



## UNSDG SYSTEM-WIDE EVALUATION OFFICE

# A visible shift – the independent resident coordinator

### Summary of United Nations evaluation evidence

The repositioning of the United Nations development system sought to reinvigorate the role of the resident coordinator system in supporting government efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This summary compiles evidence on elements of the United Nations development system reforms focused on the resident coordinator system. It covers analysis, findings and recommendations related to the role of the resident coordinator and the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) in improving efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and coordination of operational activities for development. It also covers implementation and compliance with the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) of the United Nations development and resident coordinator system and strengthened joint programming processes and the use of joint programmes at the country level<sup>1</sup>.

This summary draws on the extensive knowledge and evidence generated by independent evaluations conducted across the United Nations development system between 2021 and 2024. It presents key issues and learning from evaluations for consideration in the context of United Nations system-wide and intergovernmental policy discussions. Its publication is timed to provide information to stakeholders involved in the 2024 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), in line with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 78/166 (2023).

This summary is part of a series produced by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) which includes summaries of United Nations evaluation evidence on:

- 1 development system reform at the regional level<sup>2</sup>;

- II funding quality;
- III whole of system responses in complex settings;
- IV sustainable food systems; and
- V an interactive evidence map featuring United Nations evaluations, published between 2021 and 2024, mapped against priority areas of the 2020 QCPR<sup>3</sup>.

The complete series is available at:  
<https://ecosoc.un.org/en/what-we-do/oas-qcpr/2020-qcpr-status-reporting>.

## Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review

The QCPR is the primary policy instrument of the United Nations General Assembly to define the way the United Nations development system operates to support programme countries in their development efforts. It assesses the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and impact of United Nations operational activities for development. A QCPR resolution is adopted by the General Assembly every four years with annual follow-up and guidance from Member States provided by the Economic and Social Council at its Operational Activities Segment and the General Assembly in its Second Committee. The 2020 QCPR resolution builds on the United Nations development system reform<sup>4</sup>. The next QCPR resolution will be negotiated in late 2024 to guide efforts from 2025 to 2028.

The 2020 QCPR resolution stresses the importance of empowered, strategic, effective and impartial leadership through the resident coordinator system to foster coordination and collaboration at the country level and facilitate integrated support to host governments. It further requests that all entities support the reinvigorated resident coordinator system, including by complying with the Management and Accountability Framework and ensuring that their operational activities for development at the country level are supportive of the strategic objectives as laid out in the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks. It also asks United Nations country teams (UNCTs) to strengthen joint programming processes and the use of joint programmes at the country level, where appropriate. Lastly, it underlines the important role of the resident coordinator system in supporting government efforts by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of operational activities for development at the country level, enhancing sustainable

development results and thus making operations more coherent and efficient, coordinated and integrated.

Since the reform, the resident coordinator system has been funded through: (i) UNSDG cost sharing; (ii) a 1 per cent levy on tightly earmarked contributions; and (iii) voluntary contributions. The 2020 QCPR emphasizes the importance of adequate, predictable and sustainable funding and stresses the need to fully operationalize these three funding sources.

The Secretary-General provides annual reports on the implementation of the QCPR to the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Since 2019, the UNSDG Chair has also reported annually to ECOSOC on the work of the United Nations Development Coordination Office (DCO). The main reported achievements relevant to this summary are as follows:

- The new resident coordinator system has consolidated itself as the cornerstone of United Nations development system's support for accelerated Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) action.
- Resident coordinators scaled up collective SDG action and leveraged the comparative advantages of United Nations entities, contributing to more effective and efficient delivery in-country.
- Resident coordinators continue to minimize duplication in United Nations delivery.
- Throughout the 2020 QCPR cycle, information-sharing between resident coordinators and UNCTs improved.
- The strengthening and harmonization of core capacities across resident coordinators' offices has been a key feature of the new resident coordinator system.
- The resident coordinator system has advanced towards greater integration and collaboration. Resident coordinators are empowered to play their role as coordinators and conveners, enabled by governments and UNCTs that recognize and support their leadership.

However, challenges are reported by the Secretary-General and UNSDG Chair. Joint planning and programming continue to be constrained by compartmentalization. While the matrixed, dual reporting model<sup>5</sup> is mandated by General Assembly resolutions 72/279 and 75/233, obstacles remain to universal application across United Nations sustainable development group entities.

Specific areas for further refinement remain, including the need to bring even greater coherence to, and avoid duplication within, UNCTs, ensure that the resident coordinator is empowered to inform country presence and leadership profiles and continue to improve skill sets in resident coordinators' offices and the UNCT as a whole. To be self-sustained in the future, the resident coordinator system cannot simply "coordinate"; it must add value, which ensures that the United Nations development system becomes greater than the sum of its parts. The reports also highlight that, since delinking, the resident coordinator system has never been fully funded hampering its ability to fully deliver on its mandates. In view of this, the Secretary-General submitted a proposal to the General Assembly for the conversion of a portion of funding from the regular budget.<sup>6</sup>

## Insights from United Nations evaluations

The following summary of evidence on the reformed resident coordinator system draws on 33 United Nations evaluations conducted at global and country levels<sup>7</sup>. The evaluations in Box 1 (right), given their focus on the reform and resident coordinator system, provided the majority of the evidence for most, but not all, the findings. Evidence from other evaluations often complemented or corroborated their findings.

### 1 Improvements in programming coherence have not yet resulted in the fully coordinated delivery of operational activities.

Government representatives, resident coordinators and UNCT members have reported, through several OIOS evaluations, that indicators of programming coherence, including UNCT engagement in planning and the reduction of duplication, were improving. The convening role of the resident coordinator, which is providing independent leadership and a focus on strategic issues, is perceived as contributing to improved programming coherence, confirmed by country level evaluations. There is evidence that joint programming enhanced coherence across United Nations entities, ensuring United Nations entities leveraged their mandates and comparative technical advantages to achieve the cooperation framework-related results.

Nevertheless, the coherence of programme delivery remains inconsistent. There is evidence of a lack of coordination across United Nations entities on

## BOX 1: EVALUATIONS INCLUDING A SPECIFIC FOCUS ON THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR SYSTEM

- [Office of Internal Oversight Services \(OIOS\), Evaluation of Resident Coordinator System Support to Enabling Coherent United Nations Policy Advice \(2023\)](#)
- [Office of Internal Oversight Services \(OIOS\), Evaluation of the Resident Coordinator System Contribution to Country-Level Programme Coherence \(2021\)](#)
- [Office of Internal Oversight Services \(OIOS\), Evaluation of the Development Coordination Office Regional Support \(2023\)](#)
- [United Nations Population Fund \(UNFPA\), Formative Evaluation of the UNFPA Engagement in the Reform of the United Nations Development System \(2023\)](#)

programme implementation in shared priority areas. Hindering factors identified by OIOS include delegated authorities and reporting lines that favoured entity priorities over those agreed in cooperation frameworks and incentives around funding that led to competition. There is further scope to improve the division of labour at the country level based on the comparative advantage of entities.

COVID-19 and the United Nations response to the pandemic was a first major test of the reformed resident coordinator system, which often showcased the potential of the independent resident coordinator as a facilitator of a more coherent and cohesive socioeconomic response at the country level as confirmed by several COVID-19 response evaluations.<sup>8</sup> The 'reinvigorated' resident coordinators, who were largely in place at the start of the pandemic, played an important role in supporting the United Nations response at the country level. Governments expressed appreciation for their interactions with resident coordinators and the roles they saw resident coordinators playing in the pandemic response.

### 2 Information-sharing has improved and duplication of work is reducing, but challenges which impact coherence persist.



Information-sharing mechanisms, particularly with resident coordinators, are in place and known. Nevertheless, not all entities, particularly those not physically present at the country level, consistently make use of them. Despite evidence across the evaluations that duplication of work at the country level was diminishing within the United Nations development system, examples of duplications within the system persist, as well as with other stakeholders at the country level. Evidence remains on uneven information-sharing from United Nations entities to the resident coordinator, including on policy approaches, and advice and initiatives developed bilaterally with the government that impact on, or diverge from, joint positions or approaches that have been agreed with and by UNCTs.

The plurality of reporting requirements is also perceived by some entities to have increased and to be a significant burden. Examples of heavy reporting requirements identified by OIOS include: duplicative reporting of the same information to the DCO through the resident coordinator and to individual entity regional and global headquarters; the use of separate indicators to assess performance on common issues requested by entity headquarters and the resident coordinators; involvement in joint programmes adding

to the reporting burden; and the lack of feedback on how their reporting to the resident coordinator and their office is being used.

### **3 Resident coordinators have played key roles in enabling integrated United Nations policy advice and have supported UNCTs to increase government capacity.**

Integrated United Nations policy advice and UNCT efforts to enhance government capacity to advance the SDGs have been enabled and supported by resident coordinators, according to OIOS evaluations. While these outcomes were the result of the collective effort of the UNCTs, the resident coordinators played a key role. Resident coordinators enabled integrated policy advice through: playing a convening role; leveraging relevant United Nations expertise; coordinating country teams to provide integrated support to governments; acting as the principal United Nations system representative and interlocutor at the country level; and supporting advocacy efforts to advance the normative agenda. Resident coordinators provided support on cross-sectoral policymaking, strategic approaches to aligning national policies and financing strategies with the SDGs, coordinating United Nations programming



and connecting the government with the relevant United Nations entity or expert. They also provided assistance with engaging and convening other development partners. Resident coordinators play an enabling, convening and connector role rather than providing direct technical policy advice.

Resident coordinators effectively support the mainstreaming of normative issues (including gender, leaving no one behind, human rights and disability inclusion) in national policymaking. Challenges remain in terms of capacity to pursue cross-cutting issues throughout the implementation of programming, both from the resident coordinator and their office and from entities at the country level. The System-Wide Evaluation of the United Nations Development System's Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19 found that the role of the resident coordinators' office, to ensure consistent focus on human rights, gender equality and leaving no one behind, was especially important in countries where entities with coordination mandates lacked a physical presence, elevating the importance of regular dialogue between resident coordinators' offices and key regional bodies. There were examples of the deployment of human rights advisers to resident coordinators' offices, facilitating the mainstreaming of human rights principles throughout the common planning processes of the UNCTs, supported through the UNSDG Human Rights Mainstreaming Multi-Partner Trust Fund.

**4 Resident coordinators have helped entities without a physical presence and smaller UNCT entities engage more fully in analysis and planning processes, although difficulties persist.**

The integration of entities without a physical presence at the country level is still evolving. Evidence showed that resident coordinators allowed for a more systematic inclusion of entities without physical presence, particularly at the analysis and planning stage of country programming processes. Examples of this included the regional economic commissions, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the peer support groups. The OIOS evaluation found that the DCO's role, including at the regional level, contributed to this improvement through connecting resident coordinators and UNCTs with technical expertise at the regional and global levels, notably

supporting the mainstreaming of normative agendas, which was confirmed by other evaluations. Evidence suggested that difficulties in accessing expertise from entities without physical presence persist. Despite good efforts, their participation was limited by logistical constraints created by physical distance, a multi-country focus and weaker connections to country stakeholders.

**5 Capacity and resource gaps in resident coordinators' offices affect the coherence and responsiveness of the United Nations development systems.**

Evaluations confirmed that resident coordinators in tandem with appropriately staffed offices fostered coherence, enabled policy advice and effectively supported the mainstreaming of normative issues. The System-wide Evaluation of the Development System's Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19 identified the empowered resident coordinator and fully staffed offices as an important factor in achieving coherence in the United Nations response and resident coordinators' offices that were not fully staffed as an impediment. The UNFPA development system reform evaluation also pointed to the fact that resident coordinators and their offices have not always been fully capacitated, which was critical for moving inter-agency processes forward. OIOS evaluations identified that the capacity of resident country offices was a determining factor for achievements in the provision or facilitation of



Secretary-General Visits New UN Country Team Building  
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integrated policy advice, yet policy expertise within resident coordinators' offices was often lacking. Furthermore, UNCT members noted the significant strain on resident coordinators' offices to support the delivery of policy advice while also delivering on their coordination mandate. There was a perceived lack of capacity within the UNCTs to effectively mainstream human rights throughout their work according to the Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund evaluation. The fund has supported the deployment of human rights advisers into resident coordinators' offices, a practice potentially threatened by resource constraints in the resident coordinators' offices.

**6 Joint programmes have leveraged the new generation of resident coordinators and their coordination and convenor role, yet procedures and funding remain major obstacles.**

Joint programmes are vehicles to achieving collective results. Joint programmes intentionally leveraging the new generation of resident coordinators and UNCTs are being supported through funds, such as the Joint SDG Fund. Having pooled funds, such as the Joint SDG Fund, within which the resident coordinator has authority, helps strengthen efforts to convene United Nations entities to work together and establish a rapport with stakeholders, including government partners. Pooled funds are valued by

participating organizations as a mechanism for engaging in innovative programming, particularly where they envision a strong role for the resident coordinator and their office. They have also facilitated new partnerships among UNCT entities that may have lasting impacts on collaboration. The most successful programmes, according to the system-wide evaluation of the Joint SDG Fund, appeared to be those where funding windows coincided with ongoing cooperation framework-related work and aligned with national priorities. This led the evaluation to recommend a shift in the programmatic approach by providing space, time and capacities for resident coordinators and UNCTs to identify strategic opportunities that bring out the unique value of United Nations collective action, emphasizing countries' priorities, in line with the respective cooperation framework.

Significant transaction costs remain, and the plurality of agency rules and regulations pose barriers to engaging in joint programmes. Challenges recorded across evaluations include: differing agency programming, funding processes, cycles and implementing partners; the lack of internal guidance for joint programme operationalization; and the high transaction costs and reporting burden involved. Evaluations revealed the perception that joint projects and programmes are not suitable in all circumstances and other modes of collaboration may be better suited.



## 7 The Management and Accountability Framework provided a framework with roles and responsibilities for the resident coordinators and UNCTs but varied in its clarity.

The MAF articulates accountabilities, especially for the resident coordinator system and United Nations entities at all levels. Country teams are now accountable to resident coordinators in terms of their support for efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. Although evidence related to the MAF was scattered, it revealed weaknesses in those areas where the language lacked clarity, resulting in conflicting interpretations. There was evidence of uneven commitment to, and application of, the MAF by United Nations entities. Weaknesses and challenges regarding the clarity and complementarity of functional roles and responsibilities were noted as a source of frustration and undermined the efficient implementation of programmes. The absence of a mechanism to ensure compliance by United Nations entities at country and regional levels was highlighted in the System-Wide Evaluation of the United Nations Development System's Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19 as exacerbating the uneven entity delivery on commitments<sup>9</sup>.

There is lack of a shared understanding and clear articulation, including in the MAF, of UNDP's integrator role. According to the system-wide evaluation on COVID-19, this was a particular issue during the COVID-19 period and the preparation of the socio-economic response plans, to the detriment of the lead coordinating role of the resident coordinator. In addition, the UNDP strategic plan evaluation pointed out that this role has subsequently been ascribed to both resident coordinators and DCOs, contributing to the confusion and tensions within UNCTs.

## Approach and methodology

This summary, produced between July and September 2024, brings together evidence from 33 evaluations completed across the United Nations between 2021 and 2024. The sample was purposively selected to include the most relevant evaluation evidence, as well as balance across geographic regions and United Nations entities. An initial longlist of 66 evaluations was screened for potential relevance, providing a sample of 39 evaluations. Subsequent in-depth review using an agreed analytical

framework resulted in the extraction and summary of relevant evidence from 33 evaluations<sup>10</sup>.

The sampling strategy, methodological approach, and draft report were reviewed by an inter-agency reference group from DCO, OIOS, and the independent evaluation offices of UNDP and UNFPA.

**Limitations:** The sample of evaluations provided sufficient evidence across different types of evaluations to identify common learning, issues and challenges. The four reports listed above (Box 1) explicitly addressed the subject of this summary. Across the rest of the sample the quality and depth of analysis varied. There was limited in-depth analysis of: (i) the new roles of the resident coordinators following the reform; and (ii) United Nations entity engagement with the reforms at the country level and the MAF. This limitation was most surprising in the UNDAF and cooperation framework evaluations reviewed.

## Endnotes

### UNSDG SYSTEM-WIDE EVALUATION OFFICE

The United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) has been established by the Secretary-General to provide independent evaluation evidence to strengthen learning, transparency and accountability in order to incentivize joint work and collective learning and conduct and advance system-wide evaluation evidence on the United Nations development system's contribution towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It aims to work with United Nations evaluation offices to draw on and augment their contributions and capacities, to fill critical gaps, to promote collaboration on joint and system-wide evaluations and to improve the quality and usability of United Nations evaluation evidence in relation to the SDGs, 2030 Agenda, and United Nations reform priorities.

## UTILIZING UNITED NATIONS EVALUATION EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE 2024 QCPR

This initiative is a collaboration between SWEO and evaluation offices across the United Nations. It provides user-friendly mapping and summary products of United Nations evaluation evidence to support engagement in the 2024 QCPR. The initiative is coordinated by SWEO, with substantive contributions from the following entities:

### FUNDING



### MANAGEMENT GROUP



<sup>1</sup> The summary focuses specifically on activities and outcomes attributable to the reinvigorated RC system (the RC and RCO) at the country level, rather than broader country-level UN programme coherence and the implementation of UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and Cooperation Frameworks by UN country teams, which will be addressed by an ongoing system-wide evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> The summary of evaluation evidence on the regional architecture includes issues that relate closely to those presented in this summary. There was some overlap in the evaluation samples.

<sup>3</sup> A/RES/75/233

<sup>4</sup> A/RES/72/279

<sup>5</sup> In line with the MAF, UN entity country representatives remain accountable to their respective entities on their individual mandates but report periodically to the RC on their implementation of the cooperation framework and contributions to the 2030 Agenda at the country level.

<sup>6</sup> A/78/753

<sup>7</sup> 5 OIOS global evaluations, 2 global system-wide evaluations, 12 UNDAF/cooperation framework evaluations, 7 entity global or strategic evaluations, and 7 evaluations of pooled funds. Full list in bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> See the SWE on COVID-19, UNFPA's COVID-19 evaluation and UNDP's financing COVID-19 evaluation. Full references in Bibliography.

<sup>9</sup> In 2023, UNSDG entities began reporting to their governing bodies on their implementation of the reform of the UN development system against a 'checklist' shared by the Chair of the UNSDG.

<sup>10</sup> For full list see Bibliography. Relevant evidence on the resident coordinator system was also extracted from a sample of reports summarising evidence on the regional architecture.

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