



## UN Monitor: COVID-19 Round-Up on UN Sustainable Development Activities - 14/05/2020

“The UNDS is better positioned and ready to accompany countries as they seek to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerate SDG implementation. The reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system is now firmly in place ensuring stronger and independent leadership of the UNDS at country level. A new generation of UN Country Teams, more cohesive and responsive to national needs and priorities, is taking shape. Solid foundations have been built to nurture a culture of results and learning; and to improve efficiencies in business operations. Challenges remain however and continued effort is needed to ensure further consolidation through ongoing leadership from all involved, sustained funding of the RC system, strengthened capacity on system-wide evaluations; and improved implementation of the funding compact.”

These words by UN Secretary-General António Guterres introduce a report and assessment of progress in the **reform of the United Nations Development System (UNDS)** which will be deliberated during the ECOSOC [Operational Activities for Development Segment](#) (OAS). This segment will take place virtually, 19-22 May, and 27 May, and its [official programme](#) and a [series of reports](#) are now available online.

Ahead of the UN General Assembly deliberations later this year, this ECOSOC segment measures implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. It also serves as “accountability for, and acceleration of, system-wide performance and results in relation to the 2030 Agenda”. In light of COVID-19, the segment will assess the extent to which reforms of the UNDS have improved the UN’s ability to respond to development needs in-country.

The Secretary-General’s [report](#) on the “Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the QCPR” highlights how the ongoing repositioning and reform of the UNDS has aided country-level responses to COVID-19. The QCPR process is four years into its implementation and during September-November of 2020, the General Assembly will [review the framework](#) and recommendations. The upcoming ECOSOC OAS will feed directly into this review process.

The report prioritizes continued reform work, suggesting that: “The UNDS that we see responding to the COVID-19 crisis today is, in many respects, the UNDS that we have been building towards over the past four years.”

It includes a [Funding Analysis](#), responding to the QCPR “call for greater transparency and accountability in the funding of operational activities for development”. Additionally the [Report by the Development Coordination Office](#) evaluates progress made in reinvigorating the Resident Coordinator system and the reconfiguring the UNCT structure.

UNDS members explored system-wide efforts to address COVID-19 and its far-reaching effects at a recent Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) [meeting](#): “**Joining Forces: Effective Policy Solutions for Covid-19 Response**”.

Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Liu Zhenmin, [highlighted some initial findings](#) of the forthcoming 2020 SDG Progress report in this context, stating:

“Between 40 to 60 million people are likely to be pushed back into extreme poverty as a result of COVID-19, the first increase of poverty population in three decades. The lack of domestic financial resources, high debt levels and fragile health systems present an urgent challenge for many countries...Pre-existing inequalities along various dimensions, appear to aggravate the vulnerability of people to the pandemic and its impacts.”

At the meeting, President of ECOSOC Mona Juul [elaborated](#):

“And although this virus impacts us all, it has not been an equaliser. It has exposed the inequalities in our societies and compounded them. These disparities should be our catalyst, and our call to build back better. With responses on the national level that are shaped by, and respect human rights.”

She went on to highlight the role of ECOSOC as a coordinator of the UNDS:

“ECOSOC has a unique convening power for a range of stakeholders, from Member States, to our civil society partners, and the private sector. This, together with ECOSOC’s role to guide and coordinate its ecosystem of entities - and specialised agencies - leaves us ideally placed to plot a multilateral response for the road ahead. One that enables countries to address the immediate health crisis, stem the social and economic impacts, and accelerate our efforts to reach the SDGs.”

Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed [highlighted](#) the role of the UN at country-level in addressing COVID-19. She cited examples of UNCTs in Ghana working to protect livelihoods, in Nepal establishing call centers, and in Cameroon extending access to water, sanitation and hygiene services in vulnerable communities. She further outlined the strategy, rooted in the 2030 Agenda:

“Drawing lessons learned from previous crises and leveraging our ability to work effectively together from the UN reform, we have placed all assets of the UN development system in service of countries. Our response reflects:

- An integrated and coordinated UN offer under the leadership of the strengthened Resident Coordinator system;
- Policy expertise from across the system to support Governments with the difficult trade-offs needed to help sustain progress over time without deepening economic and social instability and environmental degradation;
- Established and new modalities for rapid funding of COVID-19 related programmes in countries;
- and Stronger partnerships with International Financial Institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, academia and the scientific community;”

She added, “The Secretary-General established the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund in early April to help catalyze joint action by UNCTs to support the most vulnerable countries and communities...Greater mobilization and international support are needed, however. We estimated billions and are receiving millions.”

**An impressive list of over 150 signatories including world leaders, past and present, health, economics and human rights experts issue a [call for a People's Vaccine](#) – “Available to all. In all countries. Free of charge.”**

Their letter notes: "Now is not the time to allow the interests of the wealthiest corporations and governments to be placed before the universal need to save lives, or to leave this massive and moral task to market forces. Access to vaccines and treatments as global public goods are in the interests of all humanity. We cannot afford for monopolies, crude competition and near-sighted nationalism to stand in the way."

Their call: “for a global agreement on COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and treatments – implemented under the leadership of the World Health Organization” specifies that such an agreement:

- Ensures mandatory worldwide sharing of all COVID-19 related knowledge, data and technologies with a pool of COVID-19 licenses freely available to all countries. Countries should be empowered and enabled to make full use of agreed safeguards and flexibilities in the WTO Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health to protect access to medicines for all.
- Establishes a global and equitable rapid manufacturing and distribution plan – that is fully-funded by rich nations – for the vaccine and all COVID-19 products and technologies that guarantees transparent ‘at true cost-prices’ and supplies according to need. Action must start urgently to massively build capacity worldwide to manufacture billions of vaccine doses and to recruit and train the millions of paid and protected health workers needed to deliver them.
- Guarantees COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics, tests and treatments are provided free of charge to everyone, everywhere. Access needs to be prioritized first for front-line workers, the most vulnerable people, and for poor countries with the least capacity to save lives.”

Those signing on include: Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo – President of the Republic of Ghana; Imran Khan - Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; Cyril Ramaphosa - President of the Republic of South Africa and Chairperson of the African Union; Macky Sall - President of the Republic of Senegal; Former leaders of Finland, Latvia, Ecuador, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Canada, Italy; Members of civil society, academia and members of the UN system, including agencies and regional executive secretaries.

### **Upcoming meetings, decisions**

- ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment will take place virtually 19-22 May and 27 May
- [Ministerial Declaration for the HLPF](#) informal negotiations will continue virtually in June 2020, preparing for HLPF in July 2020
- [Informal Interactive Dialogue](#) with the Candidate for the Position of President of the General Assembly for the 75th Session

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