

The Future of UN Development Assistance*

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Abstract: While the UN did not set out to be a development organization, this function now constitutes the fourth and largest pillar of the “second UN” of organizations, taking on the roles of norm-setter, dispenser of technical assistance, and source of ideas and research. The UN has adapted to change in its other main functions, but its development role has been disadvantaged by the parallel structures bequeathed to it. In this role, the UN has become less cohesive and more marginalized in spite of the fact that there are growing development challenges requiring urgent responses from the world organization. A new blueprint for reform in 2006 remains only partially implemented and provides an agenda for change which should be pursued. In 2015, the UN passed an important watershed with the expected agreement of a new set of development goals. “The UN we want” for “the world we want” thus becomes an urgent priority. In the future, the technical foundations of the present development UN need to be downplayed in favor of the normative. With the support of the “first” UN of member-state governments, successful change can come through new enlightened leadership within the “second” UN of

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organizations, able to respond to the messages and opinions emanating from the “third” UN: the global public in whose name the UN was originally conceived.

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Historically, periods of major conflict have been followed by security treaties: the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 at the culmination of the Thirty Years War; the Treaty of Versailles and the Covenant of the League of Nations in 1919; and the San Francisco Conference 70 years ago which brought the United Nations in being. The Charter was begotten of the same pedigree and was primarily a security treaty based on the extravagant hopes for the maintenance of a new world order. But the *leitmotif* of the UN, and of its Charter, was cooperation and while primarily about keeping the peace, it extended beyond this to encompass human and economic security considerations. Most notably, the brief Chapter IX of the Charter, entitled International Economic and Social Cooperation,¹ and being written only a few years after the Great Depression, was impelled by the need for common efforts to construct a new economic order.

Security concerns remained uppermost in the UN agenda during its early years, particularly as the Cold War took hold (and it has remained the primary focus, especially once the UN took on the new role of peacekeeping). But juxtaposed to the realism of state self-interest, there were functionalists at work who were to have an influence on the early architecture of the UN. Recent research contends that the League of Nations in its latter years provided the platform for a UN “multiverse” of international debate (Clavin 2015; Roffe 2015), while from the 1940s, Mitrany (1943) and others (e.g. Sewell 1966) extolled functionalism as a basis for cooperation through the UN, finding its expression in the

¹ Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter9.shtml>

creation of several new organizations concerned with issues such as nutrition, health and education. Pre-existing normative bodies such as the International Labour Office (created in 1919), the International Telegraph Union (1865) and the Universal Postal Union (1874) also donned the UN cloak, and the foundations of the UN development “system” were laid. Today this family of UN organizations, concerned with one or other aspects of development progress, numbers over thirty.

This article looks at the past of the UN in order to anticipate its future role. As primarily a security organization throughout its lifetime, the UN has taken on other roles through a process of accretion and accident rather than design. In development it has remained an active but dispersed multiverse which has largely resisted the many attempts to pull it into a more coherent whole. That resistance derives from the manner in which the UN system emerged and has grown. But meanwhile the target has also changed. Development was not a discipline when the UN was created. It still has no exact meaning but the needs of development, however defined, have changed in ways which have outdistanced the largely unstructured development UN.

Yet there is a vital role for the UN still to play in development. The newly-minted Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2015), in spite of their incongruent nature, are part of a normative agenda of 193 countries which could only have been hammered out under UN auspices. The requirements of development today are as much political as they are technical and the UN is uniquely placed to exert its peer-power to bring about change. This means encouraging collective action around the norms and standards which member-states have set for themselves under UN auspices, but in which they are substantially non-compliant. In the future, the technical foundations of the present development UN need to be downplayed in favor of the normative.

In this article, I refer to more than one UN. The UN of member states is the first UN and aspires to play the role of global governance based on the Westphalian logic of sovereign jurisdiction (Weiss & Ramesh 2010). I am mainly concerned, however, with the second UN of

organizations and their secretariats: the UN which can most easily be altered by reform. The third UN equates to “we the peoples” in whose name the Charter was written. It is a reminder that the UN exists primarily for the benefit of the vast global public (Weiss et al. 2009).

This article is structured chronologically. It examines respectively the origins of the UN’s development activities, the contemporary situation and necessity for change, and the prospects for “the UN we want” after 2015.

The Past

As noted above, while the United Nations was primarily conceived as an instrument of global security, there were expectations that it could play a role in the economic and social spheres. The precise nature of that role could not have been predicted, particularly in the context of development which was an inchoate concept in the 1940s, and in the absence of a conception of developing countries, or what was to become known as the Third World, as a distinct group or category.

Two short chapters were included in the founding UN Charter that would be 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 a common fold several norm and standard-setting organizations, to be known as UN specialized agencies (Burley & Browne 2015). A steadily growing number of developing countries aspired to global norms and standards as an important part of their development process, and compliance facilitated their integration into the global economy.

Operationally, 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. Also in the early years, the UN became the purveyor of grant technical assistance (TA), although giving away resources was initially

considered controversial by the two then dominant banking countries (see for example Keenleyside 1966).² This TA was encouraged by the call from US President Truman in his 1949 inaugural speech for a “bold new program” through the UN “for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of under-developed areas” (Department of State Bulletin 1949). In the following year, the United States and several other governments made available \$20 million for the new Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA).

The UN was also a leading source of ideas. People serving the UN at the time—particularly in the New York secretariat, and the newly-created regional commissions in Santiago de Chile and Geneva—were pioneers in helping to found development theory and the UN has remained a source of world-changing ideas (Jolly et al. 2009).

From the early stages, the UN has thus acquired three main strings to its development bow:

- It sets norms and standards in a variety of specialized fields from communications (through the International Telecommunications Union, ITU and the Universal Postal Union, UPU), to air safety (International Civil Aviation Authority, ICAO), to the work-place (International Labour Organization, ILO). As colonialism unwound and the world organization progressed towards universal representation, this norm-setting role has assumed much larger dimensions, with the UN becoming a forum for negotiating global conventions on key development issues;
- It provides TA through its specialized agencies, as well as from the many additional development organizations created under UN auspices;
- It is also a source and advocate of development ideas.

² The United States and the United Kingdom in particular were initially opposed to the idea of a fund governed by the UN General Assembly where the main contributors could be outvoted.

The Present

These development functions form one of four pillars of the UN system today, the other three being peacekeeping and security, humanitarian relief, and human rights and law. All four pillars have grown considerably in size. The development pillar alone now comprises more than 30 separate organizations and agencies and absorbs a majority of the UN staff. The total collective development budget is \$16–17 billion per year.

The UN development “system” of organizations, however, is the part of the UN that has adapted least well to changing realities, and the reasons are rooted in the past. The “functional” logic of the growing family of UN development organizations resulted in the pursuit of many parallel disciplines: health, education, agriculture, industry, and so on. Even within similar development domains there is organizational parallelism: education is a concern of both the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) and the UN Children’s Fund, 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. There are many other examples. Parallelism would matter less if at its creation, the UN had been endowed with a strong centre. But this was not the case. ECOSOC might have been expected to play a centralizing role, but the main architects of the UN—particularly the Americans—were cautious about creating a powerful multilateral body with wide jurisdiction (Department of State 1944).³ So, as the UN Charter puts it, the specialized agencies were “brought into relationship” with the UN through ECOSOC.⁴

The absence of a centre encouraged proliferation. Today, in

³ The language of this document was imported into the UN Charter.

⁴ Article 57. Text is available from:

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter9.shtml>

addition to the more than 30 development organizations 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, and training and research organizations. The UN University on its own has 16 specialized centers. All these entities are physically dispersed. The headquarters of the main organizations are to be found in 14 different countries. Many of them support field representatives in offices numbering 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: 145).

The response of the UN to growing atomization has been to establish mechanisms of concertation and coordination, rather than control. Most (but not quite all) of the main development organizations are members of the UN Development Group. It is chaired by the head (Administrator) of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), a successor organization to EPTA. However, 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 (SG). 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, and helping to forge common administrative procedures (which have to be separately agreed by each governing body), the existence of the UNDG and the many other UN coordinating mechanisms has the effect of slowing down the UN’s capacity to act since so much staff time is spent on attending internal meetings.

There are also powerful centrifugal forces which continue to drive the development system apart. Chief among these is the competition for funds. The UN specialized agencies and many of the organizations under

the SG's authority receive core funding through fixed percentage levies on their members ("assessed contributions"). But organizations like UNDP and UNICEF are still voluntarily funded, even for their core resources. All the UN development organizations and agencies, however, finance their operations largely through "non-core" contributions which they compete for 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, and philanthropic organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).⁵ While the real value of core contributions to the UN has declined slightly over the last two decades, its organizations have been very successful in raising non-core contributions, which rose by 149 percent between 1998 and 2013 (Figure 1). They now account for over 70 percent of total funding (United Nations 2013a).

However, competition for funds sets up strong rivalries within the system which work against closer collaboration. Dispersion is further exacerbated by the earmarking of most non-core resources for particular development purposes designated by the respective donors. In the face of stagnant core resources, organizations are reluctant to turn down offers of non-core funding, even when it means encroaching onto the mandates of other UN bodies.

This lack of cohesion in the development sphere undermines the effectiveness of the UN in at least two ways. In the first place, there is excessive duplication of effort, in which the main donors of the system remain complicit; unwilling to pool their funds, donors follow their inclinations to patronize some parts of the system in preference to others. But there is a second problem arising from organizational parallelism. While development has become more complex and multifaceted, the silo-driven UN is hampered in its ability to respond because it has difficulty combining different disciplines.

⁵ The EC and the Global Fund are currently the largest sources of funding to the UNDP.

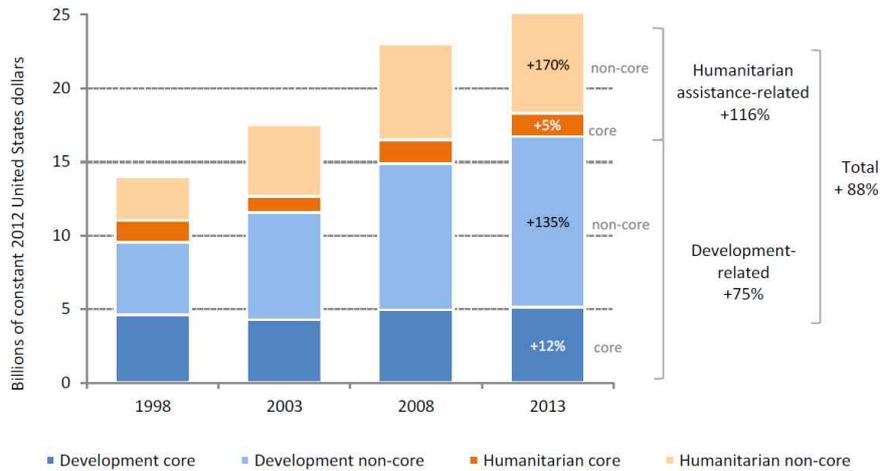


Figure 1. Funding of the UN development and humanitarian system now comes predominantly from non-core resources. Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Report A/70/62-E/2015/4, p 10.⁶

Two examples are found in the areas of migration and food security. International migration, which affects virtually every UN member country, raises issues of human rights, protection, labor standards, and a multitude of other concerns that are not yet being adequately addressed. It has been said that “the lack of a comprehensive approach to migration is the most important challenge for developing truly global governance” (Chetail 2014). The UN’s response is the Global Migration Group comprising 16 entities and with an annually rotating chair, “to encourage the adoption of more coherent, comprehensive and better coordinated approaches to the issue of international migration” (United Nations 2013b). Clearly, ten years of deliberations have not yet produced a cohesive result. A second example is food security. When food prices rose alarmingly in 2008, as a symptom of looming global shortages, the UN established a “high-level task force” which eventually included 20 different entities. A plan of action was slow in coming, and even harder to implement with responsibilities distributed to so many organizations.⁷

⁶ Retrieved from: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/62

Inevitably, mechanisms designed to balance multiple organizational interests are unlikely to result in cohesive strategies.

Holistic approaches to development would be assisted by an overarching UN paradigm by which to live and operate. In 1990, it seemed to have found one when a team at UNDP wrote the first report on human development. This was a quintessentially human-centered concept, aligned to UN values of individual empowerment and rights, contrasting with the more technocratic approaches to development embodied in the neo-liberal Washington Consensus of the World Bank (Williamson 1989). The merit of the approach was amply demonstrated when the concept was applied to the context of the Middle East. In 2002, the first Arab Human Development Report was downloaded more than a million times and became the most widely read UN report in history. Its messages anticipated by a decade the circumstances which led to the Arab Spring. But within the UN, the concept never stuck. Inter-organizational rivalry meant that human development became an almost exclusive UNDP brand. In 1995, five years after the launch of the concept, the UN organized a summit meeting on “social development,” whose report never mentioned human development in any of its 132 pages. Even within UNDP, there were attempts made to “operationalize” the concept, but human development never became a framework for its projects (Browne 2011). Today, it has a diminishing profile, even in the organization which conceived it.⁸ Meanwhile, other UN organizations

⁷ These protracted efforts at coordination ignored the fact that, since 1974, the UN has had a Committee on World Food Security, led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and comprising the UN’s three agricultural and food agencies, all based in Rome. The UN Secretary General decided to establish the task force because of poor personal relations with the then head of FAO. The FAO director-general refused to meet the head of the task force.

⁸ Almost ironically, it was the World Bank which was later to give greater verbal prominence to the human development concept in its thinking and operations.

have been branding their own approaches to development: the ILO ran with social protection and “decent work,” and the UN secretariat’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) adopted sustainable development.

How Relevant is the UN?

Gauging the relevance of the UN is critical to contemplating its role in development. As we have seen, the UN has suffered from a lack of organizational and ideational cohesion bequeathed to it at its founding. But additional organizational complexities have developed that have contributed to its progressive marginalization in each of its main functions of norm- and standard-setting, technical assistance, and ideas.

Norms and standards

In many global governance domains, it is still only the UN that has the legitimacy to arrive at standards and conventions which will bind governments. It has demonstrated its importance with agreements like the Montreal Protocol (which helped to reduce the destruction of ozone in the atmosphere by encouraging a commercially viable switch to less harmful emissions), and numerous human rights conventions. But in some areas the UN continues to rely to an excessive degree on time-honored but cumbersome processes of exclusively intergovernmental consultation in the quest for solutions. The search for a successor to the greenhouse gas emission-related Kyoto Protocol is a good case in point. While the UN has generated the scientific evidence for an impending calamity, the essential destination of a global agreement has so far eluded multiple intergovernmental conferences. The all-or-nothing consensual approach, in which any of 193 member country governments can effectively wield a veto, results in anodyne decisions of least political resistance, as well as being excessively cumbersome (Weiss 2012). And when agreements are reached by the

first UN of governments, often after protracted negotiations characterized by sharp and increasingly artificial Manichean divisions into “North” and “South,” the second UN often fails to put in place systems of monitoring to encourage compliance.

Some alternative non-UN global forums do better. Industrial standards, for example, are established by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) created in 1946, and not brought into the UN family as a specialized agency because of its composition of private, civil society and public interests (Murphy & Yates 2009). There are non-UN global standard-setters in other domains in which private interests are strong, such as the International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a US-based non-governmental organization which governs the registration of internet addresses. To maintain its relevance as the prime forum of global negotiations, the UN must accommodate the wider participation of stakeholders, as these bodies have done.

Technical assistance

In TA, UN development organizations can claim many past successes. The existence of a substantial number of technical and regulatory institutions in developing countries is attributable to past UN support. In the fields of health and education (where global surveys consistently rate the UN highest),⁹ organizations such as the WHO and UNICEF have helped eradicate disease and build up critical local support systems. As a purveyor of objective advice, the UN has also helped client countries to negotiate more advantageously in economic, financial, trade, environmental, and other areas. Moreover, the UN can call on its unique convening capacity to foster dialogue among disparate partners within developing countries. Thus, the recent substantial increase in funding would seem to indicate a commensurately larger role for the UN in development.

⁹ See <http://www.futureun.org/Surveys>

The reality is not so straightforward, however. As primary donors, funded from core resources, the UN organizations have seen a steady decline in their proportion of official development assistance (ODA). The UN's share of core multilateral development assistance was almost halved between 2000 and 2010 (Figure 2). The picture is different if the UN's non-core funds are taken into consideration. But these earmarked resources have effectively turned the UN organizations into implementing agencies on behalf of the original donors, be they governments, other multilateral agencies or private and philanthropic funds, a phenomenon described as "Trojan multilateralism" (Sridhar & Woods 2013: 326). In organizational jargon, the UN has become an "agent" doing the bidding of other "principals." As an example, in one of the largest contributions to the UN development system in recent years (\$800 million), the Spanish government specified the 50 countries (few of them among the poorest) and the eight development areas in which the funds could be used by the UN, and participated in the approval of each project. Emerging economies and developing countries also contribute "local resources" to the UN. For many years, UNDP has accepted contributions from Latin American countries which it uses to procure personnel and equipment for use in the same countries: an example of capacity replacement, rather than capacity building.

The expansion in non-core funding has, it is true, helped to maintain the scale of UN development operations. But as adjuncts to the agendas of other funders, UN organizations have seen the UN character of assistance undermined and their focus diverted away from some critical concerns. The limited capacity of WHO to respond to the Ebola epidemic in Africa is just one recent example of this diversion. The growing prevalence of donorship over ownership calls into question the legitimacy of multilateralism through the UN.

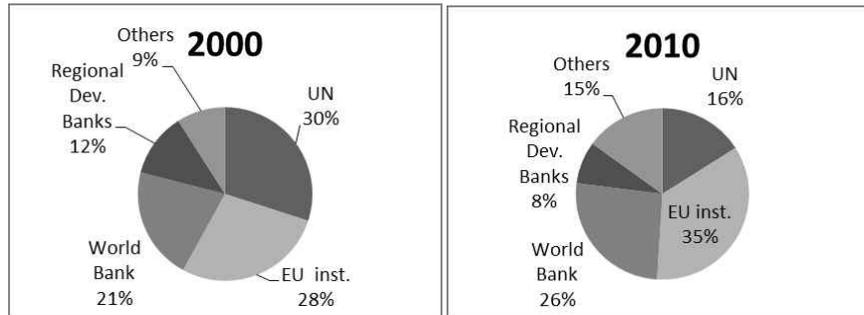


Figure 2. The UN's diminishing share of multilateral assistance. Source: data from OECD/DAC.

The second UN (agency secretariats) is also guilty of being excessively bureaucratic and cumbersome in its operations, encouraging donors to seek new mechanisms through which to channel their funds. In the area of health, the advent of the GAVI Alliance (2000) and the Global Fund (2002) were in part a reaction to the UN's operational sloth. There are also questions of the technical competence of UN personnel in specialist fields, due to a generally slow intake of specialized expertise and low turnover of staff. An excessive preoccupation with internal procedures and fund-raising also diverts staff away from more substantive tasks. Each non-core UN operation has to be reported on separately to each source, adding to the administrative burdens of staff, and circumventing the scrutiny of governing bodies within which the voices of the beneficiary countries are becoming ever fainter.

Ideas

While the UN continues to generate new thinking and research, as well as data, in some selected development areas it now competes unfavorably for ideas with many other sources, including the World Bank, regional development banks, academia, private foundations and research bodies (Edwards 1999). In itself, such competition is welcome, but in the interests of making the best use of limited resources, the UN

should focus on those areas—like demography—where it can still demonstrate a comparative advantage.

Table 1 sums up the principal shortcomings of the UN development system adumbrated above. They appear as daunting challenges, but they also point to the directions which the UN should take in order for its development activities to be more cohesive and relevant.

Table 1.
Present Challenges of the UN in Development

	Conventions, global negotiations, norm-setting	Operations: technical assistance	Ideas: research, information, advocacy
Lack of cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many multi-agency forums without strategic direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duplication of activities • Proliferation of entities • Wastage of resources • Slow response to crises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competing paradigms • Research duplication
Marginalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cumbersome negotiating practices • Alternative forums more appropriate • Weak compliance and monitoring mechanisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilateralization of UN agenda • Better alternative TA mechanisms • Lack of technical competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many alternative research sources

The Future

If there is a further internal challenge for the UN in development, it is inertia. The less the system adapts to today’s realities, the more shrill will become the voices of outsiders who more readily perceive the problems. The last major attempt at reforming the development system as a whole was in 2006 when a high-level panel on “system-wide coherence” produced its report, *Delivering as One*. Its language was uncompromising: “inefficient and ineffective governance and

unpredictable funding have contributed to policy incoherence, duplication and operational ineffectiveness across the system. Cooperation between organizations has been hindered by competition for funding, mission creep and outdated business practices” (UN High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence 2007: 2).

Regular surveys of UN-watchers and users have reached similar conclusions about the UN’s shortcomings in development. In a global perception survey undertaken in 2014, respondents agreed on eight principal areas of weakness, the most important of which were organizational structure and earmarking of funds (Figure 3) (Browne & Weiss 2014).¹⁰

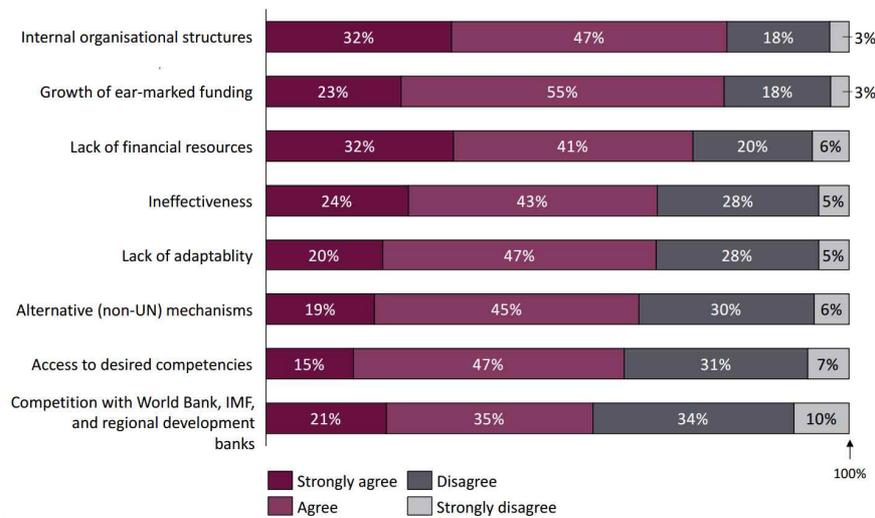


Figure 3. Perceived shortcomings of UN development system by global public. Source: Future UN Development System (FUNDS) Project.

¹⁰ The survey was undertaken by the Future UN Development System (FUNDS) Project, based at the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies of the Graduate Center, City University of New York. In the 2014 global survey, there were over 3,200 respondents from 156 countries, in six professional groups (public sector, private sector, civil society, academia, UN and other international public organizations).

But while the problems are increasingly well articulated, will change occur? The UN, through a cumbersome consultation process, is at the 2015/2016 threshold, when it turns over to the new 15-year agenda of “sustainable development goals.” Attention is on “the world we want,” but not enough is being heard about “the UN we want” to get there. The *Delivering as One* (DAO) report went to the General Assembly at the end of 2006, the final months of the former SG’s term. With the change in UN leadership, momentum in the second UN was lost. Most of the recommendations of the panel remain only partially implemented, but some modest progress has been made in at least two areas; these successes can be built on.

One is the creation of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) as a result of the merger of four pre-existing bodies. It is now moot whether the activities could have been undertaken by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) which has a similar mandate. The move did at least represent an organizational consolidation almost unprecedented in the system and indicative of the possibilities of further consolidation in the future.

The other initiative has been the attempt to bring greater convergence to the UN field offices in each country, “delivering as one” through single UN heads, programs, budgets and offices. The importance of consolidation is highlighted by the fact that many countries are host to ten or more UN organizations, each of them operating independently. The first UN is not fully sold on this reform. Some governments prefer many agency representatives who maintain direct relations with their individual ministries. But a growing number of countries—now more than 50—have been persuaded by the logic of convergence.¹¹

Since the 1970s, the UN has designated resident coordinators (UNRCs) who each act as *primus inter pares* among country agency

¹¹ A list of countries participating in “delivering as one” is available here: https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Delivering-as-One-countries_Nov-2015.pdf (accessed in November 2015)

representatives. Resident coordinators chair meetings of UN country teams, outside of which each member reports to their respective headquarters, following programming practices which are not fully aligned. In practice, therefore, coordination equates to information exchange and the role of UNRCs falls well short of providing strategic oversight and giving direction to local UN programs. Since 2006, the ultimate model has been four “ones”: one program, office, leader and fund. There has been some progress with joint programming and common premises where feasible, but single leadership and funding have been more elusive. Adhering to their autonomy, individual UN organizations are reluctant to delegate responsibilities to UNRCs, and though “one funds” have been established in some countries (pooled contributions to support joint UN programs), donors have begun pulling back from them (OECD 2015: 127-147).

The most recent evaluation of the DAO experience revealed mixed success (United Nations 2012). While governments appreciate the convenience of consolidation, there are fewer advantages on the (second) UN side where coordination—in effect parallelism—incur higher transaction costs. Full integration of UN country operations would be a superior solution, but the only example which comes close is in tiny Cape Verde where the UN head is accredited to several organizations, runs an integrated program, and has a single administration.¹² Country integration will not become more widespread until the headquarters of the UN organizations, including the specialized agencies, can agree to harmonize their programming cycles and procedures, and develop a common technology platform. The right moves are afoot and it will eventually happen. But beyond the form, a more profound cultural change will be needed for all parts of the system to agree to decentralize

¹² In 1992 the UN established twelve “integrated offices” in the newly independent former republics of the Soviet Union. However, in spite of the evident advantages of this model, it was wound up under pressure from UN organizations wanting to establish their own presence.

authority to a single joint representative. History stands in the way.

The UN field system of 1,000 offices has grown as much through reasons of convenience as developmental concerns. The UN's country presence should retain its universality, but it is most needed in fragile and conflict-prone states, and much less in middle and upper-income countries (some of which host over 20 different UN organizations), where small liaison offices could suffice. In fragile states, a unified presence is all the more important. Where the UN performs best, its joint operational responsibilities are combined with peacekeeping, security, humanitarian and human rights concerns—an all-of-UN approach.

Reform needs a strong central leader of UN development, not just to coordinate but to provide global oversight and strategy. It would require a globally acknowledged and respected specialist, of the caliber of the many Nobel laureates who have worked for the UN in the past. The SG could not perform this role as long as the incumbent has so many other responsibilities. As long ago as 1977, the UN agreed to the designation of a “director general for development and international economic cooperation” to head the development system. However, as in most senior UN appointments, then and now, the two successive incumbents of the post were career civil servants rather than internationally known development specialists. The post was subsequently abolished, although there have been repeated calls for a new development head. The creation of a development head position with real authority, and some centralized budgetary control would do more than any other single measure to bring more cohesion to UN development, including taking a strategic lead in helping the system respond to major contemporary challenges. Policy development through endless committee sessions and rotating chairs will no longer suffice. Rather than delicately balancing the interests of organizational heads, a UN development leader could designate clear responsibilities, in national cabinet-style.

These are some of the measures which would help to bring more cohesion to the UN's operations. But how can UN TA itself be made

more relevant and effective? The answer is to achieve greater alignment with the UN's other main development functions, from which it has become detached. The greatest potential strength of the (first) UN is in the nurturing of global norms and conventions across an increasingly wide swath of development domains. But norms mean little without compliance, and it is here where the UN is still weak. A good example is given by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which emerged from the first UN's 2000 summit, and was subsequently refined by the second UN the following year. But uptake was slow. No global publicity campaign followed the path-breaking Millennium Declaration which 149 heads of state and government had signed. Even a decade later, UN organizations were still trying to retail the MDG message in program countries. A monitoring system has been in place, but this sophisticated statistical exercise is passive rather than diagnostic, and there has been limited participation by "we, the peoples" who are the intended beneficiaries of MDG achievement.

The UN now has an opportunity to rectify these shortcomings with its new set of goals, the Sustainable Development Goals. Just as important as the goals themselves will be the effective scrutiny of their achievement by the global public, both in the North and the South. There could be a parallel with a UN process enshrined in its human rights pillar: the universal periodic review, which brings national civil societies into the process of monitoring the performance of governments. To that extent, the actions of the UN in devising the monitoring process for the new goals will be critically important to their relevance.

The same lessons can be applied to all the other areas of UN norm-setting. The most relevant operational tasks to be undertaken by the UN and all its development organizations would consist in helping to ensure compliance with the norms and standards which it has helped establish. The UN cannot impose sanctions or conditionality, but it can apply its own soft power of advocacy and capacity development.

The processes of negotiation to achieve norms and conventions are also ripe for change. Returning to the critical area of climate change, the

UN could eschew its unproductive all-or-nothing, top-down approach to negotiating a successor to Kyoto, and help foster “creative coalitions,” described alliteratively as “a coalition of the working between countries, companies and cities to counteract climate change” (Oxford Martin School 2014: 57). There are many ways in which civil society and private interests can and should be brought into the deliberative forums of the UN. Mini-lateral coalitions are just one of the ways towards multilateral agreements.

As a foundation for its research and advocacy, the UN also needs to come together around its own development paradigm, rather than having individual organizations competing for attention with branded slogans. A more cohesive approach would be facilitated by a common platform or portal enabling all those engaged in UN research to communicate. A current reform proposal which merits serious attention would link up the activities of all the UN research and training organizations with the main UN libraries and data centers.

Conclusions: Making Reform Happen

Table 2 is a summary of the virtuous UN development system which this article advocates. Getting there will be a challenge. As former UN deputy secretary-general Mark Malloch Brown (2011: 190) puts it: “the call for reform is likely to grow steadily” and “the question remains when not if.” There will be no second “San Francisco moment” to jump the organization into a new era of necessary change, even though much is currently expected of the UN in development. The best opportunity comes from the convenience of the calendar. In 2016, the development system embarks on a new 15-year phase governed by a second set of development goals. It is also the year in which the UN will be choosing its new leadership team.

Table 2.

Future Virtues of the UN in Development

	Conventions, global negotiations, norm-setting	Operations: technical assistance	Ideas: research, information, advocacy
Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More strategic direction • Designation of lead agencies for major development problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designation of single global UN development leader • Consolidation of similar UN entities • Fully harmonized programming procedures • Single UN country representatives, programs, offices, funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A single UN development paradigm
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More inclusive multi-stakeholder negotiating practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA focused on compliance with UN norms and conventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A single comprehensive UN research portal

Fundamental obstacles to reform remain. Almost every year UN member governments discuss the reform of ECOSOC—the body which was never allowed to be the console at the centre of the development system. It has taken on new functions, including turning itself into a “development cooperation forum” for two days every two years to debate development aid outside the donor-dominated OECD/DAC. But ECOSOC still falls well short of being an effective coordination and guidance body. Governments still enjoy providing and receiving patronage through the separate UN development organizations. For some, their organization is too friendly to fail or reform. Thus radical change will not be initiated by the deliberations of the first UN, which tends to take a line of least resistance when reform is on the agenda.

Organizational change of the second UN confronts the problems which resulted from the original architecture of independent agencies. As early as 1948, the first head of FAO, Lord Boyd Orr, pleaded with the UN secretary-general to “bring the heads of the specialized agencies together, and try to get a coordinated drive” (United Nations 1969: 33,

footnote). With time, parallelism has become more marked and the sense of autonomy has grown stronger. The latest reforms, however, correctly identified the UN's field presence as the most promising area for bringing the agencies closer. Further progress towards delivering as one is mainly held back by the reluctance of respective agency headquarters to loosen their independence by delegating downwards. Further reforms are necessary and have been shown to be possible with strong will from the top of the organization. Several important innovations were made during the previous tenure of the secretary-general, culminating in the *Delivering as One* report in 2006, demonstrating that meaningful reforms can be internally generated. In recent years, however, the impetus for change has slackened, and it is hoped that new UN leadership in 2017 will be more productive.

Expectations for change have been raised within the third UN, from which views were solicited through the *My World* survey.¹³ Starting in 2013, the survey has garnered more than 8.5 million responses as of November 2015. In the coming years, it is to be hoped that under stronger leadership, open to the opinions and support of the global public, development assistance through the UN will come closer to providing the responses to those global challenges for which it is uniquely qualified.

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¹³ Accessed November 2015 at <http://www.MYWorld2015.org>.

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