

# UNITED NATIONS REFORM and Potential Implications for NGOs

May 2020



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK  
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE  
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing United Nations (UN) Reform is an important process, with implications going beyond the UN itself. In recent years, challenges to multilateralism have been expanding, with the UN coming also under pressure to better demonstrate its added value. However, the criticism of the UN is not only linked to current trends in unilateralism. Some of the critical voices strongly support multilateralism but advocate for a renewed, more efficient, coherent and effective UN system<sup>1</sup>.

It is against this background that the current UN reform was agreed upon and is being implemented. Although the reform can be seen as a continuation of previous similar efforts, it also brings a new approach and elements. It is for these reasons that ICVA decided to invest in a specific paper clarifying the elements of the ongoing UN reform and its implications for non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

As the paper was drafted, the Covid-19 emerged as a serious challenge and disrupter for all our societies, including for the work of the UN and NGO sector. It is however too early to analyse concretely the impact of Covid-19 on the reform and the UN itself. Therefore, except for few links and hypothesis made, this paper's focus remains on:

- sharing information on the UN Reform, as NGOs might not be fully aware of it;
- discussing the positive aspects of the reform, concerns, and ways forward from an NGO perspective;
- highlighting ICVA's engagement in the process.

## 2. BACKGROUND TO THE UN REFORM

**2.1. Historical evolution:** The United Nations has undergone phases of reform since its foundation in 1945. During the first years, among the changes was the development of peacekeeping measures to oversee ceasefire agreements (examples being the Middle East and the Kashmir conflict). The early years were also highlighted by the adoption in 1948 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) and related mechanisms and the subsequent establishment of various human rights treaties. In the decades which followed, with states from Africa and Asia joining the United Nations, development issues became increasingly important. This resulted in the expansion of the UN in the development area, including the establishment of the [United Nations Development Programme](#) in 1965, and the number of UN members increasing to 118, twice as many as in the beginning with originally 51 founders.

With the end of the Cold War, the first half of the 1990s saw a major expansion of the organisation. New peacekeeping missions were launched. In the 1990s it also became apparent that the UN system was in need of reform. Various reforms were initiated by Secretary-Generals, including the [Global Compact](#) (2000, to encourage businesses to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies), the [World Summit](#) (2005, focusing on development, security, human rights and reform), and [Delivering as One](#) (2006, on the topics of development assistance, humanitarian aid, and environmental issues).

**2.2. MDGs and SDGs:** The eight [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) were established in 2000 at the UN Millennium Summit, with the goal to improve the lives of the world's poorest people. They were focused primarily on the world's least developed countries.

While the MDGs had a substantial impact in addressing poverty, they were largely determined by OECD countries and international donor agencies. Many actors advocated for a more universal approach to development which was more strongly rooted in human rights.

In 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted as part of Resolution 70/1 of the UN General Assembly, the 2030 Agenda. They were the result of international negotiations that involved middle-income and low-income countries. They are universal – applying to all countries and actors – and holistic, covering poverty reduction and inequality, sustainability and economic growth with job creation. The 17 SDGs are broad-based and interdependent. Each has a list of targets which are measured with indicators, giving thereby an excellent opportunity to NGOs and other civil society organisations to engage for progress at local, regional and global levels. The SDGs call all countries to action, they are rooted in human rights and are inclusive.

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



With the adoption of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), UN Member States pledged to ensure that “no one will be left behind” and to “endeavour to reach the furthest behind first”. In practice, this means taking explicit action to end extreme poverty, curb inequalities, confront discrimination, and fast-track progress for the furthest behind.<sup>2</sup>

## 3. WHAT IS THE UN REFORM?

The reform of the UN Development System (UNDS) involves a set of far-reaching changes in the way the UN development system works to help countries around the world in achieving the SDGs.<sup>3</sup> The reform was mandated by the General Assembly of the United Nations in Resolution 72/279 of 31 May 2018<sup>4</sup>, which responded to the vision and proposals of the Secretary-General to reposition the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

### The Secretary-General identified six priority areas to focus on through management reform:

- Improving the responsiveness and speed of service delivery
- Establishing greater coherence in management structures
- Strengthening performance management culture
- Ensuring effective management of resources for mandate implementation
- Enhancing transparency and accountability
- Increasing the trust between Member States and the Secretariat<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Reform and Potential Implications for NGOs

## 4. WHAT CHANGES ARE EXPECTED?

### 4.1. The UN Reform focuses on three areas:

- **Development Reform:** with bold changes to the UNDS centred on a strategic [UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework](#) (UNSDCF)<sup>6</sup> and an independent and empowered Resident Coordinator (RC). The Cooperation Framework is the UN development system's collective effort to support countries to address SDG priorities and gaps. It replaced the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), to more accurately reflect the relationship between governments and the UN development system in collaborating to achieve the SDGs. The Cooperation Framework guides the entire programme cycle, driving planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of collective UN support to achieve the 2030 agenda. The Cooperation Framework is intended to embody the spirit of partnerships that are at the core of the 2030 Agenda, in pursuit of development solutions.
- **Management Reform:** a UN that empowers managers and staff, simplifies processes, increases accountability and transparency, and improves on delivery of mandates.
- **Peace and Security Reform:** with goals to prioritise prevention and sustain peace, to move towards a single and integrated peace and security pillar, and align it more closely with the development and human rights pillars.

### With the start of 2019, four new UN Departments came into being;

- Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance
- Department of Operational Support
- Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
- Department of Peace Operations

A reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system was launched, served by a newly-fortified Development Coordination Office.<sup>7</sup>

### 4.2. More specifically, the reform is intended to deliver seven changes<sup>8</sup>:

- (1) A system-wide strategic approach, to accelerate the alignment of the UN development system with the 2030 Agenda.
- (2) A new generation of UN Country Teams (UNCTs), along with a redesigned UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.
- (3) An independent, impartial and empowered Resident Coordinator (RC), as the highest-ranking development representative of the UN system, leading 131 UNCTs serving 164 countries and territories. The RC will report directly to the Secretary-General.
- (4) A revamped regional approach, with better utilisation of global and regional capacities and resources.
- (5) Improved strategic guidance, transparency and accountability, with clear and more robust lines of accountability, from UNCTs to host governments and between RCs and heads of UN entities at country level.
- (6) A system-wide approach to partnerships.
- (7) A new Funding Compact between member states and the UN development system.

Some of these seven changes will have greater implications for NGOs than others, as for example (2) on UNCTs, (3) on the new Resident Coordinator concept, (5) on improved strategic guidance, and particularly (6) on a system-wide approach to partnerships (including NGO partnerships).

In addition, there is:

- An upgraded Development Operations Coordination office (UNDOCO), now called the [Development Coordination Office \(DCO\)](#), to provide support to the RC and UNCTs.
- A shift in donor funding towards more predictable and flexible resources.
- Consolidation of back offices and service centres.<sup>9</sup>

### 4.3. The UN Funding Compact:

The Funding Compact aims to provide the financial support needed for the alignment of the UN development system with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is a non-binding document which articulates concrete actions on both sides, by UN Member States and all the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) entities, with relevant indicators to measure progress for each one.

Similar to the Grand Bargain, in the Funding Compact the UNSDG commits to accelerating results for countries through more collaboration. It will do so, the text says, while reporting on needs and results more clearly, consistently and transparently. It will pursue joint activities, notably in the areas of analytical work, the formulation of operational support and policy options for SDG acceleration and evaluations. Accountability for common results, notably through the UNSDCF, and engagement with partners are to be strengthened through the implementation of a new Mutual Accountability Framework. The Compact explains that this should translate into reduced costs for host governments, and greater returns for Member States' investments.

The Funding Compact underscores the "new primacy" of the Cooperation Framework process and framework at the country level, with outcomes as shared UN country team (UNCT) results, to which individual UNSDG entities contribute. Strategic plans at the global and country levels are to articulate funding requirements more clearly, including by type of funding, and, the text notes, funding dialogues must be strengthened.

Member States from their side will align their funding with the requirements of the UNSDG entities, in terms of both quantity and quality. They commit to bring core resources to a level of at least 30% in the next five years, increase the share of multi-year contributions, and double the level of resources channelled through development-related inter-agency pooled funds and single agency thematic funds.

According to the Compact, these instruments provide the type of quality funding that allows the UN development system to integrate expertise and capacities across the system, as demanded by the 2030 Agenda. They also provide the flexibility necessary to respond to "rapidly changing and new country priorities," while for country-level funds minimising adverse effects of funding volatility.

The Compact also stressed Member States' responsibility in supporting UNSDG efforts by streamlining and harmonising reporting and visibility requirements, notably at the country level, in line with the principle of national ownership, as such requirements often carry significant transaction costs for the UN and for host governments. 'Efficiency gain' is very much at the core of the Compact, which elaborates also on the follow-up and review processes, with a two-stream approach focusing on global and country levels. The UN DCO will coordinate regular tracking of the Funding Compact commitments, in collaboration with DESA, the UN System Chief Executives Board (CEB) Secretariat, the Multi-Partner Trust Fund office, and other UN working groups and task forces as required.

#### 4.4. The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights

In February 2020, the UN Secretary General issued [The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights](#) (hereinafter: Call to Action). Despite the massive progress made since the UNDHR, as of today no country is immune to human rights violations, and often insufficient steps are undertaken to address them. The Call to Action aims at a renewed commitment to the human rights agenda by the UN as a whole. As stated in the Call to Action, 'human rights are the responsibility of each and every United Nations actor and that a culture of human rights must permeate everything we do, in the field, at regional level and at Headquarters.'

After setting out some overarching guiding principles, the Call focuses on seven domains:

- rights at the core of sustainable development;
- rights in times of crisis;
- gender equality and equal rights for women;
- public participation and civic space;
- rights of future generations, especially climate justice;
- rights at the heart of collective action;
- new frontiers of human rights.

In each of these domains, specific Actions are underlined where the UN can better engage in the near term to advance the human rights agenda. To implement the Call to Action, as emphasised by the UN SG, 'at times we will work hand-in-hand with Governments and other stakeholders, providing technical support to build national human rights institutions and guide the national application of international norms and standards. At other times we will speak out, identifying both violations and violators. At still other times we will work behind the scenes. There is a place for each of these approaches, and often all three at once.'

This recognition by the SG of the diversity of tools that the UN needs to deploy is very important. Although the Call to Action comes as an initiative outside the UN reform, the two processes will hopefully be considered as inherently linked. In this sense it is positive to note that the Call to Action covers rights in times of crises, going even further than current humanitarian discussions being narrowly focused around needs and aid delivery. Of course, on both issues positioning on paper is easier than acting in practice, and the UN has many lessons learnt from Sri Lanka and Myanmar to reflect upon. A stronger collaboration with NGOs would enable a more agile use of various tools to respond affirmatively to human rights violations.

It is too early at the moment to conclude on how NGOs are engaged in the implementation of the Call to Action, but goodwill exists at the global level. In a meeting organised in early March 2020 with NGOs in Geneva, the UN Assistant Secretary General for Strategic Coordination, Volker Türk, pledged in this direction although without further detailing the concrete possibilities for engagement.



## 5. WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE UN REFORM ON THE NGO SECTOR, SPECIFICALLY THE HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT AND ON THE GROUND?

The reform's objective to make the UN better able to contribute towards the realisation of the 2030 Agenda is a logical and welcome development. As SDGs are universal, strongly grounded in human rights and inter-connected, little progress will happen through a silo approach. Moreover, both States and NGOs wish to see UN agencies being more efficient internally and coherent among themselves through increased coordination and collaboration, especially at the country level. Evidence demonstrates how lack of coherence among the various UN agencies hinders action on the ground, it raises questions of accountability and damages trust in the entire institution. Addressing such concerns is a top management priority for the UN and very much a driving force behind the reform.

A number of specific outputs of the UN Reform, as elaborated earlier in this paper, are intended to result in a more effective UN and enhanced achievement of the SDGs. These include: an independent and empowered RC; consolidation of UN Departments; a strengthened DCO; an improved approach to partnerships, and closer alignment with the 2030 Agenda. All are very relevant and positive for the work of NGOs. Despite the recognition of the positive aspects of the UN Reform, there have also been some concerns raised by NGOs, including on the reform's potential impact on humanitarian action. This part of the paper will discuss some of these.

### 5.1. The development focus and impact on humanitarian action

The focus on the 2030 Agenda in itself might cause uneasiness and raise questions with some humanitarian actors. While many have welcomed and are investing increasingly in the nexus between humanitarian, peace and development, some humanitarian actors are not inclined or do not have the resources and expertise to follow the 2030 Agenda, what its realisation would mean and its current progress. Development work is often summarised by humanitarians as meaning 'working in support of the government', while independence is one of the core principles valued by the humanitarian sector. Therefore, one commonly faced concern is that a UN Reform focusing on delivering on the 2030 Agenda may mean a de-prioritising of humanitarian action. In theory at least, this is not correct. The underlying idea behind the emphasis on the 2030 Development Agenda is that by realising it and ensuring no-one is left behind, some of the drivers behind conflict and generalised violence will be addressed, leading to the need for fewer humanitarian interventions.

It is important to note that in an ICVA interview, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination, Fabrizio Hochschild, stated that there is no intention to dilute the humanitarian space or centrality of protection within the articulation of the UN reforms. He noted that we cannot speak of humanitarian solutions without taking into consideration work on peace and/or development.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, development actors can be extremely influential towards governments in upholding their obligations and responsibilities. Many NGOs operate across the nexus and the majority of them cover both development and humanitarian work. From the ground perspective the division between humanitarian and development work is not always distinct, with NGOs responding to a continuum of human rights violations and protection concerns. Whilst humanitarian and development work might not always share identical approaches, they do impact on each other and, as a common ground, separately and together, they should contribute to the realisation of the rights of all in the territory.

### 5.2. Reflecting the humanitarian development nexus

In its paper '[The new way of working examined](#)', ICVA explains how 'the new way of working' was originally focused on removing the "unnecessary barriers" hindering the collaboration between humanitarian and development actors. The approach evolved further to reflect a large and diverse range of situations where humanitarian, development, and – when appropriate – peace actors work towards collective outcomes over multiple years based on their comparative advantage.<sup>11</sup> The ICVA paper also elaborates on the pros and cons of the nexus approach. While today, some might wonder what has concretely changed on the ground, there is overall agreement on the potential benefits of the nexus approach.

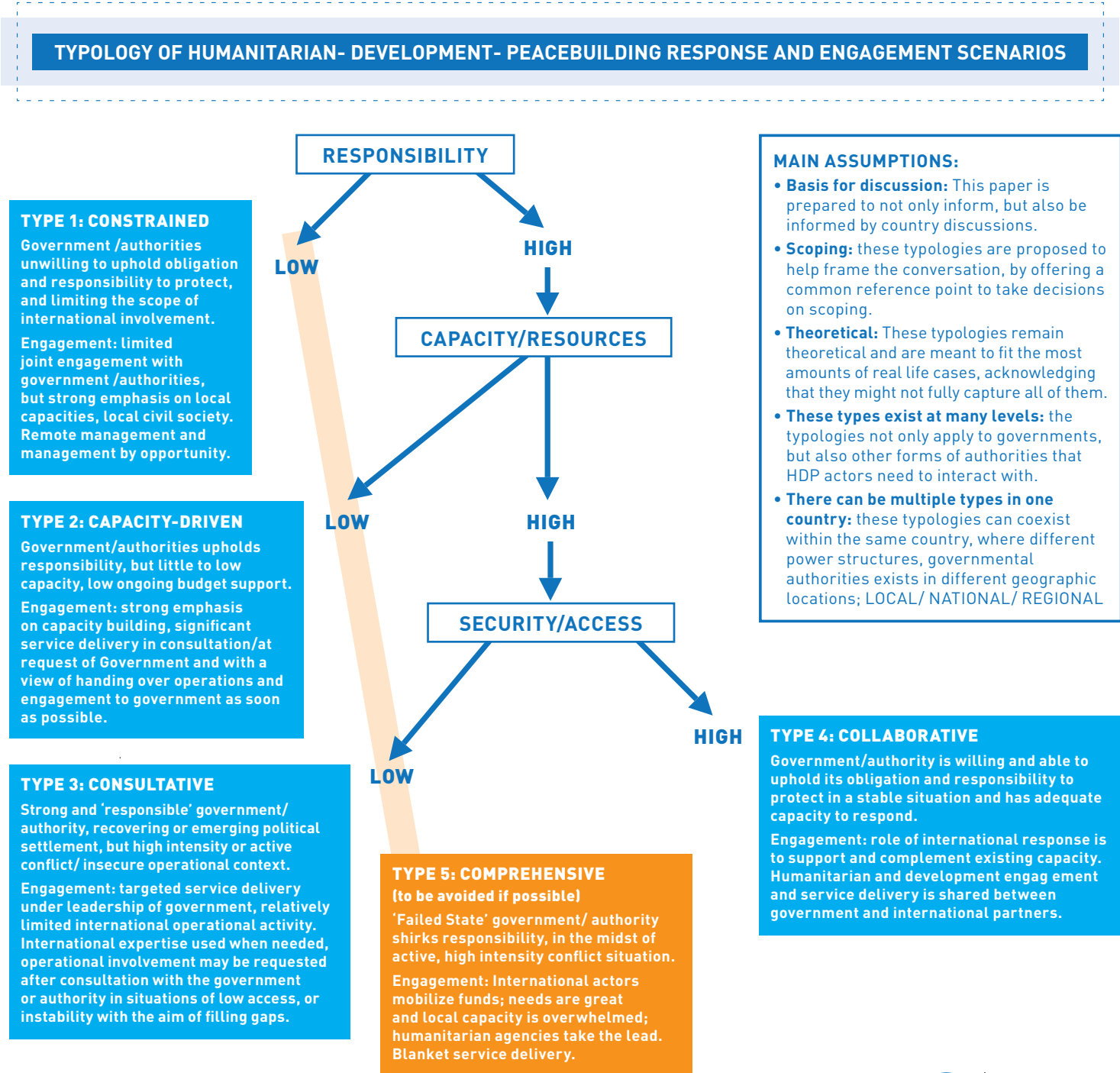
The nexus approach is strongly reflected in the UN Reform. As already elaborated above, the UNSDCF is considered the most important instrument for planning and implementation of the UN activities at country level in support of the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UNSDCF [Guidance](#) was reviewed to ensure that the UNSDCF preparation is more open to all actors, and the document itself reflects humanitarian concerns. It states that UNSDCF 'complements - and is informed by - other key policy, programmatic and legal frameworks, such as the country reviews undertaken by the different UN human rights

mechanisms, the Humanitarian Response Plan/Refugee Response Plan and the Integrated Strategic Framework in UN mission settings. In protracted crises, the Cooperation Framework reflects the “collective outcomes” that address risk and vulnerability.’

The [Guidance for Common Country Assessment](#) (CCA) has also been reviewed to ensure that the CCA is more comprehensive and independent. The Guidance strongly emphasises the CCA being an opportunity for UN agencies to come together with key national and international stakeholders to discuss national challenges and common approaches. It becomes thus important for humanitarian actors to follow and contribute to the CCA and UNSDCF processes, bring humanitarian concerns and propose joint actions.

This raises some justified concerns on the government’s participation and leadership when the government is part or even partially responsible for the humanitarian situation. The following [Inter-Agency Standing Committee flowchart](#) portrays the various scenarios and roles governments may play in protracted crises.

Evidence shows that often different typologies coexist within the same country, depending on division of power and mandate, geographic coverage, etc. Based on such analysis, humanitarian and development actors can decide on whether, when and at what level to seek government leadership or participation. This means that while some humanitarian actors might find themselves able to work more with governments, some development actors will also need to be more critical of certain governmental actions and recognise that it is not their only interlocutor at the country level.



### 5.3. Funding priorities

Other questions NGOs have on the UN Reform are linked to the operational aspects. The funding gap for example in both development and humanitarian aid is a concern and NGOs wonder what that means in terms of priorities. Are States planning to shift funding, and if that is the case will humanitarian money go to finance development work or vice versa? There is little evidence at present to show a clear trend in shifting from one area to the other. It may also be too soon to reach a conclusion on this. Humanitarian and development funding generally come from different sources and funding tracks and States have shifted the priorities between the two regularly even in the past.

As shown also by the conclusions of the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain commitments, in both sectors there is an urgent need to increase the funding sources while improving in efficiency and delivery.

The commitments of Member States through the UN Funding Compact are intended to increase core resources for the UN to a level of at least 30% in the next five years, increase the share of multi-year contributions, and double the level of resources channelled through development-related pooled funds. However, at present the Covid-19 pandemic might further shrink resources for development work. Many predict a financial crisis to hit the world and last longer than the pandemic itself. The World Food Programme is warning that the pandemic risks to almost double acute hunger by the end of the 2020 and is requesting States to invest adequate resources in fighting hunger<sup>12</sup>. It is uncertain whether States will still be prioritising their engagements under the Funding Compact, as compared to other emerging national and global concerns.

On the other hand, within its reform, the UN commits to improved efficiency in development work. Efficiency and accountability become even more relevant in the current context of the pandemic. While the UN is accountable to its Member States, NGOs can play an important role in monitoring the UN transformation and its efficiency gains. For NGOs themselves, the pressure to increase in efficiency and reduce costs has been rather constant. For many, such efforts have reached a limit, while others can further explore, especially in strengthening internally their nexus approach.

### 5.4. The role of the RCs

There have been some concerns expressed on the RC's ability to be an advocate for humanitarian issues, given the priority to support governments with the realisation of the SDGs. Such concerns, however, go beyond the UN Reform. Prior to the reform, the RC was also serving

as humanitarian coordinator in countries facing a humanitarian crisis. The UN Reform may likely bring improvements in this regard as before the RC was also the Country Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Although theoretically it was previously possible to have the role of the HC separated from that of the RC, in practice this separation has applied in an extremely limited number of cases (three cases that ICVA is aware of). It can thus be argued that it was even harder for the position in the past to speak out on humanitarian concerns, while being also the main adviser of the government on development issues.

The Reform makes the RC position accountable to the UN SG, while all the UN Agencies in the country report directly also to this position, when it comes to SDGs. This empowerment of the RCs should in principle impact favourably on humanitarian action. However, there is also the risk of having one single entry point, and a mal-functioning RC would have a substantial negative impact on the entire functioning of the UN at the country level. The RC position is a crucial and very demanding responsibility. It is important that any person holding such a position has development and humanitarian experience, a proven record of standing for human rights and international humanitarian law, while also being able to navigate between other political, economic and social interests. Ensuring thus the right [RC leadership](#) is a necessity as already recognised by the UN.

Another ICVA study, '[The Role of the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator](#)' has previously discussed some of the challenges arising from the multi-mandated role of the RC. It highlighted the important role of the deputy humanitarian coordinator (DHC) within the UNCT, providing for a number of concrete recommendations. It remains important to see how the UN Reform also provides an opportunity to optimise the DHC role.

### 5.5. Partnerships

Among the key roles of the RC will be coordination, facilitation and advocacy. The RC is also responsible for engaging, convening, and forging strategic partnerships at the national and sub-national level with diverse entities including civil society, around the UN's collective support to the 2030 Agenda. On partnerships, the Secretary-General proposes the launch of six partnership-related work streams. One of the six is at the country level, where external partners (international Financial Institutions, businesses, civil society, and other stakeholders, including "the furthest behind") will have the RC offices as a "one stop shop" resource for partnerships.<sup>13</sup> The RC offices will have a staff member responsible for partnerships to improve policy advice and increase programmatic results.<sup>14</sup>



This partnership approach is consistent with the [Principles of Partnership](#) (PoP), adopted in 2007, comprising principles of equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. The PoP provide a framework for all actors in the humanitarian space to engage in more equal, constructive and transparent ways.

So far the involvement of the NGOs especially at the country level has been limited. Some of the ICVA members interviewed for this paper expressed concerns about the civil society shrinking space in country and the lack of support by the UN country team to counter the trend. Of course, the situation differs from country to country, but even some of the UN colleagues interviewed recognised that more efforts were needed at country level, where sometimes the progress on the reform was slow to come. In January 2020, the UN launched an online [Consultation on Protecting and Promoting Civic Space](#). A number of important recommendations came out of the Consultation, including on the partnership between UN and civil society organisations, which should be duly reflected throughout the implementation of the UN Reform.<sup>15</sup>

In 2020 a number of country level assessments on the UN Reform are planned. This will be another good opportunity to measure not only progress on the UN Reform on the ground,

but also how NGOs are involved in the process and how the UN reform serves common interests. ICVA and its members will focus on several of the selected countries which will be carrying out the assessments. While it is logical that a number of efforts are placed on internal processes and coordination among the various UN Agencies, there is also the risk that the UN becomes too introverted. This would be highly counter-productive both to the objective of the UN Reform itself (making the UN better fit to deliver on the SDGs) and the realisation of the 2030 Agenda.

NGOs are key drivers behind the 2030 Agenda's efforts and play an important complementary role to other actors, including the UN. This role and place of the NGOs need to be strongly recognised and served through the UN Reform. After all, the 2030 Agenda is not a UN Agenda but a common humanity agenda. In this process, the UN will gain in effectiveness only if in addition to a better internal coordination, it also manages to better place itself externally, contributing to improved coordination among multiple actors, including NGOs. A better fit UN means a UN which is also better fit for partnership with NGOs, including those working in the humanitarian context. The NGOs stand ready to support the UN in becoming a better partner in realising together the 2030 Agenda goals.

## 6. HOW IS ICVA TO BE ENGAGED?

### 6.1. The vision

ICVA will follow up with the Call to Action for Human Rights and the UN Approach to Protecting and Promoting Civic Space. These initiatives are as crucial for the UN as they are for NGOs and they cannot lead to the expected results unless all actors contribute on equal footing. Moreover, in ICVA's view, human rights, SDGs and protection of civic space are interlinked. Thus, the Call to Action for Human Rights and the UN Approach to Protecting and Promoting Civic Space should be closely linked to and serve to guide the implementation of the UN Reform at all levels.

### 6.2. The nexus:

ICVA will continue to work with its members in supporting the bridge between peacebuilding, humanitarian and development work. The realisation of the SDGs is extremely important in this regard and ICVA will become more active in following up and sharing with its membership on the progress so far. At the regional level, ICVA is establishing closer relationships with the global and regional Development Coordination Offices (DCO), recognising that the DCO provides substantive guidance and support to RCs and to UN country teams.<sup>16</sup>

### 6.3. The Funding Compact:

Along similar lines, it will be relevant for ICVA, a signatory to the Grand Bargain, to follow the progress on the Funding Compact and discuss with other signatories of the Grand Bargain on similarities and differences between the two processes; if relevant and on how they can learn from each other. The Funding Compact risks to remain an unknown subject for NGOs and their staff, in particular those in the humanitarian context. ICVA will ensure some minimum general information is shared. Although the Funding Compact is only between States and some of UNSDG entities, it could be interesting to see how the UNSDG entities follow the language of the compact when they partner with NGOs.

### 6.4. Partnerships:

One UN Reform document notes that partnerships will make or break the 2030 Agenda, and the United Nations capacities need to reflect this reality.<sup>17</sup> A renewed and concrete commitment of the UN to partnership with NGOs is very much needed and ICVA will enhance its advocacy in this regard. While in support of any efforts for better coordination between the UN Agencies, ICVA will

continue to ask for NGOs to be equally consulted around joint agendas. At the country level, the RCs need clear guidelines and system-wide support for working jointly with NGOs, including in speaking up and responding to humanitarian concerns. ICVA will follow up with the planned country level assessments of the UN Reform and make sure that NGOs voices are reflected. In the next two to three years, ICVA will monitor closely the development of partnerships between NGOs and the UN in a few selected countries. Based on such findings and to improve further the roll-out of the reform, ICVA will facilitate discussions between NGOs, UN, Member States and other relevant partners.

### 6.5. Leadership:

ICVA will continue to follow closely the evolution of the new RC position, the RO office structure and its partnerships component. The objective is to see how concretely they will relate to and collaborate with the NGOs.

Moreover, there is the opportunity for senior NGO representatives to apply for an RC position in the UN system (RC/HC and RCO Team Leader). The humanitarian sector and especially NGOs have generally not been well represented among the RCs. Having more persons with NGO and humanitarian background and experience would be an excellent way to bridge the humanitarian-development divide. At present there are 30 RC/HCs in the

UN system, and five Deputy Humanitarian Coordinators.<sup>18</sup> Some of them have no or limited humanitarian or NGO background. ICVA will continue to encourage its members to apply for RC/HC positions in the UN system, as one mechanism to strengthen humanitarian leadership within the UN. This is in line with the intent to have more women, geographic diversity and NGOs in the RC/HC list. It is also important to ensure that humanitarian and NGO credentials of RCs are strengthened.

ICVA and OCHA are already contributing to a handbook for RCs on humanitarian action, and to a review of the RC curriculum. Part of the RC four-day induction training includes a half day on humanitarian issues developed by OCHA. OCHA regional offices provide support to RCs on emergency preparedness and contingency planning.

The Covid-19 pandemic has renewed commitments to the localization agenda. For sure there is space for more local leadership in the humanitarian sector and ICVA will continue to support such leadership in complementarity to the role of other actors.<sup>19</sup>

One overall conclusion is that, in view of the current pandemic, some elements of the reform might evolve and that there will be an impact on the resourcing and implementation of the reform, including on leadership and the UN- NGO partnership, as it will on many other aspects of our lives.

## REFERENCES

- 1 For a good summary of criticism to the UN prior to the current reform, see [The Guardian, 70 years and half a trillion dollars later: what has the UN achieved?](#); 2015.
- 2 From [“What does it mean to leave no one behind?”](#), UNDP discussion paper, 2018.
- 3 [UN development system reform 101](#), United to Reform, page 1, 2019.
- 4 [Resolution 72/279](#), adopted by the General Assembly on 31 May 2018.
- 5 From Management Reform: [Ensuring a better future for all, Management reform / United to Reform](#), 2019.
- 6 Source: UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – Internal Guidance, 3 June 2019. Additional information can be found in <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/cooperation-framework>
- 7 From the [Letter of the Secretary-General](#) to Permanent Representatives of Member States of the United Nations, 29 January 2019.
- 8 As summarised in the [UN Report of the Secretary-General](#), Repositioning the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, 21 December 2017.
- 9 From [UN development system reform 101 FAQ](#), 2019.
- 10 From the ICVA interview with Fabrizio Hochschild, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination, 21 March 2018.
- 11 [“New Way of Working,”](#) by OCHA-PDSB, March 2017. Additional information can be found in [‘Humanitarian Development Nexus’](#), UN OCHA, 2019.
- 12 [COVID-19: Potential impact on the world’s poorest people A WFP analysis of the economic and food security implications of the pandemic](#); World Food Programme (WFP), April 2017
- 13 From [An Annotated Guide to the UN Secretary-General’s Reform Proposals](#), Ana Maria Lebeda, 2018, page 4.
- 14 From RC System structure, PDA retreat, May 2019.
- 15 A Summary of the Consultation and Key Recommendations can be found [here](#).
- 16 See [here](#) for more on the UN Sustainable Development Group, Development Coordination Office.
- 17 From United Nations Development System Repositioning, [Background](#), 2018, page 3.
- 18 Humanitarian Coordinators: [Information Products](#), UN OCHA, August 2019.
- 19 See [REINFORCE, REINFORCE, REINFORCE: Localization in the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response](#), ICVA, 2020.



### Acknowledgments

ICVA would like to thank Robert White for co-drafting this paper as well as all the members and partners who contributed with their knowledge and views on this paper.

### Geneva Office

26-28 Avenue Giuseppe Motta 1202 – Geneva – Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0)22 950 9600 – Fax: +41 (0)22 950 9609

Email: [secretariat@icvanetwork.org](mailto:secretariat@icvanetwork.org)

[www.icvanetwork.org](http://www.icvanetwork.org)

 @ICVANetwork

### Regional Hubs

#### Asia and the Pacific

Bangkok, Thailand

#### MENA

Amman, Jordan

#### Africa

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Nairobi, Kenya