PART B: Witness Seminars

B.1 Witness Seminar 1: Development Cooperation

B.1.1 Overview
Michael Askwith [1]

The first Witness Seminar (WS1) on Development Cooperation took place at IDS from 13 to 14 May 2015, under the chairmanship of Richard Jolly. About 40 people attended, of whom 30 were former UN staff and the rest were observers and IDS students.

The seminar was divided into six main sessions to address: (1) *UN overview: issues and challenges,* with Mark Malloch-Brown as the Keynote Speaker, on 'The UN's four lives and future challenges' and Margaret Anstee who spoke on 'Leadership and the UN'; (2) *The regional and country perspectives*, chaired by Robert England, drawing out experiences of former UN staff in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe and the former CIS, and Latin America and the Caribbean; (3) *Global, technical and sectoral experience*, chaired by John Burley; (4) *Strengthening the UN: Lessons of cooperation*, chaired by Alan Doss; (5) *The UK and the UN* chaired by Natalie Samarasinghe; and (6) *Conclusions and recommendations*, chaired by Richard Jolly.

The *Report of WS1* summarised the contributions of the participants in each of the sessions, of which full details are envisaged in the transcripts of the official recordings (Askwith *et al.* 2015).

The report was complemented by a 370-page WS1 *Compendium of Working Papers and Career Summaries* which brought together the written contributions of each of the participants in terms of summaries, articles, memoirs, CVs, and so on (Askwith 2015). Conclusions and recommendations of WS1 were brought together in a succinct aide-memoire entitled 'Suggested topics for follow-up with the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)' which was sent to the prime minister, David Cameron, and the Secretaries of State for International Development (DFID) and Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (FCO) in June 2015 (see letter and aide-mémoire in Annex 3, and the reply from DFID in Annex 4 of the WS1 Report).

The present IDS Evidence Report has attempted to build on the above, and refine some of the key messages and experiences of WS1 contributors relating to: (i) the *country-level* development cooperation by Robert England; (ii) the *specialized agency perspective* (excluding UN funds and programmes), by John Burley; (iii) *strengthening UN coordination* by Michael Askwith; and (iv) the *future of UN development assistance* by Stephen Browne.

In the first article (B.1.2) on 'Reflections and Experiences from the Country Level', Robert England discusses how the UN's country operations have always been at the cutting edge of the organisation's country engagement and provided the framework on which other UN activities, whether political or humanitarian, have been built. These operations sit at the interface of national sovereignty and international accountability, the two potentially conflicting principles embodied in the UN's Charter. He describes seven distinctive but inter-related strands of work carried out at the country level which link the local to the global. He stresses that the UN's comparative advantage lies not in the quantity of its resources but in

its technical standards, normative agenda, convening power and access to national policymakers. He argues that the UK should value, support and sustain these functions, while not imposing unrealistic expectations in terms of short-term results.

In the second article (B.1.3) on 'The Specialized Agencies of the UN: New Challenges and Roles for the Twenty-first Century', John Burley discusses how the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present enormous challenges and opportunities for the specialized agencies and other UN organisations. He argues that the integrated nature of the goals and their universal nature call for: more effective ways of agencies working together; greater focus on the sharing of experiences of all countries in achieving the SDGs; more imaginative institutionalised instruments of governance involving business and civil society; and greater automaticity in funding. The UK – its government, academia, business, thinktanks, public opinion – has a major role to play in all this.

In the third article (B.1.4) 'UN Coordination: Strengthening Coherence, Impact and Tools', Michael Askwith discusses the history and development of collaborative arrangements and tools put in place to strengthen inter-agency coordination at country and headquarters level among specialized agencies, funds and programmes. It notes the substantial progress made in the development of the coordination architecture of the resident coordinator system and of the tools designed to assist in promoting enhanced UN System collaboration, in particular the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the Delivering as One (DaO) process. It identifies some of the questions raised and dilemmas faced in the use of these tools, their strengths and weaknesses, and potential remedial actions. He urges a resumption of former UK support to strengthening UN coordination and the resident coordinator system.

In the fourth article (B.1.5) 'The Future of UN Development Assistance – Norms, Standards and the SDGs', Stephen Browne discusses the challenges of organisational marginalisation and dispersion in future efforts by the UN System to adapt its four main functions of setting norms, standards and goals; information and research; global cooperation agreements; and technical assistance, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. He argues that the UK government, as a highly influential UN member state, can exert valuable influence in these areas, including helping to ensure that a reform-minded Secretary-General is elected in 2016.

The articles below describe generic lessons of experiences, identify dilemmas faced, and suggest potential policy options. The conclusions are summarised in Part C.

Note

[1] The opinions expressed here represent the views of the author and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.

References

Askwith, M. (ed.) (2015) *The United Nations at 70. Report of Witness Seminar 1 on Development Cooperation: Volume 2 Compendium of Working Papers and Career Summaries* (draft revision 3 February 2016)

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B.1.2 Reflections and Experiences from the Country Level

Robert England [1]

Abstract

The UN's country operations have always been at the cutting edge of the organisation's country engagement; they have provided the framework on which other UN activities, whether political or humanitarian, have been built. These operations sit at the interface between national sovereignty and international accountability, the two potentially conflicting principles embodied in the UN's Charter. They comprise seven distinctive but inter-related strands. The UN's comparative advantage lies not in the quantity of its resources but in its technical standards, normative agenda, convening power and access to national policymakers. The UK should value, support and sustain these functions, while not imposing unrealistic expectations in terms of short-term results.

Keywords: UN, specialized agencies, Voluntary Funds, development, humanitarian, MDGs, SDGs.

1   Introduction – scope and period covered, 1965–2015

This article[2] focuses on the UN's work at the country level, principally relating to development cooperation but, inevitably and appropriately, extending into the other aspects of the UN's country-level work, namely the political[3] and humanitarian dimensions. By definition, this review is limited to the experience of British nationals working in the UN but, in spanning the 50 year period 1965–2015,[4] it can lay claim to surprisingly rich pickings, since British nationals were widely present in country operations during this period. Their careers spanned the 'P2 to D2' career trajectory, and in a few cases even beyond, thereby witnessing the UN at a variety of management levels; most also served in their respective agency headquarters at some point in their careers. For various reasons,[5] their UN service was predominantly in Africa and the Asia-Pacific regions, but there were smatterings of experience in the other regions, and a very interesting engagement in the UN's expansion into Eastern Europe and Central Asia in the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

What follows is inevitably highly selective, given the space available; each of the narrative strands and experiences mentioned requires much more thorough treatment than is possible here. Nonetheless, this article attempts to delineate the pattern of the UN's country-level operations over this period, noting the extent of involvement by British staff members, many of whom have contributed more detailed accounts of their careers as part of the UN Career Records Project (UNCRP). Some but by no means all of these are highlighted in the endnotes. Readers who are especially interested in a specific topic should refer to the more extensive treatment provided in individual witness contributions, lodged with the Bodleian Library.

2   A summary of the major changes in context and approach

This 50-year period witnessed major changes to the internal and external environment in which the UN was working. It began in the aftermath of the Marshall Plan for European post-war reconstruction when post-colonial support was the priority – and post-colonial euphoria and optimism the predominant state of mind. A situation progressively evolved in which there was a very wide range of different country challenges and priorities, necessitating a highly differentiated UN response. Internally, the UN's response to the new situation began with the creation of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in 1965, combining the UN Special Fund and Technical Assistance Board; it then progressed rapidly to the Jackson Capacity

Study in 1969 (UNDP 1969) and the ensuing General Assembly Consensus resolution of 1970.[6] This Consensus placed UNDP as the central programming and funding agency of the UN development system, but was rapidly succeeded by a proliferation of agreements on the creation of new funds, within and latterly outside the UN System. UNDP's central funding role was progressively replaced by the process-driven Resident Coordinator system.

Externally, the World Bank and the regional development banks[7] moved beyond purely infrastructure investment[8] to occupy much of the programmatic areas previously dominated by the UN System, especially social development, as did the European Development Fund. Beyond the governmental sector, there was an impressive proliferation and professionalisation of non-state actors, notably non-governmental organisations but also the private commercial sector. This was driven partly by the increasing importance of humanitarian responses at the country level, but was also reflective of donors' preference for channelling their money through such organisations.

During this period, as the programme country needs and donor funding priorities changed, so did the UN evolve from being principally about the transfer of technical skills and institutional development to the promotion of international values and technical standards, as 'best practice'. In keeping with this trend, there was a steady shift from a reliance on national development priorities in UN programming to a focus on the promotion of an international normative agenda and development goals, formulated in a series of UN conferences and in 2000 distilled in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and most recently in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3 A holistic model of UN country-level operations

For the purpose of this article, it will be helpful to delineate a model of the UN's work at the country level. This model comprises two complementary elements.

The first of these is the architectural 'fault line' in the UN Charter between national sovereignty on the one hand, and the accountability of sovereign member states to the international community on the other. Although strikingly evident in the UN's day-to-day work, this fault line is too often brushed aside or simply ignored. In extremis these two principles are in conflict with each other, and engender a great deal of tension within the UN System.[9] For the purpose of this article, it should be clearly understood that the UN's country-level development operations sit on the national sovereignty side of this fault line, with UN operational activities firmly anchored in host government policies and programmes. When the UN's global policies and decisions ran counter to such national priorities, UN in-country staff were left to try to balance the pressures from the other side – seldom an easy task.

Another aspect of this fault line is more practical in nature: the tension between unity and diversity. There has always been a tension between the UN's centrally determined policies and nationally determined needs and priorities. In common with most empires and large organisations, the UN System has struggled to reconcile the unity of its vision with the diversity of its member states. UN practitioners at the country level have therefore always had to adapt centrally enunciated policies to the real world of individual programme countries, often with scant sympathy from global managers, who confront a different 'reality' at the intergovernmental level. This inherent tension within the System is further exacerbated by supply-driven donor policies and the understandable tendency of member states in general and donors in particular to base their policies on a global aggregate version of what the UN actually does at country level.

Figure 1   Balancing the two facets of the United Nations
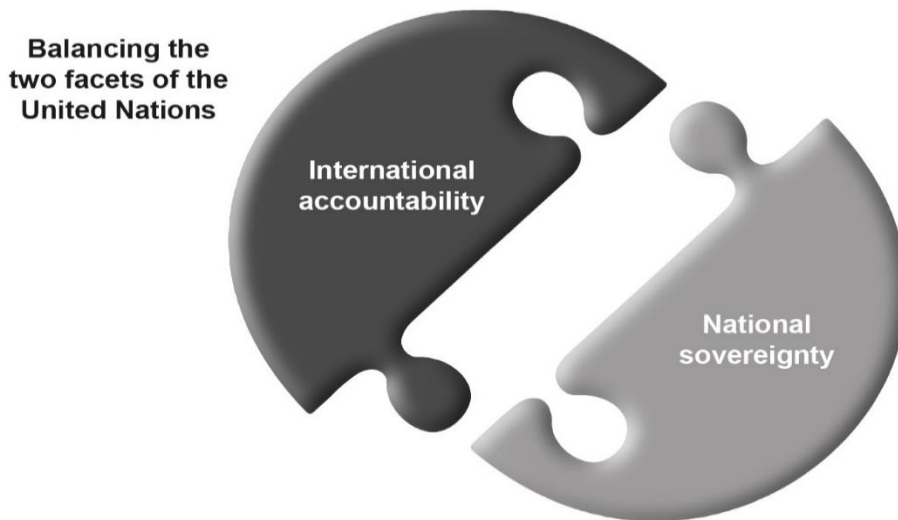
Source: Author's own.

The second component of the model is a seven-part decomposition of the work of the UN in-country. The seven strands of this model have remained broadly applicable throughout the 50-year period, although the relative weight of the strands has changed over time – and they have always varied in scale and scope depending on the circumstances of an individual member state.

Box 3   Connecting the local and the global: a model of UN country-level operations

1.   Building relationships and national capacity
2.   Advocacy, joint situation analyses and policy dialogue
3.   Promoting international values and normative standards
4.   Addressing national, regional and global public goods
5.   Addressing national development priorities
6.   Addressing immediate humanitarian needs
7.   Ensuring coherence in the UN's operational activities

Although these seven strands are conceptually distinct, they are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it should be understood that most activities that the UN undertakes embody several of them, and some programmes might embody most of these elements. It should also be noted that No. 7 is qualitatively different in that it refers principally to the UN's internal processes; since this strand has become a major preoccupation of the UN at the country level, it needs to be recognised as distinctive.

The significance of this two-part model of UN operations at the country level is that it is today applicable in principle to all member states, not just to developing countries. This in itself represents a significant progression from the way in which it was perceived in the early days of the UN's work, when decolonisation and post-colonial support was viewed as a one-way street.[10] Compare this with the international conference held in Paris in December 2015, when all countries signed up to playing their part in the achievement of international climate goals, albeit retaining the prerogative to define and measure their own contribution – a classic example, if ever there was one, of balancing international accountability with national sovereignty. The same could be said of the recently adopted SDGs, or of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) processes of the Human Rights Council.

4 Illustrative examples of UN experience from the five decades

These days it is axiomatic to say that one of the strengths of the United Nations is its near universality of membership; indeed, the above-mentioned model of the UN's country-level work is based on state membership of the institution in the first place.[11] However, in 1965 such universality of membership was not the case. This was not only because the decolonisation process itself was incomplete at that stage;[12] geopolitics also played its part: until 1971, China was represented by the exiled Republic of China in Taiwan; the newly united Vietnam was admitted only in 1977; and the two Koreas in 1991.

4.1 Building relationships and national capacity

The UN's developmental role, along with the activities of its Department of Public Information (DPI), has normally been the leading edge of the organisation's systematic country-level engagement, being generally perceived as benign and unthreatening to sensitive governments.[13] Thus, once membership was approved by the General Assembly, the UN agencies began to open offices – and British nationals were among those charged with doing so.[14] A similar pattern was repeated when the Soviet Union collapsed and the UN began to open offices in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.[15] And, during the same period, the readmission of South Africa into normalised, post-sanctions relationships resulted in the establishment of the UN's first office in that country also.[16] There was of course a parallel process at the Headquarters level of inducting such newly admitted member states into the governance and normative processes of the UN System.[17]

For those involved, the induction process that UN admission entailed represented a proxy for a wider reality, which echoes throughout the witness contributions: the UN System enjoyed and continues to enjoy a very high level of public recognition and access at the individual country level,[18] with agency representatives having weekly if not daily meetings with senior government policymakers. This is particularly true of the specialized agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). This singular comparative advantage of the UN is often under-appreciated, and can all too easily be compromised by grandstanding on sensitive issues, when discreet advocacy and advice can be more effective in the longer run. It can feed productively into joint situation analyses, policy dialogue, and capacity development (see immediately below).

4.2 Advocacy, joint situation analyses and policy dialogue

The UN has always been active in promoting evidence-based policy and programme development by assisting member states to gather and analyse data, and to formulate policies accordingly. It typically used support to national processes as a key tool for advocating policies and approaches, one of the UN's signature characteristics throughout its work at the country level.[19]

In the early days this often took the form of support to national planning and statistical offices, particularly in the immediate post-independence period. This support to international statistical standard-setting and national capacity building has continued,[20] but has been expanded into more specific types of cooperation: the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) focused especially on national censuses[21] and demographic analysis. More recently UN global reports – such as those on the state of the world's children (UNICEF)[22] and on human development (UNDP), and those on the Millennium Development Goals (the outcome of collaborative UNS effort) – have generated national analyses and their own country versions. In all such country reports, the UN's approach has been to support national processes which yielded a nationally owned report with conclusions and recommendations rooted in local institutions, if not always in government policies themselves.[23] This contrasted with, for example, World Bank reports which were frequently stronger on the technical analysis – and certainly more lavishly resourced – but characteristically enjoyed less buy-in at the country level.[24]

Operating firmly under the aegis of – indeed dependent on the goodwill of – the host government, UN country offices were always captives of the government's own development priorities, or lack thereof.[25] This led to many frustrations but seasoned practitioners learnt that institutionally sustainable development was only possible when it was led and owned by national actors and that this close association with governments, with all its limitations, also offered unique opportunities to influence national policymakers.

4.3 Promoting international values and normative standards

As regards the UN's normative agenda, the promotion of international technical standards has been, from the outset, the day-to-day business of the specialized agencies of the UN,[26] as well as its regional commissions.[27] This is characteristically taken for granted and undervalued, but the steady accumulation of such standards around the world is an achievement of which the UN can be proud. Establishment of these standards has naturally been a Headquarters-led process, whereas helping member states to apply these standards has been the function of UN agencies at country level, normally through their representative offices, where these exist.

Normative values, i.e. those relating to human rights as well as development priorities, tended to follow the same pattern. In the early days, promoting and supporting national implementation of such values was not a major preoccupation of country offices, but this has progressively changed over the years as the breadth of this normative agenda has evolved.[28] Unsurprisingly, it is in this area that the 'fault line' is most apparent, as individual member states are held to account for their compliance with international norms. As with in-country situation analyses, however, the normal approach of the UN has been to offer assistance to the host government in improving its compliance, rather than to amplify external criticism. This fails to satisfy some observers but nonetheless represents a realistic positioning for the UN country teams.[29]

The UN System provided substantial support at the country level to the stream of UN international conferences that began in the 1970s, proliferated through the 1990s, and then achieved a synthesis in the Millennium Declaration of 2000, which yielded the MDGs, which have recently given way to the SDGs.[30] UN staff at the country level characteristically supported their host government's preparations for each of the global conferences, *inter alia* promoting national dialogues on the issues, and then coached them towards implementation of the commitments they had acceded to by their participation (see also Section 4.2).

4.4 Addressing the national, the regional and the global public good

I think most of us country-level development practitioners had an instinctive grasp of global public goods as a concept, even before it became the subject of more general public discussion. We joined the United Nations because we believed it could help make the world safer, better and fairer; we saw our role in countries to advance those values in our day-to-day work. In other words we believed that the UN System was itself a global public good, and we were proud to work for it. We also understood quite easily the value of inter-country collaboration at the regional, or more often at the sub-regional level – in other words, the value of regional public goods. However, converting this theoretical appreciation into a practical and sustainable reality proved very difficult. This was not because the UN did not try; UNDP in particular devoted considerable resources and effort to supporting regional and sub-regional collaborations of one sort or another,[31] as did the regional commissions. The problem was always in obtaining sufficient government ownership and therefore sustainable funding; governments were normally supportive when it was a free good, but more wary when they were called upon to contribute financially.

Although there were many such initiatives that failed, there were also those that achieved a sustainable existence; one relatively successful example was the joint management of the Mekong River in South East Asia. The Mekong River Commission (MRC) was formally

established as an intergovernmental body in 1995, but for more than 30 years had been a UN project, functioning under the joint aegis of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and UNDP. Although it continues to suffer from the many challenges of river basin management – strong vs weak member states; upstream vs downstream interests; conflicting and competitive water use (navigation, fisheries, irrigation, power); etc. – the MRC represents a singular achievement in regional inter-country cooperation which would not exist without sustained UN support.[32]

4.5　Addressing national development priorities

Throughout the period, development cooperation projects or programmes[33] were the basic vehicles for the UN's country-level work; the reflections of UNCRP witnesses provide a wide range of specific examples. Such projects encompassed all aspects of the UN's work in a country and were normally supported in the context of government programmes.[34]

In the early years, international experts' long-term contracts consumed a substantial portion of the UN's limited funding, but as national capacities increased, such expertise became more limited in duration, and was even replaced with that of national experts whose services would have been too expensive for their own governments to afford.[35] The predominance of government programmes continued but increasingly the UN formed partnerships with other national institutions, including academia, and non-governmental and community-based institutions.[36] Attempts to reach out to the private commercial sector were generally not as successful. Underlying the UN's work throughout was the principled focus on national leadership and institutional capacity and the need to strengthen this wherever possible. This often extended to enhancing the government's capacity to manage the external assistance available to it.

Measuring the effectiveness of such development cooperation was always difficult and continues to be so. The core problem is generally agreed to be the relatively short time frame – 3 to 4 years – of many such programmes, designed to be within the expectations of the funding source and/or the assignment duration of the programme designer. Certainly such time frames bore little relationship to the real time necessary to bring about sustainable and sustained change, or to the national processes on which ultimate effectiveness would depend. This short-termism has been exacerbated by the recent emphasis on results-based management, which has many unintended consequences, including the frequent blurring of attribution and the undermining of national ownership processes.[37]

4.6　Addressing immediate humanitarian needs

Throughout this 50-year period, the UN's country-level development work was deeply affected by often more pressing humanitarian requirements. Preparedness for and response to natural disasters was always an integral part of development thinking.[38] Most practitioners faced challenges in their day-to-day work, in terms of both persuading governments to make the necessary up-front investments in disaster preparedness and mitigation, and establishing institutional capacity to respond when natural disasters struck. More often than not, such preparedness was sacrificed for more immediate government priorities, at least until given fresh impetus by a new crisis. This dynamic has continued to the present day; in this respect as in many others, the UN was characteristically asking the right questions, even if programme country governments were often reluctant to provide sustainable answers.

Politically generated humanitarian challenges were also widespread throughout the period covered. Many of the UNCRP witnesses served in countries that were beset by major political ructions, or worse.[39] Sometimes the UN could play a mediation role; often it could not. The UN's more politically activist period of the 1990s and beyond had a big impact on its development operations in the affected countries, but throughout its country network the UN's development work was profoundly affected by the political processes that framed it.[40]

4.7 Ensuring coherence in the UN's operational activities

This subject is discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this IDS Evidence Report (see 'UN Coordination' by Michael Askwith). It is certainly a process and dynamic which absorbed the time and focus of many of the British witnesses cited in this article – increasingly so, as pressure for 'reform' grew in recent years.

In the opinion of this author, however, the subject is normally approached from the wrong starting point, namely criticism of the UN System on the grounds that it tends to dissipate its efforts in too many uncoordinated programmes; UN staff are therefore charged with addressing such alleged incoherence. However, this critical viewpoint takes little account of the way in which the UNS has evolved over the years – by explicit decisions of the member states in inter-governmental forums – and of the way its architectural design is based on deliberately different institutional mandates and an inherently competitive environment for resources. Indeed, the trend over the years has been to increase the number of different sources of multilateral funding, to supplement bilateral funding.

Moreover, the conventional critique underestimates the real advantage of the UN's diversity of viewpoints on many development issues, i.e. its lack of a monolithic approach which instead provides scope for experimentation and innovation – both important elements of the UN's work at the country level, appreciated by programme countries. Member states can benefit from such diversity while, in the absence of architectural reform of the UN System, the costs of eliminating it are measured in 'proceduralisation' of reform, with high transactional costs for scarce staff resources. If the focus is on national ownership of processes, this UN 'smorgasbord' of technical advice and inputs should be seen as a strength, not a weakness.[41] Certainly few host governments evince much interest in UN coherence, but rather appreciate the diversity of advice and support on offer.[42] This encapsulates the already-discussed tension between unity and diversity: the drive for UN coherence is undoubtedly a preoccupation of the centre rather than of the periphery.

The newly adopted SDGs offer a way forward in this area: the UN funds, programmes and agencies may differ in priorities and approaches (as they have been designed to do), but they all share the same fundamental values, rooted in the Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, codified in a wide range of declarations and conventions, and now synthesised into the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030. These provide a rich source for the UN's shared advocacy, surely the function that can best provide the UN's unifying approach at the country level.

5 Lessons from the past to the future

Several generic lessons emerge from this wide range of experience at the country level. While they are not necessarily profound or original, they are often overlooked by modern-day practitioners.

5.1 The UN's value as a normative organisation: The UN's value lies not in dollars managed but in its shared normative values; its carefully formulated technical standards based on comparative international experience; its convening power and access to national decision-makers; and, finally, its cross-country experience. The SDGs provide a perfect platform from which to advance the UN's work around the world.

5.2 Costs and benefits of UN assets. These UN assets need to be funded and leveraged with the understanding that its modest financial resources are actually an advantage. However – and here's the rub – capitalising on these assets often involves relatively higher overhead costs (at least in comparison with the management of resource transfers, such as those by the development banks),[43] which should be accepted by donors as a necessary price of valuable UN engagement in national development processes.

5.3 The need for national ownership. Institutionally sustainable development can only be achieved by national actors; international supporters will always be marginal in this respect. True national ownership of development policies and programmes is too often disregarded, or at least downplayed, by donors impatient to achieve short-term results.

5.4 The need for time to achieve institutionally sustainable development. Institutionally sustainable development takes time to achieve and, by its nature, has many parents. Supply-driven funding, expectation of short-term 'results' and the wish of external actors to take credit all serve to undermine the national processes on which such sustainability depends.

5.5 The importance of political and bureaucratic dimensions for sustainable development. Development is at least as much a political process as a technocratic one. Whether a country is democratic or autocratic, national development policies and programmes are usually subordinate to political and bureaucratic machinations, which characteristically play out on a different timescale to that of the typical externally supported 3- to 4-year programmes.

5.6 The need for UK government support for the UN's strategic role at country level. The Government of the UK, as an informed, experienced, influential and constructive member state, should seek to reinforce this strategic and broad-based view of the UN's role – and comparative advantage – at the country level.

P.S. The importance of institutional memory
One of the most interesting of my recent consultancy assignments was when I was requested by UNDP to document ten examples of successful transformational change that had been supported by the agency in the recent past (UNDP 2011). These were surprisingly tricky to identify, and still more difficult to document. To begin with, one had to go back as much as 20 years to validate sustainable – and demonstrably sustained – transformational change; real development is a marathon, not a sprint. However, the difficulty I encountered also stemmed from the fact that the organisation's institutional memory was effectively defunct: the rusty old filing cabinets in the basement had long since ceased to exist, and most documentation resided on the hard drives of individual staff members, until these too were lost when they updated to the latest iPad, and/or moved to another duty station. With this experience in mind, therefore, I would add this final recommendation to our successors.

5.7 The importance of institutional memory. Re-establish these institutional memories in country offices, and take time and resources to document experience. If future UN practitioners are to build on the experience of their predecessors – and to avoid their (our) many mistakes – they need to value the past. This is one reason why the UN Career Records Project, the Witness Seminars and this IDS Evidence Report are so very valuable.

Notes

[1] The opinions expressed here represent the views of the author and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.
[2] The author of this article has been greatly assisted by comments and suggestions received from Richard Jolly, Terence Jones, Steve Woodhouse, Matthew Kahane, Stephen Browne, Sheila Macrae and Alan Doss. However, the final article is his sole responsibility.
[3] 'Political' in this context is used as shorthand for a range of issues relating to peace and security, as well as to human rights.
[4] As it happens this 50-year period coincides with that since the creation of UNDP in 1965, which was followed by a burgeoning of development cooperation that attracted many British nationals into the UN. It is admittedly 20 years shorter than the 70-year anniversary celebrated in 2015, largely because witness contributions from the first 20 years are more difficult to tap into – and UNDP's creation undoubtedly initiated a new phase of country operations.
[5] In the early years of the period being discussed, British nationals had two specific advantages, namely their colonial links with many of the newly independent UN member states, and their easy fluency in the English language. It should be added that, during the period of the United Nations Association (UNA)-UK Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programme, there was an ethos within several universities which encouraged a career in development work and which was perhaps connected with decolonisation-induced idealism and optimism. By the 1980s, such young idealists gravitated towards UN humanitarian operations and, more recently, into the non-governmental organisation community.
[6] GA resolution 2688 (XXV), 11 December 1970.

[7] It should be noted that these regional development banks were created outside the UN System and rapidly acquired and disbursed far more funds than the UN. They were thus the first examples of the more general trend, which gained pace in the 1990s and 2000s, of funding sources that were created outside the UNS and were perhaps more amenable to control by the major donors than the consensus-driven UN family of agencies. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) is just one example of this more recent pattern.

[8] It should be noted in passing that one of UNDP's predecessor institutions, the Special Fund, was specifically designed to undertake pre-investment work for the World Bank, a role long since forgotten by modern-day practitioners.

[9] As well as many decisions that might be politely termed 'ambidextrous', i.e. 'On the one hand… and on the other hand...' Such ambiguity seldom led to clarity of mandates, but did enable widely divergent interpretations.

[10] Note the change in the 1980s from 'recipient' countries to 'programme' countries, signifying a greater degree of equality between the two parties.

[11] Palestine is a notable exception to this, having been since 1978 the recipient of a special programme of assistance, approved by the General Assembly.

[12] In 1965 there were only 117 UN member states, compared with 193 by the end of 2015.

[13] This is still the case. The formal mandate of the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) is for 'operational activities for development', although every UNRC could point to his/her far more extensive role in practice.

[14] Thus, Paul Matthews was on the first UN mission to Bhutan in 1972 and was subsequently the first non-Indian representative in the country; he was succeeded by Terry Jones, who had negotiated the opening of the office in 1978/79. Terry Jones closed the Sydney office in 1973 and opened the new office that year in Port Moresby with Tom Unwin as representative, as Papua New Guinea transitioned to independence in 1975. Similarly, Alan Doss opened the UNDP office in Hanoi; while Matthew Kahane, Terry Jones and Nigel Ringrose served successively as deputies in Hanoi in this early phase of UN engagement, while Steve Woodhouse served as the UNICEF Representative. Alan Doss was the first deputy in the new Beijing office, while David Macfadyen tells of the World Health Organization's (WHO's) first programming mission to China. It might also be noted that, perhaps due to the preceding nationalist struggles that had characterised these newcomers to UN development cooperation, national ownership was especially strong in these countries, and development assistance notably effective.

[15] Matthew Kahane, Stephen Browne and Nigel Ringrose opened the first UN offices in Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan respectively; Matthew himself went on to also head the offices in Poland and Tajikistan. Michael Askwith opened the first integrated office in Eritrea, when it became independent and a member of the UN in 1992. It worked the other way also, as Terry Jones' first assignment was to the UN's office in Athens, shortly to be closed as Greece joined the European Union.

[16] To almost everyone's surprise – including his own, and that of UNDP's Africa Bureau – David Whaley was personally selected and appointed by the Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, as the first UN Representative in the country; Whaley offers some fascinating reflections on the challenges of building new relationships in a newly idealistic and democratically dynamic South Africa.

[17] In 1978 David Macfadyen was a junior member of WHO's first delegation to Beijing, led by the organisaton's Director-General, Halfdan Mahler. Macfadyen himself points out, however, that this built on an earlier relationship forged under the League of Nations in the 1930s.

[18] This high profile that UN had in developing countries contrasts with the UN's experience in many developed countries, for example the UK, where the profile is more limited in scope and marginal in the public's perception.

[19] No institution was more adept at this than UNICEF and no individual grasped this potential as did Jim Grant, the legendary Executive Director of UNICEF, with whom many of our witnesses worked – for example, Steve Woodhouse and Richard Jolly.

[20] Andrew Flatt spent his career working on this, beginning at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and continuing for more than 30 years in the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

[21] UNFPA Representative Sheila Macrae recounts her experience of helping to guide the first Vietnam Census in 1989, a process enthusiastically driven by the national authorities who were nonetheless commendably open to the externally available expertise the country itself lacked.

[22] Steve Woodhouse's reflections on his career in UNICEF describe the evolution of the fund to become what he terms 'a global political party' advocating the rights of children and for governments to address their priority needs.

[23] This could be compared favourably with, for example, the overbearing structural adjustment policies often imposed by the Bretton Woods Institutions, which singularly lacked national buy-in in most countries.

[24] In the early 1970s, when I joined UNDP, the World Bank had not yet begun to prepare such wide-ranging sectoral surveys, being at that time still more preoccupied with basic economic infrastructure. In Zambia we therefore produced several sectoral profiles – on mining, manufacturing and construction; on transport and communications; and on education and vocational training – pioneering an important function which was not replicated or sustained, and therefore rapidly supplanted by the Bank's work.

[25] Peter Metcalf provides a fascinating disquisition on different 'models' of development, as between an often naïve albeit well-intended UN agency and a post-colonial government with a different set of priorities.

[26] Basil Hoare's contribution to the UNCRP provides a wonderful account of an FAO technical adviser's work in nine different countries in the early years of this 50-year period. David Jezeph similarly provides a fascinating insight into the work of a water resources adviser, working throughout Asia and the Pacific for the regional commission.

[27] Andrew Flatt spent his entire career working in the statistics divisions of first the ECA and then ESCAP.

[28] Elsewhere in this IDS Evidence Report (Article A.5) David Whaley argues strongly that human rights should be accorded far greater priority in the UN's country work.

[29] An interesting more recent development in a sensitive area of public policy which, however, typifies this approach to the UN's country-level work is the work that UN country teams are now doing to support national inputs into the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process of the Human Rights Council.

[30] As a resident coordinator in the 1990s, I was confronted with what I (only half) jokingly referred to as 'The Big Fat Book', a daunting compendium of all the high-minded declarations and commitments that streamed from this conference continuum. The Millennium Development Goals had the great virtue of simplifying this – although my preference was always for the less reductive Declaration itself – but I fear that the 17 SDGs with their umpteen targets appear, to me at least, to be a step backwards, with too many priorities, and therefore none.

[31] Stephen Browne, who worked in ESCAP and was subsequently in charge of regional programmes in Asia/Pacific from UNDP New York, can attest to this.

[32] I was personally associated with it in the late 1970s and then in the early 2000s, during two separate assignments in Bangkok, while Alan Doss was closely associated with the 1992 Chiang Mai Agreement.

[33] Although 'project' and 'programme' are interchangeable in most lexicons, that of the development community often imbued them with some theological distinction which sowed much confusion in terms of discussion and debate. Indeed, throughout the

50-year period, the development 'business' evinced a pronounced tendency for evolving terminology, formats and political correctness. A survey of this would no doubt provide interesting reading, but this is not the place.

[34] Although normally these days associated with humanitarian food aid, the World Food Programme (WFP) has a long history of supporting development work also, as is attested by Julian Lefevre and Bronek Szynalski in their respective reflections on 'food for development' in a variety of countries across most regions.

[35] This was accompanied by a similar trend to increase national professional staffing in UN offices, thereby decreasing international staff and, some felt, international accountability. In countries where national expertise was in short supply, the UN was also criticised for encouraging, and benefiting from, an internal brain drain. This had especially negative consequences in the early stages of Africa's post-colonial development, and in the context of post-crisis countries. Frederick Lyons' contribution has an interesting reflection on this in the context of Cuba.

[36] A telling transition in this regard was the evolution of the term 'government ownership' to become 'national ownership', intended to denote the UN's broader approach to the concept. Nonetheless, being itself intergovernmental, the UN's comparative advantage was normally in its ability to influence government policies and programmes.

[37] Of course, no one can be opposed to the achievement of results as such, but in the complex process of development cooperation, it has downside risks which are too often ignored. It is one of many issues in this article which can only be touched upon, due to shortage of space. However, Frederick Lyons' reflections are among those in the UNCRP (WS1 Compendium) that underline this dilemma, as are those of Paul Matthews, who dwells on the supply-driven nature of much donor funding.

[38] As early as 1971, the General Assembly authorised the establishment of a UN Disaster Relief Coordinator, to be based in Geneva, and to support both preparedness for, and response to, natural disasters. This translated into an active programme at country level to promote such programmes as an integral part of development work.

[39] My own UN career began in 1971 when I was assigned to work in the Uganda of General Idi Amin. In the two years I worked there as a JPO, I witnessed the expulsion of the Asian community, the expulsion of the British business community and the first (unsuccessful) invasion from Tanzania of ousted President Milton Obote. I therefore witnessed perhaps the steepest decline in Uganda's fortunes, as the economy collapsed and normal development work became impossible; this was to play out for a lot longer however, until the current President Museveni took power in 1986 and began to stabilise and rebuild the devastated country.

[40] Paul Matthews' work in Cambodia in the 1990s; Peter Simkins' in the Horn of Africa as well as in the former Yugoslavia; Alan Doss's work as Deputy Chief of Mission in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, and later as Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in Democratic Republic of Congo, are all illustrations of this more activist UN role – and of its profound impact on the nature of the UN's development work.

[41] When I was Resident Coordinator in Pakistan in 1998, the year of the World Cup in France, the country was hit by allegations of child labour in the manufacture of the balls for FIFA. UNICEF and the International Labour Organization (ILO) worked together on the issue, with strikingly different but complementary approaches – and without any heavy-handed procedural controls. The misplaced priority of this issue and the unintended consequences of the intervention are stories for another day. Similarly, Sheila Macrae's pathbreaking work on Vietnam's first population census took place under the aegis of UNFPA alone, with no involvement of the UN Country Team (UNCT).

[42] There is understandable resentment of the manifold, diverse and onerous procedural and reporting requirements that the international system imposes on programme countries. However, this too is largely attributable to the centrifugal idiosyncrasies of individual multilateral funds: when the GFATM was first established it developed a completely new manual for its project cycle management and, initially at least, deliberately tried to avoid working with the UN System.

[43] The UN has always been at an unfair disadvantage in this respect *vis-à-vis* the development banks, whose much larger loans can support an overhead cost that is greater in absolute terms, while being far less proportionately.

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B.1.3 The Specialized Agencies of the UN: New Challenges and Roles for the Twenty-first Century

John Burley [1]

Abstract

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present enormous challenges and opportunities for the specialized agencies and other UN organisations. The integrated nature of the goals and their universal nature call for: more effective ways of agencies working together; greater focus on the sharing of experiences of *all* countries in achieving the SDGs; more imaginative institutionalised instruments of governance involving business and civil society; and significant reforms to funding arrangements. The UK – government, academia, business, thinktanks, public opinion – has a major role to play in all this.

Keywords: UN, specialized agencies, development, coherence, governance, funding, UK.

1 Introduction

At the Witness Seminars, UK nationals presented their experiences as technical experts in the United Nations and its specialized agencies. In light in part of those experiences, this article considers how the roles of the specialized agencies could change in relation to the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and suggests the requirements for an effective UK policy in this regard.

About 20 British staff from about ten specialized agencies and the like participated in one or more of the three seminars. Their experiences ranged widely from exclusively technical work throughout their international careers to a mix of advisory and programme management functions. Some joined the international system from a previous career with the British colonial service; others from academic or other work in the UK.

The heterogeneity of these experiences renders difficult the drawing of general conclusions. While statistics on the number of UK staff of agencies during the 70 years since 1945 are not available, it would be reasonable to assume that the Witness Seminars sample though limited is probably pretty typical of UK experiences. And the sample provides a useful backdrop to a consideration of how such global agencies might continue to evolve in the coming decades.

2 Staying ahead of the curve: the challenges facing the specialized agencies and what the UK should do

Although the UN and its system of agencies remain indispensable as the sole institution of global governance that has inherent legitimacy and although the COP21[2] outcome provides some new hope that international cooperation can produce results, doubts persist about the capacity of the multilateral system to confront the world's many development challenges. Is this paradox resolvable?

2.1 Coherence in multilateral decision-making

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the accompanying SDGs are hugely ambitious attempts to '*transform the world and build a better future for all people… The SDGs and targets are integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable.*'[3]

In encompassing economic, environmental, institutional and social issues, they encapsulate all of the world's development problems and needs. In intending to '*leave no one behind*', they provide the basis for the development work of the UN System over the next 15 years. The challenge to the System is enormous: the Agenda provides unprecedented opportunities for enhancing the work undertaken by the specialized agencies and the ways in which they function.

These opportunities arise because of the integrated nature of the goals and their universality. The goals are interdependent in both meanings of the expression, namely, that of mutual dependency among countries because of the ways in which their economic performance affects each other and that of the relationships among sectors or issues because progress or delays in one area causes the same in related areas. Trade-offs exist as a matter of course in the real world: for example, lifting millions of people out of poverty will inevitably affect demand for energy, water and food. The emphasis on food security conflicts with the drive for free international trade in agriculture. The international financial/monetary regimes and the international trade regime are not mutually coherent.[4] Some of these contradictions could and should be ironed out at country level, in the process of each country reviewing the global SDGs and setting national priorities for their application and implementation in relation to each country's national context and capacity.

Some contradictions, however, may need reforms to the international regimes underpinning the particular sector. Thus the search for coherence in the multilateral regime, and likewise in the UN System proper, will become even more important in the post-2015 period. But constraints built in to the constitutional basis on which the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) functions will continue to inhibit its capacity to seek coherence on a system-wide basis. The specialized agencies were established as organisations independent of but related to the UN, each being responsible for a particular functional area of work. This is likely to be increasingly challenged as a result of pressures arising from the integrated nature of the SDGs. The rights-based approach to development that the UN human rights machinery has so eloquently promoted likewise needs effective integration into the new Agenda.

A repositioning of ECOSOC so that it can play a more significant role in development coordination and policy dialogue is thus essential: this fits well with the UK's undoubted strengths in research and policy analysis, but it runs counter to past UK practices. The UK has always tended to prefer multilateral discussions on development policy to take place in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization and OECD-DAC,[5] all of which fall, *de facto,* outside the UN and ECOSOC. At the UN, the UK has tended to focus on relief and humanitarian issues, as well as concern for conflict and immediate post-conflict situations. But as the interconnected nature of the SDGs highlight, there is a clear need for more integrated policymaking and for strengthening ECOSOC for this purpose.

2.2   Universality of the SDGs: national provision of global public goods

The Agenda, and the goals, are explicitly universal in application. Universality is a '*shared responsibility for a shared future*' and the principle of '*common but differentiated responsibilities*' is particularly applicable in the context of a globalist agenda with an accent on progressive realisation of global commitments. The specialized agencies are, after all, universal by definition. They will remain as epistemological centres of knowledge communities organised on a functional basis. They also, by virtue of their universality and thus legitimacy, have the important roles of agenda-setting, norm-setting and standard-setting at the international level.

One challenge facing the agencies will be to manage the withdrawal of their function as a provider of technical assistance to developing countries. This is likely to happen gradually

over the next 15 years, in all but the most vulnerable countries. Most developing countries will have by then sufficient expertise to determine their policies and manage their programmes, it of course being understood that they, as for developed countries, will continue to seek technology and expertise from whatever source.

The *main* operational challenges facing the agencies will be to enhance significantly their capacity to promote awareness and technical advice on the national, regional and global implications of the SDGs and to find ways and means to facilitate the sharing of experiences and knowledge on 'how' to deliver the SDGs. These tasks are by no means confined to the so-called global South. There is much that agencies can do, using modern information technology including dedicated web pages, to promote such exchanges in which *all* countries, North and South can both contribute to and benefit from. Further, monitoring the national achievement of the SDGs is a task for all countries. Here, the many targets and indicators may well need some streamlining to be both manageable for the statisticians and understandable to the interested citizen.

Agencies should also assume responsibilities in the national provision of global public goods. The SDGs are in effect global public goods. One such good – the Paris climate agreement adopted at COP21 – could presage a new way of doing business for the specialized agencies in at least three respects. First,

> by the standards of a traditional treaty, [Paris] falls woefully short. Yet its deficits in this regard are its greatest strengths as a model for effective global governance in the 21st century. The Paris agreement is a sprawling, rolling, overlapping set of national commitments brought about by a broad conglomeration of parties and stakeholders. It is not law. It is a bold move towards public problem-solving on a global scale. And it is the only approach that could work.[6]

Second, Paris was built on a bottom-up approach, whereby governments presented their national plans for international review and agreed, as part of the outcome, to repeat the process at regular intervals. And third, Paris was not simply governments negotiating with themselves: the active involvement of the business community – essential for any agreement on climate – and of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) representing civil society were equally indispensable for an agreed outcome.

Climate change affects every country, every business and every person. It is thus not surprising that the processes leading up to Paris generated such widespread involvement and debate. Other SDGs are also heavily endowed with similar extensive societal-wide implications; for example, Goal 8 on promoting '*full and productive employment*' (a very welcome revival of the old Keynesian objective), Goal 10 on '*reducing inequality… within countries*' or Goal 12 on '*ensuring sustainable production and consumption patterns*' all lie at the heart of a properly functioning economy and society. In the latter case, it is certainly possible to imagine a process similar to COP21 whereby on the basis of participatory approaches involving governments, business and civil society, the agencies promote an agreed understanding of the *national* measures required to achieve *global* sustainable production.

The goals just mentioned represent new policies for the agencies. They are all significant additions to the international development agenda. Because they confirm the inherent inter-relationship among economic, environmental and social policies, such goals are fundamental to the 2030 Agenda as a whole. These goals are inherently universal and progress to their achievement will directly affect progress towards other goals. This in turn could generate even greater attention to proper forms of multilateral governance.

2.3   Institutionalised multi-stakeholder governance

Specialized agencies have had the involvement – in one form or another – of business and other groups in their deliberations for some time. The International Labour Organization (ILO) set the pattern a hundred years ago when in a fit of institutional imagination governments at Versailles agreed that employers and trade unions should also participate fully in all international deliberations on labour issues. Drawing on the experiences of ILO, of COP21 and of other similar approaches, the challenge for member states is to find acceptable ways and means of institutionalising a broader vision of the multilateral governance of agencies so that the 'non-state actors' are required to assume their responsibilities as well in a democratic and transparent manner.

However, the involvement of business in UN and agency affairs must be pursued with considerable care. A recent publication from the Global Policy Forum (Adams and Martens 2015) has demonstrated the heavy influence of corporate interests, as a result of 'a new UN approach to engagement with the business sector, one that has shifted from that of impartial rule-setting and balanced engagement to that of privileging the sector' (*op. cit.*: 110). Partnerships that depend on private sector initiatives and that carry the UN flag need to be managed so as to maintain the engagement of the corporate sector while preserving the democratic decision-making process of international governance.

2.4   Reforms to funding

The dilemma inherent in UN relationships with business arises in very large part because of the funding problem of the agencies and the UN. Insistence on zero-growth assessed budgets in the UN and agencies and reductions in core extra-budgetary funding have inevitably led the UN and agencies to seek ever larger non-core or tied contributions to finance development programmes and responses to global challenges. By comment consent, this has had pretty disastrous consequences:

> 75 per cent of the UN's operational activities for development are now financed through non-core resources… Multilateral mandates become increasingly difficult to carry out, as a profusion of earmarked projects fosters fragmentation and a loss of coordinated action.
> (Adams and Martens 2015: 109)

Public goods at national level – for example public health or primary education – are financed through national taxation as befits a society that accepts common responsibilities. Global public goods that affect all of mankind are being financed voluntarily, often by those with vested interests. This cannot be allowed to continue. Mainstream economics shows that without public funding, global public goods will either be under-supplied or if funded by corporations, provided with bias towards the funding institutions.

There have been numerous suggestions on raising the huge funds required to finance the SDGs. Most represent an expansion of what has gone before, namely a mix of public and private funds. Is there any other solution? Greater sustainability in and independence of funding are the best guarantees for equitable, efficient and effective multilateral operations: equitable in the sense that whatever resources are available are distributed to needy countries according to transparent criteria of need; efficient in the sense of being able to leverage additional resources from the private sector; and effective in the sense of being able to produce the desired results. The one policy measure that would dramatically improve the capacities and functioning of the UN System would be a form of automatic financing derived from a variant of the Tobin tax.[7] Such funding could replace the existing myriad of multilateral (and multi-bilateral) funding arrangements that add significantly to aid-related transaction costs and thereby greatly simplify the management of aid for all parties concerned.

Of course there are those who say such an approach is politically impossible.[8] But UNITAID has led the way, in using funds raised through a levy on airplane tickets now applied by nine countries.[9] The EU financial transaction tax is expected to be introduced in 2016 by some member states. Some countries tax CO_2 emissions for the same reason. Unfortunately, the benefits of such automaticity in revenue generation are still not yet widely appreciated: the UK is known for its opposition.

The *quid pro quo* for such automaticity in funding would be the installation of a *very* powerful and independent audit office in each UN agency that reports *directly*, and publically, to member states on the use of such funds, with career, financial and criminal penalties or sanctions in the case of staff malfeasance, incompetence or corruption. Prior approval by member states through review and control of the budget would of course continue but in a much more vigorous manner than at present. The same logic of using a variant of such taxes to finance multilateral development work would apply equally to humanitarian assistance as well as to UN peacekeeping operations.

Should such financing become available through one means or another, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides the chance for, if not a new beginning, at least a fresh start.

3 Some thoughts on UK participation in the specialized agencies

Earlier paragraphs have suggested some ways in which the UK government could support such a fresh start. At the Witness Seminar on peace and security (January 2016), some of the UK government representatives stated, unambiguously, the importance the UK government attaches to the development work of the UN. Former Foreign Office officials who had held positions at senior level also stressed the accumulated skills of UK staff in diplomacy within the UN, which often enabled the UK to influence decisions and international actions in positive directions, beyond the narrow interests of the UK or the West. This form of soft power offers major opportunities for strengthening the UN and international action.

The UK played a prominent role in the establishment of some of the specialized agencies, drawing on its pre-war experiences in the League of Nations.[10] As a permanent member of the Security Council, the UK has special responsibilities towards the UN and the System as a whole. Such membership as well as the continuing global commercial, economic and financial interests of the UK – clearly suggests a major role for the UK in support of action by the specialized agencies. Whether the UK has met past expectations in this regard is a subject worthy of debate but beyond the confines of this article.

An expanded and more effective British participation in the policies and actions of the agencies and as staff members of the agencies themselves could be improved and expanded in a number of ways.

3.1 Enhancing the quality of official government policies on multilateralism, in the sense of a genuine wish for a truly effective UN System. This will involve a number of things, not least significant and untied financial resources for the agencies and arrangements for governance that satisfy *all* member states. The integrated and universal nature of the SDGs calls for fresh attempts to address issues of global policy coherence – for example, between the trade and financial regimes, or between growth and sustainable production. As noted above, the UK in light of its past record could take the lead in reducing the coordination gap between the Bretton Woods Institutions and the UN and in enhancing ECOSOC as a real forum for coherent global development-related policymaking.

3.2 Supporting and encouraging relevant British academic and industry research on global issues. Originally stemming from the colonial experience, there has been a long and continuing tradition of British excellence in research on key development problems, for example medical problems common to the tropics or enhanced agricultural techniques or options in adjusting to climate change. Such traditions could be measurably enhanced if the criteria for distributing UK government grants for research prioritised the search for solutions to *global* problems.

3.3 Promoting SDG-related policy advice. The universalisation of the SDG agenda, the need to enhance evidence-based policymaking through reliable and comparable data and indicators and the benefits of shared experiences in achieving the goals are three new challenges facing the agencies. The UK, by virtue of its network of university departments, development-related thinktanks and NGOs, could provide significant advice and guidance on all these issues to the UK government and to UN organisations. UK economists and statisticians[11] were instrumental in designing the then new system of national accounts when working for the League of Nations and the UN. Perhaps today's generation could make a similar contribution again.

3.4 Expanding the quality and relevance of teaching at all levels (secondary and tertiary) about global issues and international organisations as regards the economics, history and politics of international relations, the management of international organisations and specialised technical subjects. Non-party public support for 'thinktanks' specialising in global issues will be necessary. Knowledge of languages and cultures of other countries will be essential.

3.5 Ensuring the effectiveness of advocacy NGOs (like Amnesty International, Oxfam and all the others concerned with global issues in one form or another) and groups like UNA-UK, BAFUNCS and others[12] in informing the public and in mobilising opinion to influence government policies.

3.6 Promoting a truly effective 'soft-power' foreign policy through equipping the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the BBC World Service with the necessary resources over a sustained period of time.[13]

3.7 Ensuring the fullest possible participation of UK nationals in the agencies. This brings us back to where this article began, namely the contribution of UK nationals to international development. The financing of special programmes to place young UK nationals in the multilateral system will both support the agencies and provide highly relevant experiences.[14] On a different level, the number of UK nationals elected as heads of specialized agencies is simply dismal: just a handful over the last 70 years.[15] No one can say there were no UK nationals with the necessary experience and stature.[16] UK policy towards the specialized agencies will enter a new phase when the British government actively supports the candidatures of UK nationals as heads of agencies. Of course, it would be best if all member states agreed to ban lobbying altogether, but the multilateral system is regrettably not there yet.

Notes

[1] The opinions expressed here represent the views of the authors and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.
[2] The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP21 was held in Paris, France, from 30 November to 12 December 2015. It was the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
[3] All quotations in italics are from A/Res/70/1 Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted 25 September 2015.
[4] For example, instability in exchange rates can undo benefits of tariff reductions or market access gains.
[5] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee.

6 Anne-Marie Slaughter, see www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jan/17/paris-climate-deal-flame-of-hope-diplomacy-christiana-figueres. The Paris outcome could perhaps set a new social contract for the twenty-first century, as some have suggested.

7 Named after the Nobel Laureate James Tobin, 'the Tobin tax' refers to a small levy, or tax, on foreign exchange transactions so designed to discourage financial speculation.

8 The recent report to the UN Secretary-General from the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, *Too Important to Fail – Addressing the Humanitarian Financing Gap*, (www.un.org/news/WEB-1521765-E-OCHA-Report-on-Humanitarian-Financing.pdf) alluded to this possibility without taking any position.

9 See www.unitaid.eu.

10 Founded in 1920, the League of Nations, with some 58 members in 1934/5, was the first international organisation with a principal mission to maintain world peace, aiming to prevent wars through collective security, disarmament and settling international disputes through negotiation and arbitration.

11 For example, James Meade and Richard Stone, both Nobel Laureates in Economics.

12 United Nations Association (UNA)-UK; British Association of Former United Nations Civil Servants (BAFUNCS).

13 Namely, the remarks at WS3 of several now retired senior UK diplomats.

14 For example, the recently resumed UK support to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Junior Professional Officer (JPO) scheme.

15 Since 1945, the following British nationals have been elected as heads of agencies: John Boyd-Orr (FAO, 1945–48), Julian Huxley (UNESCO, 1946–48); C.W. Jenks (ILO, 1970–1973), David Davies (WMO, 1956–1972) and Guy Ryder (ILO, 2012–) . Colin Goad was head of IMCO in the 1960s, before it was transformed into a specialized agency. In the 1980s, Bill Ryrie led World Bank Group's IFC. Mark Malloch-Brown was head of UNDP from 1999–2005.

16 For example, there have been five French Managing Directors of the IMF: Pierre-Paul Schweitzer (1963–73); Jacques de Larosière, 1978–87); Michel Camdessus (1987–2000); Dominique Strauss-Khan (2007–11) and Christine Lagarde (2011–). Can anyone seriously claim that during this 50-year period there was no qualified UK national?

Reference

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B.1.4 UN Coordination: Strengthening Coherence, Impact and Tools

Michael Askwith [1]

Abstract

This article assesses the effectiveness at country level of the two main institutions of UN development cooperation, namely UN System representation at the country level and specialized agencies, funds and programmes. It discusses the architecture developed over many years for enhanced UN System coordination and the instruments put in place to make it more effective in addressing national priorities. It notes the substantial progress made in the development of the Resident Coordinator system and in the tools designed to assist in promoting enhanced UN System collaboration, in particular the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the Delivering as One (DaO) process. It also identifies some of the dilemmas faced in trying to promote coordination and collaboration among UN agencies, funds and programmes, each with their own mandate and legitimacy. It also suggests some policy implications for addressing these dilemmas, while taking note of some of the issues raised in the articles by Robert England on the country-level perspective, and John Burley on the agency-level.

Keywords: UN, coordination, UNDAF, Delivering as One.

1   Introduction

Achieving coherence in UN support to national priorities is a permanent challenge. To address this, the UN has succeeded in developing with member states over many years an architecture designed to facilitate coherence, as well as mechanisms to institutionalise it. However, the UN would be the first to recognise that the challenges faced in ensuring that the benefits of working together exceed those of working separately are still formidable. UK nationals have played a small but significant role in UN efforts to achieve greater coherence both at headquarters and country level. Working as international civil servants rather than as representatives of the UK, many have risen to senior levels of responsibility in a large number of countries and headquarters, serving with specialized agencies, funds, programmes and country offices. While it is not possible, or even desirable, to pinpoint individual as opposed to collective achievements, it is worth noting the value of the UK's human resources investment in the work of the UN at both headquarters and country levels. As the UN enters its eighth decade, it is time to think how the UK can play a fuller role in support of the UN's collective contribution to global and national public goods in the areas of development cooperation, humanitarian action and peace and security. Improving the UN's performance calls for a strengthening of its operational structures, mechanisms and procedures, as well as for more effective monitoring of its results.

This article focuses on three main aspects: *the development of institutional arrangements for improved coordination* at both the headquarters and country level (Section 2); *the practical mechanisms devised to promote coordinated responses* to development challenges at both headquarters and country levels (Section 3); and *dilemmas and policy implications* faced in trying to reconcile the collective interests of the UN System as a whole, the individual interests of agencies, funds and programmes, and lastly of programme countries (Section 4).

2 Development of institutional arrangements for improved coordination

Conventional wisdom suggests that results achieved in support of development goals will be more effective if more than one agency is involved, and if their contributions are complementary and do not duplicate each other. This may not always be the case due to differing cultures, mandates and management arrangements. Achieving this goal may therefore require different levels of coordination, collaboration and harmonisation, through both formal and informal mechanisms. While the word 'coordination' may cause alarm due to a perception of unwelcome authority, the concept of 'collaboration' through mutually agreed goals may be more acceptable, and that of 'harmonisation' would normally involve only minor refinements of working practices.

Given the diversity of mandates, cultures and operational modalities of UN agencies, funds and programmes, recipient countries are normally concerned to ensure that these do not impinge on the delivery of effective support to national goals. In response, the UN System has felt duty-bound to develop appropriate ways of assisting developing countries, while also deriving maximum benefit from the particular characteristics of each partner agency. These do not come without corresponding transaction costs, hence the need to design coordination or collaboration modalities in such a way that they enhance rather than hinder development efforts.

2.1 Coordination reform attempts

In 1965, the UN Special Fund (UNSF) and the UN Technical Assistance Board (UNTAB) merged into a new organisation, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – the first UN agency designed to provide multi-sectoral and multi-agency support to developing countries.

In 1967, a report was commissioned by the UNDP Administrator, Paul Hoffman, to examine the ways whereby its burgeoning technical assistance and development cooperation activities, supported by a broad range of technical agencies, could be brought together to respond better to the needs of developing countries, many of which had recently become independent. The report, carried out under the auspices of Robert Jackson, with Margaret Anstee[2] as the principal author, was entitled *Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System* ('The Jackson Report'), and was published in 1969. It proposed a wide-ranging series of reforms to bring together UN development support and funding under a single UNDP 'country programme' with hopefully increased levels of resources. While the principle of UNDP country programmes was endorsed,[3] UN agencies were reluctant to cede their autonomy, or their resources, to provide technical assistance activities through a central coordinating and funding agency along the lines of UNDP.

At the country level, during the 1960s, a large number of UNDP country offices were established, together with corresponding five-year country programmes. Some of the larger funds, programmes and agencies also established country-level representations, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO). Most projects funded by UNDP were 'executed' (i.e. implemented) with the support of UN agencies, until such arrangements were progressively superseded by 'national execution' arrangements. Over time, as the process of 'national execution' increased during the 1980s and 1990s, the role of UN agencies in the implementation of UNDP-financed support tended to diminish, with the result that they were obliged to seek their own funding rather than depend on UNDP. The UNDP Resident Representative carried out a *de facto* coordinating function since most UN agencies' activities were funded by UNDP, while the desire by the agencies to retain their autonomy and identity continued.

Nevertheless, the pressures for coordinated approaches increased, while UNDP's *de facto* coordination role tended to diminish.

2.2 The Resident Coordinator system

In the early 1980s, the General Assembly established the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation (DIEC) within the UN Secretariat, charged with seeking ways to strengthen coordination between UN entities, and funding sources, in the area of economic and social development. One of its tasks was to develop a more formal coordination system under a UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC), which had been called for under a 1977 General Assembly resolution.[4] John Burley was charged with developing the mechanics of such a system and with facilitating a consensus-building process between UN agencies. This work was continued under his successor, David Whaley. This process succeeded in establishing UN system-wide agreement of the Resident Coordinator system, and from the mid-1980s, all UNDP Resident Representatives were also designated as UN Resident Coordinators.

The system provided increased responsibility for the UNRC, though not necessarily formal authority, with the understanding that this authority would be exercised through consensus-building rather than by dictat, thus ensuring that UN agency mandates and interests were scrupulously respected and safeguarded. UN Country Teams (UNCTs), made up of heads of agencies (both resident and non-resident) were designed to facilitate consensus-building and coordinated programming and information-sharing, thus requiring substantial diplomatic, negotiation and consensus-building skills by UNRC incumbents.

In the light of the challenges of ensuring that UNDP interests and UN System interests were maintained in a harmonious way – sometimes difficult if the UNRC was perceived to be too biased towards UNDP than to UN agencies – calls were later made in the early 2000s for the establishment of a more formal 'firewall' between UNDP and the UN System. This would be both through the appointment of UNRCs recruited either from UN agencies or from outside the UN System, and through the delegation of responsibilities for UNDP's own programmes to a UNDP Country Director, or to a Deputy Resident Representative in smaller countries. This led to a reduction in the proportion of UNRCs coming from UNDP from 100 per cent in the 1980s and 1990s to an estimated 30 to 40 per cent in 2015, although all RCs were administered by UNDP.[5]

To support this process, the functions of the DIEC were divided in 1997 between the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), responsible for the promotion of international economic cooperation and the triennial (later quadrennial) policy review of operational activities (TCPR/QCPR), and the UN Development Group (UNDG) which was responsible for supporting and guiding UNRC. UNDP meanwhile inherited responsibility for clearing (with agencies) the designation of UNRCs. The UNDG, whose first Director was Alan Doss, is made up of 32 agency members, with six observer organisations, including the World Bank Group. The Executive Committee of the UNDG was chaired from 2000 by the Administrator of UNDP, Mark Malloch-Brown, and is made up of the heads of UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP. At the same time, UN agency heads come together on a regular basis under the auspices of the Chief Executives Board (CEB).[6]

The UN Development Operations Coordination Office (DOCO) serves as the Secretariat of the UNDG and is a key component within the UNDG, promoting social and economic progress by providing support. It was a key element of UNDG's formation in 1997, uniting the UN System and improving the quality of its development assistance, providing more strategic UN support for national plans and priorities, and reducing transaction costs for governments. With the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after 2000, the sharing of common goals and other internationally agreed development objectives helped the process.

At the country level, UN agency representatives are brought together in UN Country Teams (UNCTs),[7] under the coordination of the UNRC. RCs and UNCTs can play a crucial role in addressing the issues raised in the articles by Robert England at the country level, and John Burley at the agency level.

3   Practical mechanisms to promote coordinated responses

As part of the changes promoted by the DIEC, the need for a coordinated programming process for development cooperation within the UN System was recognised. This was promoted through the testing during the 1980s of a 'Country Strategy Note' (CSN), which would reflect the broad thrusts of UN agency support in each country. This then evolved during the late 1990s into the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) (of which the prior preparation of a Common Country Assessment (CCA) was an important element). This was one of the wide-ranging series of proposals for reform launched by the former Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in 1997, through his report *Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform* (A/51/950) (16 July 1997). Thereafter, the UNDAF was tested in a number of pilot countries,[8] to the point that by the early 2000s the UNDAF had become an obligatory requirement in each country and applied in almost all countries in which the UN System provided support. As of 2012, more than 140 of the total 173 countries where the UN is represented have formulated UNDAFs or equivalents,[9] which could be interpreted as a positive sign of its acceptability, although qualitative judgements on its impact are still required. Since 1997 revised versions of guidelines have been issued periodically in order to adapt UNDAFs to lessons of experience, new international agreements and conventions (such as the MDGs), as well as to resolutions of successive triennial (or quadrennial) comprehensive policy reviews (TCPR/QCPR).

In a parallel move, the concept of Delivering as One (DaO) was developed through a report and an initiative. The report, issued in 2006 by a UN panel established by Kofi Annan as Secretary-General, explored how the United Nations System could work more coherently and effectively across the world in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. It set out a programme of reform of the international humanitarian system, focusing on four main principles: One Leader, One Programme, One Budget and One Office. The DaO initiative was tested in eight pilot countries (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay and Vietnam) as well as in a number of 'self-starter' countries[10] that had agreed to work with the UN System to capitalise on the strengths and comparative advantages of members of the UN family. Periodic reviews of the DaO experience were carried out in 2007[11] and 2012.[12]

At a thematic level, the UN has often been instrumental in bringing together stakeholders involved in specific thematic areas such as the Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN)/Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), UN fight against HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and the UN Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity (UN Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], UN Industrial Development Organization [UNIDO], UNDP, International Trade Centre [ITC], FAO, WTO, UN Environment Programme [UNEP], International Labour Organization [ILO], UN Commission on International Trade Law [UNCITRAL], UN Office for Project Services [UNOPS] and the five UN Regional Commissions).

4   Dilemmas and policy implications for UN coordination

While substantial progress has been made in strengthening UN System coordination through UNDAF and DaO processes, bringing together the operational support of individual agencies in the context of a common and unified framework still faces particular challenges. These chiefly concern the following: *design*, while superficially attractive, is often not rigorous or detailed enough to provide a comprehensive basis for monitoring in each programme or

thematic area; *implementation* often focuses on agency-specific inputs rather than coordinated approaches to address broader programme goals; *monitoring* suffers from a combination of inadequate indicators – particularly at outcome level – as well as inadequate Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) and agency capacity for systematic and continuous UNDAF monitoring; and *management* likewise suffers from capacity constraints at programme and thematic levels.[13]

The author has been involved with UNDAF processes since 1997/98 as a member of the original group of 19 UNDAF facilitators to assist in preparing the first four UNDAFs.[14] Subsequently, between 2000 and 2015, he carried out a total of 11 UNDAF formulation missions[15] and 10 UNDAF/DaO mid-term review and/or evaluation missions.[16] In addition he carried out a capacity building study with UNESCO to assist it in integrating UNESCO programming into national poverty reduction strategies and UNDAF processes (2005-06).[17] In light of the above exercises, the author observed a number of dilemmas relating to different stages of UNDAF processes (formulation and design, implementation, monitoring and management) and made recommendations to address them in each context. They highlight a number of issues which may affect the UN's capacity to deliver effectively coordinated support and have policy implications for the relevant parties at both headquarters and country level which are summarised as follows.

4.1   Prioritisation – national, global, UNDAF or agency?

One of the UN's guiding principles is the need to support national priorities and programmes, as articulated in national and sectoral plans and programmes. At the same time, the UN System is responsible for developing norms and standards in a wide variety of areas, such as human rights, the environment, health and agriculture, and in supporting the attainment of MDGs up to 2015, and from 2016 the new SDGs, as well as the implementation of international conventions. As Stephen Browne has said,

> the real strength of the field network is to keep the organization's ear to the ground, identifying the specific development priorities of each country. But while these highly differentiated needs are fed upwards, the organization has developed a set of centrally determined development priorities which it attempts to propagate downwards.[18]

Olav Stokke characterised this tension for UNDP as 'riding two horses simultaneously' (Stokke 2009). In reality, the UN System is uniquely placed to try to reconcile both national and international priorities, and to assist programme countries to combine the two, subject of course to the availability of funds. This has become more difficult as a result of supply-driven funding from donors and global funds. Thus, even if the UNCT wants to respond to national priorities, its ability to do so is limited by the available funding windows.

The primary frame of reference should be national or sectoral plans where they exist, or in their absence, national programming frameworks, broken down into corresponding sectoral or thematic strategies or programmes. These should include measures to achieve MDGs, SDGs and the goals of international conventions. UN support should be designed to use agency comparative advantages and resources, including of the World Bank Group, to support these national priorities and strategies, and particularly the relevant SDGs.

A *dilemma* resides in the fact that the UNDAFs are encouraged to focus on a limited number of areas which are often too narrow to absorb the wide range of national priorities and agency mandates, for which the UN System could provide support. Should an UNDAF therefore be a 'broad framework' for all national priorities where the UN System could assist – or should it only constitute a more limited framework focusing only on selected areas where more than one UN agency can work collectively, thus potentially excluding single-issue agencies or areas where only one agency might be involved? In practice, the latter option is

often chosen. Richard Jolly has highlighted the above dilemma and possible policy implications as follows:

> All this raises issues of coherence and coordination. Here I feel that the model should not be a never-to-come return to Jackson and Anstee (who advocated a common UN development cooperation and funding framework for all agencies) but recognition that the world of the free market is here and will be. So the RC/RRs of the UN will need to work more closely with the Bretton Woods Institutions and with the other larger and main serious international players within each country, working as at present in theme/team areas. It cannot be the old hope of coordinating everyone or even all the UN agencies – just the main serious players and the government.[19]

In terms of *policy implications*, the author's experience suggests that the former 'broad framework' mentioned above provides a more realistic framework for governments and the UN System to make fuller use of UN capacities in supporting selected national programmes, goals and SDGs, preferably jointly, or if not, individually. In this respect, even single agencies can have as much impact as a group of agencies, if suitably focused on a national programme or SDG.

Notwithstanding the desirability of promoting joint programming and implementation arrangements, a key criterion should be strategic and catalytic support to national programmes and SDGs. Thus an UNDAF would constitute an overall and flexible framework for a multiplicity of sectoral, sub-sectoral or thematic sub-frameworks using a common methodological approach made up of a series of stages: problem identification, policy formulation (national and international), plan formulation (national, sectoral), national programme development (national rather than UN), project design and implementation for national programme support, partnership development and resource mobilisation, and most importantly, performance management and monitoring.

4.2 Tools of the trade: UNDAFs/DaO, Country Programme documents and programme support/project documents

To achieve the above, a series of 'tools of the trade' in the form of documents are needed. These include documents relating to the following:

At the *national level*, it is clear that governments and civil society need to possess policy and planning documents to provide appropriate frameworks for donor partner support. There is a crucial role for external partners, particularly the UN System and including the World Bank, to provide support to formulating such frameworks, if needed.

The *UN System support* should be articulated at four different levels:

(i)   the UN System as a whole, identifying support to national priority areas, through an UNDAF/DaO document, with results matrix;
(ii)   UN agencies, through multi-year agency country programme documents (CPDs), which articulate support to UNDAFs as well as corporate goals;
(iii)   sectoral or thematic support, through programme support documents (PSDs) linked to national programmes;
(iv)   agency-specific project documents for the approval of agency-specific funds, linked to programme support documents (PSDs).

The key *dilemmas* faced are the need for appropriate synchronisation between national planning documents, UNDAFs and CPDs, and tools for UN support to national programmes.

With respect to (i) and (ii) above, the author has observed the efforts of UNDAFs and agency CPDs to support selected national priorities. But he has also noted that some agencies, for

instance, the ILO (Decent Work Country Programmes), WHO (Country Strategies), UNIDO (Country Programme) and the FAO (Country Programme Frameworks) only make brief mention of UNDAFs, while in reality focusing mainly on agency priorities. World Bank Country Assistance Strategies (CAS) barely refer to UNDAFs, if at all. At the same time, he has noted that UNDAF documents often do not adequately reflect agency mandates, with the result that their CPDs often include priorities that may not be fully developed in UNDAF documents. Furthermore, smaller agencies and less prominent sectoral priorities (e.g. UNCTAD, ITC and trade) may be omitted from UNDAFs altogether.

With respect to (iii) and (iv), the author considers that a major need is for a document which articulates needs (demand) of national programmes in each national priority area, and planned resources (supply) from all development partners, including the UN System. Such programme support documents, to be complemented by budgets, work plans and agency-specific resource approval documents (project documents), would enable all partners to plan, implement and monitor support for each sector/sub-sector, theme or SDG, according to a common methodology. These would articulate a 'programme approach' whereby UN and partner support provide coordinated and complementary agencies (through joint programming arrangements) to common components of a national programme or strategy.

While current trends to reduce UNDAF documentation are laudable, effective UNDAF implementation may require more operational documentation and flexibility, particularly at the programme support level, in order to promote a much larger number of joint programming exercises in support of national programmes.

The *policy implications* of the above suggest that increased consideration should be given to ensuring that UNDAF documents address more effectively: (i) national priorities as articulated in national programmes and strategies; (ii) integration of SDGs, international conventions and treaties within national priorities; (iii) the design of coordinated UN support to strengthen national capacity to achieve (i) and (ii) through programme support documents; and (iv) the use of agency comparative advantages and mandates in support of (i) and (ii). All of this should be complemented by rigorous monitoring and the establishment of appropriate indicators and monitoring arrangements.

4.3   Monitoring

UNDAF monitoring has traditionally faced considerable challenges, to the point that several of the author's reviews concluded that UNDAFs are impossible to evaluate due to the broad scope of outcomes, outputs, indicators and the lack of data and appropriate monitoring arrangements. Furthermore UNDAF monitoring has been under-resourced, while agency heads have given priority to the monitoring of agency country programmes and projects. In many cases, the contribution of agency support to UNDAF outcomes is not documented in Country Programme (CP) or project reviews. In addition, agency staff constraints often mean that programme staff are not able to devote the necessary time to UNDAF outcome/thematic group monitoring.

The *dilemma* is that despite the agreement of UNCT members to fulfil UNDAF monitoring arrangements, the weakness of outcome or thematic group monitoring and insufficient staff resources do not enable adequate outcome or output-level work planning and reporting to take place as required. The *policy implications* relate to the need for increased prioritisation and resources for UNDAF monitoring and the strengthening of existing monitoring mechanisms.

4.4   Management

The UNDAF reviews and evaluations in which the author has been involved have highlighted the need for more effective management of processes and tools at every level, particularly at those of problem identification, design of UN support arrangements, implementation and

monitoring. This also requires consensus-building and coordination skills among a disparate collection of agencies, staff and interests. Key among these are effective leadership at the RC/UNCT level, a well-resourced RCO, and functioning Outcome Groups (OGs) to ensure that UNDAFs are designed to optimise UN System support to sectoral and thematic priorities. The main *dilemmas* experienced have related to the varying priority given by RCs, agency heads and the UNCT to UNDAF matters in the face of agency priorities, staff and time constraints, national sensitivities, as well as inadequate tools. This has often been aggravated by the lack of support at the agency headquarters level for UNDAF participation. The *policy implications* relate to the need for increased accountability for the RC/UNCT to ensure that effective outcome groups are put in place for each priority area, linked as appropriate to national/donor thematic groups; and that they carry out systematic monitoring and reporting of UNDAF/agency results in each area of national programme support. This should include both substantive and financial monitoring, through regular (semi-annual, annual) reporting by OGs to the UNCT/UNDAF management, the existence of a well resourced RCO, including a monitoring and evaluation specialist.

4.5   Staff resources

A key feature of UNDAFs is the need for agency staff to be able to link their agency-related work to that of the UNDAF. In reality, agency responsibilities claim priority. Financial constraints also mean that the availability of RCO and agency programme staff for UNDAF-related meetings and work is often severely curtailed.

Staff are thus faced with the continual *dilemma* of work priorities, and sometimes conflicting loyalties between agency and UNDAF work, when in fact they should be mutually supportive. Once again, the *policy implications* relate to prioritisation and the strengthening of links between UNDAF and agency management, as well as strengthening RCO capacity.

4.6   Incentives

The current dichotomy between the UNDAF and agency work is often exacerbated by the lack of incentives to fully participate in UNDAF management work. In fact there are actually pronounced disincentives, caused by several factors, of which the most important are the polycentric architecture of the UN System programming, and the multiple funding sources, which are themselves polycentric, each having their own cycles, procedures, buzz words and so on.

The main *dilemmas* are the existence of sometimes conflicting UNDAF/agency work responsibilities and the need for more balanced incentives and rewards for participation in UNDAF and agency matters. The *policy implications* are the need for suitable priority and recognition to be given for UNDAF-related work, coupled with promotion and financial incentives.

5   Conclusions

The UN System has made substantial progress over the years in developing institutional arrangements for strengthening inter-agency coordination, both at the headquarters level through the CEB and UNDG mechanism, and the country level through the Resident Coordinator system. At the same time mechanisms have been developed to ensure that UN support is adequately coordinated, particularly through the UNDAF and DaO mechanisms, and through the promotion of joint programming.

Despite the inevitable tensions arising from potentially conflicting loyalties of agency and UN System accountability pressures, results have shown encouraging trends to strengthen coordination in the context of specific thematic areas, particularly those relating to the MDGs, and hopefully those of the SDGs.

But these results are often poorly documented, the value added of collaborative ventures not fully exploited, and more importantly, the actual contribution and impact of UN support (either joint or individual) to individual national programmes and priorities are not adequately monitored and reported upon. As a result, the tools developed, and the management arrangements put in place need to be strengthened so as to ensure that the collective contributions of UN agencies, funds and programmes are enhanced.

Notes

[1] The opinions expressed here represent the views of the author and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.

[2] Margaret Anstee is often referred to as Margaret Joan Anstee.

[3] General Assembly Consensus Decision of 1970.

[4] General Assembly resolution 32/197 on Restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations System (20 December 1977).

[5] The potential for inter-agency tension still exists due to the tendency of UNDP to support projects which would normally be the responsibility of a relevant technical specialized agency, thus leading to a perception of conflicting roles as coordinator and competitor, which still prevails in spite of firewalls.

[6] The CEB meets twice a year and is chaired by the UN Secretary-General. It brings together the Heads of 27 United Nations System organisations (15 specialized agencies, 10 UN funds and programmes, the World Trade Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency). The CEB is responsible for keeping up to date on current political issues and concerns that face the United Nations. Additionally, the CEB approves policy statements on behalf of the system when the reporting bodies make recommendations to do so. There are three committees that support the CEB: the High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) for global policy and other items that face the world at large; the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) to make businesses across the system work together; and the UNDG which works to promote country-level efforts within the system.

[7] Made up of representatives of all resident and non-resident agencies (NRAs), and sometimes including World Bank representatives.

[8] In 1997, a team of UNDAF Facilitators were designated to assist a first group of about 20 countries which had volunteered to pilot the UNDAF process. The author was a member of the facilitation teams sent to Senegal, Mali, Namibia and Kenya in 1997/98.

[9] While a useful summary of UNDAF logic, and providing a useful baseline for monitoring, results matrices can be inflexible tools in changing situations. If the UNDAF document is to be a 'light' framework, it should focus on broad thematic areas, and outline the key national programmes and strategies, and the proposed support. More detailed design and results matrices would be provided in programme support documents.

[10] The author assisted the UN System in the preparation of an UNDAF (called a UN Country Programme) for Papua New Guinea (2005), one of the 'self-starter' countries.

[11] 2007 Stocktaking Exercise – Key points emerging from Reports by Governments, UNCTs and the UN (27 March 2008).

[12] Stock-taking exercise of the Delivering as One experience (2007) and Report to the General Assembly on Delivering as One (2012). See: Note of the Secretary-General A/66/859, www.un.org/en/ga/deliveringasone/pdf/summaryreportweb.pdf

[13] This section has benefited from Paul Balogun's report for UNDESA on 'The relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations Development Framework' (May 2012) and Richard Longhurst's Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Report on 'Review of the Role and Quality of the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs)'.

[14] CCA/UNDAF formulation missions: Senegal (1997), Mali (1997), Namibia (1998) and Kenya (1998).

[15] CCA/UNDAF formulation missions: Mongolia (CCA) (June 2000), Kenya (UNDAF Review/Revision), Lao PDR (UNDP CCF and UNDAF) (2001), Iran (CCA) (2002), Serbia and Montenegro (CCA) (2003), Bosnia and Herzegovina (CCA/UNDAF) (2004), Mozambique (UNDAF) (2005–06), Papua New Guinea (UNDAF) (2006) (12), Samoa and Fiji – Pacific sub-regional UNDAF Review and formulation of Implementation Plans (2008), Philippines (UNDAF) (2010), Indonesia (2014).

[16] UNDAF mid-term review/evaluation missions: Kenya (2003), Cambodia (2004), Nigeria (2005), Sao Tome and Principe (2010), Equatorial Guinea (2009), Jordan (UNDAF/DaO) (2010/11), Niger (2012), Comores (2012), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2013), Lao PDR (2015).

[17] The author assisted UNESCO in 2006 in developing UNESCO Country Programme Documents (UCPD) in each of the pilot countries as part of its process to strengthen its capacity to contribute to UNDAF/DaO processes, and later in the preparation of the Papua New Guinea UCPD.

[18] Quote from copy of email from Stephen Browne to John Burley (16 February 2016) on subject of '*IDS Bulletin* – chapter on agencies, 2nd version'.

[19] Email from Richard Jolly to Stephen Browne, 11 April 2016.

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B.1.5 The Future of UN Development Assistance – Norms, Standards and the SDGs

Stephen Browne [1]

Abstract

The UN's development activities were founded on a rationale of cooperation and include four main functions: setting norms, standards and goals; information and research; global cooperation agreements; and technical assistance. Development activities constitute the largest of the UN's four functions or pillars. Many successes have been recorded over 70 years, but the UN encounters challenges of organisational dispersion, marginalisation and rivalry. From inside and outside the UN there is a growing clamour for more change and adaptation as the UN begins a new post-2015 era, characterised by the Sustainable Development Goals. Reforms must address the two main areas of weakness. The UK government, as a highly influential UN member state, can exert a valuable influence, including helping to ensure that a reform-minded Secretary-General is elected in 2016.

Keywords: UN Development System, UN reform, UK government.

1   Introduction

The United Nations was established 70 years ago primarily as a security organisation based on international cooperation. Anticipating the need for human advance, the UN Charter mentions development in its preamble and contains two short chapters which are relevant to its future development role: Chapter IX on 'international economic and social cooperation' and Chapter X, establishing the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which would bring into the common development fold several organisations, to be known as specialized agencies of the UN (Burley and Browne 2015). Subsequently, the broadly defined development activities of the UN became its largest domain, in terms of staff and financial resources. This chapter looks at the four main development functions of the UN, reviews some of the achievements and looks ahead to the increasingly urgent tasks of adaptation and reform to ensure that the development UN can remain relevant. It concludes with some thoughts on a future role for the UK government.

2   Four functions

The UN Charter's definition of the development mandate was founded on a rationale of 'cooperation'. This was the key word and in practice, UN cooperation has been pursued in four broadly different ways (Browne 2014).

2.1 Technical standards function. The *first* and most straightforward is the technical standards function. States find a common purpose in international cooperation in order to facilitate cross-border exchange. Inter-state communications begat the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in the nineteenth century because of the imperative to assign international wave-bands and to allow mail to travel across borders. These two specialized agencies of the UN, along with five others created subsequently as UN entities – the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO),the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) – are the seven most functional agencies, responding to specific and universal technical needs. They establish common technical standards which are fundamental to international collaboration. Some other parts of the system are also

'functional' in the Mitrany sense (1966) insofar as they help develop universal standards: World Health Organization (WHO) for health (and with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), for food safety), International Labour Organization (ILO) for the workplace, and UN Eductional, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for culture and education (Lee 2009; Shaw 2009; Hughes 2011; Singh 2011).

2.2 Public information. The *second* type of cooperation is the generation of public information goods, in the form of statistics, surveys and studies. From the outset, the UN has collected statistics from its member governments, screened and processed them for robustness and comparability, and published regular compendia on a wide range of subjects. Initially, the UN strove to become the main repository of information relevant to development when knowledge of the process was in its infancy. The number of areas in which the UN can still claim primacy has shrunk – some of the major exceptions being population, gender and national accounts data. However, the UN has continued to collect data and undertake research in key areas as a basis for its advocacy of development values and goals. The ILO pioneered notions of basic needs in the 1970s, and from the 1980s onwards, work by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) led to the concept of human development (UNDP 1990). The UN calls on its research for its campaigns of advocacy in the development field. There is no better example than the work of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)/World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) whose periodic evaluation of global warming is the basis of the UN's advocacy of urgent mitigation measures.

2.3 International cooperation in support of common goals. The *third* type derives from the need for cooperation through international organisations wherever there are shared perceptions of a problem and a readiness to develop a consensus. This 'cognitive condition' (Rittberger and Zangl 2006) is the basis of inter-state cooperation through the UN and the closest approximation to global governance in key domains. The best most recent examples of such global cooperation have been the intergovernmental consultations leading to agreement on the *Sustainable Development Goals*, *2016–2030* (United Nations 2015), and the *Paris Agreement* (UNFCCC 2015) on climate change, both concluded in 2015.

2.4 Provision of technical assistance. The *fourth* type of UN development assistance may be termed vertical cooperation, the rationale for which was the benevolent transfer of grants and expertise in the form of technical assistance (TA). From modest beginnings, TA has expanded to become by far the largest and most visible form of development assistance through the UN. The Charter did not provide for an operational role but the UN was soon active as the first global multilateral aid agency, initially through the dispensing of humanitarian assistance to children and refugees who had become the victims of conflict. To this day, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) are two of the most respected UN organisations. TA had been a limited feature of the defunct League of Nations fully paid for by the recipients (Rist 1997; Browne 2011). 'Free' TA, however, had not been anticipated, partly because giving away resources was controversial both for governments and for the secretariat. The two main commercial banking countries (the US and the UK) were initially opposed to unconditional funding which they could not easily control (Keenleyside 1966). Within the UN, David Owen and others were careful to craft mechanisms which ensured that TA would be fully matched by resources from partner governments. Cooperation, however, soon became assistance. Encouraged by the call from President Truman in his 1949 inaugural speech for a 'bold new programme' through the UN 'for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of under-developed areas' (US Department of State 1949), the United States and several other governments made available US$20 million for the new Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA) (Murphy 2006).

These development functions form one of four pillars of the UN System today, which also comprises peace and security, humanitarian relief, and law and human rights. All four pillars have grown considerably in size. The development pillar alone now comprises more than 30 separate organisations and agencies and absorbs a majority of the UN staff. The total collective development budget is US$16 billion to US$17 billion per year (United Nations 2013).

Over 70 years, many development successes can be ascribed to the UN in its development functions. A selection of prominent UN Development System (UNDS) activities is shown in Table 7, which illustrates that the major organisations of the UNDS are each engaged in between one and four of the different functions. The specialized agencies have developed norms and standards of critical importance to human safety and welfare, while helping to facilitate global reporting on health, agriculture, labour and education. Most UN development organisations have produced noteworthy research and data, as well as managing numerous technical assistance projects. Some of the greatest successes, however, have been in the area of global cooperation, particularly in the domains of health and the environment. Campaigns led by WHO have helped to eradicate or control deadly diseases and pandemics. Climatically, it can be argued that the world has already been saved once, through the Montreal Protocol, which has helped to reverse erosion of the ozone layer. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described it as 'perhaps the single most successful international agreement to date.'[2] The Paris Agreement of 2015 is a critical step towards addressing the perils of climate change through excessive carbon emissions.

3   Current challenges

The UN Development 'System' of organisations, however, is the part of the UN that has adapted least well to changing realities and it now faces two types of challenge as it looks to the future: dispersion and marginalisation.

3.1 Dispersion is a characteristic of development cooperation in general. Over 70 years, while UN has grown, the number of official and private development organisations has proliferated. Within the UN, dispersion is a legacy rooted in the origins of the system. The 'functional' logic of the growing family of UN development organisations from the late 1940s onwards resulted in the pursuit of many parallel disciplines: health, education, agriculture, industry and so on. Even within similar development domains, there is organisational parallelism, or rivalry: education is a concern of both UNESCO and UNICEF; international trade is a primary preoccupation of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). There are many other examples. Parallelism would matter less if UN organisations working in similar fields collaborated more closely. There are some good examples such as the WHO/UNICEF immunisation campaigns, the Standing Committee for Nutrition (WHO, FAO, UNICEF, World Bank and others), the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), with widespread membership and others like the Joint Consultative Group on Programmes (JCGP) and the previously cited IPCC. But these are the exceptions that prove the rule: the UN is more effective when it comes together but the examples of established partnerships are rare.

Things might have been different if, at its creation, the UN had been endowed with a strong centre. But this was not the case. ECOSOC could have played a centralising role, but the main architects of the UN – particularly the Americans – were cautious about creating a powerful multilateral economic body with wide jurisdiction (US Department of State 1944). So, as the Charter puts it, the specialized agencies were 'brought into relationship' with the UN through ECOSOC (United Nations 2006: art. 57).

Table 7   The UN Development System organisations, functions and selected services

	Development services			
	Technical standards and norms	**Research, data, information**	**Intergovernmental cooperation, policy, conventions**	**Technical assistance**
UN Agency/Organization				
DESA		World population projections; World Economic Situation & Prospects		Public administration support
UNODC		Narcotics production data	UN Convention Against Corruption (2005)	Crop substitution
UN Women			Convention on the Eradication of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)	
UNDP		Global, regional, national human development reports	Mekong River Commission (1960s–80s)	Electoral assistance; aid management
UNICEF		National child assessments	Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990)	Water and sanitation projects
WFP				Food for work schemes
UNFPA				Reproductive health measures
UNCTAD		World Investment Report; Trade and Development Report	Generalized system of trade preferences (1968)	ASYCUDA: automated customs administration
ITC		Export market data		Organic export promotion
UNEP		Climate change assessments	Montreal Protocol (1987) Convention on Biological Diversity (1993) Paris Agreement on Climate Change (2015)	
UN-HABITAT		Global urbanization data		Urban water supply
UNAIDS		AIDS incidence monitoring (from 1990)		Support to national AIDS Commissions
Regional commissions				
ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA		Annual regional surveys	Support for regional institutions	

(Cont.)

Table 7 (cont.)

	Development services			
	Technical standards and norms	**Research, data, information**	**Intergovernmental cooperation, policy, conventions**	**Technical assistance**
Specialized agencies				
ILO	Labour standards	Global employment data	Migration policy	
UNESCO	World Heritage sites	Global Education Monitoring Report		Restoration of cultural sites; educational curriculum reform
FAO	Codex Alimentarius (food safety)	Global agricultural statistics		Agricultural extension services
WHO		Global health statistics	Smallpox eradication; Avian flu, SARS, Ebola containment	Health system capacity building
UNIDO		Global industrial statistics		Support to Montreal Protocol compliance
IFAD				Sustainable rural development
UNWTO		World tourism statistics		
ICAO	Airline safety standards			
IMO	Maritime safety standards		Piracy containment	
ITU	Mobile communication standards			Institutes for Broadcasting Development
UPU	International postal conventions			
WMO	Weather measuring standards	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports on global warming		
WIPO	Intellectual protection		Patent Cooperation Treaty (1070)	
IAEA	Nuclear safety standards			Nuclear safety management

Source: Author's own.

The absence of a strong centre was recognised by the Capacity Study of 1969, co-authored by Robert Jackson and Margaret Anstee, and was designed to enhance the role of the newly created UN Development Programme as funder and coordinator (United Nations 1969). But the study could not prevent the growing proliferation of organisations. These new organisations were each established to respond to an emerging development need, but they were managed autonomously. Their growing number further distanced the prospect of strategic oversight of the development UN, as the development process was becoming more complex and multifaceted.

Today, in addition to the more than 30 development organisations in the UN – half of which do not even come under the authority of the General Assembly – there is an even greater number of functional commissions, training and research organisations. The UN University on its own now has 16 specialised centres. All these entities are physically dispersed. The headquarters of the main organisations are to be found in 14 different countries. Many of them support field representatives in offices, which now number more than 1,000 in total; nearly all of these representatives maintain separate administrations, budgets and premises. These numbers, moreover, are growing not shrinking. A sympathetic commentator is left 'breathless and bewildered at the sheer number of overlapping, agenda-sharing, and rival agencies within the world organization' (Kennedy 2006). The report of the high-level panel on system-wide coherence was equally critical (United Nations 2007).

The response of the UN to this dispersal has been to establish mechanisms of coordination, rather than oversight and control. The main development organisations are members of the UN Development Group (UNDG), which is chaired by the head (Administrator) of UNDP. But the specialized agencies (which nominally include the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, but which are not considered here as part of the UN Development System) have separate governance mechanisms beyond the authority of the Secretary-General. The function of the UNDG chair is therefore largely passive. While the UNDG is a useful forum for exchanging information on the UN's numerous development operations, encouraging UN country teams to develop joint programmes (UN Development Assistance Frameworks, UNDAFs) and helping to forge common ('standard') operating procedures, which have to be separately agreed by each governing body, the existence of the UNDG and the many other UN coordinating mechanisms can have the effect of slowing down the UN's capacity to act. There are also powerful centrifugal forces which continue to drive the development system apart. Chief among these is the competition for funds. The specialized agencies and many of the organisations under the Secretary-General's authority receive core funding through fixed percentage levies on their members ('assessed contributions'). But organisations like UNDP and UNICEF are still voluntarily funded, even for their core resources. All the UN development organisations and agencies, however, compete for funds to finance their operations from the major traditional donors, as well as from many newer sources, including other multilateral agencies such as the European Commission (EC), vertical funding mechanisms such as the Global Fund, the Global Alliance for Vaccinations and Immunization (GAVI) and philanthropic organisations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). The EC and the Global Fund are currently the largest sources of funding to UNDP. Donors like to patronise individual organisations of the system, and most of the UN's operational funding is now earmarked ('non-core') by donors for specific purposes and geographic destinations, through their chosen recipients. This bilateralism of the multilateral system has accelerated. While core contributions to the UN have declined slightly in real terms over the last two decades, these non-core contributions rose by nearly 150 per cent between 1998 and 2013 (Figure 2). They now account for more than 70 per cent of total funding (United Nations 2013). With stagnant or declining core budgets, UN organisations are reluctant to turn down offers of non-core funding, even when it results, as it often does, in an encroachment onto the mandates of other UN bodies.

3.2 Marginalisation. In norm entrepreneurship, in the generation of ideas, and especially in its TA functions, the UN Development System has strong competitors. The UN's universality gives it legitimacy in the establishment of norms in the wider societal interest. But it has no monopoly on technical norm-setting. The world's largest standards-setting organisation in the domains of 'business, government and society' is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) dating from 1946 with a membership of variable geometry which comprises governments, private business and civil society organisations: the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Since its founding, the ISO has developed more than 20,000 international standards, claiming to add more than 1,100 each year. Its voluntary consensus standard-setting, involving civil society and the private sector, is a model which the UN could

emulate (Murphy and Yates 2009) and arguably applies in the tri-partite structure of the ILO. A critical aspect of internet governance – the assignment of domain names – is another area which is managed by an NGO, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), and where a purely intergovernmental organisation would threaten to encroach on freedom of communications. In sum, where norm-setting is purely technical and not value-driven, it need not always be the exclusive prerogative of governments.

Figure 2 Funding of the UN development and humanitarian system now comes predominantly from non-core resources
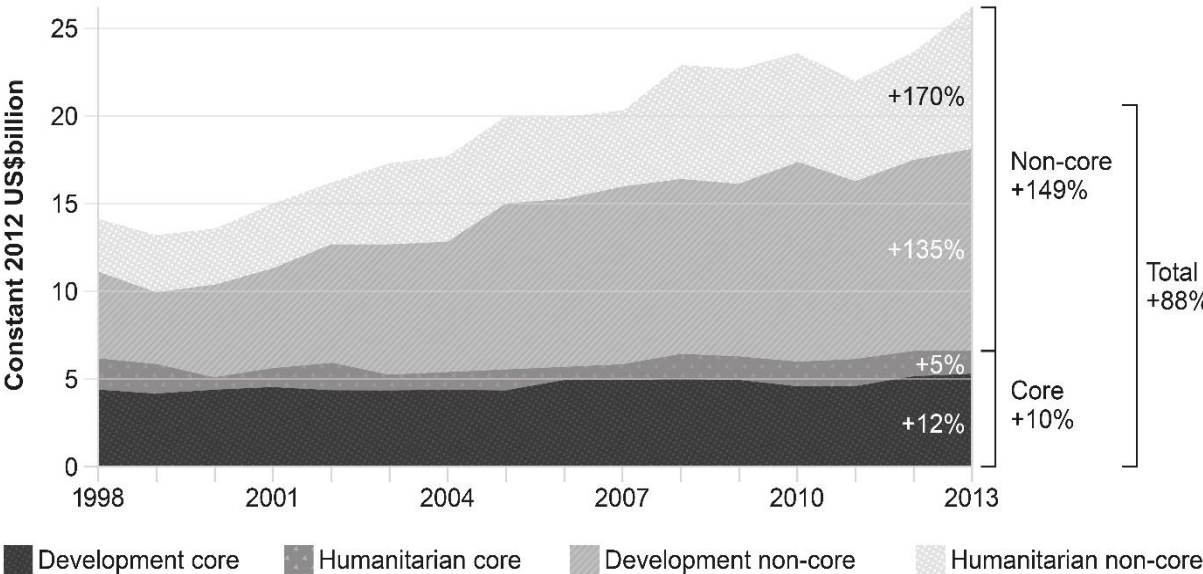
Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Report A/70/62–E/2015/4.

Turning to its ideational role, the UN in the 1940s and 1950s was the principle repository of original thinking on development. From that period onwards, the UN has counted many Nobel laureates among its staff and advisers. Inevitably, however, the UN's monopoly of original ideas was unlikely to be sustained while the volume of development research from the major development banks, numerous academic and research institutions, NGOs and bilateral development agencies has vastly expanded. Some of these alternative sources are more up-to-date, rigorous and evidence-based.

Most of all, the UN is becoming strongly challenged in its TA role. At a time when all TA – and aid in general – is coming in for heavy criticism (Moyo 2009; Deaton 2013; Easterly 2014), too many UN TA projects continue to peddle traditional techniques of knowledge transfer in often unreceptive environments. The most telling shortcomings of UN TA are the numerous examples of projects which are continually repeated. TA itself is based on the now wholly outdated assumption that development is more of a technical than a political or economic process. Experience has taught that politics trumps technical needs; while aid can fill some technical gaps, the real engines of development progress are essentially political: enlightened government leadership, transparency, a peaceful environment, competent and inclusive institutions and the rule of law (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Deaton 2013; Fukuyama 2014). These are vital areas in which the UN Development System is poorly engaged and the subject of just one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG number 16).

The SDGs represent a comprehensive set of new goals for the development system. They are an agenda of member states and not of the UN organisations as such, even though the system made important contributions to them. In the future, the UN Development System

needs to concentrate its TA on assisting countries to meet the norms and the goals which they have set for themselves, and monitoring their progress.

4 Looking to the future

Successive surveys of global public opinion by the Future UN Development System (FUNDS) project, which have canvassed more than 10,000 people across six professional groups since 2010, have underlined the need for changes in the development UN to overcome the dual weaknesses of dispersal and marginalisation. Almost 80 per cent of respondents in the 2014 survey pointed to internal organisational structures and the growth of earmarked funding as factors exacerbating dispersal. The five main proposals for change were the greater use of technology to cut costs and improve efficiency; updated mandates and activities of organisations; a common system-wide technology platform for administration and accounting; a single UN gateway to all UN research and publications; and increased funding but less earmarking (2014b).

When asked about the UN's impact, it is consistently humanitarian relief and peacekeeping that resonate more positively with respondents than the activities of the UN Development System (FUNDS 2014a). The marginalisation of the development system is reflected in perceptions about individual agencies. More than half the respondents in the 2014 survey considered the UN to be ineffective in areas such as energy, services and tourism, industry, employment, drug control and crime reduction – all areas in which the UN has dedicated organisations. Some of the UN development organisations are considered 'not relevant' by more than one fifth of respondents and the majority of organisations are judged 'not effective' by a third or more (FUNDS 2014b). These results are only based on perceptions, but they are the considered opinions of public voices who have some knowledge of the UN including many who work in it (the 'don't knows' were excluded).

Reform is about the 'what' and the 'how'. In terms of its development functions, the UN is being crowded out in some areas of research and information, as is much of its free-standing TA. The UN therefore needs to rededicate itself to the roles in which it is a unique global reference. These roles are clearly centred on the development and advocacy of norms and conventions in areas of human security, human rights and other aspects of human development including sustainable environmental management. Its activities should be increasingly orientated towards research and advocacy which supports these norms and conventions, and its operational role should be mainly confined to propagating norms and ensuring greater compliance, which is a current weakness (Weiss and Thakur 2010). The UN must also get closer to the essential political processes of development, as it does already in weaker and conflict-prone states. In these states, the development system should be just one of the players, combining with the other pillars of the UN in peace-building and reconstruction.

The 'how' begins with governance and funding: more joined-up management and oversight of the development system, and more pooled funding opportunities (in which the UK was one of the original pioneers). The prevailing patterns of patronage will be a huge obstacle to change, but greater convergence could be facilitated by enlightened leadership within the UN System. The current effective frontier of change is at the country-level, where the UN Development System continues to pursue its *Delivering as One* initiative. This process needs to embark on a new and more assertive phase (Fegan-Wyles 2016), leading to a further rationalisation of the UN country presence with policy convergence around the norms and values of the system.

5   Conclusion: a role for the UK?

The UN must strive to be relevant, particularly in its development activities, by addressing its problems of dispersion and marginalisation, and by acknowledging and adjusting to the quintessentially political nature of development. This should include:

5.1 Focus on values, norms and goals: This means more attention to values, norms and goals, and less to myriad self-standing technical interventions. The UK government, as the world's largest contributor to multilateral assistance, can continue to play a role in supporting the development UN where it is the unquestioned global reference, and in future reform.

5.2 Allocation of UK resources: Unfortunately, the majority of the UK's multilateral resources goes to the World Bank and the EU. A higher proportion of this should go to the UN.

5.3 Support to the SDGs: The UK has shown strong commitment through its support of the MDGs and the SDGs, the pre- and post-2015 development agendas.

5.4 UN reform: In UN reform, the UK Department for International Development's (DFID's) role has been seen in its support of *Delivering as One* and in its contributions to One Funds at the country level. The UK's enthusiasm for these reform initiatives has been waning but it is important that the government continues to influence change by pressing for reform.

5.5 Election of the next Secretary-General: More immediately, as one of the permanent members of the Security Council, the UK can help to ensure the election of a reform-minded UN Secretary-General in 2016.

Notes

[1] The opinions expressed here represent the views of the authors and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.
[2] Quoted in the UNEP document *Key achievements of the Montreal Protocal to date*: http://ozone.unep.org/Publications/MP_Key_Achievements-E.pdf

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