Why Member States should support the UN regional reform

May, 2020
# Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFP</td>
<td>Agencies Funds and Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cepei</td>
<td>Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCO</td>
<td>Development Coordination Office</td>
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<td>DfAD</td>
<td>Decade of Action and Delivery</td>
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<td>ECOSOC</td>
<td>United Nations Economic and Social Council</td>
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<td>IBC</td>
<td>Issue-Based Coalitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>KAS</td>
<td>Konrad Adenauer Stiftung</td>
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<td>KMH</td>
<td>Knowledge Management Hubs</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAF</td>
<td>Management and Accountability Framework</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>QCPR</td>
<td>Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review</td>
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<td>RBB</td>
<td>Result-based Budget</td>
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<td>RCNYO</td>
<td>Regional Commissions New York Office</td>
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<td>RCP</td>
<td>Regional Collaboration Platform</td>
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<td>RCM</td>
<td>Regional Coordination Mechanism</td>
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<td>REC</td>
<td>Regional Commission</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<td>SG</td>
<td>Secretary General</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNCT</td>
<td>United Nations Country Teams</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<td>UNDS</td>
<td>United Nations Development System</td>
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<td>UNGA</td>
<td>General Assembly of the United Nations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Table of contents

Summary .................................................................................................................. 1

Policy briefs .............................................................................................................. 2

*Before and After:* How the UN regional reform will change things in practice?  
**Author:** Javier Surasky ....................................................................................... 2

*Renewing the model of engagement:* What role for Member States?  
**Author:** Patti Londoño ....................................................................................... 14

*Building momentum:* the Decade of Action and Delivery and the UNDS regional reform  
**Author:** Günther Bachmann & Javier Surasky .................................................. 21

*Win-win:* How the regional UN reforms will lead to cost-efficiency  
**Author:** Jonathan Glennie .................................................................................. 28

Core team members ............................................................................................... 35
The UN Regional Reform proposal by the Secretary-General deserves to be supported because it brings a unique opportunity to achieve what Member States have sought for many years: one system working together, with common goals and concerted action. If successful it could lead to a UN system better able to deliver effectively, efficiently and accountably, to progress 2030 Agenda on the ground.

This series of papers looks at four aspects of the Reform. It is intended to help Member States understand them and pro-actively support them.

**Before and after: How the UN regional reform will change things in practice**

How does the United Nations work today at the regional level, and how will it work after the reform? This paper shows the potential of the five recommendations to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations Development System. The regional reform focuses on where improvements and rationalization are necessary and possible, to increase the system’s capacity to support the work of governments to achieve the SDGs.

**Renewing the model of engagement: What role for Member States?**

The UN system reform could result in financially smart and result-oriented projects with impact on the ground to fully support countries to achieve the SDGs. But Member States need to actively engage. They need to renew their model of engagement with the UN system to promote the consolidation of partnerships among the UN entities. This paper explains how. Issue-Based Coalitions, in particular could bolster collaboration across actors in the international sustainable development system.

**Building momentum: The Decade of Action and Delivery and the UNDS regional reform**

Try to imagine a world where purpose meets focus. The UN reform complements the commitment to and delivery of action so urgently needed to keep the promises of the 2030 Agenda. The conjuncture between these two major multilateral processes is striking. They both ask for renewed regional action. They both prioritise impact. This paper encourages Member States and the UN system to use this moment to drive SDG delivery and respond to rising challenges across the world.

**Win-win: How the regional UN reforms will lead to cost-efficiency**

Cost efficiency is one of the goals of these reforms, but as Cepei criss-crossed the world interviewing hundreds of people in and around the UN system, we found that people expected them to be costly. This paper is about how spending at the regional level can be more cost efficient. But more cost efficient does not mean cheaper. In fact, if successful there will be a strong case to increase spending at the regional level to support increased, cost-efficient, impact. Some changes are fairly easy to instigate, others are more difficult.

The UN is still evolving. It would be a mistake to think that the way things work now they are set in stone forever. If this opportunity is not taken, it could spell problems for the UN in the short term. If it is, Member States will help make the UN more streamlined and effective at the regional level for decades to come.
**Before and after: How the UN regional reform will change things in practice**

Javier Surasky

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### Introduction

The reform of the United Nations Development System (UNDS) at the regional level is part of a more comprehensive reform process at all levels to build a more coherent and effective UN. The reform is intended to provide the UN with new tools to fulfill its mandate, empowering people while protecting the Earth’s ecosystems, and optimizing support for Member States.

This paper briefly explains how the regional system operates now and introduces the core changes that will take place if the regional reform rolls out successfully, according to the Secretary-General's five recommendations. Each section analyses one recommendation.

Since the UN is facing increasingly complex challenges in its task of promoting sustainable development¹, its entities need to adopt multidimensional approaches that can integrate multiple capacities and act at different levels (national, sub-regional, regional and global). If it does this it should succeed in scaling up solutions, strengthening decision-making systems based on timely and reliable data and working under a clear and shared implementation-oriented framework. That is the main goal of the reform.

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Before Reform

Currently, there are two bodies leading the UNDS in each of the five regions (Africa, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Western Arab States) at the regional level: the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG). They have very similar mandates and are attended by much the same organisations.

The RCM’s main role is to promote policy dialogue and coherence between UN system entities, and to coordinate program implementation system-wide; the UNSDG focuses on providing coherent technical support to Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams (UNCTs).

Both the RCM and UNSDG are attended by principals and senior officials of the Agencies, Funds and Programs and Regional Commissions. However the chairing and secretariats differ. While the RCM is chaired by the Executive Secretary of the REC, the UNSDG is chaired by the UNDP regional representative. And while the RCM has the REC as its secretariat, the Development Coordination Office acts as the UNSDG secretariat. Both the RCM and the UNSDG meet twice a year.

On top of the regional meetings, the UNSDG meets twice a year at the global level as a forum for joint policy building, seeking coherence between AFP efforts in different UN regions. The UN Deputy Secretary-General chairs on behalf of the UN Secretary-General, with the UNDP Administrator as Vice-Chair.

Despite substantial overlaps, the RCM and UNSDG have largely operated independently from each other without a common agenda and lacking a clear division of labor and system-wide value proposition.

After Reform

“Collaboration” is one of the dominant ideas behind the UN Reform proposal. This first reform is the creation of Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCPs) instead of RCMs and UNSDGs, making the regional structure simpler and less bureaucratic: one joint body will do the work currently divided into two different institutions, which means fewer meetings, avoiding overlaps and a unified workflow. The establishment of an RCP in every region will avoid the current duplicative coordination mechanisms, fostering collaboration and coherence across the system.

The RCP will be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, and co-chaired by the REC Executive Director and the UNDP Regional Director. RCPs will meet in different ways throughout the year, including at least one annual plenary gathering to be held back-to-back with the Regional Fora on Sustainable Development. The DCO regional offices will act as RCPs secretariat.

The RCPs will work with Issue-Based Coalitions (IBC) and task teams, bringing together UN entities to foster policy and operational collaboration on regional, cross-border and transboundary issues.

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2. In Africa, it also includes AU representatives.
3. The UNSDG Core Group at the global level comprises DESA, FAO, ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, WFP, WHO, the rotating chair of the Regional Economic Commissions, and the chairs of the UNSDG Strategic Results Groups.
according to governmental and non-governmental stakeholders requirements, including UNCTs. Each IBC will be led by different AFPs, as decided at the RCP meetings, that have particular experience and specific mandates in a particular area of work. Collaboration between IBCs working on similar issues in different regions could also spearhead RCP cooperation. The RCPs will produce unified annual reports to be presented to Member States at the Regional Fora on Sustainable Development.

**Figure 1. From the RCM and UNSDG to RCP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FROM</th>
<th>TO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCM</td>
<td>Regional Collaborative Platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REC secretariat</td>
<td>Strategic direction, oversight and decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With AFP attending</td>
<td>UN country teams, led by the UN Resident Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional UNSDG</td>
<td>Reports to…</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP Chair</td>
<td>Guidance/oversight</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFPs + REC members</td>
<td>In support of the work of…</td>
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**Source:** Own elaboration
Recommendation 2: One-Stop platforms to share regional knowledge

Before Reform
UN’s regional knowledge and expertise is a system asset well recognized by stakeholders. However, at present, there is no consolidated entry point across UN regional entities to their expertise and knowledge products. As a result, experts in different entities work apart from each other, and it is hard for Member States and other parts of the UN system to know what kind of know-how is available within the region, where the experts are, or what are the results of their work.

After Reform
The establishment of Knowledge Management Hubs (KMHs) will put together currently disparate UNDS expertise, and knowledge-based products, pooling them by and across sectors through a common entry point. Thus, UNDS will make UNDS regional expertise easily accessible, allowing governments to identify UN experts, and request for specific support.

As a result, those implementing projects - from governments and Resident Coordinators to AFPs and RECs, will get better access to regional available UNDS knowledge, and UN entities will improve their ability to build upon their pool of expertise rather than externalizing it.
**Figure 2. From dispersed knowledge to unified Knowledge Management Hubs**

**FROM**

UNDS dispersed expertise and knowledge

Knowledge and expertise

- Expert 1
- Expert 2 (hired)
- Expert 3
- Expert 4
- Expert 5 (hired)
- Expert 6
- Expert 7
- Expert 8
- Expert 9 (hired)
- Expert 10
- Expert 11

- REC
- AFP 1
- AFP 2
- AFP 3, 4, 5

Governments, UN entities, UNCTs

**TO**

Knowledge Management Hubs

Knowledge and expertise

- Expert 1
- Expert (hired)
- Expert 3
- Expert 4
- Expert 5
- Expert 6
- Expert 7
- Expert 8
- Expert 9 (hired)
- Expert 10
- Expert 11

- REC
- AFP 1
- AFP 2
- AFP 3, 4, 5

Governments, UN entities, UNCTs

**Source:** Own elaboration
Recommendation 3: Enhancing regional results-based management and transparency

Before Reform
Programming and implementation efforts are substantial at the regional level, but silo-based approaches are still common. Collaboration between UN entities is not as strong as it could be, which is reflected in limited transparency of regional activities due to uncoordinated reporting mechanisms. Even when RECs and AFPs publish information and reports intended to make their work accountable, there is no standard structure, agenda, or schedule for reporting.

After Reform
Action-oriented programming requires results-oriented management to realize its potential. This is especially relevant in the framework of the launch of the Decade for Action and Delivery for the SDGs, and in confronting the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The reform will result in the creation of Issue-Based Coalitions (IBCs) led by different UN regional entities around which the whole regional system would organize its work. IBC themes will be jointly decided by RECs and AFPs on a region-by-region basis, in the framework of the RCP meetings, considering relevant experience and requests for support from UN country teams, reinforcing national efforts. IBCs will be the main operational tools for the RCM, replacing all current mechanisms. The importance of establishing IBC themes at RCP meetings is crucial, because the whole regional system will be involved in this work, acting as a shared space in which setting agendas and reconciling various priorities will be defined by each region internally and based on dialogue between UNDS parts.

The establishment of the RCPs would change this transparency gap dramatically since they are mandated to produce whole-of-region annual reports, coordinated by the RECs with DCO support. The reports would include in one document information on UNDS regional activities, funding allocations and impacts, including the work and achievements of regional intergovernmental fora. One of the expected outcomes of this reporting exercise is to strengthen debate and simplify communication regarding each region’s value proposition through a more robust engagement of Member States and other stakeholders on region-specific issues.
Figure 3. From work and reporting dispersion to joint efforts and results

FROM

Dispersed efforts and reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efforts</th>
<th>Reporting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REC work</td>
<td>REC reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFP 1 work</td>
<td>AFP 1 reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFP 2 work</td>
<td>AFP 2 reporting</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFP 3, 4, 5 work</td>
<td>AFP 3, 4, 5 reporting</td>
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</tbody>
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Disconnected regional reports
No common reporting guidelines
Information overlapped

TO

Dispersed efforts and reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efforts</th>
<th>Issue-Based Coalitions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REC work</td>
<td>IBC on theme 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFP 1 work</td>
<td>IBC on theme 2</td>
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<td>AFP 2 work</td>
<td>IBC on theme 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFP 3, 4, 5 work</td>
<td>IBCs on theme 4, 5…</td>
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Lead by REC and AFP 2
Lead by AFP 2 and AFP 4
Lead by REC, AFP 1 and AFP 5
Lead by AFP 3 and AFP 4

Network of reinforced synergies
One common regional annual report

Source: Own elaboration
**Recommendation 4:**
One-Stop platforms to share regional data and statistics

**Before Reform**
Currently, the UNDS lacks a standard data-sharing tool. UN regional-generated data and statistics are scattered among RECs and different AFPs working in each region. A UNDESA Statistics Division compiles the global UN system statistical information, among other tasks related to statistical standards setting and UN Statistical Commission supporting. Furthermore, thematic reports published by different entities are not currently joined up. As a result, critical regional data and information to support Member State efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda are not always simple to find.

**After Reform**
The creation of regional data and statistics gateways will gather data and statistical information in each region in a common virtual home, making it easier for governments to find it. As part of gateway building, regional data compiled by AFPs and RECs will be harmonized and promoted inside and between regions, under REC leadership. These virtual platforms will also enable the UNDS entities to have a more flexible presence at the country level, allowing them to make savings that, regionally reinvested, could improve their ability to deliver on the ground. In short, gateways will become mechanisms for refining Member State access to currently disparate UNDS data and information.
Figure 4. From dispersion to unified data gateways

FROM

Dispersed UNDS data and statistics sources

Data and statistics access

- REC Database + REC repository
- AFP 1 Database
- AFP 2 Dashboard
- AFP 3, 4, 5 data and statistical own sites

Multiple entry point for dispersed data

TO

UNDS data and statistics unified gateway

- REC (leading)
- User (Governments, UN entities, Experts, Stakeholders…)
- AFP 1
- AFP 2
- AFP 3, 4, 5

One UNDS common entry point at the regional level

Source: Own elaboration
Before Reform
The entire UN administrative system, at all levels, is changing as part of the reform process. Two examples are the adoption of the Funding Compact and the UN Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) at the global level, and the new structure of UN country teams. Regions lack a centralized administrative hub to provide support for the different UN entities. Each AFP and the RECs have their administrative support office, and only in a few cases, and by specific request, RECs have provided administrative support to some AFPs. As a result, administrative overlaps occur within UNDS regional system administrative tasks. Moreover, each AFP has different administrative rules on issues like hiring experts, purchasing and human resources, which hinder attempts to join efforts and means internal system capacities are missed. For example, while some RECs and AFPs have slack report printing capacity, others are signing printing contracts with external suppliers.

After Reform
In this regard, establishing single management and administrative hubs at the regional level, consistent with a region-by-region mapping of assets, capabilities, weaknesses, and strengths, will help to integrate all the UNDS entities and better respond to their needs. Joint administrative back offices will contribute to improving the UN’s ability to support country efforts to implement the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda by providing solutions to bureaucratic interoperability problems, facilitating administrative coordination and simplifying partnerships by solving administrative issues such as conflicting purchasing systems and recruiting of external experts.

Joint back offices will alleviate costs to the system, promoting the alignment of management and other procedures. Common back-office support will alleviate RECs and AFPs from the administrative burden, allowing them to focus their energies and human and capital resources on delivering on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

Last but not least, it is essential to have in mind that common back-office support administrative activities will not interfere with the very specific administrative requirements during “emergency” response situations. In the case of an emergency (floods, droughts, famines), the regional system will develop service functions in the head of the body that leads the urgent actions, without the interference of other decision-making bodies. Every UN humanitarian response must be supported by a Security Council resolution or accepted by the country in which it will be deployed, providing each emergency response with its particular framework of action.
Figure 5. From administrative fragmentation to common back office work

**FROM**

Disaggregated administrative support

- Operational work
  - REC operational work
  -AFP 1 operational work
  -AFP 2 operational work
  -AFP 3, 4, 5 operational work

- Administrative work
  - REC back office services
  -AFP 1 back office services
  -AFP 2 back office services
  -AFP 3, 4, 5 back office services

**TO**

Administrative common back office support

- Operational work
  - REC operational work
  -AFP 1 operational work
  -AFP 2 operational work
  -AFP 3, 4, 5 operational work

- Administrative work
  - Common back office services
  - Increased efficiency and effectiveness administrative services delivery

Source: Own elaboration
The Secretary-General’s proposal for reforming the UNDS at the regional level will allow for more efficient, effective, and coherent work of the entire UN in support of its Member States. Hubs, collaboration, transparency, promoting synergies, and avoiding overlaps are at the core of the process. And all this must be done in a cost-neutral framework respecting staff contracts.

Regional realities are different. They have evolved in different historical, geographical, social, and cultural contexts. In this context, a region-by-region adaptation of a shared reform framework is both possible and necessary. But taken together these reforms, implemented in all regions, will strengthen the UN.

In recent years, Member States have repeatedly underlined how the UNDS regional level could act as a bridge between UN efforts in supporting global and national efforts towards sustainable development. The call for a Decade of Action and Delivery and the Covid-19 pandemic response further highlights the need to provide the UNDS with renewed, powerful, tools.
Renewing the model of engagement: What role for Member States?

Patti Londoño

Summary

Now is the time to renew the UN system’s engagement model. Member States should support the reform package presented by the Secretary-General which aims to help the UN system deliver more effectively and efficiently with transparency and accountability to show progress on the ground in implementing the SDGs and 2030 Agenda. Issue-Based Coalitions give the opportunity to bolster collaboration across actors operating in the international sustainable development system and should be at the centre of the UN system’s renewed engagement model.

Introduction

The United Nations is a political organization created in 1945 with 193 Member States of all continents and political, economic, social, cultural and environmental differences. There are many different understandings about how the UN should act or support Member States in fulfilling their national agendas, and there are different negotiation groups and mechanisms to advance issues of common interest. Some Members States have more influence on the Secretariat than others because of the funds they spend on specific initiatives, gaining privileged access to internal functioning.

In this context, the challenge to implement the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda is that as well as doing the technical support work the UN system has to take into account this political nature. Member States agreed in the UN Charter “to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character,” (ChI, art 1, para 3). They also agreed for the UN “to be the centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.”

Inspired by this fundamental consensus, Member States unanimously adopted the Sustainable
Development Goals in 2015 and committed to a universal though differentiated agenda of 17 goals and 169 targets, that allowed for governmental flexibility regarding targets and indicators to suit specific environmental, social and economic needs and conditions.

On 25 September 2015 at the 70th session of the General Assembly, Member States adopted resolution A/70/1 whose title already explicitly set expectations: “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. Member States understood this agenda basically “as a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” and they agreed that “all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan.” Furthermore, they declared themselves “determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.”

Since 2015, Member States and the UN system have adjusted their methods to improve the way they operate on the ground, as well as their collaborative mechanisms to adapt to the web of interconnections that exist between the SDGs. The SDGs are not to be implemented in silos. Ear-marked funds for specific, low impact projects, are no longer valid – classic business-as-usual. They may serve political purposes, but in terms of adapting to a universal, differentiated, integrated and comprehensive agenda, they seem totally anachronistic.

Therefore, to really embrace the spirit and purpose of the SDGs, Member States must support the efforts of the Secretary-General to adapt the UN system. The system works in a fragmented manner. at the global, regional, subregional and national levels. And this fragmentation also exists between Agencies, Funds and Programs, that in their competition for funds forget the essential component of their mandates and possibilities to join efforts with other stakeholders. This division is the result both of AFP behaviour and Member State actions, giving preference to specific AFPs instead of financing and cooperating within the scope of ambitious projects requiring partnerships.

The Secretary-General has presented a set of proposals to deal with the system’s lack of coherence. Some proposals are possible to implement without the direct participation of Member States. Others, such as the Issue-Based Coalitions (IBCs) are doomed to failure unless Member States, the UN system and other stakeholders participate and join efforts for their successful implementation. That is why, this short paper advocates the building of strong partnerships around the IBCs to seek real transformation. The faster the UN system adapts to respond to this transformational agenda; the faster results will show on the ground.

For the reform to succeed, Member States must adapt cooperation strategies, mindsets and behaviours. The tools are there, and progress can be achieved with commitment and political will. All levels of the UN system –global, regional, sub-regional and national– have a responsibility to engage proactively. Past proposals to adjust the system have failed because of mistrust, lack of political will, and a failure to follow through. Without the support of Member States, this reform could be yet another failure.

This reform requires a transformation in the way Member States interact with the UN system. They need to become partners in a comprehensive vision, including across the different platforms such as Issue-Based Coalitions and Knowledge Management Hubs. It will require adaptation and flexibility. That is why Member States should not just agree to the reform package with resignation; they should study, understand, and contribute.

The UN system at the regional level can sometimes appear invisible. Considering a starting point of fairly weak collaboration, something the reform proposal is trying to address, the UN regional system can really make a difference on the ground at a large scale by working more effectively and efficiently.
Transformation at the regional level

The 2030 Agenda is challenging because its successful implementation requires interested parties to dare to renew the engagement model within a complex bureaucracy and a difficult political environment, with diverse interests from all corners of the world approaching the problem in a different way. Member States deserve a simpler, more predictable, and more accessible system. A more visible, transparent, and accountable UN enhances the possibility of creative and results-oriented partnerships. Member States now have a great opportunity to support concrete initiatives.

One of the most important changes relates to understanding the UN system as a comprehensive and encompassing organization. Although there are many components with different mandates and responsibilities because the purpose is shared there is plenty of opportunity for sharing resources as well, both human and capital, to create meaningful transformation. Therefore, the different components of the UN system must, without delay, start conceiving their role within a larger organization and Member States should be able to recognize and adapt to the new collaboration model resulting from the reform process.

There are only 10 years remaining to reach 2030, but regardless of how well the world does on the SDGs, the international system will have to continue working. In this context, aligning methods and resources towards common goals, and committing to act according to our common global well-being should guide decisions taken today. The international community is undergoing pressing times in terms of social and economic conditions, so citizens deserve long-term visions and bold decisions from their political leaders. Responses to current challenges such as Covid-19 would benefit from the integrated response proposed in the reform.

In today’s international system, regions and sub-regions have become centres for decision making. Therefore, it is only natural that the UN improves the performance of its already-existing regional presence to better respond to the most important transboundary issues. The UN system at the regional level is the key broker to advance our common global sustainable development agenda.

The UN Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP), proposed by the Secretary-General could open possibilities for the system to better respond to national problems. The better exchange of information and management of resources could cause the efforts of the different entities operating at the regional level to combine, expediting solutions with real impact.

In this context, the Secretary-General proposed so-called Issue-Based Coalitions (IBC), to work at the national and regional level, to create impact at a larger scale. IBCs should foster policy and operational collaboration among UN entities, Member States and other stakeholders, and align their methods of engagement including administrative and financial support. In other words, instead of giving priority funding to a particular Agency Fund or Program (AFP), Member States could support IBCs that include several AFPS, the UNDP, the RECs, and other entities, working on joint programs to tackle two or more SDGs, and multiple targets.

The Secretary-General also proposed Knowledge Management Hubs that would incorporate rosters.
of experts, giving visibility to what the system can provide in terms of expertise. The UN system rosters could be complemented with countries’, organizations’, and other stakeholders’ expertise, contributing to a better use of local capacities more adapted to the conditions of each country, sub-region or region. SDG Gateways of consolidated data could also act as a one-stop regional shop.

How Member States can support the UN system reform

The Secretary-General is focused on making the system work better at all levels, and he needs Member States to be willing to transform their behaviour, conceiving the UN system holistically, as one organization. Member States play different roles in the UN system, especially in relation to its sustainable development dimension. Some are net-donors, other net-recipients with third party financing, and others finance their own development needs. Therefore, they have different approaches regarding what the system can do and how it should function. Regardless of the differences, synergies are possible, overcoming political and ideological debates and controversies. The sustainable development agenda and a renewed UN system give the opportunity to build on that common long-term vision.

Member States can support the reform by:

1. Financing Issue-Based Coalitions (IBC) to deliver shared strategies.

2. Having a comprehensive assessment of the existing funds within the UN system, avoiding duplications, and encouraging them to support integrated goals.

3. Seeking the system’s cooperation with the reform initiatives at the regional level, as well as at the global and national levels.

4. Making cooperation requests that encourage the UN system to move towards a renewed model of engagement with Member States and other stakeholders, leaving behind the silo approach and building a collaborative platform.
How IBCs can boost SDG implementation

So, Member State support for the reform proposal is key to its success. Some issues depend on internal adjustments and others require Member States to be more proactive in their involvement, giving them a great opportunity to strengthen the collaborative platforms proposed in the reform. The Issue-Based Coalitions are the best example of this. IBCs are about building partnerships around 2-plus SDGs, as shown in the diagram below. Well-conceived IBCs should, as appropriate, partner with Member States, sub-regional and regional organizations, banks and funds, and other stakeholders, to foster their common contribution to a particular social, economic, or environmental challenge.

Figure 1. IBCs towards an integrated SDGs implementation

Source: Own elaboration
Many major issues have transboundary consequences, such as migration and displacement, climate change and resilience, human trafficking, violence and crime, crisis prevention and sustainable urban development. IBCs will initiate a new model of engagement on these issues by combining resources, both human and capital. The successful implementation of IBCs, delivered with transparency, accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency will give a new meaning to the way Member States and other stakeholders engage with the UN system.

Member States can work with the UN system to empower the IBCs to be at the centre of collaboration efforts by integrating IBCs into their own decision-making processes. They could also adapt their bilateral cooperation agencies to the IBC methodology. Their participation would reinforce strategies, consolidate human capacities and capital resources, and help the UN system evolve towards a collaborative framework.

The same goes for other stakeholders – from civil society organizations to business associations – whose contribution to IBCs, in actions and resources, and expertise on problems, will help ease the burden on the UN system. Working with regional and sub-regional organizations will bolster partnerships, engendering a complementary division of labor with all profiting from a closer comprehension of regional and sub-regional realities.

### Funding

It is not a secret that SDG financing has had some setbacks, despite the Addis Ababa Action Agenda in 2015 on Financing for Development. In a world already recovering from financial crisis and now with an uncertain economic outlook triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, whose repercussions are still unclear, the UN system must commit to creative and collaborative approaches to assure donor countries and financial institutions that the available resources will be managed effectively for optimal impact. That is why efficient, transparent, and accountable IBCs can become the model to execute the SDGs, guaranteeing a responsible administration of the trust put in the UN system and its implementing partners. A disciplined financing strategy can contribute to the success of the IBCs, so the commitment of global and regional funding is essential, as well as UN special and other funds and other sources of financial support.
Inter-regional collaboration

Although IBCs are meant, in principle, to operate within the five Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCP), nothing prevents them from reaching out to an inter-RCP platform for lessons learned, information sharing, and joint project implementation with Member States from the different regions. This could lead to accelerated progress on national and international targets. The Regional Economic Commissions (RECs) could be key actors in this trans-regional dialogue since they already have inter-regional communication, which could evolve towards more collaboration and joint implementation of IBCs, with other stakeholders involved, as appropriate, when the particular conditions of countries or sub-regions allow for them to prosper and present tangible results. The Regional Commissions New York Office (RCNYO) already has expertise in this regard, so there is no need to create any new mechanism to bolster collaboration.

Final remarks

The global sustainable development agenda needs coherence, commitment and a long-term vision of all actors working together towards common goals. The support of Member States is not only needed at the QCPR or any other UNGA or ECOSOC meeting, but also at the implementation phase of the sustainable development agenda. This means understanding the spirit of the reform and being prepared to change.

The international community on occasions focuses on the urgent, and that is understandable in contexts such as the current Covid-19 pandemic. However, the work done to tackle such pandemics should not replace the long-term work required to implement this ambitious agenda. Supporting the Secretary-General’s recommendations will benefit the design and implementation of sustainable development policies around the world (which will, of course, have a positive effect in preventing and responding to such pandemics). Beyond any doubt, such progress would be a win-win for all, especially for “we the peoples of the United Nations” and the planet we are privileged to inhabit.
Building momentum: The Decade of Action and Delivery and the UNDS regional reform

Günther Bachmann & Javier Surasky

Introduction

Two major political UN processes generate benefit if being seen in conjunction with each other rather than in separate universes. They are strengthening the respective purpose of the other and each is gaining momentum. The regional reform will benefit from the urgency, substance and political context of the 2030 Agenda; the 2030 Agenda will gain from a new working mode of regionality and the access to regional and local delivery action. As of now, no attempt has ever been made to use this conjunction as a lever. This paper works out why this is important and what needs to be done.

Towards a new multilateralism

The 2030 Agenda is progressing slowly, as everyone knows. To deliver the SDGs, in both global North and South, we need new gateways, and one of these will be opened by the UNDS regional reform. The national adaptation of the universal concept of sustainable development allows for a wide variety of action recognizing social, ecological, and economic differences. Correspondingly, additional, and partly new procedures are necessary to intensify the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly the sharing of experiences and emergency response measures. Open methods of cooperation and issue-driven collective forms of leadership will become the building blocks of a new multilateralism under the umbrella of the UN. The empowerment of regional action promises to accelerate Agenda 2030, and the regional reform sets out to make the UNDS fit for this purpose.

The Covid-19 pandemic underscores the deadly risks of unsustainable inequalities in public health,
The transformation towards sustainable development will either lead rapidly to more change or disappear entirely. There is reason to hope for the former. Against the odds, the 2030 Agenda did not disintegrate over global geopolitical divisions. UN Member States responded to the Sustainable Development Goals with ambitious pledges, with some countries taking the lead and others working to overcome obstacles and lack of financing. All over the world, cities and local authorities, the private sector, academia, youth and civil society organizations, sport organizations and churches, designers and artists have picked up on the SDGs. Never has the world established and committed to global goals so fast and so effectively. Multilateral institutions and national governments are readying themselves to deliver, to engage with wider society and to learn through peer reviews.

Efforts to reposition the United Nations development system are ongoing, and within that frame the regional reform plays an important role. In respect of the sustainability challenges, the UN sustainable development system needs to increase and qualify links at the regional level between the institutional action of Member States with actions by citizens and markets on the ground. Conferencing and decision-taking will remain key features, but we need more. For example:

- To combat food waste and losses from harvesting (SDG 12.3) regions need to track and communicate measures along national and transnational supply chains.
- To quickly provide examples of how to effectively engage the private sector. Transparent and meaningful corporate reporting is an essential and upcoming issue (SDG 12.6), and all regions need to prepare

This understanding is widely shared. The Decade of Action and Delivery (DfAD) for sustainable development, agreed by the General Assembly in September 2019, gears global leaders up for new kinds of interaction. The momentum of the DfAD pledge must free all stakeholders to act, and in particular to cover new ground, both in size and approach.
easily accessible reporting guidelines and - even more important - provide public data spaces for disclosed non-financial data.

- To incorporate meaningful advice from multiple stakeholders. The issue of how to arrange for the governance of this source of responsible advice (SDG 17.17) is of prime importance for almost all Member States.

These needs are of prime importance. They mark the difference between the new and old forms of multilateralism.

### The regional reform must add transformational governance to the 2030 Agenda

Disaster and unpredicted eventualities may compromise pledges. Even worse, people may lose faith in the 2030 Agenda if major solutions remain untapped despite being possible and sharable. Implementing technically feasible solutions still depends on several external factors. A key factor is institutional governance, on the part of the regional UN institutions. Breaking through, silos “and cooperating across departmental routines, while keeping both the silos (because they are reliable) and the routines (because they produce administrative results), are key aspects of governance reform. Breaking this down into operative standards is not easy, but neither rocket science. A Peer Review of Sustainable Development Strategies can make a difference as former UN Administrator Helen Clark showed when she chaired one at the request of the German Chancellor. Another good option is the selection of some fast-track departments to let comparative advantages work where supervising this process asks for regional expertise and brokerage competencies. The regional reform is supposed to make UN institutions more effective and efficient although neither effectiveness nor efficiency are ends in themselves, but rather parts of countries’ policy cycles towards delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals.

While the task of verification, measurement and reporting will most probably stay within the remit of Member States, the strength of regional cooperation lies with the practical side of impactful delivery. It is about the sharing of expertise, the timely generation and smart use of reliable data, the encouragement of leaders and leadership, the prepping of delivery-oriented projects, the getting together of field workers, academics and administration in new governance frames. Open methods of cooperation allow for governments and other stakeholders to address SDG delivery issues collectively with due respect to political differences and interests. All actors are required to develop skills in understanding the issues, peer learning and accessing meaningful and satisfying dialogue structures. The 2030 Agenda requires skills in sustainable development, both individual and institutional, and, as part of the 2030 Agenda, Member States committed to lead a whole-of-society effort with the support of the United Nations system. This is easily proclaimed, but difficult to achieve. The need for concerted and synergetic action
across United Nations institutions, and nationally across all major stakeholder groups in any given Member State, must not be underestimated. Synergies may come with the building up of an infrastructure for recycling, in particular for cars or wind turbines, with all countries mutually benefitting from sharing technical know-how, due diligence standards and ESG standards for resale markets (SDG 8.1 in combination with 8.4 and 17.1). Unanimously for all countries, zero net land degradation (SDG 15.3) is a very basic new challenge, and the exchange of soil protection policies and approaches to sustainable food systems is mandatory. That is another reason why promoting synergies between the United Nations mode of action and Member States’ modes of delivery is critical. The UN development system at the regional level is positioned to play a key role in this regard.

In terms of the UN structure, there is a need to clearly link the Decade on Action for Delivery and the various reform processes. The institutional reform must be regarded as a major contributing source to overall efforts to deliver SDGs, and at the same time the DfAD can be expected to empower Member States to deliver better development results. Vigilance against administrative superstructures is useful. The conjuncture between the two processes does not overload bureaucracies (the bureaucratic effort is often feared by both Member States and UN bodies) if carefully managed. Countries of the global North and South will win from a reform that will respond to their respective concerns.

### Sustainable finance in (post-Covid) economies

One of the most urgent concerns is about the future of a fair and globalized economy. Trendsetting institutions and countries are searching to open ways to enter sustainable finance investment schemes. Doubtless, for the DfAD this is a driver. Decarbonisation, in particular, must not be seen as end of industry and economy, but rather as an entry point into new jobs and the re-industrialization of a sustainable economy. Digital innovation, in conjunction with green tech and sustainable economies, allows for amazing opportunities. The challenge to economic and labor markets, often seen as risk, turn into chances. Brokering relevant data e.g. on the availability, implication and long-term reliability of sustainable projects and their bankability is key. Here, the combination of regionality plus sustainability is a lever.

There are trailblazers in this area. For example, the European Union is currently establishing a Sustainable Finance taxonomy standard that will include banking regulations and will be of enormous significance for all financial actors worldwide. Stock exchanges all over the world are experimenting with listing schemes that are implementing sustainability criteria. Auditing criteria for public and private spending are also introducing benchmarks for sustainable development and SDG-performance. Trend-setting enterprises are putting sustainability at the core of their business-case rather than following the notion of mere corporate social responsibility. The concept of full value balancing and accounting, including what the mainstream so far ignores as external non-financial costs (ecology, human rights, land rights of indigenous people, etc.) is gaining political clout.
When concrete dangers threaten the lives of so many people directly, strengthening the national state is a general trend because of its primary responsibility for survival. The current pandemic proves this case. But it also highlights the point that strengthening the national state must not turn into pure nationalism. Such threats also trigger the call for intergovernmental help and concerted action. For the ten years to come we can safely assume that we will see further global dangers and regional emergencies. As bad as the current pandemic is, global warming and species extinction are worse. And there will be no anti-carbon vaccination. The best remedy available are concrete deliveries against the SDGs combined with empowered regional engagement. Delivery of the SDGs depends heavily on how market access can be scaled up. Internal markets are a powerful instrument to both satisfy the needs of people and safeguard against overexploitation of the environment (as the case of Europe and other regions and subregions demonstrate). However, the majority of internal markets are incomplete and dysfunctional for the implementation of SDGs, adding to tax evasion, corruption and offshore banking. Solutions on the national level alone will never succeed. Implementing SDG 17.1 in conjuncture with 17.4 and 8.3 by introducing a sustainable finance taxonomy may be the first and foremost scope for applying a brokering initiative.

The UN HLPF proves that there is already a certain dynamic of constant exchange and collaboration, coordination, and project reviews. It has to be maintained and strengthened. The regional preparation will play a growing role in this.

As of now, the HLPF, along with its regional preparation efforts, follows a rational of internal logistics. It is mostly inward-looking and provides space to those who are seen as experts in the field. Combining the processes of DIAD and the regional reform opens the room for external showcase features that would communicate the SDG issue to a wider, regional audience. That would empower multi-stakeholder networks and links, a feature that Voluntary National Reports to the UN HLPF frequently highlight as urgently needed. Brokering relevant information and matching stakeholder and regional governance processes is not easy, but it is needed, and it is certainly something experienced UN institutions can deliver. Typical bottlenecks include missing processing capacities for big data and the lack of coordination with private equity money and development investments. Another major obstacle is the fact that SDG-based ecological or fair-trade product standards (stewardship labels) are misconceived as restricting rather than opening access to markets. This is a misconception resulting from bad advice, branding failures and the untransparent overload of overlapping standards. Independent and responsible brokering of verified information would help.
Linking national to regional

Often the mandate and funding (if it exists) for action on the issues central to sustainable development will lie at the national and sub-national levels. Their role and capacity are crucial. Flexibility and reliance are key and can best be delivered in the regional context. Building resilience into societies and systems means enabling them to adapt and innovate as new circumstances arise. This is critical in a world where economic trends expose people and countries to events over which they have no control but around which they must manage. It is fair to assume that for many if not all countries capacity may well not be available from within standing government procedures. Member State governments should be encouraged to engage with expertise in multiple contexts, including academic communities and local activists, to ensure that all knowledge relevant to decision-making can be tapped. And reformed regional UN institutions should be encouraged and positioned to contribute as they see fit.

Providing the UN regional development system with enhanced tools to support country efforts towards sustainable development through a more collaborative structure, avoiding overlaps, promoting accountability and reporting exercises, and sharing data in a more open and effective way, are all concrete and essential steps in the wider context of accelerating the delivery of results. Concretely:

- Enhanced tools may imply a public data space for corporate non-financial data which is not in existence as of now.
- The challenge of matching projects for climate change compensation schemes (Paris Agreement article 6) where big money waits to be invested.
- The facilitation of cross-country peer reviewing of e.g. “sustainable cities” or policies on how to qualify higher education institutions to better satisfy the need for experts in sustainability.

Conclusion

Multilateralism is at a crossroads. Muddling through the implementation of the SDGs as a tickbox exercise would not be answering the challenge of modern times.Bringing in some add-ons here and there is not adequate. This is a fundamental question of political design and of leadership competences. The argument laid out by this paper endorses re-connecting and re-engineering multilateralism. Better delivery on the SDGs will become possible. More efficient regional UN action will be possible, too, while combining the two processes will even add more value and provide new leverage for better concerted and synergetic action across United Nations institutions and Member States. Transformational governance features are nothing completely new, but are of groundbreaking significance for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals on which all countries have to deliver collectively. The 2030 Agenda and the regional reform need to be carefully linked, can add value to each other. The Regional Reform is the one option at hand to spur new engagement and to empower regional and local actors. Brokering meaningful data and information will provide cross-border and cross-issue solutions and increase the scope for action. This is a task the regional reform is better equipping the UN bodies with.
Figure 1. From challenges to solutions: UN development system reform at the regional level and the Decade for Action and Delivery

**Challenges ahead**
- Slow progress of the 2030 Agenda
- Covid-19 impacts
- Better support to UN Member States

**Region-by-region Approach**
- Lack of data
- Bureaucracy overlaps
- Strengthen action-oriented frameworks
- Strengthen UN regional accountability tools
- Share UN regional expertise

**Decade for Action and Delivery**
- Mobilize a movement for the SDGs
- Unlock financing
- Generate the ambition, innovation and solutions to deliver
- Invest in key sustainable development areas
- Improve governance
- Build economies for the future and ensure decent work for all, especially young people
- Focus on women and girls

**UN Regional Development System Reform**
- Value proposition of the regional level
- Regional collaborative platforms
- Regional knowledge hubs (statistics and data)
- Efficiency gains and regional assets

**Results: Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development**
- Stronger UN System capabilities to support UN Member States effort towards sustainable development

Source: Own elaboration
Win-win: How the regional UN reforms will lead to cost-efficiency

Jonathan Glennie

Introduction

Cost efficiency is one of the goals of these reforms, but as Cepei criss-crossed the world interviewing hundreds of people in and around the UN system, we found a common expectation that, taken together, the proposed regional reforms were likely to be costly. People wanted them to be cost-neutral but were unclear how that would be possible, let alone how they might present an opportunity to reduce excess costs.

Any attempt to collaborate better for more effective action must imply more impact for each dollar spent. Either costs come down, or impact goes up, or both. However, not all cost savings will be quick, and there may be an initial investment required to make savings in the medium and long term. Part of the problem is that there is no cost analyses in most of the documents promoting the regional reforms. Whether this is deliberate or not, limited progress can be made without clarity on budgets. If this reform is to be cost-efficient rather than costly, plans must explicitly state how, with analyses of the short, medium and long term.

This paper is about how spending at the regional level can be more cost efficient. But more cost efficient does not mean cheaper. The reform is about making money go further. In fact, if successful there will be a strong case to increase spending at the regional level to support increased, cost-efficient, impact. Some changes are fairly easy to instigate, others are more difficult, bureaucratically, technically and politically.

The UN is still evolving. It would be a mistake to think that because things work poorly now they are set in stone that way forever. There is an opportunity to make the UN more streamlined and effective at the regional level for decades to come. Conversely, if that opportunity is not taken, it could spell problems for the UN in the short term.

Structure of the brief

There are SEVEN main ways cost-efficiency and development effectiveness could combine to give enhanced impact and value-for-money. We look at each in turn:

1. Assets & mapping
2. Working together better
3. Reporting
4. Sharing resources
5. Aligning funding incentives
6. **Horizontal and vertical efficiencies**

7. **Brokering and partnering**

Importantly, we expect efficiencies to benefit not just the UN at the regional level, but also the UN at country and global levels, and also non-UN stakeholders. While many of the efficiencies can be foreseen, we also expect many unforeseen efficiencies. Scrutiny and openness lead to unexpected efficiencies and impacts. This, then, is a moment for brainstorming and improvisation, not simply mechanical implementation of a reform package.

Some of the recommendations are part of the SG’s reform package. Others are other possibilities identified by the Cepei team which are included to prompt brainstorming in each region as to how to embed and encourage a culture of reform.

### 1. Assets & mapping

It is hard to calculate precisely the resources the UN manages at the regional level, but our best estimate, according to the [mapping exercise](#) conducted by Cepei in 2019, is that around 10,000 regional staff are working at any one time, about 80% of which are permanent staff, with the remained contracting in some way. In terms of budget, the UN’s annual regional spend is upwards of $1.5bn, about 61% of which is core budget, with the rest considered “additional funding”. Regional Commissions account for about 33% of staff and about 20% of spend, with the rest being managed by the regional operations of the Agencies, Funds and Programmes.

A clear mapping of the regional assets and capacities allows the system to coordinate its strategies better, deliver on policies and make an efficient use of resources and staff knowledge. This mapping will be compared to the global and national one, to decide on a more efficient use of assets at all levels. There is ample evidence that simply ensuring better visibility of costs and personnel can lead to better management of resources and increased value for money. An effective and efficient UNDS would work on the ground to open the system to new sources of financing. The UN could build a map of regional donors, by region and thematic area of support, to increase the financing sources for trans-boundary and national projects.

### 2. Working together better

The fundamental way in which the regional entities of the UN can reduce costs and increase impact is by thinking of themselves as one organisation, not a large number of separate ones. Of course, this happens to some extent already. But most people Cepei spoke to emphasised that the UN is working as a collection of projects at the moment, rather than as one, with all the usual consequences for efficiency and impact. The donor practice of earmarking funds for preferred projects contributes to this fragmentation.

During the MDG era the UN focused on the eight MDGs but continued to work on many issues...
they did not cover. That meant that there was no overarching set of objectives for the UN globally and regionally. The value of the sustainable development concept is that it gives the UN a unique opportunity to work together, to join efforts, to share programs and projects, to establish a common platform for coordination, to focus on delivering on the ground.

Careful thought has to be put into initiatives intended to increase coherence as some attempts do not lead to greater efficiency in reality, although they might be expected to do so on paper. It is worth differentiating between a consolidated regional strategy as such and a common approach with much more crossover and sharing. Organising a joint strategy would require too much investment of time to be worth it, especially as strategies have a habit of being shelved within a few months as events take over (as the Covid-19 crisis shows clearly). Instead, efforts should be made to work better together on specific issues.

**Regional Collaboration Platform (RCP)**

At the heart of the reform is a unified Regional Collaboration Platform (RCP) as a first step towards a renewed comprehensive and integrated organizational culture that will transform the way the UN delivers at the regional level. Under this approach, the various activities of the UN will be integrated better, leading to efficiencies across the board.

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**Single UN Regional Analysis**

A single UN Regional Analysis on specific issues, probably following the SDG framework, could help unite the various UN entities and provide crucial input for the national and global levels. It will enable countries to better understand potential areas for growth and improvement, and identify best practices. We do not propose a single regional strategy, which would be difficult to develop, considering different countries’ priorities and frameworks. Instead, creating shared rules of procedures and a UN internal communications plans could promote coherence and efficiency.

**Performance evaluation to promote collaboration**

Changing organisational culture is hard. One well-established means of shifting working habits is to include certain behaviours or activities when recruiting for new positions and in the performance evaluations of both senior and junior staff.

**Joint operations**

Most UN programmes are still delivered at the country level, but many issues require trans-boundary activities as well. Relevant AFPs should join with RECs, interested Member States and other relevant stakeholders on key trans-boundary projects (Issue-Based Coalitions).
### 3. Reporting

Reporting is an essential dimension of accountability. However, making thousands of reports every year does not make the organization more accountable or more transparent. In situations where UNDS entities combine efforts with human, financial and logistic resources, common reporting should be established as a good practice. When governance bodies hold joint sessions, common reporting becomes a real possibility. The key will be responding to the many reporting requirements placed on the UN – and in this sense Member States have a crucial role to play in helping streamline their own reporting needs. The multiple reporting obligations of any given agency to a variety of donors is neither sustainable nor effective.

**Regional impact report**

A more integrated reporting mechanism will enable Member States to keep track of what the UN does. Publishing a single annual regional report on funding management could enhance accountability and transparency. Standardising reporting across donors plus consolidated country-level reporting would be a first step.

**Consolidated data, statistics, analysis and advice**

Data gathering and analysis should be unified, with all relevant UN entities working together on specific themes. Crucially, outputs (written and spoken advice) should be joined-up.

**Single regional website**

The UNDS should create an integrated website with the core capacities and portfolios of all UN entities at the regional level, linking to country websites. This should be a platform to allow Member States and other stakeholders to see the portfolios of the different entities in terms of their respective mandates in analysis, norm setting, convening and delivering on the ground.

### 4. Sharing resources

The third major cluster of cost-efficiency measures, going beyond working together, is actually sharing resources formally, for instance in the consolidation and streamlining of management and administration, and the sharing of human and physical resources.

**Management & administrative oversight**

A common office for management and administration will allow the UNDS to better organize its operations and benefit all entities delivering at the regional and country levels. Eventually, a single management and administrative hub at the regional level could integrate all the UNDS entities needs. Some economies of scale will be generated and the alignment of software and procedures will benefit the whole UNDS operation.

**Regional knowledge and capacities hub**

A regional knowledge and capacities hub could have two main purposes. First, giving experts a home (virtual and/or physical) in the different regions enabling the UNDS to provide expertise and knowledge at the request of Member States. Second, enabling different entities to have a more
flexible presence at the country and regional levels, allowing them to make meaningful savings.

**Country hubs & co-location**
Being far apart makes joint-working harder, and there are significant efficiency savings to be made from sharing cities and buildings (in terms of travel, services, etc.). For those organisations already in the same city, gradual co-location in the same building will reduce costs and enhance the possibility of dialogue.

**Customised databases**
Customized database platforms will allow all entities to centralize information in a coherent manner, including information requests to the UN system.

## 5. Aligning funding incentives

At the moment there is too much competition between UN agencies and with non-UN stakeholders. Getting the balance right between competition and cooperation is key to getting cost-efficiency in service delivery. Funding incentives should be aligned. Fund insufficiency is perceived by the five regions as a significant obstacle and as a primary reason behind competition between UN actors. There is broad consensus on the need for promoting core and pooled-funding instead of project funding. Before setting strategies aiming to increase the funding sources, there should be a thorough evaluation about the way the system is working in relation to spending its budget. To that end, UN budgeting could move towards a Result-based Budget (RBB), and give priority funding to projects, programmes and institutions that achieve better results.

The regional level needs more investment of time and resources, not less. A message should be sent quickly that any savings made through greater efficiency will be reinvested at the regional level. This message would increase regional entities support to actual reforms on finance related issues, such as the Funding Compact or the change from biannual to annual UN budget exercises.

## 6. Horizontal and vertical efficiencies

The work of the UN is less impactful than it could be because of weak collaboration between its parts, both horizontally (between the regional UNDS) and vertically (from global to national via the regions, and vice versa). Efficiencies generated by better collaboration will be hard to quantify, but theory suggests that better linking between national regional and global will lead to more efficient and effective UN as a whole, not just at the regional level.

**Cross-regional communication**
Cross-regional cooperation on a wide variety of areas –needs assessment, local capacities, levels
of expertise and available technology for practical solutions, lessons-learned in project implementation, local solutions—will require collaborative approaches among the different stakeholders involved, including Member States, civil society, academia and the private sector. Cross-regional work also facilitates negotiation processes and provides channels for renewed cooperation.

**Streamlined regional groupings**

Geographical anomalies are inevitable in a huge organisation but they should be the exception rather than the rule. If UN entities are to work together they need to share the same regional maps. All UN entities could revise their structures to align with the five Regional Commissions. This is a fairly simple management exercise and should lead to efficiency and effectiveness benefits for the system.\(^4\)

**Regional Sustainable Development Forums**

The role of the Regional Sustainable Development Forums as a link between the national and global levels should be enhanced, including with a unified report from the regions on experiences, progress and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

**Aligning global, regional and national**

Work at the three different levels is necessary and complementary. Existing capacities need to be better leveraged and more closely aligned to ensure the United Nations system delivers in an integrated way. A strategic framework for statistical capacity development, in particular, will set out roles and areas of work to align funding, functions, governance and organizational arrangements.

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4. The fact that some Member States are members of two Regional Commissions is a separate issue, one that is harder to resolve given that these are decisions for the states themselves rather than the UN Secretariat.

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**7. Brokering and partnering**

Agenda 2030 is a common creation, involving all stakeholders from the outset. It goes beyond the responsibility of governments and should be seen in a broader spectrum to integrate different actors of the society. Each sector has specific capacities and can contribute to the integrated approach this ambitious agenda deserves. Convoking power is a crucial UN intangible asset at the regional level. However, engaging with non-government stakeholders is still not part of the UN’s core instincts. More effort, a conscious change of approach, and investment is required to transform this aspect of the UN’s work. Better use of the UN’s convening power to bring together non-government actors could also contribute to finding answers to the UN’s funding problems. Bringing together UN expertise and the expertise of other stakeholders in Issue-Based Coalitions could be a truly innovative way of working together on transboundary issues (e.g. migration, water, women, youth). Acting as broker more and as implementer less could be an efficient use of resources.
Conclusion

The regional reforms will increase efficiency and can be expected to improve impact. This will be a crucial part of elaborating the regional value proposition and bringing in more sustainable funding. For that aim, besides transparency, accountability and impact-oriented information on resources allocation, funder visibility could, sometimes, be increased. While efficiency is regularly being audited by relating general spending to general output, actual increased, issue-related and specific impact is harder to measure.

Senior UN leaders should communicate clearly that these reforms will be cost-neutral or cost-efficient in the medium term. Member States should encourage the regional leadership to cost these reforms using available budget methodology. Only by putting numbers on the problem will clarity be possible and buy-in achieved from key stakeholders.
Core team members

**Philipp Schönrock**

Director of Cepei, an independent think-tank he founded in 2003. During the last 16 years he has provided policy solutions and insights in critical strategic areas so as to optimize the engagement on: governance, finance and data for sustainable development. He has been part of numerous initiatives: he was co-chair of Beyond 2015, and currently serves as board member of Together 2030 and of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century. He is also a member of the Technical Advisory Group of the Global Partnership on Sustainable Development Data, the Programme Committee of the UN World Data Forum, and the SDSN Thematic Research Network on Data and Statistics (SDSN TReNDS). In 2018, he was a visiting fellow at the German Institute for International Security and Affairs (SWP).

**Patti Londoño**

Former Colombian diplomat and former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. She is a political scientist from the University of Geneva and the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, with a Masters in international relations from the University of Stockholm and a Ph.D. from the UNED University in Madrid, Spain. Ms. Londoño was a professor and researcher at the Finance, Government and International Relations Faculty of the Universidad Externado de Colombia. She has co-authored books on the United Nations and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries with former Foreign Minister Luis Fernando Jaramillo, and has published several academic documents on multilateral relations.
Günther Bachmann  
Senior Policy Advisor

Since April 2001, at the behest of the Federal Chancellery, Prof. Dr. Bachmann took over the management of the office of the Council for Sustainable Development, since 2007 as Secretary General. The Council for Sustainable Development advises the Federal Government on sustainability policy through recommendations and projects. He closely worked with the Chairs of the Council Mathias Platzeck, Volker Hauff und seinem Stellvertreter Klaus Töpfer, Hans-Peter Repnick und Marlehn Thieme. In his function he reported back to the Federal Chancellery and federal departments. His duties as Secretary General of the Sustainability Council include the initiation, guidance and implementation of all content and process-related work of the Council. The mediation to government, parliament and associations, including the conceptual development of the concept of sustainability is another important feature. He was responsible for the independent, professional and political work of the council and the office, with its nineteen employees. The direct and indirect budget currently amounts to nine million euros annually. In March 2020, he hand over the management of the Sustainability Council to his successor and enter the third phase of his life.

Jonathan Glennie  
Research Fellow  
Cepei

Writer, researcher, consultant and practitioner on international poverty and human rights. Until recently, he was Director of the Ipsos Sustainable Development Research Centre and previously he was Director of Policy and Research at Save the Children UK, Country Director of Christian Aid in Colombia, and Senior Research Fellow at ODI, leading research and policy advice on the future of development cooperation. He has published a well-received book on aid and was a regular columnist for The Guardian's Global Development website.
Javier Surasky

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Juanita Olarte

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KAS - CEPEI partnership for the transition to a repositioned United Nations Development System at the regional level

Mandated by the UN General Assembly in response to the vision and proposals of the Secretary-General, the reform of the United Nations Development System involves a set of far-reaching changes in the way this global architecture works. Its ultimate objective is to yield a UNDS that is more integrated, more focused on delivery on the ground, with clearer internal and external accountability for contributions to national needs, and with capacities, skillsets and resources better aligned to the 2030 Agenda.

Taking into account the importance of the 2020 Operational Activities Segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, in reviewing four years of implementation of the guidance given by UN Member States in General Assembly Resolution 71/243 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, KAS and Cepei decided to join forces to feed with evidence, analysis and recommendations into the Member States briefing process heading towards the QCPR in May 2020.