

Retreat on the 2020 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review and 2021 Reporting

5 February 2021, 10:00am - 3:00pm (New York time)

Draft Concept Note

I. Context

The General Assembly resolution on the Comprehensive Policy Review of UN system operational activities for development (QCPR), adopted in December 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflects a clear vision of Member States for the work of the UN development system in the beginning of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

The resolution reaffirms Member States' support to the reforms for the repositioning of the UN development system. It welcomes the progress made thus far, notably regarding the leadership of resident coordinators. It provides guidance for the continuing reform efforts, including on the implementation of the multi-country offices and regional reviews; as well as on transparency, integration, efficiency, better collective reporting and the implementation of the commitments made in the funding compact. It also reinforces the Secretary-General's call to continue to improve our internal standards on gender parity, sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, Member States requested the United Nations to support countries' efforts to build a sustainable and inclusive recovery from COVID-19 with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the core. The resolution calls for the UN development system to embrace the objectives related to climate change and environmental protection, as well as mainstreaming disaster risk reduction strategies.

In tandem, the new QCPR underscores the principle of leaving no one behind, reaffirms poverty eradication as the overarching objective and calls on the system to support social protection, universal health coverage, quality education and human rights. In addition, the QCPR refers for the first time to youth and people with disabilities, and highlights the need to strengthen the social, economic, political empowerment of women and girls and to end violence against women and girls.

The resolution includes a call for greater UN support to mobilize financing and other means of implementation, including leveraging partnership with International Financial institutions, civil society and the private sector, and strengthening support on capacity building, technology digital cooperation and innovation.

The QCPR makes a strong request for the UN development system to tailor its work to different contexts, including a new focus on the type of support needed by the various groups of countries in special situation. It also calls for enhancing cooperation, collaboration and coordination between development activities and humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding efforts at the national level, with a notable emphasis on jointly developed and risk informed analysis and on joined up planning and action between pillars.

II. Objectives of the Retreat

The purpose of the retreat is to start an internal reflection on the UN development system's overall response to the 2020 QCPR. This will include the identification of strategic priority actions required by the UNSDG for the 2021-2024 cycle, with a focus on consolidating the reforms, implementing the UNSDG socio-economic response framework and advancing the priorities of the Secretary-General for the Decade of Action.

III. Format and Outcome of the Retreat

The retreat will be convened by the Under Secretary-General of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General/Chair of the UNSDG.

Participants invited to the retreat are the Deputy Secretary-General/UNSDG Chair, UNSDG Vice-Chair, DCO, Core Group members (FAO, ILO, OHCHR, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNWOMEN, WFP, WHO, UN Women and the regional commissions' coordinator) and IOM. Other participants may be invited where an added dimension is needed.

Session I (10:00 am-12:00 pm) will be held at Principal level while Session II (12:00pm – 3:00pm) will be held at Assistant Secretary-General level. The Deputy Secretary-General will open the retreat and engage in a discussion with Principals during Part I and be part of the reporting-back in the closing. DESA will facilitate the meeting.

The outcome of the retreat will be a summary of the discussions to feed into the UNSDG and help inform further action by the system and its entities.

IV. Draft Programme

Part I [at Principals' level]

The Retreat will be opened by the Deputy Secretary-General and UNSDG Chair who will outline overall expectations for the retreat, linking the 2020 QCPR outcome with the Secretary-General's priorities. The DESA Under-Secretary-General will follow with remarks on the new QCPR's policy content, as well as current intergovernmental dynamics and insights on the way forward for the system. The UNSDG Vice-Chair will then provide a reflection on the implications for the UNSDG's work and action on the ground.

A plenary discussion facilitated by the DESA Under Secretary-General will follow on the implications of the vision and direction contained in the QCPR resolution for the work in the coming four years, with a focus on consolidating the reform and advancing the system's response to the QCPR and the priorities of the Secretary-General for the Decade of Action. A set of guiding questions for the discussion is shared below to facilitate preparations.

10:00 - 10:45am **Session I: Context, Reflections and Expectations**

- Opening by the Deputy Secretary-General and UNSDG Chair
- Remarks by DESA Under Secretary-General
- Reflection by UNSDG Vice Chair

10:45 – 12:00pm **Session II: Dialogue on Implications of the new QCPR**

This session will allow the principals to engage in a frank dialogue on how we accelerate our common efforts to implement the 2020 QCPR and leave a sustainable world for the next generations, including through urgent and collective climate action. It will also tackle the evolution in the demand from the UN development system, in particular following the pandemic and its impact. The dialogue could consider linking the new directions mandated in the QCPR to the thinking around the New Social Contract and the New Global Deal, including how we can shift the nature of our work to drive innovative policy on critical global public goods (e.g. public health, climate action, sustainable development and peace).

Guiding Questions:

- *What overall direction and critical actions does the UNSDG need to put in motion in the short and longer term to respond to Member States' expectations expressed in the new QCPR and to continue to adapt to a fast-changing reality and the broader transformations needed to accompany a rethinking of multilateral action?*
- *What actions should be prioritized as the UNDS repositioning is consolidated?*

Part II

Part II will be organized in four sessions, with participation at Assistant Secretary-General level. The sessions have been intentionally designed in clusters, to facilitate the discussion on novel aspects of the QCPR and support integrated approaches to policy, programming and implementation.

Sessions III and IV will follow the same format, and be based on suggested guiding questions, included below, to enable a concrete and well-focused discussion. Each discussant will be allocated a total of 3 minutes for his/her presentation. This will be followed by a 30-minute plenary discussion on all subthemes of the session, moderated by the DESA Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Interagency Affairs.

Session V will have two back-to-back presentations, one by EOSG/SDU and one by DCO, followed by a 30-minute plenary discussion moderated by the DESA Assistant Secretary-General.

*The Deputy Secretary-General will re-join the Retreat for **Session VI**, which will recap the highlights of the discussion. During this session, the UNSDG Vice-Chair and DESA Assistant Secretary-General will provide remarks on the next steps and the take-aways on the intergovernmental dimension, respectively. The UNSDG Chair will close the retreat with some final remarks.*

12:00 – 12:45pm **Session III: Supporting an inclusive and sustainable recovery from COVID-19**

- a) COVID-19 immediate health response (**WHO**)
- b) Addressing economic, social, and environmental risks, including disaster risk reduction, and recover back better and greener (**UNDP & UNEP**)
- c) Advancing the Secretary-General's financing strategy, including partnerships with international financial institutions (**DESA & UNDP**)

Guiding Questions:

- *What are two strategic actions in these specific areas that would enable greater impact if taken by the UNSDG?*

- *What UNSDG decisions would facilitate the elaboration and delivery of integrated policy advice and programme support across these three areas, in order to support an inclusive and sustainable recovery from Covid-19 and get on track for achieving the SDGs?*

12:45 – 1:45pm **Session IV: Leaving no one behind in practice**

- a) Beyond GDP: Multi-dimensional poverty **(UNDP & RECs Coordinator)**
- b) Cooperation, collaboration & coordination of development, humanitarian action and linkages to peacebuilding **(UNHCR, IOM and PBSO)**
- c) Leveraging data **(DESA & UNICEF)**
- d) Social protection floors, education, disabilities, youth **(ILO & UNFPA)**
- e) Human rights approaches to development and addressing gender equality and other forms of discrimination **(OHCHR & UNWomen)**

Guiding Questions

- *What are two strategic actions in these specific areas that would enable greater impact, if taken by the UNSDG?*
- *What UNSDG decisions would facilitate the elaboration and delivery of integrated policy advice and programme support across these five clusters, in order to leave no one behind?*

1:45 – 2:30pm **Session V: Deepening efforts on the repositioning of the UN development system ahead of the review of the RC system (EOSG/SDU & DCO)**

- a) Adapting UN response to country context: country configuration, integrated policy advice

Guiding Questions

- *Do we collectively have the integrated technical expertise to support countries in the areas of priorities identified in the QCPR?*
- *What steps can be taken to incentivise and strengthen the contribution of all UNDS entities to joint planning and providing integrated policy advice?*
- *How does funding serve as an inhibitor to integrated policy advice – and how could alternative financial models serve as an incentive?*
- *How can we best proceed with the country configuration exercise in 2021 in a way that ensures a focus on tailoring expertise, capacities and resources – rather than focusing on size of the UNCT footprint?*
- *What further steps are needed to ensure all UNSDG entities have simplified their own guidance, rule and regulations to allow system-wide UNSDG guidance to be fully implemented?*

b) Stronger business operations and greater efficiencies

Guiding Questions

- *How can the executive Leadership of UNDS entities help ensure full buy-in towards greater efficiencies, and drive implementation in countries of Business Operations Strategies; Common Back Offices; Common Premises?*
- *What are the main concerns and risks that need to be managed to ensure full buy-in and support and how to accelerate progress on the areas that are less advanced?*

c) Stronger results reporting for better quality funding: system-wide results reporting and evaluation and Funding Compact commitment

Guiding Questions

- *How can UNDS entities and Principals support UNCTs to make use of the tools in place to ensure informed, comprehensive and timely results reports from the UNCTs?*
- *What further steps are needed to support UNCT data gathering and results reporting through UN INFO, in line with the UNDS commitment in the Funding Compact?*
- *What actions are needed towards stronger system-wide data harmonization and aggregation, better data interoperability to facilitate results reporting at country, regional and global levels, and reducing transaction costs for all stakeholders?*
- *What are the critical priority areas that would benefit from system-wide evaluation?*

2:30 - 3:00 pm

Session VI: Closing

- a) Next steps by the UNSDG Vice-Chair
- b) Key takeaways for the intergovernmental dimension by the DESA ASG
- c) Closing by the Deputy Secretary-General and UNSDG Chair