



Executive Board of the United Nations
Human Settlements Programme
First session of 2025
Nairobi, 25–27 March 2025
Item 10 of the provisional agenda*

**Implementation by UN-Habitat of the reform of the
development system and management of the United Nations**

Implementation of the United Nations development system reform in the United Nations Human Settlements Programme**

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. The present report builds on previous updates and briefings¹ by the secretariat to the Executive Board (EB) on the implementation by UN-Habitat of the reform of the United Nations development system (UNDS) and its compliance with the “Checklist” of compliance developed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) to guide the governing bodies of the UNDS entities through the reform process implementation and to “facilitate their oversight role, including monitoring alignment and entity adherence to the dual reporting model.”
2. The development of the “Checklist” by the UNDG was in direct response to the request by member States² for adequate information and tools to accompany the UN reform implementation process adequately. It articulates key elements across the six pillars of repositioning of the UNDS including reviving the United Nations funding compact on which UN-Habitat in a previous briefing provided an update entitled: “new commitments to the funding compact for United Nations development system activities”. This was done in recognition of the instrumental role that the funding compact for the UNDS is meant, and expected, to play in ensuring the success of the reform process in all its components, and at all levels of interventions.
3. This current 2025 report to the EB on the UN reform will mainly focus – amongst other key points, on the efforts by the secretariat to comply with the guidance by the UNSDG on derivation of entities country programming requiring to recognize the primacy of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for planning of their country-level activities and

* HSP/EB.2025/1.

** The present document has not been formally edited.

¹ HSP/EB.2022/9 of 11 January 2022/EB session of 29–31 March 2022; HSP/EB.2023/19 of 19 September 2023/EB session 28–30 November 2023 supported HSP/EB.2023/INF/8, entitled “Checklist on the Implementation of the Reform of the UN development system by UN-Habitat”; HSP/EB.2024/9 of 26 February 2024/EB session of 6–8 May 2024 supported by HSP/EB.2024/INF/8, entitled “Checklist on the implementation of the reform of the United Nations development system in UN-Habitat”.

² GA 76/4, on the “Review of the functioning of the reinvigorated resident coordinator system, including its funding arrangement”, op 13 and 14.

directing them to derive their country programme documents from the UNSDCF as the sole source of development priorities on the field.

II. Background

4. Since 2022 onwards, there has been an improved engagement and an effective contribution by UN-Habitat to various streams of the UNDS reform process, following the gradual deployment of the new UN-Habitat's regional architecture owing to the Agency's internal restructuring initiated in 2020, which replaced its regional and country-levels activities at the core of its planning and implementation orientations. The consolidation of the status and structure of its regional and country offices improved the planification and execution of a range of activities in UN-Habitat's mandated substantive areas aligned with the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the urban-related targets of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), mainly SDG 11. This is in line with the "United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development"³, aiming to advance UN system-wide coherence and coordination in assisting Member States to boost sustainable urban development as a key step to realizing the 2030 Agenda through the enhanced collaborative implementation of the New Urban Agenda. UN-Habitat has been promoting the operationalization of the UN system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development, including in the current reporting period, through the different inter-agency mechanisms and platforms in which it participates, also using the UNSDCFs as the ideal avenue to impact on national priorities setting and implementation.

5. The above efforts have allowed the Agency to take part regularly and efficiently in different regional mechanisms such as the regional collaborative platforms (RCP) and Issue-based coalitions (IBC). Further – at the country level, UN-Habitat's country representatives have embraced the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) under the leadership of United Nations Residents Coordinators (RCs) appointed by the Secretary-General (SG) at the helm of the United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs). Together, with other entities within the UNCTs, they contribute substantively into the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF).

6. Recently, in 2024, a new step by UN-Habitat towards full compliance and alignment with the reformed country programming processes has been made with the development of a corporate guidance for reviving UN-Habitat's country programme documents (HCPDs) as the Agency's main planning tools in support of its country-level activities and delivery on its mandate within the UN reform context.

III. Contribution by UN-Habitat to regional coordination mechanisms of the UNDS reform

7. The UNDS reform brought about new opportunities for collective technical and advisory support, joint system-wide responses to development needs, challenges, priorities and synergetic impact at the regional level. While Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCPs) are destined to unite all UN entities working on sustainable development to ensure full coordination of UN regional assets in addressing key challenges that transcend country borders and effectively pool expertise at the service of the specific needs of each country in the region, Issue-Based Coalitions (IBCs) represent broad, multi-partner coalitions led by one or more agencies, to coordinate the UN response to cross-cutting challenges across the region.

8. As reported previously, UN-Habitat pursues its active engagement contributing to the above regional frameworks as a member or co-convenor of several RCPs and IBCs across different regions. More concretely, in Africa, the Agency has been working with other entities including UNECA providing guidance and able support to the progress review of Goal 11 on the continent also in direct support to the Africa SDGs Forum. Further UN-Habitat has been serving as co-convenor of IBC 3 on "Innovation, Digitalization, Youth, and Transforming Education" where it provided an emphasis on smart cities and digital development in support of southern African countries such as Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa. Similarly, in the Arab States, UN-Habitat has been supporting the integration of urban data in the regional data platform developed with UNESCWA. It has also supported different OIBCs in the region, including on (i) Climate, Food Security and Environment, (ii) Gender, Justice and Equality (iii) Youth and Adolescents and (iv) Migration).

³ The strategy, prepared by the High-level Committee on Programmes, was the outcome of a six-month consultative inter-agency process, led by UN-Habitat. It was endorsed by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) in May 2019.

9. In the same vein, UN-Habitat has been actively participating in the Asia and Pacific RCP on Human Mobility and Urbanization together with IOM providing expertise e.g. on integration migration into urban development, as well as guidance on issues such as housing, SDG localization, climate adaptation and waste management and urban mobility. It also led the collection of inputs on SDG 11 for the SDG11 Synthesis Report. In Latin America, the Agency has been a co-chair of the RCP working group on “partnerships and communications” with UNDP and advocating for urban and territorial dimensions to enrich the discussions on the implementation of SDGs across the region. The LAC IBC has benefited from the technical support from UN-Habitat coordinated with IOM and UNHCR on “human mobility, migration and integration of migrants into the cities”.

10. However, this report stresses – once again, the challenge faced by the Agency attempting to maximise its participation in all streams of the UNDS reform process due to the continued scarcity of resources and dependency on earmarked project funding. It is a fact known by all system-wide that the full compliance by entities with the reform requirements also depends on the availability and predictability of finances for prompt support to operations on all fronts. In that connection, UN-Habitat continues to reach out to places where it has limited representation and capacities by delivering through the common back office (CBO) policies and common premises (CP) modalities. It also contributes to the development of business operation strategies (BOS) where and whenever possible working with other entities in mutual recognition as required by the reform.

IV. Country-level engagement and participation in the implementation of the UNDS reform

A. Influencing CCA and UNSDCF

11. UN-Habitat commitment to supporting the UNDS reform at the country-level remains strong in view of its increasing substantive contribution to CCA and UNSDCF over recent years.

12. More concretely in Africa, UN-Habitat has been signatory to – at least, 45 UNSDCF with an active participation in 25 of them while contributing to other 20 frameworks through various avenues with soft engagement to ensure urban dimensions are factored into the UN interventions planned for in all cooperation frameworks. This effort is meant to facilitate the natural linkages with the joint programming opportunities resulting from those frameworks.

13. The Arab States serves 18 Arab countries in total with active projects in 16 of them and physical presence in 14 countries. In that connection, UN-Habitat has been signatory to 14 UNSDCFs in this region mainly in those countries where the Agency is present, while it has been supporting the CCA processes in all countries.

14. In Asia and the Pacific, UN-Habitat has been supporting actively - at least 15 out of 22 countries with ongoing UNSDCFs following a successful contribution to their CCAs, while providing lightly inputs feeding into other frameworks noting that the Agency has a limited presence in countries such as Bhutan, Indonesia, Maldives or Timor-Leste.

15. UN-Habitat covers around 15 countries in the Latin American and the Caribbean region with an active participation in UNSDCFs of - at least 8 countries, including Brazil and Argentina. Likewise, efforts are ongoing in several Eastern European countries such Armenia, Kazakhstan, or Uzbekistan supporting and contributing to their CFs, as UN-Habitat continues to increase its footprint in this region.

B. Planning for UN-Habitat’s country activities through HCPD

16. There has been a gradual shift taking place across the regions in the development of Habitat Country Programme Documents (HCPD), which also contributed to their structural improvement in terms of programme integration and alignment with the new orientation brought about by the UNDS reform at country level. This demonstrates a positive advancement and an encouraging trend, despite the limited number of new HCPDs developed by UN-Habitat country managers over the recent months. Obviously, all regional offices have embraced the new spirit and guidance by the UNSDG through new practices within UNCTs acknowledging the primacy of the UNSDCF over individual entities strategic planning frameworks for development.

17. In fact, it has become a norm within the context of the UNDS reform to derive all country programme tools and documents from the UNSDCF following an inclusive CCA. The new generation of HCPDs developed by UN-Habitat’s regional and country managers such as in Kenya also demonstrates that practice. It shows how and why this new joint modality of planning UN entities

activities at the country level has been innovative. It facilitates harmonization of both content and timelines, including resource mobilization opportunities for joint programming addressing elements of individual mandates of entities as captured, reflected and agreed upon by the UNCTs with national government co-signatories of the UNSDCF. In the Arab States, only Lebanon and Palestine have prepared a new HCPD. Other regions such as Asia and the Pacific and Eastern Europe, have also taken decisive steps in this direction as demonstrated in new HCPDs prepared for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Nepal. No doubt - Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka currently initiating their new HCPD will follow up on the above good examples. In Azerbaijan, the option of a light HCPD was privileged, but just simply as a temporary solution.

18. Against this backdrop – the need for a unified template for HCPD to formalize the new corporate guidance for country programme planning and implementation became urgent and self-evident. In order to address various demands and repeated requests for clarification and harmonisation of standards to be applied for review and approval of the new generation of HCPs, a new policy document has been drafted in 2024 in consultation with the programme review committee (PRC). It will contribute to the further improvement in the development of HCPDs and implementation of the UN reform by UN-Habitat by addressing the bottle necks and closing the gaps in joint delivery also as UN-Habitat prepares its next strategic plan 2026-2029.

V. Essence of the new policy guidance on alignment of HCPD with UNSDCF

19. The new policy guidance on HCPDs responds to the need for alignment of UN-Habitat’s planning instruments at the country level UNSDCF. It endorses the internal guidelines provided for programme and project review and approval in recognition of the fact that the HCPDs provide a matrix for incubation of in-country initiatives and hence addressing the needs for improved coordination and alignment at all levels to maximize synergies for speeding up sustainable urbanization. This should facilitate the revival and revamping of the HCPD portfolio based has the potential to become an umbrella programme with various country programmes embedded in it.

20. In view of the UNDS reform and the new modalities of business operations at the country level, the transformation of HCPD reinforces the Agency’s position as leader in addressing SDG 11 and related targets whenever captured in national priorities. Adjusting the premises and ambitions of HCPD moving away from a planning perspective exclusive to UN-Habitat to embracing the provisions of the UNSDCF addressing challenges and articulating solutions to priorities identified and agreed upon by the beneficiary country with the UN family represented by RC as the leader of the UNCTs.

21. In that connection, the new generation of HCPD will build on a two-tracks process namely - on one hand, the CCA and UNSDCF to capture the beneficiary country priorities, and – on the other hand, the UN-Habitat’s strategic frameworks and tools for inclusion of urban policy elements into the national development plans and goals as agreed upon by partners signatories to the UNSDCF.

22. UNSDCF representing the UN commitment against which UNDS entities are held collectively and individually accountable provides an environment conducive to more inclusive approaches and integrated modalities pooling both implementing and beneficiaries of the 2030 development agenda into the same direction. Keeping this on mind, the UN results framework at the country-level becomes the only avenue to evaluate progress and impact of the joint programmes delivery for all entities.

23. Therefore, the new generation of HCPD will be designed to be results-based management (RBM) compliant, adding value to the UN results framework at the country level. This means building on an approach intended to achieving results by integrating a results philosophy and principles in all aspects of management and, most significantly, by integrating lessons learned from past performance into management decision-making.

24. A key element of the new policy guidance for HCPD to create synergy and partnerships is the promotion of mainstreaming south-south and triangular cooperation as a modality and a means of implementation of the planned priorities actions under the UNSDCF. This is drawing from the New Urban Agenda (NUA) committing to “expand opportunities for North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation, as well as subnational, decentralized and city-to-city cooperation, as appropriate, to contribute to sustainable urban development, developing capacities and fostering exchanges of urban solutions and mutual learning at all levels and by all relevant actors”, as well as building on the General Assembly resolution 71/244⁴ encouraging “the continued integration of South-South and triangular cooperation into the policies and strategic frameworks of the funds,

⁴ GA 71/244, Para 9, 21 December 2016.

programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, and requests those funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system that have not yet integrated South-South and triangular cooperation into their policies to do so, taking into account the complementary nature of South-South to North-South cooperation”.

VI. Conclusions

25. This report by UN-Habitat on its efforts to support and contribute to the implementation of the UNDS reform revealed the Agency’s strong commitment to claim its space within the UN family at both the regional and country levels embracing the MAF philosophy to continued advocating for sustainable urbanisation as a prerequisite for sustainable development. The Executive Board has been briefed on previous occasions on the main challenges jeopardizing the momentum in future engagement with the reform mainly in relation to the Agency’s limited resources to be on all front to support all processes.

26. UN-Habitat ongoing efforts to sustain the pace are encouraging. The regional and country-based approach brought about by the UNDS reform to achieve swift results and long-lasting impact in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has met UN-Habitat well prepared and committed to engage with others to deliver on the entities expectations. The continued contributions to the RCP and IBC, at the regional level, as well as the CCA and UNSDCF at the country level, provide evidence of the Agency’s determination to serve member States within the reformed environment inspired and approved by them.

27. The revamped new generation of HCPD aligned with the UNSDCF and the emphasis on the promotion of south-south and triangular cooperation are additional signals of the firm resolution to add value the implementation of the common development agenda of the UN. More can always be done, provided the Executive Board members have considered exploring supporting options to increase the revenues collection of UN-Habitat through non-earmarked resources and soft-earmarked funding. In that connection, the additional core financial support sought by UN-Habitat, including those staff positions under the scalability are critical to enable the Agency to align fully and abide by the reform requirements.