

# The United Nations at the Country Level: Reassessing Operational Activities for Development

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## Introduction

The new Secretary-General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres presented a report to the General Assembly entitled *Repositioning the United Nations Development System to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: Ensuring a Better Future for All*.<sup>1</sup> The report addressed the issue of how the UN system should operate at the country level. After noting that, over the seventy-two years of the organization, to work effectively at the country-level,

12. I am convinced, nonetheless, that the current model has reached its exhaustion point and is insufficient to match the ambition, effectiveness and cohesion required by the 2030 Agenda. Reforms have been implemented over the years, predominantly in the field, with a lack of commensurate progress in regional and global arrangements and within individual entities. There is, more than ever, an imperative to ensure we have a system firmly in place that emphasizes leadership, accountability, collaboration, efficiency and results. Governments and partners are counting us, with 114 Governments having already requested support as they localize and implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

While international organizations have been involved in this process throughout, it is not a subject that has been addressed strongly by academic researchers. Fortunately, a number of researchers, mostly young, have begun to look at aspects of the transition to a new model for international organizations as the culmination of a long process. It has been my honor to organize and edit this edition of JIOS and, through this essay, put the research presented into context.

In preparing this overview essay, building on the articles that follow, I am using a data source that is not always used: my own experiences. I have been engaged with the UN at the country level since 1966, near the point at which the reform process began, and have experienced many of the events that have, over some fifty years, led to the current reform. I started as a technical assistance expert in Venezuela, was a headquarters backstopper for technical assistance, served as an administrator with UNDP, was involved in interagency coordination for rural development, undertook cross-organizational policy analyses of the UN system in key areas, was a senior manager in the UN's women's program, and, after retirement, have done results-based management training and evaluations of the UN system at the field level. I will apply what I observed to the analysis.

Action by the UN at the country-level began with the creation of the organization in 1945. Previously, there had been only one international organization that undertook extensive work at the country-level, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees which, after World War I, had offices (or representatives) in a number of countries. One of my colleagues at New York University, Henri Reymond, a Swiss national, was the high commissioner's representa-

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1. *Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a better future for all*, Report of the Secretary-General (A/72/124-E/2018/3), 11 July 2017.

tive in Hungary.<sup>2</sup> However, the other organizations created after World War I, including the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO) did not have field operations except for a few missions that ILO undertook regarding labor law conventions.

One of the first things the new UN did that was different from the League of Nations was to set up activities at the member state level. One of the objectives in the UN Charter was “To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.” In practice, this implied from 1946 that there would be a transfer of resources from north to south (and this was an incentive for developing countries to join the organization). The Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC), was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 58(I) in 1946, to support developing countries, least developed countries, countries in economies in transition, and countries emerging from conflict in their capacity development efforts. This was to be financed by the assessed contribution of the budget. Other organizations, like ILO and WHO also began to set up technical assistance programs.

The idea for funding technical assistance (now called development cooperation) from the assessed budget did not last long. Major contributors noticed this would be a major area where developing countries would want budget increases. As a result, they pushed for voluntary funding of development activities and, in 1949, an Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA) was created to be financed from voluntary contributions. This provided funding for the entire UN but was not based on a coherent strategy at the national level. Instead, each agency would offer services, governments would agree to accept them, and funding would be sought from EPTA. This approach was subject to some seventy years of reforms, as I will show, leading up to the most recent round that is analyzed by the papers in this issue.

In looking at this process, however, there has been a major change in the current round of reform. For much of the organization’s history this was about operational activities for development, basically a model of providing technical and financial assistance from north to south, but as the twenty-first century has begun, this is changing, and rapidly. There is a new and expanding role of the international public sector at the country-level. This issue of JIOS looks at the process from several perspectives, but to start, this essay covers the various issues as they stand in the second half of 2017.

### **Origins of Operational Activities for Development**

The role of the UN system in providing development assistance has been evolving rapidly, and this evolution has not been well covered by academic researchers. A main feature since the late 1960s has been UN system country offices, headed by a resident coordinator. There are currently 137 of these offices, mostly in developing countries. How this emerged and what consequences it produced need to be seen to understand the current situation. All of the essays in this edition address the process by which the approach to operational activities has been reformed. Luciana Campos’ analysis covers the entire process, and Annett Richter’s essay covers the most recent period. Patrick Tiefenbacher’s essay looks forward. Taking advantage of these and my own experience, I start with an examination of the reform process over the past seventy-two years, as I have seen them.

#### *The UN System at the Country Level—Beginnings (1945–76)*

The creation of EPTA, which tended to focus on smaller projects, was followed by the creation of the Special Fund, for larger projects. In countries with large numbers of projects, the UN, through the Technical Assistance Board, created local offices headed by an official

2. He wrote his memories about this period before his death in 1998 in Henri Reymond, *The International Service: Experiences and Recollections*, New York, nd. This was sent to me by his daughter-in-law and has not yet been published.

called a resident representative. These were largely administrative offices. A good recollection of how they worked is found in Margaret Joan Anstee's memoir *Never Learn to Type: A Woman at the United Nations*.<sup>3</sup> Anstee worked in one of the first offices in Manila, in 1952, at the beginning of a long and illustrious career.

The system, however, did not work very well. She characterized it well:<sup>4</sup>

From the field I had been one of the systems most vociferous critics, and had once sarcastically remarked, 'Any relationship between the programme and the priority needs of a developing country is purely coincidental.' That was an exaggeration, but I despaired at the constant competition between agencies and the pressures their visiting firemen put on the recipient governments.

In 1965, in order to address the problem, the UN merged the two funds into a new UN Development Program (UNDP) that took over funding and the country offices.

I first joined the UN in 1966 as a technical assistance expert in Venezuela funded by the Regular Program. In the field we were administered by UNDP. I started my work in the first year of UNDP (and the transition could be noted by the sign at the entry to the UNDP offices which said "United Nations Bureau of Technical Assistance Operations"). The resident representative, Adriano Garcia,<sup>5</sup> was from the Philippines and the rest of the staff was local. Most of the UN system personnel were technical assistance experts like me. We met periodically but did not coordinate.

By 1968, there was a concern that UNDP was not functioning well in its new form. The UNDP Governing Council commissioned a major study of the system led by Sir Robert Jackson, an Australian diplomat, who was assisted by Margaret Anstee, who was the main drafter. As she expressed it in her memoir,<sup>6</sup>

The underlying premise was that technical cooperation through the United Nations would play an increasing role in promoting world development, and that UNDP would be the main channel for providing it. We were conscious that this was a historic opportunity at a critical point in North-South relations.

The Jackson Report made a number of recommendations; the principal ones being that UNDP should be the main, almost exclusive funder of development assistance and the office of the Resident Representative would be the liaison with the government, officially accredited to the government, and work to define agreed development assistance packages, called country programs. The amount of funds available to each country would be set mostly based on income as an indicative planning figure (IPF). As a result, an integrated UN system response to national development needs would be achieved. The broad outlines of the Capacity Study were adopted by the UNDP Governing Council as The Consensus. However, as is noted by Craig Murphy in his history of the UNDP,<sup>7</sup>

The Governing Council gave the Res Reps much greater control over UNDP funds, but abandoned the Capacity Study's plan to make them the true leaders of unified UN country offices. The Res Reps got a new title, 'Resident Director' (which was unpopular and quickly abandoned), but no new sources of influence over the country representatives of the Agencies.

I experienced the follow-up of the Jackson Report in two ways. When I joined the UN Secretariat in 1971 as an associate social affairs officer, providing headquarters backstopping to technical assistance projects in regional and community development in Latin America, one of my first tasks was to provide briefs to Latin American countries preparing their country

3. Anstee, Margaret Joan, *Never Learn to Type: A Woman at the United Nations*, London: John Wiley, 2002.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 241–42.

5. Garcia moved up in the UNDP and in the 1970s was the assistant administrator and regional representative for Asia and the Pacific. He wrote an analysis of the resident representative system. See Garcia, Adriano R., *International co-operation and development: The United Nations Development Programme: resident representative system*, UP Law Center, 1982.

6. Anstee, p. 248.

7. Murphy, Craig, *The United Nations Development Programme: A Better Way?* Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 149.

programs on options for technical assistance in social development. Since we had few experts in the countries involved, the briefs were more theoretical than real. Only in countries where we had experts did we get included. I thought it was a futile exercise.

My second experience with the reforms that explained why they did not work well came in 1974, when I was seconded to UNDP to be an assistant resident representative in Pakistan. At the time, Pakistan had one of the highest IPFs and had a large number of UN system organizations working. It was also a country that really did not need technical assistance, since it had qualified national personnel that were well-educated, mostly in the UK. As an administrator in the UNDP office, my job was to work with a select number of organizations by backstopping the administration of their projects. My portfolio included the World Bank, UNICEF, the UN, and the UN Industrial Development Organization. In addition to the UNDP staff, FAO and WHO had country representatives. All project funding came from UNDP. The country program had largely been drafted by UNDP, with the government of Pakistan reviewing the proposals and agreeing. For Pakistan, at the time, the main purpose of operational activities was to provide foreign exchange funding, so most of the projects included heavy equipment components.

By 1974, a new problem had developed. Based on the IPFs, UNDP presented budgets to the donors on that basis. However, some governments, including especially the U.S., were beginning to question their contribution size. At the same time, the organizations of the UN system had not been able to deliver on schedule. As Murphy put it, “The United States, and some other donors, had adopted a practice of cutting off funds to particular projects as a way of pressuring UNDP and the executing agencies to speed up their still abysmally slow rates of delivery.”<sup>8</sup> As funds were not spent on schedule, the donors reduced their contributions to match expenditure. Confronted by this<sup>9</sup>

To try to deal with the same perception that UNDP was not using the funds entrusted to it in a timely manner, Peterson [the UNDP Administrator] had instituted a practice of “over-execution” giving the Agencies funds for a vast stream of projects long before the Agencies had begun to carry them out. Therefore, when New York began to see a huge cash-flow problem, many of the Agencies were holding millions of dollars of unused UNDP funds; yet they also anticipated huge new transfers.

In UNDP country offices, this was called “over-programming,” and each office was advised how much additional programming could be done over the annual budget. In the case of Pakistan, this was about 25 percent. In 1974–75, we generated new projects on a large scale, including large amounts of equipment. At the global level for UNDP, this provoked what was politely called a financial crisis. Accordingly, we were told the funds would not arrive, and we had to quickly cut back on projects. One of my projects was a UN project to explore groundwater resources in the province of Baluchistan. It was, at the time, the largest UNDP-funded project in the world, at \$3.5 million, of which \$3 million was for equipment (mostly drills). When the financial crisis hit, one of our concerns was when we would have to repay the UN for the drills, which was when they were delivered at the project site. If the drills had been delivered in 1975, we would not have had resources for the repayment, but if they were delivered in 1976, the new budget would cover them. Fortunately, there were delays in delivery, and we had to pay in 1976.

One of the consequences of the crisis was that all of the organizations of the UN system lost confidence in UNDP as a funder and began to create their own development assistance funds from their own donors. Another consequence was that UNDP began to execute projects on its own, thus becoming a competitor of the other organizations of the system.

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8. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–59.

*UNDP at the Country-Level: Middle (1976–96)*

In 1974, a major negotiation took place at the General Assembly to re-focus international actions in favor of developing countries. Called the New International Economic Order (NIEO) it led to an effort at reforming the operational activities in 1977 through an Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the UN System, whose recommendations were adopted in a General Assembly resolution 32/197 on 20 December 1977. This set the formal basis for country-level operations until the next reform. Specifically, it had a section on operational activities for development which stated

28. Restructuring measures in respect of the operational activities of the United Nations system for development should serve to promote the achievement of the following objectives:
- a. A real increase in the flow of resources for such activities on a predictable, continuous and assured basis;
  - b. The assistance provided should be in conformity with the national objectives and priorities of the recipient countries;
  - c. The orientation of these activities and the allocation of available resources for the activities to fully reflect the over-all strategies, policies and priorities of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council;
  - d. The achievement of optimum efficiency and the reduction of administrative costs with a consequent increase in the proportion of resources available to meet the assistance requirements of recipient countries.

To achieve these objectives, the reform resolution proposed legislative oversight by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, fund-raising through a single pledging conference, maximum uniformity of administrative, financial, budgetary, personnel and planning procedures, including the establishment of a common procurement system, harmonized budget and programme cycles, a unified personnel system, and a common recruitment and training system.

33. At the country level, there should be improved coherence of action and effective integration, in accordance with the objectives and priorities of the Government concerned, of the various sectoral inputs from the United Nations system. The United Nations Development Programme country-programming process should be utilized as a frame of reference for the operational activities carried out and financed by the organizations of the United Nations system from their own resources.

34. On behalf of the United Nations system, over-all responsibility for, and co-ordination of, operational activities for development carried out at the country level should be entrusted to a single official to be designated taking into account the sectors of particular interest to the countries of assignment, in consultation with and with the consent of the Government concerned, who should exercise team leadership and be responsible for evolving, at the country level, a multidisciplinary dimension in sectoral development assistance programmes. These tasks should be carried out in conformity with the priorities established by the competent national authorities and with the assistance, as necessary, of joint interagency advisory groups. Subject to the requirements of individual countries, steps should be taken to unify the country offices of the various United Nations organizations.

Some of these, like the use of country programming, continued existing practices. A new approach to designate a single official “to exercise team leadership and be responsible for evolving a multidisciplinary dimension to development assistance programs” in the end involved designating the UNDP resident representative as the resident coordinator since only UNDP had budgetary resources for funding country staff.

Since the 1977 reform did not really address the problems with the system, country-level actions continued in a generally non-coordinated way over the next twenty years. My own experience with this was primarily at headquarters level, looking at coordination of rural development, general coordination of the UN system and the inclusion of gender in operational

activities. In all of this, I did not observe any major issues, but I did know that the system was not functioning well.

*The 1997 Reform and One United Nations (1997–2015)*

When Kofi Annan became the secretary-general in 1997, he initiated a further effort at reform. Annan presented a report entitled *Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform*, which included a renewed focus on the UN at the country level. This is described in detail in Richter’s paper in this edition, “The Norm Life Cycle of the UN Reform: ‘Delivering as One’ and ‘UN System-Wide Coherence.’” She applies a theoretical approach to her on-the-ground research to describe how the reform was agreed by governments. Richter shows how the negotiation process led to the decision to have a “one UN approach” on a test basis. In fact, the SG’s report<sup>10</sup> made two proposals:

A United Nations Development Group is being constituted, comprising the major United Nations development programmes and funds as well as departments and other relevant entities. The objectives of the Group are to facilitate joint policy formation and decision-making, encourage programmatic cooperation and realize management efficiencies. This change at headquarters will be reflected at the regional and country levels, where all United Nations programmes will be integrated within a United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

At the same time, the report stated that “Participating funds and programmes in the Development Group will retain their current distinctiveness and existing structures of accountability.” The report suggested a long-run change in the role of the UN system by concluding (para. 98) 95. Everything that is now known about the next quarter century or so—be it demographic trends, shifts in global production structures, continued financial integration, relative rates of economic growth, predictable dislocations in the biosphere—suggests that equally if not more far-reaching changes lie ahead. The international community, therefore, has an obligation to itself and to successor generations to put in place effective multilateral mechanisms that can successfully harness the mutual benefits such changes may offer while managing their adverse consequences. With the reforms proposed in the present report, the United Nations will be better equipped to play its part in meeting this challenge.

In addition, a process of periodic reviews of the system’s operational activities was established as a vehicle for governments to affect how these activities were devised and managed.

The UN Development Group (UNDG) was duly established, the triennial (now quadrennial) reviews of operational activities took place, the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) replaced the “country program,” and there was an effort to put UN system country staff in the same office space. A proposal was presented that “all funds and programmes and United Nations information centres will be part of a single United Nations office under the Resident Coordinator as the designated representative of the Secretary-General and leader of the United Nations country team, who would be accredited to the head of Government.” This was partly implemented, except that the resident coordinator was not fully accredited in most countries but rather only through his or her status as UNDP resident representative.

On a broader issue, the report proposed that “to further strengthen the management of the Organization, the Secretary-General is proposing that the United Nations place greater emphasis on results in its planning, budgeting and reporting and that the General Assembly moves the budget of the United Nations from input accounting to accountability for results.” This was adopted and applied across the system, including at the country-level.

As noted in both Richter’s and Campos’ analysis, the reform led to an experimental approach of “one UN” in several countries. These were evaluated by the UN system, and the results of these are shown in the essays.

10. *Renewing the United Nations: An Agenda for Reform*, Report of the Secretary-General (A/51/950) 14 July 1997, para. 73.

I retired from the UN in 1997, so my connection with the reform was as an outside consultant to a large number of UN organizations. My specialty has been results-based management, which was one of the main reforms started by Annan,<sup>11</sup> and evaluation as a component of that.

One evaluation over the period since 1997 has given me a sense of what was happening during the reform period. It was a review of the management and accountability system of the UN at the country level. This was occasioned because, to address the possible conflict between the role of the resident coordinator and the UNDP resident representative (the same person), a firewall between the two roles was established so that a country team could be effective. It was decided to do an evaluation of the system that was outsourced by the UN Development Group (UNDG) to my company, Associates for International Management Services (AIMS). To undertake the evaluation, we interviewed many people at agency headquarters and also visited a sample of twelve country offices in all regions. I led three of these, which gave me a sense of what was happening. The evaluation report has not been issued publicly, although comments on it may be found in public documents of the UNDG.<sup>12</sup>

In the evaluation, we observed that the role of the UN system at the country-level was changing from a development model, where agencies provided technical assistance, to a model that involved providing services to governments that allowed them to link more effectively with the UN system, especially in terms of norms, standards, and agreements that had been reached at the global level. This was in a context where there was a large number of country teams (131), and the average number of organizations that were part of the teams (either in person or from distance) was sixteen. The system we were evaluating was intended to make the country team leadership independent from UNDP so the conflict of competitors could be reduced. We found that it somewhat worked, but the structure of development assistance makes this difficult. One issue was that, as resident coordinator, the recognition of the post was secondary to the recognition as resident representative. We also suggested the resident coordinators, who reported through the UNDG, should report to the secretary-general as the head of the UN system rather than to the administrator of UNDP who was the formal head of the UNDG. We suggested the changing role should be reported through the Quadrennial Report on Operational Activities.

The main structural recommendations were not accepted by the UNDG, and this may be one reason the report has never been published. The management comments, however, have been published. The comment on the first recommendation states:<sup>13</sup>

The UNDG does not agree with the recommendation that an independent UNDG analysis is undertaken at this time, since an analysis of the future role of the UN system at the country-level will be undertaken as part of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR). The UNDG will instead prepare strategic input into the preparatory work for the QCPR led by DESA/OESC.

In fact, over time, all of the recommendations have been put into effect, mostly through the quadrennial reports.

11. The 1997 secretary-general's report included that in a section called "Results-based Budgeting," which, among other things, proposed "that Member States and he enter into a dialogue with the aim of shifting the United Nations programme budget from a system of input accounting to results-based accountability. Under this new approach, which many Member States have adopted at the national level, the General Assembly, through its relevant Committees, would specify the results they expect the Organization to achieve within the relevant budgetary constraints. The Secretariat would be held responsible for, and judged by, the extent to which the specified results are reached." (para. 46)

12. There is a reference to the study in the Report of the UNDG Meeting of 3 February 2012, especially para. 34–36. ([www.unsystem.org/CEBPublicFiles/United%20Nations%20Development%20Group/Document/Final%20meeting%20summary\\_UNDG%20meeting%203%20February%202012.pdf](http://www.unsystem.org/CEBPublicFiles/United%20Nations%20Development%20Group/Document/Final%20meeting%20summary_UNDG%20meeting%203%20February%202012.pdf))

13. UNDG, Summary: UNDG Management Response to the review of the Management and Accountability System for the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System, including the "functional firewall." (<https://archive.undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/UNDG-Management-Response-Manda-system-review.pdf>)

### **The Current Reform Effort and the New Country-Level Role**

Each previous reform, in many ways, merely matched the same principles as those before them. The issue was development cooperation, the method of determining system response was via country programs and country teams led, in one way or another, by UNDP, with a consistent financial crisis. The current reform is different, as the secretary-general's report argues.

As noted above, one vehicle for intergovernmental discussion is the Quadrennial Report on Operational Activities presented to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council by the secretary-general on behalf of the UN system (A/71/63–E/2016/8 and A/71/292/Rev.1). The most recent quadrennial report was presented in September 2016, and on that basis, the General Assembly is now negotiating revisions to the formal role of the UN at the country level. As the secretary-general's report notes: "The new development era calls for a new dynamic way of thinking, new ways of acting and new ways of organizing. The United Nations development system has embraced this vision and has already taken steps in this direction."

One new contextual factor in reforming the role of the UN system at the country-level is the broader effort to define sustainable development goals (SDGs) that will guide global social, economic, and environmental policy until 2030. The vehicle to connect UN system organizations to the implementation of the SDGs at the country level is expected to be the UNDAF, which should be developed in a partnership between the UN country team and the government.

Tiefenbacher's practitioner's essay in this edition shows how the current reform effort is moving in a new direction to address these new circumstances. I would note that he was involved with developing UNDG policy on results-based management at the same time the evaluation I was leading was taking place. We both have drawn on our experiences.

But how is the new direction different?

#### *The Changing Role of Country Teams: Norm Enforcement*

A major factor in the current reform is a recognition that the services provided by UN country teams has basically changed. The staff that are resident in the country offices no longer only manage development projects but provide services to the countries in which they are stationed in terms of advice, training, and connections with agency headquarters. They work together to prepare the UNDAFs, whose role is expected to include providing assistance in the achievement and monitoring of the SDGs.

A second evaluation in which I have participated, an independent evaluation of the ILO's field operations and structure, completed in September 2017, has given an additional insight.<sup>14</sup> This involved extensive review of documents, a survey of ILO staff and ILO constituents (employers and labor), and field visits. I visited the ILO regional office for Latin America and a country that did not have an ILO office. The ILO had undertaken a reform in 2008, revised in 2014 to place more of its technical staff in the field, mostly by transferring posts to what were called Decent Work Teams located in country offices. These were posts funded from the regular budget and organized their work to provide technical and policy advice or training at the national level. The evaluation found that they were successful in providing the services, and were becoming increasingly important in the formulation of UNDAFs to address the SDGs. ILO was also the only organization that had placed large numbers of technical staff funded from the assessed budgets in the field.

While many UN organizations have argued for many years that their projects and programs are motivated by the need to achieve global goals (especially those like poverty eradication), these were mostly in the development area. One change is when the organization works at the country level to achieve global goals that are not formally called development. As an example, another of my evaluation work was to lead an evaluation of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's Global Programme on Money-Laundering and the

14. International Labour Organization Evaluation Office, *High Level Evaluation of ILO's Field Operations and Structure 2010–16*, September 2017.



Financing of Terrorism.<sup>15</sup> Money-laundering is considered to be a global crime practiced almost everywhere. It is monitored by the Financial Action Task Force, which, among other things, shows national compliance with international norms and standards.<sup>16</sup> The evaluation in which I participated showed that the UNODC program was effective when field operations involving technical mentors worked with national officials to develop national policies and programs to identify and address money-laundering.

There are other such issues, like corruption, that are beginning to be addressed by organizations like international banks and funds. A particular issue where there is international public sector involvement is human trafficking.

### *The SDGs, Team Coherence, Funding, and Accountability*

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in September 2015 are another factor in the changing UN country teams. All countries, developed and developing, are expected to implement the goals (and a similar, related area is the Paris Agreement on climate change). The UN system is supposed to support achievement of the goals, which are, almost entirely, integrated and not the whole property of a single organization. The tool for this support is the UNDAF, and the system is beginning to develop methods for ensuring they meet standards. At the same time, the process of monitoring the SDGs is still a work in progress as the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly begin to determine what should be done.

The SDGs provided an incentive for the General Assembly to use its analysis of the Quadrennial Review of Operational Activities (resolution 72/243) to call for a thorough reform of the UN system at the country level, specifying, for example:

53. *Stresses* that the resident coordinator system, which encompasses all entities of the United Nations development system at the country level dealing with operational activities for development, while managed by the United Nations Development Programme, is owned by the United Nations development system as a whole and that its functioning should be participatory, collegial and mutually accountable within that system;

It requested the secretary-general, as chair of the UN system, to

58. . . . to prepare a comprehensive proposal on further improvements to the resident coordinator system administered by the United Nations Development Programme, with a view to ensuring, at all levels, sufficient leadership and prerogative over the United Nations country team, as well as impartiality, independence, funding and a proper dispute resolution mechanism, and to present it to the Economic and Social Council at the end of 2017 for its review and recommendations and to the General Assembly at its seventy-second session for further action;

For the system to work, the organizations of the system need to work together to achieve a coherent product. One way to do this is to implement the reforms relating to methods of cooperation, including jointly shared, financed, and managed country teams, which is a process underway. The resident coordinators report formally to the UNDG, which is under the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, chaired by the UN secretary-general. UNDG's secretariat is called the UN Development Operations Coordination Office (DOCO). According to its web site,<sup>17</sup> it “promotes social and economic progress by helping UN organizations deliver coherent, effective and efficient support to countries.”

In the previously noted Repositioning Report, the SG called for a new model at the country level and proposed:<sup>18</sup>

15. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, In-depth evaluation of the United Nations Global Programme against Money Laundering, Proceeds of Crime and the Financing of Terrorism, February 2011.

16. [www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/4th-Round-Ratings.pdf](http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/4th-Round-Ratings.pdf).

17. [www.unsystem.org/content/un-development-operations-coordination-office-doco](http://www.unsystem.org/content/un-development-operations-coordination-office-doco).

18. Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a better future for all, *op.cit.*, para 93.

93. In reinforcing global leadership and accountability on the coordination of the United Nations development system, I will:

(a) Task the Deputy Secretary-General with (i) assuming the role of Chair of the United Nations Development Group, with UNDP serving as vice-chair; and (ii) working with the development system in reviewing the composition and working methods of the United Nations Development Group;

(b) Reposition the Chief Executives Board to enhance the coordination, coherence and accountability of United Nations system leadership.

While this had not yet been formally agreed by the CEB when this article was written, the current system has already begun the shift from leadership by UNDP to a broader set of leaders. Naming the deputy secretary-general of the UN as chair of the UNDG is one indicator of the transition (with the administrator of UNDP as deputy chair). A second will be when the resident coordinator and his/her office are funded from a common fund. The current system has been based on UNDP funding from what are called “core resources,” which are basically unallocated voluntary resources used for staff and central services. These have been declining as is noted in a recent study by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) that undertakes evaluations of the UN system. It noted:<sup>19</sup>

Non-core donor Government funding (also referred to as extrabudgetary or voluntary contributions) and funding from donors such as the European Commission and pooled funding mechanisms have become increasingly essential for most United Nations system organizations to pursue their mandates. The portion of non-core or voluntary contributions of United Nations system organizations amounted to about 70 per cent in 2015. Reliance on non-core resources is strongest in the case of United Nations funds and programmes, which received 77 per cent and 79 per cent of all their funding as non-core in 2010 and 2015 respectively, up from 58 per cent in 2007.

This has meant that a new effort is being made to have the funding for the country teams come from diverse sources, including specialized agencies and the UN itself. This is now called the UN Country Coordination Fund. Campos’ article includes an assessment of its predecessor fund of the Delivering as One pilot. The ILO, for example, contributes a considerable sum to this central fund that will pay for country program staff that are not paid for by individual organizations like UNDP. In addition, there is a move to leverage UN system funds, including from the World Bank, to attract other sources of funding, including the private sector, through “collaborating in new ways with an increasingly diverse array of partners.”<sup>20</sup>

One of the new (if also old) priorities is what is called “accountability.” In fact, “strengthening accountability to guide the United Nations development system’s support for implementing the 2030 Agenda” is one of the main areas in the SG’s report. Because of the imperatives of results-based management, the role of evaluations is becoming more important. The JIU study of donor-led assessments shows the extent of this aspect, stating:<sup>21</sup>

The management and oversight bodies of United Nations system organizations have been expressing concerns in recent years about the increase in such donor-led assessments (a total of 205 bilateral assessments by members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development during the 2012–2014 period alone).

The JIU documented the growth of evaluation in the UN system in 2014 and concluded:<sup>22</sup>

Assessed over a 36-year time span (1977–2013), the central evaluation function of United Nations system organizations has changed with regard to roles, structure, systems and standards. It has moved from a predominant role of oversight over and qual-

19. Joint Inspection Unit, *Donor-led assessments of the United Nations system organizations*, (A/72/298), 8 August 2017, para. 1.

20. World Bank, *Annual Report 2016*, p. 2.

21. JIU, *op. cit.* para 2.

22. Joint Inspection Unit, *Analysis of the evaluation function in the United Nations system* (JIU/REP/2014/6), Geneva, 2014, p. iv.

ity assurance of decentralized evaluations to focusing on supporting broad and strategic corporate-level decision-making. The emerging global challenges faced by the United Nations system call for greater involvement of the central evaluation function in cross-cutting and multi-sectoral types of evaluation that provide more integrated and holistic solutions for the system.

As noted, the evaluation function of the UN system has been growing rapidly and increasingly focuses on programs and projects at the country level.

### *The Role of Evaluations in Academic Study of International Public Management at the Country Level*

The articles in this edition of *JIOS*, including this one, have documented a change in the way the international public-sector functions at the country-level, a process that will be increasingly important in dealing with the SDGs, including especially those that related to multi-country or global issues like climate change.

A point I have frequently made in *JIOS* is that there is relatively little academic study of the functioning of the international public sector. In my introduction to the *JIOS* issue on management of climate change, I said:<sup>23</sup>

Management of international institutions has been a focus of governments, often in the context of financing the organizations, but not of scholars. One reason may be that the organizations themselves seem opaque and impenetrable. They are non-sovereign and exist formally at the behest of their sovereign member states. In fact, they are mostly visible only when member states negotiate. As I have argued in my study of international secretariats, *Invisible Governance* (Mathiason 2007), it is the de facto policy of international officials to remain below the radar. For that and other reasons, it has typically been difficult for scholars to examine the inner workings of the international public sector. Certainly, scholars of public administration and management have not paid much attention to the management of the international public sector, and there are few universities who have bothered to look seriously at these issues.

As the number of issues of interest to academic investigators, including climate change, migration, economic development and conflict, increase in terms of dealing with them at the country level, there will be a need for careful academic research. As Campos noted in a comment on the draft of this essay, there is a need for practitioners and academia to bridge between their knowledge in order to forward the reform consensus by building trust through evidence based analysis.

This would be particularly a problem at the country-level, if data were unavailable about how the public sector works. But, fortunately, data do exist in the form of evaluations of projects (and also the country-level processes themselves). Several of the papers in this issue draw heavily on evaluations of the “one UN” experiment. My own personal reflections since 1997 draw heavily on evaluations in which I have participated. As a matter of UN system policy, almost all evaluations are publicly available on agency web sites. As a result, academic investigators have a new set of data that they can use to analyze the workings of the international public sector. I should add that UN system evaluations are expected to follow quality guidelines that are driven by the same scientific method that is used in academia.

Hopefully, the research in this issue of *JIOS* can help provoke an increase in scholarly attention to this key aspect of international public management.

23. Mathiason, John, “Managing Climate Change: Challenges for International Organizations and for Scholars Who Study Them,” *Journal of International Organizations Studies*, 4, No. 1, 2013.