



UNSDG SYSTEM-WIDE EVALUATION OFFICE

United Nations development system reform at the regional level – slow progress

United Nations evaluation evidence brief

The Secretary-General's repositioning of the United Nations (UN) development system sought to reorganize the regional level to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This brief, one in a series of five, draws on the extensive knowledge and evidence generated by 26 independent evaluations conducted across the UN development system between 2021 and 2024. It presents evidence of the United Nations development system reforms at the regional level. A core set of four evaluations provided the majority of evidence¹, complemented by a further 22 evaluations which referred to the topic.

Its publication is timed to provide information to stakeholders involved in the 2024 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), which is the primary policy instrument of the UN General Assembly. The QCPR defines the way the UN development system

operates to support programme countries in their development efforts.

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

Insights from UN evaluations

- 1 Regional reforms have been slow in their implementation, suffer from unclear directives and remain a work in progress.**

Challenges included ensuring that the UN regional presence supported both a regional response and the work of UNCTs at the country level, and that the regional presences of entities fully took part in regional mechanisms in each region. Evidence on knowledge management hubs was limited and although regions were successfully sharing UN knowledge products with

the public, there was less progress sharing knowledge internally and inter-regionally with colleagues.

Evaluations highlighted: a lag between the pace of UN development system reforms at country and regional levels; and difficulties across regional-level entities to respond in a coherent way to expressed demands from the country level.

2 Regional collaborative platforms, although established, are not yet fully meeting expectations.

Issue-based coalitions were not well covered in evaluations and, although their opportunity for technical support was recognized, they were more likely to be described as formal structures, unevenly responsive to country needs. Some issue-based coalitions and other, less formal, coordination mechanisms have been more effective at the technical level than regional collaborative platforms at the policy level.

Evaluations highlighted that regional collaborative platforms: brought UN entities and the respective regional economic commissions closer; established opportunities to better position mandates; and could foster collaboration and information-sharing among entities at the regional and country levels, although this has not been fully achieved.

3 Peer support groups are providing appreciated support to country level planning and programming.

Evaluations highlighted that peer support groups were effective in providing support and quality assurance to UNCTs in the development of common country analyses and cooperation frameworks.

4 The DCO at the regional level plays an important role in supporting resident coordinators and UNCTs, including connecting them with regional assets.

Evaluations highlighted that DCO regional offices enhanced the capacity of resident coordinators to coordinate United Nations programming at the country level.

DCO regional offices connected resident coordinators to regional United Nations expertise and to the United Nations Secretariat and wider United Nations system entities and brought together resident coordinators, UNCTs and regional directors of agencies, funds and programmes to address discrete thematic issues. The main challenges were the complexity of transboundary issues and office capacity constraints.

5 The role of DCO is not well understood with regard to regional collaborative platforms and issue-based coalitions.

Evaluations highlighted that the role of DCO with regard to the regional collaborative platforms was not consistently clear to staff; and that coordination of the regional collaborative platforms and peer support group meetings was logistically highly demanding.

As the DCO's role regarding regional collaborative platforms was defined in the Management and Accountability Framework, some DCO regional offices felt the role was mainly administrative while others fulfilled a more active connector role. Platform members suggested that the DCO did not have the resources to adequately perform its platform secretariat role, including to be able to articulate resident coordinators' needs, connect resident coordinators with platform discussions and adequately promote issue-based coalition work to resident coordinators.

6 Regional economic commissions are increasingly integrated into the United Nations development system at regional and country levels.

Evaluations highlighted that regional economic commission programmes were relevant, well-aligned with their mandates and responsive to requests from Member States; and the strong collaboration between the regional economic commissions and a diverse set of United Nations and non-United Nations entities, especially at the regional level.

The lack of formal tracking mechanisms to manage Member State requests affected knowledge-sharing



and retention. It also hindered opportunities for building upon services and impeded the ability of other entities to identify synergies or duplication with their own country level work. Coherence vis-à-vis the resident coordinator system was limited. Commissions were members of more UNCTs, but participation at the planning stage of the cooperation frameworks was followed by limited involvement in implementation. Recommendations to address these shortcomings included creating a formal tracking system for Member States requests and increasing engagement with the resident coordinator system.

7 Entity efforts to realign regional assets and change how they are deployed to better support countries are underway, but progress is patchy.

Evaluations highlighted that while regional entities and offices were providing support to the country level, the comparative advantages of regional and subregional offices were not being fully leveraged.

Regional offices played a convening role, adding value in generating information on good practices, and had an important and valued role in the delivery of joint programmes, yet there was more work to be done. Further effort is needed to communicate the added value to the country level, particularly to resident coordinators and UNCTs. Efforts should be focused on delivering support to where it adds the most strategic value in collaboration with other country-level UN entities and leveraging the partnerships needed to ensure regional coherence.

Endnotes

- ¹i) [OIOS, 2024. RECs synthesis.](#) ii) [UNFPA. 2023. Engagement UNDS reform.](#) iii) [UNECE. 2023. Support for the 2030 Agenda.](#) iv) [OIOS, 2023. DCO Regional.](#)

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The United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) has been established by the Secretary-General to provide independent evaluation evidence to support the implementation and achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

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