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Reforming the UN Development System: can North and South overcome their political differences in making the UN fit for purpose?

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Reforming the UN Development System

Can North and South Overcome their Political Differences in Making the UN Fit for Purpose?

Max-Otto Baumann

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Abstract

In July 2016, Member States of the United Nations (UN) concluded the ‘ECOSOC Dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UN Development System’ in which they had discussed options for reforming the UNDS for nearly two years. The next step in the reform process will be intergovernmental negotiations on specific reform measures. Against this backdrop, this paper offers a genuinely political analysis of the UNDS and the current reform process. Special emphasis is given to the continuing North-South divide within the UNDS. The paper starts by introducing three theoretical perspectives on the UNDS which emphasize the roles of power, utility and attitudes. These three factors correspond to major shifts in the international development landscape, namely, a global power transformation, the rising need for collective action and a new social context for global cooperation. From these considerations emerges an understanding of the political space and the yardsticks for a successful UNDS reform, whereby success is understood in terms of future political relevancy. In the empirical section, the paper turns to the ECOSOC Dialogue and offers an analysis of major reform options under consideration by Member States in the areas of the ‘functions’, ‘governance’, ‘funding’ and ‘organization’ of the UNDS. The paper concludes by identifying three strategic directions for reform and how Member States should change their behaviour towards the UNDS if they wish to fully exploit the UNDS’s comparative advantages as the epitome of multilateral global development cooperation.

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Abbreviations

AAAA	Addis Ababa Action Agenda
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CBDR	Common but differentiated responsibilities
CEB	Chief Executives Board
DaO	Delivering as One
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
F&P	Funds & Programmes
GA	General Assembly
GDP	Gross domestic product
GNI	Gross national income
GPG	Global Public Good
G20	Group of 20
G77	Group of 77
ITA	Independent Team of Advisors
LDC	Least developed country
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MIC	Middle income country
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OAD	Operational activities for development
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QCPR	Quadrennial comprehensive policy review
SA	Specialized Agency
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SSC	South-South Cooperation
UN	United Nations
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USD	United States dollar
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

1 Introduction

With the adoption of the ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ in 2015, states and individuals from around the world once again look to the United Nations (UN) for assistance in implementing the Agenda’s 17 ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ (SDGs). The new Agenda is arguably more ambitious than any previous development programme because it spells out a plan for ‘Transforming our world’¹ by making societies socially, ecologically and economically sustainable while ‘leaving no one behind’ in the process. To be able to make a difference in realizing the 2030 Agenda, the UN Development System (UNDS) needs to be reformed. Member States, experts and academia agree that the UNDS lacks efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and accountability – and is currently not fit for purpose.

A short overview of what constitutes the UNDS suffices to demonstrate this. With an aggregated budget of USD 28.4 bil. (2014), the UNDS is by far the largest pillar in the UN system.² It consists of 34 entities that receive contributions for operational activities for development (OAD), among them 12 ‘Funds’ and ‘Programmes’ (F&Ps) such as the UNDP, WFP and UNICEF; 13 ‘Specialized Agencies’ (SAs) that are constitutionally self-contained (including UNESCO, FAO and WHO); and nine other entities (UN Secretary-General, 2015b, p. 6). Intergovernmental oversight and coordination is provided, in theory, by the UN General Assembly (GA) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In practice, however, they both have limited authority over the UNDS. UN expert Thomas Weiss has characterized the UNDS as a ‘number of disparate moving parts – lacking any center’ (2009, p. 75). With its multi-centred anarchic character, the UNDS can hardly be said to operate as a ‘system’.

Member States have recognized the need for reform. In December 2014, ECOSOC launched the ‘Dialogue on Longer-term Positioning of the UN Development System’.³ Over an almost two-year period that concluded in July 2016, a group of around 50 interested Member States held meetings to consider reform options for the UNDS. Results of the ‘ECOSOC Dialogue’ are expected to feed directly into negotiations for the ‘Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review’ (QCPR), the resolution through which the GA reviews and gives strategic orientation to the UNDS every four years. The ECOSOC Dialogue gathered additional momentum through the formation of an Independent Team of Advisors (ITA) in early 2016 that was asked to provide ideas and options for how to reposition the UNDS.

A political perspective of the UNDS

This paper offers a genuinely political perspective of the UNDS and the current reform process. The UNDS is often described as a bureaucratic monster and a rich body of literature deals with organizational aspects of the UNDS.⁴ However, the UNDS is also an

1 ‘Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’

2 For comparison, the security/peacekeeping pillar received USD 7.9 bil. in 2014 (UN Secretary-General, 2015b, p. 6).

3 For more information see: <http://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/content/what-ecosoc-dialogue>.

4 See for example Adams and Martens (2015), Burley and Malik (2015), Chandran (2015), Helgason and Weinlich (2015), Hybsier (2015), Jenks and Aklilu (2014), Jenks and Chandran (2015), Lopez-Acuna and King (2015), Muttukumaru (2015) and Wennubst and Mahn (2013).

‘obsessively political environment’ (Luck, 2009, p. 32) where even seemingly innocent aspects such as inter-agency coordination can turn out to be ‘a deeply divisive political issue hinging on the views of Member States about the organization’s priorities’ (Fomerand & Dijkzeul, 2007, p. 579). As such, the quest to reform the UNDS has to be grounded in an analysis of the political interests that Member States have in the UNDS. For the reform of the UNDS to become possible and sustainable, it has to offer something for everyone.

When speaking of political interests and the UNDS, among all the cleavages that divide states, there is one master cleavage: the division between the ‘North’ (or ‘West’) and the ‘global South’, between ‘industrialized’ and ‘developing’ states, or ‘donors’ and ‘recipients’.⁵ These terms have slightly different connotations, but they all point to a global bifurcation that is deeply entrenched in the structures, processes and values of the UNDS and that has become a constant source of friction. How the rise of emerging powers like China, India, South Africa and others affects the North-South divide within the UNDS is an open question. Will the closing of the global political- and economic-power gap eliminate or accentuate the North-South divide? Will interests become more homogeneous, leading to a revival of UN development cooperation, or will positions become hardened and cause deadlock?

Failing to adapt the UNDS to the changing global context threatens the UN’s role as the organization that, as Article (103) of the UN Charta states, stands legally and politically above all others and is the epitome of the multilateral system. Political marginalization of the UNDS would negatively affect its ability to assist Member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Repositioning the UNDS would also contribute to the larger exercise of negotiating the transition into a new world order.

Research question and methodology

The paper tries to analyse how political interests of Member States affect the UNDS and how specific reform options discussed in the ECOSOC Dialogue affect the interests of Member States or groups thereof. More specifically, the paper is guided by the following three questions:

1. How does the behaviour of Member States shape the UNDS – its structures, processes and values?
2. How does the changing global context of UN development cooperation affect the UNDS reform effort?
3. What political hurdles and opportunities are associated with specific reform options discussed in the ECOSOC Dialogue?

5 The terminology provides some awkward challenges. For the purpose of this study, I mostly go along with the terms ‘global South’ as a shortcut referring to ‘developing states and emerging economies’ and ‘industrialized states’ to refer to all Members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The terms ‘West’ and ‘North’ have strong ideological connotations and exclude large donors like Japan. I acknowledge that, from the standpoint of the new 2030 Agenda and its principle of universality, industrialized states should also be addressed as developing states. I also believe that aspects of the North-South divide remain relevant, or become even more acute, as the global South approaches the industrialized world in terms of economic power. I deviate from my convention in cases where the emphasis is on particular aspects that are more adequately connoted by one of the other terms.

These three questions structure the course of the argumentation. The first chapter provides the theoretical basis for the discussion. Drawing on the theory of international relations, it distinguishes three factors that explain how Member States act towards and shape the structure and functions of international organizations: power, utility and attitudes. From that analysis emerges an understanding of how, on the one hand, the UNDS in its current shape bears the signature of its more powerful Member States while on the other it is also a product of Member States' overlapping utility interests as well as their historically grounded attitudes around norms, identities and values.

The second chapter considers how changes in the global context – the rise of the global South, the emergence of new development challenges and changes in the world public – affect the constellation of interests that underpin the UNDS. It thus provides some clues about how the changing international landscape favours, impedes or necessitates certain reforms to ensure the continued relevancy of the UNDS. The third chapter then turns to the ECOSOC Dialogue and offers a political assessment of the most pertinent reform options discussed by Member States. The paper closes with a vision of a UNDS that more fully exploits the potential of international development cooperation, and offers some reform proposals.

The empirical basis for this study is a comprehensive review and analysis of statements made by Member States in the first phase of the ECOSOC Dialogue and in the Operational Activities Segment of ECOSOC, both in 2015. Most of these statements are available to the public on 'PaperSmart', a UN information service, or on the websites of the respective Permanent Representations to the United Nations in New York. In addition, interviews were conducted with 15 diplomats, mostly from developing countries, in July and August 2015 – in the context of the informal negotiations of the 2030 Agenda.

2 Explaining the UNDS: power, utility and knowledge

Despite its fragmentation and its pluralistic nature, the UNDS is an international organization with the broad purpose of providing certain functions for Member States that they cannot provide bilaterally (or not as well). In this section, the analysis turns to the theories of international relations and organizations in order to answer such questions as: Why do states create and support international organizations, or the UNDS for that matter? How do international organizations help states to cooperate? What are the implications for their mandates and institutional set-up? Answering these questions is not an exercise in abstract thinking but helps us to better understand how political forces act upon and shape the UNDS, and the implications regarding the political challenges of UNDS reform.

2.1 Three theoretical perspectives of the UNDS

Scholars have developed a rich and varied body of literature that tries to give answers to the questions above. There is no space here to do justice to the sophistications of this discourse. For our purpose it suffices to note that in attempting to understand both the external roles and internal structures of international organizations, we can concentrate on three factors which pervade the theoretical debates: power (associated with the theory of Realism), utility (Institutionalism) and attitudes (Constructivism). In the following, these

factors will be addressed in turn. Table 1 provides an overview of how they can be applied to the roles of the industrialized world and the global South with regard to the UNDS.

Table 1: Three theoretical perspectives with regard to Member States' interests in the UNDS			
	Realism / power	Institutionalism / utility	Constructivism / attitudes
Hypothesis	The UNDS's shape and activities are determined by hegemonic powers.	The UNDS supports Member States in realizing their self- and collective interests.	The UNDS embodies, rests upon and actively promotes certain perceptions and goals.
Interests of industrialized states	Projecting influence through the UNDS, including through the promotion of certain norms	Pooling of resources, achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness	Multilateralism, global solidarity and human development as drivers of UN support
Interests of global South	Collective vote in GA as an instrument of power and a forum for rhetorically constraining others	Financial support, more reliable and effective development cooperation	UN as a 'third world institution', a forum for global justice and a guardian of sovereign equality
Overlapping interests	Both sides benefit, either through their funding or voting power	Coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of UNDS and global public goods	Principles of the UN Charter, commitment to multilateralism
Conflicting interests	Representation in governance bodies, mutual neutralization of power resources	Distribution/burden-sharing of financial resources, benefit of development efforts	Stereotypes, lack of trust, conflicts around normative issues and global responsibilities
Source: Author			

Power: The UNDS through the lens of realism

Power and security are at the center of the theory of political Realism, which is among the most influential paradigms in international relations theory. According to advocates of this thinking, states have one interest that trumps all others: They seek relative gains in power and security vis-à-vis their competitors – because in an anarchical 'self-help system', only power can protect states from being disadvantaged or even destroyed by others. International organizations do not play a big role in this approach (Brühl & Rosert, 2014, p. 33). To the extent that they do, they are conceptualized as a 'tool of great powers'. They 'exist because strong states create them and find their continued existence serves their interests' (Barnett & Finnemore, 2007, pp. 43-44). Hence, the shape of the organization and the activities it performs reflect the hegemonic power's interest, especially as it is usually the hegemon that provides most of the funding. If an international organization is not supported by a hegemon, it will probably only exist in a niche and not play any effective role in international politics (Brühl & Rosert, 2014, p. 33).

Lofty rhetoric about universal values and multilateralism is, in the realist paradigm, a smokescreen that hides the mechanisms of power. Woods, Betts, Prantl, and Sridhar (2016, p. 6) aptly express such a view when they write: 'Post-1945 multilateralism was a supplement to rather than a substitute for inter-state relations' and 'multilateralism was not very multilateral. It was centered on the United States and the industrialized global North, and largely excluded the developing global South. Its aims and scope were partial'.

Applied to the UN, the power analysis suggests that both its creation 71 years ago and its continuous expansion since then were driven by the industrialized states. Regarding the role of the UNDS, great powers certainly were interested during the Cold War (and probably afterwards, albeit to a lesser extent) in having a tool to gain influence in global South states, promote Western norms and concepts, and bolster the exercise of ‘harder’ forms of military power by appealing to UN legitimacy. With regard to the UNDS’s internal structures, hegemonic power can explain why the UN Charter does not give the GA the authority to pass decisions that legally bind Member States (the way the Security Council can). It can explain why trade and economy issues have been shifted to the Bretton Woods Institutions and the WTO, where the voting principle of ‘one dollar one vote’ gives industrialized states a greater say (Rosenthal, 2007, p. 140). It also helps explain why the UNDS is almost entirely dependent on voluntary funding instead of having a system of assessed funding which would grant the UNDS more autonomy from its donors (Hüfner & Martens, 2000, p. 231).

However, weak states can also benefit from the UN in terms of power. Global South states find in the UN a forum and in the principles of the Charter the tools to publicly ‘name and shame’ powerful states into complying with basic norms such as sovereignty and multilateralism (Hurd, 2005). In the GA, the global South’s majority allows them to override opposition from industrialized states. This explains why the G77⁶ often adopts principled positions that are meant to maintain group solidarity and collective influence ‘rather than reflecting the [differing] needs and experiences of developing countries’. (Wilton Park, 2015, p. 12) Any division within the G77 would reduce the global South’s capacity to oppose policies of industrialized states.

Playing the power game has limits for both sides: Strong states have to maintain a degree of multilateral inclusion, lest weak states turn away from a UNDS that they perceive to be operating as a power tool for the strong states. On the other hand, if weak states overplayed their resistance by consistently opting for the strongest challenges, industrialized states could turn to other organizations where they can wield more influence. Imagine the BRICS⁷ ‘baying up’ the UNDS by channelling huge amounts – of what was once bilateral aid – through it or refusing consensual decision-making.

Utility: The UNDS through the lens of institutionalism

Institutionalism presents a more optimistic view of international cooperation. Like Realism, states are seen as rational actors maximizing their individual benefits, but according to Institutionalism, they seek absolute instead of relative gains. Institutionalism starts with the premise of interdependence and mutual vulnerability, which means that unilateral action often results in less-than-ideal solutions (Brühl & Rosert, 2014, p. 35). But cooperation cannot be taken for granted, mainly because of free riders. International organizations can play a role as ‘catalyzers’ for cooperation ‘that make[s] everyone, big and small, better off’ (Barnett & Finnemore, 2007, p. 45). The typical functions of organizations include:

6 The ‘Group of 77’ is a coalition of developing states that was established in 1964 to ‘articulate and promote their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues within the United Nations system’ (quoted from the G77 website: <http://www.g77.org/doc/>). Today, it comprises 134 members.

7 The ‘emerging economies’: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

lowering transaction costs, exposing non-compliance, exploiting synergies, providing objective information, pooling resources, creating incentives for using more foresight, enhancing the credibility of commitments and setting the agenda. To do this, an international organization needs a certain degree of centralization and autonomy from its member states (Abbott & Snidal, 1998).

Both the industrialized states and the global South stand to benefit from development cooperation as institutionalized by the UNDS. Development of the global South is, within certain limits, a matter of industrialized states' genuine self-interest insofar as global imbalances can threaten the economic system (Wesel, 2012, pp. 252-253) and other global public goods (see below). The UNDS helps industrialized states to promote development in different ways. It provides an infrastructure and network with global reach that no single donor can maintain single-handedly, allows industrialized states to pool resources and use them more efficiently, and provides the necessary competences. From this perspective, the current high proportion of non-core funding provided by donors⁸ from the group of industrialized states might be less about forcing their agenda on the UNDS and more about utilizing the comparative advantages of the UNDS.

Despite its North-South uni-directionality, even traditional development cooperation is governed by principles and norms in which both donors and recipients have interests and which can be anchored in international organizations (Wesel, 2012, pp. 252-253). For donors, these 'regimes' make sure that spending money is wisely spent by defining standards for transparency, efficiency, accountability and professionalism. Recipient states do not only benefit from the greater flow of resources and knowledge, it also makes a difference whether aid is bilateral or multilateral. Multilateral aid enables development cooperation to be less politicized and more predictable (Klingebiel, 2013).

While classical development cooperation is primarily intended to benefit developing countries, more and more global problems are affecting all states and demanding collective action. The Ebola epidemic broke out in West Africa but quickly became a threat to public health everywhere. Often, such problems are discussed as 'global public goods'.⁹ The concept of global public goods marks a paradigm shift in development thinking. It implies that in the age of globalization, development activities that used to be motivated by moral concerns, such as notions of solidarity and attending to those in need, can become matters of rational self-interest. Tackling such problems requires an institution that can raise awareness of certain threats and help reduce the free-rider problem, for example, by allocating responsibilities and compliance mechanisms. One lesson learned in the Ebola crisis was that richer countries can simply buy themselves out of a threat – in that case, by having established effective health care systems domestically instead of investing in public health systems in developing states. This highlights the difficulties of translating a GPG-related threat into collective action.

8 See Chapter 3.3 for a chart and more detailed discussion of funding mechanisms.

9 In economics, the concept of (global) public goods is defined by two characteristics, non-excludability (everyone can benefit from them) and non-rivalry (consumption by one does not reduce its availability to others). In the development context, 'GPGs' is often used very broadly to also cover common goods like air, soil and oceans – where exploitation by one does in fact reduce the availability for others (Barret, 2007; Kaul, 2013; Nordhaus, 2005; Zedillo & Thiam, 2006).

Attitudes: The UNDS through the lens of constructivism

Constructivism emphasizes that social reality is ‘constructed’ and therefore contingent. According to constructivism, nothing can be explained just by fixed state interests, utility functions or an alleged logic of the international system. In the end, what matters most is the actors’ attitudes regarding their own and others’ interests, and how they define situations. Constructivism makes two important claims with regard to international organizations: on the one hand, a certain ‘community base’ is necessary for an international organization to bring states together (Lenz, Bezuijen, Hooghe, & Marks, 2015, p. 138). The stronger their shared moral principles, awareness of common interests and patterns of transnational solidarity are, the stronger and more effective the international organization can be (Wesel, 2012, p. 59).¹⁰ On the other hand, international organizations can also help to create these conditions. They can even become moral authorities in their own right: ‘Appeals to principles, elaboration of standards of acceptable behavior, and moral censure are powerful tools to which states can and do respond’ (Barnett & Finnemore, 2007, p. 47; Brühl & Rosert, 2014, pp. 39-40; Hurd, 2011, pp. 30-33).¹¹

Both mechanisms are evident in the UN. Its Charter can be read as a collective response to the atrocities of the two World Wars that highlighted universal moral concepts of human dignity. Later in the UN’s history, the emergence of a new awareness of threats to the environment led to the establishment of new organizations like the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in 1972. The Charter also set out normative principles like sovereign equality, non-interference, neutrality, human rights, global solidarity, international cooperation through consensus, deliberation and mutual accommodation, which have become widely accepted, although they are also frequently violated. The UN has served to make unilateralism illegitimate. The UNDS also played a major role in advancing new concepts like ‘human development’ in the 1990s, the ‘Millennium Development Goals’ (MDGs) in the 2000s, and most recently, the universal ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’. All of these provide norms and standards for judging states’ behaviour and mobilizing them to engage in international development cooperation.

Although constructivist approaches generally point to the chances of better international cooperation, they are not per se ‘friendly’. Attitudes cause some of the most obstinate problems in international cooperation for the simple reason that they are often grounded in identities and normative beliefs that their bearers consider to be non-negotiable. Furthermore, states tend to externalize their values and norms, inflicting them upon others and thus eliciting counter-reactions. Against this background, core funding can be interpreted as an instrument for pushing agendas that others prioritize differently (like human rights and gender equality). Moral conceptions are often rooted in historical experiences, thus creating conflicting notions about the distribution of global responsibilities. All this leads to the conclusion that while cooperation might be perfectly rational from an institutional perspective, it can nevertheless fail because of attitudes associated with stereotypes, historical mistrust, group solidarity, and so on and so forth.

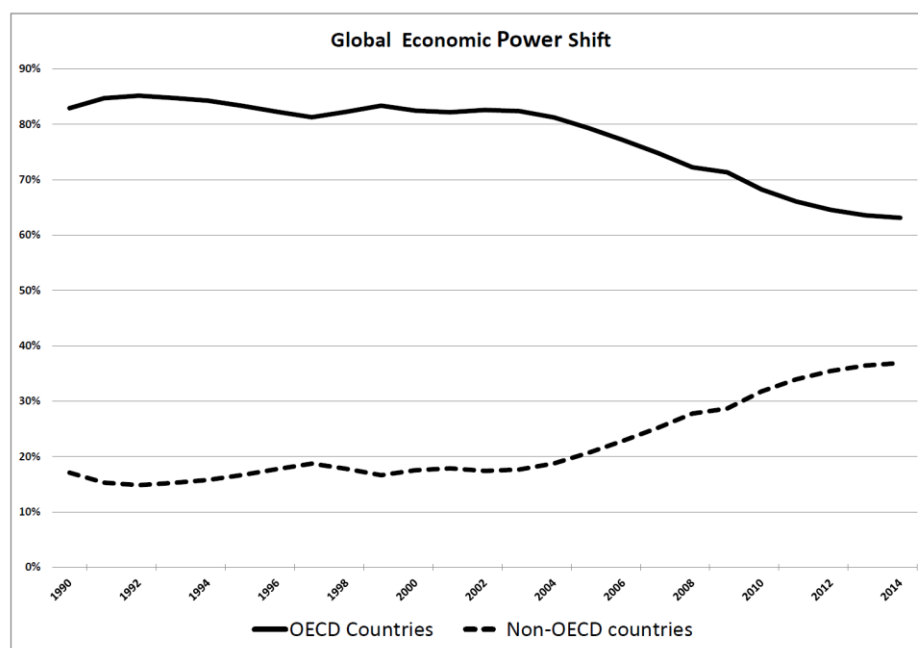
10 Zürn (2016, p. 330) points out that if an international organization is badly aligned with existing social structures it can lead to a defensive reaction, especially when the organization is perceived to be too invasive. For that reason, an international organization usually cannot engage in redistributive activities.

11 It has similarly been argued that a state’s foreign policy is at least partially guided by moral conceptions (Lumsdaine, 1993; Noël & Thérien, 1995).

2.2 The global context of UNDS reform: three broad trends

The previous section discussed the UNDS from a theoretical standpoint. This section broadens the analytical horizon and uses a more empirical approach to consider how the current international context affects Member States' interests in the UNDS. It is important to understand current shifts in power, utility and attitudes because they indicate opportunities in and limits to the current reform process. The UNDS can also only remain functional and relevant if it reflects current political realities. While there is no space to empirically measure how the three factors change, the analysis nevertheless points out the most significant trends that need to be taken into account when thinking about UNDS reform.

Figure 1: Evolution of global economic power (% of global GDP)



Source: Author, using World Bank data

Power: the global shift towards the south

The international system is undergoing a power transition that started roughly a decade ago with the economic rise of the global South. If the gross domestic product (GDP) is accepted as an indicator of international power, Figure 1 suggests that the current power distribution has become significantly more balanced than in the 1990s when Western, or for that matter American, hegemony was unrivaled. Some commentators have already announced the advent of a 'post-American world' (Zakaria, 2008).

The effects of the global power shift on the UNDS are not immediately clear, however. On the one hand, emerging economies, with developing states in their shadows, are increasingly loath to be told how to develop by the former colonial master. They find themselves confronted with a multilateral development system that was created and further evolved under Western hegemony. On the other hand, it is another thing to translate deeply rooted misgivings into a change in one's behaviour vis-à-vis other states and international organizations. Observers note that despite their new economic and

political clout, the BRICS are still ‘ducking for cover’ in the UN rather than flexing their muscles to exert influence commensurate with their power (Weinlich, 2014). The global South’s increased funding of the UNDS¹² does not indicate its intention to exert power. Growing internal differences, owing to the graduation of many countries from low-income to middle-income status, might even threaten the global South’s capacity to speak with one voice in the international arena.

Although the UNDS itself has not yet been fundamentally shaken by the global power shift, the wider global governance system has certainly experienced change or is clearly being pressured to change. A campaign for the reform of the UN Security Council, debated since the end of the Cold War, has intensified, inter alia through the formation of the ‘G4’ (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan). This suggests that the global South has not yet dismissed the UN system but considers it worthwhile to fight for a better position in it. In a number of international humanitarian and/or security crises, like those in Darfur, Syria and the South Chinese Sea, some of the BRICS have displayed a new diplomatic self-assertiveness that reveals another aspect of the global transformation: an increasing reluctance to comply with what are viewed as Western values and norms. The BRICS also launched their own ‘New Development Bank’ in 2014, which is based in Shanghai, in reaction to their marginalization in the Bretton Woods Institutions; the same holds for the new ‘Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank’. It remains to be seen if these initiatives will compete with or complement the UNDS.

Self-interest and common interests in a globalized world

A second broad trend of our times is the growing demand for collective action in the 21st century. A problem exists with collective action when individual states cannot, or can only unsatisfactorily, protect their interests alone and consequently need to cooperate internationally. Since the 1990s, German sociologist Ulrich Beck and others have been warning that the number and significance of global threats is increasing in the age of globalization, requiring a new kind of international cooperation (Beck, 1995; Barret, 2007; Janus, Klingebiel, & Paulo, 2015). No single indicator like GDP can illustrate the need for collective action. Table 2 suggests four development-related fields in which the need for collective action is particularly acute. All of them appear in the 2030 Agenda.

Table 2: Global public goods and their current threats	
Global Public Good	Is threatened by ...
Climate & oceans	CO2 emissions; desertification; ocean acidification; deforestation; consumption patterns
Global health	Pandemic risks; vaccine resistance; communicable diseases; clean drinking water
Security	Fragile states; internally displaced persons; international migration; refugees; safe havens and terrorism
Trade & finance	Volatile financial markets; economic marginalization; agricultural subventions; non-sustainable debt burdens; tax evasion
Source: Author	

12 In 2014, non-OECD governments accounted only for 12% of all contributions to the UN OAD. OECD states, including in the European Commission, accounted for 69% (UN Secretary-General 2015b, p. 12).

With regard to the politics of collective action, one problem is that threats to GPGs are not always self-evident or universally shared. Some global health problems, such as catastrophic pandemics, exist only as latent risks that increase with weak national health systems and increased global travel. Nor do ‘global public bads’ like overfishing or migration directly translate into the need for collective action because they often affect states in quite different ways (Barret, 2007).

In the context of GPGs, the rise of the global South is a risk because it strains the planetary boundaries and the global South remains sceptical of a GPG agenda in the UNDS for various reasons (see Chapter 3.1). But it is also a chance: Without the South’s cooperation, the capacity for global problem-solving would be severely limited (Messner, 2008, pp. 144-145). The successful negotiations in 2015 of both the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA, the global framework for financing development cooperation) and the 2030 Agenda are signs that, at least in principle, all parties recognize the need for collective action (Brock, 2015, p. 152). The 2030 Agenda contains about two-dozen references where it asks states to engage in international cooperation (Jenks & Kharas, 2016, p. 24). The global South’s weaker resiliency with regard to global challenges might increase its readiness to engage in development-related collective action.

Social change in the international society

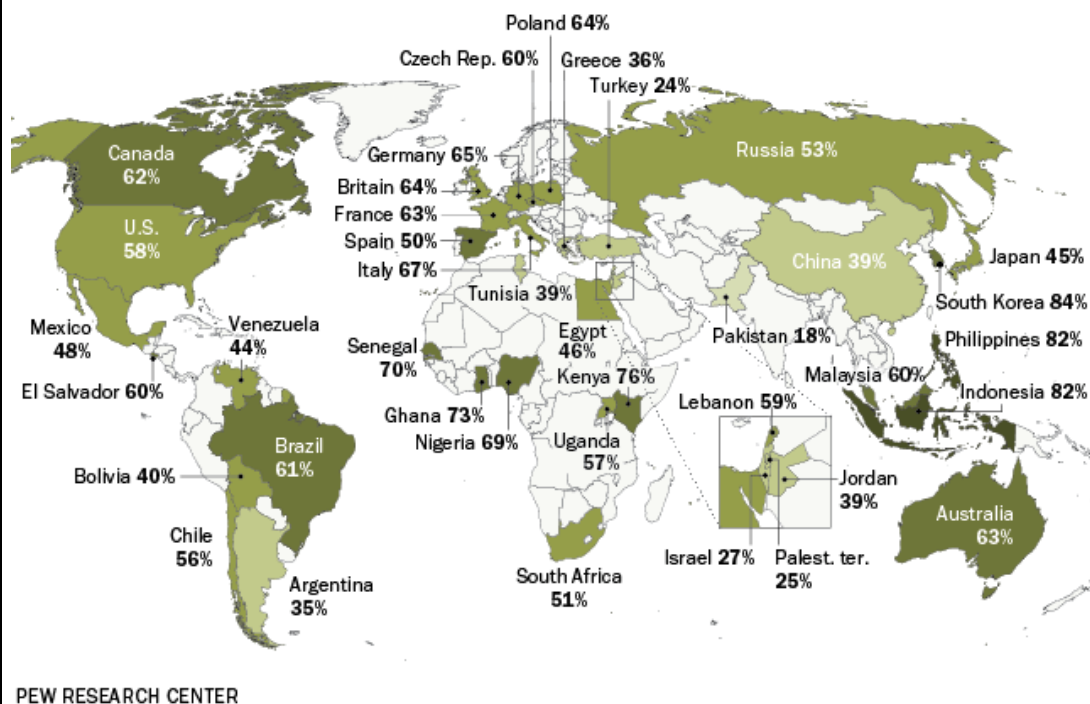
No matter how clear the *objective* need for international cooperation is, the crucial factor with regard to UNDS reform is how states *subjectively* define their (common) interests, what they perceive to be their most dangerous threats and how inclined they are towards multilateral cooperation. An empirical assessment of these attitudes is extremely difficult given the lack of respective data. The only global survey that covers at least one aspect that is relevant to our context comes from the Pew Research Center. It shows high favourability rates for the UN, in some regions even higher than among the founding members of the UN (Figure 2). Some authors find evidence for the emergence of a new Southern brand of cosmopolitan thinking (Webb, 2016). This suggests that there are political resources for collective action within the UNDS. Other surveys, however, point to the fragility of such expressions of international-mindedness: Multilateralism is usually abandoned when international organizations are perceived to be interfering with the political course of one’s own country (Zürn, 2016).

An optimistic perspective would note the following trends that have the potential to strengthen the UNDS’s global community base: First, with the social media revolution, singular events like humanitarian or environmental disasters can act as catalyzers for the emergence of a world public, based on shared impulses of outrage and solidarity. Second, the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work on development-related issues has significantly grown and now constitute a political force that can shape discourses in and around the UN.¹³ Third, the economic rise of the global South can lead to greater international-mindedness as people are better educated and travel more.

13 From 2000 to 2014, the number of NGOs registered for consultative status with ECOSOC more than doubled from about 2,000 to 4,189 (UN DESA. <http://csonet.org/?menu=100>).

Figure 2: The international image of the United Nations

Percent in each country who have a favorable view of the UN



Source: Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/09/17/global-image-of-the-united-nations/>

These trends are not unequivocal, however; they can also have a divisive effect, for example, when social media increases awareness of global inequality. As the global South gains influence, it would be naïve to assume that the existing global normative structure will not be affected by it: In the long term, global power shifts can be expected to lead to an ‘idea-shift’ of possibly equal dimensions (Acharya, 2006, p. 1157). This should be seen as a transformation rather than a threat. Nevertheless, tensions are already visible, especially in politically sensitive areas like the Human Rights Council (Kinzelbach, 2013; Atlantic Council & Chatham House, 2011). North-South concepts like the ‘Common But Differentiated Responsibility’ (CBDR), which is essentially a philosophical framework for collectively sharing the burden, have been challenged in the informal negotiations regarding the 2030 Agenda, where industrialized states argued for the alternative concept of ‘shared responsibility’. In the same setting, a number of contested normative issues arose. Industrialized states, for example, wanted to give peace and stable societies a greater role in the 2030 Agenda, while the G77 countries and the BRICS viewed connecting development and peace as a threat to their sovereignty – a sign of deep international mistrust (Brock, 2015, p. 156).

3 Reform options in the ECOSOC Dialogue

In this chapter, the analysis turns to the ECOSOC Dialogue conducted by Member States in New York and offers a political assessment of reform options for the UNDS discussed in that forum. The chapter is structured along the four areas of the ECOSOC Dialogue: functions, governance, funding and organization of the UNDS.

3.1 Functions: What should the UNDS (not) do?

Hardly any other phrase has been quoted more often in the ECOSOC Dialogue than ‘form follows function’, a principle from the world of architecture and design. The term ‘functions’ refers to the activities and goals of the UNDS. Functions are important to Member States for two reasons: First, opting for certain functions has implications for the form, that is, reform options regarding governance, funding and organization. Second, functions serve and affect the interests of different Member States differently. Therefore, functions are deeply political.

It should be pointed out at the beginning that a degree of consensus exists regarding functions. No Member State in the ECOSOC Dialogue contested the notion that the UNDS should lead the fight against poverty and hunger. There was broad consensus that the UNDS needs to carry out both operational activities (such as capacity building and project implementation) and normative work (setting norms and standards and offering policy advice). Furthermore, Member States agreed that the UNDS is in a unique position to convene development stakeholders and facilitate international cooperation.

All these functions should be thought of as parts of a spectrum. The political conflict – mostly between industrialized states and the global South – is about the relative weight accorded to certain functions. The three most contested areas in that regard are discussed below.

The balance of normative and operational activities

Currently, the focus of the UNDS is clearly on operational activities. The bulk of UNDS funding (76%) is earmarked for non-core funding, typically supporting country-level operational activities (also including normative functions like policy advice). The primary function of the governing boards of the Funds & Programmes (F&P) has become adopting country plans. An immense network of 1,432 UNDS offices in 180 countries (ITA, 2016, p. 1) testifies to the UNDS’s country-level engagement. The question for Member States is: Should the UNDS continue to remain heavily invested in operational activities or should its focus shift to normative work?

Industrialized states prefer to shift UNDS functions from operational to normative activities. In the ECOSOC Dialogue, they maintained that ‘the UN cannot do everything’. It should be ‘selective’ and focus on its ‘comparative advantages’ (UN DESA, 2015, p. 1). Industrialized states see comparative advantages in the field of norms and standard-setting, advocacy and policy advice. In terms of content, they see the UNDS as particularly suited to making a difference with regard to gender equality, woman’s empowerment, democracy and

governance.¹⁴ Regarding operational activities, industrialized states argue that in the long term, the UNDS should limit itself to crisis situations or fragile states, where bilateral development actors often do not have direct access.

Developing states disagree. They resist the departure from what they understand to be the UNDS's primary mandate of fighting poverty and hunger at the country level. In interviews, attainment of this goal was described as the litmus test for the UN's credibility. At the same time, the G77 harbours a distinct skepticism of normative work. No statement in support of a turn towards normative functions was found in the ECOSOC Dialogue.

How to explain these different positions? One factor is resources. Operational activities are money spent in developing states. Between 2008 and 2011, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) alone spent approximately USD 1.54 bil. on poverty reduction annually, or 28% of its programme expenditures (UNDP, 2013, pp. 23, 34). Considering that poor people live both in least developed countries (LDCs) and middle income countries (MICs), there is now fierce competition within the G77 for aid, as is evident from statements made in both the ECOSOC Dialogue and the informal negotiations of the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, the G77 presents a unified front to industrialized states' perceived attempts to rationalize UNDS activities in fighting poverty and hunger.

Power concerns are another factor. Norms regulate behaviour; as such, they reduce the political space of those regulated. Ideally, norms are agreed in consensus, but global South states tend to see a Western bias in the UNDS's advocacy for norms, which are often liberal-democratic and do not reflect the priorities of governments of global South states. Norms also require monitoring, which interferes with national sovereignty. While industrialized states consistently emphasize the need for a robust monitoring mechanism, global South states argue that review and follow-up arrangements should strictly be based on voluntary national inputs.¹⁵ For them, the UNDS should function as a 'learning platform' on which best practices could be identified and shared, not as a supervisory institution.¹⁶

Global South states do not totally refrain from calling for stronger normative functions. In a typical G77 statement, Ecuador (on behalf of the G77/China) demanded 'strengthened international cooperation, particularly in the areas of finance, debt, trade and technology transfer'.¹⁷ A more balanced regulation of international commerce through the UNDS could benefit the global South states that have long been sceptical of the Western trade and finance system built around the Bretton Woods Institutions in which industrialized states have greater influence due to the principle of 'one dollar one vote'.

14 Ireland, 9 Jun. 2015, Session IV; Canada, 15 Dec. 2014, Session I of ECOSOC Dialogue.

15 In the negotiations of the 2030 Agenda, some global South states insisted that for reasons of national sovereignty, reporting data to the UN should only take place through national statistics authorities and independent reporting by NGOs should be ruled out.

16 However, industrialized states might become more sceptical of monitoring if – based on the 2030 Agenda's principle of universality and in the name of mutual accountability – they were turned from subjects into objects of the global monitoring exercise. A UNDG paper proposed increasing the UN's country presence in industrialized states in order to improve the monitoring function in these countries (UNDG, 2016, p. 2).

17 Ecuador, 9/10 Feb. 2015, Statement of the Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, High-level Thematic Debate on Means of Implementation for a Transformative post-2015 Development Agenda, UN General Assembly.

Table 3: Political positions and theoretical considerations (indicated by bullet points) regarding the UNDS functions		
Reform option	Industrialized states	Global South
Adjusting the balance of normative and operational activities	<p>A UNDS focused on ‘comparative advantages’ regarding normative functions, limiting operational activities to crisis situations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norms are seen as drivers of development. • Maintaining capacity to shape normative issues • Reducing financial burdens of operational activities 	<p>Maintaining operational activities; UNDS as a platform for exchange of experiences & mutual learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining global solidarity and financial support related with project work • Normative function primarily in economic and financial issues, where global South states feel disadvantaged
A greater role for the UNDS in transnational, cross-border and global challenges	<p>Demanding a role for the UNDS in dealing with transnational and cross-border problems and GPGs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging the global South for solving supranational problems • Achieving a new, more adequate burden-sharing 	<p>Scepticism with regard to shifting from national development to transnational and global challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern that national development resources are rationalized, while having to shoulder a greater international burden • Sovereignty concerns due to supra-national regulations and monitoring
Greater support of UNDS for South-South Cooperation (SSC)	<p>Status quo: support of SSC on a case-by-case basis as it proves relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reluctance to commit to a practice that is openly advocated as being ‘non-Western’ • Maintaining a degree of influence through soft conditionality 	<p>Demand for increased support of SSC, organizationally and financially:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SSC as distinct from the ‘Western’ regime of rules and principles around aid • Closing development gaps that are not covered by UNDS (like infrastructure)
Source: Author		

Cross-border, regional and global challenges

A number of industrialized states in the ECOSOC Dialogue called for the UNDS to become more active in dealing with cross-border, regional and global challenges. Citing the comparative advantages of the UN, they envisioned the UNDS facilitating the collective action necessary to provide and protect GPGs or to fight against global public bads (Jenks & Jones, 2013; Kaul, 2013). Although the term ‘GPGs’ is generally avoided in New York, in one statement the EU (European Union) explicitly demanded that the UNDS become the ‘guardian of internationally agreed goals, objectives and norms, convening Member States on critical global public goods agreements’.¹⁸ With a slightly different emphasis on cooperation rather than norms, Indonesia demanded ‘effective and sustainable action against challenges that surmount national boundaries’¹⁹ – the only such statement from a G77 Member State.

18 EU, 25 Feb. 2015, ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment.

19 Indonesia, 9 Jun. 2015, Session IV of the ECOSOC Dialogue.

Industrialized states, in which most people have little reason to worry about their basic needs, generally have more capacities and more political space (and therefore also the moral responsibility) than developing states to address the abstract and/or longer-term challenges to global sustainability. States in the global South remain concerned about how a supranational agenda might disrupt established UNDS practices. They are sceptical about whether shifting development cooperation from classical ‘development’, based on transfers, to a new form of ‘cooperation’ involving mutual accountability, would be beneficial. In the informal negotiations regarding the 2030 Agenda, global South states vigorously defended the CBDR principle against attempts by industrialized states to replace it with the principle of ‘shared responsibility’.²⁰ Small Developing Island States have been fairly open to a GPGs agenda of the UNDS or, pointing to their vulnerability from climate change and external economic shocks, have even explicitly advocated one.

South-South Cooperation

If the GPGs agenda is a priority in the ECOSOC Dialogue and the logical next step in the evolution of the UNDS’ functions for industrialized states, then South-South Cooperation (SSC) plays a similar role for the global South in response to the changing global development landscape (see Box 1 for an overview of SSC in the UNDS). In the first phase of the ECOSOC Dialogue, global South states complained that SSC is not adequately recognized and supported by the UNDS. The relatively small UN Office for South-South Cooperation and the existing mandates for incorporating SSC into the activities of the F&Ps/SAs are regarded as insufficient. With regard to concrete reform options, the G77 requests that the Office for South-South Cooperation be scaled up and a Special Representative of the Secretary-General be appointed for SSC.²¹

SSC is as much about identity as it is about resources. The global South describes SSC as a decidedly non-Western development practice. SSC is presented as free of both conditionality and geopolitics and as an expression of the principle of ‘solidarity’ as opposed to ‘commitment’. In a statement by Ecuador in the ECOSOC Dialogue, SSC was described as

a relationship among equals that derives from the common challenges and historical ties of developing countries, based on solidarity and demand-driven initiatives. These are reasons enough not to have South-South Cooperation limited under a set of rules, conditionalities and policies’ prescriptions derived from North-South cooperation business models.²²

On the one hand, this strict separation of SSC and North-South reflects dissatisfaction with the current UNDS as a Western construct that is biased towards Western values, norms and interests. As such, the call for SSC is a warning signal to the UNDS. Global South initiatives like the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank

20 See, for example, the statement by India on CBDR at the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda. Retrieved from <http://www.pminewyork.org/adminpart/uploadpdf/40503IGN-6%20Post%202015%20June%2023,%202015.pdf>.

21 See GA Resolution 69/239, 19 Dec. 2014.

22 Ecuador, 9/10 Feb. 2015, Statement of the Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, High-level Thematic Debate on Means of Implementation for a Transformative post-2015 Development Agenda, UN General Assembly.

demonstrate the preparedness of the global South to challenge global development institutions. On the other hand, stressing the fundamentally different modalities of SSC serves to emphasize that SSC should not compete with more conventional North-South development cooperation – reminding the North of its global responsibilities.

Therefore, it is an open question whether SSC will evolve into a complementary modality of international development cooperation or whether it will fragment the global multilateral development system further. In the end, this will also depend on the attitudes of industrialized states. They are, for obvious reasons, reluctant to sponsor a practice that is defined in explicitly anti-Western terms.²³ Yet interviews with representatives from industrialized states point to growing recognition that SSC does in fact fill a gap in the provision of development services. Industrialized states support SSC at the operational level, which then technically becomes ‘triangular’ cooperation. UNDS entities have also started to embrace SSC as a business opportunity (UN Secretary-General, 2015a). All this suggests a certain overlap of interests and attitudes around SSC.

Box 1: The history of South-South Cooperation in the UN

While the bulk of international development cooperation has been North–South, collaboration between developing and emerging countries to promote development is growing in importance. At the UN, the emergence of SSC was recognized early on when in 1974 the General Assembly set up the ‘UN Office for South-South Cooperation’ in order to promote and coordinate South–South cooperation.²⁴ In 1995, a voluntary South-South trust fund was established that became the ‘UN Fund for South-South Cooperation’ in 2005. Over the last decade, the relevance of SSC increased dramatically with the rise of the emerging economies. In 2015, China announced new funds totaling USD 5.1 bil., which some interpreted as an SSC ‘game changer’ (Khor, 2015, p. 8). However, reliable numbers on the scope of SSC are hard to come by because the concept is not well defined (like the OECD definition of official development assistance, ODA) and comprises various forms of bilateral economic exchange.

3.2 Governance: How should the UNDS be governed, and by whom?

The term ‘governance’ refers to the intergovernmental bodies and their mechanisms through which Member States steer and oversee the UNDS and its entities. The UNDS has two levels of governance. System-wide, the GA has supreme authority over F&Ps; ECOSOC is only mandated to coordinate the specialized agencies (SAs) (UN Charter Chapter X). However, as more and more F&Ps have been created, ECOSOC has assumed a substantial role in overseeing their operational activities. At headquarters level, F&Ps and SAs have their own ‘Executive Boards’ (F&Ps) or ‘Governing Bodies’ (SAs) that approve budgets, adopt strategic plans and evaluate their respective institutions.

From the various issues discussed in the field of governance, three stand out because they are particularly controversial: representation on Executive Boards, reinforcement of central, system-wide governance and non-state actors’ participation in UNDS governance.

23 The GA resolution on SSC mentioned above showed a clear North-South divide with all donors voting against it.

24 See the UNDP website <http://ssc.undp.org/content/ssc/about/Background.html> for a more detailed historical overview and other information about SSC.

Representation on the Executive Boards

From the perspective of the global South, the issue of representation at entity level is central for measuring the success or failure of the reform process. In a GA resolution in December 2014, the G77/China introduced language stating ‘the need to review the composition and functioning of the governing structures of the United Nations funds and programmes’ and for ‘early reforms of those governance structures’. In a comment on the resolution, Bolivia argued that two-thirds of UN Member States believed that ‘reform of those governance structures should be a priority’.²⁵ In their statements in the ECOSOC Dialogue, global South states consistently argued that their time had come to be granted geographically equal representation.²⁶

From a power perspective, governance is a zero-sum game: When one group of Member States exerts more influence by votes and negotiation power, the other exerts less. According to this logic, both the global South and industrialized states will try to either maximize or at least keep their share of seats on Executive Boards. Both interviews and statements in the ECOSOC Dialogue reveal the strong perception among global South states that donors have a firm grasp on UNDS entities. One diplomat bashed the ‘donor mentality’ in the Executive Boards in an interview, while another described board sessions as a ‘conversation of the deaf’ because the positions of global South states were ignored so often. Bolivia, speaking on behalf of the G77/China, complained that the real ‘structures of governance’ at the UN are constituted by the informal ‘clubs of donors’.²⁷

Industrialized states reject the call for geographically equal representation. The typical justification provided for this position is that there is nothing to be won for global South states by greater representation because decisions are taken by consensus. However, there is probably a concern by donors – that is politically too sensitive to be articulated – that decision-making could change to majority voting and then every seat would count. One diplomat voiced concern about losing control over how donor money is spent, which would pose a problem at home for justifying UNDS funding. The representative of a Scandinavian state argued that board membership should be linked to resource mobilization. In a joint statement, Australia and Canada maintained that governance structures should ‘reflect funding realities’,²⁸ following the logic of ‘representation for taxation’. Such a model of representation would obviously serve the power interests of large donors. However, there is also a less self-serving, functional explanation: Aligning oversight with funding means putting in charge those who prioritize efficiency, thus guaranteeing that the system will stay competitive and accountable. Furthermore, such a system can incentivize greater contributions. UN Women already practises a system of representation that is partially based on core and non-core contributions.

25 GA Resolution A/C.2/69/SR.38, 11 Dec. 2014.

26 According to this principle, a region’s number of seats on Executive Boards would reflect the region’s number of Member States. This would increase the number of seats for the global South. Board composition varies, but the general patterns remain the same throughout the F&Ps. Industrialized states are in the minority in terms of absolute numbers but overrepresented in terms of regional proportion.

27 Bolivia, 15 Dec. 2014, Session I of the ECOSOC Dialogue.

28 Australia and Canada, 30 Jan. 2015, Session II of the ECOSOC Dialogue.

Given the vague link between shares of seats and political influence, the ultimate reason for the global South's demand for greater representation might be found in normative notions. For the global South, greater representation is a matter of fairness and democracy. In interviews, several diplomats from the global South spoke to the effect that it was actually not greater representation, but the current lack thereof that needs moral justification: If donors preach democracy, why not start practising it in the UNDS? As a counter-hypothesis to the zero-sum logic, the global South's greater representation might increase its identification with the UNDS – which could in turn lead to greater financial contributions from the global South and less principled resistance to initiatives from the industrialized states.

At this point in the discussion, it might be interesting to link back to functions. If industrialized states treat governance as a power issue only, they risk foregoing the potential benefits of a multilateral system, for example regarding common goods. Governance of transnational and GPGs must be different from governance of operational activities at the country level. '[It] would require a much more robust capacity to monitor and hold different parties to account for whatever burden sharing agreement had been reached.' (Jenks & Aklilu, 2014, p. 9) This can only be achieved if the loss of sovereignty is compensated by greater capacity to influence the course of action at the global level. Thus, industrialized states have to balance their power interest with the potential benefits of granting the global South a greater say in the UNDS.

Table 4: Political positions and theoretical considerations (bullet points) regarding the governance of the UNDS		
Reform options	Industrialized states	Global South
Geographically equal representation on boards	Interest in maintaining the status quo or enlarging donors' representation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Representation for taxation': holding the purse strings • Ensuring influence in case of future majority votes • Allowing the global South enough ownership and identification 	Demands for greater, geographically equal, representation in the Governing/ Executive Boards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing adequate political influence commensurate with regional/global South weight • Strengthening UNDS accountability
Greater system-wide governance capacity	Welcomed for the sake of greater efficiency, effectiveness and coherency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost-savings and maximization of development impact • Loss of influence if a more representative intergovernmental authority controlled the UNDS • Potential limits on liberties in terms of bilateral influence 	Scepticism about reducing inter-governmental oversight <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revamping the UNDS to strengthen it and possibly increase aid flows • Strong intergovernmental oversight of operational activities could limit political space of recipients.
Participation of non-state actors in UNDS governance	Welcomed as value added in expertise, experience, innovation and resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs are likely to be more aligned with norms and concepts of industrialized states than with global South normative structures. 	Reluctance to accept non-state stakeholders in UNDS governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of erosion of the principle of intergovernmentalism • Concern about a power shift if non-state actors hail from/are supported by industrialized states
Source: Author		

Greater system-wide governance capacity

Industrialized states argue that UNDS governance should not be narrowed down to the question of representation but that other dimensions of governance should also be considered. Chief among them is the proposal to establish centralized governance capacity in the UNDS with a mandate to provide system-wide strategic guidance and oversight. Ideas include strengthening the ECOSOC and creating a system-wide ‘Sustainable Development Board’, as well as a global strategic framework as a management tool. Industrialized states regard centralized governance capacity supported by a system-wide budget as necessary to overcome the inefficiency, ineffectiveness and incoherence that has limited the UNDS virtually from its inception (Taylor, 1998).

From a donor perspective, efficiency and effectiveness are essential since they make it easier for governments to justify UNDS contributions to domestic audiences. Better system-wide governance can also help to bridge the gap between norms and operational activities, a point industrialized states frequently made in the ECOSOC Dialogue. In the 1990s, strengthening ECOSOC significantly helped to translate a surge of global agendas into operational activities; today’s proposal of a revamped central governance capacity could have the same effect. However, creating a political bottleneck in terms of concentrated, multilateral decision-making could make donors sceptical of this reform option. They have to weigh the benefits of improved system-wide governance against the risks of being outvoted by a majority of global South states.

The global South’s position on strengthening system-wide governance is not clear-cut. During the last reform drive from 2006 to 2009, there was a concern among global South states that strengthening non-governmental coordination mechanisms would undermine the principle of intergovernmental oversight. This concern has some plausibility, as for example the Chief Executives Board (CEB) has eroded ECOSOC oversight functions (Jenks & Jones, 2013). Against this backdrop and considering the global South’s collective voting power, strengthening the multilateral, system-wide governance might be welcome. The global South would increase its control of the UNDS, something they have long struggled to achieve.²⁹ On the other hand, depending on how strictly it is enforced, greater system-wide governance might reduce certain liberties at the country level, for example, the liberty of recipient countries to selectively engage UNDS entities.

The participation of non-state actors in UNDS governance

A third potentially (no concrete reform proposal has been presented yet) controversial issue is the inclusion of non-state actors in UNDS governance. Actors from civil society, the private sector and academia are increasingly present in the UNDS, including in intergovernmental processes. For example, they played a crucial role in the informal negotiations of the 2030 Agenda and the number of NGOs registered with ECOSOC has risen to more than 4,000. Within some limits, NGOs are allowed to observe meetings, submit written statements and make oral interventions. Industrialized states favour giving

29 The G77 for example proposed that entities should be obliged to report to the ECOSOC ‘on efforts made in accordance with their mandates’. Stronger system-wide governance could help to enforce policy discipline in the UNDS through such measures (South Africa on behalf of G77/China, 24 Feb. 2015, ECOSOC, Operational Activities for Development Segment).

non-state actors a stronger role in the UNDS – counting on their expertise, experience, potential for innovation and resources. Non-state actors are also perceived to be natural allies of industrialized states, sharing their philosophy of promoting an active civil society and the potential of markets.

Many global South states remain sceptical about the participation of non-state actors in UNDS governance. Their reservation is usually presented as a concern for the principle of intergovernmentalism, which according to the Charta is the basis of the UN's political system. However, behind that concern lurk more fundamental issues regarding the nexus of power and norms. The majority of non-state actors hail from the West; their greater participation could shift the power balance in the UNDS. Civil society organizations from the global South have often emerged in opposition to their governments, supported by Western donors and promoting agendas that lean towards liberal democracy (Taylor, 1998, p. 139). This is nowhere clearer than in the human rights field where some global South governments are known for going to great lengths to prevent NGOs and non-state actors from their own countries from appearing on UN platforms.

3.3 Funding: How should the UNDS be funded, and by whom?

Funding refers to the modalities and practices through which the UNDS and its entities receive and manage financial contributions from all kinds of resources, but mostly from governments.³⁰ Funding is an important area in the reform process because functions, governance and organizational arrangements depend on appropriate funding. From a more political point of view, funding is a source of power that can be applied for the common good as well as for Member States' own agendas. The UNDS has long struggled with the problem that the funding power of donors can vitiate the voting power of the global South majority. Apart from issues of power and accountability, funding also raises normative questions regarding the distribution of global responsibilities.

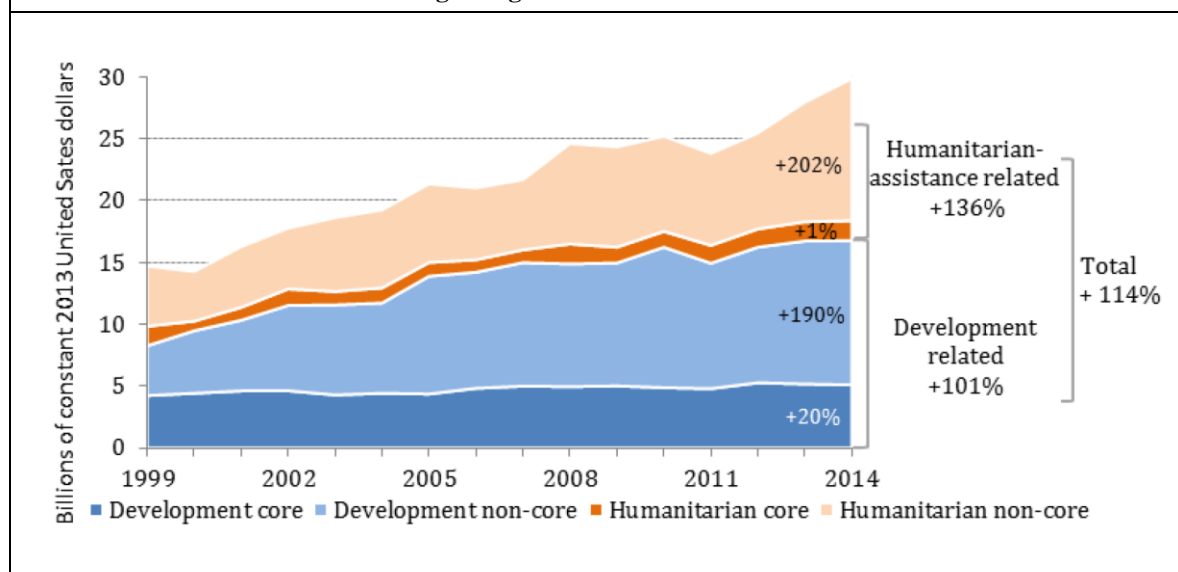
The UNDS works with a number of funding mechanisms but for this paper, it will suffice to focus on the most relevant structures of UNDS funding and the associated political conflicts. While the main organs of the UN and its peacekeeping activities are funded through assessed contributions (whereby countries have to pay annual contributions according to a key that basically reflects the size of their economies), F&Ps are dependent on voluntary contributions. These can come in two ways: core funding, which has no strings attached and is used to implement strategic plans as agreed in the boards, and non-core or earmarked funding, which is directed to certain countries or purposes and requires that a treaty be negotiated between the donor and the UN entity. Apart from rebalancing core and non-core funding, other new and potentially conflicting reform options include introducing assessed contributions and establishing a centralized budget. Behind all that lurks the issue of renegotiating global burden-sharing.

30 Governments account for 77% of the contributions for UN development activities (UN Secretary-General 2015b, p. 12).

Core and non-core funding

UNDS funding has been transformed over the last two decades. While there has been a considerable increase for the UN’s OAD, this has come almost exclusively from non-core funding, whereas core funding has stagnated in absolute numbers (see Figure 3). Today, core funding accounts for only 24% of total UNDS funding (UN Secretary-General, 2015b, p. 7). Most UNDS resources still come almost entirely from industrialized states, although global South states have recently started to increase their contributions (this aspect is discussed later).

Figure 3: Voluntary contributions to the UNDS. Non-core funding has increased substantially, whereas core contributions are stagnating.



Source: UN Secretary-General, 2015b, p. 8

The expert literature addresses non-core funding as an important driver of competition, fragmentation and UNDS inefficiency (Klingebiel, Mahn, & Negre, 2016; Muttukumaru, 2015). From a political point of view, the main issue is that non-core funding has the potential to undermine intergovernmental multilateral oversight because entities follow the money rather than the guidance provided by the QCPR, ECOSOC and F&P strategic plans. Because of the surge in non-core funding, the Executive Boards that control entity policies and disbursements have significantly less to decide today than two decades ago (Jenks & Jones, 2013, p. 121). Influence has shifted to a small number of donors. In 2014, the 10 largest donors accounted for 73% of the total funding from Governments (UN Secretary-General, 2015b, p. 17), a figure that has hardly changed in the last five years.

Global South states are concerned about the funding shift. They have consistently criticized the shift towards non-core contributions that support ‘projects that reflect the interest of a particular donor’³¹ rather than multilateral UN mandates and strategic plans. The corrosive effect of non-core funding is exacerbated because low overhead costs usually do not reflect the real costs of implementation – meaning that core resources have to be used to support non-core funded activities. This kind of subsidization was originally

31 Bolivia on behalf of G77/China, 15 Dec. 2014, Session I of the ECOSOC Dialogue.

set up to incentivize greater non-core funding but has become a liability. In interviews, some diplomats aired their frustration with these arrangements, complaining that donors ‘used’ or even ‘exploited’ the UNDS. Another problematic aspect associated with non-core funding discussed in the ECOSOC Dialogue is that it creates supply-driven development activities, whereas a demand-driven system would be more in the interest of developing states.

The issue of core and non-core funding has other nuances that go beyond power and influence. Donors also resort to non-core funding to create political visibility, effectiveness and accountability (the same reasons why ‘vertical funds’ are favoured by donors³²). Ownership helps donors to justify UN funding to domestic audiences. However, insisting on bilateral ownership creates a vicious circle in which non-core funding creates the conditions (fragmentation, inefficiency and a lack of transparency, accountability and credibility) that make core funding even less attractive. As such, funding is linked to governance and organizational arrangements. In his recent report on humanitarian funding, the UN Secretary-General proposed a ‘Grand Bargain on Efficiency’ (2016, p. vi), according to which the UNDS should make an effort to increase its efficiency, transparency and horizontal accountability, and donors should reciprocate with a greater share of core funding. This would transform the vicious into a virtuous circle.

The global South’s interest regarding non-core funding also includes trade-offs. They have to balance their preference for multilateralism with the benefit of receiving larger volumes of aid through the UNDS. Attacking the practice of non-core funding is risky in the absence of an alternative funding mechanism. Furthermore, non-core-funded projects, including vertical funding, usually allow for a considerable degree of local ownership.³³ As a result, non-core funding often creates a win-win situation, at least for the short term: Developing countries benefit from the aid flow and a fair amount of ownership while donors avoid the exigencies of the multilateral process.

Assessed contributions

In the ECOSOC Dialogue, some Member States have proposed an additional mechanism of assessed contributions for the UNDS, especially to cover the costs of running the system and for specific normative functions. These two areas could benefit all Member States but are underfunded due to free riding and a lack of burden-sharing agreements. The proposal of assessed contributions has gained some initial traction, judging by its appearance in various ECOSOC documents,³⁴ but was not taken up by the ITA.

To evaluate the politics of assessed contributions, two effects need to be considered. First, in contrast to voluntary contributions, assessed contributions would grant the UNDS

32 ‘Vertical funds’ are financing mechanisms that are focused on one particular issue. A prominent example of a vertical fund is ‘GAVI’, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation. Vertical funding initiatives are attractive for donors because they are usually based on a high degree of accountability and clear cause-and-effect relationships (Sridhar & Tamashiro, 2009, p. 4).

33 Vertical funds are set up under the auspices of the UN or in partnerships with UN agencies, with a heavy involvement of states and private donors.

34 See draft notes prepared by UN DESA for discussion in the ECOSOC Dialogue: <http://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/content/what-ecosoc-dialogue>.

financial autonomy from Member States. This would allow the UNDS to better perform certain functions that Member States request, for example, knowledge management, longer-term strategic planning and quick emergency reactions. Peacekeeping is a good example of assessed contributions allowing the UN to play an active role that is highly appreciated by all Member States. Second, assessed contributions constitute a burden-sharing arrangement. Under the current key for the UN's regular budget, the United States (US) accounts for 22% and China for 5.1%; many LDCs pay a symbolic fee of 0.001% (about USD 30,000).³⁵ If the same or a similar key were used for the UNDS, global South states would have to pay significantly more than they do now.

With regard to the first aspect of burden-sharing (financial autonomy), assessed contributions raise a number of issues. Industrialized states would give away part of their bargaining powers that come with voluntary contributions. Bilateral influence in the UNDS would be weakened and multilateralism strengthened. This can cut both ways for donors: Assessed contributions threaten national sovereignty while they also allow the UNDS to better perform the functions expected of an international organization. Developing and emerging states are likely to see assessed contributions as a paradigm shift when they are asked to fund functions that used to be free. They might benefit in terms of greater multilateral oversight and a system that is driven more by demand than supply. But they also might be sceptical about implications regarding their sovereignty.

Quite similar to assessed contributions is a global tax, which has been debated since the 1990s³⁶ but has not been established because of some of the factors mentioned above. Among the more influential proposals was a global tax on plane tickets, a concept advocated by the 'Lula Group' in 2005 that gained support from 66 Member States. Apart from concerns about technical feasibility, the main hurdle was US resistance based on concerns of sovereignty and more generally, the inability to reach consensus on fair burden-sharing. In a world marked by inequality, any global tax would inevitably burden some states more than others, making multilateral agreements hard to achieve.

A central budget for the UNDS

Raising revenue is one aspect of the funding discussion, spending resources another. Experts, some Member States in the ECOSOC Dialogue and the ITA have argued for some kind of a centralized budget for the UNDS (Wennubst & Mahn, 2013; Jenks & Glemarec, 2015). Ideas range from budgetary transparency (keeping books of all financial transactions) to the authoritative, centrally administered allocation of resources (using a multilaterally agreed system-wide strategic plan). In all cases, the purpose of system-wide funding is to incentivize – or force – coherence in the UNDS, create a system-wide management instrument and better exploit synergies, leading to overall gains in effectiveness and efficiency.

Politically, a centralized budget that goes beyond simply creating transparency raises issues like those regarding assessed contributions. Financial centralization implies greater central decision-making, so both industrialized and global South states will carefully

35 See the UN Committee on Contributions website: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/contributions/budget.shtml>.

36 For an overview, see: <http://www.globalpolicy.org/social-and-economic-policy/global-taxes-1-79.html>.

evaluate their chances to influence budgetary decisions and direct resources to their respective (operational/normative) priorities while avoiding funding others. The outcomes of centralized, multilateral decision-making could disrupt current UN practices. If, for example, the UNDS, prompted by the majority of global South states, scaled back its efforts to streamline gender and good governance in UNDS activities, how would Western donors react? The more the UNDS gets involved in authoritatively allocating resources for specific purposes, the more likely it is to draw fire from various corners, which poses a risk to its reputation and the Member States' willingness to fund its activities.

Global transformation and burden-sharing in the UNDS

How does the rise of the global South affect UNDS funding? Will emerging economies step up their non-core funding and attempt a hostile takeover of the UNDS from Western donors? Or will they shoulder more financial responsibilities for global development, based on multilateral processes? Individual states in the global South probably cannot yet match the funding power of large industrialized states (with the possible exception of emerging economies), but collectively they could come close to balancing it and thus transform the way the UNDS works.

The numbers are inconclusive. To some extent, the global South has already stepped up its financial role in the UNDS. Its contribution to the UNDS grew by 26% from 2011 to 2014 (UN Secretary-General, 2015b, p. 17). The amount would be greater if self-supporting contributions were taken into account. Yet the overall funding level remains comparatively low: The donor base has not broadened over the last five years nor have UN contributions by the global South matched its economic growth rates. Thus, the effect of the global South's economic and political rise is still a matter of speculation.

From a power perspective, it is important to note that funding does not directly translate into influence. F&Ps are governed according to the principle of 'one state one vote', so funding and voting power are separated.³⁷ This means that emerging powers have little incentive to try to 'grab power' by drastically increasing funding. If global South states adopt the donor role and also resort to heavy non-core funding,³⁸ this might weaken UNDS multilateralism. Given these considerations, the most probable effect of the global South's rise will come in the form of a gentle but ever more obvious shift in the kind of projects and agendas in which global South actors invest, striking a balance between core- and non-core funding.

Attitudes, rooted in norms and values, are also likely to affect the evolution of UNDS funding from global South states. Despite the sharply increasing volume of SSC, emerging economies have consistently rejected a new interpretation of the CBDR principle with regard to the UNDS. With many MICs still struggling with pockets of poverty and underdevelopment, they would find it hard to justify providing aid to other developing states to their domestic audiences. Thus, the global South states' identities and associated

37 There are some exceptions, however. In UN Women, for example, seats are partially distributed according to the volume of financial contributions by Member States.

38 They already do: Roughly 50% of voluntary contributions from the global South are provided as non-core funding, as compared to the average of 76% of total funding for UN OAD provided as non-core (UN Secretary-General 2015b, pp. 8, 13).

beliefs about global burden-sharing constrain them from more actively asserting themselves in the UNDS. That also has an element of rational calculation: By maintaining the identity of developing states, they conveniently avoid taking on greater financial responsibilities (Weinlich, 2014).

Table 5: Political positions and theoretical considerations (bullet points) regarding UNDS funding

Reform option	Industrialized states	Global South
Shift from non-core to core funding to enhance efficiency and strategic planning of UNDS activities	<p>Pledges to improve but not fundamentally change non-core-funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-core funding ensures bilateral influence, accountability and visibility. • But it has negative effects on other donor interests (efficiency and coherence). 	<p>Criticism that non-core funding undermines the multilateral mandates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in reducing the donor footprint in the UNDS while maintaining incentives for aid • Core contributions would lead to a more demand-driven UNDS.
Assessed contributions to fund the running of the system and multilateral functions	<p>Floated as an option with little support from donors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessed contributions support donor interest in a well-organized system. • Fairer global burden-sharing and reduced free riding • Concern for sovereignty and reduction of bilateral influence 	<p>Neither promoted nor rejected by the global South</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System coordination is not the highest priority. • Normative implications of breaking the paradigm of North-South transfers will probably be seen as problematic.
Centralized budget, ranging from transparency to authoritative allocation of resources	<p>Floated as an option with moderate support among donors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater efficiency and coherence is a donor interest. • Transparency can limit current funding liberties. • Central decision-making poses a sovereignty concern because donors are in the minority. 	<p>Idea has neither been promoted nor rejected by the global South.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater multilateral oversight benefits the global South that has a majority.
Greater contributions of global South for UNDS activities	<p>Welcomed by industrialized states</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More equal burden-sharing is commensurate with global economic realities. • But there are implications for the currently privileged control of UNDS activities. 	<p>Opposed based on the principle of CBDR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra costs for the UNDS are hard to justify given domestic development challenges. • Fear of weakening North-South solidarity and losing developing country status
Source: Author		

3.4 Organization: How much centralization does the UNDS need?

The term ‘organizational arrangements’ can be defined as the formal structures and processes that link the various UN entities – ‘in other words the way the UN development system [...] collectively organizes itself’ (UNDG, 2015b, p. 1). The concept of ‘self-organization’ sounds curious, almost like an oxymoron, yet most experts would probably

agree that the UNDS is fragmented today largely because the system was not organized from outside. Experts point out three main problems of the organizational arrangements of the UNDS:

- Country level: An inflated country presence of 1,432 UN offices in 180 countries (2014), with many of them delivering comparatively minor amounts of aid, thereby creating fragmentation and causing inefficiency (ITA, 2016, p.1)
- Headquarters level: An assemblage of 34 F&Ps/SAs and other entities that constitute institutional fragmentation, because there is little communication and coordination among them
- Global level: Weak central leadership, with both the CEB and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG, formally part of the CEB) criticized as being unable to manage and control the UNDS in any meaningful sense

Why is integration so difficult? Time and again, experts point to the self-interest of UN entities that resist greater coordination and integration. But it is inconsistent to say that only organizational self-interest stands in the way of a better organized UNDS, in view of the mandates to exercise oversight of the UNDS and its entities that the UN Charter gives to the GA and ECOSOC. Once the required majorities are established, Member States can simply order organizational arrangements (although resistance from the system can make it difficult to implement reforms). The fact that the UNDS has been allowed to become so unwieldy indicates that Member States' political factors have prevented them making the tough decisions.

Rationalization and integration at country level

A number of reform options in the ECOSOC Dialogue aim to further improve the Delivering as One (DaO) mechanism, for example by giving the Resident Coordinator 'real authority' so as to increase the coherence and coordination of different entities' operational activities. This option is currently uncontroversial, as shown by the fact that 54 Member States have voluntarily adopted DaO.³⁹ Nevertheless, like all organizational arrangements, DaO also affects Member States' political interests. Those that have adopted DaO are all LDCs or Lower MICs; none of the BRICS has done so and only a very few Higher MICs. In interviews, diplomats say that they are concerned about sovereignty. Coherent policy advice is useful for poor states, but for more developed states, it smacks of paternalism. More developed countries typically also have bureaucratic capacities to deal with the complexities of the UNDS and pay higher transaction costs. If this observation is correct, then the global spread of DaO might have reached saturation level.

Another, more controversial, reform option concerns reducing the vast number of UN country offices with the aim of improving efficiency and coherence, and reducing fragmentation. This reform option overlaps the proposed shift from operational activities to normative functions, as the latter would arguably require fewer staff resources at the country level. As such, rationalizing country offices would mainly affect MICs but not LDCs or states experiencing conflict in which UNDS operational activities remain

³⁹ See the UNDG website for a list of countries that have adopted DaO: <https://undg.org/home/guidance-policies/delivering-as-one/>.

essential. It is likely that the affected countries will voice opposition. Host governments would lose employment opportunities. They also fear that their ownership would be weakened since country offices are usually associated with well established relationships with F&Ps/SAs that guarantee some attention, which is helpful in counterbalancing donor interests (Taylor, 1998, p. 121). Last but not least, rationalizing country presence might be seen as a precursor to rationalizing the UNDS at headquarters level.

Coordination and integration at the headquarters level

One of the main conclusions of the ‘Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One’ (UN 2012) and a frequent observation made in the ECOSOC Dialogue is that further improving coherence at the country level now requires complementary reform efforts at the headquarters level.⁴⁰ Reform proposals include harmonizing business practices, (selectively) merging institutions, clustering F&Ps (possibly including the SAs) around thematic issues and establishing thematic platforms.

The constellation of political interests regarding the headquarters level is similar to that discussed above regarding the country level. To start with, efficiency tends to be a higher priority for donors than for recipients. This became evident during the last reform drive in which European states and Canada advocated a ‘massive overhaul’ consisting of shutting down some UN entities and merging others, while the G77/China were strongly opposed to such a far-reaching reform of UNDS structures and mandates (Weinlich, 2010; Müller, 2010).

The G77’s principled opposition was rooted in concerns over sovereignty, power and resources. One author summarized the attitudes: ‘The coherence initiative [...] was seen as constituting a cost-cutting exercise, which would introduce conditionality, reduce flexibility, marginalize developing countries and translate into decreased funding’ (Müller, 2010, p. 54, also pp. 46-50). It is not entirely clear what gave rise to this sceptical assessment of institutional integration. Given the broken promises by industrialized states to meet the 0.7% target of ODA/GNI (gross national income), a lack of trust probably played a role, and ‘developing countries considered diversity to be a strength which provided a choice among providers and created resource mobilization opportunities’ (Müller, 2010, p. 93). As discussed above, organizational centralization implies the centralization of decision-making. In an institutional environment that global South states felt was dominated by donor interests, they had reason to believe that industrialized states would have the final say – if only because reducing senior positions would leave only representatives of the West.

Today’s political situation might be more favourable for reforms at headquarters level. The need to improve the system’s efficiency is now universally accepted, judging from statements made in the ECOSOC Dialogue. No industrialized state has advocated for the kind of massive institutional integration that polarized Member States during the last reform drive. Japan, the second-biggest contributor to UNDP after the US, expressly

40 It is believed that a less fragmented UNDS would save up to 20% annually, delivering a ‘harmonization dividend’, according to the Coherence Report (GA, 2006, p. 29). However, this number is highly speculative, since no study substantiates the number and methodology. What baseline ‘20%’ refers to is not clear, nor whether the number is still valid a decade later.

stated that ‘it is not easy, nor needed, to drastically change the organizational chart of the system at once’.⁴¹ Other large donors have adopted similar cautious positions.

The creation of a central executive leadership function

Another set of reform proposals refers to strengthening the system-wide executive management and leadership capacity. In its final paper, the ITA proposed installing a Deputy Secretary-General to be exclusively and full-time responsible for managing the UNDS. This person would draft a system-wide strategic framework, a consolidated budget and manage the Resident Coordinator System and other executive functions, such as staff and business practices.

The political analysis of a concentrated leadership resembles what was discussed in the area of governance (a system-wide Executive Board) and funding (a centralized budget) – with one difference. Whereas global South states are likely to be in favour of strengthened multilateral control of the UNDS, strengthening an administrative executive leadership might be seen as detrimental to intergovernmental oversight. During the last reform drive, when strengthening the CEB was an option, global South states argued that it should have ‘greater accountability to the intergovernmental bodies in charge of operational activities’ (Müller, 2010, p. 63). The G77 was also disquieted by the idea that increased system-wide organization would create greater transparency and monitoring of UNDS activities and could ‘result in monitoring recipient countries and [hence in] the politicization of development assistance’ (Müller, 2010, p. 63).

Two more aspects are relevant from a political perspective. First, a centralized leadership capacity costs money. Even if it can be demonstrated that costs are compensated by overall savings from system-wide gains in efficiency, funding faces the free-rider problem: There are few incentives to invest in a function that provides a common good but has no immediate benefit. If donors voluntarily shouldered a greater share, the ‘power of the purse’ would threaten greater bilateral influence at the heart of the system. Second, Member States have to balance their interest in efficiency and effectiveness with the risk that a central authority could limit freedoms Member States enjoy as both donors and recipients. Any real progress in dealing with the system’s fragmentation would require tackling the centripetal forces of non-core funding, which has benefits for both donors and recipients, as discussed above.

41 Japan, 9 Jun. 2015, Session IV of the ECOSOC Dialogue.

Table 6: Political positions and theoretical considerations (bullet points) regarding the organizational reform of the UNDS		
Reform option	Industrialized states	Global South
Country level: integration and consolidation of UN offices	<p>Welcomed as a measure that increases efficiency in the context of a shift from operational to normative functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gains in efficiency are a high priority for donors. • However, consolidated country-level organization might reduce direct bilateral influence. 	<p>Scepticism, fears of losing symbolically – in resources and in access to the UNDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency gains are not a high priority for recipients. • Identification with the UNDS and ownership through close contacts may be weakened. • Fear of opening the Pandora’s box of further rationalization
Headquarters level: institutional integration to reduce fragmentation	<p>Welcomed as a way to increase efficiency and coherence in the UNDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gains in efficiency and coherence have high priority for donors. • However, there are political costs of pushing an unpopular reform agenda. 	<p>Mostly scepticism; integration is seen as the donor agenda; preference for diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insistence on intergovernmental/ multilateral oversight over administrative leadership capacity • Fear of losing influence and ownership, both politically and in terms of senior UNDS positions
Global level: concentrated executive leadership and management capacity	<p>Mixed attitudes, ranging from enthusiastic acceptance to deep scepticism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gains in efficiency, coherence, and effectiveness have high priority for donors. • Potential risk to the factual prerogatives and liberties donors currently enjoy 	<p>No clear position known at time of writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only indirect interest in greater efficiency and coherence • Concerns with regard to increased monitoring of country activities
Source: Author		

4 Conclusion and recommendations

The UN is probably a civilizational attainment in its own right, but my analysis has tried to establish that it is also the scene of rather profane and entrenched political conflicts. This is neither a new insight nor a new reality. To some extent, the political conflicts around the UNDS are even proof of its vitality. Yet, complacency based on the UN's alleged 'natural' conflict-proneness would be dangerous because the political conflicts also stem from – or are dangerously exacerbated by – recent changes in the international development landscape. Some of these transformations were described in Chapter 3.2. In order to finish the political analysis of UNDS reform, this final section starts by pointing out three core challenges to the UNDS's political relevancy. They indicate a growing tripartite mismatch between the universally shared ideal of UN multilateralism, the current shape and functions of the UNDS, and the realities of the 21st century. Some suggestions for reforming the UNDS follow.

(i) *Fragmentation of the development landscape:* Not only the UNDS itself, but the international development landscape, too, is increasingly fragmented (Klingebliel et al. 2016), creating both a threat and an opportunity for the UNDS as the epitome of multilateral international development cooperation. Fragmentation occurs in four ways: First, new development platforms and funding modalities, including the vertical/global funds that are partially or entirely outside the UNDS, emerge. Second, the number and influence of non-state development actors grows. Third, new development banks in the context of SSC that are seen as competing with, or at least complementing, the respective UNDS institutions are founded. Fourth, other governance forums, in particular regional organizations and the Group of 20 (G20), which play an important role in global governance, especially in the economic field, grow in importance. None of these developments alone threatens the existence of the UNDS. However, altogether, they marginalize it and reduce its ability to shape the global agenda.

(ii) *North-South divide in UN development cooperation:* Both the UNDS and the normative premises of international development cooperation are marked by a North-South logic which is increasingly at odds with the political and economic realities of the 21st century. The industrialized states and the global South have become accustomed to their distinct roles as 'donors' and 'recipients' that often prevail over their shared roles as 'UN Member States'. There has been an implicit societal contract according to which industrialized states support the global South, which in turn commits to certain norms of liberal-democratic behaviour. Today, both sides are signalling their readiness to cancel this contract. In the face of new, genuinely global threats, a more ambitious development agenda ('Leaving no one behind'), and the graduation of developing countries (in early 2016 there were only 48 LDCs),⁴² industrialized states are envisioning a new global burden-sharing. Global South states, on the other hand, are not only hesitant about assuming greater international responsibilities, but they are also increasingly reluctant to accept the North's norms and notions. The 2030 Agenda is a point in case: Its negotiation was truly multilateral, with the global South's full participation, but it was fraught with multiple North-South conflicts and did not result in a new global burden-sharing

42 OECD, Development Assistance Committee. List of ODA Recipients retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/dacelist.htm>.

agreement, despite the reference to a new ‘global partnership’ (SDG 17). The AAAA did not accomplish this, either.

(iii) (Dis)satisfaction with the UNDS: Member States are dissatisfied with the way the UNDS functions today. Industrialized and global South states agree on some issues, such as the fragmentation and bureaucratic complexity of the UNDS, but they also have their own distinct list of grievances. For industrialized states, the greatest concerns are the duplications, inefficiency and multilateral inertia of the UNDS. Global South states complain about a ‘donor culture’ that pervades the UNDS and flies in the face of the ideal of multilateralism. It is probably no coincidence that the global South presents the emerging SSC as an antithesis to conventional North-South development cooperation. The perception that the UNDS is firmly dominated by the ‘West’ is one explanation why emerging economies are reluctant to take on more responsibilities in the UNDS that are commensurate with their new economic weight. However, there is also a dangerous type of satisfaction with the UNDS as it exists today. The UNDS currently offers certain benefits for all Member States and effective defensive safeguards for their interests. Change would require all states to leave their comfort zones.

Elements of a new vision

Member States, especially the industrialized states, often refer to the ‘comparative advantages’ of the UNDS as the guiding concept for UNDS reform. The comparative advantages are generally seen as the UN’s normative role, universal legitimacy, neutrality, global reach and convening power. To a certain extent, these are structural features of the UN that are guaranteed by the UN Charter. By citing them, Member States appeal to the ideal of the UNDS as the ‘custodian of the Global Agenda’ (Thakur, 2007, p. 7). But comparative advantages can’t be taken for granted. To use the metaphor of a credit card: A credit card is a powerful tool that provides the holder with certain opportunities, but it has to be regularly replenished. Member States now have to create a UNDS that can bring its comparative advantages to bear in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

This exercise involves two sorts of questions: First, how should the UNDS be repositioned to assert its political and practical relevance? Second, and perhaps more importantly, how should Member States change their behaviour towards the UNDS? If the current UNDS reflects how Member States related to the UNDS in the past, today’s reform effort must be supplemented by reflections about their roles. Below are three strategic proposals for repositioning the UNDS in a politically sustainable way.

(i) The UNDS must be the multilateral center for global development cooperation and counter the fragmentation trend in the global development landscape. In its current shape, the UNDS is a rather introverted system (Jenks & Jones, 2013). With its organizational complexity, flurry of coordination mechanisms and many, often crossing lines of accountability, both Member States and UNDS personnel are too concerned with keeping the system running instead of employing it to solve problems. To reclaim its role as ‘the principal embodiment of the principle of multilateralism’ (Thakur, 2007, p. 10) and significantly contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda, the UNDS needs to become more extroverted. What it loses (or never had) in financial weight, it has to gain in leadership and normative functions. Internal coherence must be complemented through the projection of external coherence. Instead of just focusing on doing development work, the

UNDS must be able to leverage, utilize, guide and orchestrate the activities of others. In terms of reform options, this would imply a shift from operational to normative activities and the capacity to lead partnerships.

This requires Member States to adopt a different attitude. In the field of economy, Adam Smith's concept of the 'invisible hand' is the basic principle of the market economy: It has its limits, but is always part of the consideration. In the field of international development, Member States should similarly embrace the idea of multilateralism. This is easier said than done. One of the UN's comparative advantages, norm-setting, is more difficult in today's international context than it was in the 1990s; it requires engaging with those who hold other beliefs. Inclusion involves both the global South and non-state actors – sharing power and reciprocating with development efforts.

(ii) The UNDS must help to resolve cross-border, regional and global challenges. Some SDGs refer explicitly to regional or global public goods, while others cannot be implemented without taking into account cross-border dependencies. The question here is not so much about which particular issues the UNDS is working on, but rather how it is dealing with them. During the era of the MDGs, the UNDS was optimized to help achieve development goals only in or for developing countries. Today's development challenges are different. An increasingly interdependent world needs genuine international cooperation. Back in the 1990s, German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1995) pointed out that most of today's risks are man-made, or at least have a strong human component, and often affect different countries differently. Accordingly, there is a need for an international organization that offers the expert and political space to manage these risks. The UNDS with its unique comparative advantages is well positioned to lead in this field.

For this new function, Member States' attitudes towards the UN will have to change. The industrialized states must be prepared to take responsibility for the risks they produce, and they have to accept that the global South has a greater voice to articulate its legitimate interests. The global South, on the other hand, has a complementary obligation to not condemn global governance as a 'backdoor to imperialism' (Messner & Nuscheler, 2003, p. 41). Global governance also serves their interests because many global risks disproportionately affect the global South. Under the new arrangement, the global South would 'trade the predictability of country level allocations that will become very marginal for the opportunity to access GPG allocations for addressing global challenges' (Jenks & Jones, 2013, p. 127).

(iii) The UNDS needs more (financial) autonomy. While the individual entities of the UNDS enjoy considerable autonomy from system-wide governance, they are closely controlled by Member States, especially donors. Through non-core funding and their principled insistence on national sovereignty, Member States have kept the UNDS on a short leash. The internal coordination mechanisms are weak because Member States prefer the liberties that come with a highly pluralistic and decentralized system. Research has established that international organizations need a certain degree of independence and centralization to perform functions that Member States 'on their own are unable to do' (Hurd, 2011, p. 18; Abbott & Snidal, 1998). Initiating solutions, providing high quality, neutral information, monitoring, and so forth does not work effectively under the tight control of Member States. Organizational centralization is necessary to run the system efficiently and effectively.

The UNDS' anarchic pluralism results from the way Member States chose to interact with it. Member States can have two different notions of the UN. In one, they use the UNDS as an extended arm of their own development activities, picking and discarding items without making any effort to hold the organization together (Hybsier, 2015, p. 9). The other concept is that of providing the UNDS with the kind of mandates, funding, capacities and neutrality that are necessary to reap the benefits of multilateral cooperation. In a recent conference paper, Jones and Kharas captured these different philosophies by distinguishing 'consumption-based' and 'investment-oriented' models of the UNDS. 'Consumers' of the UNDS look for short-term gains in their narrow self-interest; 'investors' see the UNDS as a long-term project that is about creating the kind of institutions necessary to benefit the common good (Jones & Kharas, 2016).

Suggested reform options

Member States should prioritize consideration of a number of reform options if they want to 'invest' in the UNDS and make it politically sustainable. Some of these options are already being discussed in the ECOSOC Dialogue, others are more novel. They all aim to transcend the political differences discussed in this paper and move the UNDS in the strategic direction described above.

(a) Regarding the UN's multilateral leadership role:

- The UNDS's role as a norm- and standard-setter must be strengthened, which requires stepping up its convening and knowledge-broker functions. In the longer-term, operational activities should be concentrated in LDCs and crisis-affected states.
- Linkages with the Bretton Woods Institutions and other international financial institutions should be reinforced in order to better link development with financing. The GA and ECOSOC should exploit their legal and political potential for coordinating with the Bretton Woods Institutions.
- Non-state actors from civil society and others carefully chosen from the private sector should be included. They can play an important role in providing advice, monitoring and innovation. One concrete option would be to set up advisory boards associated with Executive Boards.
- A framework for partnerships should be created with well-defined standards that ensure partnerships are in line with the UNDS's comparative advantages, are efficient and effective, transparent and accountable, and serve the purposes and reflect the values of the UN.
- More equal representation should be assured on Executive Boards, where seats should be assigned on the basis of equitable geographic representation, as well as for senior positions within the UNDS, with the aim of boosting the global South's ownership.

(b) Cross-border, regional, and global challenges:

- A mandate and capacity for monitoring, and possibly an early warning function, should be created. While conventional SDG monitoring takes place mostly in the High-level Political Forum, the UNDS should focus on cross-border, regional and global risks, especially those that are not yet known or properly understood. As the guardians of

certain topical issues, all operationally active UNDS entities should publish yearly analyses of their risks.

- The UNDS's role in knowledge production and management should be enhanced. Each entity should have a 'Chief Scientific Adviser' who is adequately resourced. This would facilitate contact with the scientific community and rally Member States around pressing problems. The Chief Scientific Advisers should participate in relevant sessions of the Executive Boards.
- Political and expert space to exchange knowledge and for joint strategic planning should be created. F&Ps/SAs should become conveners of functional commissions. Experience suggests that temporary and narrowly focused thematic groups of experts and state representatives are more successful in creating solutions than all-purpose gatherings.

(c) Greater autonomy and centralization:

- A central 'Development Commission' led by a 'High Commissioner for Sustainable Development', who is responsible for managing the UNDS based on strategic guidance from the GA and ECOSOC, should be established. The Development Commission could be based on the UNDG, whose administrative capacities would need to be significantly strengthened. It should be a legal entity.
- The Development Commission's mandates would include drafting a system-wide budget, developing a joint human resource system, harmonizing business standards, reviewing the F&Ps/SAs' mandates and managing the Resident Coordinator system.
- A mechanism of assessed contributions for funding the Development Commission should be devised, ideally as part of the UN's regular budget, or, alternatively, independent of it. This is essential to safeguard the Development Commission's independence and neutrality.
- ECOSOC should be strengthened or a new system-wide 'Sustainable Development Board' should be created to reinforce intergovernmental oversight. This would constitute a sort of grand bargain in which the system's greater autonomy accompanies increased accountability – not to individual donors, but to a multilateral board.
- UNDS entities should be merged selectively. To reduce the internal competition and make the UNDS less support- and more demand-driven, some UNDS entities should be merged following a comprehensive review of mandates. Alternatively, only the Executive Boards would be merged to consolidate lines of accountability.

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