

# The “Delivering as One” UN Initiative: Reforming the UN System at the Country Level

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## Introduction

In order to understand the changes of how the UN system operational activities are structured at the country-level, this article contextualizes and presents the Delivering as One UN initiative (DaO) by describing the process by which it emerged and diffused throughout UN member states in the aftermath of the 2005 World Summit. This reform initiative aims to incite better coordination and coherence throughout the system at the local level, tackling the deleterious effects of an overstretched, underfunded, and excessively fragmented institutional structure. Although these motivations to create the DaO initiative and its objectives are often clear, defining the initiative itself is less so. Thus, this article tries to explain the DaO’s real purpose and structure.

Before introducing the DaO initiative itself, it is necessary to outline the origins of the UN system’s fragmented structure and briefly present previous debates and proposals for tackling its negative effects. This historically contextualizes the DaO initiative, identifying its predecessors, which serve as references to explain the initiative singularities in the face of previous reform cycles aimed at streamlining the UN system’s institutional framework.

Therefore, my hypothesis is that the DaO initiative is not the simple sum of multiple institutional instruments previously established by scattered efforts to incite coherence within the UN system at the local level. Previous institutional innovations were brought about by different reform impetuses—such as Jackson’s 1969 Capacity Study and Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s reform agenda in the 1990s. While these are often incorporated under the same umbrella as the DaO initiative, it would be incorrect to infer that the initiative simply reproduces them in a different context today.

To shed light on DaO, this article follows the transition of negotiations over UN fragmentation from the System-Wide Coherence topic at the UN General Assembly (UNGA)—in the wake of the 2005 World Summit—to the ongoing debates around the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Reviews (QCPR). The QCPR debates incorporated some of the System-Wide coherence reform topic content after its discontinuation in 2012 and gained momentum with the integrated approach of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of SDGs establishment, the UNGA mandated the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to conduct the “Dialogue on the Longer-Term Positioning of the UN Development System” to prepare the formulation of the latest cycle of the QCPR better to be adopted by 2016, introducing institutional changes needed to improve UN cohesion. Including these latest debates permits us to analyze the enlargement of DaO initiative from the idea of efficiency at its emergence to the more nuanced approach represented by the current conceptualization of *fit for purpose*.

This research finds that DaO stems from the reinterpretation of previous reform cycles innovations, such as the *resident coordinator* system, adapting them to the current time and introducing novelties, and such new funding mechanisms as the *multipartner trust funds*—that together make the initiative an original and relevant reform effort in its own terms. The analy-

sis of the debates surrounding DaO shed light on how its emergence and diffusion bear witness of a compromise between aid donors and recipients over the reach and degree of centralization advanced by the initiative—aid recipients engaging with it in spite of initial resistance.

Methodologically, the analysis of UN documents and other primary data, as well as publications by UN observers, were especially relevant for analyzing the history of UN local activities. Research was conducted through interviews with practitioners from both UN system headquarters and UN country teams (UNCT). The period of focus was between 2006 and 2016, when the debate over UN activities on the ground gained prominence following the 2005 World Summit and the Agenda 2030, unleashing the adoption of multiple resolutions and initiatives over the subject.

The article is divided into three parts. First, I introduce the UN system institutional fragmentation and its historical origins, briefly describing debates over a more centralized system. In the second part, the focus is on contextualizing the DaO by identifying previous reform proposals that it would retake and by presenting the debate between member states over the “High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence” report at UNGA, which led to the establishment of the initiative. The third section defines the DaO initiative, laying down its pillars and appreciating its pilot experiences and its diffusion throughout countries that originally resisted its creation at UNGA reform negotiations. The research then assesses the current initiative status, taking into account the latest developments after the end of the pilot phase in 2012 and the current debates over Quadrennial Reviews of UN system operational activities.

### **The Historical Origins of the UN System’s Fragmented Framework**

It is not exactly accurate to refer to the UN as a single body, since it consists of a complex network of interconnected assemblies, councils, committees, commissions, specialized agencies, programs, and funds (Smith 2006, p. 19). The UN system comprises the UN, with its main organs and subsidiary bodies, such as funds and programs, and specialized agencies and related organizations.<sup>1</sup> This whole institutional framework is labeled the UN *system*, but even this term implies more cohesion and coherence than its behavior characterizes, since its horizontal nature of authority does not encompass a top-down hierarchy (Weiss 2013, pp. 73–75).

The fragmented framework of the UN system dates to its origins in the aftermath of World War II, and it gave birth to a debate placing centralists and decentralists in an opposition that echoed throughout UN history and has arrived today with new colors. Both then and today, while centralists believe the fragmentation exerts a negative force on the UN system’s cohesion and effectiveness, decentralists argue that the fragmented system is in the best interest of member states, as it offers better possibilities to exert control over it, as well as to diversify and multiply cooperation partners and possibilities (UN 2005; Muller 2010). Thus, decentralists advocate for UN bodies’ autonomy, while centralists problematize the potential outcomes of the lack of harmonization and cohesion among the UN system.

At the beginning of the UN system, when member states were mostly developed countries, the debate between centralists and decentralists was mainly about the degree of autonomy specialized agencies’ would have (UN 2005). In this period, representatives of specialized agencies advocated for decentralization, while member states often argued in favor of a more centralized system, making, however, little effort to consolidate the coordination mechanism of the system (Muller 2010, p. 31).

The specialized agencies’ staff perceived centralization as a threat to its independence, engaging in the debate to resist centralization. On the other hand, member states’ lack of engagement in favor of the coordination mechanisms is associated with their perception that a fragmented system permits them to act more freely. Multiples arenas of negotiations allows their strategic use (Tsebelis 1990), enabling member states to choose from the UN

1. The UN main organs are the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice, and Secretariat (Chapter III, paragraph 1).

system's multiple decision-making arenas to leverage their bargaining power in favor of its preferences and interests.

The coordination function was formally delegated to the ECOSOC by the UN Charter and relationship agreements between the UN and specialized agencies were signed and subjected to UNGA approval (article 63, paragraph 1 and 2), including the Breton Woods institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB).<sup>2</sup> These agreements, along with the UN charter prescriptions, are the normative base for integrating these entities to the UN system. They are complemented by institutional mechanisms put into place to implement these interconnections and to guarantee compliance with the normative prescriptions. In 1946, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC)—made up of agency heads and chaired by the UN secretary-general—was created to ensure the implementation of those agreements between the UN and the specialized agencies (UNSCEB 2015).

However, ECOSOC could not fulfill its inter-agency coordination mandate due to stakeholders' resistance, and since the means through which its coordination authority over the specialized agencies was to be implemented—consultations and recommendations—lacked enforcement capacity. Accordingly, specialized agencies were established and developed into highly autonomous bodies whose activities on the ground have little coordination. Therefore, there is a gap between the UN Charter prescription concerning the UN system institutional framework for coordination and the authority relations verified in practice among the UN system's formally independent entities, such as the specialized agencies.

In different historical contexts, a succession of factors furthered this fragmentation to the harmful point that currently characterizes it. The emergence of the development agenda from 1960s and the consequent multiplication of UN entities and operational activities is one of these historical moments. After the end of the Cold War, the division of the UN agenda into thematic silos is also a factor that has weighed in favor of fragmentation, which some associate with the vertical nature of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Jenks and Jones 2013).<sup>3</sup> Recently, the financing pattern of UN operational activities—increasingly short-term, voluntary, and earmarked rather than long-term, assessed, or obligatory—has been identified as favoring the excessive fragmentation and its negative effects (Weinlich 2011; Jenks and Jones 2013; Weiss 2013).

These factors have given birth to different rounds of debates and reform efforts to cope with the acute institutional decentralization effects, such as the UN system's lack of cohesion and coherence that has the potential to decrease its relevance within global cooperation dynamics (UN 2005, A/60/1). The duplication, competition for funds, and low capacity for strategic action are noted as some of the problems that currently defy the proper achievement of the UN system mandate.

The duplication is the result of UN entities undertaking the same operational activities, due to overlapping mandates and implementing them through different procedures, leading to inconsistencies derived from the lack of procedural harmony and to the rise of transaction costs. The competition for funds is a consequence of the development and humanitarian activities' decentralized financing pattern making UN bodies compete for financial resources, while further pressure is presented by the stagnation of assessed budgets. The limited ability to act strategically is a consequence of the previous challenges, since uncoordinated activities do not explore complementarity among the system's units and hampers well-informed and effective collective actions, which might range in focus from more specific matters to broader endeavors, such as setting common strategic plans (A/60/1; DaO independent Evaluation 2012).

2. An exception is the International Atomic Energy Agency reports to the Security Council.

3. To recognize the impact of MDGs over UN system institutional fragmentation is not necessary to decline policy and programing coherence gains resulting from MDG's establishment.

Consequently, the lack of coordinating among entities that compose the UN system means they may take contradictory positions and policies when faced with global challenges. For example, the multifold and divergent responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic led to the 1994 creation of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Criticism of the World Health Organization (WHO) and Ministries of Health leadership in response to an epidemic with a multi-sectoral nature resulted in a UNAIDS mandate to build a global consensus over HIV/AIDS policies. Rather than limiting itself to public health policies, to be effective this approach needed the engagement of other UN agencies and local ministries involved with social and educational issues (Nay 2009; Weiss 2013, p. 157–58).

This debate between centralist and decentralists has accompanied different historical contexts since the UN system's inception and remains to this day, but in each context, the debate presented nuances related to its own historical specificities. Addressing these nuances makes it possible to better contextualize and present the DaO initiative, defining its place in the overall historical debate between centralists and decentralists.

### **UN System Institutional Fragmentation Reform Proposals**

*The Capacity Study and Annan's Reform Agenda: Aligning the UN System through Horizontal Centralization and Vertical Decentralization*

The debate between centralists and decentralists along the UN system's seventy years can be divided into three periods often used to characterize the UN's history. In the first period, from 1945 to 1960s, the debate focused on the relationship between the specialized agencies and the UN, as briefly presented above. In the 1960s, decolonization meant the UN increasingly took over tasks on development cooperation, and new UN system entities were created to advance these tasks, raising concerns about institutional fragmentation and accentuating the debates. The third, and current, period came with the end of the Cold War, when an overstretched and underfunded UN led to a reform agenda in which institutional fragmentation was the subject of several change proposals and fierce debates. The focus of this and the next section is to address the second and third periods, since this debate became particularly intricate in terms of UN system operational activities at the local level in these periods.<sup>4</sup>

The period beginning in the 1960s accompanied the emergence of the development agenda at the UN and the rise of a growing number of entities, especially funds and programs, that were seen as ways to coordinate specialized agencies and other entities that enjoyed legal autonomy through common programing and financing. The proliferation of UN entities had led to scattered and unconnected efforts at the country level, being identified as a source not only of UN system ineffectiveness but also of the overall international aid endeavors (Pearson Commission 1969). However, countries' recipients of aid saw the UN system decentralization as an institutional feature that promoted the diversification of their cooperation partners and advocated for better adaptation of UN local activities to their needs, which they argued could be accomplished by headquarters granting more autonomy to UN country teams (Jackson 1969).

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) had been established in 1958 to advance the UN system's technical cooperation through joint programing. In 1969, amid aid donors awareness of aid effectiveness and recipients demands for national ownership over aid flows, the UNDP ordered a study by Sir Robert Jackson on how it could fulfill its mandate to coordinate UN system operational activities for development that take place mostly at the local level.

The Jackson *Capacity Study of United Nations Development System* was a benchmark in the debate between centralists and decentralists, defending the former approach but with nuances. While it recommended a horizontal centralization at headquarters and with UN country teams, it also advocated for a maximum vertical decentralization, this

4. However, this article's intent is not to unravel every debate and negotiation behind each report and reform proposal but rather to focus on negotiations behind the DaO emergence, referring to previous debates among centralists and decentralist briefly as a manner of historically contextualizing the latter.

being the basic philosophy behind the report, as put by one of its drafters, Margaret Joan Anstee (Weiss 2013, p. 107).

Horizontal centralization was to be pursued both at the systemic and the local levels. At the systemic level, Anstee states that centralization would stem from the UNDP mandate as the sole funder of UN system and cooperation with host countries, giving UNDP leverage to bring the agencies together through an integrating approach that would leave behind the pattern of separate and unrelated projects sponsored by each specialized agency. At the local level, the capacity study defended an undivided UN system presence, which would be consolidated by a unified local programming and leadership, the latter two both being implemented as a UNDP new system of country programs and of UNDP resident coordinators (GA/Res-32/197).<sup>5</sup> As previously mentioned, developing countries were not fond of the horizontal centralization, since they saw UN entities' multiplicity as broadening cooperation options.

The vertical decentralization is based on the idea that development is locally driven and, therefore, the UN system's activities should be largely determined at the country level, where the UN would act in response to local demands. This implied a bottom-up approach, based on the alignment of a UN system country program and each country's planning for development. The report underlined that UN operational activities should not be based on a pre-determined formula, highlighting the importance of respecting local specificities in the concept that "no size fits all" (Jackson 1969). This vertical decentralization meets aid recipients' demands for national ownership over international cooperation and for more autonomy for UNCTs.

In 1977, building on a point of convergence between member-states' donors and recipients of aid, the UNGA Resolution 32/197 created the resident coordinator (RC) system and established the UNDP system of country programs as reference to all UN organizations.<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 34 states:

On behalf of the [whole] United Nations system, over-all responsibility for, an coordination 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 assignments, in consultation with and with the consent of Government concerned, who should exercise team leadership and be responsible for evolving at the country level a multidisciplinary dimension in sectoral development assistance programmes.

In practice, the RC function was taken by the UNDP resident representatives, while the country program was often criticized by member-states' recipients of aid as being set without taking their priorities into consideration. UNDP exerted coordination over UN system operational activities by running 75 percent of all technical assistance funds—90 percent of which was regular voluntary contributions, while specialized agencies remained in charge of implementation (Jenks 2014, p. 1814).<sup>7</sup> However, also in 1970s, the UNDP passed to be an implementer, undermining its role as coordinator and the RC leadership legitimacy. Despite advances stemming from the creation of entities in response to Global South countries demands, such as the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) established in 1964, many of the recipients had not yet developed their full capacity to build up national development plans, maintaining international actors' uneven power of influence over development cooperation priorities.

As a result, many recommendations from the report and of the resolution were not implemented due to a combination of member states lack of consistency (Weinlich 2011; Jenks and

5. [www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=a/res/32/197](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=a/res/32/197).

6. This resolution endorses the conclusions and recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System.

7. Recipient agencies were concentrated in six UN specialized agencies: WHO, ILO, UNESCO, UNIDO, and the UN itself (main organs, funds, and programs), which together accounted for more than half of the UN system cooperation implementation expenditures (Jenks 2014, p. 1814).

Jones 2013) and the UN's bureaucracy resistance (Weiss 2013). Member states kept offering resources to projects and entities individually, and practitioners' recalcitrant position over the new approach even came from within UNDP higher ranks. Notwithstanding, the idea that UN activities "success would be largely determined at the country level" and, therefore, there should be only *one strategy* (Jackson 1969, p. 162), echoed throughout the decades.

The third phase coincides with the end of the Cold War and globalization, being a turning point to UN operational activities. Specialized agencies and the UNDP lost, respectively, their quasi-monopoly over UN operational activities implementation and funding allocation and supervision, in parallel with the growing share of non-core earmarked contributions for funding UN activities (UN 2005; UN 2011; Weinlich 2011; Jenks and Jones 2013). Accordingly, agencies advanced their own funding strategies, leading to the competition for resources among them. By the late 1980s, developing countries had advanced national capacities that enabled them to implement multilateral cooperation, accounting for more than half of the programs delivered (Jenks 2014, p. 1815).<sup>8</sup> The result was that UN operational activities "*became a myriad of numerous, often small scale, interventions responsive to a multitude of governments priorities expressed across a wide range of ministries*" (Jenks and Jones 2013, p. 25).

In 1989, trying to cope with the lack of cohesion among the UN system, which resulted from the piecemeal approach and the absence of a system-wide source of finance, the UNGA created the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR) to offer guidance and to improve UN operational activities coherence (A/RES/44/211).<sup>9</sup> The TCPR mandate was to review UN system policies and mechanisms that enabled its operational activities to play their assigned role, assessing how the system was positioned at the country level. In doing so, the TCPR should also identify changes that might be needed to make the UN a more cohesive and effective development partner (OESC 2016). However, shortly after its creation, the TCPR had already been discredited, as stated in the 1992 TCPR resolution, which recognized that "the full and coordinated implementation of the resolution 44/211 has not been achieved by the United Nations System" (A/RES/47/199).<sup>10</sup>

In 1997, when Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged reform in his report "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme of Reform" (A/51/950, para. 73), the influence of Jackson's study was clear. At the local level, UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) created a physical document and supporting results framework signed by both the member state government and the UN system entities accredited in a given country. This was to ensure individual *country programs* that UN system funds and programs are harmonized by common objectives and timeframes, inciting goal-oriented collaboration, programmatic coherence, and mutual reinforcement (A/51/950, p. 50, 160–61).

In parallel, the Common Country Assessment (CCA) was created to serve as common instrument for the entire UN system to locally monitor each country's development status, attempting to apply internationally agreed upon development-related norms and goals at UN decision-making forums, as well as conferences, conventions, and summits. The CCA would be a reference to the UNDAF planning and to the UN operation activities evaluations. The reform agenda also turned the former resident coordinator of the UNDP into a local leader for all UN operational activities by establishing a UN resident coordinator system, along with a firewall that should separate it from the UNDP resident representative. This article will show this firewall's lack of implementation was still a problem on the latest reform debates.

The ideas behind the UNDAF are the *country program*, *one strategy*, and *no size fits all* presented in Jackson's report three decades earlier. The intent of the UNDAF is to bridge host

8. Jenks states that in the mid-1980s UN agencies' answer to 58 percent of total program delivery financed by UNDP and national execution accounted for only 6 percent, by the mid-1990s, the situation was reversed and national execution corresponded to 58 percent and agencies only 15 percent of UNDP total expenditures (Jenks 2014, p. 1815).

9. [www.un.org/documents/ga/res/44/a44r211.htm](http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/44/a44r211.htm).

10. [www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r199.htm](http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r199.htm).

countries and the UN, while bringing together the UN's scattered institutional presence and attending to national priorities. This approach implied that coherence at the local level was vital to the overall functioning of the UN operational framework, while emphasizing the need to adapt to local specificities in order to operate effectively. Therefore, the local institutional instruments introduced by Annan's reform agenda are consistent with the horizontal centralization combined with the vertical decentralization.

At the systemic level, the 1997 reform agenda also pursued horizontal centralization, creating the UN Development Group (UNDG) to coordinate UN funds, programs, specialized agencies, departments, and offices that play a role in development and, therefore, make up the UN Development System (UNDS).<sup>11</sup> The UNDG was created by the secretary-general after stillborn proposals to merge some of the UN entities that played a role in its operational activities, such as the suggestion to merge UNICEF, the World Food Program (WFP), and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to the UNDP.<sup>12</sup>

Merging entities has been taboo throughout UN system reform negotiations, since entities wish to avoid losing autonomy and negotiators are afraid some successful organizations would be undermined in the merging process. An exception to this was UN Women—UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which merged funds and programs on the subject in 2010, following the 2005 World Summit reform agenda.

Following the 1997 reform agenda in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, other attempts emerged to further UN coherence and effectiveness at the systemic level, such as the revitalization of the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR) and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), which was renamed the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) in 2001.<sup>13</sup>

In 2008, the UNGA's resolution 67/226 created the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, which took the TCPR mandate and recognized it was mostly a sum of the UN system's many parts' reports and plans. This, rather than actually being a review of their activities, would serve as a basis to set strategic priorities through joint decision-making at the UNGA and by each UN system agency's own strategic plans.

In the late 2000s, the CEB was structured into three pillars: the High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP), which promotes system-wide cooperation, coordination, and knowledge-sharing in program and operational areas; the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM), with a mandate to identify and analyze administrative management reforms toward improving efficiency and simplifying business practices; and the UNDG, which is responsible for coordinating UN operational activities at the country level.<sup>14</sup>

In July 2005, the CEB report "One United Nations: Catalyst for Progress and Change—How the Millennium Declaration is Changing the Way the United Nations System Works" credited UN organizations' joint work the way to achieve the Millennium Declaration's goals. The report put forward the term "One UN" to refer to the idea that a harmonized system demanded policy and practice changes. The report also took the Jackson's capacity study recommendations and proposed a unified country-level UN presence and influenced the debate for the need of UN institutional change that took place at the 2005 World Summit and at the following sessions at the UNGA.

This report also crystalized the concept of *One UN* as referring to reform efforts directed to further UN system entities' interagency coordination and coherence, whose proposals range from full integration to loose, but nevertheless effective, interconnections. This presented a

11. Annan's reform agenda has its own negotiations and decision-making dynamics, which is beyond this work's scope, being presented here merely descriptively.

12. The UN Population Fund acronym corresponds to the former entity titled UN Fund for Population Activities.

13. The CEB currently comprises twenty-nine executive heads of the UN funds, programs, and specialized agencies, from which the inclusion of the Bretton Woods Institutions (the World Bank and the IMF), and related organizations—the WTO and the IAEA—enhanced its legitimacy in consequence of its wider composition.

14. For further information, access [www.unsceb.org](http://www.unsceb.org).

consensus among UN system representatives in favor of a less fragmented UN system, contrasting with previous reforms cycles, when, as seen above, specialized agencies' heads and the UNDP openly resisted change.<sup>15</sup>

*The High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence and DaO as a Feasible Alternative of Reform in the Face of Negotiations Deadlock*

The 2005 World Summit triggered a more systematic debate on how to promote a more effective, efficient, and relevant UN, relating its performance with the need for better coordination between its many specialized agencies, programs, and funds.<sup>16</sup> Section V of the summit's final document—"Strengthening the United Nations"—calls for UN reform. It stressed that "United Nations bodies should develop good cooperation and coordination in the common endeavor of building a more effective United Nations (art. 147)" and outlined six areas where changes were needed: the UNGA, the Security Council, the ECOSOC, the creation of the Human Rights Council, the secretariat and management reform, and system-wide coherence.

The *system-wide coherence* topic was a formal recognition of the need to change the UN system in order to address its fragmentation and lack of cohesion. Member states admitted the need to overcome issues that hinder the effective delivery of its operational activities, such as competition for funds, duplication, overlapping, and multiple institutional cultures. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, invited by the UNGA to suggest initiatives to advance the subject, appointed a High-Level Panel on United Nations System-Wide Coherence to Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and Environment (HLPWSC).<sup>17</sup>

The HLPWSC report "Delivering as One UN"<sup>18</sup> recommended UN changes that implied a more centralized approach to its activities—ranging from the wide review of UN entities' mandates to a unified UN presence at the local level. The HLPWSC report suffered resistance immediately, since the degree of centralization desired by member states varied, mainly putting countries from the global south in conflict with those from the north, with the former overall position to resist changes.<sup>19</sup>

The report's recommendations consisted, at the systemic level, of reviewing all UN entities' mandates and consolidating them under the three pillars of development, humanitarian assistance, and environment, while, at the local level, it suggested that the UN local team and activities should be concentrated under a unified country presence, based on joint leadership, programing, financing, and communication. Altogether, this implied a centralized approach in order to improve UN performance and suffered resistance immediately due to member-states' positions on the matter.

In order to tackle the lack of efficiency and accountability of the UN system, donor countries from the north argued in favor of structural changes, such as entities' consolidation on fewer changes, while recipient countries from the south resisted the north's arguments, afraid that changes were an excuse to cut funds to UN operational activities. The north's position aligned with its broader agenda of aid effectiveness, pointing to the UN system's lack of accountability as a problem in maintaining constituencies' support for their governments funding of the UN. Accordingly, these countries said this made them prioritize earmarked contributions, which has surpassed UN system regular budgets in the last few decades, saying this would not change unless UN reform advanced and argued in favor of centralizing UN

15. The politics behind this report are beyond this article's objectives, but its publication already points to a more favorable approach for some degree of centralization than practitioners had in previous reform cycles.

16. Full report available at [www.un.org/womenwatch/ods/A-RES-60-1-E.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ods/A-RES-60-1-E.pdf).

17. For a better understanding of high-level panels and other commissions' roles in international decision-making, see Gareth Evans's article "Commission Diplomacy" in *Oxford Handbook on Modern Diplomacy*, edited by Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine and Ramesh Takur. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013.

18. Full report available at [www.un.org/en/ga/deliveringasone/pdf/mainreport.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ga/deliveringasone/pdf/mainreport.pdf).

19. To grasp the politics behind this development report, see J. Von Freiesleben's chapter "System-Wide Coherence," in *Managing Change at the United Nation*. New York: Center for UN reform Education.



activities. Even before the report was out, Canada and thirteen European countries organized themselves under the Group of 13, having their ranks strengthened by other donors when the report was released (Freiesleben 2008, p. 42–43).<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, representatives from underdeveloped and developing countries organized behind the lines of the Group of 77 coalition (G-77), through which they usually held a collective position and acted together in development-related themes at UNGA. This was against the establishment of further accountability and standards related to UN entities, being afraid it could set the same kind of conditions of World Bank aid. The G-77 argued that favoring earmarked contributions was actually related to donors trying to impose their preferences on recipients and that there should be room for variety, as diverse structures in the UN system are in their best interest, offering a wider margin of choice and multiple cooperation partners (UN 2005b, para. 25).

This north and south divide led to a deadlock over the report's recommendations; the opportunity for change emerging from divergences among the G-77 members. The G-77 medium-sized and smaller countries continuously emphasized their lesser capacity to better interact with the UN and ended up advocating for a more centralized and rationalized UN system (Swart 2010). These countries frequently complained about the draining procedures to deal with multiple UN entities and about their lack of resources to make themselves present at all UN and G-77 meetings in order to contribute significantly to both stages of internal discussions (Lund 2010).

The resistance from the overall G-77 is related to its larger members' agendas, as they see UN reform debate as part of their wider political interest, such as international trade and the official development aid negotiations (Weinlich 2011; Jenks and Jones 2013).<sup>21</sup> Few countries of the G-77 drive these debates at the UN, especially Brazil, India, and a handful of other countries that have the most interest in these issues (Swart 2010). Therefore, it is hardly possible that discussing operational reforms at this context will advance the best interest of those who compose the G-77 lower hierarchy and lack capacity to make the best of its presence at headquarters.

In order to advance the reform efforts regardless of the lack of consensus between member states, the secretary-general announced eight countries—Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay, and Vietnam—that volunteered to pilot the report recommendations on changes needed locally until 2012. The panel recommendations implied structuring UN activities under four "ones," which together constitute the DaO initiative: One Programme, One Leader, One Budgetary Framework, and One Office. Since 2007, UN operations in these countries have been an experiment to foster cooperation between UN system actors, especially among the members of the UN Development System.

The debate deadlock did not impede the creation and the progress of the DaO, which built on the engagement of volunteered pilots to implement changes at the country level and on other stakeholders' support, such as donors and UN representatives that attended annual meetings where the initiative was debated.

### **The "Delivering as One" UN Initiative: Aligning the UN System at the Local Level**

The DaO initiative resembles the capacity study, in that it relies on the idea of horizontal centralization as well as vertical decentralization down to the field level, the main difference being that horizontal centralization is limited to the local level at the DaO initiative, not comprising, necessarily, system-level centralization. Although the DaO's reach has limitations compared to the capacity study's proposal, it presents a more refined version of the alignment of the UN system's local presence, building on institutional instruments' advances that took place between them and adapting as well as innovation in accordance with the contemporary context, such as the current UN funding pattern.

20. G-13 members were Canada, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and UK.

21. It is worth noting that G-13 members UK, Norway, Denmark, and Luxemburg met the 0.7 percent benchmark by 2013.

DaO-integrated institutional developments of Annan's reform agenda inspired by the capacity study intends to further horizontal centralization locally—as the UNDAF and the RC system—also recovering the 1969 report's idea of centralized funding as a centripetal force. Nevertheless, the concept of centralized funding was adapted from a previous version in which only one agency would be in charge of all UN operational activities' funding at the systemic level—the UNDP—to a local Common Budgetary Framework align with the common programming of the UN country team, which will be further explored below.

The DaO initiative is based on the structure of UN system field presence into four pillars that entails horizontal centralization along with vertical decentralization. Therefore, it does not prescribe a fixed formula, accommodating UN activities to the local demands and echoing and advocating for the capacity study's idea of *no size fits all*. This means aligning UN activities' programming with local specificities.

The One Programme pillar is based on a document signed by the local government and the UN entities accredited in a given country; it establishes the UN action plan in accordance with the national development framework and internationally agreed development goals (A/61/583). The document is often designated as One Plan, but some countries, such as Mozambique, have kept the UNDAF title, since both represent unified local planning for the participating UN system entities and are often used interchangeably to characterize such an instrument with countries that adopt the DaO.<sup>22</sup>

Since its creation by the 1997 reform agenda, the UNDAF has received criticism for being merely the simple sum of UN system entities' individual plans to act locally. The intent of the One Programme pillar was to tackle this by encouraging common planning that should stem from a collective endeavor among UN entities. A preliminary analysis of these plans in the pilot countries suggests this collective collaboration proved difficult for the generation of One Plans that created at the initiative's inception. More recently, these plans tend to point out how they were conceived by the collective participation of the plan's signatories from UN system and present the process through which the plan was negotiated, as observed in Vietnam One Plan 2012–2016 (Vietnam 2011, p. 24).<sup>23</sup>

The One Programme pillar intends to integrate UN local activities to the national development framework and is the starting point to give life to the concept of *no size fits all*, since the plan should align in content and cycle with local development planning. Albeit the 1969 capacity study proposed a Country Program to align with a local National Development Plan, back then both “Development” and, in consequence, a “National Development Plan” had completely different meanings from today, since they were related to an evolutionary idea based on the degree of an economy industrialization. It is also necessary to underscore that, in 1969, many recently independent and underdeveloped countries lacked the capacity to conceive such a plan. Since the 1990s, the development agenda concerns mainly human development and, more recently, poverty eradication, the UN local activities being less concerned with economic growth and more with filling national institutional gaps with technical assistance focused on human development.

The One Leader pillar was conceived to empower the resident coordinator in an attempt to delegate to him or her the authority to negotiate the One Programme on behalf of the entire UN system and hold the whole local team accountable (A/61/583). The resident coordinator should also be provided with adequate staff and other means necessary to effectively manage the UN country team, such as pooled and central funding mechanisms. The resident coordinator should be selected from the best within and outside the UN, diversifying the pattern since its creation in 1997 by selecting staffers accruing mostly from the UNDP ranks.<sup>24</sup>

22. The use of these plans as institutional instruments by the UN may vary, this is better observed by comparing them, which is beyond the scope of this analysis.

23. This shows the limitation of the Independent Evaluation on DaO finalized in 2012, since it is based on data from an incipient endeavor, whose implementation and impact is yet to be fully analyzed.

24. Some representatives of the Food Agriculture Organization are selected outside its staff, which could give some feedback over the advantages and drawbacks of adopting the same practice for select resident coordinators.

The One Office pillar goal was to achieve administrative and management improvements through an integrated results-based system and services support (A/61/583). This would reduce transaction costs by harmonizing business practices. A common infrastructure, when possible, is also suggested by this pillar, since close contacts among the local staff and shared facilities are seen as means that would not only facilitate the harmonization of business practices and the accountability across entities but would also decrease transactions costs.<sup>25</sup> This points out how the DaO incorporates items that were treated separately at the 2005 World Summit, since the One Office pillar, currently denominated Operating as One, encompasses administrative reforms contained on the secretariat and management reform topic of that summit final document.

The One Budgetary Framework pillar was to denote transparency to the local activities' budgets, shedding light on expenses and transaction costs of all UN system entities in the country (A/61/583). The budgetary framework should also connect the funding demands and availability to the One Programme elaboration and implementation. A common budgetary framework is the financial structure for UN development-related operational activities at the country level, including both development and humanitarian-related activities. The common budgetary framework is based on the agreed costs of the UNDAF or the One Programme pillar and was developed for planning, managing, and identifying funding requirements and gaps along a specific country program timeframe (A/71/63-E/2016/8).

The One Budgetary Framework also encompassed the One UN Funds, which were funds established with the same rationality of the Capacity Study suggestion that centralizing the provision of resources would exert pressure in favor of more coordination and coherence at the country level (A/61/583). The One UN Funds would be under the management of the resident coordinator that would also serve as way to leverage this leadership position. The One UN Funds complemented local activities' funding by providing the local team with a centralized source of resources to be divided by them, with the intent to bring them together, serving as carrots to drive the coordination and cohesion among UN system many parts (Weiss 2013, p. 110).

The One UN Fund is part of an innovative financing instrument type, the Multi-Partner Trust Funds (MPTFs). MPTFs were created to permit donors (that are not allowed to contribute to UN operational activities' core resources) to contribute to endeavors with a system-wide scope, not committing to individual organizations' budgets and relying on the UN system's internal allocation mechanism to align with local priorities (Clemarec and Jenks 2016). This type of fund was created in 2004 with the UN Iraq Multi Donor Trust Fund and was put in to place so member states could provide resources by more flexible earmarked contributions. It presents an unprecedented degree of flexibility that enables resources to be strategically and effectively allocated by the judgment of the UN local teams, in contrast with the rigidity of most earmarked contributions (Clemarec and Jenks 2016).

This innovative financial instrument allowed multiple countries to aggregate their contributions in a centralized structure to finance policies and countries in need with pooled funds open to the UN system. However, the One UN Funds have a complementary character, covering mainly underfunded points of the One Programme. This made some affirm that they might have only a residual role since it is a limited source of resources used side by side with core and other earmarked contributions (Clemarec and Jenks 2016), but further empirical evidence is needed, since their role is related to the share of total UN local expenses and the type of activities they cover.<sup>26</sup>

25. Albeit DaO Independent Evaluation points to a raise in costs with some pilots, it is not clear if this is compensated by efficiency savings that might follow it.

26. There is also the idea of Communicating as One, which is especially relevant for advocacy by UNCT, however, due to the limited scope of this article, this idea will be discussed in another opportunity.

## *The Pilot Phase (2006–12)*

### PILOT COUNTRIES

The countries that volunteered to pilot the DaO are small and medium-sized states' recipients of foreign aid, which present a diverse social-economic, political, and geographic reality. They range from the low-income countries Mozambique, Rwanda, and Tanzania, passing through the low middle-income Cape Verde and Vietnam, and the upper middle-income Albania and Pakistan, to the high-income Uruguay.<sup>27</sup> These include countries with huge populations like Pakistan and Vietnam to the very tiny populations of Cape Verde and Uruguay. Many of these countries have come a long way along the last two decades, reaching political stabilization and positive socio-economic indicators. This made some of them reach most of the MDGs, like Rwanda and Vietnam, while others, like Pakistan, face significant economic, governance, and security challenges preventing the achievement of durable development outcomes, not reaching many MDGs by 2015.

Nevertheless, in the last decade, poverty reduction is a remarkable accomplishment of all DaO pilot countries. While some reached significant reductions of people living in extreme poverty—in Vietnam the rate fell from over 50 percent in the early 1990s to 3 percent today—others still have a considerable part of their population below the poverty line, such as Mozambique at a 40 percent rate, despite its recent rapid economic growth (World Bank 2016). This diversity of the DaO pilot countries illustrates the demands they have for UN local involvement, while some still need action to further reduce poverty, others, due to their new economic status, have emerging demands, such as policies to deal with the rise of economic inequality among the national population. Altogether, the socio-economic diversity of countries that volunteered to pilot the DaO underlines the importance of the UN to adapt its activities to local specifics, as proposed by the no size fits all principle.

Accordingly, the initiative is not based on a unique formal recipe for all pilot countries to follow, having at their disposal a menu of approaches that could be used and brought together in many ways. This principle does not undermine the DaO's pillars—the four “ones”—since they improve the perception of local specificities by gathering information and organizing them by common programing, summing up the UN entities' capacities to allocate its resources more effectively.

In this regard, the different but equally successful approaches adopted under the pillar One Programme by the DaO's pilots Vietnam and Mozambique are illustrative. The Vietnam country team has developed the concept of program coordination groups, bringing together the diverse expertise from UN entities and providing them a forum for policy dialogue. This had significant outcomes, such as Vietnam's new law on administrative detention in 2012, which led to the shutdown of “rehabilitation centers” for sex workers and gave drug-users, still detained in such centers, the right to due legal process. Furthermore, these centers violated the detainees human rights by not providing access to basic health care, such as HIV-AIDS prevention and treatment, with centers presenting an elevated prevalence and death rate of people living with HIV. The new law was the result of a collective advocacy effort made by UNDOCO, WHO, UNAIDS, UNICEF, and UNDP that worked collectively, along with the local government, to advance changes needed to meet international human rights standards.<sup>28</sup>

In Mozambique, the UN country team had moved beyond joint programing to the concept of policy cluster, which led to policy coherence across its many entities, also leading to tangible advances in areas such as social protection and maternal and child health (Jenks and

27. Uruguay's engagement in the DaO initiative can be related to its overall profile of commitment with UN activities, shown, for example, by its involvement in UN peacekeeping operations, to which other DaO pilots are also significant troop contributors.

28. The advocacy coordination was led by the acting Resident Coordinator Eamon Murphy, UNAIDS local representative, along with Nicholas Booth, UNDP's legal policy advisor, as well as WHO's HIV-AIDS office staff, David Jacka and Fabio Mesquita, and many others that limited space does not permit me to cite.

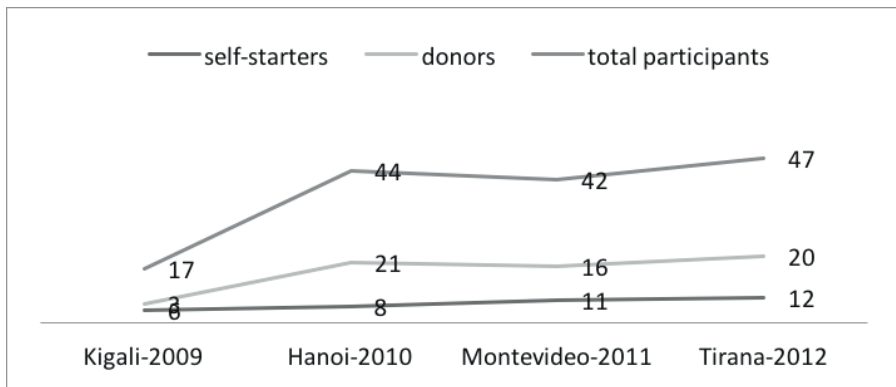
Jones 2013, p. 105; Bujones 2013, p. 5). The pilot countries and their development partners had the chance to share and discuss these approaches at the annual meetings on the DaO held annually during its pilot phase.

### *The High-Level Intergovernmental Conferences on DaO*

In order to share experiences and assess the initiative, a series of high-level intergovernmental conferences on Delivering as One were held between 2009 and 2012 with the presence of representatives of the UN system, major donor countries, pilots, and so-called self-starters—non-pilots that progressively adopted the approach. These conferences took place around the globe—Rwanda (2009), Vietnam (2010), Uruguay (2011), and Albania (2012)—and were hosted by the pilot countries, who invited countries from their region to attend and become familiar with the initiative. The final declarations presented an overall positive impression, successively reaffirming the need for proper funding and engagement from donors along with the need for the adoption of norms and procedures by the UN to align with the initiative, both at headquarters and at the local levels.

The number of state actors at these meetings grew consistently, more than doubling from the Kigali conference to Tirana. The rising presence of major foreign aid donors stands out, passing from only three at the first conference to twenty at the last one (see Figure 1 and Appendix for a full list).<sup>29</sup> In the same period, the number of self-starters that passed to adopt the DaO doubled, especially among recipients of foreign aid, many of them—forty-seven of fifty-two by November 2015—being members of the G-77 coalition, which originally resisted this reform topic at the UNGA's negotiations, as seen in the previous section.

**Figure 1. Conferences on Delivering as One Attendance<sup>30</sup>**



The Tirana final declaration (para. 8 and 16) called on the UN secretary-general to mandate the UNDG chair to lead the formulation of Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) for UN country teams that would enable the full DaO implementation. The definition of SOPs should have been ready in time for the 2012 negotiations of the QCPR, which has bidding authority over twenty-three UN entities of the thirty-two working in operational activities; the remaining are primarily the specialized agencies. Nonetheless, it was actually the 2012 QCPR that demanded UNDG to define the DaO SOPs that were published in September 2014. This put to rest the issues presented by the pilots that had been a pivotal challenge to the implementation of the DaO initiative.

29. In 2009, only Norway, Spain, and the UK were present, while, in 2012, the U.S. attended alongside other major donors.

30. Elaborated by the author, based on these conferences' final declarations. The item *total participants* include the eight pilots and those countries invited to learn about the initiative. A total of seven attended each conference (see Appendix for a full list). It was not possible to establish the number of UN system representatives present, since all conferences' final documents cite some specific higher profile presences, such as the deputy secretary-general and the UNDG chair, but refer generically to "other UN system Senior" presences.

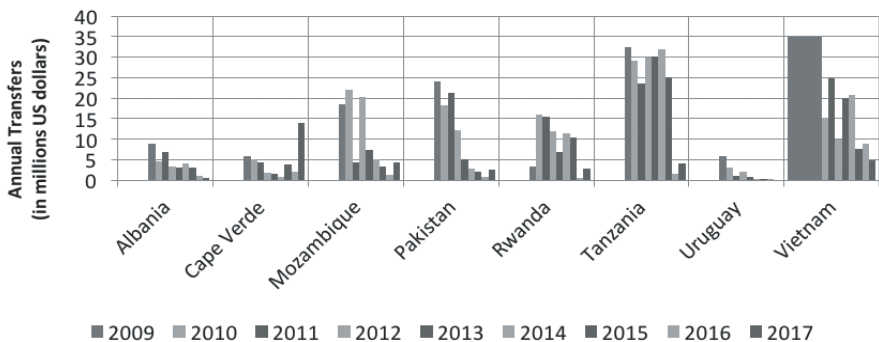
These conference documents also point out how the funding trends of UN activities challenge their coherence, defying DaO implementation. Pilots constantly ask donors for predictable and un-earmarked resources, arguing that fragmented funding would only lead to fragmented programing.<sup>31</sup> They also highlight the need for greater funding flows and ask that they not be at the expense of core funding from agencies through headquarters, advocating for balanced improvements between core and non-core funding.

At the conferences, pilots pointed out that the One UN Fund was partially successful, since it increased funding predictability for the UN’s entities and national governments but only for short-terms due to their annual assignment.<sup>32</sup> However, the One UN Fund importance was recognized as an effective trigger for change, since its softly earmarked nature—directed to a country but not to a specific project—permits programmatic flexibility at the local level and allows recipients to have greater decision-making power over its allocation.

Resources committed to the One UN Fund have experienced a steady increase during the initiative pilot phase, with Tanzania’s fund around \$30 million annually, from 2009 to 2014 and the impressive numbers of Vietnam’s fund, which was \$175 million in 2007 (see Figure 2). In spite of these funds currently fading, previous flows might show donors’ engagement and may have served as incentives for countries to adopt DaO.

Nonetheless, the One UN Fund corresponds to different shares of the UN system’s expenditures for the DaO pilots. In 2011, the One UN Fund accounted for significant shares in some DaO pilots. For example, 30% in Albania, 25% in Vietnam, 22% in Cape Verde, 20% in Rwanda and Tanzania, and 14% in Mozambique, while in other pilots this share was less noteworthy, such as 4% in Uruguay and 4.7% in Pakistan (UN 2012). This means that five out of the eight pilots have reached the threshold of 20%, recently set by the UN Department on Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) as the minimum share of common resources necessary to advance the UN local team coordination.

**Figure 2. One UN Fund Disbursement in DaO Pilot Countries**



Elaborated by the author based on UNDG multi-partner trust fund office data.<sup>33</sup>

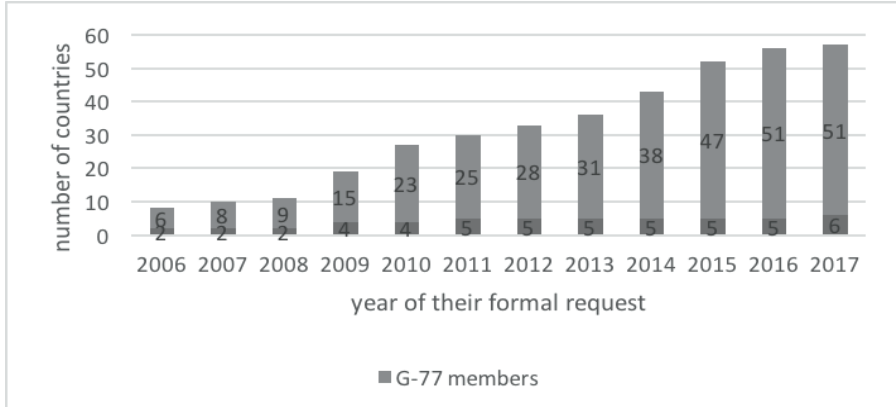
31. See, for example, Montevideo Final Declaration paragraph 23.

32. See, for example, paragraph 25 of the Hanoi conference outcome document.

33. Vietnam inflows in 2009 were \$170 million, shown by the width of the column graphic. The data used is from Albania One UN Coherence Fund and MDG Achievement Fund; Cape Verde Transition Fund; Tanzania One UN Fund and SDG Fund; Mozambique One UN Fund and MDG Achievement Fund; Pakistan One Fund and Joint Programme FATA; Rwanda One UN Fund and MDG Achievement Fund; Vietnam One UN Fund and MDG Achievement Fund. Joint Programmes and the MDG Achievement were taken into consideration due to their allocation and objective similarity with the One UN Fund.

The number of countries adopting the initiative have grown steadily (see Figure 3), although not at the pace suggested by the High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence, which set as benchmarks twenty by 2009, forty by 2010, and all others by 2012. The majority of the participation coming from the G-77—often resistant to change at the UNGA—that could be seen as a more favorable context for changes today than following the 2005 World Summit.

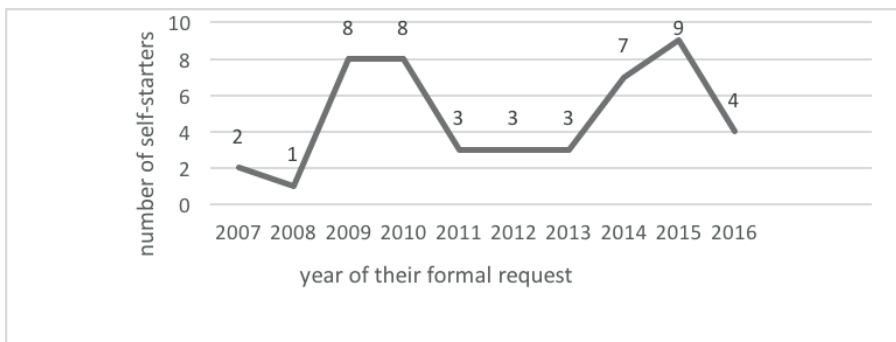
**Figure 3. UN Member States Adopting DaO**



Source: Elaborated by the author based on UNDG list of countries adopting DaO.

A more accurate analysis of the self-starters’ participation, those that were not pilots, indicates that, participation accelerates when UNGA makes positive decisions over DaO. This is the case when, in 2008, UNGA took note of the High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence report, deciding to advance recommendations *exclusively* regarding changes at the country level. This is also the case following the launch of the DaO’s Standard Operational Procedures (see Figure 4). Altogether, this seems to point toward a correlation between institutional progress resulting from the intergovernmental decision making at headquarters with the DaO diffusion on the ground.

**Figure 4. Adoption by Self-Starter**



Source: Elaborated by the author based on the UNDG list of countries adopting DaO.

*The Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Reviews and the Dialogue over the Long-Term Positioning of the UN Development System (2012–16)*

By 2012, the system-wide coherence reform topic—established at the 2005 World Summit—was discontinued, while the DaO initiative survived and passed to the QCPR mandate. Accordingly, in 2012, Ban Ki-Moon’s “Secretary-General’s Five-Year Action Agenda” launched the “Delivering as One Second Generation,” furthering the initiative beyond the pilot phase. Along with the SG’s agenda, the 2012 QCPR indicated the member states’ interest in consolidating the DaO initiative through the harmonization of operational procedures and the clear definition of each of its “one” pillars (RES67/226), a request made by the pilot countries at their last annual conference. These set off a new DaO phase, since it passed, to be considered by a periodic institutional instrument—the QCPR—prompting the launch of the Standard Operational Procedures for Countries Adopting the “Delivering as One” Approach by UNDG in August 2014.

The 2012–16 QCPR recommends the diffusion of pillars by furthering the resident coordinator and the UNDAF systems as well as the elaboration and adoption of a common budgetary framework by all UN country teams. Improved RC and UNDAF systems have become a part of the institutional structure of every country where the UN performs operational activities, although their monitoring is still a challenge, as the debates over the 2016 QCPR have shown.

The annual surveys carried out with RCs since 2013 indicate some of the shortfalls and advances on each pillar. At the survey conducted in 2015, only 34% of the overall countries where the UN system is engaged in operational activities had adopted a common budgetary framework, compared to 25 % of the 2013 survey, while 63% of countries adopting Delivering as One have a common budgetary framework (DESA 2015).<sup>34</sup>

In 2014, connections between MDGs’ silos and the fragmentation of UNDS activities were suggested, leading to a growing awareness of the need for a more integrated approach for the post-2015 development agenda. Therefore, the horizontal character of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that succeeded the MDGs has given momentum to the debate over UN institutional fragmentation, giving rise to the “Dialogue over the Long-Term Positioning of the United Nations Development System” at the ECOSOC, which was intended to serve as a basis for the 2016 QCPR.

This dialogue was mandated to ECOSOC as a route to an intergovernmental debate over the institutional structure behind the UN’s operational activities. The dialogue lasted eighteen months and was divided into two phases, one focused on sharing information with member states to incite well-informed negotiations and decisions, and the other focused on elaborating and presenting concrete proposals to strengthen the UNDS. The first phase took place between December 2014 and June 2015, while the second phase began in December 2015 and was completed by July 2016.

The dialogue focused on the interdependence between the UNDS’s organizational structure, function, governance structures, funding, capacity, and partnerships (ECOSOC 2016). This broad scope encompassed the many institutional instruments put into place over the last decade to tackle the UN’s fragmented framework—from those at the systemic level (UNDG and CEB) to those at the local level (UNDAF, RC system, and DaO)—giving these reform efforts attention and familiarizing member-states’ negotiators with them.

The influence of non-state actors along this process was clear, with reports by the secretariat and recommendations of a special independent team of advisors setting the tone of debates. This set a context for the QCPR to fulfill its mandate to review the UN’s activities and advance changes, being interested to observe its reinforcement of previous reform instruments by assessing their implementation status and keeping their momentum. In this respect, the RC’s mandate as leader of the entire UNCT has been reaffirmed, as noted by the strong language to detach it from the UNDP’s resident representative (A/RES/67/226, para. 139; A/

34. The fact that not all countries adopting the DaO have a common budget is due to the fact that many have adopted it recently or the adoption was not, for different reasons, fully implemented.



RES/71/243, para. 57c). However, the RC decisions must rely on a collegiate consultation process within the UNCT, a recommendation that came from the independent group of advisors (A/RES/71/243, para. 53).

The dialogue debate informed member-states' negotiators about the UN's internal workings, clarifying terminologies, whose indiscriminate use has blurred reform topics, such as the UN's coherence, coordination, and collaboration. At the dialogue, coherence was clearly associated with the UN's normative mandate, while coordination and collaboration were defined as the means necessary to advance a cohesive institutional framework, which resembles Cox and Jacobson's dichotomy of forum and service functions of organizations (1973). Thus, the Agenda 2030 is the normative base for the UN's local activities, with the organizational adjustment being summarized by the slogan "fit for purpose." Since form should follow function, and the SDGs are transversal, the UN should be structured accordingly.

Yet, the 2016 QCPR is more evasive on harmonization of its organizational dimension—*encouraging* the "progressive implementation of standard operating procedures and business operating strategies" (para. 62). And not on its normative dimension, *requesting* the "Secretary-General, to carry out by June 2017 a system-wide outline of present functions, as defined in their strategic plans and similar planning documents (. . .) in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (. . .) identifying gaps and overlaps in coverage and providing recommendations for addressing them (para. 19)." And "*also requests* the heads of the entities of the United Nations development system, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, to develop and present by the end of 2017 (. . .) a system-wide strategic document translating those recommendations into concrete actions."

Subsequently, UN reform at the local level, which comprises the bulk of its operational activities, is limited to countries that volunteer to maximize the DaO or make use of the UNDG's standard operating procedures and business operations strategies. Despite this voluntary basis, the fact that forty-seven of the fifty-two countries that currently adopt the DaO are members of the G-77 coalition indicates that the political context has changed and more member states from the global south are willing to implement it.

However, if, on the one hand, the MDGs' silo approach was succeeded by the more integrated SDGs, on the other hand, the financing pattern of UNDS continues to be decentralized and increasingly relies on non-core earmarked contributions. Thus, while the normative dimension is based on goals that have a less fragmented perspective, the operational ones still depend on resources that supposedly intensify its institutional fragmentation.

Accordingly, demands for a more predictable financing pattern were at the center of the 2016–2020 QCPR, as more multi-year and softly earmarked contributions. This also emphasized the need for funds to be directed to priorities defined both at the systemic level, such as those set by UN system entities' strategic plans, as well as at the local level, such as those determined by UNDAFs. However, this depends on the appropriate elaboration of the aforementioned documents.

The 2016–2020 QCPR also criticized negotiations' failure to develop and operationalize the concept of "critical mass" of core resources (para. 29), which is defined as the minimum amount needed to keep UN system cohesion, falling short of the 2012 QCPR's request. It also urged more transparency of pooled funds, but its recommendations over funding sounded less incisive than those of the previous QCPR. This might be explained by the establishment of Addis Ababa Action Agenda in 2015 at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, part of Agenda 2030, the QCPR limiting itself to ratifying this agenda.

## Final Remarks

Throughout UN system's history, different factors served as drivers that furthered its fragmentation and led to different proposals to tackle its negative effects. The negative effects range from duplications provoked by overlapping mandates of entities that witnessed a haphazard growth along the emergence of the development agenda to the competition for funds

in an underfunded system with a decentralized financing structure. Nevertheless, most reform proposals found resistance, some surviving rounds of reform and eventually succeeding or advancing, as the Delivering as One initiative, from which the latest guidance for UNDAFs and the resident coordinators system builds on.

The centralization of the UN system at the country level was proposed since the 1969 capacity study, but its recommendations were implemented gradually, through rounds of reform negotiations that adapted as well as innovated previous propositions. These rounds include Annan's 1997 Reform Agenda and the system-wide coherence topic of the 2005 World Summit, when the DaO initiative was introduced to pilot the local horizontal centralization of the UN system, bypassing a deadlock between aid donors and recipients.

The DaO focus on local horizontal centralization of the UN system made it survive the discontinuation of the reform topic it was born in—system-wide coherence, which intended to advance institutional centralization at the systemic level and proved harder to accomplish. It is interesting to note that when members were asked: "What should be the main organizational priorities of the new secretary-general during the first six to nine months?" The top answer of seven was, "Review the mandate of all UN system entities." Instead, what would be great news would be if this response: "Reduce the number of entities of the UN system," was not one of the bottom two (FUNDS 2016). This shows the complexity for overcoming the stalemate over a less fragmented UN at the systemic level. Meanwhile, the answer: "Establish Delivering as One principles as standard for all program countries" (FUNDS 2016) took the less prestigious but more realistic, second place.

On the other hand, the DaO—currently under the QCPR mandate—advanced and even incorporated the content of some other reform topics established at the 2005 World Summit, as the administrative reform and the harmonization of business practices, which corresponded to the DaO's pillar One Office that was recently renamed Operating as One. This also reveals the initiative is not static and has been the object of adaptation itself. It transitioned from a proposal emerging close to an agenda of aid effectiveness and efficiency, polarized by developed and developing countries (the latter suspecting the initiative intended to cut costs and impose conditions), to an initiative that was voluntarily adopted by a significant portion of G-77 members in the hope to facilitate their relationship with the UN system or the lure of the promise of new funds, such as the One UN Fund.

It is noteworthy that recent developments—such as UNDAFs, the resident coordinator system guidelines, and their pioneer Standard Operational Procedures—stem from the DaO approach and previous reforms brought under its umbrella. This, along with the more horizontal nature of the SDGs, seems to be a promising future for the DaO, but the UN activities financing landscape remains a challenge to UN cohesion, as the analysis of both 2012 and 2016 QCPRs demonstrates. Further work is needed to examine the DaO content potential and limitations, since the implementation of and compliance with new institutional mechanisms put forward by reforms rounds are not the object of full attention. Therefore, instead of accumulating knowledge of previous experiences and building on constructive criticism, assessments of the UN country-level activities' reforms often do not explore its implementation and their lessons systematically.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1. Presence at DaO Conferences 2009–12**

Conferences	Donors	Self-Starters	Invited Countries
Kigali 2009	Norway, Spain and United Kingdom	Benin, Bhutan, Comores, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Malawi	No-information
Hanoi 2010	Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States	Bhutan, Comores, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Malawi, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Montenegro	Cambodia, Ethiopia, Jordan, Laos, Mali, Moldova, and Nepal
Montevideo 2011	Australia, Austria, Canada, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom	Bhutan, Botswana, Comoros, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, and Montenegro	Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay and Russia
Tirana 2012	Australia, Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America	Bhutan, Comoros, Ethiopia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Montenegro, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Laos	China, Egypt, Kuwait, Macedonia, Russian Federation, Serbia

Elaborated by the author based on these conferences final declarations.

**Table 2. One UN Funds at Pilot Countries Disbursements**

COUNTRIES/TRANFERS	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
ALBANIA	8,912	4,509	6,877	3,271	3,045	4,023	3,105	1,143	0,559
CAPE VERDE	5,84	5,211	4,373	1,846	1,557	0,850	3,770	2,181	1,386
MOZAMBIQUE	18,572	22,141	4,392	20,210	7,283	5,103	3,458	1,249	4,346
PAKISTAN	24,024	18,372	21,271	12,149	5,079	2,874	2,079	0,717	2,531
RWANDA	3,630	16,087	15,524	12,050	6,834	11,569	10,565	0,495	2,888
TANZANIA	32,447	29,027	23,463	30,015	30,219	32,031	25,001	1,635	4,233
VIETNAM	175,133	15,229	24,868	10,035	20,131	20,809	7,548	8,977	4,816
URUGUAY	5,885	3,167	0,981	2,170	0,740	0,396	0,367	0,063	N/A

Elaborated by the author based on transactions tracked at Multi-Partner Trust Fund database.

**Table 3. Countries Adopting DaO (G-77 members in bold; 51 of 57).**

2006	<b>Albania; Cape Verde; Mozambique; Pakistan; Rwanda; Tanzania; Uruguay; Vietnam</b>
2007	<b>Bhutan; Papua New Guinea</b>
2008	<b>Kiribati</b>
2009	<b>Botswana; Comoros; Indonesia; Kyrgyzstan; Lesotho; Malawi; Montenegro; Sierra Leone</b>
2010	<b>Benin; Ethiopia, Kenya; Laos; Liberia; Maldives; Mali; Uganda</b>
2011	<b>Moldova; Namibia; Zambia</b>
2012	<b>Ghana; Samoa; Seychelles</b>
2013	<b>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina; Burundi; Nicaragua</b>
2014	<b>Cameroon; Chad; Côte d’Ivoire; El Salvador; Gabon; Guinea; Togo</b>
2015	<b>Congo; Eritrea; Guyana; Jamaica; Madagascar; São Tomé and Príncipe; Senegal; Swaziland; Venezuela</b>
2016	<b>Burkina Faso; Jordan; Niger; Zimbabwe</b>
2017	<b>Macedonia</b>

Elaborated by the author based on UNDG list of countries adopting DaO and the G-77 list of its members, available respectively at <https://undg.org/standard-operating-procedures-for-delivering-as-one/delivering-as-one-countries/> and at [www.g77.org/doc/members.html](http://www.g77.org/doc/members.html).