

Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in complex settings: enhanced collaboration between humanitarian and development action and stronger linkages to peace

As crises have been growing exponentially, supporting countries' development needs and goals must remain front and center if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Inclusive sustainable development is the only comprehensive solution to prevent or transition from conflict and emergencies, development support is often the first to be sacrificed when a crisis breaks out. This risks compromising hard-won development gains and hindering early efforts towards stabilization and recovery for affected communities.

The 2020 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of UN system operational activities (QCPR) resolution [A/RES/75/233] recognized the positive role that sustainable development can play in mitigating drivers of conflicts, disaster risks, humanitarian crises and complex emergencies. The text sets out that a comprehensive whole-of-system response from the UN, including greater cooperation, coherence, coordination and complementarity among development, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian action and sustaining peace, is fundamental to efficiently and effectively address needs and support countries attain the SDGs. In this resolution, Member States emphasized that, in countries facing humanitarian emergencies, there is a need to work collaboratively to move beyond short-term assistance towards contributing towards longer-term development gains with the aim of reducing need, vulnerability and risk over time.

The subsequent reports of the Secretary-General on implementation of the QCPR and of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) on the Resident Coordinator system and the Development Coordination Office (DCO) highlighted how the UN development system has increasingly focused on providing support to the affected countries' national SDG acceleration efforts through a comprehensive response across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. They reported on the pivotal role of Resident Coordinators (RCs) during a time of unprecedented emergencies in strengthening synergies across the UN's operations. RCs worked to better address risks and vulnerabilities, including by working across UN operations to better identify and address root causes of crises and reduce drivers of humanitarian needs, , in full compliance with respective UN mandates.

There has been some notable progress in delivering on the mandates by Member States in the QCPR including:

- Efforts to improve alignment between the global pooled funds' country allocations (Joint SDG Fund, Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF);
- Enhanced UN system-wide analysis underpinning UN sustainable development programming that tackles root causes and drivers of instability, conflict and violence;
- Strengthened support for collaboration between UN and international financial institutions (IFIs) in more than a dozen countries to facilitate joint data and analysis by the Peacebuilding Support Office's Partnership Facility;
- Reinvigoration of the Joint Steering Committee.

As per the Secretary-General's 2023 report on the QCPR, most concerned host country Governments (93 per cent) assessed the UN's collaboration between humanitarian and development interventions as "close". However, RCs and UNCT members noted comparatively greater difficulties in sustaining collaboration due to a range of systemic and institutional challenges. Through concerted efforts, progress is being made with ongoing efforts to improve joined-up analysis, coherent and complementary planning, effective coordination, and synergistic funding and financing towards mutually reinforcing priorities.

Some of the challenges are the result of different mandates and institutional arrangements, others may be more behavioral in nature. For example, some challenges exist as the nature of humanitarian responses are intended to be short term (meaning a 1 year or shorter planning cycle), whereas development responses are longer term (3-5 years). While there has been some progress in overcoming structural barriers to joint analysis and complementary planning, the lack of funding and insufficient investments in

sustainable development to prevent or address crises remains a challenge. RCs and UNCTs consistently report difficulty in ensuring appropriate financing flows for development in complex settings. Conditionality around funding can also limit the ability of the system to jointly work on programming linked to prevention and addressing root causes. However, a stronger appetite to overcome these barriers – including by political and financial support from Member States – would support in making progress on this agenda.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), DCO and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) continue to engage with bilateral and multilateral partners to try to overcome such structural challenges and facilitate stronger collaboration for the most impactful and sustainable response to countries experiencing crisis. As part of this effort, the departments have jointly developed guidance for RC/HCs on ways to leverage the three global pooled funds (the Joint SDG Fund, the Central Emergency Response Fund and the Peacebuilding Fund) for more coherent results.

Over the past two years, the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Solutions to Internal Displacement has led work support for government-led development approaches to helping internally displaced people onto a path to sustainable solutions. This includes support for 15 pilot countries, and updated guidance and a toolkit to UN teams on the ground, covering humanitarian, development and prevention/peacebuilding aspects of the response efforts.

To strengthen coherence and complementarity across humanitarian and development planning, RC/HCs have asked for simplification of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) processes and guidelines, while allowing for greater flexibility and contextualization. Efforts are underway to address these requests. RC/HCs have also expressed the need for sufficient capacity, expertise and resources to allow a focus on solutions and development in the most complex of settings. As an initial step toward supporting this, surge capacity in RC Offices has been set up, in complementarity with surge support from across the UN system.

OCHA, DCO and DPPA have also strengthened their joint engagement with Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (DSRSG)/RC/HCs and RC/HCs to promote coherence and facilitate collaboration around analysis and complementary response planning, including to facilitate an early focus on prevention, peacebuilding, resilience and development solutions. On an annual basis, OCHA, DCO and DPPA have convened DSRSG/RC/HCs and RC/HCs in a joint workshop with a view to strengthening dialogue with and support for these field leaders to deliver coherently in line with QCPR guidance.

THE PATH FORWARD

Resident Coordinators and their teams need to be adequately resourced and capacitated to achieve the ambition set out in the 2030 Agenda..

Coherent analysis and complementary planning are essential for coordination and coherence across mandates, and need to be further enhanced. They need to be accompanied by behavioral shifts across the UN system, and by addressing disparate governance mechanisms and entity-specific incentive structures, which risk encouraging inter-agency competition.

These efforts must be supported and incentivized by appropriate funding and financing, essential conditions to enable delivery in a coherent, complementary and strategic manner. While earmarked funding can provide important resources for specific initiatives, it presents significant challenges for the UN in meeting Member States' expectations to deliver at scale in support of the 2030 Agenda. The revised Funding Compact seeks to address some of these challenges by encouraging Member States to increase the proportion of funding allocated as core/unearmarked funding that is predictable and multi-year to allow for greater sustainability, including through multi-partner pooled fund mechanisms. Member States are also encouraged to redouble efforts to ensure predictable financing for prevention and development

Strengthened UN engagement with multilateral development banks and international financial institutions will also be important in order to mobilize development investments in ways which advance the SDGs and address critical resilience and prevention pathways.