

UN80 structural changes and programmatic realignment

Compilation of non-attributable suggestions by the UN80 Task Force

General observations

Systemic challenges

- Increased mandates (often without clear exit strategies) and complexities have led to significant **overlaps, inefficiencies, and increased costs** in the UN system.
- The progressive proliferation of agencies, funds, and programmes has led to a fragmented development system, with **overlapping mandates, inefficient use of resources, and inconsistent delivery of services**.
- **Outdated working methods** are leading to inefficiencies. Intergovernmental meetings are not making use of modern tools and technologies.
- **Overlapping agendas** – such as between ECOSOC and its functional commissions and expert bodies, and those of the General Assembly and its Second and Third Committees – has led to duplication of efforts.
- **Fragmentation and duplication** across the UN system has become a major impediment for effective UN engagement.
- Geopolitical shifts and substantial reductions in foreign aid budgets are **challenging the legitimacy and effectiveness** of the Organization.
- **Inflation of USG, ASG and D** positions continues.

Systemic solutions

- Advance a more streamlined, impactful, and fiscally responsible organization by building on three core principles: **integration** to foster greater mandate coherence, **consolidation** to improve functional efficiency, and **coordination** to enhance overall effectiveness.
- Move towards a **more integrated and collaborative model** whose footprint reflects fiscal responsibility.
- **Rationalize programmes/entities implementing similar mandates** to eliminate redundancy and ensure a strategic **reduction of the UN's presence in high-cost locations** to ensure long-term financial sustainability.
- Position reforms as **proactive measures to enhance UN agility and responsiveness** that extends beyond measures for cost-cutting or austerity.
- Ensure a system-wide commitment to delivering the UN's mandate in ways that are **principled, forward-looking, innovative and effective**.
- Increase **scale for greater impact**.
- **Reduce number of high-level posts** (D1 and above)

Peace & Security

- Merge multiple entities into a **single Peace and Security entity**. Options:
 - Establish a **UN Peace & Security Department** managing political, peace & peacebuilding engagement globally, including DPPA, DOS, DPO, ODA, UNODC, OCT, OSAA.
 - Establish a single **Department of Political Affairs and Peace Operations** by merging DPPA and DPO, headed by a single USG. **Consolidate substantive/technical support functions** for peace in one structural location.
 - [Partial merger] Comprehensive **restructuring of DPO and DPPA**, further consolidating their regional divisions and policy divisions to eliminate redundancies, improve coordination, and enhance the relevance of policies.

- Consider **moving Peace and Security resources closer to the field**. Options:
 - Consider a **regional approach and decentralisation policy** for Secretariat entities. Send the regional and policy offices for DPA, DPKO, OCHA to their respective regions to be nearer the areas they cover, just like the Agencies, Funds and Programmes have done. The USG, ASG with respective front offices, as well as offices that directly support the GA, various committees and the Security Council, should remain in New York.
 - Consider strategic **relocation of peace and security personnel closer to field missions** to improve responsiveness and effectiveness.
 - **Decentralize** a significant percentage of **political, peace & peacebuilding resources** to regional levels and UNCTs.

- **Consolidate Special Envoy and Special Advisor** mandates to eliminate overlaps, such as UNOCA overlapping mandate with MINUSCA and MONUSCO; and, the SRSG for Horn of Africa and SRSG for the Great Lakes' overlapping mandates with the countries they cover. Consider a possible **merger of UNOAU and the Great Lakes Office**.

- Establish a **single Office for Counter-Terrorism**, by merging OCT and UNODC's counter-terrorism related policy functions or a broader merger of the two entities.

- Establish a **single Office for Disarmament Affairs** with USG/High Representative for Disarmament relocating and also serving as **Director-General of UNOG**. Integrate ODA's regional programmatic capacities into UN's regional hubs or broader regional UN presences.

- Strengthen **coordination between UNIDIR and OPCW**. Consider **merging UNIDIR with UNITAR** and further consolidate with other research & training institutes.

Humanitarian Affairs

- Merge multiple entities into a **single humanitarian entity**. Options:
 - Create a **streamlined "UN Humanitarian Response and Protection Organization"**, by integrating OCHA, UNHCR and IOM, leveraging WFP's expertise for material assistance procurement, distribution and logistics.
 - Establish a **UN Humanitarian Operations Department** managing UN-wide humanitarian preparedness and response, including OCHA, WFP, UNRWA and a UN Refugee & Migration Agency (merging UNHCR and IOM). Consider whether UNDP Crisis Bureau should be consolidated into Department.

- **Merge operational responsibilities and capabilities of major operational agencies** (WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO) in humanitarian and conflict affected contexts.
- **Merge Rome-based agencies'** operational capacity.
- **Align programmes** for overlapping agencies: UNHCR and IOM; WFP and FAO; etc.
- Consider **whether OCHA should remain in New York** or move to ensure field operations are much more localized with implementing partners.

Sustainable Development

- Consolidate and **reduce the number of UN development system entities**. Options:
 - Establish a **UN Sustainable Development Department** that consolidates relevant entities to ensure cohesive and integrated support for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, including: (Secretariat entities) DCO, DESA, UNDRR, UN-OHRLLS and (other entities) UNDP, UNCDF, UNV, UNRISD, FAO, IFAD, UN-Habitat, WHO, UN-Women, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNEP, WB, IMF, WTO, UNOPS, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNESCO. **Prioritize provision of common services** across the Department and **decentralize resources** to regional levels.
 - **Decouple intergovernmental mandates from programmatic capacities**. Entities with dual roles in inter-governmental support/normative role and country-level programming could be strategically reorganized. Programmatic activities could be supported operationally by agencies possessing extensive country presence, while the inter-governmental/normative mandates could be maintained through dedicated "hosting arrangements", by being 'docked' within another agency's operational platform.
 - **Migrate financially non-viable entities**. For example, UNAIDS, under severe financial pressure and with a sunset clause of 2030, could transition into another, larger entity such as WHO or UNDP.
 - **Merge UNDP and UNOPS**, creating a single entity to seamlessly integrate strategic planning with project implementation. Integrate the International Computing Centre (ICC) to provide efficient and tailored IT support.
 - **Integrate UNFCCC into UNEP** to create a stronger global environment authority and consolidating the administrative functions **under UNON's existing support structure** for UNEP. Consider **whether COP in current form should be discontinued**.
 - Strategic **integration of UNAIDS into WHO**, creating a more unified and efficient global health authority.
 - **Merge UN WOMEN and UNFPA** to create a powerful new entity focused on advancing gender equality and reproductive health and rights. Align **select UNICEF programmes with this new entity**, especially those focused on adolescent girls' well-being and gender-based violence prevention and response.
 - Center the structural reform proposals around our four basic pillars, each with a **geographic focus (Nairobi/ Africa should be the center of development agencies**, including UNDP/ UNICEF/ UNFPA).
- **Strengthen coordination** among development entities, including:

- Enhance **coordination between the UNEP and UN-Habitat** to promote sustainable urban development.
- Enhance **coordination between UNCTAD and ITC** to effectively integrate policy expertise with capacity-building, resulting in more impactful programmes.
- **Consider possible overlaps/duplications and opportunities for harmonization** where aims/functions of different entities align, with a view to streamlining mandate delivery & reducing costs. For example:
 - UNDP-DESA-UNCDF;
 - UNDRR-OHRRLLS-UNDP;
 - UNRISD-UNITAR-UNIDIR-UNICRI-UNSSC-UNU
- **Reorganizing UNDP's Regional Bureaux** around countries' shared development challenges rather than traditional geographic regions would improve programme relevance, resource allocation, and partnerships with multilateral banks.
- **Consolidate Functional Commissions under ECOSOC**; rotate Functional Commission meetings to be held among Regional Commissions or hold them in Nairobi; consider replacing annual with biennial sessions.

Human Rights

- Merge multiple entities into **a single human rights entity**. Options:
 - Establish a unified "**Office for the Protection of Vulnerable Populations**" by consolidating offices dealing with protection issues affecting vulnerable populations (CAAC, SVC, VAC, SEA) within OHCHR.
 - **Consolidate the specialized protection mandates and offices in OHCHR**, with each area headed at Director level, reporting to ASG/OHCHR.
 - Establish a **UN Human Rights Department** led by High Commissioner for Human Rights, coordinating human rights promotion and protection across the UN system, including servicing the UN human rights mechanisms and integrating human rights into sustainable development, peace & security and humanitarian engagement.
 - **Merge protection mandates** (CAAC, SVC, VAC, Genocide Prevention & Responsibility to Protect into the Department. Reduce senior posts by replacing existing 4 USGs + 1 ASG with 1 ASG + 1 D2 + 2 D1s, thereby **lowering costs**, and redistribute existing resources from respective offices across the Department – prioritizing use of RB resources **to fulfill existing mandates**
 - Strengthen implementation of **UN Agenda for Protection** by using existing resources to establish a consolidated **Protection Support Hub**, thereby increasing impact of UN-wide human rights protection work
 - Continuous decentralization of core functions and capacities envisaged, including through shifting support to mechanisms/mandates away from HQ (e.g. UPR), leading to **reduced staffing & operational costs**.

Resident Coordinators system

- **Streamline coordination arrangements at country, regional and global** levels by transitioning current coordination arrangements, including fixed RCs, RCOs with rigidly defined staff capacities and a large DCO headquarters and regional presence into a **smaller and more focused support structure**.
- Explore **rotational leadership among UN Country Team heads** to maintain UN coherence without fixed infrastructure, supported by an agile and lean DCO that would support the UNSDG as its Secretariat. Only in cases **of humanitarian emergencies, dedicated RC/HCs would be necessary** to deploy, given the complexity of these settings.
- **Boost coordination/leadership role of RC/HC**, including clearer oversight of agencies in country and a **prioritised country strategy**.
- **Strengthen coordination between the UN Resident Coordinator System and the Regional Economic Commissions** to foster integrated regional development strategies, improve data sharing and enhance policy advocacy.
- Consider a **strategic reduction of the Resident Coordinator System's presence in countries** to optimize resource allocation and promote greater national ownership of development initiatives.
- Consider a fundamental **re-orientation of the UN system's country-level engagement**, including by folding in peace and political missions and ensuring that RCs can utilize pooled funds to reconfigure and tailor engagement based on changes on the ground.
- Identify the different **typologies of country-level engagement**, e.g., operational, advisory, to make UNCTs fit for purpose.
- **Leverage data** – internal and external – before deciding on in-country interventions.

Cross-cutting proposals

Structural

- Establish an **Executive Secretariat** supporting the Secretary-General's leadership and coordination of the UN system by **managing all corporate services**, including: administration, management, communications, human resources, policy, strategic planning, secretariat support to Charter-based organs. The Executive Secretariat would include EOSG, DGACM, DGC, DMSPC, OLA, DSS, OIOS, Ethics Office, Ombuds, Administration of Justice, UNON, UNOV, UNOP & UNOG.
- Establish a unified '**Normative Policy Hub**', which could consolidate several functions:
 - Elements of OHRLLS focused on development advocacy, into other entities' global policy functions.
 - Other small Secretariat offices with thematic mandates on human rights, civic space, migration policy, and innovation, where mandate complementarity exists.
- Undertake a collective review of all **transnational cooperation entities** that support the elaboration, promulgation and arbitration of global standards and norms that contribute to friendly relations among nations and **identify opportunities for consolidation and common service**. This would include: OOSA, WMO, ICAO, IMO, ITU, UNWTO, UPU, ITLOS, ISA. UNICC – ICT (possible consolidation), UNICRI, UNITAR and other research and training entities (possible merger).

- **Streamline/merge thematic Special Envoy** offices, including the Office of the Special Envoy for Africa and the Office of the SRSG to the African Union; the Office of the Tech Envoy; Offices of Special Envoys / Advisers with narrow or duplicated mandates, e.g. Indigenous Issues, Small Island States.
- Conduct cost-benefit analyses for **merging entities serving similar sectors or audiences** (e.g., digital, youth-focused initiatives); consider integrating them into unified units with shared resources.
- Consider opportunities for **consolidation among research and training entities**, including UNIDIR, UNRISD & UNICRI.
- **Merge overlapping expert bodies** and limit the services provided to these expert bodies, e.g., removing their entitlement to interpretation in 6 languages.
- **Relocate development entities** or their sub-units to **lower-cost hubs** (e.g., Nairobi).
- **Consolidate thematic programs into single entities** (e.g., environment, child protection and welfare, trade and investment)

Administrative and Budgetary matters

- Adopt a **market-led common services model** by selecting 3-4 agencies with large operational footprints and capacity to serve the rest of the system to substantially reduce redundancies. Competitive internal markets would drive service quality and cost-efficiency as 'user' agencies would be free to select one of the providers on the basis of their competence.
- Reorient **UNOPS back to its original mandate**, from servicing Member States directly to focusing more on operational support for agencies.
- **Review the programme planning and budget review process** which has truncated the programme planning, implementation and reporting cycles along with the work of CPC, ACAB and the 5th Committee. When ACABQ and 5th Committee cuts are made to the SG proposed programme budget, the corresponding adjustments to programme deliverables must also be made to avoid under-funded or non-funded mandates.
- Encourage **joint initiatives, joint reporting and joint pitches to** donors on similar and intersecting topics/issues and **consolidate events, meetings and conferences** that focus on similar topics/areas. **Consolidate and streamline resource mobilization** such as through the Joint SDG Fund. Better **coordinate capacity building efforts** based on themes.
- **Change funding model from competition to collaboration**. 25%+ through centrally managed pooled funds (not agency/cluster); clear donor strategy to stop behaviour that encourages competition; stronger CERF and country based pooled funds (with 50% to NGOs).

Other proposals

- Revisit the **frequency of intergovernmental meetings; streamline reporting** processes; explore alternative **information-sharing tools** and formats such as policy briefs or dashboards like SDG tools **instead of written annual reports** by the Secretary-General; **digitize processes** using real-time platforms and data tools, to better support hybrid and virtual meetings.
- Before creating new offices, **make all efforts to delegate functions to existing structures**.
- **Avoid creating new coordination mechanisms** (especially multi-layer coordination) and strengthen existing coordination mechanisms.
- More coherent approach to future: climate change/AI/cyber/big tech/data: consolidate various units into **centralized capacity under a USG for the future**.