions with those of other key stakeholders, including national governments, development partners and IFIs. In addition, the evaluation examined the role of the UNCTs in advancing the UN core normative values – the third component of the OECD/DAC definition of coherence.[2]

By directly addressing the coherence and strategic direction (and suitability) of the UNDS response at country level, the evaluation provides a window on the overall effectiveness of UNCT efforts to support an effective national response to the socio-economic effects of COVID-19.

It is important to note as well that the evaluation was designed and carried out in full recognition of the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity which guide the operation of the SWE function. As an SWE it builds on and complements the work of UN entity evaluation offices. It does not attempt to evaluate the contribution of individual UN entities but rather the effectiveness of the overall UNDS response, especially at country level (Annex 1).

This report provides evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations in response to five over-arching evaluation questions.

EQ 1: To what extent have UNCTs been able, through the SERPs and CFs, to achieve a coherent and sustained UNDS focus on progress toward the achievement of SDGs during the pandemic?

EQ 2: To what extent have pooled funds been an effective instrument for mobilizing resources and planning and implementing programming coherent with the collective socio-economic response of UNCTs?

EQ 3: To what extent have UNCTs developed and implemented coherent strategies and programmes to advance core UN values of Human Rights, Gender Equality, Inclusions[3] and LNOB?

[2] For a full definition of coherence as an evaluation criterion see: https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm#coherence-block

[3] Inclusion refers to all marginalized and vulnerable groups as identified in the UN Framework (UN 2020c, p.12) including, inter alia, women, older people, adolescents and youth, minorities, persons with disabilities and others. The most affected groups vary from country to country depending on national context.

EQ 4: To what extent have SERPs and CFs contributed to UNCT support to partners to achieve progress toward the recover better and greener agenda – including a more equitable and sustainable recovery?

EQ 5: To what extent have UNCTs and the UNDS learned lessons from the SERP and CF processes regarding mechanisms to overcome constraints and identify incentive structures to achieve collaborative results?

For detailed information on the evaluation Areas of Investigation (AOI), methodology and analytical approach, as well as data collection methods, please refer to the Inception Report for the evaluation.[4] A brief summary of the methodology for the evaluation study as a whole (encompassing both the interim and final reports) is provided in Annex A.

1.3. A Note on Sources

Unlike the Interim Report of March 2022, this report draws on the full range of data and information sources accessed from October 2021 to August 2022. These include:

- A review of the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those affecting progress toward the achievement of Agenda 2030, from March 2020 to December 2021. The review surveys the global context for the evaluation by addressing the depth and persistence of the emergency described by the Secretary-General in *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity* (UN 2020a).
- The results of eight country case studies of the UNCT response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in Argentina, Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Indonesia, Jordan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan. The country case studies included reviews of essential, country-specific documents and data on the UNDS response as well as interviews with a total of 265 key informants across all eight countries (see Annex B).

  On average, each country case study involved interviews with 33 key informants, of whom 23 were UN staff and 10 were from outside the UNCT (national government staff, civil society organizations, bilateral development partners or International Financial Institutions (IFIs). Seven of the eight case study county case studies included travel to the countries involved and a mix of in-person and on-line interviews with key informants. Because of the ongoing civil emergency, the case study of Sri Lanka was conducted remotely and interviews were confined to a small number (13) of UN staff. If Sri Lanka is excluded from calculating the averages, each in-country case study involved interviews with an average of 36 key informants with 24 (66 percent) from within the UN family and 12 (33 percent) external.
- Interviews with 51 key informants at a global and regional level (see Annex B) including the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, DCO headquarters, DCO Regional Offices, the Joint Inspection Unit, the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, Regional Economic and Social Commissions of the UN, Secretariats of Multilateral Pooled Trust Funds (the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, the Joint SDG Fund and the Spotlight Initiative), IFIs, bilateral development partners and most of the member entities of the UNDS. The results of these interviews have been coded in relation to the key evaluation questions and sub-questions and analyzed through the use of content analysis software (Dedoose).

[4] https://unsdg.un.org/resources/inception-report-system-wide-evaluation-unds-response-covid-19

- The findings of a review of evaluative reports summarizing the results of evaluations and lessons learning exercises of the COVID-19 response by selected UNDS entities (FAO, ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Habitat and UN Women) as provided to the evaluation by UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) members. The review highlights overall findings and lessons learned by UNDS entities through their own agency-wide evaluations and lessons-learning studies with implications for the COVID-19 response.
- A review of the 13 UNDS entity strategic plans developed during the pandemic and covering the period from 2022 to 2025. These were reviewed with a view to assessing how the entities involved have used the narrative component of their Strategic Plans to communicate key messages from the executive management level to Country Offices and how those may, in turn, provide important insights to the evaluation areas of investigation, always in the context of UNDS reform as specified in the ToR.
- A structured document review of evaluative and analytical reports, guidelines and results reports regarding the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the UNDS response to COVID-19, including:
    - Global guidance on the UN Framework and the design, implementation, and monitoring of Socio-economic Response Plans (SERP)
    - Country level documents including Common Country Analysis (CCA), UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (CFs), minutes of joint coordinating bodies at country level, Socio-economic Impact Assessments (SEIA), national medium term development plans, Joint Workplans, etc.
    - Scorecards and metrics for assessing UNCT performance regarding Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), youth engagement and disability inclusion

For a full listing of documentary resources used at global and regional level see Annex C. Documentary sources use for the country case studies are provided in the country case study notes.

The breadth and diversity of the evaluation data sources accessed for the evaluation allows for a high level of triangulation, both across and within each type of data source. For example, at country level the views of UNCT entity staff are triangulated among UN entities as well as against the views of national government partners, CSOs, bilateral development partners and IFIs. In turn, the results of the key informant interviews are triangulated with reference to key documents such as the CCA, SEIA, SERP, national development plans and the plans and priorities of key ministries.

1.4. Limitations

The evaluation was able to carry out almost all data collection and analysis tasks as proposed in the Inception Report (UN 2022a) with three notable exceptions:

1. The Sri Lanka country case study was not able to conduct interviews outside the UNCT as a result of the agreement between the evaluation team and the Sri Lanka RCO to avoid adding to the work of key stakeholders during a time of acute crisis.
2. A review of available data on SERP results at country level in the eight case-study countries (as submitted for the results indicator framework on UNINFO) found that reported data on results was difficult to verify and, in some cases, subject to issues in data quality and consistency across the eight countries. As a result, the evaluation has relied on results evidence gathered during the country case study visits. Limitations regarding SERP results data are further elaborated in Section 3.7.

3. The Interim Report of March, 2022 presented an overview of the relevant findings of available, published evaluations made by UNDS member agencies addressing their effectiveness with an agency-wide perspective. It was expected that the sample of available evaluations fitting the study criteria would significantly expand by July of the same year. However, a review of published evaluation reports as of that date revealed that it will be some time before the set of published evaluation reports will support a full meta-analysis of the results of UN evaluations of the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

The evaluation has responded to these limitations by: a) cross-triangulating the results of the Sri Lanka country case study with results of key informant interviews in the remaining seven countries; and, b) gathering information on the results of UNCT support to national efforts to address the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 through document reviews and key informant interviews in each of the case study countries. It is important to note, however, that a systematic quantitative assessment of results remains outside the scope of the evaluation.

1.5. An Important Note on the Structure of the Report

In the Sections of the report which follow this introduction, there are important differences in orientation and perspective:

- Section 2 presents an updated and documented overview of the **global** nature and impact of the ongoing COVID-19 development emergency.

- Section 3 encompasses a **detailed assessment of the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in the eight case study countries** – including implications for the evaluation areas of investigation.

- Sections 4 and 5 broaden the lens of inquiry from the country level in order to provide **an evaluative assessment of some of the most important system-wide efforts to strengthen the coherence of the UNDS response to COVID-19** and to support national stakeholders to accelerate progress toward the SDGs. The measures and instruments examined in these two Sections include pooled funding mechanisms, regional structures and platforms for supporting the response, the Management Accountability Framework (MAF) and other efforts to empower the RC as well as system-wide efforts to strengthen learning and provide messaging from headquarters level.

- Section 6 builds on the preceding Sections (2 to 5) provides **a reflection on the important factors driving or constraining** the development and application of **a coherent UNDS response to COVID-19.**

- Sections 7 and 8 put forward the **conclusions and recommendations** of the evaluation.

The evaluation findings are embedded in Sections 2 through 6. Each evaluation finding is coded in relation to the Evaluation Question it addresses (EQ 1-5).

2. A Continuing Development Emergency

2.1. Overview: Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 2020-2022

In the years leading up to the pandemic, governments worldwide had taken steps towards advancing the 2030 Agenda. For example, by 2019 progress was made towards SDG 1: Eradicating poverty, as the percentage of the world's population living in extreme poverty was reduced from 10.1 per cent in 2015 to 9.3 per cent in 2017. Achievements were also made towards SDG 2: Zero Hunger, with the percentage of undernourished people reducing from 12.4 to 8.4 per cent from 2005 to 2019 (UN 2021e).

Despite these achievements, there were also setbacks in progress toward the SDGs, even before the pandemic. The Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 identified challenges across various dimensions. For example, the vigor of global economic growth had slowed after the 2009 crisis, and average growth since 2012 had been approximately 3.8 per cent. Despite progress in access to basic services, coverage remained low for many countries and social groups. In 2019, 650 million people suffered hunger, and around two billion people suffered food insecurity (UN 2021e). Furthermore, several dimensions with cross-cutting impacts on various SDGs were moving in the wrong direction; this included income inequality, climate change, biodiversity loss, and increasing waste from human activity.

In 2020, the global COVID-19 health emergency further intensified development challenges across almost all SDGs. Health, employment, economic growth, hunger and food security, poverty, and education were particularly affected. Equality also suffered an important drawback as the global pandemic widened existing inequalities within and between countries.

Some of the most important socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in relation to the five pillars of the UN Framework can be summarized as follows:

- ***Pillar 1- Health First:*** *The pandemic brought massive disruptions in health services, including detecting and treating non-communicable diseases (WHO 2020, p.14*). Additionally, vulnerable groups such as older persons, people living in poverty, migrants, and refugees required specific strategies for accessing healthcare. According to UNICEF (2021a, p.13), routine vaccination, outpatient care, antenatal and postnatal services, births attended by a skilled attendant and health campaigns were amongst the health services reported to be most affected by the pandemic.
- ***Pillar 2- Protecting People***: *Social protection systems were the first line of defense to mitigate the massive income loss caused by rising unemployment*. In 2020, virtually all countries adapted, expanded, and scaled up programs; just over 1,600 social protection measures were announced in 2020 (ILO 2021, p.68). The UN Women/UNDP Global Gender Response Tracker showed that only 10 percent of social protection, employment, economic and fiscal measures analyzed were directed towards women's economic security, and only eight percent of measures on social protection and employment were directed towards care (UN Women 2021a, p.11). Social protection programs proved financially unsustainable for most governments, which now face large primary fiscal deficits, limited fiscal space, and heavy public debt.
- ***Pillar 3- Economic Response and Recovery:*** *The pandemic resulted in massive losses in employment with most severe impacts on workers in the informal sector – especially in developing countries.* In 2020, the global unemployment rate reached 6.5 percent. Compared with the fourth quarter of 2019, 8.8 percent of global working hours were lost in 2020 (UN

2021e, p.42)—a loss equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs. Informal sector workers (especially women) were hit worse by the pandemic; an estimated 1.6 billion informal workers were significantly impacted by lockdown measures in 2020.

- ***Pillar 4- Macroeconomic Response:*** *While the global economic downturn was not as negative as initially expected, the fiscal response has led to increased debt distress for developing countries, exacerbated by rising inflation.* GDP growth (annual %) for 2020 was estimated at -3.3 percent by the World Bank; the economic downturn for 2020 was not as negative as initially estimated, mainly because of the fiscal and monetary stimulus packages put in place by various governments during 2020. However, two years into the pandemic, more than half of low-income countries faced debt distress, or were at high risk of debt distress due to declining exports and revenues and capital flight (UNDP 2021a). Low-income countries continue to face constraints in their ability to respond to the crisis because of growing debt and lack of fiscal space. According to UNDP, these rising obligations will result in untenable choices for governments: forcing them to choose between budget cuts for health, education and safety nets or defaulting on debt obligations (UNDP 2021a) Rising inflation has become an alarming concern, highly correlated with rising food insecurity and hunger.
- ***Pillar 5- Social Cohesion and Community Resilience:*** *The pandemic has widened gender inequality and worsened factors which weaken social cohesion and community resilience*. In 2020, adult women, compared with men, faced higher unemployment rates, job insecurity, increased housework, and deteriorated health due to overwhelmed health systems. Physical and sexual violence towards women spiked in spring 2020, with early reports from many countries seeing up to a 25 percent increase in household violence (UN Women 2020, p.19). Since the outbreak of COVID-19, data and reports from those on the front lines have shown that all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, have intensified (UN Women 2021a, p.6). The pandemic has also had disproportionately negative consequences for older persons, youth (especially youth unemployment), workers in the informal sector, and migrants and refugees.

The world was barely recovering from the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic when yet another event drove new development challenges. In February 2022, the war in Ukraine began. At that time, Ukraine and the Russian Federation provided around 30 percent of the world's wheat and barley, one-fifth of its maize, and over half of its sunflower oil. The Russian Federation is the world's top natural gas exporter and second-largest oil exporter. Belarus and the Russian Federation export around a fifth of the world's fertilizers (UN Global Crisis Group on Food, Energy and Finance 2022a). The supply chain issues that the war has exacerbated have generated an inflationary process fueled by rising food and energy prices and rising interest rates that affect the economy. The overall crisis has tightened financial conditions worldwide.

The FAO Food Price Index reached its historic highest level in March 2022. Although the index then registered four consecutive monthly declines, it was still 13.1 percent above its value in July last year. The Food Price Index has increased by 48.2 percent since 2019. According to the World Bank (Bloomberg 2022), food and energy price surges worsened by the war in Ukraine could last through the end of 2024 due to disruptions in trade and production.

The compounded effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine has devastated millions of families in most countries. As of June 2022, "60 percent of workers have lower real incomes than before the pandemic; developing countries miss $1.2 trillion per year to fill the social protection gap, and $4.3 trillion is needed per year - more money than ever before - to meet the SDGs. In 2022, between 179 million and 181 million people are forecasted to face a food crisis or worsened

conditions in 41 out of 53 countries where data are available." (UN Global Crisis Group on Food, Energy and Finance 2022b).

From the perspective of August 2022, it seems clear that the sense of urgency and the overall direction and framework for action set by the Secretary-General in March and April of 2020 was a valid response to the rapidly developing and persistent development emergency.

The rapid development of the COVID-19 pandemic with fast evolving variants and sub-variants and succeeding waves of infection and death – all with serious and ongoing socio-economic impacts has presented a uniquely challenging environment for planning and mounting a cohesive UNDS response – a challenge that is testing the resilience and adaptability of the system at a global, regional and country level. In addition, the UN and its partners are faced with the ongoing and evolving demands of the war in Ukraine and its effects on global supply chains, food security and inflation. In many ways, the socio-economic crisis driven by the COVID-19 pandemic continues to this day. In the final quarter of 2021, UNCT development planning processes turned from planning, implementing and monitoring SERPs under the UN Framework back to the development and implementation of CFs. However, the reality on the ground suggests that CFs, while they increasingly focus on a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery, will be dealing with the effects of COVID-19 for years to come.

Findings: Depth and Complexity of the Development Crisis Posed by COVID-19

The experience of the past two years **has confirmed the depth and seriousness of the development crisis** identified by the Secretary-General in early 2020 as result of COVID-19. It has also confirmed the **deepening challenge to achievement of the SDGs under Agenda 2030** and the need for re-gaining and accelerating momentum during the Decade of Action. Consistently across the eight country case studies the **social and economic effects of the pandemic were deep and effected all groups** but with **particularly dire impacts for vulnerable groups** identified in the UN Framework. The recovery remains a complex and challenging endeavor.

The pandemic has contributed to **deepening inequalities both within and among countries**. At country level the pandemic, and the lockdowns and public health measures taken in response, have had a significantly worse impact on women and girls, self-employed and informal workers, migrant workers, refugees and virtually all of the at-risk populations identified in the UN Framework (UN 2020c, p.7).

3. The UNDS Response at Country Level: Seeking Coherence in Diverse Contexts

In addressing the overall UNDS response, this evaluation has focused most directly on assessing this response at country level through the lens of case studies in Argentina, Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Jordan, Indonesia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan. This Section highlights the experience of UNCTs as they engaged in the challenge of responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, primarily through the development and implementation of SERPs but also through the ongoing process of developing and implementing a new generation of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (CF).

3.1. National Contexts Prior to COVID-19

The UN Framework recognized that national contexts would play a critical role in determining the shape of the UNDS response including the design of the SERPs.

> In this response, we must always recognize that governments and national actors are in the lead, appreciate the frontline role of local governments and communities and acknowledge that many other partners will often bring more financial and other resources to bear. (UN 2020c, p.3-4)

Interviews during the inception phase of the evaluation also highlighted important national factors that shape and guide the UNDS response including, for example, the level of national income, the extent of progress in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), regional and sub-regional issues, and the relative position of the UNCT and the national government in the CF cycle. In recognition of these factors, case study countries were selected to provide examples of the diverse national contexts which confronted the UNDS response in 2020.

Table 1: Diverse Contexts of the Case Study Countries

Region	Country	Income Level	UNDAF/CF	CF Cycle	Gender Dev. Index	Pop. (Mill)
Africa	Sierra Leone	Low	2020-2023	MID	5	8
Africa	Rwanda	Low	2018-2024	END	3	13
Central Asia	Uzbekistan	Lower-middle	2021-2026	START	3	33
South Asia	Sri Lanka	Lower-middle	2018-2022	END	2	21
Asia Pacific	Indonesia	Lower-middle	2021-2025	START	3	275
MENA	Jordan	Upper-middle	2018-2022	END	5	10
LAC	Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean	High	2017-2022	END	1	0.3
LAC	Argentina	Upper-middle	2021-2026	START	1	45

The evaluation confirmed the importance of these factors but also identified more of the complex ways in which the situation in the host country was critical in determining the shape of the UNDS response, especially its coherence and alignment with national priorities.

In each of the case study countries, key informants from the UNCT, government ministries and agencies, civil society organizations and development partners emphasized different important contextual factors which pre-dated the COVID-19 pandemic with important implications for its socio-economic impacts and, therefore, the UNDS response. They were also noted in UN and government planning and programme documents.

Table 2: Key Aspects of the National Context Shaping the UNCT Response

Case Study Country	Important National Context Pre-Dating COVID-19
Argentina	• Steady decline in GDP per capita (2012-2019) coupled with high inflation leading to renegotiation of national debt and public service restructuring • Increased poverty levels and regress in progress toward SDGS • Limited development assistance due to Upper Middle Income (UMIC) status

Case Study Country	Important National Context Pre-Dating COVID-19
Barbados and Eastern Caribbean	• Countries highly dependent on tourism (severely curtained by COVID-19 measures) for revenue with very limited fiscal space • Sub-region subject to frequent natural disasters and vulnerable to climate change
Jordan	• Water scarcity and dependence on imports for food and energy complicate deep environmental challenges including climate change • Very large population of refugees in camps and among the population • Significant levels of assistance from partners as a key regional strategic partner
Indonesia	• A decade of strong economic growth • Strong commitment to the SDGs in the Medium-Term Development Plan • Persistent inequalities impeding attainment of SDG targets • High risks of natural disasters and vulnerability to climate change
Rwanda	• Investment driven economic boom with high rates of growth in 2019 • Strong commitment to the National Strategy for Transformation (NST) • Significant refugee population and urban/rural divide in poverty levels • Regional instability and conflict a constant in policy considerations
Sierra Leone	• Modest progress toward the SDGs pre-2020 • Continuing efforts to recover from impacts of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) • Ethnic and geographic tensions encourage emphasis on social cohesion and stability in the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) • Vulnerability to climate change, coastal erosion, deforestation and natural disasters (flooding and landslides) - high visibility to environmental issues
Sri Lanka	• Persistent economic crisis led to downgrade from UMIC to LMI status • High level of economic and financial fragility and continuing economic mismanagement during the pandemic led to default on sovereign debt and subsequent shortages of food and fuel and rising inflation
Uzbekistan	• Sweeping economic structural reforms from 2016 to 2020 • Effort to move from international economic isolation and economic stagnation to sustained GDP growth • Commitment to the SDGs through 2018 resolution adopting 16 national SDGs with a national council to oversee implementation.

While **there is considerable variation in which factors were seen as most important in each case study country, there are also some factors which recur**. Some of these recurring factors were found to influence the UNDS response to COVID-19 in important ways. This relationship was confirmed by key informant interviews across stakeholder groups with supporting evidence from CCCA, SEIAs, SERPs, and national development plans.

In particular, the factors listed in table 2 had a direct effect on the national government's responsiveness to efforts to arrive at a more coherent and coordinated UNCT response to COVID-19. This positive pattern of interaction included:

- In **countries with recent and ongoing experience with natural disasters** or longer-term exposure to environmental damage (Argentina, Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Jordan, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Uzbekistan) there was an enhanced national government receptiveness to advocacy for policy and programme actions relating to **investments in a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery**. This includes action to address climate change, especially for adaptation and increased resilience.

- Countries with recent and ongoing experience with **humanitarian relief operations** saw increased national government willingness and capacity to **react strongly and to engage with the UNCT in supporting action to address the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19** (especially in social protection). These countries have an advantage in addressing the socio-economic impacts of humanitarian disasters gained from their experience of the nexus between humanitarian and development programming (Indonesia, Jordan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone).

> *"In Sierra Leone we learned from the Ebola Virus Disease Crisis that more people died from lack of access to health services than from Ebola. We have a laser-like focus on maintaining ongoing support to the health system to ensure that COVID-19 does not have the same result."*
>
> *Government Stakeholder in Sierra Leone*

- Countries where national governments have a consistent track record of **strong commitment to continuity in engagement around the SDGs** and in support of the national medium-term development plans had an advantage in pivoting to a coherent response to COVID-19. This determination that progress made in achieving prior agreed goals and targets would not be lost as resources were re-directed to combat COVID-19 was a positive factor in ensuring that all sources of external support (bilateral, UN and IFI) were coherent and aligned with national priorities (Argentina, Indonesia, Jordan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uzbekistan). Governments also viewed the UNCT, led by the RC as an important partner in retaining a strong focus on the SDGs.

- The **vulnerability of key population groups** in all eight case countries was exposed and deepened by the pandemic (see Section 2 above). This was met by a notable **willingness to address the specific needs of vulnerable populations on the part of national governments**. They were largely receptive to advocacy for policies and programmes targeted to address the uneven and differential socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. In particular, this recognition was essential to address the needs of, for example, economic participation by women and girls, gender-based violence (GBV), disability inclusion, food insecurity and poverty in women-led households, and access to services (including vaccination) by refugee and migrant populations. UNCTs recognized and acted on the opportunity to support policies and programmes advancing GE/HR/LNOB values. (Argentina, Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Indonesia, Jordan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan).

Findings: National Pre-COVID Contexts and Their Effect on the UNDS Response

The evaluation found that specific **national contextual factors** relating to: the strength of national government commitments to the SDGs, recent experience with responding to large scale humanitarian crises through a nexus approach, and willingness to address inequalities and vulnerabilities exposed and deepened by the pandemic (including those relating to environmental sustainability) **had an important positive influence on the cohesiveness of the UNDS response at country level**. (EQ1)

Where **national governments** were **strongly invested in ensuring that national medium term development plans remained focused on the SDGs** with support from all development partners and the UNCT **they exerted a strong positive influence of the cohesiveness of the response across and beyond the UNDS**. (EQ1)

3.2. The UNCT Context

The country case studies highlighted different factors characterizing the situation of UNCT's in the period just before the onset of the pandemic. The relative importance of these factors varied across the eight countries, sometimes relating more to the relationship between RCO capacity and the geographic challenges inherent in the country or sub-region (Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Indonesia) and sometimes to the UNCT history in dealing with large scale humanitarian operations and/or participation as a pilot UN Delivering as One country. Table 3 highlights some of the most important factors cited in each country.

Table 3: Key Aspects of the UNCT Context Pre-COVID-19

Case Study Country	The UNCT Context in Early 2020 (Pre-COVID)
Argentina	• New generation RC appointed to Argentina in September 2019. • Limited RCO capacity (two staffed positions). • Resource mobilization challenges (UMIC status and debt renegotiations).
Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean	• UN Sub-Regional Team (UNST) covers a sub-region (Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean) of seven independent nation states and three territories. • The UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNMSDF) covers a broader region including 18 countries overseen by one RCO (Guyana) and four Multi-Country Offices including the Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean Office.
Jordan	• RCO staffing building steadily in the period before 2020 • A single position serves as Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator (RC/HC). • UNCT and bilateral programming dominated by very large-scale humanitarian operations (US$ 6.6 billion 2020 to 2022). • 2017-2022 UNSDF brought together humanitarian and development programming under a single plan. • Coordination within and beyond the UNCT through a combined Humanitarian and Development Partners group.
Indonesia	• RC departure in April 2020 with an offsite acting RC (to October 2020) until arrival on-site of new RC. • RC and RCO work to coordinate a UNCT with 20 resident agencies and three without a physical presence and over 2000 personnel in the fourth largest country in the world by population with UN operations spread across the country.

Case Study Country	The UNCT Context in Early 2020 (Pre-COVID)
	• RC leadership works through the United Nations Country Team and the Humanitarian Country Team (latter included all members of the UNCT pre-pandemic but since 2021 only those engaged in humanitarian operations). • CF for 2021 to 2025 finalized in early 2020
Rwanda	• UNCT builds on longstanding history as a pilot Delivering as One country. • United Nations Development Assistance Plan 2018 to 2023 (UNDAP-II) directly aligned to the National Strategy for Transformation 1 (NST-1) 2017 to 2024. • UNCT engaged in strong country-led platform for aid coordination (Rwanda Development Partners Group).
Sierra Leone	• UNCT experienced in ongoing humanitarian and development operations. • UNCT in preparation of a new-generation CF in 2019 (to cover the period 2020-2023. • CF prepared in the same time frame as the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) with high level outcomes supporting the pillars of the national plan.
Sri Lanka	• RCO core positions only partially staffed until 2021 • UNCT experienced in humanitarian and development programming. • UNCT responding to a fast-changing and unstable political environment. • IFIs play a critical role in responding to the social and economic crises inf Sri Lanka which pre-dated and persisted through the pandemic.
Uzbekistan	• Two key RCO positions staffed in early stage of pandemic • UNCT in final stages of drafting UNSDCF in early 2020 • IFIs have a key role in financing national plans for reform. • IFIs included in the UNCT offer of services for response and recovery. • Government fiscal and economic reform efforts dominate the agenda for all development partners in effort to grow the economy in an LMI country.

The country case studies illustrate the different ways that these aspects of the UNCT context have influenced the coherence and effectiveness of the UNDS response. For example:

- In several case study countries (Indonesia, Jordan, Uzbekistan), the Resident Coordinator position was vacant at some point over the 2.5 year period under review, relying on *ad interim* actors, for months during the pandemic and the development and/or implementation of the UNDS response. This absence presented an important challenge to the task of ensuring a coherent plan and programme. Similarly, in Sri Lanka the core positions in the RCO were not fully staffed until 2021. In Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, the multi-country responsibility of the UN Sub-Regional Team posed a challenge to RCO capacity. The very dispersed UNCT geographic presence in Indonesia also posed a challenge to the work of the RCO. In general, the case studies illustrate that the empowered RC and fully staffed RCOs were an important factor in achieving coherence in the UNCT response to COVID-19, but it is important to recognize the challenges they often faced.
- In Argentina, Indonesia, Jordan, Rwanda Sierra Leone and Uzbekistan, the process of developing a new-generation CF was just completed, underway or being launched in 2020 (the new Rwanda CF was endorsed by the Government of Rwanda in December 2021). The process of developing a new CF helped the UNCTs to pivot more readily to joint development of a coherent UN response. The new generation CFs, supported by regularly

updated CCAs provided UNCTs with experience in coordinated and collaborative planning which both fed in to and benefited from the experience of developing the SERPs.

- In Jordan and Indonesia, the UNCT brought together entities engaged in humanitarian and development programming in a formal joint planning arrangement. In Jordan this occurred through the work of the RC/HC and in Indonesia through cross membership in the United Nations Country Team and the Humanitarian Country Team. In addition, UNCTs based in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka had considerable experience in planning together to address nexus issues.

> *"Here in Rwanda, we in the UNCT built on our experience as a pilot Delivering as One Country. In addition, when COVID-19 hit we had a head start with functioning coordinating bodies and a national government committed to effective action while maintaining the progress of the National Strategy for Transformation."*
>
> *Rwanda UNCT Stakeholder*

- The role of IFIs (the IMF, the World Bank and regional development banks) posed an important challenge as well as an opportunity for many UNCTs, with some responding more effectively than others.
- In addition, of course, there were contexts quite unique to each country in the sample regarding the working capacities and relations of the UNCT prior to the pandemic. Just a few examples include:
    - The dominance of humanitarian programming in Jordan where the budget for humanitarian operations is many times larger than UNDS support to development programmes;
    - Rwanda's history as a pilot UN Delivering as One country which gave the UNCT an advantage when called on to develop joint programming under the UN Framework;
    - Sierra Leone's experience in responding to the Ebola Virus Disease emergency in 2013-2015 which set the tone for the national response to the pandemic.

Findings: UNCT Pre-COVID Contexts and their Impact on UNDS Cohesiveness

There were **important challenges facing RCs and RCOs and, in fact, the whole UNCT in many of the case study countries prior to the onset of the pandemic**. These included challenges in staffing the RC position and the RCO complement as well as challenges in matching the capacity of the RCO to demands in sub-regional offices and in countries with a very large and geographically disbursed UN presence.

However, there were offsetting positive factors as well, including:

The evolution of the **CCA and the new-generation CF in the case study countries both before and during the pandemic provided a strong impetus to a coherent and coordinated UNDS response**. This was especially true for UNCTs like Rwanda with a history of involvement as a UN Delivering as One country but it also reflects the ongoing evolution of the new-generation CF process. (EQ1)

UNCT's in countries where the UN has history of addressing large-scale humanitarian responses alongside support to development programming had a special advantage in **applying a nexus approach to dealing with the social and economic impacts of COVID-19.** (EQ1)

3.3. The Immediate Crisis Response of the UNCTs

Faced with an unprecedented crisis, UNCTs took different paths to organize responses to the development emergency in the early days of the pandemic, many taking action to develop coordination structures before the launch of the UN Secretary-General's call for coordinated actions in March 2020.[5] Some UNCTs, such as Indonesia, Sierra Leone and Uzbekistan, moved swiftly to establish Crisis Management Teams (CMT) while others, such as Sri Lanka and Argentina, utilized a focal point system to link entities to coordination structures under the RCO. The Barbados and Eastern Caribbean UNST created a COVID-19 Committee with representation from all agencies with a physical presence in the multi-country sub-region.

United Nations Uzbekistan Immediate Crisis Response

The UN Uzbekistan was seen to respond rapidly to meet its duty of care to staff members and their families. The UN established a multilateral COVID-19 Crisis Management Team (CMT) on 12 March 2020 under the leadership of the RC. Supported by six Task Forces, the CMT also brought together key actors from the Government, UN and IFIs to address key issues in the national response.

1. Health capacity building co-chaired by WHO and Ministry of Health
2. Health procurement co-chaired by ADB, UNDP and Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade
3. Socio-economic mitigation co-chaired by UNDP and the World Bank
4. Protection and key populations chaired by UNFPA with OHCHR as senior adviser
5. Risk communications and community engagement chaired by the UN RCO
6. Security and duty of care chaired by the UN RCO

The CMT structure and task forces were seen as effective mechanisms by stakeholders, supported by frequent meetings and clear roles and responsibilities. Communication mechanisms set up by the UN were seen to be widespread and well-functioning, reaching the Government, development partners, ambassadors, and CSOs.

Initial responses centered on ensuring that the UN system was able to maintain business continuity for critical work as well as to meet obligations for duty of care to staff and their families. The need to act together in a coordinated fashion to protect staff was identified as a key facilitating factor for strengthened collaboration more broadly. The duty of care role was seen to be highly critical particularly in contexts where many staff contracted COVID-19 and some staff /dependents lost their lives or required medical evacuation. The role that the UN Uzbekistan was able to play vis a vis both internal and external stakeholders to share information around health and duty of care elevated UN visibility within the development partners community, garnering increased understanding and respect for the critical role that the UN plays in a crisis situation.

[5] *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19* was launched 31 March 2020.

> *"Having a full-time RC handling the work on duty of care was important – the work on medical and mental health oversight was huge. Many of the agencies looked to the RC to do all of that. Agencies were grateful for that role. This helped to catalyze the shift in how agencies saw the RC on the 'stay and deliver' side."*
>
> *UN Stakeholder Uzbekistan*

The UN, under the leadership of the RC/RCO, was seen to effectively meet obligations for duty of care to staff members and their families as well as to external stakeholders in many contexts. Communication and operational mechanisms established to ensure staff safety and welfare were seen as generally well-functioning, offering information through virtual townhall meetings, bulletins and other updates as well as important material resources such as PPE, oxygen concentrators, masks and special access to vaccines for staff, dependents and extended members of family units. The UN Indonesia used pooled resources to recruit three additional personnel (staff counselor, medical clerk, medical officer) to support staff health and well-being; the UN Sri Lanka made arrangements with a team of physicians to remain on call to address questions from UN personnel, and staff were further provided access to mental health and psychosocial support through vetted counsellors.

As in other countries, Argentina's RC designated the RCO Head of Office as the Duty of Care COVID-19 Coordinator, who worked with a small team to implement actions to safeguard the health of nearly 800 UN staff members including developing guidelines, protocols, and contingency plans that were approved by the UNCT to protect UN staff. Agencies were also asked to appoint a focal point whereby relevant care information and updates were shared across the UN system. The team also coordinated webinars and town-halls to address questions and concerns. Additionally, a PAHO/WHO clinical doctor was made available for UN staff. The UNCT further assembled a vaccination team led by the UNICEF Representative as *Local Vaccine Coordinator*, with focal points from RCO, UNICEF, PAHO/WHO, and ILO that procured and administered over 800 vaccines to UN staff and dependents. In many countries the RCO Head of Office also acted as the coordinator for UN vaccinations.

UNDS reform processes that heralded in a new generation of Resident Coordinators supported by RCOs were seen as important facilitative factors to enable early coordinated responses in all case study countries.[6] At the same time, the need to work together collectively, drawing on the specialized technical expertise of different entities across the UN system under a single leader to ensure staff safety and business continuity, helped to broaden and deepen understanding of the value of the reform processes in many instances.

[6] This remained constant despite the fact that case study countries were at varying stages of filling key positions within RCOs and many were only partially staffed at the start of the pandemic.

Findings: The Immediate Crisis Response of UNCTs

The **experience gained by UNCTs under the leadership and coordination of the RC** supported by the RCO **in the immediate response to COVID-19** (January to March 2020), including ensuring ongoing continuity of operations as well as meeting obligations under the duty of care to UN employees**, provided a strong foundation for a more cohesive UNDS response to COVID-19**.

In particular, the experience gained in taking **rapid collective action under the overall coordination and leadership of the RC and RCO** at the earliest and most uncertain point in the pandemic made the transition to collective analysis and planning more feasible. UNCTs reported that **the pivot toward planning UN support to combatting the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic** was **enabled in part by the immediate collaborative actions** taken to ensure a safe operational presence at the onset of the crisis. (EQ 1)

3.4. Planning and Implementing the UNDS Response: From SERP to CF

3.4.1 Engaging with national governments and ensuring alignment

The country case studies highlight the critical importance of the relationship between the UNCT (under the leadership of the RC) and the highest-level policy making bodies of the supported national governments in ensuring alignment between the UNDS response and national priorities. They also show that national development plans and policies, especially medium-term national development plans (MTNDP) had an important role to play in shaping the UNDS response to COVID-19.

In all eight case study countries the UNCT worked through existing and newly formed coordination mechanisms to ensure that SERPs were consistent with and linked to national priorities, especially as expressed in national COVID-19 response plans as well as development plans that pre-dated the pandemic. The effort to ensure alignment with national humanitarian and development priorities while planning the UNCT response was coordinated and led by the RC with operational support from RCO staff and cooperation from UNCT entity Heads of Agency (HOA) and technical staff.

The extent that national government partners were able and willing to engage with the UNCT during the preparation of Socio-Economic Impact Assessments (SEIAs) and SERPs varied across the case study countries.

In Jordan, the development of the Socio-Economic Framework (SEF) was seen by

The Many Faces of the SERP

One of the most notable features of the SERPs in the case study countries was their variability in naming conventions and in designation of their areas of work.

In Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, t*he Muti-Sector Response Plan* (MSRP 2.0) gathered together the UNST response under 4 pillars. In Indonesia, the *MSRP* encompassed all three highest level pillars of UN action – health, humanitarian and development. In Rwanda, *the One Joint Programme* focused on six outcome areas in order to effectively support the national Economic Recovery Programme (ERP). In Uzbekistan, *the Consolidated COVID-19 Socio-economic Response Offer* (the Offer) addressed seven different thematic areas in order to better align with the national response.

In all cases, the response plans were able to work broadly within the five defined pillars of the UN Framework. DCO support to allow UNCTs the flexibility to work with the overall guidance of the Framework while ensuring alignment with national contexts and development plans was greatly appreciated by all UNCTs.

UNCT entities as largely an internal UN exercise, especially in light of the Government of Jordan's pre-occupation with competing demands during the immediate emergency phase of the pandemic. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, during the early phase of the pandemic, it was difficult for the UNCT to develop a working conversation with the Government, although this improved significantly over time.

In contrast, in the six remaining case study countries, the UNCT and national authorities worked closely with the Government from the earliest days of the pandemic to ensure alignment in their response plans. This alignment took two main forms: designing the UNCT socio-economic response so that it contributed to the national response plans and aligning the SERP closely with the national medium-term development plan. Table 4 illustrates the ways in which UNCTs worked to ensure alignment between the SERP and national development and humanitarian priorities.

Table 4: Engaging with National Government Priorities and Plans

Case Study Country	Key Features of UNCT Alignment with National Priorities and Plans
Argentina	• The UNCT's SEIA provided one of the earliest assessments of socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and helped development of policy during the response • The SERP mapped, aligned and provided a coordination mechanism for all UNCT support to the national response
Barbados and Eastern Caribbean	• In advance of the UN Framework, the UN Sub-Regional Team (UNST) developed a Multi-sector Response Plan (MSRP) to support recovery efforts • This was followed by a second iteration (MRP-2.0) which served as a bridge to the UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework 2022-2026
Indonesia	• In a process led by OCHA, the Government of Indonesia and other stakeholders were engaged in the design and coordination of the MSRP
Rwanda	• The Government of Rwanda required that all support to the response to COVID-19 should align with the National Strategy for Transformation (NST 1). • The Joint Programme was structured to align closely with the Government of Rwanda Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) and Economic Recovery Fund (ERF) and linked closely to the Social Protection Response and Recovery Plan (SPRSP) embedded in the ERF
Sierra Leone	• The CF 2020 to 2023 was prepared in 2019 and was explicitly linked to the MTNDP • In March 2020 the Government released its Quick Action Economic Recovery Program (QAERP). The UNCT organized its responses in two main streams with WHO leading on the health response and UNDP leading on the socio-economic response. The RCO worked to develop a matrix of UNCT action across the two streams of health and non-health prior to development of the SERP • The SERP built on the earlier matrix of budgetary actions and was published in October 2020
Uzbekistan	• WHO worked the Ministry of Health to issue the National Health Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) • In May 2020 the UNCT put forward the Consolidated COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Offer which combined with the SPRP to encompass all UN support to COVID-19 Response and Recovery

UNCTs (with coordination and support from the RC and RCO) were able to match the UN socio-economic response at country level to the priorities, plans and programmes of national governments. More importantly, the case studies illustrate how different factors in the interaction of national plans and the development of the SERPs have contributed to the coherence of the UNDS plan and programme of support.

- Where the national government had a clear and strong commitment to the SDGs as expressed in a MTNDP, UNCTs were able to ensure that the SERP (and its precursors in Argentina, Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uzbekistan) aligned with and supported both the national priorities and progress toward the SDGs. This also made it easier to ensure that the process of updating CCAs and preparing new generation CFs benefited from the experience of the SERP.
- Where national governments responded rapidly with the development of COVID-19 response and recovery plans and programmes, UNCTs (working through Crisis Management Teams or their equivalent and supported by the RCO) were able to ensure that plans and programmes for the UNDS response were aligned with and supported those programmes – both before and during the launch of the SERP. This was an important factor driving a more coherent UNDS response at country level.
- The advent of COVID-19 in many of the case study countries corresponded with either a very recently developed new generation CF (Sierra Leone and Indonesia) or processes already under way to develop one (Barbados, Jordan, Rwanda, Sri Lanka). In many of these countries the annual update to the CCA either fed into or benefited from the process of developing the SEIA for COVID-19. Similarly, the process of developing the SERP contributed in most case study countries to the priorities and programmes contained in new-generation CFs.

3.4.2 The process of SERP development

While the process of preparing the SEIA, sharing it with national stakeholders and subsequently developing the SERP (or its equivalent) followed varying paths in the case study countries, it was characterized by important common features as well.

With the UN Framework in April 2020, UNCTs had access to an established process and a thematic framework for planning and implementing a coherent UNDS response to the common and very serious negative social and economic impacts described in Section 2 above. Perhaps the most significant deviation from that process and thematic structure occurred in countries like Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Indonesia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone where a national response plan preceded or coincided with the release of the UN Framework and the UNCT had responded with a corresponding UN response programme or plan prior to development of the SERP. Nonetheless, in each of these countries a subsequent plan or programme was developed under the general guidelines of the SERP as supported with webinars and guidance notes by DCO headquarters[7].

> *"Being tied together early in the crisis was critical. Once agencies take their different directions a coordinated response can be very difficult. You end up doing patchwork and putting on band-aids."*
>
> *Barbados and Eastern Caribbean UN Sub-Regional Team (UNST) Stakeholder*

The elements of the SEIA/SERP development process which strengthened the coherence of the UNDS response included:

[7] Following the release of the UN Framework in April 2020, DCO headquarters and regional office staff hosted global and regional webinars with RCs and RCO staff and provided a series of guidance and methodology notes on development and monitoring of the SERPs.

- Rapid action by UNCTs to shift from the CCA process or to augment it by concentrating on the development of a SEIA. In some places like Jordan this was done not in a separate document but in a series of UNCT entity-led impact studies. In Indonesia, the UN commissioned in 2021 a review and analysis of surveys and assessments undertaken since the start of the pandemic to assess the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on SDG progress in the country. The SEIA serves as an updated addendum to the 2019 CCA in line with the new generation of 'living' CCAs instituted as part of UN reform processes.

> *"This was a huge effort. We put the report together using a matrix approach and identified the synergies between actions. The RC played an important role in identifying and eliminating duplications."*
>
> *Argentina UNCT Stakeholder*

- Where UNCTs engaged with government to develop a UN response plan in advance of the release of the UN Framework (Argentina, Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Sierra Leone, Uzbekistan) these early initiatives allowed the teams to pivot quickly to the development of a more conventional SERP. This rapid start also meant that UNCT entities were comfortable and experienced in working together to plan a response to COVID-19 even in advance of the UN Framework.
- UNCT staff in the case study countries felt that the process of developing the SEIA (or its components) and the SERP was generally participatory and inclusive across the UNCT, including for entities without a physical presence. For the latter, their participation increased partly because of pro-active leadership by the empowered RC and partly because of reliance on remote methods which took away the normal disadvantage or exclusion from in-person planning meetings. UNCT entities also benefited from a more capable and well-staffed RCO which helped support joint planning and programming exercises.
- The QCPR Monitoring Framework indicator 3.1.12 indicates that, in 2021, 75 percent of program country governments surveyed agreed that the annual results report from the RC encompasses relevant expertise of UN agencies without a physical presence (UN SGR 2022).[8]
- The inclusive planning process was seen by UNCT staff, bilateral development partners and Government staff in many case study countries as facilitating a more cohesive and comprehensive response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, one which incorporated expertise from across the spectrum of UNCT member entities.
- The division of responsibility between the RC, the RCO, the UNDP Resident Representative and other HoAs on the development and implementation of the SERP took various forms in different case study countries, sometimes requiring negotiations and support from regional and global bodies to understand the appropriate roles depending on the context and capacities. For example, in Indonesia the MSRP was developed under the leadership of the RC supported by OCHA in a coordinating role so that the MSRP covered both the development and humanitarian response. In Uzbekistan, the COVID-19 Socio-Economic

[8] The Results Monitoring Framework of the QCPR defines element ix of indicator 3.12 as "in respect of annual reports provided by the Resident Coordinator to them", however, the UNSDG (2021) United Nations Country Results Report Guidelines for UN Country Teams notes that results are reported by the UNCT as a whole. https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-country-results-report-guidelines-un-country-teams

Response Offer was drafted under the umbrella of the Crisis Management Team (CMT) with UNDP Uzbekistan as designated technical lead working closely with the World Bank.

- In all eight case study countries, the empowered RC and, eventually, the RCO played an important role in providing overall leadership and coordination throughout the process of developing and implementing the SERP. The fully staffed RCOs also were essential in supporting SERP monitoring against global indicators and effective participation by all the UNCT entities, including those without a physical presence.

On the other hand, there were challenges and issues in the processes used to develop and implement the SERP:

- While the participatory and inclusive nature of the SERP development process was a strength in ensuring cohesion and coordination in the UNCT response, it was labour intensive and time consuming for participating entities.
- In those countries where both the national government and the UNCT responded very rapidly to the need for strategies and programmes to address the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 the UN Framework came somewhat late in the process and necessitated re-tooling by the UNCT of plans already in place.
- Across the case study countries there was considerable variation how UNCT entities (and national government counterparts and development partners) understood the role of UNDP, including its technical leadership role on the SEIA and the SERP and the "integrator" function of the UNDP Resident Representative[9]. In some cases, and by some parties, this was interpreted as UNDP having the overall lead role on guiding the UNCT response – to the detriment of the independent role of the RC. In general, the case studies illustrate the lack of a clear definition and understanding of the integrator function on the part of UNCT entity staff and key stakeholders outside the UNCT.
- There was also a continuing issue regarding accountability for results at a collective level across the UNCT as compared to individual UNCT entity accountability toward their own headquarters. Many UNCT staff noted that while the UNDS is responsible for a coherent response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 (and collective support to achieving the SDGS), main lines of accountability remain headquarters oriented and mandate specific.

[9] The UN General Assembly Resolution 72/279 of 31 May, 2018 on repositioning of the UNDS (para 32): "*Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure an effective and efficient transition to a repositioned United Nations development system, in particular to a reinvigorated resident coordinator system, including by giving due consideration to the role of a responsive United Nations Development Programme as the support platform of the United Nations development system *providing an integrator function* in support of countries in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda."

- There was considerable variation across the eight case studies in the extent that IFIs, including the World Bank and the IMF, participated in or benefited from the SERP planning and implementation process. In Sierra Leone, for example, the IMF was not able to gain needed information on the UNCT position on key issues to inform its budget negotiations with the Ministry of Finance. On the other hand, in Uzbekistan IFIs are considered an increasingly integral part of the UNCT and they worked closely with the UNCT under the leadership of the RC on the development of the socio-economic response.

> *"It was important to have a sense of what everyone was doing. Understanding the support coming to the Government helped our analysis and dialogue with the Government to avoid duplication. We complemented each other - the UN on the ground at the decentralized level and the IFIs on the macro-level – this worked well. This was the first time UN agencies and IFIs sat together to align language. We understand each other much better because of that."*
>
> *Stakeholder in Uzbekistan*

- With some exceptions (as in Uzbekistan), engagement between the UNDS entities and IFIs (such as the IMF, World Bank and Regional Development Banks) was limited. Key informants from some IFIs noted that UNCT entities have reliable granular knowledge of vulnerabilities in host countries that can make an important contribution to IFI planning, but full engagement was not being realized in most countries despite increased efforts by some UNCTs. At the same time, knowledge of IFI policy and programmes can be leveraged by the UNCT to better influence the quality of national policies and investments. UNCT and IFI staff generally agreed that the level of coherence between UNCT and IFI socio-economic engagement required improvement, including in such areas as the development of Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFF).

- While the rapid development and roll-out of the SERP results indicator framework represents an important development in transparency and accountability at a global level, it came with a very significant burden of time and effort for UNCT entities and for the RCO in each of the case study countries. With some exceptions (see Section 4.7), UNCT staff felt that the effort, coming as it did during a time of crisis and extreme workloads for all staff, was out of proportion to the utility of the resulting information which was not useful for managing programmes at country level.

- The three-pillar structure of the overall UN response (OCHA's Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP), WHO's Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) and the UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19) presented challenges for UNCTs as they worked to ensure a coherent response from the entire UN team at country level. In particular, the division between health systems support interventions under the SPRP and the health pillar of the SERP was often difficult to clearly define. In addition, UNCTs had to adjust frameworks and adopt special measures to ensure coherent support to humanitarian and development responses in some countries including Indonesia, Jordan and Sierra Leone. However, at global level, key informants noted that the results indicators for Pillar 1 in the UN Framework were adapted from the WHO SPRP to ensure common reporting to headquarters of UN entities regarding efforts to support the national health response and reduce the burden of data collection.

Overall, however, the process of developing the SEIA and the SERP or its equivalent in each of the eight case study countries was seen as a valuable exercise which improved the coherence and relevance of the UNDS response and was helpful in further strengthening approaches and process for the development and implementation of new-generation CFs.

3.4.3 Added value of the SERPs

While questions were raised regarding the overall value-added and utility of the SERP, especially in countries where the UNCT had developed a plan to support the national response in advance of the release of the UN Framework, the preponderance of opinion in field settings supported the conclusion that the SERPs did add value and were both relevant and useful. Aspects of this added value and utility include:

> *"We had already made gains in cohesion during development of the UNSDCF in 2019 but developing the SERP allowed us to consolidate and extend those gains."*
>
> *Sierra Leone UNCT Stakeholder*

- Providing clarity within and outside the UNCT in real time (or close to it) of the actions of UNCT entities, including programmes and budgets, in support of the national response.
- Offering a structure for re-purposing programme funds from bilateral development partners or core resources.
- Encouraging UNCT entities to engage in national and sub-regional initiatives such as the joint UN initiative to address vaccine hesitancy in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean.
- Acting as an integrating instrument to allow the UNCT to demonstrate, in a time of crisis, its ability to come together as a collective and become more aligned to government priorities.
- Encouraging UNCT entities toward a strong consensus on the need for well-functioning inter-agency structures to support joint planning and programming.
- In some countries, preceding and augmenting the national response plan and expanding key stakeholder awareness of the interconnection of the development and humanitarian spheres.
- Contributing to the development of national health sector and socio-economic response plans in some countries.
- Highlighting the importance of the empowered RC and the capacitated RCO to facilitate UNCT entity collaboration.
- Providing a platform for identifying inequalities and the differential impacts of COVID-19 on key vulnerable groups, elevating the conversation on GEWE, HR and LNOB to be deepened in many case study countries with national governments more agreeable to targeted action for vulnerable group members (especially refugees and migrants) based on how SEIAs and SERPs helped to expose the negative consequences of COVID-19 for the most vulnerable groups.
- For some UNCT entities in some countries (including Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Sierra Leone) the SERP did provide a vehicle for resource mobilization although the overall effect on resource mobilization was limited.

Most importantly, there was a consensus across the eight case study countries on the part of UNCT entity staff, development partners, national government officials and CSOs that the SERPs did

represent a more coherent and relevant UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 than could have been expected in their absence.

3.4.4 The SERP and the Cooperation Framework

The extent to which the SERP has informed or influenced the Cooperation Frameworks (CF) in the case study countries depends, to some degree, on where the CF development cycle stood in each case study during 2020. Refer to Table 1 for overview.

In all case study countries, UNCTs worked towards integrating key elements of the SERP into the CF using different strategies and approaches depending on where the country was located within the CF development cycle. In Argentina, Indonesia and Uzbekistan, with CFs that commenced on January 1, 2021, there was an opportunity for the SERPs to inform the new CF.

In these cases, UNCTs were often in the process of completing the CCA (now updated annually) to inform the new CF when the COVID-19 pandemic started. In response, UNCTs pivoted their focus from developing the new CCA/CF to developing the SERP. Progress made in the CCA was often used to inform the SEIA and SERP process. As the pandemic evolved, the focus shifted back to preparing the new CF. Both the Indonesia and Uzbekistan UNCTs closed their SERPs at the end of 2020 to avoid a period of parallel reporting to multiple guiding frameworks, continuing relevant SERP activities in the new CFs.

In Sierra Leone, which had just commenced a UNSDCF cycle in early 2020, the UNSDCF provided a firm foundation for UNCT action. The UNCT in Sierra Leone was careful in developing the SERP to complement both the CF and the national Quick Action Economic Response Plan.

Guidance on how the SERP and CFs were meant to be integrated into the planning process of UNCTs in 2021 and 2022 was described in a background note on country planning tools for 2021 presented to the COVI-19 Response and Recovery Fund advisory committee. The note indicated that all SERPs were to be completed by late 2021 and to be integrated back into the main Joint Work Plans (JWP) under the CFs. According to the guidance note, the UNCTs were meant to use the SERP as a baseline rather than the past CF. In most countries, folding the SERP into the CF was seen as an organic and relatively smooth process.

Findings: Coherence of the UNDS Response at Country Level: From SERP to CF

The evolution of the pandemic and its social and economic effects has confirmed the **relevance of the five pillars of action of the UN Framework**, with particular emphasis on the immediate need (in 2020 and ongoing) for strengthened systems of social protection and economic response and recovery (without neglecting other pillars of the response). UNCTs have been able to organize the response under the five pillars from a strategic (upstream) point of view as well as a programming perspective. **This was facilitated by both the original structure of the pillars and their expected content and by the way in which DCO headquarters supported a flexible approach to SERP development by UNCTs**, allowing flexibility to modify the structure as needed to fit national contexts either by regrouping pillars under the thematic structures of national development plans or by slicing the pillars to fit national planning instruments. (EQ 1)

The evaluation has confirmed the significant **added value of the UN Framework and the SERP in supporting a more cohesive and focused UNDS response to COVID-19** in closer alignment with national response plans and priorities. In some countries, UNCTs, under leadership and coordination

from the RC and RCO, were able to develop an agreed UNDS response prior to development of the UN Framework which was then revised in order to meet its requirements. (EQ 1)

The **three-pillar structure of the overall UN response (Health, Humanitarian and Socio-economic) presented challenges for many UNCTs**. For example, it was often difficult at UNCT level to distinguish between efforts to address the health effects of COVID-19 as supported by the global health response and efforts to sustain health systems as supported under the SERP. In addition, it was clear in a number of case study countries that planning UNCT support to the national response needed to incorporate a coherent approach which **crossed the boundaries between humanitarian and development programming**. UNCTs were able to overcome these constraints and to ensure integration across the humanitarian and development nexus but their experience highlights the need to attend more closely to these issues in future UN crisis response planning. (EQ 1)

Engagement with IFIs including the IMF, World Bank and Regional Development Banks for the purpose of **coordinating and ensuring coherence in policy engagement, advocacy and programming remains a challenge** for both UNCTs and the national offices of the IFIs. UNCTs in many countries are searching for **mechanisms and approaches to ensure more consistent and meaningful engagement with and by the IFIs**. (EQ1)

UNDS reform efforts aimed at strengthening the role of the **empowered and independent Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator have helped to support collaborative and coherent planning processes for a coherent response to COVID-19** by the UNCT. These have combined, in most countries, with an inclusive process for developing SERPs (including moves toward deeper integration of agencies without a physical presence) to contribute to more coherent CFs, which are better aligned with national needs and priorities. There is also evidence in some of the case countries that the SERPs did influence the structure of programming – partly through the use of pooled funds. In most case study countries, there is a demonstrable link from the SERP to priorities in the CF. An important factor in this link is the continuing evolution of the CCA – CF process in 2020 and 2021, in parallel with the SEIA and SERP. (EQ 1)

The empowered RC, supported by the RCO staff, has played an important role in ensuring that entities without a physical presence and smaller UNCT entities without large programme allocations have engaged more fully in processes of analysis and planning, including CCAs and CFs and in some cases joint programming. Further, this has helped improve the overall coherence and comprehensiveness of the offer of support from the UNDS. (EQ1)

Notwithstanding the progress made toward more coherence and collaboration in policy engagement and programme planning of the UNCT response to COVID-19, there are **continuing impediments and barriers limiting progress including issues of accountability** (with primary accountability to individual UNCT entity headquarters rather than collectively). (EQ1)

Agency priorities remain a determining factor in programme planning and performance appraisals while **messaging from UNDS entity headquarters** to the country office level as illustrated in part through the newest generation of Strategic Plans **often lacks specific reference to advancing UNDS reforms**. In addition, some elements of the UNDS reform process continued to lag during the period under review, with detrimental effects on the coherence of the UNCT response to COVID-19, including:

- Lack of clarity and understanding of the UNDP “integrator” role
- Lack of or contradictory guidance from UNCT entity HQ to country heads of agencies
- Absence of a mechanism for enforcing full compliance with the MAF at UNCT and regional levels

- Limited progress in aligning UN entity business operations so that administrative systems support joint programming. (EQ 1)

The various platforms which provide the **overall architecture for coordinating development support at country level have played an important part in promoting and ensuring the coherence of the UNDS response**. The country case studies, the *OIOS Evaluation of the Resident Coordinator System* and the *Early Lessons and Evaluability of the COVID-19 MPTF* all noted that the RC and the RCO play an important role in the operation of these multi-agency mechanisms for coordination at country level both within and beyond the UNCT. (EQ 1)

3.5. Moving to an Equitable and Environmentally Sustainable Recovery

A key element of the UN Framework is a commitment by the UNDS to support countries to Build Back Better (BBB) and Greener, towards sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda[10]. This involves four specific areas of national and international action to be addressed through the five pillars of the framework (UN 2020c, pp.38-34).

1. Laying the foundation for a fair and sustainable transition to a new social contract in the years ahead.
2. Addressing the current unsustainable economic model and its unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.
3. Addressing the linkages between nature and health.
4. Investing in social and economic interventions today to build a better post-pandemic future (including decarbonization, the protection of natural capital, enhancing gender and social equality and inclusion, and the realization of human rights for everyone).

As noted in the report of the *Early Lessons and Evaluability* of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF (UN 2021a, p.30), there has been an ongoing global effort to promote the Build Back Better and Greener agenda through the UN Framework and subsequent guidance, including, for example:

- Socialization of the concept with RCs and UNCTs in bi-weekly global webinars hosted by DCO.
- Guidance provided by DCO on how SERPs are to be integrated in their longer-term CFs and updated as per joint workplans.
- The High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) guide on COVID-19, Inequalities and Building Back Better.[11]
- The Secretary-General's policy briefs as compiled by UN DESA.[12]

[10] This section concentrates on the question of environmental sustainability as addressed in SERPs and CFs. The question of how the UNDS has supported an equitable response to the pandemic is addressed in detail in Section 3.6.

[11] Accessible at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/10/HLCP-policy-brief-on-COVID-19-inequalities-and-building-back-better-1.pdf

[12] Accessible at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PB-Compilation-final.pdf

- Individual agency policy briefs including for example, UNEP on BBB and fiscal policy.[13]
- Monthly discussions on specific subjects linked to recover better by the UNSDG COVID-19 Task Team which are then discussed with RCs and UN country teams in the biweekly webinars.

3.5.1 Addressing environmental sustainability in the SERPs

The report of the *Early Lessons and Evaluability* study of the COVID-19 MPTF (UN 2021a, p.39) pointed out that "*UNCT entities find it [*the UN Framework*] less clear as a guide to supporting the environmental aspects of BBB and Greener for accelerating equitable and sustainable progress to the 2030 Agenda*". The same report (p.20) noted that projects funded under the first call of the COVID-19 MPTF were highly concentrated in health, social protection and livelihoods protection and generally paid less attention to environmental aspects of BBB and Greener, including decarbonization and the protection of natural capital.

Not surprisingly, the SERPS developed in the case study countries vary greatly in the extent they include an analysis of the impacts of COVID-19 on environmental equity and sustainability. They also vary on the level of attention paid to supporting efforts for a more environmentally sustainable recovery – including actions to address climate change. Three of the SERPs for case study countries (Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Indonesia, and Sierra Leone) provide little or no discussion of the impacts of COVID-19 on environmental sustainability and provide little visibility to UNCT actions in support of a BBB and greener agenda. The Socio-Economic Response Framework (SEF) for Jordan does identify environmental sustainability as an "accelerator" for a more equitable recovery but there is little clarity on how this would translate into actions by the UNCT.

In contrast, the SERPs developed to guide the UNDS response in Argentina, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan do include an analysis of the environmental impacts of COVID-19 and do highlight the importance of investing in a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery – including efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The Rwanda Joint Programme makes specific reference to environmental sustainability in UNCT support to the Economic Recovery Fund (ERF): "the support to the ERF will be guided by the UN Secretary-General's call to "Build Back Better" following the six climate-related actions to shape the recovery process" (UN Rwanda, 2020, para. 26).

At least with regard to SERP development, many UNCTs have been challenged by the task of ensuring that the response to COVID-19 includes significant effort to achieve a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery, particularly through investments in decarbonization and the protection of natural capital.

[13] Accessible at:
https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/32923/BBB.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

3.5.2 Developing a deeper understanding at UNCT level

> *"We in Jordan are at the beginning of understanding what build back better means – we have not yet fully made the case for what help the UN can offer for designing this more equitable recovery."*
>
> *Jordan UNCT Stakeholder*

Notwithstanding the relatively low visibility of these issues in many SERPs, UNCTs in the case study countries developed and deepened their understanding of and commitment to the need to support a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery during the pandemic. This commitment to understanding and owning the Build Back Better (BBB) and greener agenda was shared by the UN and the governments to a greater or lesser extent in all of the case study countries. Each UNCT developed this commitment over time and with slightly differing interpretations around common themes of resilience and equity. For example:

- In Argentina this commitment was expressed through a common UNCT understanding that recovery must strengthen the resilience of affected communities to future risks including those arising from climate change.
- In Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, the UN Sub-Regional Team (UNST) and the seven island governments and three territories agreed on the need to commit to structural changes aimed at increased resilience to climate change and other environmental shocks and to sustainable natural resource extraction.
- In Jordan the UNCT and the national government coalesced around the need to address environmental sustainability, especially in terms of vulnerability to water shortages and the need for climate change adaptation.
- In Indonesia *t*he UNCT and other key stakeholders developed a deeper understanding of the importance of focused efforts to build back better and greener especially in order to reach the most vulnerable.
- In Rwanda the RC and the RCO worked to ensure that a more equitable, environmentally sustainable and resilient recovery featured in deliberations of high-level development coordinating bodies.
- In Sierra Leone, the UNCT focused on the need for addressing resilience and environmental sustainability and risk reduction relating to environmental degradation from mining operations and the impact of deforestation, coastal degradation and climate change.
- In Sri Lanka in the SERP, the UNCT highlighted the importance of paying early attention to a 'green recovery' to advance climate change and environmental protection commitments, identifying the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for a vast reorganization of production in the country, including an opportunity to implement a new fiscal framework that nudges the transition to greener, low-carbon economy investments.
- In Uzbekistan, the SERP includes a section on the environmental impact of the pandemic in the Situation Analysis that highlights the need to build back better with green jobs and a transition to a carbon neutral economy.

UNCT entities noted that the experience of responding to the pandemic provided the basis for strengthened ability to work collaboratively toward environmental sustainability and resilience both within the UNDS and with external stakeholders.

In some of the case study countries (Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Jordan, Indonesia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan), UNCTs have gained experience in providing programmatic support to efforts to improve environmental sustainability and community resilience in the face of climate change and other shocks. Examples include support to projects aimed at more climate-resilient agriculture and efforts to address deforestation and coastal degradation as well as the promotion of secure green spaces for women in urban settings.

3.5.3 CF content on environmentally sustainable recovery

In contrast to the SERPs, there is a pattern of strong attention to the need for an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery in the UNSDCFs across the eight case study countries. Through new or updated CCAs and based on the deepening understanding referred to above, UNCTs have incorporated attention to an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery in CFs in virtually all the case study countries.

> *"The CF in Argentina will promote environmental protection, resilience and climate change mitigation and adaptation actions"*
>
> *Argentina UNCT Stakeholder*

Table 5: An equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery in Cooperation Frameworks

Country	Environmental Sustainability in the Cooperation Framework
Argentina	UNSDCF incorporates environmental sustainability as a cross-cutting approach. Strategic priority is a fair transition towards a green economy. CF includes 3 outcomes for the strategic priority of environmental sustainability.
Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean	Structural change for resilience one of three priorities areas in the UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework for the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean. MSDCF commits UN to supporting efforts to access climate change adaptation financing to be better prepared for natural disasters. MSDCF has two outcomes relating to an environmentally equitable and sustainable recovery
Jordan	Environmental sustainability identified as one of the four priority areas of the CF 2023-2027.
Indonesia	UNSDCF (2021-2025) integrates analysis of key issues related to environment and climate change throughout the document. CF includes a strategic priority area on Green Development, Climate Change and Natural Disasters. Outcome 3: Institutions, communities and people actively apply and implement low carbon development, sustainable natural resources management, and disaster resilient approaches that are gender sensitive. CF details 16 UN entities working toward Outcome 3 across seven outputs.
Rwanda	Advancing the build back better and greener recovery is highlighted as a priority in UN Development Assistance Program II and carried forward as Outcome 2 into the UNSDCF 2018-2024.
Sierra Leone	CCA Updates for 2020 and 2021 include extensive analysis of the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on Sierra Leone progress to SDGs. UNSDCF 2020-2023 includes sustainable agriculture, food and nutrition security and climate resilience as one of four outcomes. Supported by 6 outputs.
Sri Lanka	The new CF (2023-2027) includes environment as a strategic priority (resilient and green recovery) with targets at the outcome level: - sustainable and inclusive green-led growth, people centred economic recovery, livelihoods and productivity - more people and communities, especially the vulnerable and marginalized, are more resilient to climate change and disaster risks, have enhanced water and food security, and equitably benefit from ambitious climate action and increasingly sustainable management and protection of the environment and natural resources.

Country	Environmental Sustainability in the Cooperation Framework
Uzbekistan	UNSDCF 2021-2025 includes as strategy priority area C: Sustainable, Climate Responsible and Resilient Development with a related outcome: *By 2025, the most at-risk regions and communities of Uzbekistan are more resilient to climate change and disasters, and benefit from increasingly sustainable and gender-sensitive efficient management of natural resources and infrastructure, robust climate action, inclusive environmental governance and protection.* The CF identifies 15 UN Entities working toward area C.

3.5.4 Progress on a more environmentally sustainable recovery

With some important limitations, there is a clear progression during the period from April 2020 to June 2022 in the extent and quality of UNCT planning and priority setting in support of efforts to ensure a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery. This progression has four main elements:

1. A deepening understanding among UNCT staff, supported by the RC and RCO, of the need to address the environmental consequences of COVID-19 and to support and invest in a more equitable and environmental recovery.
2. A pattern of variability in attention to environmental sustainability and action on climate change during the development of the SERPs with these areas gaining traction and visibility in a few of the SERPs, but not in the majority.
3. A much higher level of visibility and concrete specifications of strategies, priorities and targets for environmental sustainability and action on climate change in the CFs developed or modified during the pandemic response.
4. Throughout this period, increased experience within UNCT entities in providing support to selected programmes aimed at improving national and community resilience to climate change and other environmental shocks.

By the end of 2021, when the SERPs were completed and their remaining activities folded into the relevant Cooperation Frameworks, UNCTs were focused on engaging more fully in supporting the BBB and greener agenda. They had also gained some experience with different forms of support to these ends but there remains considerable scope for learning lessons and accelerating progress in pursuit of an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery with special emphasis on addressing climate change.

The overall trend toward attention to environmental sustainability and addressing climate change in the CFs occurred during a period of increased global attention to these issues. One aspect of this trend was the decision by member states at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to join the Glasgow Climate Pact and thereby keep the goal of no more than 1.5 degrees centigrade of climate warming alive and to finalize outstanding elements of the Paris Agreement.[14]

[14] Accessible at: https://ukcop26.org/cop26-keeps-1-5c-alive-and-finalises-paris-agreement/

Findings: Contributing to a more environmentally sustainable recovery

Ensuring a strong focus on a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery – including action on climate change adaptation and mitigation has been a challenge for UNCTs, partly due to the ongoing evolution of the pandemic itself which means that host government priorities were often focused on the immediate response phase and the need for promoting employment and strengthening social protection. As a result, some **SERPs have not addressed the environmental impacts of COVID-19 and have not provided high visibility to efforts to promote an environmentally sustainable recovery and address climate change**. Nonetheless, UNCTs are turning their attention to stronger engagement on environmental sustainability and climate change with encouragement by RCs supported by high level messaging. (EQ4)

UNCTs have taken advantage of the CF development process to strengthen their approach to supporting an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery. **There is more evidence of planning to address a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery in the new-generation CFs in the case study countries than in the SERPs themselves.** A key question that remains is how best to integrate action on environmental sustainability and climate within a more equitable social and economic recovery. (EQ 4)

3.6. Pursuing GE, HR, LNOB, Inclusion in the UNDS Response

3.6.1 Collective Ownership

The UNDS commitment to gender equality, human rights, disability inclusion and leaving no one behind (GE/HR/LNOB) was evidenced in the socio-economic response to COVID-19. Equality and inclusivity were generally well integrated into the fabric of the UN response at the global and country level, guided by the presence of strong advocates for equality and inclusion amongst key bodies at the highest level, including Member States, the Secretariat, and the COVID-19 MPTF Advisory Committee.[15]

Targeted responses at the country level were further bolstered by SG policy briefs in the early months of the pandemic that highlighted key issues for at-risk groups specific to the COVID-19 pandemic as follows:

5 April – Appeal against Gender-Based Violence and COVID-19

9 April – Impact of COVID-19 on Women

16 April – Impact of COVID-19 on Children

23 April – COVID-19 and Human Rights: We are all in this together

1 May – Impact of COVID-19 on Older Persons

6 May – A Disability Inclusive Response to COVID-19

8 May – Appeal against Hate and Xenophobia

[15] Advisory Committee membership offered an important avenue for agencies with mandates and expertise around vulnerable groups, including UN Women, UNFPA and UNICEF, to influence processes and provide technical expertise to operationalize GE/HR/LNOB principles. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was consulted, but was not included on the Advisory Committee.

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Integration of GE/HR/LNOB focus in UN responses to the pandemic were further supported by checklists and guidance notes such as:

- *Checklist for a Human Rights Based Approach to Socio-Economic Country Responses to COVID-19* (OHCHR, UNDP and UNSDG 2020)
- *Minimum Requirements Checklist for Integrating Gender Equality in the Implementation of the UN Framework for the Socio-Economic Response to Covid-19* (IANGWE 2020).
- *Checklist for Planning a Disability Inclusive Covid-19 Socio-Economic Response and Recovery*. (Inter-Agency Working Group on Disability Inclusive Covid-19 Response and Recovery 2020)
- *UN Covid-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund – April 2020 Call for Proposals – Guidance Note on Gender Markers* (UN Women 2020).
- *Guidance Note: UN Covid-19 Response and Recovery Fund Gender Equality Marker* (United Nations 2020).

High-level guidance and technical tools to highlight the needs of various vulnerable groups were deemed important and useful at the country level by most stakeholders. As one stakeholder noted, *"One of the triggers that allowed it to happen rapidly was the avalanche of tools from HQ level during the crisis - markers and checklists and frameworks around joint focus for LNOB, gender, human rights, disability".* Though important, inputs were also perceived as voluminous, fragmented and overwhelming by some stakeholders as teams sought to respond and ascertain priority areas in an evolving situation. There remains a need to ensure more holistic support to country teams by reducing splintering of issue areas.

A focus on vulnerable groups and leaving no one behind was seen as integral to the work of UNCTs and was considered central to the pandemic response and continued recovery work of the UN in all case study countries. This is consistent with global data that shows that 90 percent of program country government that feel that the UN contributes substantially to assessing the situation of the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind. Eighty-four percent of governments feel that the UN substantially addresses the development needs of those furthest behind.[16]

Integration of LNOB principles featured prominently in the SERP guiding frameworks analyzed as part of case study reviews:

Socio-Economic Response Plans

- Argentina's SEIA and SERP assess and identify the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable populations and territories, women, persons deprived of liberty, children and adolescents without care, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees, LGBTI+, people with disabilities, and older persons.
- Barbados and Eastern Caribbean's Multisectoral Response Plan (2020) includes a pillar on gender-based violence and violence against children as well as a pillar on human rights interventions to protect the most vulnerable. The Sub-regional Multisectoral Response Plan 2.0 establishes a cross-cutting priority to protect the human rights of the most vulnerable, identifying youth/children, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, women/girls, and LGBQTI+ as most vulnerable to COVID-19 impacts.

[16] QCPR Monitoring Framework baseline data (2021) for Indicator 1.4.1.

- Indonesia's MSRP (2020) includes a dedicated section on most at-risk groups; priority areas seven is focused on the protection of vulnerable groups; and response principles focus on GE/HR/LNOB.
- Jordan's SEF (2020) identified key groups at risk of being left behind in the crisis, and put forth a gender responsive recovery and application of an equity and inclusiveness lens as two of the five accelerators needed to fast-track recovery.
- Rwanda's One UN JP in Support of the Government COVID-19 Response Plan and Recovery (2020) identifies the most at-risk populations: women, pregnant women, children under five (boys and girls), adolescents (boys and girls), elderly, peri-urban/rural areas.
- Sierra Leone's SERP results matrix identifies specific indicators for women's access and participation under the action areas for health, basic services, social protection, GBV, and women and girl's access to justice.
- Sri Lanka's SERP includes a dedicated section on the people who must be reached and further recommends the LNOB as a guiding principle for the socio-economic response.
- Uzbekistan's LNOB COVID-19 Analysis (2020), annexed to the SERP (2020), identifies mitigating actions and lead UN entities to support over 19 priority vulnerable groups most affected by the pandemic.

Integration of core values into SERPs was supported by years of training and focus within the system. The crisis demanded from UNCTs a clearer definition of vulnerabilities pertaining to new contexts, essentially broadening and deepening the concept of LNOB and intersectionality. Additionally, several case study countries with development and humanitarian streams noted that a focus on the most vulnerable was intrinsic to humanitarian work, which was increasingly understood as intertwined with development work in line with the nexus modality and in light of pandemic responses.[17]

Despite progress and positive examples, the level of attention paid to gender equality, human rights, disability inclusion and LNOB in SERPs and other planning documents varies across countries, as highlighted in a SERP review that found a strong focus on certain vulnerable groups such as women, youth, children migrants, internally displaced people and refugees, with less attention to other groups such as indigenous people, minorities, people living with HIV/AIDS, persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ (DCO/UNDP 2020). A further review of SERPs and SEIAs found that while almost all UNCTs understood that addressing gender equality was a priority in the pandemic response, most failed to meet minimum gender mainstreaming standards related to the integration of gender analysis, mainstreaming gender across outcomes and interventions, and the inclusion of gender-sensitive indicators (UNSDG 2021a).

A separate review of 109 SERPs found that only 32 percent of plans offered evidence of Human Rights Based Approaches (HRBA) across the five pillars, and almost one-third (30 percent) failed to include a human rights analysis or identify how human rights will guide the process (UNSDG Task Team for LNOB and HR 2020). Although human rights remain at the core of the UN identity, defining and operationalizing rights-based programmatic work remains a challenge in many countries. While recognizing progress, global tracking points to the need for continued focus on GE/HR/LNOB at the planning stage to ensure consistency globally, as detailed below.

[17] Notably Indonesia, Jordan and Sri Lanka.

Table 6: Percentage of CCAs and Cooperation Frameworks that Focus on Vulnerable Groups[18]

#	Indicator	QCPR Monitoring 2022 Value	Year
Common Country Analysis			
1.4.3	Percentage of CCAs that include an assessment of barriers faced by those being left behind or at risk of being left behind	60%	2021 (baseline)
1.4.9	Fraction of CCAs developed in the past year that thoroughly maps relevant international human rights obligations and commitments made by the country	60%	2021 (baseline)
1.4.22i	Fraction of CCAs that include a dedicated section on EVAWG	79%	2021 (baseline)
Cooperation Framework			
1.4.10	Fraction of CFs developed in the past year that address program country capacity gaps in meeting human rights obligations	78%	2021 (baseline)
1.4.16i	Fraction of CFs developed in the past year that have dedicated gender equality results at the outcome level	64%	2021 (baseline)
1.4.16ii	Fraction of CFs developed in the past year that mainstream gender equality perspectives across outcomes	82%	2021 (baseline)
1.4.22iii	Fraction of CFs developed in the past year where at least one output and one output indicator focuses on EVAWG	35%	2021 (baseline)
1.4.30	Percentage of UNCTs that have met or exceeded standards for the UNDIS UNCT Accountability Scorecard for CF	39%	2021, up from 35% in 2020 (baseline)

3.6.2 Architecture and Accountability

At the country level, the RC and UNCT have joint accountability overall for GE/HR/LNOB as articulated in the MAF (UNSDG 2021b, p.16):

> The RC/UNCT promote and advocate fundamental values, standards and principles of the UN Charter, including respect for and protection of human rights and gender equality and advocacy on the commitment to 'leave no one behind' and reaching the furthest behind first, ensuring a strategic and coherent approach, with due regard to relevant roles and responsibilities of individual agencies.
>
> RC and UNCT members' performance assessment systems include performance indicators relating to of the following: communications and outreach on the SDGs, promoting norms, advocating for human rights and gender equality (drawing on the UNCT SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard, the Youth 2030 UNCT scorecard, the UNCT scorecard on Disability Inclusion) and effective engagement with civil society and State institutions.

Case study interviews highlighted the important role that the RC plays at the country level to influence the direction of the UNCT by serving as strong and vocal public advocate for HR/GE/LNOB and Inclusions, including for persons with disabilities. Discernible and swift progress in demonstrations of collective ownership of these core values were evidenced in several case study countries under particular Resident Coordinators, pointing to the importance of the RC leadership role to foster collective action.

[18] QCPR Monitoring Framework 2021-2024. Accessed August 2022.

The RCO also plays an important role to coordinate joint actions that are led in many countries by agencies with specific mandates. The RCO role to ensure consistent focus on HR/GE/LNOB is especially elevated in countries where entities with coordination mandates lack a physical presence, elevating the importance of regular dialogue between RCOs and key regional bodies.

Supporting Architecture

The UN commitment to HR/GE/LNOB in the socio-economic response to COVID-19 was supported and enhanced by global architecture that was in place at the start of the pandemic to facilitate and coordinate operationalization of core UN values. Notably, global networks of focal points had been established for gender and disability that provided key contacts and allowed for easier communications on emerging issues across a complex system.[19] OHCHR's field presence of over 70 advisory personnel as well as regional presence and a surge team of economists with human rights expertise also provided support to UNCTs globally for the COVID-19 response.[20]

Most case countries had in place country-level experts and architecture to support joint operationalization of core guiding principles consistent with global tracking and in line with UNDS reform. Interagency groups most commonly evidenced in case study countries included Gender Theme Groups, Human Rights Groups, Youth Groups, Disability Inclusion Groups, Migration Networks and Task Forces on HIV/AIDS. Importantly, evidence from case study countries showed that key experts and interagency groups with cross-cutting technical expertise were utilized strategically to provide inputs and quality assurance to the crisis response and continued recovery.

In some countries, new groups were established to ensure a unified focus on guiding principles of equality, inclusivity and human rights in the COVID-19 response. For example, in Uzbekistan, a task force under the CMT on protection and key populations was chaired by UNFPA with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) serving as senior adviser. In Indonesia, an Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) on protection of vulnerable groups was led by UNFPA and UNHCR under the MSRP (SERP) structure. In November 2020, the UN Argentina formed a UN Migrant Network (comprised of nine UN agencies) to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants, especially related to increased racism and discrimination as well as access to health and employment services.

Mandatory Markers and Accountability Frameworks

Collective ownership of UN guiding principles in the COVID-19 response was enhanced by UN systemwide investments in standardizing country-level accountability for GE/HR/LNOB. Mandatory UNCT Gender Equality Markers and Human Rights Markers in UNINFO, together with accountability frameworks for monitoring UNCT collaboration on gender, youth and disability inclusion, aided in preparing field settings to support a collective LNOB focus in the pandemic response and recovery.

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[19] In the early stage of the pandemic, the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) consisted of approximately 60 gender focal points from 25 UN entities. Disability inclusion focal points had been established in 65 UN entities and over 50 UNCTs as part of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNSG Early Lessons and Evaluability of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF 2021).

[20] QCPR Monitoring Framework Indicator 1.4.12 documents growing in-country expertise on human rights with 70 percent of UNCTs having a dedicated capacity to advise on human rights in 2021, up from 60 percent in 2020. In addition, 97-98% of RCs feel that they receive adequate support on human rights by the UNDS (QCPR Monitoring Framework Indicator 1.4.11 (SGR 2022 value). For example, in Indonesia, OHCHR has played an increasingly visible role to support a focus on human rights in the COVID-19 response from the regional level, working closely with the RC.

Gender markers and targets applied to the COVID-19 MPTF and Joint SDG Fund also supported an elevated focus on gender equality and women's empowerment.

While mandatory markers for gender equality and human rights were identified as playing a positive role in elevating UN focus on these principles, they require considerable time investments to be operationalized. The criticality of the role of entities with coordination mandates (UN Women and OHCHR) together with the RCO was highlighted in several case study countries as key to ensuring accuracy and meaningfulness of reporting. For example, the RCO team in Indonesia worked diligently with lead entities and personnel across the UNCT to ensure consistent application of the gender equality and human rights markers against program activities, including building capacities and undertaking quality assurance reviews to foster greater accuracy. As one UN stakeholder offered, "*The markers are a trigger but ticking a box doesn't automatically improve the program. This is a GEM 2 – so what? We need to focus on the purpose of the exercise. It requires investment – time and human resources - to build capacities and understanding. It's not easy."*

Accountability frameworks that set minimum standards for joint UNCT work around crosscutting areas of gender, youth and disability were identified in case study countries as playing a positive role in facilitating cohesiveness and elevating a joint focus on key vulnerable groups in the COVID-19 response. As with the mandatory markers, meaningful assessments and progress toward greater compliance with standards required commitments and time investments across the system, especially from key interagency groups, UNCTs, and RCs/RCOs. A good practice model was identified In Uzbekistan, whereby annual reporting for all three frameworks is coordinated by the RCO and findings are brought collectively to the UNCT for endorsement and action to strengthen results in the next reporting cycle.

Performance against standards set by the three frameworks varied between case study countries, though some common patterns emerged. Consistent with global tracking [21], a number of countries were able to demonstrate progress against the UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard (launched in 2018), suggesting that adjustments UNCTs made to respond to the pandemic did not derail, and may even have enhanced, UNCT collective work toward gender equality and women's empowerment. Four countries (Indonesia, Jordan, Rwanda, Uzbekistan) met/exceeded standards for over two-thirds of the 15 performance indicators set by the UNSDG at the end of 2021 reporting cycle. Argentina and Sri Lanka met requirements for six and seven of the indicators respectively, while Sierra Leone achieved only four indicators. The Barbados and Eastern Caribbean UNST has yet to undertake the assessment.

Reporting on the UNCT-SWAP was usually supported by Gender Theme Groups, often led by UN Women, and further facilitated by RCOs. Gender coordination mechanisms have been found to play an important role in gender mainstreaming in joint planning frameworks, consensus building on national gender priorities, and driving cross-thematic collaboration. Groups are guided by updated standards and procedures (UNSDG 2021a) that provide guidance related to the role, functions and working methods of Gender Theme Groups to support UNCTs to strengthen UN gender coordination at country level and facilitate coherent UNCT support to Governments in achieving their gender equality commitments across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Global results for the Disability Inclusion Scorecard, launched in 2020, show a similar pattern whereby progress has been made globally against performance indicators over the pandemic years

[21] QCPR Monitoring Framework Indicator 1.4.15 shows that 35% of UNCTs that completed the comprehensive UNCT-SWAP in the past four years (2018-2021) met/exceeded at least 60% of the standards compared to 41% of the UNCTs that completed the assessment in 2021 alone.

so that 21% of UNCTs met/exceeded minimum standards for at least 50% of UNDIS indicators in 2021 compared to just 11% of UNCTs in 2020.[22] Case study countries showed variable performance with Uzbekistan standing out for meeting standards for 11 out of 14 indicators. Indonesia and Rwanda each met six of the performance indicators; Sierra Leone met five. The remaining four case study countries demonstrated lower rates of compliance: Sri Lanka met three indicators, Argentina and Jordan met two indicators, and the Barbados MCO met only one of the 14 performance indicators.

Reporting responsibilities for the Disability Inclusion Scorecard were less consistent across countries. In Uzbekistan, reporting and progress was supported by the Human Rights and Disability Inclusion Task Force whereas the RCO took the lead role in a number of other countries, and senior Human Rights Advisor handled the exercise in Jordan. Coordination is important to ensure mainstreaming of disability inclusion across UNCTs, but only 47 percent of teams have established a coordination mechanism on disability inclusion - either stand-alone or as part of a broader interagency group (UN 2020a). In general, teams realize better results against global standards when countries have an interagency coordination mechanism in place as well as when the UN involves organizations representing persons with disabilities in planning and programming.[23]

The 2030 Youth Scorecard, launched in 2020, was reported against by 130 UNCTs globally. UNCTs globally progressed from meeting on average 25% of the Youth 2030 Scorecard (Key Performance Indicators) KPIs in 2020 to 30% in 2021 (UN 2022c, p.24). Case study countries demonstrated results consistent with global tracking whereby all but one[24] showed progress over the pandemic years by meeting an increasing number of KPIs. See Table 7 below. Indonesia most notably progressed from meeting only one criterion in 2020 to meeting 10 in 2021 due in large part to RC leadership and RCO coordination supported by a Youth Theme Group.

Reporting and actions to progress results against criteria were handled in several other case study countries by Youth Task Forces with support by the RCO and oversight by the RC/UNCT. After meeting four criteria for two successive reporting years, the Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean MCO responded with the formation of a Youth Advisory Group to forge more innovative and creative partnerships and promote youth entrepreneurship and employability, among other priorities.

The 2020 Scorecard included a dedicated KPI that assessed UNCT action on youth and COVID-19 across 10 areas: "Leave No Youth Behind", policy support, data, public finance, mainstreaming youth engagement in design, monitoring and review of national response, investments in youth-led solutions for COVID, advocacy and communication, knowledge exchange, updating UNCT workplans to respond to youth in COVID and UNCT commitment to meaningful youth engagement in COVID response.[25]

Eighty percent of UNCTs reporting in 2020 included support to youth in at least one of the 10 action areas of COVID-19 response and recovery, but only 54% of UNCTs met the milestone threshold. As shown below, five case study countries met the KPI for youth and COVID.

[22] QCPR Monitoring Framework Indicator 1.4.28 (SGR 2022).

[23] QCPR Monitoring Framework Indicator 1.4.29 shows that 36% of UNCTs met/exceeded UNDIS standards for consulting organizations of persons with disabilities (SGR 2022).

[24] The Barbados MCO showed no change in number of criteria met between 2020 and 2021.

[25] This KPI was omitted from 2021 reporting in favor of an integrated approach.

Table 7: Youth 2030 Scorecard Results for Case Study Countries[26]

Case Study Country	2020 Youth and COVID KPI	2020 Number of Criteria Met out of 27	2021 Number of Criteria Met out of 26
Argentina		3	5
Barbados MCO		4	4
Indonesia		1	10
Jordan		6	7
Rwanda		13	14
Sierra Leone		4	6
Sri Lanka		6	8
Uzbekistan		14	17

3.6.3 Advocacy and Visibility

Responsibilities at the highest country levels for communications and advocacy for achieving the SDGs in a way that leaves no one behind and ensures protection of human rights and gender equality is elaborated in the MAF (UNSDG 2021b, p.16):

> The RC/UNCT promote and advocate fundamental values, standards and principles of the UN Charter, including respect for and protection of human rights and gender equality and advocacy on the commitment to 'leave no one behind' and reaching the furthest behind first, ensuring a strategic and coherent approach, with due regard to relevant roles and responsibilities of individual agencies.

Country level stakeholders in case study interviews identified varying complexities in local contexts that influenced visibility and advocacy on HR/GE/LNOB. While RCs were generally deemed to fulfil their duties well in this regard, some were seen as more vocal than others, partly in response to specific contexts and risks of backlash. As one RC noted, "*I am not going to be very effective if I am PNG'ed.*"

The rights of some vulnerable groups were often classified as easier to address with Governments than others, requiring delicate negotiations. In Sri Lanka, the human rights agenda has been particularly sensitive, requiring the UN to walk a very precarious line with advocacy and visibility. As one UN stakeholder offered, "*LNOB is a key principle for us. It's a given we look at it and also the human rights agenda. We understand human rights is sensitive so we work closely with OHCHR on due diligence."*

Collective UN advocacy to extend health and vaccine coverage to refugees and displaced persons in COVID-19 responses were cited as important 'wins' for marginalized groups in several countries, including Argentina, Indonesia, Jordan, Rwanda and Uzbekistan. Advocating for the rights of LGBTQI+ groups remained extremely challenging in many countries, and this did not seem to be significantly shifted by the pandemic response. Progress toward greater inclusion of people with disabilities, on the other hand, was evidenced in some responses and continued recovery work, though significant work remains.

The COVID-19 pandemic is seen by some stakeholders as a pivotal point in time to deepen UN efforts to address certain issues around inclusion and vulnerability. UN stakeholders in some case study

[26] United Nations 2022 and 2021. Youth 2030: A Global Progress Report Data Companion.

countries (notably Jordan, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan) emphasized that the pandemic had exposed and exacerbated gaps in social welfare and vulnerabilities, offering new opportunities to raise issues related to human rights and gender equality that has previously been deemed sensitive. Stakeholders pointed to a renewed imperative in light of the inequalities exposed by the pandemic for the UN to work strategically to advance equality and inclusivity by using the collective UN voice to raise 'sensitive' issues around in a manner that would be difficult for an individual entity or for others outside of the UN.

External stakeholders from Governments, IFIs, Bi-laterals and CSOs that were interviewed for case study countries felt (with a limited number of exceptions) that the UN spoke with a clear and unified voice to effectively play a critical role at the country level to advocate for the most vulnerable though this is well understood by most to be a difficult balancing act. In some contexts, UN advocacy for the most vulnerable was supported by growing national ownership of these issues in line with Government commitments to SDG targets. As one UN stakeholder in Jordan quipped, "*The SEF (SERP) brought new momentum for working together and laid the groundwork for further working together. We saw in the UNCT a change in the discourse, which was much more norms and standards based. The opportunity is there to seize the COVID moment*!"

Findings: Pursuing GE, HR, LNOB, Inclusion in the UNDS Response

At country level, there is **strong ownership among UNCT entities of the guiding principles of Human Rights, Gender Equality, Inclusion and Leaving No-One Behind, though continued work is required for full operationalization**. There is evidence of integration of a focus on vulnerable groups, including women, refugees, youth, older people, people with disabilities and migrant workers into key planning documents, but less evidence of joint programmatic impacts. There is also evidence that RCs have played a leadership role in advocacy for HR/GE/LNOB and inclusion during the pandemic. This has helped UNCTs to successfully highlight key vulnerabilities and engage with governments to ensure that national responses address the needs of vulnerable populations. (EQ 3)

The **strength of the response at country level is related to capacities and architecture for HR/GE/LNOB and inclusion across the UNCT**: examples include the presence of a Human Rights Advisor in some RCOs and the establishment of empowered interagency groups (e.g. Gender Theme Groups, Youth Task Forces and Disability Inclusion Groups) as well as the presence of key entities with coordination mandates in field settings (e.g. OHCHR, UN Women). In addition, where there is a significant humanitarian response under way and a nexus modality is applied by the UNCT, a focus on vulnerable groups and LNOB is seen as integral to the humanitarian response. (EQ 3)

The use of **accountability tools and metrics such as mandatory markers, targets and the UNCT-SWAP gender equality, youth and disability scorecards are important contributors** to efforts to advance HR/GE/LNOB and disability inclusion in the response to the pandemic. While demonstrating progress over time, the need remains to accelerate efforts to meet standards and improve results. (EQ 3)

3.7. Monitoring and Assessing the Results of the UNDS Response

This section deals with the available evidence of the results of the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 from the perspective of UNCT operations at country level. In April 2022 (UNSDG 2022a) the UNSDG submitted a report summarizing, at a global level, the results of

UN efforts to advance the SDGs, including through the socio-economic response to COVID-19. That report highlighted very large numbers of people benefiting from UNDS interventions, including:

Pillar One: Heath First

- People accessing essential, non-COVID health services during the pandemic including vaccination, nutrition and maternal health
- A large number of health facilities supported to maintain services in vaccination COVID19 and maternal and child health
- Health workers supported in order to maintain essential non-COVID services

Pillar Two: Protecting People

- Critical WASH supplies provided to large numbers of people
- Large number of children with access to distance learning
- Large numbers of students accessing school feeding programmes
- Introduction and support to policies and programmes to address GBV
- Very large numbers of people accessing cash transfer programmes for social protection

Pillar Three: Economic Response and Recovery

- Private sector firms, labour unions and informal enterprises supported during the pandemic
- Reinforced national employment policies for vulnerable groups including women, youth, informal workers, migrants and workers with disabilities
- Beneficiaries of food supply protection regimes to protect livelihoods

Pillar Four: Macroeconomic Response and Multilateral Collaboration

- Multi-sectoral needs and impact assessments in a wide range of countries including fiscal and public debt assessments
- Implementation of socio-economic and employment policies focus on at-risk populations

Pillar Five: Social Cohesion and Community Resilience

- Capacity development support to community-based organizations, including those representing at-risk populations
- Facilitation of spaces for political engagement and social dialogue.

3.7.1 Key results in the case study countries

The evaluation was able to identify and document important results at the country level with supporting evidence gathered by triangulating the results of key informant interviews across stakeholder groups (UNCT staff, government officials, bilateral development partners, IFIs and CSOs) and checking these results against planning and reporting documents and data wherever available. This section highlights those results which stand out as likely impacting the lives of those vulnerable to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. The list of examples is not meant to be exhaustive, but to illustrate some of the more important "wins" achieved by the UNCTs as they organized and implemented the UNDS response.

Supporting sustained and expanded investments in social protection

Perhaps the most readily identifiable, and evidence-backed contribution by the UNDS in supporting an effective response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 at country level has been in the field of social protection. This began with many UNCTs providing support to essential research on

the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups including women, adolescent girls, youth, migrants and refugees and urban and rural workers in the formal and informal sectors to name just a few. Sometimes this research was embedded in the SEIAs undertaken during the development of the SERPs and, in other cases, it was through research supported by a specific UNCT entity in support of a mandate area. Both types of research were used to inform the development, modification or expansion of social protection programmes in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Examples effective UNCT support to expanded and targeted social protection from the case study countries include:

- Use of funds from the Joint SDG Fund to support adaptive and inclusive social protection programmes in Barbados and St. Lucia and in Indonesia and Uzbekistan. In St. Lucia, this helped trigger a permanent expansion with support from the World Bank.
- Expansion of the national social protection fund to cover single women-headed households in Jordan.
- In Rwanda the UNCT provided technical and financial support (under the Joint SDG Fund) along with advocacy to help shape the national *Social Protection Response and Recovery Programme* and, thereby, leverage the results of very large investments by the World Bank, the UK and the European Union.
- In Sierra Leone, the SERP helped to shift UNCT programming investments from other areas into support to social protection as Pillar 2 received a high priority.

As noted in SEIAs for the case study countries, the direct effects of lockdowns and similar measures to contain COVID-19 were most severe for vulnerable populations with an evident need to sustain and improve social protection systems on an emergency basis. If this opportunity had been missed, the effects of the pandemic on women, youth, informal workers, persons with disability, cross-border traders (mostly women) and other vulnerable groups would have been catastrophic. Working jointly with national governments, development partners and IFIs, the UNCTs in the case countries were able to support rapid action to sustain and deepen national social protection systems and increase the flow of cash transfers to vulnerable households. This is an important positive result for vulnerable people in the case countries and can be attributed to the receptivity and urgency of national governments, the willingness of bilateral partners and IFIs to fund the large increase in investments, and, to some degree at least, to effective technical support, advocacy and selective funding (often through the Joint SDG fund) by the UNCT.

Supporting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and addressing SGBV

A common feature of the UNDS response across the case study countries has been supporting national policies, national and local government institutions, civil society organizations and service providers to strengthen national efforts to reduce and mitigate Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and address its impact on survivors. This was done with the support of the Spotlight Initiative in Argentina and Grenada in the Eastern Caribbean. In Argentina this involved supporting local institutions, engaging in communications campaigns on SGBV prevention, virtual training of police officers, improving emergency services for survivors and strengthening CSOs engaged in combatting SGBV.

In addition, most of the case study countries included programming in support of GEWE under the SERP. Examples include:

- Improving working conditions in early childhood care for women workers (Argentina)

- Using the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MTPF to implement an inclusive approach to economic empowerment of women and vulnerable groups (Indonesia)
- Spotlight Initiative regional support to aid in realizing women migrant worker's rights and opportunities (Indonesia) as well as direct programme support to GEWE in Argentina.
- Engaging in a strong partnership with the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs to contribute to the draft national bill on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (Sierra Leone).

Addressing the humanitarian/development nexus in SERP-supported activities

In those countries where the UNCT has experience in large-scale humanitarian operations in response to either pandemic (Sierra Leone), sudden natural disasters (Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Indonesia, Sierra Leone) or ongoing conflicts and large-scale migrant and refugee populations (Rwanda and Jordan), the UNCTs were able to very quickly conceptualize, assess and prepare a response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. In the experience of these teams, large-scale humanitarian events inevitably include and encompass very significant negative socio-economic impacts which most severely affect vulnerable populations. Thus, the UNDS in these countries was pre-conditioned to respond rapidly to the onset of COVID-19 in cooperation with similarly experienced national governments and development partners. Specific examples of how the UNCTs responded to the nexus between humanitarian and development responses at the country level include:

- In Argentina, the UNCT issued a human rights alert in response to an acute hunger crisis in the Salta region and contributed to a humanitarian response plan in collaboration with the EU and the Red Cross.
- In Indonesia, the UN drew heavily on the presence of OCHA and the humanitarian structures already in place to respond to the continuous natural disasters that the country faces to develop the crisis response to COVID-19.
- In Jordan, the UNCT worked with the national government to ensure that refugees in camps and in the general community were included from the beginning in the national COVID-19 immunization campaign.
- In Rwanda, UNCT members advocated strongly and helped to ensure that refugees are formally included in the National Strategy for Transformation (NST). Similarly, in Argentina UNHCR recognizes the RC's important contributions in advocating for refugees to be included in government social protection schemes during the pandemic.
- In Sierra Leone, the UNCT supported the establishment of the National Disaster Management Agency to respond to the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change and to accelerated occurrences of natural disasters.

3.7.2 The SERP Results Indicator Framework

In parallel with the development of the UN Framework, DCO and UNDP undertook a consultative effort to develop a results framework to be used by each UNCT to report the results of the SERPs, and thereby support UNDS accountability for the results of its response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19

The monitoring framework for the SERPs was first published in June 2020, with a set of technical updates on the indicators provided on 14 September of the same year and subsequent methodology notes added in the following months. It contains a total of 18 separate indicators covering all five

pillars of the UN framework. In total, UNCTs were tasked with reporting on 79 specific data points to ensure coverage and disaggregation of all 18 indicators.

Each of the 18 indicators and their constituent disaggregation were the responsibility of a different UN entity at the headquarters level. The lead UN entity for a given indicator was charged with providing support to the UNCTs on questions of how to effectively and reliably gather the underlying data, and compile the resulting information into the indicators. Responsibility for uploading the data to UNINFO was determined by the UNCT governance mechanism in each country. In practice, at country level, the job of ensuring that UN entities provided the required data and that it was compiled and uploaded to UNINFO in a timely manner fell to the RCO, usually the data management and evaluation specialist but often with involvement and support from the RCO team lead and/or the RCO economist. In all cases, staff from the DCO provided technical notes and updates to guidance on the indicators from mid-2020 into 2021.

There is general agreement among the UNCT entity and RCO staff interviewed at country level that the development and implementation of a special system of results indicators and reporting requirements represented an extraordinary burden during a time of crisis and very high workloads that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic and the UN response. The system also required UNCT staff to engage with national partners to secure the necessary data with an accompanying workload for them. There is no doubt that UNCT staff, especially monitoring and evaluation specialists, spent very large amounts of time gathering, collating, compiling and reporting data to fulfil their reporting obligations related to the SERP indicator framework.

> *"It seemed like our efforts in Rwanda to provide the needed data were never encouraged or acknowledged by HQ. Rather, we were more often scolded and asked to address deficiencies. No analysis or acknowledgement of the effort put by UNCT entities or the RCO ever came our way."*
>
> *Rwanda UNCT Stakeholder*

Among the issues noted by some RCO staff, was their view that headquarters UN agency staff charged with responsibility for a given indicator were not active enough (or were unable) to communicate to their counterparts at the country level the responsibility to report on designated indicators for their entity. They also lacked the time or capacity to provide effective technical support across 121 UNCTs. This left the burden for communicating with UNCT entities at the country level up to the RCO staff in most countries.

UNCT staff opinions on the utility of the SERP indicator framework varied to some degree across and within the case study countries.

- A significant majority of key informants in the case study countries found the SERP indicator framework had little utility for planning and managing the UNDS response at the country level, including in the design and management of joint programmes. They saw the exercise as primarily extractive in nature in order to provide data useful for UNDS accountability at the global level. In fact, this view corresponds with the results of interviews at a global level. Key global stakeholders indicated that the purpose of the SERP results indicator framework was indeed

> *"In our routine tasks here in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean we struggle to collect results data, imagine how we could find time for this extra burden in a crisis."*
>
> *Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean UNST Stakeholder*

to allow the UNDS to be accountable to member states for the results of their investments. In addition, many UNCT staff felt that the effort to identify, collect, compile and report on these indicators drew attention from the important task of reporting on common results for Country Frameworks.

- A minority of key informants highlighted some benefits to SERP reporting. In Rwanda, for example, while most UNCT entity staff (and the RCO staff) found the SERP indicator framework burdensome and lacking in utility, some UNCT staff indicated that the exercise of reporting on SERP results was useful in strengthening results monitoring and reporting on UNCT contribution to the SDGs. In Sri Lanka, while the data did not influence programming, SERP tracking offered consolidated data from across the system in a way that would not have been otherwise available. This proved very useful for outreach and advocacy, and was further drawn on for annual reporting

A Positive View: Sri Lanka

The HQ decision to host the SERP data collection on UNINFO was seen as facilitative from a coordination standpoint as it helped to show users where the data was going while also introducing the UNINFO system in the country. While there were some growing pains with learning a new system, there is a sense that the experience with the SERP reporting positively supported joint work planning on UNINFO from 2021 with growing familiarity of the platform across the system. SERP reporting ceased in 2021, in line with global guidance issued by DCO in February 2021.

Overall, however, there is a strong majority view at the UNCT level that the SERP results indicator framework represented an additional and costly burden of reporting during an acute crisis with little resulting utility for planning and managing the UNDS response. While it has been used for accountability purposes at the global level (as in the April 22nd report of the UNSDG, *Measuring the UN contribution towards the SDGs: including through the socio-economic response to COVID-19)* it has not been particularly useful for UNCTs and their partners.

The effort to design, develop, implement and support the SERP results indicator framework represented a pioneering initiative to match a global appeal for resources by the Secretary-General with a corresponding system to identify, define and track the results of the ensuing UNDS response and, thereby, to be accountable to member states. By uploading data on the results indicators to UNINFO in real-time, the framework aimed to achieve maximum transparency for all partners.

Unfortunately, this process encountered problems and roadblocks along the way. UNCT staff were first overwhelmed with the need to ensure personal safety and maintain or restore operations at the country level as rapidly as possible. Once this was more or less ensured, they turned to planning and implementing the three-part overall UN response (Humanitarian, Health and Socio-economic) while addressing new programme planning frameworks and maintaining processes for planning and implementing Country Frameworks and Joint Workplans.

The impact of these and other pressures led to a varied level of uptake across the 121 countries with SERPs leading to missing data across important data points in many countries and to issues in both the quality of original data uploaded from the UNCTs and problems in data aggregation across countries and time periods. To provide just one example, the MSRP for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean covers seven independent countries and three territories but results when uploaded to UNINFO are attributed to Barbados because the system incorporates a single data point for the

Multi-Country Office (MCO). In addition, UNCT staff report developing their own, country-specific rules for aggregating data across quarterly time periods and from disaggregation to the full indicator. The issue of aggregation was addressed by DCO in revised methodological notes provided to UNCTs in late 2020 for use in reporting on results in 2021.

Most of the issues were reportedly foreseen by DCO and others at the technical level. The UNSDG is working to address these concerns through the development of a more flexible common output indicator framework, with agreed governance at the UNSDG level through an implementation guide, along with a joint messaging to the country-level. DCO reports that this work is underway in a phased approach to allow reporting beginning in 2024, to respond to Member States requests on reporting (A/RES/72/279 OP28(a)).

On balance, the effort to develop and implement the SERP results indicator framework was a necessary beginning step to this difficult but critically important task. Without discounting the burden on UNCT staff, it is important that UNDS continue to invest in developing a robust set of common indicators for the results of support to the SDG.

The UNCT staff interviewed pointed out some of the improvements that could be undertaken moving forward to develop and implement results monitoring systems to track UNDS results in support of the SDGs and in carrying out the agreed UN contributions to Country Frameworks. Their suggestions include:

- Investing in a common framework for reporting on indicators which capture the UNCT contribution to the goals of the CFs and to advancing the SDGs which can be used in future development emergencies.

- Refraining from development of a custom results reporting framework when large scale programmes are initiated in response to a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic: relying instead on existing results reporting frameworks and constituent indicators.

- Vetting all agreed common indicators at UNCT level to ensure that the data required is available from reliable sources, within the required time frame and relatively easily accessed.

- Ensuring that indicators and data elements required to construct them are developed in consultation with UNCT entity staff (with and without a physical presence) at the country level.

- Providing clarity on responsibilities for data collection, quality assurance, and reporting at UNCT and headquarters level. At UNCT level this requires ensuring that all entities are aware of their responsibilities for data reporting and that overall responsibility for the UNCT is identified at the RCO. At the headquarters level this means that lead UN agencies for a given indicator must communicate effectively with their respective country offices and must establish the capacity to provide technical support on the indicators as needed.

- Identifying and validating the incentives for UNCTs to invest the time and resources to gather, compile and report on the indicators and to ensure the quality of uploaded data. This could be done in part by communicating more clearly to UNCTs the potential and planned use of rolled-out indicators.

Findings: Monitoring and Assessing the Results of the UNDS Response to COVID-19

At a global level, and in the case study countries, the **UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 has contributed to results in critical areas including, inter-alia, the maintenance of health services, enhanced, targeted and expanded social protection programmes, efforts to combat Gender-Based Violence (GBV), employment for the most vulnerable groups, and food security and sustainable agriculture**.

The framework for reporting results of the SERPs at country level through indicators agreed and pre-defined at headquarters level and **uploaded to the COVID-19 portal on UNINFO represents a pioneering effort to promote system-wide accountability and transparency**. However, rolling out and sustaining the framework has been a challenge for DCO, for participating agencies at headquarters level, and for UNCTs. The resulting challenges in maintaining data quality and consistency across 121 countries are being addressed in the ongoing development of the common output indicators for the UNDS contribution to the SDGs. (EQ5)

The results framework and data gathering and reporting system developed for the SERPs imposed a significant workload and administrative burden on UNCTs (and especially on RCOs) at a time of crisis. The resulting information was also not deemed useful in planning or managing the response at country level. (EQ5)

4. System-Wide Efforts to Strengthen Coherence

While Section 3 examined the coherence and effectiveness of UNCT support to addressing the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 at country level, Sections 4 and 5 take a broader perspective. They focus on system-wide global and regional efforts to strengthen the coherence of the UNDS response including the use of pooled funding mechanisms, regional structures for supporting UNCTs, the MAF as an instrument for strengthening RCs and system-wide efforts to enhance learning. This wider focus was anticipated in the ToR for the evaluation and reflects elements of Evaluation Questions 2 (Pooled Funding) and 5 (Lessons Learning).

4.1. Pooled Funding and the Funding Compact

Arguably, pooled funding for joint programming among UN entities is one of the strongest drivers of strengthened coherence in the UNDS socio-economic response to COVID-19. Member States and the UNDS have endorsed this type of funding under the Funding Compact agreed upon in 2019, establishing commitments for both groups. In the QCPR report of April 2020, the Secretary-General wrote:

> "The funding compact aims to address high levels of earmarking and fragmentation in fund – patterns that are proven to increase transaction costs and competition within the system, ultimately compromising the multilateral nature of the United Nations development system. In turn, the compact includes a set of commitments to ensure a more transparent and accountable deployment of resources."

Under the Funding Compact, UNDS agencies have committed to enhancing cooperation for results at the country level and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of development-related inter-agency pooled funds.

In 2020, three inter-agency pooled funds were readily available to play a key role in the COVID-19 socio-economic response: the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, the Joint SDG Fund, and the Spotlight Initiative Fund. These three funds were fully operational during the COVID-19 pandemic

and financed joint programmes among UN entities at the country level. All case study countries in this evaluation were recipients of at least one of these three Funds during the pandemic. Table 8, summarizes the resources assigned per fund and country in the case study sample.

Table 8: Pooled Funding in Case Study Countries

Country	COVID-19 MPTF	Joint SDG Fund	Spotlight Fund
Argentina	$850,000	$2,000,000	$7,714,286
Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean	$727,475	$8,535,551	$1,650,000 (Only covering Grenada)
Indonesia	$3,700,000	$12,000,000	Regional Programme
Jordan	$850,000	$1,300,000	
Rwanda[27]	$831,514	$4,907,000	
Sierra Leone	$930,000		
Sri Lanka	$1,000,000	$200,000	
Uzbekistan	$1,000,000	$3,000,000	Regional Programme

"As Non-Resident Agencies we need to make a special effort to be there. We have to convince the RC of the added value to our role so that they can advocate for us – in some cases simply to contribute our technical expertise – it's not always about the funding. The future for us is in joint programming"

Uzbekistan UN Staff Member

Each fund played a different role in the UNDS socio-economic response to COVID-19. When viewed collectively, findings from most case study countries suggest pooled funds would greatly benefit from better coordination among global pooled funds, which could be facilitated by harmonizing processes, procedures and templates. During the pandemic, RCO's and UNCTs found themselves under constant time pressure to submit proposals or report on programme implementation. Harmonizing procedures and formats among pooled funds could significantly decrease the burden on Country Teams. UNCTs also pointed to the need for more flexibility within pooled funds, meaning greater flexibility in transferring funds between agencies and mechanisms for pooling different agencies assigned funds together when wanting to collectively hire consultants or programme implementors.[28]

It is important to note, however, that pooled funds have dedicated governance structures and accountability requirements to donors (linked to legal agreements). Contribution agreements often require maintaining a separate ledger for each individual pooled fund. In order to maintain all financial and programmatic accountabilities to participating organizations, transferring funds between different agencies without reflecting these changes in the Funds' operations and ledger is not allowed. Memoranda of Understanding also require agencies to maintain separate ledger for each Fund, so transferring funding from one agency to the other without recording in the ledger is not possible.

[27] The Rwanda SERP was in the form of a Joint One UN programme with a budget of $20,014,299. UN Rwanda, 2020, p.48.

[28] QCPR Indicator 3.5.1 shows that the percentage of UNDS entities that have procurement procedures that enable mutual recognition of another entity actually declined between 2019 and 2021 from 75 percent to 60 percent. The percentage of entities with compatible finance systems rose from 50 percent in 2019 to 63 percent in 2021 (UN SGR 2022).

The role of the RC/RCO in facilitating coordination around design and reporting for pooled funds was deemed an important facilitative factor by most stakeholders across all Funds, particularly those with fewer resources. UNCT entities without a physical presence felt disadvantaged in terms of their abilities to access pooled funding mechanisms due to limited visibility, complications to operationalize without field presence as well as limitations in the human resources available to comply with reporting requirements.

4.1.1 The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund

On 3 April 2020, the Secretary-General's UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (COVID-19 MPTF) was launched. The Fund's primary objectives were to enable governments and communities to suppress the transmission of the virus, mitigate the socio-economic impact, safeguard livelihoods, and help countries recover better. The Fund was set to finance country-specific joint programmes operated by 2-4 participating UN entities. The Fund had an ambitious financial target of 2 billion USD overall and 1 billion in the first nine months of operation.

By design, the COVID-19 MPTF was set to strengthen the capacity of the RC to coordinate action on the UNDS response to the pandemic. The Fund was envisioned to enhance the RC's convening and coordinating power by giving the RC the role of selecting the strongest proposals for submission to the Secretariat and facilitating rapid programme approval and disbursement of funds to participating entities.

Call 1 for joint-programming proposals was rapidly launched on April 15, less than two weeks after the establishment of the Fund. The *Lessons Learning Exercise*[29] found a strong agreement among UN staff and national authorities that the interventions financed under Call 1 were genuinely relevant to the context at the time each was implemented. **The Exercise also noted that in all its case study countries, UNCT entity staff indicated that the experience of working together on the Fund under the coordination of the RC had strengthened their commitment to and understanding of collaborative and joint programming approaches.**

Programmes approved under Call 1, covering 47 countries, served as a demonstration of UNDS capacity to work together in response to the development emergency. In addition to Call 1, Call 2 funded 38 countries.

The Fund also allocated a standard $50,000 to each RC to advance the SERP's development, dissemination, and utilization. Staff at DCO headquarters confirmed that Call 2 of the Fund had the effect of accelerating progress toward SERP completion. They also noted that positive interventions by UN Women and the refinement and targeted use of Gender Equality Markers in the Fund had served to "professionalize" and "incentivize" the treatment of GE in SERPs.

> *"There was a mismatch in terms of expectations and the reality of what kind of resources were available. Still, the idea of the potential money drove the design of the SERPs – UNCTs accelerated then."*
>
> *UN Entity Stakeholder*

Informed by growing evidence that women stood to lose critical gains during the pandemic, UN Women and other advocates worked to provide critical analysis and to ensure the second call for proposals from the Fund took a decisive approach to gender integration, establishing a target for at least 30 percent of funded proposals to have gender

[29] The COVID-19 Lessons Learned Exercise is available at: https://unsdg.un.org/resources/early-lessons-and-evaluability-un-covid-19-response-and-recovery-mptf

equality as a principal objective. Moreover, proposals that made no contribution to gender equality were excluded from consideration.

With limited funding, it is difficult to conclude that the Fund "drove" the SERP process. However, it is clear that the SERP process was energized to some degree by the COVID-19 MPTF.

The Secretary-General's Designate, the Fund Secretariat and the Advisory Committee members all spent considerable effort to broaden opportunities for resource mobilization and increase resource commitments to the Fund and SERPs. Based on the high demand for resources and innovative solutions proposed by UNCTs, the Fund developed a Solutions Catalogue of unfunded priority programmes. By September 2020, the Solutions Catalogue consisted of 206 unfunded concept notes with an estimated funding requirement of $252 million. Evidently, significant levels of UNCT effort went into preparing these programme proposals that were unsuccessful in obtaining funding, not least due to the Fund's under-capitalization.

The *Lessons Learning Exercise* also found that the relatively low level of resources available for the Fund was a constraint limiting the RCs ability to engage national. This low level of resourcing also reduced the incentive for UNCT entities to work collectively under the coordination of the RC.

Given its financial limitations, overall, the relevance of the Fund in the UNDS socio-economic response to COVID-19 differed somewhat depending on the national context in each country. In countries with relatively limited access to large-scale funding, the funded programme budgets, while small, were still significant and helped demonstrate that the UNCT could provide focused support to fill gaps in the response. In countries with large-scale funding, stakeholders consistently noted that the monies on offer were relatively minimal, which did not aid in gaining programme visibility with the Government in some instances.

For many entities involved in the COVID-19 MPTF-funded programmes, the most important benefit of the Fund was that it allowed actors to engage in new areas of programming that have the potential for catalytic effects in the future. Some stakeholders have noted that the COVID-19 MPTF-funded programmes have facilitated new partnerships and working relationships with other UN entities, which may have lasting impacts on future collaborations that build on a deeper understanding of each other's areas of expertise and comparative advantages.

4.1.2 The Joint SDG Fund

The Joint SDG Fund predates the COVID-19 MPTF. The Fund was established as a key mechanism to promote coherence and integrated, multi-sectoral actions by the UNDS for the 2030 Agenda at the country level. The Fund became fully operationalized in 2019 and was designed to play a key part in the UNDS reform by empowering the leadership role of the RC in joint programme design and implementation; RCs could use the Fund to leverage their coordination role and authority to bring about effective and catalytic UN joint actions in response to country needs and SDG priorities.

> *"The Joint SDG Fund has been extremely empowering for the RC, while the reform is ambitious, we wouldn't have been able to generate dialogues on how to work together and have such a substantive engagement unless we have this instrument that puts resources on the table, that invited us for joint programming."*
>
> *Joint SDG Fund Evaluation Informant*

The Fund launched its first call of proposals in March 2019, a year before the pandemic. The call focused on integrated policy solutions for LNOB and specifically promoting integrated social protection solutions that contribute to catalytic progress towards the SDGs with special attention

to the most vulnerable and marginalized population groups. Through its first call, the Fund financed 35 joint programmes covering 39 countries and territories for a total of $69 million (an average budget of $2 million per joint programme). These joint programmes began operations in the fourth quarter of 2019 with a two-year programme implementation timeline; as such, they were perfectly timed to contribute to the UNDS socio-economic response to COVID-19.

The Joint SDG Fund provided additional support towards the UNDS response to COVID-19 by allowing participating UN entities (PUNOs) to reallocate 20 per cent of funding to programmes directly focused on LNOB in April, May and June of 2020. As a result, according to the Joint SDG Fund Secretariat, funding was primarily used to enhance social protection for vulnerable groups. For example, the Fund Secretariat reports that in Vietnam, the financed joint-programme supported the government in designing and improving the Government's COVID-19 package that provided cash support to some 14 million vulnerable people that lost income due to the pandemic.

The Fund's second call for proposals was also launched immediately before the pandemic in December 2019. The call focused on programmes that would leverage additional financing for the SDGs. The call was divided into two components: reinforcing the SDG financing architecture (Component 1) and catalyzing strategic investments (Component 2). Joint proposals under Component 1 entailed developing and implementing INFFs.

INFFs are a planning tool that helps countries cost their development strategy (e.g., a national development plan that lays out what needs to be funded) and design a financing strategy that relies on public and private financing sources. INFFs are meant to help countries overcome obstacles to financing sustainable development and guide thinking about necessary financial reforms. Through the call, the Fund selected 62 joint programmes covering 69 countries and territories. The total budget for Component 1 was US$ 59 million, with an average budget of US$ 0.95 million per joint programme. Most of the joint programmes under this second call began operations in the 3rd and 4th quarters of 2020 and immediately faced heavy challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Joint SDG Fund Evaluation found that shifts in national priorities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic challenged government ownership and engagement.

Given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, under both calls for proposals, the vast majority of the Joint SDG Fund programmes required no-cost extensions due to implementation delays related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

> *"Overall, the Fund made significant contributions to the socio-economic response to COVID-19, probably more, because we did not create new mechanisms for emergency response but adjusted our Joint Programmes to continue building systems and developing policy and financing solutions that are transformative, strategic and cross-sectoral."*
>
> *Global UN Stakeholder*

In support of Small Island Development States (SIDS), which were severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fund launched a third, non-competitive call for proposals in June 2021 focused on building resilience and reducing vulnerabilities with a funding envelope of USD $30 million. Through the call, the Fund received 26 joint programme proposals covering 42 SIDS implemented in partnership with 23 UN entities both at the country and regional levels. Funding was assigned to eight out of the nine UN MCOs. While all focused on building resilience and addressing vulnerabilities, 18 joint programmes are prioritizing the promotion of integrated policies and LNOB, while the other eight are focused more on SDG financing and investments. The joint programmes have been launched in the first half of 2022 and will run for two years.

Building on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 MPTF, in May 2022, the Joint SDG Fund was directed by the Deputy Secretary-General and its Operational Steering Committee to open a special call for proposals activating a *development emergency modality* to distribute rapid seed funding to UNCTs affected by the unfolding global food, energy, and financing crisis due to the impact of the the Russian military offensive in Ukraine. The call has been designed under the direct guidance and framing provided by the UN Global Crisis Response Group (GCRG) task team, which the Secretary-General has set up to ensure an immediate and cohesive UN response.

Much like the COVID-19 MPTF, the Joint SDG Fund has mainstreamed the use of gender markers throughout its programmes, where 88% of joint programmes are at or beyond GEN2 (making a significant contribution to gender equality). Some 26% of programmatic funds are channelled to GEN3 programmes whereby gender equality is the principal aim. In addition, the Fund has collaborated with UN Women to update its Gender Matrix in 2021 and to carry out gender specific reviews of joint programmes during the calls for proposals.

4.1.3 The Spotlight Initiative Fund

Among all pooled funds, the Spotlight Launched is the first and largest global effort with a significant investment channeled towards eliminating violence against women and girls. Launched in 2017, Spotlight is an innovative fund with 500 million dollars in seed money from the European Union. The Fund's interventions focus on six mutually reinforcing programming pillars: laws and policies, institutions, prevention, services, data, and women's movements. Spotlight Initiative Fund is currently implementing 40 ongoing programmes in 28 countries. In most countries, programmes are coordinated by the RC Office and operated jointly by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN WOMEN.

Spotlight began operating in September 2017 and has distributed nearly USD 300 million to its ongoing programmes since then. The bulk of those funds, 169 million, were distributed during 2020 to boost prevention and increase support to victims and survivors of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic hit, Spotlight was equipped to act. Being in its third year of operations, the broad base of partnerships it had developed helped to quickly identify new ways of working to deliver results for women and girls. The joint efforts across UN entities were adapted quickly to respond swiftly and retool programmes as needed. Spotlight had the flexibility of shifting funds to local and grassroots women's organizations working on the front lines; in the first four months of the pandemic, 21 million dollars were reassigned in small grants to grassroots organizations globally that had been traditionally left out of mainstream funding opportunities.

According to the *Spotlight Initiative's Annual Report for 2020*, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fund helped design 88 strategies, plans, and programmes in 19 countries that address violence against women and girls in their work. Programmes began connecting more survivors to hotlines, tele-counselling, and virtual courts to support their recovery and hold perpetrators accountable. Attention centers were also created to provide women and girls with medical, police, legal, and psychosocial services in one convenient place. Due to the Fund's efforts, over 650,000 women and girls were provided with gender-based violence services despite COVID-19-related constraints and lockdowns. In 2020, the Spotlight Initiative's work led to 84 newly signed or strengthened laws that support gender equality or the elimination of gender-based violence in 17 countries. Outreach campaigns financed by the Fund reached more than 65 million people through 80 locally tailored, behavior-change multimedia campaigns in more than 15 languages.

Considered a model fund for UN Reform, Spotlight aims to prove the power of working in a more coordinated and integrated way across the UNDS to deliver activities with diverse stakeholders. Evidence to support the Fund's effect at the country level was found in the Argentina case study,

where the Spotlight programme supported local institutions, engaged in communications campaigns on SGBV prevention, carried out virtual training of police officers, and improved emergency services for survivors and strengthened CSOs engaged in combatting GBV. While it's difficult to measure direct contribution, the participating UN entities (PUNOs) believe their work has contributed to the first decrease in femicides in the country in 2021. They also believe their work pressured sub-national government authorities into creating local institutions that address GBV. PUNOs in Argentina mentioned the important coordination role played by the RCO in programme implementation. Participating agencies all point to the RCO being a neutral voice in the programme, with the adequate capacity to coordinate the agencies and steer towards the common objective.

4.1.4 Country-Level Pooled Funds

A country-level pooled fund is a funding instrument to consolidate and leverage funding towards the country priorities established in the UNSDCF. These funds are complementary to global pooled funds. Half the countries in the case study sample have a country-level pooled fund; Indonesia (Indonesia Disaster Recovery Trust Fund- $5 million), Rwanda (Rwanda SDG Fund- $16.6 million), Sri Lanka (UN Sri Lanka Multi-Partner Trust Fund- $20.1 million), Uzbekistan (Uzbekistan Vision 2030 Fund[30]).

Unlike global pooled funds, where resource mobilization and capitalization depend on Member State contributions, for country-level pooled funds, RCs and UNCTs can mobilize resources directly with donors in support of the objectives of the funds. In the context of the pandemic, having such a funding instrument proved valuable as funding could be repurposed for programmes that addressed the immediate emergency response. In Sri Lanka, for example, the country-level pooled fund financed a $1.9 million programme for COVID-19 Emergency Medical equipment and a $1 million programme for improving maternal and childcare health systems for COVID-19 response. Additionally, donors could fund other joint programmes contributing to the COVID-19 response. In Rwanda, for example, through financial support from the Norwegian Government to the Rwanda SDG Fund, UN Women and UNFPA operated a joint programme that provided personal protective equipment to strengthen the prevention of COVID-19 in 44 GBV One Stop Centers[31].

A country-level pooled fund could have proven useful for certain countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, the RC made a significant effort to mobilizing additional resources from specific donors for joint programmes under the Multisectoral Response Plan without a country-specific pooled fund in place. Yet, finalizing the financial transaction became burdensome as no mechanism was set in place to receive the resources. According to interviewed stakeholders, the team even explored adding the programme to the COVID-19 MPTF Solutions Catalogue and getting the donor to earmark the funds. Ultimately, the donor opted to contribute directly to a single UNST member.

[30] The Uzbekistan 2030 Vision Fund will be capitalized through a contribution representing a return of assets that have been definitively forfeited in criminal proceedings in Switzerland. The Fund will support principled, transparent, and effective asset restitution via programs aimed at accelerating Uzbekistan's SDG progress.
[31] Information regarding country-level pooled funds and their programmes is available at: https://mptf.undp.org/funds-area/country-level-funds

Findings: Pooled Funding Mechanisms

All three pooled funds examined in the evaluation played important roles in enabling a more rapid and focused response to the pandemic by UNCTs at country level. While they faced challenges with regard to being under-capitalized, the Funds under review established the utility of pooled funding mechanisms in supporting more coherent and coordinated UNDS support to programme countries. (EQ 2)

Pooled funding mechanisms such as the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF, the Joint SDG Fund and the Spotlight Initiative, have been valued by participating organizations as a mechanism for engaging in new areas of programming to address the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, with the potential for catalytic effects. They have also facilitated new partnerships among UNCT entities which may have lasting impacts on collaboration. In addition, in some case study countries, there is evidence that pooled funds supported programmes have been able to influence and leverage much larger investments by bilateral development partners and development banks. (EQ 2)

Participating entities note the limited resources available through pooled funds and the resulting limited visibility among national governments and development partners. The downside remains that **project allocations under the pooled funds remain small in relation the level of effort required to successfully propose, implement and report on joint projects**. This reflects, to some extent, a failure of the development partners to meet their commitments under the Funding Compact.[32] Regardless, the resource requirements for UNCT entities to identify opportunities, engage in joint planning, submit proposals and implement programmes using pooled funds is often not commensurate with the level of financial resources that result from this effort. (EQ 2)

While there have been improvements in the flexibility of global pooled funds in the past two years, **programmatic procedures**, **rules and requirements for approving and disbursing funds to joint projects still present barriers to their use in an emergency setting.** (EQ 2)

[32] QCPR Indicator 4.1.1 shows the percentage of commitment indicators in the Funding Compact with values on target/met by Member States declined from 50 percent in 2020 to 38 percent in 2021 (UN SGR 2022).

4.2. Support to a Cohesive UNDS Response from the Regional Level

It is important to note that the mandate for the evaluation did not extend to an assessment of the effectiveness of UNDS reforms at a regional level or to the overall performance of UN regional bodies. Rather, this section is concerned with the extent UNCTs have been supported by the regional UN bodies in their efforts to develop and implement a cohesive response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

The Regional Role of the UN: The View from Rwanda

Interviewees pointed out that Rwanda (like other countries in the sub-region) is directly affected by cross-border and regional and sub-regional issues resulting from COVID-19 including cross-border trade, refugee movements, insecurity and conflict. In the face of COVID-19 there was a clear need for a coordinated response among countries in the sub-region. Among UNCT entity staff, opinions on the strength of support from regional entities were mixed. While some noted that support from their RO was timely and useful, others felt that regional offices of UN agencies were not, themselves, coordinated.

"*There seems to be a lack of guidance from HQs to regional levels on how the regional offices should coordinate and support UNCTs as they work together for cohesion. The reality is that the regional level has sat aside from much of the effort at UNDS reform which has been concentrated at UNCT level".*

Rwanda UNCT Stakeholder

The country case studies confirmed that UN regional bodies, the Regional Offices (RO) of DCO, the ROs of UN agencies and UN Regional Economic Commissions (REC) have an important role to play in supporting UNCTs as they engage with national stakeholders to address COVID-19 related issues with regional, sub-regional or cross-border dimensions.

In Rwanda and Sierra Leone, for example, UNCT staff noted how the pandemic has resulted in very important issues relating to the plight of cross-border traders (mostly women), to migration and human trafficking and to regional and continental trade relations. They also highlighted the need for ready access to technical assistance from UN entity RO in dealing with cross-mandate issues relating to the response to COVID-19. In many cases, they found that ROs lacked the capacity to respond to demands from country teams. Other UNCT staff felt that, overall, the UN had not mounted an effective response to the regional challenges of restoring progress toward the SDGs in the face of the pandemic.

In March 2018, an explanatory note on the implementation of UNDS reforms identified a process of reform and strengthening of the regional operations of the UNDS. The note described the regional presence of the UN at that time (UN 2018, p.1).

- Regional Economic Commissions perform three major common inter-connected functions, including: convening in support to intergovernmental platforms; think tank functions, serving as a source of knowledge, data, statistics and evidence-based analysis for Member States on priority policy issues; and operational functions, providing policy advice and targeted capacity development to assist Member States to achieve results on regional and global agreements and trans-boundary and sub-regional issues.
- United Nations Funds, Programmes and Specialized Agencies maintained regional presences to provide strategic and policy guidance, technical backstopping, policy and operational support to their country offices. They also produce multi-country and regionally focused data and analysis.

- The total UN development system regional presence amounts to some 9,600 personnel with an approximate annual expenditure of $1.6 billion per year. RECs and regional offices of Agencies, Funds and Programmes were located in 54 cities globally.

Perhaps the most important element of the reforms proposed and implemented at the regional level of the UNDS to date has been a change in the structure and operation of regional coordinating mechanisms.

In 2018 under the regional dimension of reforms, UNDS regional coordination mechanisms were integrated into a single structure. In the new arrangement, overall coordination is the responsibility of a Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) in each region. The RCP is chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General (DSG), with the REC and UNDP regional heads acting as vice-chairs. The RCP is supported by a secretariat composed of DCO, the REC, and UNDP. In each region there is a set of Issues-Based Coalitions (IBC) – in the Africa Region they are called Opportunity and Issues-Based Coalitions. Each IBC is co-convened by relevant UN entities and, in some cases, this includes the REC.[33]

The predominant view from UNCT entities and RCO staff interviewed for the country case studies contends that regional reforms have lagged behind those at UNCT level with the result that efforts to develop a cohesive and coordinated UNDS response at country level were constrained by a lack of cohesion and consensus in the UNDS system at regional level. More specifically, key stakeholders at UNCT level felt that the regional system did not provide them with the tools to adequately reflect regional and sub-regional needs and priorities in either the SERP or the CF. They also felt that the coherence achieved in the UNCT responses to COVID-19 were not matched by a similar level of coherence at regional level.

In order to explore these concerns raised at UNCT level, the evaluation undertook interviews with DCO Regional Directors, senior staff of RECs, and senior UN entity headquarters staff (Annex B). These interviews provided the following insights:

- There is a general acknowledgement that reforms at regional level were later in starting and have proceeded more slowly than at UNCT/RC level and that this was foreseen in the 2018 QCPR resolution on UNDS reform which prioritized the establishment of DCO and strengthening the empowered RC.
- Notwithstanding the above, the global/regional interviews point to some positive results of the regional reforms and to achievements in coordinating a regional response to COVID-19:
    - DCO Regional Offices (RO) played an important role in supporting the SERP development process and the operation of the results framework by hosting regional webinars and providing an interface with DCO headquarters.
    - DCO Regional Offices (RO) point to re-purposing of significant parts of the regional budget framework toward addressing COVID-19 in the early months of the pandemic and to engagement by the RO with the RCP and the IBCs.

[33] For a more complete description of progress in regional UNDS reforms see: CEPEI (2021) , *Assessing the roll-out of the UN regional reform.* Accessible at: https://cepei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Assessing_RollOut_V3.pdf

- REC staff provided examples of extensive work on policy briefs and other knowledge management tools for addressing COVID-19 at a regional and sub-regional level which were made available to UNCTs.

On the other hand, the global and regional interviews also pointed out ongoing issues in ensuring that the regional presence of the UN effectively supports both a regional response and the ongoing work of UNCTs at country level. They indicate the need for more work aimed at:

- Ensuring that UN entity ROs fully take part in the RCP in each region and that there is no dissonance between messaging by Regional Directors and UN entity principals at headquarters level in Geneva, New York and Rome.
- Improving the understanding among RCs and UNCT staff regarding the value proposition of policy support and knowledge management products generated at regional level, especially by the RECs.
- Increasing the capacity of RECs and ROs to provide timely support to UNCTs in the process of planning and implementing CFs and for demand driven technical support as needed.

Findings: Regional Dimensions of the UNDS Response

During the pandemic, there was a major reform and re-organization of the structures and processes for UNDS representation at the regional level involving a unification of overall responsibility for the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) in each region, supported, inter alia, by Issues-Based Coalitions (IBC) as required. **This, and other ongoing reforms at regional level hold the promise of improved support to UNCTs** as they strive for a collective and coherent offer of UN support to the SDGs at country level. (EQ 1)

At the same time, key informants noted that **there is a general lag between the pace of UNDS reforms at country level and regional level**, including adherence to the Management Accountability Framework (MAF). **Regional Offices and Regional Economic Commissions have not fully conveyed to UNCTs the value of their support.** In addition**, they often find it difficult to respond in a timely way to the expressed needs and demands of UNCT entities**. (EQ 1)

4.3. The Management Accountability Framework (MAF) and the Empowered RC

The Management Accountability Framework (UNSDG 2021b), considered a foundational element for the reinvigoration of the RC system, establishes the management and accountability structure at the country, regional and global levels to ensure consistency to the UNDS repositioning. An empowered and independent RC leading the UNCT, supported by the RCO, is central to the country-level repositioning of the UNDS.

The 'new generation' of RCs that were largely in place globally at the start of the pandemic played an important role in supporting a coordinated UN socio-economic response at the country level. Drawing off the MAF structure, the selection process and accountability systems for RCs have been significantly refined over the last years, including *The RC Leadership Profile* (UNSDG 2020) that outlines required competencies, knowledge, values and attributes, *The RC Peer Feedback Tool* (UNSDG 2018) and *Transitional RC Performance Management System* (UNSDG 2022b) that elaborates RC performance appraisals.

Internal tracking of trends shows significant shifts toward greater diversity in RC profiles in the years preceding the pandemic whereby women comprised 52 percent of RCs in 2022, up from 43 percent in 2015. Current RCs in the UNDS come from 55 different countries. Former UNDP staff held 59 percent of RC positions in 2018, but only 36 percent in 2022.[34] Individual RC personalities, along with their skills and the new structures in place, played a key role in leadership effectiveness at the country level.

> *"The RC personality has a major impact. A UNCT is only as good as the RC – the day they select the wrong RC is the day we lose ground."*
>
> *Global UN Stakeholder*

Gaps in leadership at the highest level of country teams were felt particularly acutely during the pandemic response, requiring significant efforts from acting RCs and RCOs (especially Heads of Office) to continue key operations. Disruptions caused by RC vacancies are recognized at the highest levels, and continued efforts are underway to monitor and minimize vacancy time, stymied at times by bureaucratic delays and government clearance processes.[35]

Despite references in the MAF to the integrator function of UNDP, there were significant differences in experiences with understanding and defining the role of the RC and UNDP in the SERP process. Experiences varied considerably across countries, but UNDP's technical role in the SERPs was a point of confusion for many and stress for some, pointing to the need for much greater clarity on the mechanics of the integrator role going forward.[36]

Evidence from several case studies highlighted the importance of the RC role vis-à-vis the international community as a critical element in leadership success in the COVID response. Some RCs were able to utilize the SERPs and other frameworks to clarify and elevate the RC/UNCT role within the country, garnering greater respect and authority with governments and the international community going forward (though opportunities were also context-specific). As one UN stakeholder noted, *"UN reform works with an empowered RC who can coordinate the international community – the UNCT will follow. It works when RC can broker the international response. Taking the MAF to the UNCT isn't going to make them follow."*

The pandemic and the need to respond in a coordinated fashion was seen to have supported and even accelerated the reform process. In the words of one RC, *"Most RCs would say there has been a catalytic shift for a number of UN agencies in believing that UNDS reform and role of the RC is important after all."* This is consistent with baseline data shows that 87 percent of UNCT members and 84 percent of RCs feel that MAF implementation has improved over the past year.[37]

While recognizing progress, there remain some areas of the MAF implementation that are lagging and require further focus to foster greater cohesion. Though the MAF establishes that UNCT members will be appraised through the performance management process of their respective entities by both their supervisor, on the entity's mandate, and the RC, on their contribution to

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[34] UNINFO. Accessed August 2022.

[35] Currently 112 out of 130 RC positions are filled, with 17 RC a.i. and 1 vacancy. UNINFO. Accessed August 2022.

[36] The RC is supported by UNDP–in its integrator role - in leveraging system-wide expertise and knowledge for more integrated policy advice and whole-of-government and whole of society approaches toward achieving the SDGs. (UN MAF 2021:14)

[37] QCPR Monitoring Framework baseline data (2021) for Indicators 3.2.11 and 3.2.12.

results towards joint UN activities (UNSDG 2021b, pg.9), approximately two-thirds of RCs formally contribute to less than one-third of UNCT members performance assessments, and this has not improved since baseline reporting in 2017. [38] On the plus side, 73 percent of UNDS entities had updated job descriptions of UNCT heads to recognize the role of the RC by 2021, compared with only 36 percent in 2019.[39]

4.3.1 RCO Configurations

> *"COVID hit when UNDS reform was still in process and all were eager to show their role. Initially we were almost implementing UNDS reform without any rehearsal."*
>
> *Indonesia UNCT Stakeholder*

There is broad consensus across the system that the presence of an independent RC, supported by an RCO, played an important role in facilitating a more coherent and cohesive UNCT socio-economic response to the pandemic. A fully staffed RCO was identified in case study countries as an important element that strengthened cohesion of the COVID response. Conversely, the crisis further helped to clarify roles and prove value of the newly-configured RCO in many countries.

While the RCO had been staffed to its full complement of five staff persons by the onset of the pandemic in most countries, some countries were still in the process of filling key RCO positions.[40] In some countries, a large RCO presence to support joint operations allowed RCs to second and assign RCO staff to support key processes in response to the crisis. For example, Uzbekistan's RCO Communications and Advocacy Officer was seconded to WHO for a period of time to coordinate the overall crisis communication response.

The RCO plays an important role in empowering RCs to act on their responsibilities to coordinate the UNCT and facilitate cohesiveness of the UN system. Those personnel who can best perform their duties have both the technical knowledge and the soft skills that allow them to foster harmony and consensus in what are sometimes tense environments. Many are highly regarded across the UNCT. In some countries, technical agencies and agencies that are not physically present have found important space within the RCO to communicate and advocate more effectively on common issues.

All five designated positions for the RCO were deemed important by stakeholders interviewed: Strategic Planning/Team Leader; Programme Communication and Advocacy; Partnership and Development Finance; Economist and Data Management and Results Monitoring. The sixth position of Administrative Assistant, added during the course of the evaluation, was also welcomed by RCs. The technical inputs of the Economist were flagged by stakeholders in some case study countries as particularly useful to the COVID-19 response, offering a skill set that most agencies did not have. The leadership role of the Head of Office was also critical.

The globally standardized RCO core configuration is deemed appropriate, but there is also an understanding that the core structure requires adaptation to specific contexts. RCOs varied significantly in size across case study countries with several adding significant numbers of temporary

[38] In 2017, 65% of RCs contributed to less than one-third of performance reviews compared to 68% in 2021 (SGR 2022, QCPR Monitoring Framework Indicator 3.2.5.i)

[39] QCPR Monitoring Framework data (SGR 2022) for Indicator 3.2.10

[40] For example, the RCO in Sri Lanka was in the process of filling the globally mandated core positions at the outset of the outbreak of COVID-19, concluding this process in February 2021.

positions or hosting multiple advisory staff. Concerns were raised in a number of countries regarding the optimal size of the RCO machinery, suggesting that the core model may benefit from review. Furthermore, issues with the operational aspects of de-linking the RCO from UNDP were identified as problematic to several RCO work functions such as Information and Technology and Human Resources.

Findings: The MAF and the Empowered RC

The selection, training and appointment of **the "new generation" of RCs** that were largely in place globally at the start of the pandemic played a central **role in ensuring effective leadership and supporting a coordinated UNCT response to the pandemic** at country level. The selection process and accountability systems for RCs were refined in recent years with **significant shifts in the diversity of RC profiles,** which can contribute to increased engagement across the UNCT at country level**.**

While the MAF has supported the growing importance of the RC role, **some areas of MAF implementation continue to lag** with the potential to impede further gains in coherence of the UNDS support to national governments at country level.

RCOs played an important role in facilitating a coherent response to the pandemic. The core configuration may not always represent optimal size and functions depending on national contexts.

5. System-Wide Learning on the UNDS Response

5.1. Strategic Plans and HQ Messages

In addressing the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, the evaluation has taken note of the important contextual role of UNDS reform in supporting and strengthening the coherence of the response at country level. In light of UNDS reform as a contributing factor for a more coherent UNDS response, in its Interim Report, the evaluation examined UNDS entity Strategic Plans (SP) developed in 2021 and commencing in 2022 as an example of an important supporting message from executive management at the headquarters level to their respective COs that make up the UNCT. Thirteen UN entities developed a Strategic Plan amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the time they were developed and approved, these SPs should reflect the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on programming, the ongoing efforts to advance UNDS reforms as well as articulating the entity's role in the overall UNDS COVID-19 response.

The evaluation analyzed the messages provided through SPs regarding advancing UNDS reform and addressing the socio-economic response to COVID-19. A full description of the methodology for the analysis and its detailed results can be found in the Interim Report for this evaluation.

SERPs, CFs, and a coherent response to COVID-19

A common denominator across all Strategic Plans is the recognition of the effects of COVID-19 on their mandated SDG-related goals. All entities recognize the setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and have consequently made notable adjustments in their programming to regain progress towards the SDGs. When it comes to specific cooperation amongst UN entities, most SPs (10/13) provide evidence on inter-agency partnerships. However, the commitment set out in the QCPR regarding the RCs role in coordinating joint work is rarely present in Strategic Plans.

No reference to the UN Framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 was found in any of the reviewed Strategic Plans. Only three SPs (UNIDO, UN Women, UNDP) included a reference to country-level Socio-economic COVID-19 Response Plans (SERPs). Given that SERPs

were a short to medium-term measure intended to operate from early to mid-2020 until late 2021, it is not surprising that most SPs commencing in 2022 lack an explicit reference. However, some SPs do indicate their intention to move forward on UNDS reforms. For example, UNIDO (2021, p.25) recognizes the importance of strengthening their contributions within the UNDS reform, ensuring a more systematic cooperation with the RC offices and UNCTs. Similarly, by working within the UNDS, UN Women (2021b, p.20) aims to become a development organization that is equipped to deliver results as part of a repositioned UN development system where they are most needed – in the field.

Pooled Funds

Pooled funds have been referred to as a priority in the 2020 QCPR; they are meant to serve as the financial incentives that drive UNDS reform. In response, UNDS entities have committed to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of development-related inter-agency pooled funds. Yet, references to pooled funds were only found in four of the reviewed Strategic Plans. When mentioned, the entities referred to collaborating on specific pooled funds such as the SDG Fund or the Spotlight Initiative. No specific mention of the COVID-19 Response and Recover Multi-partner Trust Fund was found.

Human Rights/Gender/Inclusion/LNOB

Most entities have mainstreamed gender equality into their Strategic Plans. When doing so they tend to cite their overarching commitment to the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. **Yet, only a few entities (UNDP, WFP) explicitly refer to a joint collaboration with UN Women to promote gender equality and accelerate women's empowerment**. On the other hand, UN Women (2021b, p.18) explicitly recognizes it will:

> Significantly step up its UN coordination work. This work will include: leveraging UN-Women's leadership role in promoting accountability of the UN system for work on gender equality, through inter-agency coordination bodies and mechanisms at global, regional and national levels; supporting gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes in the UN system, through guidance and services to strengthen the relevant capacities of the UN system; and developing accountability frameworks of harmonized and commonly agreed standards in this regard.

Evidence that an entity is committed to **a cross-agency approach** to addressing HR/GE/Inclusion/LNOB was also scarce amongst SPs. References to joint work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was only found in UNICEF's Strategic Plan. In a similar manner, three Strategic Plans (WFP, UNEP, UNICEF) cite working with UNHCR in support of refugees and returnee populations as a strong commitment.

Equitable and Greener Recovery

Through their SPs, UN entities have consistently addressed how environmental changes impact their mandates and goal areas. Most have elaborated on how their entity will support environmental change, yet only very few of them explicitly detail joint work across UN entities for a greener recovery. UNDP (2021b, p.10) is amongst the very few by emphasizing working with FAO, UNEP and other specialist partners, to catalyze a shift away from business-as-usual land-use and agricultural systems towards practices that restore long-term productivity, bolster livelihoods, safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services and provide climate solutions.

In a similar fashion, all entities stress the importance of strategic programming to address diverse vulnerable groups' development setbacks. They consistently recognize the growing inequalities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, only UNICEF (2021b, p.2), refers specifically to the term *equitable* in a joint-work amongst UN entities and COVID-19 response context.

Joint Accountability

The majority of Strategic Plans have incorporated joint accountability components (9/13); these include collective monitoring and reporting frameworks, joint evaluations, and evidence/data sharing to strengthen the work of the entire UN system.

When referring to monitoring and reporting frameworks, entities tend to emphasize the importance of harmonizing tools and methodologies with other UN entities to report on progress towards achieving SDGs. Entities have also recognized the relevance of supporting the exchange of monitoring data and information with UN Systems, including UNINFO. UNFPA (2021, p.24) elaborates on the importance of UNINFO as the planning, monitoring, and reporting system of the UN DCO that tracks how the UN system at a country level supports Governments to achieve the SDGs.

In summary, the evaluation found that UN entities that have prepared new SPs during the pandemic have uniformly endorsed the characterization of COVID-19 as a "development emergency" and a setback to achieving the SDGs and Agenda 2030 as stated in the UN Framework for COVID-19 (2020). While rarely making direct reference to the UN Framework or the SERPs, the SPs developed during the period under evaluation reflect diverse commitments to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 by re-gaining and/or accelerating action toward transformative results across the UNDS in line with the SDGs and Agenda 2030.

The thirteen SPs assessed positioned their plans within the framework of the UNDS, with most making explicit references to joint work around the CF, although usually in terms of joint programming among a subset of UNDS entities. This differs significantly from an expressed commitment to achieving the UNDS reform goal of a more coherent UNDS offering to the host government. The majority (9/13) referenced the QCPR as a guiding document. However, **UN entities were less consistent in presenting an explicit commitment to support a strengthened RC system and a new-generation UNCT or advance UNDS reforms**, as defined in QCPR resolution 75/233. Furthermore, only four entities committed to increasing development responses through inter-agency pooled funds in their SPs.

Reviewed SPs expressed an overarching commitment to core values of Human Rights, Gender Equality, Inclusion and LNOB in their SPs. However, very few demonstrated specific commitments to working collectively and/or collaboratively to achieve global goals around HR/GE/Inclusion/LNOB and even fewer committed to working collaboratively with those entities within the system that have coordination mandates (UN Women, UNHCHR). While most analyzed SPs include a general reference to meeting the needs of persons with disabilities, references to collaborative work to ensure the inclusion of persons living with disabilities were largely absent.

UN entities have also demonstrated through their SPs an understanding of how environmental changes have impacted their mandate’s goals, although very few explicitly detail joint work across UN entities for a greener recovery as part of BBB strategies. Similarly, all entities stressed the importance of strategic programming to address the setbacks of various vulnerable groups, largely exacerbated by the pandemic. Yet, framing of joint work toward equitable BBB responses was generally missing.

Finally, the majority of entities reviewed have also emphasized the need to incorporate joint accountability components into their SPs, including collective monitoring and reporting frameworks, joint evaluations, and evidence/data sharing to strengthen the work of the UN system.

Findings: Strategic Plans and Messaging

UN Entity Strategic Plans developed during the pandemic **have emphasized the need for increased joint programming and collaboration.** However, this is most often seen as specific, tailored joint programming between selected UN entities. As a consequence, **commitments to collective action and accountability across the UNDS at country level are often lacking**. UN entities **have not been consistent in their commitment to support the strengthened RC system and new-generation UNCTs** as defined in QCPR resolution 75/233.

5.2. Lessons from UNEG Member Evaluations

The Interim Report of the evaluation also included a review of the main findings of two different types of thematic evaluations carried out by UNEG members with special relevance to the UNDS system-wide response to COVID-19.

1. Thematic or joint evaluations and synthesis of evaluations covering overall UN entity actions in response to COVID-19; and
2. Real time assessments (RTAs) or synthesis of RTAs of UN entity response including global evaluation summaries drawing on regional reports.

The resulting set of evaluation reports and operational reviews (UN 2022b, p.21) included agency-reports on the response to COVID-19 from FAO, ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UN Habitat, UNICEF and UN Women.

For this report, the evaluation referenced the website of the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition to identify any evaluation reports published since February 2022 that would meet the criteria noted above. A full meta-analysis of published evaluations of the COVID-19 response by UNDS members should be possible by the end of 2023.

At a technical level, the evaluation remained in regular contact with the ongoing Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response. This includes a review of the Learning Paper published in April 2022[41].

The findings from the published evaluation reports as summarized in the Interim Report remain relevant to the overall evaluation of the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. The key messages for this evaluation from completed UNEG member evaluations include:

- The requirement, in the immediate phase of the pandemic, to adopt new ways of working by relying on hybrid (remote and in-person) methods, advance digitization and strain to re-design and re-purpose programming and funding – sometimes with remarkable success but also in the face of significant constraints, especially on funding;
- The uncovering by the pandemic of new opportunities and a heightened impetus to advocate for controversial elements of HR/Gender/LNOB and inclusion values to support those most heavily impacted by the pandemic;

[41] Available at: https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/IAHE%20COVID-19%20GHRP%20Learning%20Paper.pdf

- The need to reduce internal UNDS entity barriers to better foster cross-sectoral collaboration; and,
- The need and opportunity provided by the pandemic to increase inter-agency collaboration with and beyond UNCTs.

Findings: Learning from UNEG Member Evaluations of the COVID-19 Response

The findings and lessons learned from UNEG member evaluations of their overall response to COVID-19 confirmed that **UNCT entities were faced with important challenges in the immediate response to the pandemic in order to maintain operations and respond to the duty of care to employees.** While they faced important constraints the results of the evaluations indicate **UNCTs responded effectively to these challenges** while taking advantage of opportunities for increased digitization and the use of remote methods.

Evaluations also emphasized **the need to act to counter increased inequalities and take advantage of opportunities for successful advocacy on GE/HR/LNOB/Inclusion** while working to enhance inter-agency collaboration. The country case studies conducted during this evaluation have confirmed these findings.

At the same time **the available sample of completed agency-wide evaluations of the response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 is not yet sufficient to support a full meta-analysis.**

5.3. Lessons learned from ongoing UNCT Experience

In all eight case study countries, UNCT entity staff demonstrated a capacity for learning from the experience of collaborating on the response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 from the very earliest days of the pandemic through to the merging of the SERP into the CF which began as early as late 2020 in some countries and was completed in all eight by the end of 2021. These lessons are relevant in two important ways:

1. They can inform strategies and approaches to arrive at a cohesive UNDS response to future large-scale development emergencies, and

2. They can help to guide continuing progress in the CCA/CF process so that UNCTs make the strongest possible contribution to supporting the achievement of the SDGs.

The most important lessons emphasized by UNCT staff (including RCs and RCO staff) can be summarized as:

- The need and capacity to adapt and reprogram activities and reallocate resources when faced with a development emergency.
- The opportunity and heightened requirement during a global development emergency to address national issues of GE/HR/LNOB and inclusion presented by the pandemic.
- The increased value of collaboration and coordination, especially relating to advocacy and policy interventions during a crisis situation.
- The importance of defining and operationalizing the nexus approach to humanitarian and development planning and programming in advance of a crisis in order to achieve truly collaborative and coherent response by the UNCT.
- The value of close collaboration between the RC and all HOAs (with or without physical presence) based on a clear understanding of their roles in coordination and leadership.

- The critical importance of existing platforms and structures for coordination both within and outside the UNCT when responding to a development emergency.
- The value of UNDS reforms implemented at UNCT level prior to the onset of the pandemic tempered by the understanding that these changes are still ongoing and require continuous support and further clarification of roles.

Findings: Learning from UNCT Experience

UNCTs have demonstrated an ability to learn from experience and adopt to operational requirements to maintain business continuity in the immediate response to the pandemic. They have also **built on progress in UNDS reforms at country level made before and during the pandemic to improve coherence in policy development and in planning processes** for the SERP and the CF. In addition, the experience of the pandemic has **highlighted the importance of joint coordination structures** including inter-agency thematic and results groups as an important lesson learned. (EQ5)

6. Factors Driving Coherence

This section does not present new evaluation evidence. Rather it draws on the evidence presented in Sections 2 through 5 to identify the most clearly evident factors that enabled or constrained UNCT efforts to jointly plan, implement and account for a coherent UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 at country level. It is also based on the findings of the *Early Lessons and Evaluability Study of COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF* and the Interim Report of this evaluation. The evaluation classified the driving and constraining factors in three main groups:

1. Factors relating directly to the **UN Framework and UNCT efforts to plan and implement the SERP** (and after December 2021, the CFs).
2. Factors relating to **progress or lack of progress in implementing UNDS reforms**, and;
3. Factors which are **largely external to either the UN Framework or UNDS reforms** and are most often related to national governments experiences and priorities in development planning.

The goal of the Section is to situate the UN Framework and the SERPS within larger processes of change both within and outside the UNDS system. It also recognizes the important role that national partners play in efforts to ensure a coherent approach to socio-economic development across all stakeholder actions. The driving factors and constraints for each of the three categories are presented in tables 9, 10 and 11.

The UN Framework and SERPs

Table 9 identifies the ways the UN Framework and the process of developing SERPs and, eventually, integrating their main components into the CF helped to drive the planning of a cohesive UNDS response at country level. Where they were evident, the table also points out counter-factors which have, in some countries and to a greater or lesser extent, constrained the SERPs.

Table 9: The UN Framework and SERPs as Drivers of a Coherent UNDS Response

Driving Factors Grounded in the UN Framework and the SERP Development Process	
Positive Driving Factors	**Potential Constraining Factors**
Prominent RC role in ensuring business continuity and fulfilling the UN duty of care during the immediate emergency phase	

Driving Factors Grounded in the UN Framework and the SERP Development Process	
Positive Driving Factors	**Potential Constraining Factors**
Use of innovative digital and remote methods for coordination and planning enhanced role of UNCT entities and without a physical presence	Risk of return to "business as usual" with negative impacts on "smaller" entities and those without a physical presence
Coordinated, UNCT-wide, SEIA with cross UNCT participation and RC lead on coordination and technical leadership by UNDP	Lack of shared understanding of the UNDP integrator role – with negative consequences for the lead coordinating role of the RC
Flexibility in the application of the UN Framework as led and supported by DCO, allowing for experimentation by UNCTs to develop SERPs responsive to national context and UNCT capacities	Considerable effort required in some cases to adapt pre-existing UN response plans agreed with governments to the requirements of the SERP
Designated Role of the RC and RCO in convening, inspiring, coordinating, advocating for and providing technical support to the SEIA/SERP process	Occasional reluctance of UNCT entity HOAs to engage fully in collective approach to SEIA and SERP development and implementation
Role of the RCO in supporting entities in gathering, collating and reporting on SERP results	Lack of HQ level capacity for UNCT entities to support data gathering and reporting on indicators
Positive UNCT-Wide response and enhanced joint advocacy on the five pillars with notable "wins" in areas such as inclusion of refugees and migrants and targeting of most vulnerable in national social and economic responses.	Challenge of engaging with IFIs, especially the World Bank, Regional Development Banks and the International Monetary Fund. Overlap and sometimes confusion between the health response (SPRP) and the SERP.

UNDS Reforms

There is also clear evidence that progress in the UNDS reforms has helped to propel each UNCT to develop a more coherent and comprehensive response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. Similarly, factors which constrain the influence of the reforms have, to some extent, limited the cohesiveness of the response. As attention shifts to recovery and to the implementation of CFs, the same drivers and constraints have the potential to influence the cohesiveness of UNDS support to accelerating progress toward the SDGs and the achievement of Agenda 2030.

Table 10: UNDS Reforms as Drivers of a Coherent UNDS Response

Driving Factors Grounded in UNDS Reforms	
Positive Driving Factors	**Potential Constraining Factors**
A continuing and strengthening trend to collective UNDS ownership of cross-mandate Issues of HR/GE/LNOB/Inclusions – supported by appropriate metrics – contributes to cross-mandate action and genuine ownership by the whole UNCT	In some countries a focus on UNCT entity mandate-driven targeting limits scope for joint programming to reach selected vulnerable groups
Empowered and independent RC providing skilled neutral leadership focused on consensus building Effective DCO efforts to recruit, train and support (through regular meetings and webinars) RCs Strengthened RCO with standardized staff complement	Discontinuity in RC staffing impacting the response to COVID-19 Some resistance to the coordinating role of the RC on the part of UNCT entities. Some variations in RC leadership styles impeding consensus building

Driving Factors Grounded in UNDS Reforms	
Positive Driving Factors	**Potential Constraining Factors**
Effective RC/UNDP Resident Representative partnerships. Often includes effective working relationships between RCO staff and technical staff in the UNDP CO.	Lack of clarity and common understanding of the UNDP "integrator" role sometimes confusing development partners and national government staff as to relative roles of the RC and UNDP RR. Some RRs expand concept of the integrator role to impinge on scope of influence of the RC while others minimize the concept.
Strengthened CCA processes (annual updates) with greater participation across entities, supported by cross-cutting thematic and result groups. New Generation Country Frameworks – aligned with National MTDPs and SDGs and often encompassing BBB and Greener, supported by a functioning coordination architecture (task teams, results groups, working groups)	Uncoordinated or inconsistent support from headquarters and regional levels of UNCT entities.
Results frameworks and reporting platforms (UNINFO) for CFs driven by the SDGs and encompassing a common output indicator set.	Burden on UNCTs of addressing the SERP indicator framework while working to standardize reporting on the CF. Inconsistent buy-in and support across UNCT agencies at headquarters and country level.
Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) at UNCT, regional, and global level	Incomplete implementation of the MAF in many countries– especially with regard to the RC role in performance assessment of HoAs. Lag of regional MAF implementation in comparison to UNCTs.
Pooled Funds and the Funding Compact – Providing mechanisms for innovative joint programming and new partnerships and strong support role of the RCO	Limited funding leading to diminished incentive for UNCT entities to engage with pooled funding mechanisms (undercapitalized). Spread too thin. Sometimes lack of joint programming (parallel implementation).
UNCT Business Operation Strategy (BOS) unified operational management systems	Agency specific administrative systems not compatible at country level, impeding flexible joint programme implementation and disincentivizing joint work.
Recent efforts to advance UNDS reform at regional level with potential to reinforce and encourage UNCT cohesion at country level	Delayed responsiveness of UNDS entities at regional level to reforms limits regional contribution to coherence.

External Factors

The country case studies also identified factors driving in the direction of a more cohesive, focused and well aligned UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 which lie somewhat outside the boundaries of either the UN Framework/SERP process or the advance of UNDS reforms. Many related to the capacities, policies and programmes of the partner national governments.

Table 11: External Drivers of a Coherent UNDS Response

Factors Outside the UNDS Reform or SERP Process	
Positive Driving Factors	**Potential Constraining Factors**
National Government ownership of Medium-Term Development Plans driven toward SDG goals and targets acts as a strong force driving cohesion of the UNDS and other development partners	More scope for divergent actions by the UNDS in countries where national governments do not insist on coherent and coordinated and UNCT support to the MTDP
In countries with large scale and ongoing humanitarian relief operations or frequent natural disasters, a strong incentive for UNCT entities to focus on nexus issues and address the socio-economic impacts of COVID 19 under both development and humanitarian programming, sometimes supported by the role of a joint RC/HC.	Slow progress in developing effective approaches to addressing nexus issues at UNCT level, limiting efforts to plan a coordinated response across the humanitarian-development boundary.
UNCT/DP/Host Government engagement in strong development planning coordination mechanisms with co-leadership (Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uzbekistan)	Lack of national government engagement and support of coordination architecture creates potential for a less coherent UNDS response
Increasing engagement in issues of equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery by national governments, UNCTs and development partners	Lack of concrete guidance and sharing of country-level UNCT programmatic experience in supporting environmentally sustainable and equitable recovery
Emergence of cross-national and regional impacts of COVID-19 and other challenges requiring cooperation by governments and UNCT entities across borders.	Lack of clarity and understanding of UN regional roles and capabilities to support UNCTs in engaging with cross-national issues in support of governments. Lack of a clear value proposition of the role of UN entity regional offices and regional social and economic commissions for UNCTs.

Findings: Factors Enabling or Constraining a Coherent UNDS Response to COVID-19

It is clear that **the development and roll-out of the UN Framework** with its call for a coordinated, UNCT-wide process for conducting the SEIA and SERP, **contributed strongly to a more coherent and comprehensive UNDS response that aligned with national government priorities**. This was **enhanced and supported by the flexibility applied by DCO in its guidance to UNCTs** on the application of the Framework and by the role played by the RC and RCO in convening and providing technical support to the process, including encouraging full participation by UNCT members without a physical presence.

UNDS reforms, especially the empowered and independent RC providing neutral leadership and consensus building, contributed to the coherence of the UNDS response at country level. Similarly**, the strengthened CCA process and ongoing improvements in the new-generation CF**, with greater participation by UNCT members and a strengthened national coordination architecture **were instrumental in ensuring a more coherent response**.

However, progress on the UNDS reforms, including at regional level, is still incomplete. There are **continuing issues in UNDS reform which constrain the level of coherence in UNCT support** to national efforts to accelerate progress toward the SDGs.

The **coherence of the response was also positively driven by advances in collective UNDS ownership of Gender Equality, Human Rights, LNOB and Inclusion** values, supported by accountability structures and use of specific metrics to measure progress.

Another strong positive factor has been the **commitment of national governments to ensuring that the response to COVID-19 did not lead to neglect of national development plans**, especially in relation to the SDGs.

7. Evaluation Conclusions

This section presents the evaluation conclusions based on findings reported in Sections 2 through 6 above. The conclusions are intended to both provide an assessment of the coherence and effectiveness of the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and to point out the implications for an equitable and sustainable recovery from the pandemic and more effective UNDS support to the SDGs.

1. The depth and scale of the crisis presented by COVID-19 in early 2020 and the resulting persistent challenges to the SDGs fully justify the Secretary-General's declaration of a development emergency and appeal for a global response in March 2020 (UN 2020b). The deep and unequal socio-economic impacts foreseen at that time also provided a strong rationale for the UN Framework and the SERPs.

2. The UN Framework has proven to be an effective instrument for guiding a coherent UNDS response at country level through SEIA and SERP development adapted to national contexts, although the three-pillar structure of the overall UN response to COVID-19 presented challenges to UNCTs to integrate planning across all three pillars (health, humanitarian and development). Nonetheless, the SERPs have provided important added value to the process of planning the UNDS response at country level. The positive evolution of processes for CCAs and CFs should provide a sufficiently agile and robust framework to respond to future development emergencies without the need for parallel planning frameworks and reporting mechanisms.

3. On-going UNDS reforms helped to establish necessary pre-conditions for a coherent and effective UNDS response to socio-economic impacts of the crisis, helping to drive success in maintaining UNCT operations and meeting duty of care to employees and their families during the early phase of the crisis. This, in turn, helped create the conditions for a more effective socio-economic response as embodied in the SERPs and CFs.

   In addition, progress in the reforms was crucial to enabling a coherent UNDS response at country level. However, impediments remain to joint action and a coherent UNCT approach to an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery arising from the competitive environment for resource mobilization and ongoing issues of selective accountability under the MAF. There are also continuing challenges in achieving full coherence and coordination between UNCTs and IFIs at country level. Continued progress in UNDS reforms at global, regional and country level is required to achieve a cohesive UNCT focus at country level in support of the SDGs through CFs.

4. Pooled funding mechanisms, including the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF, the Spotlight Initiative and the Joint SDG Fund, have provided a valuable mechanism for

engaging in new areas of programming and collaborative partnerships by UNCT entities at country level. Challenges remain in relation to the levels of funding provided to pooled funds and the full realization of the Funding Compact, as well as the need for improved administrative rules and processes.

5. The UNDS response at country level has been characterized by a strong commitment to Gender Equality, Human Rights, Leaving No-one Behind and Inclusion (including for persons with disabilities) as reflected in the programming, policy engagement and advocacy, though continued work remains for full joint operationalization of these principles. Tailored accountability tools and metrics applied to programming to ensure effective incorporation of these normative UN values have played an important role in fostering collective accountability while demonstrating a need for accelerated efforts to meet standards.
6. Many SERPs did not provide a high level of visibility to measures to support a more equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery and to address the challenge of climate change. However, recent CCAs and CFs have demonstrated a heightened ability to address these issues with related priorities, goals and targets. Programme support to achieve these goals is largely in the early phases of implementation.
7. UNCTs have used the experience of developing and implementing SERPs to learn valuable lessons regarding effective collaboration for a coherent offer of support to national efforts for socio-economic development and progress toward the SDGs. Important lessons have also been learned from efforts to develop and implement a robust and relevant result monitoring and reporting framework for the SERPs that are especially applicable to efforts to develop common indicators for UNDS support to achieving the SDGs.

8. Recommendations

This section presents the recommendations developed by the evaluation based on the findings and conclusions presented above. Each recommendation is followed by a brief discussion of its supporting rationale and expected benefits. They are forward looking and intended to strengthen the coherence and effectiveness of UNDS support to an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery and to the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030. It is expected that the DCO will prepare the management response to these recommendations:

1. **DCO should continue to support efforts to advance the UNDS reform process with particular emphasis on the Cooperation Framework as an instrument for collective planning, programming and accountability in support of accelerating progress toward the SDGs. This should include strengthening aspects of reform that may not yet have reached their full potential but have been found to enhance the coherence of UNDS support including measures to:**
    a. **Address issues and weaknesses in the application of the MAF, including the absence of a mechanism to ensure compliance by UNCT entities at country and regional level;**
    b. **Fully define, identify and communicate the expected complementarities between the UNDP "integrator function" at country level and the coordination and leadership role of the RC;**

c. **Clarify and strengthen processes for ensuring coordination and coherence between UNCTs and IFIs at country level;**
d. **Accelerate UNDS reforms at a regional level to achieve a more coordinated regional and sub-regional response and to better support UNCTs;**
e. **Conduct a review and move forward with efforts to harmonize administrative and operational systems among entities for flexible joint programming.**
f. **Reinforce progress in the pursuit of equity in line with UN normative values (HR/GE/LNOB/Inclusion) by monitoring and reporting on advances in the use of markers, targets and other accountability mechanisms as well as strengthening supporting architecture to accelerate progress toward standards.**

Rationale

The evaluation found that the experience of developing and implementing the SERPs has made an important contribution to a more coherent CF which is in line with national needs and priorities and focused on the SDGs. The extent that these improvements can be sustained and can contribute to strengthening of UNDS support to the SDGs is dependent on continued progress in implementing UNDS reforms. The evaluation findings illustrate the important role of the newly empowered RC system, the strengthened RCO and the more responsive and inclusive UNCT in ensuring a coherent offer of UNDS services at country level. At the same time, this evaluation and the recent Evaluation of the Resident Coordinator System (OIOS 2021)[42] both identify the need for continued efforts to reduce competition for resources, align incentives and improve collective accountability for UNDS results at country level.

Benefits

The primary benefit will be to avoid a loss of momentum in the continuing effort to strengthen the coherence of UNCTs as they work to contribute to a more equitable and sustainable recovery and to respond to future development emergencies as well as effectively supporting achievement of the SDGs. This will improve coherence across all modes of engagement, including policy development and planning, technical assistance, advocacy and programme support.

2. **DCO and participating entities should cooperate in the process of developing common output indicators to be used to assess the collective contribution of the UNDS to advancing progress toward the SDGs to ensure that:**
    a. **The agreed common indicators for support to the SDGs are robust enough to provide accountability for the UNDS response to a global crisis;**
    b. **Common indicators and data elements required to construct them are developed in consultation with UNCT entity staff (with and without a physical presence) at the country level and vetted at UNCT level prior to publication to ensure that the data required is available from reliable sources and accessible within the required time frame;**
    c. **Responsibilities for data collection, quality assurance, and reporting at UNCT and headquarters level are made explicit and consistent across the system;**

[42] Accessible at: oios.un.org/inspection-evaluation-reports

d. **Incentives for UNCTs to invest the time and resources to gather, compile and report on the indicators and to ensure the quality of uploaded data are identified and validated with UNCT entities.**

Rationale

The evaluation has found that the results framework developed and implemented for the UN Framework was an important, and pioneering effort to arrive at a common set of meaningful results indicators, gathered and shared through UNINFO in a timely and transparent way. In doing so, DCO and the participating UNDS members provided an important enhancement to accountability.

At the same time, the results reporting framework imposed a considerable burden of extra work on the UNCTs, and especially on RCOs, during a time of crisis. Not surprisingly, the process of defining the indicators and data points and gathering together the data at country level and uploading it to UNINFO gave rise to important issues of consistency and overall data quality. It is essential that the indicator framework being developed to monitor the UNDS contribution to the SDGS responds to these challenges. If successful, a common indicator framework for results reporting can facilitate efforts to ensure that the UNDS provides more integrated support to the SDGs over time

Benefits

The primary benefit will be negating the need to develop a customized results monitoring and reporting framework to track the UNDS response to any large-scale development emergencies that may arise in the future. A set of common output indicators developed under the principles outlined in the recommendation will be more resilient and less likely to encounter data quality and consistency issues.

3. **The DCO should examine how to further strengthen the potential and impact of pooled funds for accelerated implementation of the SDGs and a more effective response to development emergencies. This includes:**
    a. **To work with member states in intergovernmental discussion on how to ensure that contributions to pooled funds align with commitments under the Funding Compact;**
    b. **To ensure streamlined procedures and formats across global thematic funds to decrease the administrative and other burdens on UNCTs;**
    c. **To support the RC/RCO in helping UNCTs to strategically access and employ pooled funds (as well as monitoring and evaluation of pooled funds;**
    d. **To examine potential measures to facilitate funding of country-specific pooled funds aimed at responding to development emergencies and accelerating progress to the SDGs.**

Rationale

The evaluation has found that pooled funds have made an important contribution to a coherent and focused UNDS response to COVID-19 but they continue to face the challenge of under-capitalization. It is important that the UNDS and development partners address the problem of under-capitalized pooled funds if their full potential is to be realized. Global level funds such as the Joint SDG Fund have recently developed mechanisms to allow for more rapid contributions and disbursements in response to development emergencies. At the same time, the evaluation (and the Early Lessons and Evaluability of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF) has found that country-specific pooled funds can be an important mechanism to support COVID-19 recovery efforts and to

accelerate progress to the SDGs. However, these pooled funds can be cumbersome and inflexible both for the development partners contributing financial resources and the UNCT entities attempting to design and implement the joint programmes they fund. There is an opportunity to explore potential changes to the mechanism of country-specific pooled funds to bring to them some of the flexibilities envisioned in the recent changes to the Joint SDG Fund.

Benefits

The primary benefit from enacting this recommendation would be the potential for more rapid and more substantial resource flows from pooled funds to funded projects along with better levels of capitalization of the funds themselves. In addition, it would result in more timely development and implementation of UNCT joint programmes and projects to support acceleration toward the SDGs, even during times of crisis. A more flexible system for contributing to country-specific pooled funds could assist development partners to meet their commitments under the Funding Compact.

4. **UNDS entities should prepare a supplement to their Strategic Plans to reinforce messaging on necessary action to advance progress in response to UN General Assembly resolutions on UNDS reform.**

Notwithstanding the different levels of obligation placed on Funds and Programmes and Specialized Agencies by resolutions in response to the QCPR, UNDS entities should consider supplementing current Strategic Plans/Frameworks with a clear statement detailing their commitment to taking further action in response to UNGA resolutions on UN development system reform including the reform related elements of General Assembly Resolution 75/233. In particular, this may include a strong emphasis on coherent and collaborative action on Human Rights/Gender Equality/Inclusion/LNOB as well as coordinated action on environmental sustainability and climate action as central elements in an equitable recovery.

It may also include further action to strengthen the RC system and commitment to pooled funding and joint policy and programme actions at country level across the full UNCT. UN entities may also consider reviewing results frameworks for their Strategic Plans to ensure they incorporate performance indicators relating to realization of the elements of UNDS reform highlighted in Resolution 75/233. UNDS entities will be able to strengthen and communicate a consistent message from the executive management level to regional and country office staff, to development partners and to member states regarding their commitment to advance the UNDS reform agenda.

Rationale

There remains a wide diversity and sometimes lack of uptake of the QCPR resolutions on UNDS reform in the Strategic Plans/Frameworks reviewed for this evaluation. By incorporating QCPR provisions on system collaboration and reform in a more substantive/comprehensive manner, UN entities can visibly reinforce their commitment to the reform and thus help enable effective collaboration within UNCTs. This is consistent with the recommendation by the Secretary-General in his report on the functioning of the Residence Coordinator system that the chair of the UN Sustainable Development Group should prepare a UN development system reform checklist (UN 2021c, para.153).

In developing a supplemental statement to support this aspect of their SPs, UNDS entities may wish to undertake consultations with the Chair of the UNSDG to ensure responsiveness to the critical elements of UNDS reform. In this discussion they may be guided by the proposals contained in the

Secretary-General's Review of the functioning of the Resident Coordinator system: rising to the challenge and keeping the promise of the 2030 Agenda, particularly those referring to adherence to the letter and spirit of the dual reporting function (UN 2021g paras. 152-156 and General Assembly Resolution A/Res/76/4, para 13). They may also wish to inform their respective governance bodies of the changes. These steps will support a better collective response by UNCTS, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, as expressed through the Cooperation Framework.

Benefits

The primary benefit of these actions will be to reinforce messages from executive management level in UNDS entities to representatives and staff of regional and country offices regarding the need to continue to advance the UNDS reform agenda and, thereby, to improve the coherence of the UNDS contribution to advancing progress toward the SDGs. They will also help to reassure member states that UNDS entities are intensifying efforts to advance the reform agenda and to respond effectively to member state decisions and resolutions to that effect.

5. **The System-Wide Evaluation Office, in consultation with UNSDG, should undertake an evaluation of UNDS efforts to support an environmentally sustainable recovery and address climate change. This forward-looking evaluation should aim to identify important contributing factors which will allow UNCTs to more effectively support national efforts to ensure a greener, more equitable recovery, including as appropriate, the use of accountability mechanisms and markers similar to those which have proven effective in supporting UNDS actions on GE/HR/LNOB and disability inclusion. This will build on the priorities for action on environment and climate currently expressed in many CFs.**

Rationale

Despite the gains in experience by many UNCTs in documented in the report, there is a compelling need for a formative SWE of UNCT efforts to support countries as they engage in addressing the reality of pursuing an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery – including action on adapting and mitigating climate change.

The evaluation has noted that SERP documents sometimes failed to address environmental impacts or to engage in programming efforts to support a more equitable and sustainable recovery. At the same time, there is considerable evidence that new generation CFs include priorities, goals and targets to address environmental sustainability and climate change at country level. The importance of addressing these challenges is further emphasized by the decision by member states at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to join the Glasgow Climate Pact and keep the goal of no more than 1.5 degrees centigrade of climate warming alive and to finalize the Paris Agreement.[43]

The priority need for effective UNCT support to climate change adaptation and mitigation is also strengthened by commitment number two (protect our planet) of Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General (UN 2021b, p.6). Finally, regional and global interviews note that now is the

[43] Accessible at: https://ukcop26.org/cop26-keeps-1-5c-alive-and-finalises-paris-agreement/.

time to address the most effective means of supporting an environmentally sustainable recovery that includes action on climate change.

Benefits

As a formative evaluation, the SWE would focus on identifying and validating emerging good practices at a country and system-wide level and sharing those practices across agencies and countries. It would augment the results of completed and ongoing evaluations carried out by UNDS members (including, for example, the Evaluation of UNDP Support to Climate Change Adaptation completed in 2020) but with a system-wide lens. The resulting report would be useful to the UNDS as a whole, to RCs and RCOs and to UNCTs as they further develop programmes on climate change adaptation and mitigation to give programmatic expression to this priority in emerging CFs.

6. **DCO should develop specific guidance to be implemented by RCs and supported by UNCTS to maintain and further extend the participation and contribution of UNCT entities without a physical presence at country level in processes for analysis and planning including the CCA and CF as well as pooled funds and other forms of joint programming where appropriate. This will lead to a more comprehensive offer of services by the UNCT which incorporate the experience and expertise of all members.**

Rationale

This evaluation and the Early Lessons and Evaluability study of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF have demonstrated the significant contribution made by smaller UNCT members, and those without a physical presence to processes for planning and implementing the UNDS response to COVID-19. These UNCT entities bring to bear specialized expertise in country analysis and in identifying and reaching the most vulnerable as well as effective programming in their areas of competence. It is essential, as countries transition from the most acute phase of the pandemic into medium and longer-term recovery programming that the contribution of these agencies is not lost. By ensuring the continued, substantive and meaningful participation of smaller UNCT members and those without a physical presence, UNDS can contribute to a stronger and more coherent offer of support to the SDGs at country level.

Benefits

The primary benefit will be a more comprehensive offer of service by UNCTs which is responsive to national needs and priority and which reflects the specialized expertise of the system as a whole. Smaller UNCT entities and those without a physical presence at country level will be enabled to make a more significant contribution to advocacy and policy engagement at country level through their participation in planning and priority setting.

Annexes

Annex A: Methodology

Evaluation Focus and Data Collection Methods

At country level, the evaluation has been guided by the DCO/UNEG Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNDCO/UNEG 2021). As a result, it deals with the overall strategic coherence and alignment of the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and on joint programming, technical assistance and advocacy by the UNCT and its member entities. It does not include assessments or evaluations of individual UN programmes implemented by single UN entities at country, regional or global level. The main data collection methods used were:

- A review of key documents at global and country level. Global documents include those providing guidance to UNCTs, including but not limited to, select UNDS entity strategic plans;
- Key informant interviews at global, regional and country level;
- A synthesis of lessons learned from completed evaluations undertaken by UNEG members and applicable to the UNDS COVID-19 socio-economic response;
- Country case studies of the UNDS response as realized through the SERP and the UNDAF/CF in eight countries;
- A review of data provided through the results reporting portals of the UNDS (UNINFO) and selected MPTFs (the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF, the Joint SDG Fund and the Spotlight Initiative Fund).

Respecting the Subsidiarity Principle

The evaluation was designed to respect the principle of subsidiarity by ensuring that the role of evaluating programming by each UNCT entity remains the purview and mandate of the entities themselves, in keeping with the policy on SWE as enumerated in the 2020 QCPR. Country case studies carried out for the evaluation conformed to the joint UNDCO/UNEG guidelines on evaluation of the CF. The guidelines define CF evaluation (UNDCO/UNEG 2021, p.5).

Lessons Learned from UN Evaluations and Lessons Learning Studies on COVID-19

A focused review of evaluation reports and lessons learning studies directly relevant to the UNDS response to COVID-19, selected from reports available as of December 2021 was undertaken by the evaluation team as evidence to inform the Interim Report.

Document Reviews

The evaluation compiled and reviewed a comprehensive set of documents for analysis at both global and country level. All documents were collected and uploaded to a common drive for access by all team members. The google-drive repository hosted relevant documentation for the exercise. The Document Review included a structured analysis of the Strategic Plans developed during the pandemic by 13 UNDS entities. The detailed methodology and the results for this analysis were incorporated into the Interim Report.

Key Informant Interviews

Given available resources and time, the evaluation team interviewed 51 key informants at global and regional level. In addition, in each of the countries chosen to provide a country-level perspective through a case study approach, the evaluation team interviewed:

- The Resident Coordinator;
- Staff of the RCO;
- UNCT Heads of Agencies;
- UNCT technical staff assigned to thematic working groups and results groups;
- Senior National Government representatives;
- Staff of Civil Society Organizations representing vulnerable groups;
- Staff of selected bilateral donor agencies active in the socio-economic response to COVID-19.

Because of the ongoing civil unrest in Sri Lanka and the difficulty in accessing key informants outside the UN system, the Sri Lanka case study was conducted remotely based on a review of relevant documentation and interviews with selected UNCT entity staff, including the RCO.

After country level data and documentary evidenced was collected and analyzed and country-level interviews conducted, the principal author of each case study conducted a stakeholder feedback and verification session prior to finalizing the case study. The final case study product consists of a brief summary note on key findings and lessons learned as per the ToR.

Country Case Studies

The case study countries were selected independently by the evaluation by applying a screen of six specific criteria:

1. The need for **geographic balance**, including at least one Small Island Developing State (SID);
2. The need to ensure adequate representation across **different national income levels;**
3. The need to ensure the sample included countries that were making use of one or more of the three **pooled funds of special interest** (Joint SDG Fund, COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund and Spotlight Initiative Fund);
4. The need to include countries at different stages of the **UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework Cycle** to examine the link between SERPs and CFs;
5. The need for representation by countries at **different levels of gender inequality** as measured through the GDI; and,
6. The need for a mix of **smaller, mid-size and larger countries by population** size.

Selected sample countries

The eight countries selected for case studies that meet all of the criteria are:

- Argentina
- Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean
- Indonesia
- Jordan
- Rwanda
- Sri Lanka

- Sierra Leone
- Uzbekistan

Assessing Human Rights, Gender Equality, Inclusion and LNOB

The United Nations leave no one behind (LNOB) commitment seeks to combat inequalities and discrimination grounded in the foundational principles of the UN Charter and inter/national human rights law. LNOB exclusions may be on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, age, disability or other dimensions as well as on a combination of multiple vulnerabilities depending on individual contexts. This evaluation integrates a cross-cutting focus on Human Rights (HR) and Gender Equality (GE) in line with the principles of LNOB and the imperative to protect the rights of the most vulnerable members of society. It is important to highlight that the focus on inclusion and LNOB includes an explicit commitment to ensuring that supported programming recognizes and addresses the needs of persons with disabilities.

In line with *UNEG Guidance on Integrating Gender Equality and Human Rights in Evaluation* (2011), the assessment treated gender and inclusion as critical lines of inquiry that cut across all relevant areas of investigation. The evaluation draws on the knowledge of key informants with specialized expertise on systemwide accountability frameworks for human rights, gender, disability and youth. The evaluation also drew on available secondary data and analysis, including LNOB and gender reviews, application of gender equality markers in pooled funds and results from country-led Scorecards that assess common processes for gender, disability and youth inclusion.

Case studies complemented the broader findings with in-depth exploration to better understand the extent to which the UN socio-economic response, as conducted through the SERPs and CFs, has adequately operationalized a human rights-based approach and addressed the needs of the most vulnerable/excluded segments of society at the country level. Each country case study was supported by short working briefs to highlight key HR/GE/Inclusion/LNOB issues for each case study country.

Annex B: Persons Interviewed

Persons Interviewed: Global and Regional

Name	Organization	Position
Adnan, Sarwat	DCO	Senior Regional Coordination Officer, Asia Pacific
Aleshina, Olga	COVID-19 MPTF Secretariat	Head of the Secretariat
Alvarez, Priya	UN Women	UN System Coordination
Angela Neil, Natalie	OIOS	Evaluation Officer
Arapakos, Demetra	OIOS	Evaluation Officer
Baker, Laila	DCO	Regional Director, Arab States
Baki, Yasser	OCHA	Head, COVID-19 Team: Jan 2021 to present
Balakrishnan, Sudha	Executive Office of the Secretary-General	Head of Youth 2030 Secretariat
Bhatia, Anita	UN Women	Deputy Executive Director for Resource Management
Boutin, Genevieve	UNICEF	Deputy Director, Programmes
Cisneros De Alencar, Antonio	DCO	Human Right and Normative Advisor
Cronin, Eileen	Joint Inspection Unit	Inspector
Grogan, Brian	OCHA	COVID-19 Response and Recovery Focal Point
Guarnieri, Valerie	WFP	Assistant Executive Director
Guliyeva, Narmina	DCO	Liaison Coordination Officer, Asia Pacific
Gyles-Mcdonnough, Michelle	Office of the Deputy Secretary-General	Director for SDGs
Hereward, Mark	UNICEF	Associate Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
Igarashi, Masahiro	FAO and UNEG	Chair, UNEG
Kalapurakal, Rosemary	DCO	Deputy Director, UN Development Coordination Office
Kehris, Ilze Brands	OHCHR	Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights
Keita, Diene	UNFPA	Deputy Executive Director
Kenney, Erin	Spotlight Initiative	Technical Unit Head
Kowbel, Nicholas	OIOS	Evaluation Officer/Team Leader
Kim, Heewoong	Joint SDG Fund Secretariat	Reporting and Evaluation Specialist
Kurbel, Lisa	Joint SDG Fund Secretariat	Head
Landry, Magda	UNESCO	Senior Coordinator Field Security
Lennartsson, Magnus	Swedish Permanent Mission to the UN	Ambassador

Name	Organization	Position
Lust-Bianchi, Philippe	Spotlight Initiative	Technical & M&E Specialist
Messina, Claire	DCO	Chief RC System Leadership Branch
Mitra, Gopal	Executive Office of Secretary-General	Senior Social Affairs Officer, Disability Team
Murillo. Mara	UNEP	Intergovernmental Affairs Officer
Noronha, Ligia	UNEP	Assistant Secretary-General
O'Malley, Stephen	OCHA	Head, COVID-19 Team; March 2020 to December 2020
Pak, Alexander	UNFPA	Team Leader, Interagency Affairs
Pedro, Antonio	UNECA	Director Subregional Office Central Africa
Piper, Robert	DCO	Assistant Secretary-General for Development Coordination
Powell, Robert	IMF	Special Representative to the UN
Rye-Pedersen, Anders	UN Jordan	Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator
Rubian, Renata	UNDP	Policy Advisor, Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific
Saetre, Halvor	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway	Director, Section for UN Policy
Steeghs, Gerard	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands	Director, Multilateral Organisations and Human Rights
Tabet, Mounir	ESCWA	Deputy Executive Secretary
Torero, Máximo	FAO	ADG, Economic and Social Development Department/Chief Economist
Than, Nguyen	ESCAP	Sustainable Development Officer, Office of Executive Secretary.
Valent, Robert	DCO	Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean
Valji, Nahla	Spotlight Initiative	Head
Woo Guo, Yee	OIOS	Director, Inspection and Evaluation Division
Xu, Haoliang	UNDP	Secretary-General's Designate a.i. for COVID-19 RR MPTF and Chair of the Operational Steering Committee of the Joint SDG Fund
Yeop Son, Gwi	DCO	Regional Director, Europe and Central Asia
Zahedi, Kaveh	ESCAP	Assistant Secretary-General
Zou, Ciyong	UNIDO	Managing Director, Directorate of Programmes, Partnerships and Field Coordination

Persons Interviewed: Argentina Case Study

Name	Organization	Position
Aizcorbe, Julieta	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Multilateral Cooperation

Name	Organization	Position
Baracat, Verónica	UNWOMEN	Country Programme Coordinator
Basz, Pablo	RCO	Partnerships & Development Finance
Bohorquez, Paola	UNDP	Inclusive Development Coordinator
Braver, Jessica	RCO	Head of Office
Canaviri, Antonio	UNICEF	Monitoring & Evaluation
Carlavan, Francisco	Red Cross	Migrant Programme Director
Cazut, Veronica	UNOPS	Communication and Parthership Officer
Chamorro, Javier	RCO	Monitoring & Evaluation
Escoffier, Natalia	IOM	Policy Officer
Farinelli, Fulvia	RCO	Economist
Fernandez, Anabel	RCO	Spotlight Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist
Galar, Santiago	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Head of International Cooperation
Guelfo, Maria Isabel	UNFPA	Spotlight Communication Specialist
Guerra, Valeria	RCO	Human Rights Specialist
Hahn, Tamar	UNIC	Director
Isai, Mariana	UNFPA	Head of Office
Lacasta, Ignacio	UNOPS	Portfolio Manager
López, Elva	ILO	Inclusive Work Officer
Marchen, Luciana	UNHCR	Durable Solutions Officer
Marzoa, Cecilia	PAHO/WHO	Programme Officer
Mojica, Claudia	RCO	Resident Coordinator
Mortola, Paula	RCO	Executive Associate
Roccatagliata, Juan	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Multilateral Cooperation Director
Rodriguez, Claudia	UNHCR	Deputy Representative
Santi, Victoria	UNDP	Monitoring & Evaluation
Skiba, Daniela	UNHCR	Associate
Toledo, Laura	La Poderosa (CSO)	Programme Coordinator
Vaccaro, Victoria	UNFPA	Spotlight Programme Specialist
Villafañe, Soledad	ECLAC	Economics Affairs Officer
Wainstein, Vanesa	Ministry of Social Development	Senior Advisor on International Relationships and Cooperation
Withrow, Catherine	UNOPS	Programme Manager

Persons Interviewed: Barbados and Eastern Caribbean

Name	Organization	Position
Aleyne, Stephen	FAO	Programme Specialist
Alleye, Oswald	RCO	Monitoring and Evaluation
Andrew, Andrea	RCO	UN Country Coordination Officer for Antigua and Barbuda
Banister, Simone	FCDO	Climate and Disaster Risk Advisor
Blackstock, Denise	UNFPA	Officer covering Barbados and Eastern Caribbean
Blanco, Ugo	UNDP	Deputy Resident Representative
Chapman, Regios	WFP	Representative and Country Director
Clarke, Cherianne	FCDO	Social Development Advisor
Clarke, Marlon	UNDP	Programme Manager
Clarke, Renata	FAO	Sub-Regional Coordinator for the Caribbean
Coto, Janet	European Union	Team Leader
Davis, Stuart	RCO	Economist
George, Kelvin	Grenada	Head of Division of Economic and Technical Cooperation
Joseph, Gloria	Dominica	Permanent Secretary Ministry of Planning, Economic Development, Climate Resilience, Sustainable Development and Renewable Energy
Kamuragiye, Aloys	UNICEF	Representative
Langdon, Anderson	Barbados Family Planning Association	Executive Director
Loraine	RCO	UN Country Coordination Officer for St Lucia
Marlon	RCO	UN Country Coordination Officer for Dominica
Muhura, Bijou	USAID	Director
Murray, Andy	FCDO	Monitoring and Evaluation
Octave-Joseph, Velda	St Lucia	Permanent Secretary Ministry of Equity, Social Justice and Empowerment
Omeir, Darlene	PAHO	Technical Advisor
Polson-Edwards, Karen	PAHO/WHO	Acting Representative
Roach, Kenroy	RCO	Head of Office
Shury, Alana	USAID	COVID-19 Response Consultant
Skinner, Kimberley	UNFPA	Programme Assitant
Trebucq, Didier	RC	Resident Coordinator
Wheatly, Benito	British Virgin Islands	Special Envoy of the Premier

Zulu, Dennis	ILO	Country Director

Persons Interviewed: Indonesia

Name	Organization	Position
Alwi, Fahrudin	Human Initiative (CSO)	Manager International Partnerships
Ardiansyah, Syamsul	Dhompet Dhuafa (CSO)	Senior Officer of Strategic Alliance
Bootsman, Afke	RCO	Head, Senior Strategic Planner
Faiz, Dwi Yuliawati	UN Women	Head of Programmes
Ferdiansyah	Human Initiative (CSO)	Public Relations
Ginting, Valentina	Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection	Assistant Deputy for Women's Rights and Empowerment
Hendrajati, Tomy	Human Initiative (CSO)	President
Hidayat, Melania	UNFPA	Assistant Representative
Hoffman, Louis	IOM	Chief of Mission
Julliand, Valerie	UN Indonesia	Resident Coordinator
Kaimuddin, M.	Human Initiative (CSO)	Humanitarian Diplomacy
Kori, Risya	UNFPA	Gender Specialist
Landiyanto, Erlangga	RCO	M&E Officer
Meinke, Tim	USAID	Senior Advisor
Mindaraga, Iwan	OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Analyst
Miyamoto, Michiko	ILO	Country Director
Moektijasih, Titi	OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Analyst
Nishino, Yoshimi	UNICEF	Chief of Social Policy
Oppusunggu, Yusak	USAID	Mission Disaster Relief Officer
Pratami, Diandra	RCO	Economist
Ramli, Razmi	ADB	
Sari, Inda Kurnia	Ministry of Health	Head Emerging Infectious Diseases
Scott, Niels	UN Indonesia	Former RC a.i.
Shimomura, Norimasa	UNDP	Representative
Sidabutar, Elisabeth	UNFPA	Humanitarian Officer
Suryo, Andri	UNIC	National Information Officer
Trisnadi, Wiwied	Save the Children	Senior Field Manager
Williams, Inga	WHO	Planning Officer
Yulaswati, Vivi	BAPPENAS (Government)	Special Advisor to Minister

Persons Interviewed: Jordan

Name	Organization	Position

Ababneh, Huda	Ministry of Health	Director of International Cooperation
Aboul-Hosn, Randa	UNDP	Resident Representative
Abu-Shan, Yousef	Ministry of Education	Director of Planning
Abuthiab, Deema	UN Habitat	National Programme Coordinator
Allen, Fiona	UNHCR	Senior Development Officer
Alassaf, Majida	UNDP	Deputy Resident Representative
Al Farah	IMF	Economist
Al-Hadidi, Farouk	Ministry of Labor	Secretary-General
Al-Kayyali, Husam	RCO	Partnership and Development Finance Specialist
Almunizel, Sana	IMF	Office Manager
Al Sawalha, Dr. Lora	WHO	National Professional Officer
Bartsch, Dominik	UNHCR	Country Representative
Belbeisi, Dr. Adel	Ministry of Health	Secretary-General
Bellizzi, Dr. Saverio	WHO	Health Emergencies Lead
Botto, Catarina	UN Women	Coordination Analyst
Bryer, Marlene	Embassy of Germany	Humanitarian Coordinator
Campbell, Jonathan	WFP	Deputy Country Director
Chhetri, Vickram	UNWRA	Field Program Support Officer
Cihan, Cengiz	RCO	Senior Economist
Chaupisat, Tanya	UNICEF	Representative
di Camillo, Pamela	UNFPA	GBV Specialist
Dmour, Dr. Barq	Ministry of Social Dev	Secretary-General
Duncan, Sally	UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office	Social Development Officer
Elian, Mai	Ministry of Labor	Director of Policies Department
Hagood, Anne	RCO	Peace and Development Advisor
Hanquart, Baptiste	Jordan INFO Forum	Coordinator
Hasan, Rabia	UNDP	Business Development Specialist
Hawatmeh, Hala	RCO	Communications Associate
Geha, Carlos	UNHCR	Head of Office
Gjerding, Sarah	UNOPS	Gender Specialist
Isaczai, Ghulam	UNCT Jordan	Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator a.i.
Ishtay, Yasmine	Tamkeen	Programme Manager
Jobara, Safia	UNICEF	Gender and Youth Specialist
Johnston, Christopher	Embassy of Canada	Head of Cooperation
Kalash, Linda	Tamkeen	Director
Kalm, Nicolas	Embassy of Germany	Deputy Head of Cooperation
Kanaan, Nihal	RCO	M&E, Results Reporting Specialist
Khan, Frida	ILO	Country Coordinator
Kurt, Tajma	IOM	Chief of Mission
Malkawi, Khetam	RCO	Communications and Advocacy Specialist
Malhas, Danakhan	UNDP	Innovation Specialist, Gender and Youth Focal Point

Meinecke, Christina	RCO	Senior Human Rights Specialist
Mendes, Alberto	WFP	Representative and Country Director
Moon, Richard	Embassy of the UK	Deputy Head of Mission
Mdanat Issa Ayed, Sulafa	UNIDO	Representative
Monda, Nivedita	Oxfam	Country Director
Naatour, Lama	Ministry of Education	Director of Development and Coordination
Nikonoro, Anna	OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Officer
Patrier, Marina	UNESCO	Education Programme Specialist
Pettersson, Marie	UN Women	Gender and Humanitarian Specialist
Prokop, Michaela	UNDP	Senior Economic Advisor
Rai, Pallavi	RCO	Nexus Advisor
Ramadneh, Wafaa	FAO	Programme Officer
Sakr, Sabine	UNEP	Regional Development Coordinator
Shaar, Yousef Abu	Ministry of Education	Director of Research and Planning
Sheikh, Ziad	UN Women	Representative
Spiazzi, Agnese	RCO	Head of Office
Tomeh, Laila	IOM	Programme Coordinator

Persons Interviewed: Rwanda

Name	Organization	Position
Chulu, Osten	UNDP	Economist and Focal Point for the UN Joint Programme on COVID-19 Response and Recovery
Dukuzumuremyi, Noelle	UNHCR	External Relations Associate
Dusabe, Schadrack	UN Women	Head of Programme and focal point for the COVID-19 MPTF Joint Programme
Effiom, Keisha	USAID	Contracting Officer Regional Executive Office USAID/West Africa"
Fall, Baba	UNHCR	Representative
Gomera, Maxwell	UNDP	Resident Representative
Ikeda, Yuko	Embassy of Japan	Second Secretary, Political and Economic Affairs
Ishimwe, Marie-Jeanne	RCO	UN COVID-19 Response Coordinator
Kabutenit, Dr, Theopista	WHO	Technical Officer, Reproductive and Newborn Health
Kanobana, Dominique	UN Women	Technical Advisor for Gender Statistics
Kaodoa, Angelique	Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion	Program Manager and Head of Single Program Implementation Unit
Karumba, Silver	USAID	Nutrition Specialist
Lindsey, Juliana	UNICEF	Representative

Makayato, Dr. Lynda	WHO	Health Emergency Team Lead
Marealle-Ulimwengu, Josephine	RCO	Strategic Planning and RCO Team Leader
Moritende, Patrice	World Bank	Health Economist
Mukantwali, Janviere	UN Women	Programme Coordinator
Munyaneza, Richard	USAID	Point Person – Emerging Threats
Murwanashyaka, Theophile	Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion	Director or Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation
Ndiaye, Fode	RC	Resident Coordinator
Ntagengerwa, Theoneste	Private Sector Forum	Spokesperson & Director of SPIU
Nyinawagaga, Claudinel	Local Administration Development Agency (LODA)	Director General
Pryce, Rolande	World Bank	Country Manager
Umutoniwase, Gisele H.	Rwanda Women's Network	Minimum Package for Graduation specialist (MPG)
Uwantege, Emma Carine	UN Women	Ending Violence Against Women Specialist
Rappaport, Wendy	UNHCR	Senior External Relations Officer
Waldhuber, Natalija	European Union	Programme Officer, Economic Adviser
Wilson, Anna	British High Commission	Development Director, Rwanda
Zeleza, Angela	RCO	Economist and Focal Point for the UN Joint Programme on COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Persons Interviewed: Sierra Leone

Name	Organization	Position
Ahonsi, Babatunde, A	RCO	Resident Coordinator
Adam, Sally	Women's Forum	President
Ansumana, Samuel	Statistics Sierra Leone	Director of Communications
Bagonza, James	IOM	Representative
Bangura, Dr Sheka	Ministry of Development and Planning	Director of Planning, Monitoring and Research
Bentley, Kobi	British High Commission	Development Director
Beyai, Pa Lamin	UNDP	Resident Representative
Brima, Abdula S.	Statistics Sierra Leone	Director, Cartographic and Geographical Information System
Ellie, Josephus	Embassy of Ireland	Senior Programme Advisor
Francisco, Ellennor	RCO	Senior Development Coordination Officer, Deputy Head
Gilroy, Sonia	UNFPA	Gender Equality Specialist

Inden, Kazumi	World Bank	Task Team Leader
Kabia, Francis	Ministry of Social Welfare	Director of Social Welfare Programs
Kamara, Dr. Brima Osaio	Ministry of Health	Director of Primary Health Care
Kargbo, Gbassay	RCO	Economist
Korjie, Mohamed	Statistics Sierra Leone	Director of Operations
Hailu, Binyam	WHO	Maternal and Child Health and M&E
Lamin, Bangalie	UNICEF	Monitoring and Evaluation
Laminso, Mamadu	UNESCO	Senior Programme Specialist-Abuja Regional Office
Mwaluwa, Gegbe	Statistics Sierra Leone	Director National Economic Statistics Division
Makiu, Edmund	UNAIDS	Consultant on Programming
Manderino, Laurie	RCO	Partnerships and Development Finance Officer
Massaquin-Taylor	UNFPA	Programme Specialist
McLoughlin, Emma	Irish Aid	Deputy Head
Mongo, Setcheme Jeronime	UN Women	Economist, Head of Office
Musoke, Dr. Robert	WHO	Coordinator, Health Security and Emergencies
Newiak, Monique	International Monetary Fund	Resident Representative for Sierra Leone
Ngabwe, Wycliff	UNCDF	Digital Country Lead
Nsubuga, Steve	WFP	Representative and Country Director
Rossi, Simonetta	RCO	Peace and Development Advisor
Sambuli, Ibrahim	UNFPA	Acting Representative
Sanko, Osman A.	Statistics Sierra Leone	Statistican General
Sartie, Marbey	RCO	Data Management/Reporting
Sene, Ligane Massamba	UNDP	Economic Adviser
Sesay, Dr. Tom	Ministry of Health	Director of Reproductive and Child Health
Shongwe, Dr Steven Velabo	WHO	Representative ai
Sawyerr, Eugene	Ministry of Development and Planning	Deputy Director, Development Assistance Coordination Office
Sowe, Dr. Sulaiman	Irish Aid	Senior Nutrition and Food Security Advisor
Suehiro, Yuki	UNICEF	Health and Nutrition Officer
Will, Albert Bangora	Statistics Sierra Leone	Project Coordinator
Wuyango, Harding	FAO	Officer in Charge

Persons Interviewed: Sri Lanka

Name	Organization	Position

Bastiansz, Shyara	UNDP	Programme Analyst
Blackman, David	RCO	Economist
Brigham, Emma	UNICEF	Deputy Representative
Chelliah, Madura	RCO	Date, Monitoring & Evaluation
Farook, Razmi	RCO	Former Head of Office
Karpati, Andreas	RCO	Head of Office
Mallawa, Suranga	UNOPS	Programme Manager
Markar, Fadhil Bakeer	UNDP	Policy Specialist
Nivieras, Olivia	WHO	Former Deputy Head
Pelpola, Ruthie	UNICEF	Operations Manager
Ratnayake, Ramani	UNOPS	Project Support Officer
Singer, Hanaa	UN Sri Lanka	Resident Coordinator
Skoog, Christian	UNICEF	HOA

Persons Interviewed: Uzbekistan

Name	Organization	Position
Aliev, Umid	UNICEF	Social Policy Officer
Assangaziyev, Rakhymzhan	World Bank	Senior Operations Officer
Asthana, Roli	UNCT Uzbekistan	Resident Coordinator
Azizova, Nargis	UN Women	Programme Specialist
Baron, Nicolas Dath	UNECE	Chief a.i.
Dimovska, Matilda	UNDP	Representative
Djailov, Bergzod	Asia Development Bank	Senior Economics Officer
Fraser, Helena	UNCT Uzbekistan	Former Resident Coordinator
Gumpas, Cherry	USAID	Health Development Director
Hacker, Simon	RCO	Head
Hoshimov, Sherzod	UNODC	Program Officer
Ishanov, Alisher	USAID	Project Manager Health
Jalilov, Abdulmalki	Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction	Director of the Department of Macroeconomic Policy Analysis and Forecasting
Jumaev, Zarif	RCO	Economist
Kabulova, Dilovar	Civic Initiatives Support Center (NGO)	Director
Kalimulina, Gulfiya	Opa-Singillar (NGO)	Assistant to Director
Khalikova, Liia	RCO	Reporting and Information Management
Kholdarov, Zamon	Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction	Deputy Director of the Department of Macroeconomic Policy Analysis and Forecasting

Kuppens, Lianne	WHO	Representative
Lipcanu, Dumitru	UNHCR	Deputy Representative for Central Asia
Mamiit, Rusyan	RCO	Partnerships & Development Finance
Mantovanelli, Marco	World Bank	Country Manager
Meliboev, Anvar	RCO	Communications & Advocacy Officer
Miital, Ashita	UNODC	Regional Representative
Muntenau, Doina	UNDP	Deputy Resident Representative
Murodullaev, Dilshod	Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade	Head of Sector in Social Sphere Department
Plotnivova, Natalya	Opa-Singillar (NGO)	Director
Teshabaev, Bekhzod	Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade	Head of Department
Tursuna, Abdulla	Ministry of Makhalla and Support of Elderly	Deputy Minister
Tursunova, Dilorom	Sanitary and Epidemiological Surveillance and Public Health Service	Head of Vaccination and Immunization Department
Umarkhojaev, Anvarkhon	Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction	Head of the Department for Monitoring the National Goals and Objectives
Umurzakova, Matluba	RCO	Data Management Results and Reporting
Yu, Yu	UNFPA	Representative

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