



The UN Resident Coordinator system – an overview

The UN Resident Coordinator (RC) system encompasses all organizations of the United Nations system dealing with operational activities for development, regardless of their formal presence in the country. The RC system aims to bring together the different UN agencies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of operational activities at the country level. It comprises a series of global, regional and country-level working mechanisms that provide guidance and support the work of UN Resident Coordinators around the world.

At present, there are 129 UN Resident Coordinators posts leading 131 United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) – each composed of 16 UN entities on average, and serving 165 countries and territories.¹ Of the 129 RCs, 110 also act as Designated Officials for Security, 29 as Humanitarian Coordinators and 14 as Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General.

The objective of the RC system is to support the role and functions of the RC and the UNCT through shared global, regional and country level vision, norms and standards, capacities and operating protocols to deliver together more coherent, effective and efficient support to globally, regional and nationally agreed goals and priorities. To do this, the RC system focuses on leveraging the leadership, policy and practices, and diverse expertise across UN development entities, to work together towards this common end, of improving the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the UN's contribution to development results.

1. INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

The current configuration of the Resident Coordinator (RC) function, has its origin in [General Assembly resolution A/RES/32/197 of 1977](#), which endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the UN System, chaired by Kenneth K. S. Dadzie, from Ghana. Established in 1975, the Ad Hoc Committee sought to prepare detailed action proposals with a view to initiating the process of restructuring the United Nations System so as to make it more fully capable of dealing with problems of international economic cooperation and development in a comprehensive and effective manner.

At the country level, the Ad Hoc Committee argued for *“improved coherence of action and effective integration, in accordance with the objectives and priorities of the Government concerned, of the various sectoral inputs from the United Nations system”*.² It also established that UNDP's *“country-programming process should be utilized as a frame of reference for the operational activities carried out and financed by the organizations of the United Nations system from their own resources”*³ (OP33), laying out the basis for the current configuration of the RC/RR function, by which UNDP's resident representative (RR) also holds the position of UN Resident Coordinator.

The Ad Hoc Committee and the subsequent GA resolution on Restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the UN System already foresaw a role for the UN RC that went beyond the simple facilitation of UN entities'

¹ See UNDG 2015 Results Report for details of results at each level of the RCS: <https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/UNDG-results-report-2015-Digital-Final-Revised.pdf>.

² GA resolution A/RES/32/197 'Restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations System' (pp124)

³ Ibid., 124

country-level operational activities for development and involved the RC leading the UN's integrated (or multidisciplinary) programme support to host countries. Thus, operational paragraph 34 in GA resolution A/RES/32/197 of 1977, established:

“On behalf of the United Nations system, over-all responsibility for, and co-ordination of, operational activities for development carried out at the country level should be entrusted to a single official to be designated taking into account the sectors of particular interest to the countries of assignment, in consultation with and with the consent of the Government concerned, who should exercise team leadership and be responsible for evolving, at the country level, a multidisciplinary dimension in sectoral development assistance programmes. These tasks should be carried out in conformity with the priorities established by the competent national authorities and with the assistance, as necessary, of joint interagency advisory groups. Subject to the requirements of individual countries, steps should be taken to unify the country offices of the various United Nations organizations.”(OP34 - A/RES/32/197).

The RC System has since been reaffirmed and strengthened through a series of resolutions, notably the TCPDR and QCPR GA resolutions on the UN's operational activities for development. The most recent set of mandates is provided by [GA resolution 67/226 on the QCPR](#) (Section B, OPs 122-131).

2. THE RC AS DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL - AS FIELD-LEADER OF UN OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The 2012 GA QCPR resolution 67/226 recognized the core elements of the MAS, stating that the “*resident coordinator system is effectively managed under the leadership of the Secretary-General on behalf of the entire United Nations development system, drawing on all the assets of the system in support of national needs, priorities and challenges*”. Consistent with this recognition, the RC is the designated representative of, and reports to the Secretary-General who as Chairperson of the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination/CEB tasks the UNDP Administrator in his/her capacity as Chair of the UN Development Group (UNDG) to be the first line of reporting. This is reflected accordingly in the [RC Job Description](#). Thereby, the RC is accountable to the UN system at the global level, through the Regional UNDG Teams (R-UNDGs) and, through the UNDG Chair, to the CEB. The RC is accredited by letter of the SG, to the Head of State or Government and acts as the primary UN interlocutor with them.

The leadership role of the RC in driving the UNDS operational activities for development at the country level is captured in the current [job description of the UN Resident Coordinator](#). The RC job description describes the RC as the leader of the UNCT, playing a central role at the country level in making possible the coordination of UN operational activities for development. The RC upholds and promotes the UN's responsibilities with regard to preventing and responding to serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law, including the responsibilities of UN entities and staff in this regard. In accordance with the UNDG Management and Accountability System, the RC is also the UNDP RR and as such remains accountable for UNDP business. Finally, the RC ensures that the interests of non-resident agencies are adequately represented, including when s/he is leading the UNCT in developing the UNDAF.

The above job description is operationalized around the following six core functional areas, which define the results expected from RCs in performing their duties in their respective duty stations:

1. Ensuring coordination of UNDS operational activities for development, creating a platform for coordinated delivery, and promoting the development of national capacities.
2. Supporting the Government, at the latter's request, in its coordination of all types of external development assistance (including from the UNDS).

3. Ensuring effective advocacy of human rights and other UN values, norms, standards, principles and activities on behalf of the UNCT with the highest level of Government.
4. As Designated Official, where applicable ensuring effective coordination of country-level security and the safety of all UN staff and dependents, and leading the inter-agency Security Management Team.
5. Encouraging and supporting national efforts in disaster risk reduction.
6. Finally, if international humanitarian assistance is required and a separate HC position is not established, the RC takes on the role of Humanitarian Coordinator, leading and coordinating response efforts of the UNCT and other relevant humanitarian actors.

This set of core functions capture the desired footprint of RCs in the countries in which they serve – and goes well beyond the chairing of meetings, giving speeches or the simple facilitation of country-level activity. Carrying out these functions requires of a degree of knowledge, trusted relations, policy engagement and drive for collective operational impact that can only be achieved through an RC system that is embedded in the UNDS' country-level policy, normative and programme support.

In certain country contexts, RCs are required to take on additional responsibilities. Thus, as defined in the RC job description:

1. In the event of a significant deterioration or evolution of the political situation in the country, the RC liaises with the Department of Political Affairs for support, as well with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, if one is appointed.
2. If a special political mission or peacekeeping operation is established, the RC/HC may be appointed to function as the Deputy of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General under his/her overall authority, with responsibility for the coordination of development and humanitarian assistance.
3. In locations where the UN Department of Public Information has a UN Information Centre but no DPI Director, the RC usually assumes the functions of the Director of the Centre. In some countries the RC/RR is the representative for other UN entities, such as for UNFPA or UN Women.

The above frames a strategic, substantive role, based on bringing together the UN system in a country with the national government and partners, to support national priorities and the national development plan across varied country contexts.

3. THE MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM (MAS)

Following the [2007 GA Resolution on the TCP](#) in which Member States again underscored that *“the resident coordinator is owned by the United Nations development system as a whole, and that its functioning should be participatory, collegial and accountable”*, in 2008, the UNDG put in place the [‘Management and Accountability System of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System including the “functional firewall” for the RC System’](#) (MAS), which defines the overall governance and accountability framework for the UNDG, its member entities and its working mechanisms.

Together with the MAS (2008), the UNDG agreed on a [RC System Management Framework and Implementation Plan](#) (2011). Under the MAS, all Agencies agree that in the long term we need a Resident Coordinator who:

- Has an equal relationship with, and responsibility to, all UNCT member agencies
- Is recognized by and accredited to Government
- Has all the leadership qualities required to be an excellent team leader who can represent the whole UN development system effectively

- Is empowered by clear recognition by each Agency of his / her role in strategically positioning the UN in each country
- Has immediate access to Agencies' technical resources to support the RC function
- Has flexible financing for start-up/preparatory activities of the UNCT.

3.1. The principle of Mutual Accountability in the MAS

The key principle underlying the MAS framework is that of **mutual accountability** between RCs and members of the UN Country Team. Mutual accountability ensures the collective leadership of the UNCT and serves to empower the leadership of the Resident Coordinator within the UNCT as representative of the UN Secretary General at the country level. The mutual accountability component of the MAS is captured in the following four actions, to which all UNDG member entities have committed to as part of the MAS and which are regularly monitored and reported in the Secretary General's annual QCPR report:

1. **Job descriptions:** Revisions of JDs of resident [UNCT] members – and definition of framework for non-resident members of UNCTs – to explicitly recognize the role of the RC in strategically positioning the UN in each country;
2. **Reporting obligations:** Reporting obligations to the RC to reflect the agreement in the M&A system, by informing the RC on resource mobilization and programme implementation performance of any UNDAF/One Programme elements led by the agency;
3. **RC inclusion in agency performance appraisal systems:** RC providing an assessment of [the above] performance (as well as other performance relating to the UNCT) as formal input to their respective agency performance approval process;
4. **UNCT results included in agency performance appraisal systems:** Implementation of agencies agreement to include procedures for assessment of UNCT results in their own agency assessment systems monitored and reported.

Under the MAS, each UNDG member entity has agreed to carry out specific actions to support mutual accountability between RCs and UNCTs: Under the MAS, the RC is accountable for:

- i. Reporting on UNCT results;
- ii. Achieving agreed RC results drawn from UNCT works plans; and
- iii. Implementing the [UNDG Guidance Note on UNCT Conduct and Working Arrangements](#).

UNCT members, on the other hand, are accountable for:

- i. UN country team results where they have agreed to lead the team;
- ii. Implementing the UNCT Conduct and Working Arrangement; and
- iii. Agency results.

3.2. Functional firewall between the RC and the UNDP/RR role

The [Management and Accountability System \(MAS\)](#) further establishes that a functional firewall separates UNDP's functions as manager of the RC system at the global, regional and country level from its UNDP-specific responsibilities, including delivery of the UNDP programme and UNDP-specific operations. The functional firewall is intended to ensure that the RC system belongs and is equally accountable to all UNDG member entities, including UNDP.

In sum, two different strands of management and accountability run through the RCS:

- *A clear line management, going from the UNDP Administrator to the UNDP Regional Director to the RC/RR, balanced by;*
- *A clear accountability line, going from the UNDG Chair to the Regional UNDG Chairs to the UNCT.”*

In 2011, following a review of the implementation of the Management and Accountability System, the [UNDG committed](#) to “*retain the current Resident Coordinator/ Resident Representative system and improve delivery of the existing functional firewall, in particular in areas of accountability, training, information sharing and representation*”. This was then reaffirmed by Member States in the 2012 QCPR resolution which asks “*the United Nations development system to ensure the full implementation, including monitoring, of the management and accountability system of the United Nations development and resident coordinator system, including the function firewall for the resident coordinator system, in areas that do not require intergovernmental approval*”.

3.3 Dispute Resolution Mechanism for UN Country Teams

The [Dispute Resolution Mechanism for UN Country Teams](#) applies to disputes associated with UNCT common processes such as common services, common programming, joint programmes, and related funding, which should be solved first and foremost at country level in an amicable environment⁴. The main principles of the mechanism are that it should have UNCT ownership, disputes, , including those with regards breach of the functional firewall, should be resolved in a timely manner, be based on resolution at country level first before involving the regional or HQ levels, and foster mutual acceptance of the result and engender UNCT trust.

The following two-stage process will be in place: (1) at the country level, every effort will be made to resolve disputes between two or more members of the UNCT in an amicable manner, and documented; and (2) in the exceptional (often more difficult) cases where a dispute cannot be managed or resolved at country level, either party to the dispute can request a review by the Regional UNDG Team or senior manager from headquarters of concerned agencies.

Since its initial formulation in 2008, many of the elements of the MAS have been incorporated into different parts of the UNDG architecture, leading to the de facto institutionalization of commitments made by UNDG entities in the original MAS. Thus, in 2014, the UNDG approved a new set of “functioning and working arrangements’, defining roles, responsibilities, membership criteria and working methods of different mechanisms and entities of the UNDG.

4. THE ROLE OF UNDP AS THE MANAGER AND HOST OF THE RC SYSTEM

The MAS is defined around two core and distinct dimensions: “management” and “accountability”. The accountability dimension of the MAS emphasizes the fact that the RC system *belongs to all*. The MAS articulates this dimension by defining a set of roles and responsibilities for all parts and levels of the UN development system – global, regional, and country level, which serve to underpin and support the RC System. This includes the definition of roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability for UN entities, the UNDG, Regional -UNDGs, UN DOCO, UNCTs and RCs.

The management dimension of the MAS captures the fact that the RC system can only be *managed by one* entity, with clear responsibility and clear accountability based on common understanding of what is required.

⁴ Issues of misconduct will be dealt with under the respective staff rules and regulations of each organization.

UNDP is recognized in the MAS framework as manager of the RC system, with guidance from all, and being accountable to all through the UNDG Advisory Group and the full UNDG.

UNDP provides and finances the backbone of the RC system, described further in Section 7, enabling resident coordinators to perform their duties, as outlined in the description of roles and functions defined above. The role of the host entity includes human resources, budget and financial management support; audit, accounting and review services; transport, ICT and premises management; managing the regular performance management, advisory and continuous learning provided at country, regional and global level.

The Role of UNDG Chair as vested in the UNDG Administrator

Legislation since 1977 affirms UNDP as host of the RC system, and designates the UNDP Administrator in this role of manager of the common system (relevant GA legislation and ACC/CEB policy referred below). The UNDG Chair carries the following roles:

- Chairs the UN Development Group (UNDG), providing strategic leadership, vision, oversight and strategic priority setting to the UNDG and its various working mechanisms, including the UNDG ASG Advisory Group and the various UNDG Working Groups.
- Plays a leading role in RC selection process, which requires understanding of the leadership needs and the matching with country context based on needs over time. Supports the SG in his/her final decisions on RC selection.
- Plays a critical advisory role to the 129 RCs, based on a familiarity and understanding of their situations and of the contributions of the UN's operational activities for development at country level.
- Makes decisions on RC contracts and posts - upward/downward adjustment of levels based on RC post management, similarly approval of RC contract extensions and terminations, and other related human resources management decisions embedded in UNDP human resource management and systems.
- Highest level oversight on RC system financing, that includes the UNDP backbone and the RC system cost sharing oversight, to ensure sustainability and required financing.
- As UNDP is host of the RC system, the role requires decision-making that impacts the internal workings of UNDP and actions to be carried out through direct delegation to UNDP management, for example, on RC system audit which is carried out through UNDP audit.

5. THE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES – THE ONE LEADER PILLAR

In 2014, the UNDG approved the Delivering as One [Standard Operating Procedures for UNCTs \(SOPs\)](#), which define a minimum set of requirements as to how UNCTs should work together to ensure greater coherence of its development operations. Many of the changes introduced through the SOPs stem from mandates and recommendations coming out of the past GA resolutions, TCPRs and current QCPR 2012. One of the five pillars of the SOPs is the One Leader. The following are the two core elements that measure this effort:

1. Strong commitment and incentives of the UNCT to work towards common results and accountability through full implementation of the Management and Accountability System and the UNCT Code of Conduct and Working Arrangements
2. Empowered UNCT to make joint decisions relating to programming activities and financial matters.

The One Leader pillar is pivotal in strategically positioning United Nations support to countries to reach their development goals and is a critical factor enabling UNCTs to work together (e.g. on programming and

resource allocations). Under the One Leader, the Resident Coordinator and the UNCT act as one leadership team, under the overall leadership of the RC.

The SOPs leadership pillar, in full implementation, is intended to contribute to the reduction of transaction costs, duplication, fragmentation and competition for funds; it enhances strategic dialogue on development and the positioning of the UN with the host-country authorities at the highest level; focuses system wide capacity behind strategic integrated policy and programmes; it plays a central role in driving forward reform efforts to enable UN Country Teams to optimize joint funding and work together on shared results.

In 2015 the UNDG agreed on a new RC and UNCT performance appraisal system as a key contribution to mutual accountability for results at the country level. The RC performance appraisal picks up the core functions and responsibilities, which are relevant and reflect the UN's core role across all country contexts, weighted differently as to whether, for example, a low income, crisis or high middle income situation.

Evidence from DESA's ['Report on QCPR Monitoring Survey of Resident Coordinators in 2015'](#) suggests that considerable progress has been made at the country level in implementing the core elements of the One Leader Pillar of the SOPs. Thus, 92 percent of RCs reported that all or some of the UNDAF results groups are now co-chaired by a head of agency, and 57 percent stated that all or some UNDAF results groups are co-chaired by the national government. Seven percent of RCs reported that all the UNDAF results groups have non-governmental partners as members, while 49 percent revealed some of the UNDAF results groups have such members. Of the responding RCs, 29 percent reported that the job description of UNCT members from all agencies in their country recognizes the role of the RC. Thirty percent of RCs stated that this was the case for most agencies, 38 percent for some agencies, and three percent for none of the agencies.

The SOPs are welcomed by host governments where it brings internal coherence and organization to the UN in-country, while also supporting and strengthening a whole-of-government approach to national coordination.

6. FINANCING OF THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR SYSTEM

In 2012 and 2013, the UNDG reviewed the funding mechanism for the RC system, in order to improve the provision of resources and support at country level and determine how to provide a sustainable resource base for the RC system, as requested by Member States ([ECOSOC resolution 2011/7](#) and [GA resolution 67/226 on the QCPR](#)). This independent review estimated that in 2011 some \$131 million was spent globally on the Resident Coordinator system. The amount was equivalent to 0.9 percent of UN operational activities for development at the time. The study concluded that coordination was underfunded at the country level, and significant gaps in capacities also persisted at the regional and headquarters levels.

As the manager of the Resident Coordinator system, UNDP has been funding the "backbone" costs of the RC system at the global, regional and country levels. The "backbone" constitutes the salaries of UN Resident Coordinators, the infrastructure to support them, and some costs at the regional and global level of the RC system (approx. \$91 million in 2011). These funds used to be complemented by resources provided by bilateral agreements with donors globally to the UN Country Coordination Fund (UNCCF) managed by the UN Development Operations Coordination Office (approximately \$31 million), as well as by resources raised by RC Offices from donors and UN entities locally at the country level (approximately \$9m).

As donors started phasing-out the donor-funded portion of the budget, the UNDG started implementing a system-wide cost-sharing agreement in 2014. The agreement is based on a global funding scenario of approximately \$125 million for 2016, with \$89 million covered by UNDP and \$36 million expected to be cost-

shared by the 18 UNDG member entities, including UNDP. However, the Fifth Committee has not approved the UN Secretariat's contribution to the cost-sharing agreement since 2014 (approximately \$6.5 million/year), and five UNDG member entities only contributed reduced contributions. This has resulted in a continued gap in funding for the RC system (in 2016, this was a 25% funding gap, which amounts to approximately \$9 million).

A persistent funding gap of this magnitude significantly impacts the UN development system's capacity to deliver coherent country-level support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly as 91 percent of the budget is being allocated to RC Offices at country level, with the remainder funding regional and global support. Moreover, as the current funding allocations only provide for 1.8 staff members on average for each RC Office, any further cuts would seriously jeopardize the minimum core coordination capacity required to ensure the strategic positioning of the UN system as a whole at the country level.

7. RC SELECTION AND ACCREDITATION

Following the [2007 GA resolution on the TCP](#) in which the UN development system was encouraged to "to improve the selection and training process of resident coordinators", the UNDG established "[Guidelines for the Selection and Appointment of Resident Coordinators](#)". The UNDG continuously refines the implementation of the guidelines, including the training of RCs. A review by the [Joint Inspection Unit in 2013 on the "Selection and appointment process for United Nations Resident Coordinators, including preparation, training and support provided for their work"](#) found that "*the established framework for the selection and appointment of RCs has resulted in a more predictable, inclusive, participatory interagency process, with clear separation of the assessment, selection and appointment phases.*", and that "*significant improvements have been attained in the identification of the training needs of RCs, followed by reshaping and strengthening of training programmes and learning resources*". At the same time, the study found that "*continuing training opportunities for RCs remain limited and financing of RC training remains a challenge*".

Generally, the RC position is open to senior UN staff from the funds, programmes, and specialized agencies and the UN secretariat (P5 and above); and external candidates with relevant experience from recognized international and regional organizations, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations and academic institutions.

The RC application, selection and appointment process is guided by the following:

- a. Nominations for RC positions that reflect "the best and brightest" candidates and the selection process promotes transparency, participation and ownership by the UN system.
- b. Emphasis on identifying the best suitable fit between the country post profile and the candidate's qualifications.
- c. To ensure that candidates considered for RC positions reflect diversity in accordance with the following broad criteria: equitable geographical distribution; gender balance; a broad representation of candidates from the across the UN system; and broadening the pool to external candidates from outside the UN System.
- d. Confidentiality, impartiality and efficacy in the of assessment, selection and clearance process.
- e. UN DOCO provides the secretariat to the inter-agency advisory panel managing the process.

The final steps of the RC selection process lies with the respective government, who has to a) clear the candidate and provide **formal agreement** for the candidate to arrive in-country; and b) provide their **accreditation**, upon arrival.