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Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP

27 May 2021

Background Note:

**“QCPR and UNDS reform in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic,
what has happened in the last 12 months (since the last Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards)”**

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a defining global crisis of our time, with devastating health, social, and economic consequences. By May 2021 COVID-19 caused more than three million deaths directly, with countless more resulting from lack of access to essential services, and well over 140 million confirmed cases worldwide. Food security is deteriorating, hunger is increasing. 957 million people have insufficient food consumption, whilst up to 270 million people are estimated to be in acute hunger crisis. An estimated 500 million jobs were lost, shrinking the global economy by 3.5 per cent. The ongoing disruptions in services due to COVID-19 restrictions will also have long-lasting impacts for the most vulnerable. The pandemic already created the largest disruption of education in history, with millions of students experiencing interruptions in learning, impacting longer-term skill development and economic prospects. Almost 370 million children are missing out on school meals because of school closures. The pandemic also rolled back progress on gender equality, including in relation to extreme poverty, employment, health, including sexual and reproductive health, unpaid care work and violence against women and girls.

Against this backdrop, there has never been a greater need for unity and cohesiveness across the United Nations development system (UNDS). Throughout 2020 and into 2021, UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes (AFPs) set up response frameworks and funding mechanisms to reinforce national healthcare systems and save lives. At the same time, the [UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19](#), powered by the UNDS reform, enabled coordinated and integrated responses to help mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and prepare for recovery. This background note demonstrates, predominantly via examples, how the six agencies work together and with the rest of the UN system to support Member States.

The future brings new challenges. The momentous task to achieve a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19, in line with the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR), presents unparalleled challenges at global and national levels. With the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines, the UNDS must continue to work with governments, local communities, civil society and the private sector to strengthen the capacity of healthcare systems and address challenges related to vaccine hesitancy, equity and distribution. We must also ensure that recovery efforts are people-centred, gender-responsive and human rights based, minimizing pandemic impacts on those most vulnerable. UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP remain resolute in their commitment to joint and coordinated actions to not only address the challenges, but also to help sustainable and equitable recovery and achieve the 2030 Agenda while leaving no one behind.

The UN system recognizes its essential leadership role in the international community to effectively bring global responses to control and contain the spread of COVID-19 and address the critical interlinkages between health, trade, finance, and economic and social development. The Funding Compact underscores



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the importance of flexible, predictable, and quality funding for the UN system to effectively play this role and to meet the added demands of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 2. One year on from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, what broader lessons can we learn from the COVID-19 response to guide the recovery? How has the joint UNDS action through the UN Framework for Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19, powered by UNDS reform, enabled coordinated and integrated responses, including to address the gender dimensions of the pandemic and ensure the most vulnerable are at the forefront of UN system efforts, to leave no one behind?**

The following are selected examples to demonstrate answers for the questions involving all agencies and inclusive of regions and thematic areas.

Key Examples of Joint Efforts

Working together across 12 agencies and two International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) to secure access to an uninterrupted, sustainable supply of affordable personal protective equipment (PPE) was critical to safeguard the health of frontline workers during the COVID-19 outbreak.¹ In response to a disrupted supply chain, UN agencies and interested INGOs collaborated to meet demand and support countries with limited buying power to access essential supplies. Through COVID-19 Common Services, 436 organizations have so far been supported with: 1,565 passenger flights used; 29,563 passengers transported to 68 destinations; and 148,333 m³ of cargo dispatched. The Procurement Hub in Copenhagen, where UN agencies work to source, buy, and contract supplies, led the scaled-up response with a team of experts. Quality Assurance experts from eight agencies assessed companies and products, including reviewing almost 400 items for acceptable quality, safety and performance. From this, 15 long-term agreements were signed covering 34 products for PPE. These agreements were pivotal for stabilizing the supply chain, providing security, and easing planning and forecasting. This collaboration between agencies helped ensure countries could access the products they needed to respond to the pandemic and keep healthcare systems running.

In **Cameron**, using more than USD27M in financing from the Islamic Development Bank, UNDP, UNICEF and UNOPS procured vital equipment and supplies to aid Cameroon's COVID-19 response efforts. In **Cambodia**, funded by the World Bank and in partnership with UNDP and UNICEF, UNOPS procured in excess of USD6M of medical supplies for the Government.

At the behest of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (COVID-19 MPTF) Advisory Committee, 11 agencies cooperated, and built a common UN system dashboard of gender indicators to drive gendered responses to the COVID-19 crisis. The [COVID-19 and gender monitor](#) on the Women Count Data Hub has been essential to ensure that the COVID-19 MPTF proposal includes evidence-based gender-sensitive analysis. In turn, the [COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#) has proven a valuable resource to monitor government responses to tackle the pandemic, highlighting those that have integrated a gender lens.

Over 53 Rapid Gender Assessment (RGA) surveys on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 have taken place involving multiple agencies. The data has influenced government policy across all regions: In the **Maldives**, the Government utilized the findings to establish a mental health helpline and a COVID-19 recovery team in the Office of the President to focus on safeguarding the rights of women and girls. In **Pakistan**, the Ministry of Women utilized the results to design the country's gender-responsive COVID-19 policy response.

¹ IAEA, IFRC, IOM, MSF, PAHO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOPS, UNPD, UNRWA, WFP and WHO combined their procurement expertise.



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The UN Trust Fund to end Violence Against Women, in turn, developed a five-point Action Plan to assist over 150 current grantees in 71 countries and territories in adapting interventions – based on consultations with grantees to assess their needs.

Agencies worked together to improve adolescent and maternal health outcomes using joint assessments on pandemic impacts, alignment with national COVID-19 response plans, capacity-building and greater engagement with adolescents and youth, and strong partnership responses.

- In the **Philippines**, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNODC and WHO supported the national Department of Health in assessing the impact of COVID-19 on the national HIV response.
- In **Botswana**, UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO, launched an assessment to track the continuity of essential sexual, reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health services in the country. The assessment was supported by the regional offices of all agencies involved, and provided the Government and partners with actionable recommendations to address bottlenecks in service delivery. Concerted attention has also been placed on the needs of women who are often most left behind.

In **Uruguay**, agencies worked collaboratively to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable groups of women are addressed in the joint response to COVID-19, ensuring that the UN country team (UNCT) SERP is gender responsive and disability-inclusive. To support this objective and with funding support from the inter-agency UN Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) initiative, UN-Women conducted consultations with organizations and networks of women with disabilities, who highlighted the need for accessible information and services.

Across Africa, the agencies and partners stepped up their efforts around mental health and psycho-social support. For example, in **Mozambique**, counsellors were trained to deliver remote psycho-social support, referrals to health services and strengthen linkages with helplines such as Linha Verde regarding reporting of sexual exploitation and abuse cases.

In **Somalia**, collaboration between WFP, UNICEF, ILO and the World Bank supported the Government in developing the 2019 Somalia Social Protection Policy and the Social Protection Implementation Plan. Moreover, they coordinated to provide capacity strengthening support to the government in the journey towards government-owned and implemented social protection programmes. Building on this work the agencies helped rapidly establish a social protection system in Somalia where none existed before. This has already shown distinct value in the COVID-19 response and will continue contributing to peace and stability.

Early on in the pandemic, the UN Kosovo Team (UNKT) in **Kosovo**² recognized as a challenge the lack of data to inform policy responses, and the need to ensure data on the situation of women is collected and analyzed. The UNKT already had an active, well-functioning UN Gender Theme Group (GTG) involving multiple agencies, national institutions, and civil society. Having pre-existing gender equality coordination structures meant the UNKT had ready access to internal and external gender expertise across thematic areas at crisis onset, enabling a strong gender equality and women's empowerment focus to the SEIA, and mechanisms in place ensure visible gender mainstreaming in the SERP, Common Kosovo Analysis (equivalent to the common country analysis) and Cooperation Framework 2021-2025.

² References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



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In response to COVID-19 in the **Dominican Republic**, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP and the World Bank collaborated to support the Government to scale up social protection programmes (“Quedate en casa” and “Superate”) that contribute to breaking the intergenerational transmission of the root causes of poverty through facilitating investments in education, health and food at the household level and developing capacities to enhance opportunities to enter the job market and enhance the human capital of the household members. The programme includes interventions such as cash transfers, community engagement, vocational training and distribution of micronutrients and fortified foods to vulnerable groups.

While the COVID-19 confirmed cases have been extremely low in the **Pacific region**, the general socio-economic impacts have been far-reaching. Sectors such as tourism and the service economy have been devastated. For example, tourism makes up 40 percent of **Fiji’s** GDP and the country has recorded a 99 per cent reduction in tourist arrivals in 2020, compared with the same period last year. The UNCT³ led socio-economic impact assessments of COVID-19 to inform response and recovery efforts, including the demographic dividend, with engagement by national governments and development partners.

Lessons Learned

Over 150 country socio-economic impact assessments (SEIAs) were prepared by the UN, which informed 119 socio-economic response plans (SERPs) covering 137 programmatic countries. For the socio-economic response to COVID-19 the UN Secretary-General entrusted UNDP as the technical lead, many agencies including UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS, UN-Women and WFP made substantive contributions to the development of the assessment methodology as well as the roll-out at country level. Agencies leveraged their comparative advantages at the country level, supporting the Resident Coordinators to elaborate the UN response. SEIAs and SERPs provided valuable lessons and insights. For example, the response to the crisis showed that the agencies’ need better interoperability between individual assessment tools and internal systems to improve and accelerate collective planning and implementation to meet the needs of vulnerable groups in a meaningful and timely manner.

To continue protecting the wellbeing of UN staff, delivering vital assistance and supporting the humanitarian community through logistics services, WFP, UNICEF and other partners overcame challenges by combining lessons learned from past experiences, such as the response to Ebola outbreaks, with innovative approaches, technologies and digital transformation. A key lesson from school closures during the Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa was that the impact was on both children’s academic performance and on their overall health and well-being. This helped inform responses to COVID-19.

Effective gender-responsive planning and programming requires a strong focus on adequate and timely gender data and statistics, which need to be fully prioritized as part of COVID-19 policy responses. Gender and Leave No One Behind (LNOB) data ‘blind spots’ should be identified at crisis onset. During the pandemic, women have lost more jobs, shouldered a greater share of unpaid work, and suffered a surge in domestic violence.

3. How can UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes leverage the 2020 QCPR and our Common Agenda in the Decade of Action to support COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda, including through partnerships and development financing?

The 2020 QCPR highlights the centrality of a revitalized, strategic, flexible and results- and action-oriented Cooperation Framework as the most important instrument for the planning and implementation of UNDS activities in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, emphasizing

³ UNDP, UN-Women, UNFPA, WFP, UNICEF, ILO, WHO, UNESCO, UN Habitat, UNDESA, UNESCAP, FAO, IFAD, and IOM.



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the need for a sustainable and resilient recovery which is people-centred, gender-sensitive and respects human rights. Strengthening joint action on health, nutrition, social protection action, and restoration of jobs and livelihood will be crucial to provide safeguard for future shocks and protect development gains as well as investments made.

Development financing needs a broader compact consisting of traditional/non-traditional donors with multi-year and unearmarked funding in order to strengthen the humanitarian-development peace continuum and to provide a more reliable and sustainable frame for development operations over time. Also, the private sector needs to step up and contribute to the revitalization of markets and market links, especially in underdeveloped and emerging markets, in a more equitable, conflict-sensitive and eco-sensitive way.

The SERPs, covering 137 countries, reflect a comprehensive and a coordinated approach by the UNCTs working with international financial institutions (IFIs), bilateral donors, the private sector and civil society actors to provide a joint response framework aligned with government plans and priorities. It is estimated that about 56 per cent of SERPs received some input from the World Bank, 32 percent from the IMF. In various SERPs, a clear linkage with the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) process is articulated as a tool to understand the national financing for development landscape.

The commitment to national sustainable financing strategies with strong national ownership is a core entry point for agencies to enhance national prioritization of SDG finance. The UN is leveraging its collective assets across agencies to support governments in developing INFFs that will enable them to facilitate financing for their COVID-19 recovery. The Joint SDG Fund is investing USD60M across 62 countries. More than 15 agencies are working together towards this effort including partnering with the IMF and the European Union to strengthen national capacities and to deploy technical assistance support. Preliminary reporting suggests 41 country programmes have established a link between their INFF programming with COVID-19 recovery. Advocating and supporting governments to align their finance with green, equitable and resilient recovery strategies requires a joined-up UN effort. Furthermore, as the COVID-19 crisis increased the salience of social protection for the most vulnerable, the Fund provided an opportunity for repurposing 20 percent of programme budgets to adapt and respond to the pandemic.

In **Uzbekistan**, the SERP demonstrated a combined effort, aligned behind the Cooperation Framework. 16 agencies and six IFIs⁴ are working to create jobs, re-skill migrant workers and affected youth, deliver medical and protective gear, and provide vital information and expertise to its population. Priority areas for multilateral response and mitigation are health, macro-economy, social protection, job creation, education, social cohesion, and data and assessments. In Uzbekistan alone, IFIs have secured some USD3B in loans. Other responses include emergency financing, guidance on remote learning, trade guarantees and cash advances for small and medium-sized enterprises, support to frontline law enforcement officers at border crossing points, expanded access to clean water, and science-based communications about the pandemic and services available to mitigate and contain it as well as the establishment of an effective multilateral COVID-19 Crisis Management Team to coordinate support

The new Cooperation Framework for 2021-2025 was approved in September 2020, which integrates the lessons and priorities with the COVID-19 response. It focuses on supporting Uzbekistan to achieve the national SDGs and enhance compliance with international human rights obligations, under the overarching vision of a more just, equal and resilient society by 2030, while recovering from the impacts of the pandemic. Furthermore, in addition to national level support, the UN launched two new national

⁴ Six IFIs (ADB, EBRD, IFC, IsDB, World Bank, IMF) and 16 agencies (FAO, ILO, IOM, ITC, OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNECE, UNESCAP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, WHO).



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UN Joint Programmes: a) on INFF; and b) on holistic pandemic response to vulnerable people's needs (the UNCT received COVID-19 MPTF resources).

An example of a strong COVID-19 response including SERP, monitoring and reporting on system-wide results, and collaboration across pillars can be seen in **Jordan**. Jordan's SERP builds on and complements the 2018-2022 Cooperation Framework. The Cooperation Framework and the SERP align to the Government's 'Jordan Vision 2025', the Economic Growth Plan, the 2020-2025 National Strategy for Women and other key strategic planning documents.

Jordan's Cooperation Framework identifies that one in seven people in the country are poor, with young people, women, refugees and their host communities, people in remote, disadvantaged areas of Jordan, persons with disabilities, and migrant workers most at risk of being left behind. UN socio-economic assessments indicate that since the beginning of the crisis, women have been disproportionately impacted in multiple areas, as have refugees, contractual migrant workers, and poor communities. Workers in the informal sector have also been heavily impacted by the economic downturn and other pre-existing vulnerabilities.⁵

In **Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal**, UNICEF, WHO, WFP and other partners are supporting Ministries of Health and Nutrition partners to maintain the nutrition programme while mitigating the spread of the virus and its negative impacts on under-five children and mothers. As a result, and based on global and regional guidance, national institutions, the agencies and key partners have already adapted country nutrition programmes. In addition, within all nutrition activities, key messages on COVID-19 have been integrated and are being disseminated widely at both community and health facility levels to better protect the health and nutritional status of children under five and mothers.

In February 2019, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) adopted a new ground-breaking recommendation on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to improve coordination, programming and financing in support of coherent, complementary and effective approaches in fragile contexts to fulfil our shared support for ending need. Since then, five agencies have formally adhered to the recommendation: UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA and IOM. These five agencies have adopted the OECD-DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus to support better results, particularly in fragile and conflict affected settings. The emergency response must be seen within the broader country-level strategies for building resilience and strengthening the links between funding and humanitarian, development and peace programming.

Together with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, UNDP and UNICEF, the **South Sudan** Ministry of Finance and Planning and the National Revenue Authority launched the UN Joint SDG Fund Programme to strengthen national and subnational Public Financial Management (PFM) mechanisms. Through their joint advocacy efforts, South Sudan was able to secure access to IMF Rapid Credit Facility total resources of about USD52.3M, with increased allocations for social sectors, particularly education and health, with current indications in the funding year 2020/2021 for increased allocations for both health, education sectors and a dedicated COVID-19 budget focused on social sectors.

Gaza Sky Geeks, a joint effort of Mercy Corps and Google for Startups, in partnership with WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, the Ministry of Empowerment and Entrepreneurship and other corporate and government partners, conducted the first virtual hackathon in **Palestine**, bringing together Gaza, the West Bank, people from different backgrounds, and the global and local tech communities. The Hackathon was inspired by the global #HacktheCrisis movement to generate solutions and to respond to the pandemic.

⁵ [Socio-Economic Framework for COVID-19 Response in Jordan](#) (issued July 2020).