

# First Regular Session of the Executive Board

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1. Madame President, members of the Executive Board, colleagues, and friends. It is my great pleasure to join you today for this first regular session of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board for 2021.
2. Allow me to begin by congratulating Her Excellency Ms. Lachezara Stoeva, the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria, on her election as the President of the Board, and welcoming our new Bureau members for 2021.
3. I would like to express my gratitude to the outgoing Bureau members. In particular, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Walton Webson, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda, for his unwavering leadership and guidance.
4. As we begin this new year, new faces join the UNDP family's leadership team: Ms. Khalida Bouzar as the new Assistant Secretary-General and Director of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States, who will join mid-February; and Ms. Preeti Sinha as the new Executive Secretary of the United Nations Capital Development Fund.
5. And some familiar faces take up new leadership roles: Mr. Toily Kurbanov is the new Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers, and Mr. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye takes up the role of Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel. I know you all join me in extending a warm welcome and congratulations to our colleagues on their important appointments.

### A development emergency

6. Madame President, Excellencies, we begin this new year in the **middle of a development emergency**. As the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition of our Human Development Report "The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene" sets out, the COVID-19 pandemic is the latest crisis facing the world, but unless humans release their grip on nature, it won't be the last.
7. For the first time in 30 years, global human development is set to drop. Governments and development partners everywhere are struggling to stop the spread of COVID-19; respond to the unprecedented socio-economic crisis it has created; and stand up to new and age-old assaults on human rights and gender equality, on social cohesion and the rule of law.
8. Innovative new UNDP research with the University of Denver is sobering. **By 2030, one billion people could be living in extreme poverty**, a quarter of them as a result of the pandemic, unless we act now. Right now, half of the world is struggling to make ends meet without social protection like unemployment benefits or healthcare – a consequence of 'care-free' and inequitable economies.
9. And the **climate crisis is getting worse**, with 2020 effectively tying as the hottest year on record, making the last seven years the warmest since the beginning of modern record-keeping. Despite a temporary dip in carbon emissions in 2020 as the world hit 'pause', there is a real danger of building back worse, with the vast majority of initial stimulus funds invested in fossil fuel- and capital-intensive projects.

10. Even this week, we are reminded that both the number of new COVID-19 cases and deaths have not peaked around the world; our timelines are suspended between the promise of new vaccines and the certainty of more human suffering.

## The perfect storm

11. Excellencies, Madame President, with the impacts of **COVID-19, inequality, and the climate crisis**, we begin 2021 in the **eye of a perfect storm**. As **vaccine roll-out begins and debt crises loom**, we must be united in the conviction that developing countries simply **cannot afford a lost decade** – no-one can.
12. In theory, pandemics are levellers – anyone can catch a virus. In practice, poverty, inequality, and marginalization have resulted in **highly differentiated impacts**. According to a **UNCDF** pulse survey, 88 per cent of small and medium-sized businesses in **Least Developed Countries** (LDCs) have substantially reduced their operations. In Ethiopia, for example, women represent 80 per cent of the workforce in two of the hardest hit sectors -- tourism and hospitality -- and they bear the brunt of job losses. And COVID-19 has led to the **“shadow pandemic” of rising gender-based violence**, which spiked by 30 per cent in some countries.
13. With international travel severely restricted and global supply chains disrupted, countries slipped from **middle-income to ‘no-income’ economies** overnight. A number of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) expect the most severe GDP contractions in their islands’ histories – **the economy of Fiji** is expected to **shrink by one fifth**, for example – reinforcing the necessity of **going beyond income in measuring vulnerability**.
14. As eyes turned to the pandemic, some **protracted conflicts** grew worse and new conflicts emerged. Three million more Yemeni people will face starvation in the first half of 2021 than last year -- with over half the population projected to be on the edge of famine. Such countries have very little capacity to absorb more shock. Globally, more people were displaced in 2020 from conflict and crisis than at any time in recorded history.
15. This differentiated impact speaks to the importance of being able to **work across diverse development contexts in an integrated way** where no-one is left behind -- as UNDP’s Strategic Plan sets out and as Member States have called for -- because **the only way through this storm is together**. That is one of the most important lessons of 2020, and that is why I am grateful to speak with you today.
16. My remarks will focus on three things: **first**, I will preview the **development results that UNDP achieved and contributed to** in 2020, when **#NextGenUNDP** investments were tested and demonstrated their worth. **Second**, I will preview the **institutional and financial results** achieved and milestones reached in 2020. A full annual report for 2020 will be forthcoming in the months ahead. **Third**, I will set out some **key priorities for 2021**, as we close out this Strategic Plan period and ramp up preparations for the next, guided by the common agenda of the UN Secretary-General and the Sustainable Development Goals.

## I. Preview of 2020 development results

### UNDP at the heart of the UN’s COVID-19 response

17. The COVID-19 pandemic **tested the UN system's ability** to deliver better, quicker, and more effective support to programme countries. Appointed by the UN Secretary-General as the UN System's technical lead on the COVID-19 socio-economic response, UNDP co-led the drafting process of the common UN framework for an immediate socio-economic response, leveraging our **SDG integrator role**, which was rolled out to support UN Country Teams. The implementation of the Framework is overseen by an Inter-Agency Task Team co-chaired by UNDP and Development Coordination Office (DCO), with the participation of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.
18. Under the convening role of the UN Resident Coordinators, in addition to supporting the UN's COVID-19 health response led by the World Health Organization (WHO), **UNDP effectively steered the implementation of the Framework at country level**, in close collaboration with other UN entities, working with governments, International Finance Institutions (IFIs), bilateral donors, the private sector, and civil society.
19. To date, **128 socio-economic impact assessments** have been completed across 93 countries and five regions. These have guided governments in navigating public policy amidst unprecedented complexity. Since July 2020, the UN has **tripled the number of Socio-Economic Response Plans (SERPs)** – currently at 119 – as a result of dedicated efforts of UN Country Teams, steered by Resident Coordinators, with the technical lead and support of UNDP.
20. The **SERPs enabled an emergency development response to COVID-19** to supplement existing UNDAFs or Cooperation Frameworks. Over one-third of the response plans included measures focusing on **social cohesion**, informed by UNDP's 2020 think piece on the same. **Nearly half** were developed with engagement and insight from the **World Bank**, and a **third** from the **IMF**, a clear example of our intensified partnerships with **International Financial Institutions (IFIs)** in 2020.
21. To support evidence-based insights, we also launched the **Data Futures Platform. Drawing on data sources from across the UN system and partners**, the platform builds on UNDP's long-standing commitment to leverage technology and innovation in responding to development challenges. At its core is UNDP's commitment to accurate, multi-dimensional and inclusive data, with transparent sources and methodologies.
22. With **UN Women**, UNDP created a **Gender Response Tracker**, which monitors the policies that governments are using to tackle the crisis—directly addressing women's economic and social needs, as well as their physical security. The **Inclusive Digital Economy Scorecard** developed by UNCDF with support from UNDP and others is designed to help governments set and track an inclusive digital transformation.
23. Excellencies, our work together to help countries tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts **is an example of UN Reform in action**. We are learning and improving together as we go. I would like to draw your attention to the **background paper** that has been shared with you -- it details our progress with respect to UN Development System reform.
24. UNDP welcomes the 2020 **Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR)** and will prioritize its full implementation in line with the ambition expressed by Member States. Through its strong focus on thematic and cross-cutting issues affecting the 2030 Agenda – such as gender, youth, digital, and climate, as well as the need for integrated policy solutions – the new QCPR helps shift our collective focus from process to delivering tangible results and generating impact, which is what the world needs from the United Nations more than ever right now.

25. Furthermore, the QCPR requires us to reflect **UNDP's unique contribution and added value to implementation of the 2030 Agenda in our new Strategic Plan 2022-2025**. The current conceptualization phase of the plan provides an opportunity to fully reflect its relevance for our work and build it into the design of the plan.
26. **UNDP's development financing** expertise helped UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to 'cost out' response plans – with the total cost estimated at **\$27.8 billion**. To date, \$2 billion has been mobilized by the UN, and \$3 billion repurposed by the UN agencies in consultation with host governments and development partners. During 2020, **UNDP re-programmed and mobilized over \$982 million** in support of the COVID-19 response.
27. These are exceptional numbers, mobilized in a short amount of time, **but the amount is not nearly enough to help countries build forward better from COVID-19** and deliver on the SDGs. UNDP is committed to supporting a **fundamental step up in financing**, including through the **Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs)** - a collaborative initiative by UNDP, UNDESA, the European Union (EU) now in place for 62 countries. Preliminary reporting suggests that over 40 are linked with COVID-19 recovery.
28. We are calling on all Member States to urgently step up their investment to tackle this **development emergency**. That includes delivering on the **Funding Compact**, particularly to increase core and multi-year funding, which give UNDP the **agility to respond quickly** to emerging needs. This pandemic has proven that no-one is safe until everyone is safe. I reiterate, Excellencies, Madam President, **that the only way through this is together**. Indeed, when the pandemic hit, access to finance on the ground was an immediate priority. UNDP developed a two-step response, to address first urgent and then medium-to long term needs.

## Prepare, Respond, Recover

29. **First, as part of our urgent Prepare, Respond and Recover COVID-19 offer, a Rapid Response Facility (RRF)** was established to quickly deploy critical finances to 130 countries in the space of just four weeks. This amounted to \$30 million -- half to fragile contexts -- and **it catalyzed ten times that amount:** an additional \$304 million.
30. Alongside our focus on the pandemic's **socio-economic impacts, crisis management and strengthening health systems** were priorities. We leveraged our existing health portfolio **and Global Fund partnership**, which disbursed \$3.5 billion across 150 countries to fight HIV, TB and malaria and strengthen systems for health in 2019 and has saved 38 million lives since 2002 to take agile actions in the health response to COVID-19 under the leadership of WHO.
31. In Angola, for example, UNDP played a critical role in three main areas – epidemiological surveillance, logistics, community engagement. In Guinea Bissau, we immediately expanded the partnership between the government, the World Bank and UNDP to procure critical COVID-19 supplies, including PPE and disease surveillance tools.
32. In India, UNDP, together with WHO, UNICEF and others is supporting the Government's rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. UNDP helped to develop the **eVIN vaccine supply chain and temperature monitoring system** for 28,500 vaccine storage centres across all states and trained 50,000 health care staff in its use.

33. In Pakistan, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, UNDP led the development of a **telemedicine platform to facilitate doctor-to-doctor communication**. 4,500 medical professionals and junior doctors in 60 underequipped or understaffed intensive care units are now linked with critical care specialists and receiving on-the-spot guidance on patient care.
34. Thanks to support from Japan, UNDP launched **Libya's largest-ever telemedicine initiative**. During the pilot phase, three hundred doctors are now connected with 7,000 patients offering virtual consultations and e-prescriptions – critical services during COVID-19.

## Beyond Recovery, Towards 2030

35. **Second**, leveraging **SDG integration**, UNDP focused on linking immediate response efforts to **medium- and longer-term** sustainable development needs. Our *COVID-19 2.0 offer: Beyond Recovery, Towards 2030* focused helping decision-makers to set priorities, make choices, and manage complexity in four integrated areas -- **governance, social protection, the green economy, and digital disruption**, with a focus on gender equality and human rights throughout, while crisis management and health system support continued where needed.
36. To accompany UNDP's four-part offer, we launched a **Rapid Financing Facility (RFF)** mid-2020 by reprogramming and mobilizing an initial \$100 million. Within just 16 weeks, 129 proposals from across the world worth \$105 million had been conceptualized, assessed, and approved across the four areas of the offer.
37. In many countries, RFF funds are being used to **grow programmes with the potential to go to scale**. UNDP's support to the **Supreme Court in Bangladesh** to establish virtual courts to process bail applications is one such example. It included training over 1,000 Judges, lawyers, courts officials, contributing to a 12 per cent reduction in the prison population in the space of three months.
38. In **Togo**, the RFF project will expand the existing social protection system run by the National Institute of Health Insurance, particularly to cover the informal sector and the extremely poor. The project will implement a social insurance scheme using mobile technology and other digital technologies.
39. Here, let me once again express my deep appreciation to the many Member States that provided UNDP with **flexible and predictable core resources**. Core resources were critical to UNDP's COVID-19 response in 2020. Of the over \$982 million re-programmed and mobilized in support of UNDP's COVID-19 response in 2020, **\$103 million was in the form of core resources**.
40. Noting that our teams are still reporting on results, and that **a full analysis will follow**, let me briefly illustrate what those resources -- along with UNDP's broader portfolio as set out through our Strategic Plan -- contributed to in 2020 in the four areas of our COVID-19 '2.0 offer'.

## Governance

41. On **governance**, on which UNDP invests the **major share of programme resources**, UNDP responded rapidly to the need for **national and local e-governance systems** to ensure the continuity of essential public services in Ethiopia, Sudan, and other countries around the world. Always in tandem with the UN

Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), we helped national partners to **organize elections** during the pandemic -- from Bolivia to Vanuatu -- enabling people to exercise their right to vote in the most challenging of circumstances.

42. We worked with national human rights institutions, including in partnership with OHCHR, to support their business continuity during COVID-19 to **monitor and address human rights violations**, including in Nepal, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe, and with countries like Albania, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey to meet the growing demand for free **legal aid**; with **indigenous communities** in Peru to broadcast COVID-19 safety messages in their own languages, and with Iraq, launching a “Let’s Beat Corona” campaign in ten cities.
43. UNDP’s Oslo Governance Centre, funded by Norway, is strengthening eight countries response to ‘**information pollution**’ in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, while UNDP, WHO, UNAIDS and the O’Neill Institute for Health Law at Georgetown University launched the **COVID-19 Law Lab** to help countries implement evidence- and rights-based legal frameworks for COVID-19 responses, building on lessons of HIV. Together with DPPA, UNDP deployed close to 60 **Peace and Development Advisors** to support UNCTs’ engagement in cross-pillar analysis and programming for prevention and peacebuilding.

## Green economy

44. Fiscal and financial responses to COVID-19 are an **opportunity to accelerate a green recovery with green jobs**; to take decisions that will tackle the climate crisis, reverse biodiversity loss, reduce pollution and improve production and consumption patterns – restoring balance between people and planet as we build forward better.
45. Towards this end, UNDP continued to grow our **Climate Promise** in 2020 throughout the pandemic. We are now supporting **115 countries to enhance their pledges under the Paris Agreement**. Delivered in collaboration with over 35 partners, this is the world’s *largest* offer of support for the enhancement of climate action to advance an inclusive, green recovery. It leverages UNDP’s \$1.9 billion climate portfolio across 150 countries.
46. This scaled investment is fundamental to keep countries focused on a green recovery as the UN Secretary-General has called for. Otherwise, the socio-economic impacts being felt today will pale in comparison with what may come because of the climate crisis.
47. UNDP’s engagement work to advance a **green economy** responds to requests of our partners and is grounded in our long-standing expertise and global network. In addition to the Climate Promise, we helped countries across the world to **create jobs and sustainable livelihoods** for those hit by pandemic shutdowns.
48. This included ‘**cash for conservation**’ initiatives in Cambodia covering over 1,600 rural households; a partnership with Belarus and the EU to help newly unemployed people find **new careers in eco-farming**; **urban greening** initiatives in Paraguay and in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and integrated efforts to help Uganda’s 1.4 million refugees and their host communities to **create sustainable livelihoods** through the management of environmental resources.

## Social protection



49. On **social protection**, UNDP's **Temporary Basic Income** research published in July 2020 estimated what it would cost to establish a minimum guaranteed income above the poverty line, for vulnerable people in 132 developing countries – a step that could slow the current surge in COVID-19 cases by enabling nearly three billion people to stay at home. It is an example of the **ambitious policy options** that UNDP is putting on the table to help countries both respond to and build forward better from COVID-19 -- a measure we continue to advocate for where appropriate.
50. This was the first in a **flagship new UNDP policy paper series** called the **Development Futures Series**. More such insights and ideas will follow in 2021, capitalizing on the wealth of ideas and thought leadership that UNDP colleagues and our partners bring from the country perspective and reality every day to stimulate much-needed conversation on the future of development.
51. On the ground, we worked with **88 countries** from Honduras to Nigeria to **top-up or expand existing social assistance or cash transfer programmes** to reach vulnerable populations quickly, with a clear focus on informal workers, self-employed workers, domestic and unpaid care work, people with disabilities as well as migrant and internally displaced populations. We went beyond income to understand who to target and made digital the default to scale quickly.
52. In Kenya, UNDP's Accelerator Lab supported the use of **mobile money** as an alternative to cash payments and is working with the International Labour Organization and the National Hospital Insurance Fund to explore ways to **expand medical coverage** to informal sector workers. In Paraguay, the UNDP Accelerator Lab works to monitor the informal sector, improve the design of public policies, and **accelerate the formalization of employment**.
53. Their work is one of many examples of how **#NextGenUNDP's Accelerator Lab Network** came to the fore in UNDP's pandemic response generating a range of innovative, frugal and scalable solutions, helping to change the way we do development by **learning fast** and tapping into **new data sources** such as geospatial, social media and citizen data. That included everything from helping to roll-out robots in COVID-19 treatment centres in Rwanda to supporting a "3D Community" in Tanzania to design, produce and distribute personal protective equipment to health workers.
54. The work of these labs is critical. Key actors, including development banks, investors and the private sector can sow the seeds of green growth by making **long-term investments in local innovation**. Thanks to support from key partners like Germany and Qatar, I am pleased to share that we added **32 new labs** to the Accelerator Lab Network in 2020. It now covers **116 countries**, including 79 per cent of Least Developed and Low-Income Countries and 66 per cent of Small Island Developing States.

## Digital disruption

55. From the work of our Labs teams with Nepal to help **local government to report quarantine data** to our work with Palestine, connecting **small-scale women farmers to customers through web platforms** -- the focus of UNDP's Accelerator Lab Network epitomized just how central digital interventions were to UNDP results in 2020, and are to the future of development.
56. Indeed, our digital support to governments across the world in 2020 helped them to keep their lights on – so that they could continue to offer support to citizens as COVID-19 spread rapidly. Today, **digital by default** is becoming part of the UNDP family's DNA, driven by government demand.

57. By the end of 2020 -- **over half a million Zoom and Teams calls later** -- UNDP had obtained 9,200 zoom licenses for partners at 40 per cent of what it would have otherwise cost and supported approximately 290 entities – including the offices of Heads of State, Parliaments, and Ministries – in their digital transitions.
58. **As a result, and with our support**, the National Congress of Honduras held its first-ever virtual session; Madagascar’s COVID-19 Operational Command Centre connected with its regional hubs; Kazakhstan trained over 1,000 civil servants on effective teleworking, including nearly 400 civil servants with disabilities; and Bangladesh provided critical telemedicine services to over 350,000 people.
59. In Uganda, **UNCDF** supported the main ride-hailing company to switch to an **e-commerce model**, ensuring the delivery of essential goods during the lockdown to 50,000 customers per day and helping 18,000 drivers and 800 vendors to stay in business. And we joined forces with Jumia Foods, the **country’s largest e-commerce company**, to create an online platform specifically designed to connect some of the most vulnerable members of the workforce with potential customers. We harnessed the power of digital to reduce corruption, as in Ukraine where we supported a [new e-platform](#) which increased transparency in procurement.
60. While reporting is still coming in from UNDP Country Offices, at least **70 countries sought and received UNDP’s digital support in 2020**. Increasingly, these requests are for **wide-ranging, strategic support for digital transformation**. With UNDP support, for example, Dominica is preparing to **build a national Digital Strategy**. Digital disruption has become a permanent feature of development. Establishing the policies, norms and standards that guide and accompany an **inclusive digital transformation** will be a central development challenge in the immediate years ahead.

## Gender

61. Excellencies, Madam President, the long struggle against one, pervasive inequality is at the heart of UNDP’s pandemic response, as it must be at the heart of all development action. That is **gender inequality**, which risks leaving half of the world behind, more so today than ever before. The UN Secretary-General said that the global pandemic has already reversed *decades* of limited and fragile progress on gender equality and women’s rights.
62. Addressing gender inequality takes commitment and tenacity. That is why I was delighted to be joined by Madame President, Ambassador Stoeva, on 19 January to celebrate the extraordinary work of country teams and partners over the past years at UNDP’s Gender Equality Seal Awards.
63. The **Gender Equality Seal** is where the high bar that we set on gender equality – in our development results, through our partnerships, and for our institution -- finds expression in practical terms. For the 2018-2020 round of the Gender Equality Seal, **seven Country Offices were awarded with the Bronze Seal, 17 with the Silver Seal, and seven with the Gold Seal**. Over 60 per cent of UNDP Country Offices have now completed the Gender Seal since the programme’s launch, representing a significant advance for our organization.
64. Excellencies, colleagues, so often, the world does not see the many faces of the people of UNDP in all the countries we serve: colleagues in Yemen who put **women at the centre of efforts to create jobs** even in



the worst humanitarian situation in the world; in Paraguay who, alongside trade unions, women's rights groups, ILO and UN Women, helped to establish **minimum wage laws for domestic workers**; in Kyrgyzstan, who were instrumental in changing the law to **ban marriage for those under 18 years of age**;

65. Colleagues in Chile, Guinea, and the Central African Republic, for their role in establishing minimum thresholds and parity laws for **women in elections and political processes**; or colleagues who promote **women's roles in non-traditional sectors**, like in water management in Costa Rica and as forest rangers **fighting climate change** in Indonesia.
66. Looking ahead, we will launch a Gender Seal Accelerated Gold Track in the RBEC region and a special Gender Seal track for countries in crisis settings, which will inspire new ideas across all regions to take us to the next level, and. And we won't stop at UNDP: we are already transforming the Seal into a **tool for the public and private sector**.
67. Organizations including **WFP, IUCN and OHCHR** are partnering with us to develop their own gender incentive programmes. We are working with over **600 diverse companies** around the world on our Gender Equality Seal for the private sector and multinational companies, and in 2021, we will officially launch the **Gender Equality Seal for Public institutions**.
68. In the meantime, I hope you will join me in taking a moment to recognize these Country Offices and our partners who fight for a gender-equal world and are determined to bring a feminist lens to our common efforts to build forward better from COVID-19.

## II. Preview of institutional and financial results

### People for 2030 and a digital shift

69. Excellencies, as you know, for the past two years we have been working hard to improve UNDP's ability to attract, retain and develop top talent to help countries build forward better from COVID-19 and deliver on the SDGs.
70. The implementation of **UNDP's People for 2030 strategy** continues at pace, with **84 per cent** of the strategy's policy recommendations now implemented -- including the introduction of an improved performance management system, a new mobility policy, and a new Career Management Framework -- and the balance set to be implemented by June 2021 and on time. At the heart of this strategy lies our commitment to a working environment that is **safe and inclusive** and where there are opportunities to grow and develop. This includes **tackling all forms of discrimination and harassment**, including all forms of sexual misconduct.
71. But perhaps the biggest change in the way we worked in 2020 was **the pace at which UNDP went digital**, a transformation made possible by the **UNDP Digital Strategy** and enabled by the recently adopted **IT Strategy**. They enabled UNDP to keep its doors open, so that we could help others to do the same.
72. Zoom and Teams were made available. The electronic signature solution *DocuSign* was rolled out, increasing organizational efficiency, and saving the equivalent of **five million sheets of paper**, reducing our **CO2 emissions by 154 metric tonnes**. Over **600 colleagues** enrolled in UNDP's Digital Transformation

Learning Programmes while **6,000 colleagues** availed of online capacity building on how to work successfully in a virtual environment.

73. Of the 9,458 UN Volunteers who served with 60 UN partners in 158 countries and territories, **2,300** Volunteers -- 90 per cent of them from the Global South -- carried out their assignments remotely. These volunteers served across the frontlines of the pandemic -- from medical professionals who offered their vital skills to healthcare centres in countries such as Kenya and South Sudan -- to advancing opportunities for persons with disabilities in Kazakhstan.

## Sound finances, strong programme delivery

74. Three-and-a-half years ago when I became the Administrator of UNDP, I made a commitment to you, to the UN Secretary-General and to the Deputy Secretary-General, and to my UNDP colleagues and partners that together we would take an organization that was built for a different generation and make it effective for this one, and ready for the next.
75. That has required pushing the boundaries in how we think, deliver, invest, and manage as UNDP. The result is *#NextGenUNDP*. In 2020, *#NextGenUNDP* faced the ultimate stress test, and the institution and our teams proved ready. While the 2020 financial books have not yet closed, let me start by considering a few key **financial and institutional results and milestones**.
76. I made it a priority when I joined UNDP not to have a budget deficit. In 2020, UNDP achieved a **balanced budget for the fourth year in a row** -- solid financial foundations from which to deliver more development results.
77. And that is what we have done. Remarkably, despite the constraints of the pandemic, UNDP's 2020 programme **delivery is expected to come in at \$4.5 billion**, which would be UNDP's **second-highest delivery rate in six years**. Nearly 60 per cent of UNDP's budget - \$3.2 billion in 2020 -- and nine of our top ten programme countries are fragile contexts. In the Africa region, UNDP's programme delivery was the highest ever in 2020 at \$1.2 billion, with books yet to close.
78. UNDP's intensive efforts to strengthen institutional performance, enhance efficiencies in delivery and reduce in institutional costs represent an estimated **\$350 million in additional resources for development** in 2018-2020.
79. These figures were made possible **notwithstanding global lockdowns** and because of strong leadership, rapid adaptive management, innovation, and strong support to and **trusted relationships with national partners**. Taken together, they are a direct expression of Member States' interest, trust, and confidence in UNDP.
80. That our efforts to be more efficient are showing results is reinforced by our management efficiency ratio: as we enter the last calendar year of this Strategic Plan, regardless of the management costs of UN Development System reform and the upheaval wrought by the pandemic, UNDP is **on track to meet our four-year management efficiency target of 7.3 per cent** -- meaning that over the life of this Plan, programme delivery has risen and related institutional expenditures have been reduced.

81. UNDP's strategy to introduce **clustering** for 'state of the art' **finance, human resources, and procurement** business processes is designed to further enhance efficiencies, and implementation is well underway. Already in 2020, UNDP's Global Shared Service Centres in Copenhagen and Kuala Lumpur **improved, standardized, and modernized** the management of nearly **500 Country Office bank accounts** and nearly **64,000 vendors** across five regions, processing over **26,000 transactions** in a way that improves efficiencies, quality as well as oversight, thereby mitigating risk.
82. In 2020, we achieved our **highest volume of core contributions since 2016 with a 13 per cent increase** over 2019, while **non-core resources increased by 20 per cent**. This is tremendous news for programme countries and reflects the growing confidence of our funding partners in UNDP's ability to deliver results.
83. At \$1.5 billion, capitalization of the **UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund** portfolios, which are administered by UNDP, reached the highest level since the MPTF Office was established in 2003, representing a **20 per cent increase over 2019**.
84. UNDP increased its engagement **in; and income from UN inter-agency pooled funds by a remarkable 80 per cent from 2019** - an illustration of how UNDP is realizing its commitment to work closer than ever with UN partners as part of a reformed UN development system.
85. UN collaboration was made easier thanks to the Executive Board's approval of a **harmonized cost-recovery policy in 2020**, as a result of which it will now be easier for Member States to compare the costs of working with different UN funds and programmes, in particular between UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA.
86. Allow me to take this opportunity to **sincerely thank all our funding partners**, especially, those who increased these much-needed core contributions in 2020 – namely Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Israel, Japan, and the United States – in addition to those who have consistently been among our **top providers of flexible funding** – including Canada, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.
87. In 2020, core contributions from **multi-year commitments** covered 50 per cent of the total core contribution received. I also thank the 11 Member States with multi-year core agreements in place. Some Member States have also been stepping up their support to UNDP's **Thematic Funding Windows**, with year-on-year increases since their inception in 2016.
88. At the same time, the pace of global economic recovery points to a **tough year ahead for funding** that we will have to navigate together. I know that the impact of COVID-19 on economies will be a major factor in your decision to finance development through UNDP in 2021 and beyond and I encourage *all* Member States to **avoid taking short-term decisions** that would redirect ODA away from sustaining hard-earned development gains.

## Accountable, transparent, and learning

89. In 2020, we continued to invest in **transparency and accountability**. UNDP received an unqualified (clean) audit opinion from the United Nations Board of Auditors (UNBOA) for the year ending 2019 -- its **15<sup>th</sup> consecutive unqualified (clean) audit opinion**.

90. The 2020 Aid Transparency Index, produced by the campaign for aid transparency Publish What You Fund (PWYF), again rated **UNDP as the most transparent of UN agencies**. In June, UNDP started publishing our COVID-19 response work on the UNDP Transparency Portal, making us one of the first organizations to do so.
91. In December 2020, we had an opportunity to discuss the **Office of Audit and Investigation (OAI)** audit of UNDP's management of GEF resources and the independent review of the GEF – funded "Russia Standard and Labels" project. We have taken the findings very seriously. **UNDP will not tolerate any conduct that undermines our credibility, trust, and ability to perform our mission** in support of programme countries and the wider 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
92. Moreover, I have undertaken a set of comprehensive actions designed to have a significant and immediate impact on the issues identified by these reports – as detailed in my separate letter to you. UNDP will continue to update the Executive Board periodically and systematically on this matter.
93. UNDP welcomes the recommendations of the three key **Independent Evaluation Office (IEO)** evaluations carried out in 2020, management responses for which are before the Board for this session:
- a. The evaluation on UNDP's **support to conflict-affected countries** will contribute to the development of new programmatic offers on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, as well as a corporate crisis and fragility framework in 2021.
  - b. The evaluation of UNDP's support to **the Syrian refugee crisis response ('3RP')** -- which IEO cites as a model that showcases how humanitarian and development actors can collaborate to address protracted crises -- will strengthen the organization's work across all refugee response situations.
  - c. We welcome the positive findings of the **evaluation on climate change adaptation** of UNDP's extensive and valued contribution to supporting vulnerable countries in building resilience, and we acknowledge the recommendation to accelerate attention to mainstreaming consideration of climate risks across our entire development portfolio.
94. In this respect, for example, I am pleased to note that, effective 1 January 2021, climate assessment and climate-risk screening are now essential parts of UNDP's updated **Social and Environmental Standards (SES) and Screening Procedure (SESP)**.
95. For each evaluation, UNDP will build on the areas identified as strong and respond to the areas in need of strengthening. UNDP continues to analyse the key findings arising from evaluations more broadly, including those of the independent country programme evaluations, to identify learnings and ways to improve.
96. Areas to strengthen, for example, include further upgrading **results-based management** across programme portfolios to advance transformational change; developing a **funding model** that supports a shift from short-term projects to longer-term portfolios to enhance the sustainability and scalability of results; and moving beyond women's participation to focus more on tackling **the root causes of inequality and discrimination**. UNDP will ensure that such findings, along with those of the IEO's broader body of work, inform the development of UNDP's **next** Strategic Plan (2022-2025).

97. In this respect, I would like to draw attention to a **new Reflections series** from IEO Director Oscar Garcia and his IEO team. It harvests insights from years of evaluation and observation of UNDP's work in crisis settings and I know it will be invaluable in guiding the design and implementation of programmes with a continuous research and development mindset.
98. Tabled for your consideration during this Board are twelve new **country programme documents (CPDs)**, for Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Georgia, Mexico, North Macedonia, Panama, Tunisia, Somalia, Uruguay, and Uzbekistan.
99. In addition, seven extensions are presented for the Board's approval: Afghanistan, Guatemala, Madagascar, Tajikistan, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen and four extensions of country programmes will be presented to the Board for information only: Argentina, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Maldives.
100. Let me reaffirm, Excellencies, that I alongside my counterparts at UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN Women are committed to promoting the primacy, alignment and sequencing of the UNSDCF and CPD processes and to uphold high-quality standards in our CPDs, as set out in our briefing for Board Members on 18 January and a related joint information note shared with the Boards (dated 8 January).

### At this tipping point, an integrated SDG push could make all the difference

101. Excellencies, COVID-19 is a **tipping point**. The decisions taken today could take the world in very different directions, and the SDG regression we see already is profound, but not random. It follows a pattern: **restricting rights and freedoms**, affecting **young workers** and **women** in the labour force, excluding **informal workers** from social protection, reinforcing polarity and exclusion undermining an inclusive social contract, and reinforcing pre-existing **structural discrimination**. Such patterns can guide a country's response.
102. Eye-opening research from UNDP's SDG Integration team creates future scenarios for the impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs. It illustrates that an ambitious but feasible set of SDG investments across **governance, social protection, the green recovery, and digitalization** – the four integrated areas of UNDP's COVID-19 response offer – could lift an **additional 146 million people** out of extreme poverty by 2030, the majority in fragile and conflict-affected states.
103. This research **reinforces the importance of taking SDG action** and the implications of not doing so. **It suggests that while this new development landscape is complex, it can be navigated** with an ambitious architecture of interconnected policy interventions and political choices.
104. In September, Excellencies, you will be asked to consider the adoption of **a new UNDP Strategic Plan** for 2022-2025. At a time when COVID-19 has exacerbated almost every development challenge you care to name, I see the Strategic Plan as our opportunity to show how UNDP, as an integral part of the UN system and under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General, will adapt to **an uncertain, fast-changing future** and support countries in getting back on track towards the SDGs.
105. How will we continue to **fight poverty, build resilience, and tackle climate change**? How we will focus on the most vulnerable people, those hardest hit by COVID-19 on top of conflict, compound crises, and multiple inequalities? And how we will help countries take advantage of opportunities – in innovation, digitalization, women's empowerment?

106. Our plan will look **not just at what we do, but how we do it**. How we support our partners in addressing complex 21<sup>st</sup> Century problems and the demands of digitally connected citizens. How we capitalize on the investments we are already making in **innovation, acceleration, and knowledge management**. How we deliver development in a conflict-sensitive manner, informed by deeper understanding of multi-dimensional risks. How our business processes and operations can become nimbler and more efficient. And overall, how we become a more agile organization that is ready to respond to any number of possible futures in the huge variety of the countries we serve.
107. We will take **deepened UN partnerships** into the new Plan period as a result of our investments in this one: including, for example, with UNICEF on innovation, youth, and entrepreneurship; with ILO on the present and future of work; with IOM and UNHCR on livelihoods and digital solutions for people on the move; with UNEP and FAO on finding a balance between people and planet; and ITU and the Broadband Commission to advance inclusive digital nations.
108. And we will bring greater focus to **external partnerships** because we are but one part, though a unique part, of an ecosystem of public and private, global and grassroots actors who will build the future of development. The **COVID-19 Private Sector Global Facility**, for example, is an initiative of UNDP, the UN Global Compact and the International Chamber of Commerce's (ICC) to collaborate with major private sector actors such as Microsoft to co-create solutions for **micro, medium and small enterprises**, which represent about 50 per cent of employment worldwide will be vital to power the global recovery.
109. Right now, as we continue to build out that new Plan with your engagement, UNDP has a clear job to do, and **several immediate priorities for 2021**.

### III. Priority areas for 2021

#### Delivering on UNDP's current Strategic Plan

110. UNDP's Strategic Plan was designed to be **agile, responsive** and **transformational** and it remains deeply relevant right now. The COVID-19 pandemic has cast *more* light on the urgency of an equitable, green transformation, where countries have the **capacities and resilience** they need to **manage crises and an uncertain future**. UNDP's role in this changed context is to help accelerate that transformation. Our primary responsibility and priority for 2021, therefore, is to **deliver on the final calendar year of our Strategic Plan**, with its six signature solutions, covering three, integrated development contexts across the world. As the **mid-term review** of the Plan set out last year, progress is on track. UNDP is carefully analyzing further progress made and challenges faced in 2020.
111. Consolidating the gains of UN development system reforms and advancing on the implementation of its remaining strands will continue as priorities for in 2021 and beyond. UNDP will advance work, including through the UNSDG, to prioritize the mandates of the **QCPR**, including through the development of the new **UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-25**, to ensure the ambitions of Member States are realized.

#### Governance and fragility



112. UNDP spends more than **50 per cent of our total budget in fragile and crisis contexts**, and **nine out of our 10 largest country programmes** are in these places, where we promote collaborative approaches between humanitarian, development, and peace actors.
113. Our role in this space is critical because fragile contexts are home to over 75 per cent of the world's extremely poor people; only 18 per cent of fragile and conflict-affected states were on track to meet SDG targets on *'unmet basic needs'* before COVID-19, with indicators now sliding backwards. And as the pandemic demonstrated, 'normal' development settings can **no longer be assumed to be certain or predictable**.
114. In 2021, UNDP will draw on what we learn from evaluation, experience, and partnerships to craft a **new approach to development for peace**: on increasingly risk-informed policy and programming, investing early to prevent conflict, crisis, and violent extremism, on sustaining peace and addressing fragility. And drawing on ongoing dialogues and consultations, we will **develop a forward-looking, renewed offer on governance**, supporting the transformation of governance systems across all development settings.
115. We will build on our stabilization experience in countries like Iraq, where the Funding Facility for Stabilization has helped over **8.5 million Iraqis**, half of them women, since 2015; in Yemen, where our partnership with the World Bank created over **10.7 million workdays of emergency employment**, and helped to stabilize the local economy; and in Sudan.
116. When I visited Khartoum this time last year, just before lock-down, I was privileged to meet with the young women and men who came out onto the streets with everything to lose, whose actions may have changed the course of their country. Today, we are supporting their efforts to **transition to civilian democratic rule**.
117. We will draw on our partnerships, such as with the **UN Peacebuilding Support Office** on strengthening core government functions in fragile settings; our work with UN Women, UNFPA, and OHCHR on the **UN-EU Spotlight Initiative**, a global, multi-year initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.
118. We will leverage our work with partners like DPPA and UNEP on climate-related security risks through the **Climate Security Mechanism**; with the UN's Department of Peace Operations in co-leading the **Global Focal Point for Rule of Law**; and **UNHCR, IOM and ILO** to promote durable solutions for the record number of people who have been forced from their homes, drawing on our experience in countries such as Colombia, Iraq, Libya and Somalia.
119. We will build on our work across borderlands, including as part of the **UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel** to move from **delivering aid to ending need**, with local leadership, ideas, and investment that breaks cycles of violence and dependence. UNDP's partnership with the Tony Elumelu Foundation, for example, will support **100,000 young African entrepreneurs** in the Sahel region. The initiative aims to generate millions of new jobs and contribute at least \$10 billion in new annual revenues across Africa.

## Poverty and inequality

120. Tackling poverty and inequality will remain at the centre of UNDP's work in 2021. At the macro level, the ultimate **stress test of equality within and between countries** will be the ability to deliver the largest

public health intervention of a lifetime – **the COVID-19 vaccines** -- to the world’s population this year. The vaccine must be treated as a **global public good**. There is no place for ‘vaccine nationalism’.

121. UNDP is committed to playing its part guided by **WHO’s leadership** and working in partnership with the UNICEF and the broader UN family, as well as GAVI, the Global Fund, the ACT Accelerator, the SDG3 Global Action Plan and others to advance equity and access.
122. At the same time, looming debt threatens to derail any recovery. Six countries have defaulted already in 2020. The **poorest countries in the world spent over twice as much** of their GDP (as a %) as other countries on external debt service payments in 2020, limiting their options for investing in an emergency development response.
123. Unlike advanced economies, **most developing countries will not be able to spend or borrow their way out of this pandemic**. Most would like to continue **providing income support** to SMEs, households and workers until vaccination campaigns are in place, but many have already **run out of fiscal space** to do so. Last year, UNDP called for a **Temporary Basic Income**, funded in part by freezing debt service payments in the developing world.
124. In 2021, UNDP is joining with our UN partners to call for a **Multidimensional Vulnerability Index** that reflects environmental and socio-economic vulnerabilities – for SIDS and all countries; that would enable policymakers, creditors and investors to better understand and address structural constraints, including through concessional finance access, and help safeguard the 2030 Agenda and the S.A.M.O.A. Pathway progress. More will be forthcoming on this shortly.
125. Through our Finance Sector Hub flagship initiative **SDG Impact**, UNDP developed **practice assurances standards for SDG Bonds** in 2020 -- illustrative of the kinds of innovative tools and instruments that UNDP will work on with our partners in 2021 in response to growing public and private demand.
126. The UN Secretary-General, together with the Prime Ministers of **Canada** and **Jamaica**, have put far-reaching proposals on the table spanning liquidity, debt, and sustainable development finance measures. We must all follow up on these commitments because **this is not an accounting issue and it is not about surpluses or deficits**. It is fundamentally about advancing human well-being across the globe.

## The climate promise and beyond

127. As *The Next Frontier: Human Development in the Anthropocene* set out, **4,000 generations could live and die** before the carbon dioxide released from the industrial revolution to today is scrubbed from our atmosphere, and yet economies continue **to subsidize fossil fuels, prolong our carbon habit like a drug running through the economy’s veins**.
128. And the impact will be deeply unequal. By the year 2100, the richest countries in the world could experience up to **18 fewer days** per year of **extreme temperatures** as a result of climate change, while the poorest countries could experience up to **100 days more**. That number could still be cut in half if the Paris Agreement is fully implemented.

129. **2021 will also be the year of nature** – from the UN Food Systems Summit to the biodiversity and climate Conferences of the Parties. It is a year we must be ready for. **UNDP will keep and expand its promise**, including by placing greater emphasis on **energy**.
130. We will continue to advocate against narrow adherence to GDP as a singular measure of a country's prospect, building on the new and experimental **Planetary-adjusted Human Development Index (PHDI)** of the 2020 Human Development Report, which adds countries' material footprint and carbon emissions to the Human Development Index (HDI).
131. And through partnerships such as that with IRENA, Sustainable Energy for All and the Green Climate Fund on the **Climate Investment Platform**, we will help to declutter the climate finance space and bridge the gap in funding that countries will need to realize an accelerated energy transition in an efficient and impactful way.

### The next frontier for human development starts now

132. Madam President, colleagues, and friends, **2020 was a year like no other**. Throughout, UNDP stood by all our partners, with a rapid local response, ambitious *thought leadership*, integrated SDG policy and programmes, and an increasingly agile and efficient institution that puts a premium on transparency and accountability.
133. We were able to do this because **our teams stayed and served** and as a result, we helped others to do the same. We **mourn our colleagues, partners, friends, and family** who lost their lives in 2020 and begin 2021 with the hope that it will mark the end of this terrible pandemic. Though we hope for swift recoveries around the globe, we will help countries to prepare for and adapt to a **prolonged season of downturns, delays, and partial recoveries**.
134. My hope is that 2021 will also mark the end of complacency on the climate crisis we all face, the **end of assaults on human rights**, on dignity, on facts, and on science. With the peoples' vaccine distributed based on need and not wealth to inoculate against this first-in-a-generation disease; with a **commitment to inoculate against inequality**, misinformation, racism, stigma and discrimination; a renewed **pursuit of peace** and a **determination to inoculate against the abuse of the planet** that we live on and the air that we breathe in.
135. As the UN Secretary-General has said, as the SDGs make clear: **our common agenda is a universal agenda**, Madam President. This is the time for an **SDG push** – for a true **Decade of Action** that delivers the future of development. Finding a way forward from COVID-19 will be the journey of a generation. UNDP is committed to it. And I know that we can count on the leadership, guidance, support of our Executive Board. Thank you.

END

