

Discussion Paper



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A vehicle to articulate development issues and foster dialogue

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UNDP as an integrator in UN Support to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Implementation¹

Summary – *This discussion paper which was prepared to support the rollout of the UNDP Kenya Country Programme Document 2018-2022 argues that UNDP has a critical role as the arrowhead of a new generation of Country Teams (UNCTs) to lead the implementation of the SDGs using country, regional and global platforms. Furthermore, UNDP has a unique comparative advantage in strengthening countries monitoring and evaluation systems, evidence-based policy making through improvement of the quality and timely statistical data and developing innovative ways of financing the SDGs. Leveraging these comparative advantages should ensure that UNDP continues to play its role as a facilitator and integrator of the UN system.*

1. Introduction

Following the approval of the reforms of the United Nations Development System (UNDS)², UNDP Kenya is exploring how to implement the reforms including how to strategically position UNDP's programmatic, analytical, policy advisory and advocacy work at the country level through its Country Programme Document, 2018-2022. The aim is to support the evolution of UNDP and the UNDS and ensure that UNDP remains the partner of choice for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs. The UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021 highlights the vision and positioning of UNDP for the coming four (4) years during a period of significant changes. These changes require UNDP to have a coherent progressive approach that focus on transformative development results to ensure it continues to deliver as efficiently and effectively on its mandate.

¹ This discussion paper is an output of the Strategic Policy Advisory Unit (SPAU) in the UNDP Kenya Country Office. The Unit focuses on upstream policy interventions in the areas of human development, pro-poor policy analysis, Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. It also supports the national and county governments in the design and implementation of evidence based national development plans, county integrated development plans and other relevant policy instruments.

The views expressed in this policy brief are those of the SPAU, and do not represent the views of UNDP, the United Nations or any of its affiliate organizations

For more information, please contact the Unit at the following email: policyunit.ken@undp.org

² Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet available at <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/node/3553102>

The delinking of the RC system from UNDP reinvents UNDP's ability to continue to play its role as a facilitator and integrator of the UN system. There is a critical role for UNDP as the arrowhead of a new generation of Country Teams (UNCTs). UNDP's integrator mandate is an asset for the entire UNDS. UNDP's institutional, operational and strategic capability for multi-sectoral, whole-of-government responses, mobilizing other agency-specific expertise as required is very crucial in supporting countries to achieve sustainable and inclusive development.

UNDP needs to pro-actively engage and lead implementation of the SDGs at country, regional and global level as they are "the best tool to build resilience, prevent crises, ensure human rights are a lived experience, and sustain peace." The SDGs also provide a **New Way of Working** of offering a concrete path to removing unnecessary barriers between humanitarian and development actors as "for those whose livelihoods and lives are at risk on the ground, the distinction between humanitarian assistance, development support, and building peace is meaningless. These challenges affect people's lives in a unified and simultaneous manner ..."

2. UNDP opportunities in supporting the Agenda 2030 and SDGs

General Assembly resolution 71/243 of 21 December 2016 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR) establishes key system-wide strategic policy orientations and operational modalities for the development cooperation and country-level modalities of the United Nations development system. It describes how agencies of the United Nations system should support countries in achieving the 2030 Agenda and related agreements, and provides a set of guiding principles and mandates for agencies of the UNDS, including UNDP. (UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021).

Against this background, guided by the integrative approach embodied in the 2030 Agenda, UNDP vision for the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 is therefore: **to help countries eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions, accelerate structural transformations for sustainable development and build resilience to crises and shocks.** This is in line with UNDP mission statement that states that **UNDP helps countries to determine their future and support countries to pursue human development -- development that is about improving people's lives based on:**

- Equitable and inclusive growth;
- Enhancing resilience to safeguard hard won development gains against vulnerability and shocks;
- Ensuring sustainability for people and the planet; and
- Helping all men and women participate fully in all aspects of the development process -- economic, social and political -- and to share equitably the gains of development.

The overall approach of UNDP support is premised strongly on the continuing validity of key aspects of UNDP's institutional philosophy and intellectual inheritance: in essence, **sustainable human development**. It is, however, necessary to re-interpret these references to construct a fresh narrative about UNDP's purpose and action over the short-to-medium term. This could be done around four (4) core and very closely connected ideas:

- The need for UNDP to acknowledge that although the the SDGs are comprehensive, universal and internally linked, and cut across all dimensions of sustainable development, they will be pursued differently in each country, according to national priorities, needs, institutional set-ups and the financing mix available for SDG implementation;
- Inclusive growth and development, do not take place in isolation within individual countries but as part of a growing web of connections between countries and peoples. The regional and global presence of

UNDP at the country level should be leveraged for work on mitigating risks; for working across multiple issues, investing in long-term risk mitigation and management and operate in difficult and sensitive settings thus making UNDP a pillar of the international risk management system for the 21st century;

- Just as development thinking and the risks to development are evolving rapidly so is the environment within which development solutions are being found. Any institution that expects to be effective in such an environment will have to adjust its attitudes. Expectations and business model to address certain realities; learning to share the policy space with other players; becoming much more open to partnerships, focusing on roles as well as products and services that stand out for their excellence, ruthlessly boosting the speed and efficiency of operations; and embracing effective communication as an essential ingredient for success. UNDP has no choice but to fully embrace these consequences and apply them in its work in the countries it operates; and
- "At the structural level, UNDP needs to imagine that big transformations are possible and that there is demand from governments for structural reform." (Interpaul Johar, Senior Innovation Associate, Young Foundation, *n.d.*).

This shift will only work to the fullest, however, if UNDP can also make better use of an often-neglected asset: its covening power, indispensable facilitator and integrator for the UN development system at the country level to address the **complexity** and **integrated nature** of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Many, if not all, of the next generation of development problems, go to the heart of the UN's work and require the system to come together in line with the Secretary General's Reform agenda of making the UN fit for purpose.³ The experience gained with the UN's work on the MDGs, among others, has shown empirically that this can be done and, indeed pointed out what more needs to happen to ensure better outcomes in the future.

In order to respond effectively to these trends and concerns, UNDP needs to be clear about three things; first, **why** it wishes to engage on development issues in a particular way -- in other words, explain the ethos that drives the organization; second, **how** it intends to put this ethos into practice in a way that brings the greatest benefit to its stakeholders -- that is, the organization's value proposition, and third, **what** it hopes to achieve to give tangible meaning to its value proposition -- namely, the organization's priorities over the short-to-medium-term.

Three over-arching corporate priorities to support countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, cutting across practices, are proposed for the the UNDP Strategic Plan (2018-2021); (see annex 1)⁴

- End poverty in all its forms undepinned by intergated poverty solutions to end multimentional poverty. This will require roling back poverty, addressing poverty, inequality, exclusion and vulnerability to ensure no one is left behind.
- Accelerate structural transformations for sustainable develovelopment with focus on removing structural obstacles to SDGs achievement, deepen sustainability and increase resilience, promote multidimensional wellbeing and reduce structural inequalities.
- Contribute to SDG 16 which aims at "Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."

³ For UNDP, this means working in close collaboration with UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women based on the common chapter of the Strategic Plans as indicated in the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021.

⁴ UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018- 2022, available at

https://intranet.undp.org/unit/office/exo/Strategic_Plan_2018_21/SitePages/Intranet.aspx

- Build resilience to shocks and crises underpinned by integrated crisis solutions focusing on improved governance, crisis prevention response and recovery to address short-and long-term development challenges: development of integrated strategies for stabilization and recovery-combining access to rule of law, justice, security and sustainable livelihoods. National and local capacities for dialogue and mediation developed and applied with practical results; and critical governance reforms and institutional capabilities for accountable, equitable and effective use of public resources at national and sub-national levels.

Two cross cutting issues of data to inform evidence-based policy making and feedback loop and advancing gender and equality and women empowerment to unleash the transformative power of women and girls in the development process will be key under the three over-arching corporate priorities to accelerate structural transformation for sustainable development.⁵ To contribute to the UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021, the UNDP Kenya Country Programme Document (CPD) 2018 – 2022 *aims to: (a) better respond to varied localized governance contexts through area-based and integrated programming⁶ to reach the marginalized in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) and border counties, including women, youth and persons with disabilities; (b) support alignment of subnational policy with the 2030 Agenda; and alignment of national macroeconomic policy to national targets; and (c) in line with Sustainable Goal 17, drive sustainability through philanthropic and private sector partnerships and with international financial institutions (IFIs)⁷ to realize the country programme's strategic three priorities; (i) governance, peace and security; (ii) inclusive growth and structural transformation; and (iii) environmental sustainability, climate change and resilience.*

Summarizing, if UNDP pro-actively positions itself as leading the implementation of the SDGs of the UNDS using its country, regional policy platforms advantage, it would generate several benefits to the UNDS and SDG implementation:

- UNDP opens doors to new partnerships and thinking; e.g., Government partnerships, multidimensional poverty measurement and SDGs Voluntary National Reporting among others and provides intellectual leadership in Development Finance Assessment (DFA), ODA, growth and productivity, MPI analysis and LNOB.
- UNDP tests innovative ideas and lays groundwork for multi-partner initiatives with scale and impact; e.g., UNDP as a Pre-Investment Facility, UNDP Global Climate Fund (GCF), Youth Connect among others.
- UNDP connects and work across thematic issues and partnerships providing integrated solutions to difficult SDG challenges; e.g., climate change and health; changing weather patterns and spread of dengue.
- UNDP as a “back-back office” of UN operations to realize economies of scale and reduce operation costs and generate revenue for UNDP.
- Scaling up of generation of reliable disaggregated data and a stronger focus on ending exclusion as disaggregated data is the key to “leaving no one behind.”

⁵ To address the complex and interconnected challenges countries face such as shocks from crises, economic stagnation, inequality and poverty, providing access to clean and affordable energy or mitigating and adapting to climate change, UNDP aims to develop integrated responses to these issues through signature solutions

⁶ See UNDP Kenya Strategic Policy Unit's Policy Brief 7 – A Primer on Area Based Programming for a definition of Area Based Programming.

⁷ Country Programme Document for Kenya, 2018-2022 available at <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/executive-board/documents-for-sessions/adv2018-second.html>

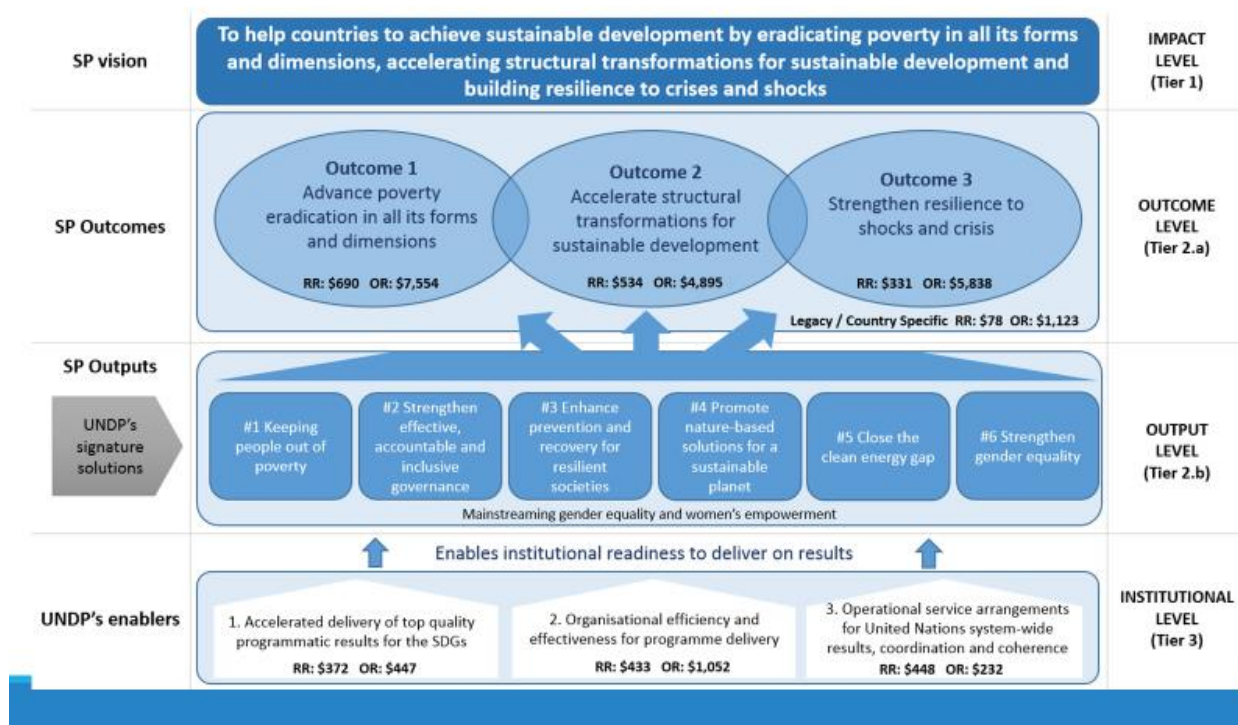
- Harnessing the convening power of the UN through the Country Support Platforms proposed in the UNDP Strategic Plan (2018- 2022) where stakeholders can finance, meaningfully engage and support innovation to SDGs implementation.
- Scaling up of South -South and Triangular cooperation in SDGs implementation.
- Leveraging UNDP's institutional, operational and strategic capability for multi-sectoral, whole-of-government responses to SDGs implementation.

3. Conclusion

UNDP has a unique comparative advantage to lead the implementation of the SDGs using country, regional and global platforms. Furthermore, UNDP has a unique comparative advantage in strengthening countries monitoring and evaluation systems, evidence-based policy making through improvement of the quality and timely statistical data and developing innovative ways of financing the SDGs. Leveraging these comparative advantages should ensure that UNDP continues to play its role as a facilitator and integrator of the UN system. Of course for UNDP Kenya to play this role effectively, it will also have to transform itself into a centre of development excellence in order to make the office 'fit for purpose'. This requires a re-engineering of the internal processes and procedures for:

- Improved operational effectiveness and service delivery based on demand for the provision of these services;
- Improved quality of critical functions and best configuration to support programme delivery;
- Flexible configurations to help the office respond in better, more agile ways to evolving client needs;
- Strategic positioning of the Country Office;
- High quality programmes aligned with national priorities;
- Better and evidence-based analysis, understanding and reporting of the Country Office's contribution to development outcomes;
- Developing a people capability action plan for the Country Office which focuses on workforce planning and analysis; competencies for delivering results; and promoting a culture of accountability; and
- Streamlining the Country Office operational processes for greater efficiency and effectiveness by creating synergies between the difference Programme and Operation Units.

Annex 1: UNDP Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022⁸



⁸Resources are in millions of US Dollars, RR-Regular Resources and OR-Other Resources.