



ARTICLE 12 - JIU60

JIU reviews related to the development-oriented initiatives of the United Nations system

This article is part of a series commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations system highlighting its mandate, evolution and contribution to the United Nations system over the last six decades.

“Effective development requires the United Nations system to work in a coordinated, evidence-based and accountable manner. Through its reviews and recommendations, the JIU has helped identify practical ways to strengthen that collective effort and better support progress towards sustainable development”



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As the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) marks its 60th anniversary, it is worth reflecting on how six decades of independent system-wide oversight have helped strengthen the development pillar of the United Nations. Achieving sustainable development requires a UN system that is coordinated, effective and responsive to the diverse challenges facing countries around the world. Through its reviews and recommendations, the JIU has identified systemic challenges, highlighted good practices and promoted reforms to improve how United Nations organizations support development. Many of the governance, coordination and accountability issues identified in JIU reviews anticipated challenges that continue to shape discussions on UN reform today, including under the UN80 initiative.

JIU contributions at a glance

Drawing on its unique system-wide mandate, the JIU has examined development challenges that cut across multiple UN organizations. Its comparative perspective has enabled it to identify common trends, good practices and opportunities for greater harmonization throughout the system. Over the past 25 years, JIU reviews have addressed topics including:

- Improving support for least developed, landlocked and small island developing countries.
- Promoting more coherent United Nations support to Africa.
- Strengthening national statistical capacities and the use of data for policymaking.

- Encouraging South-South and triangular cooperation.
- Enhancing evaluation and accountability frameworks for country-level development cooperation.
- Enhancing approaches to private-sector partnerships and policy research.
- Examining the United Nations system's response to development-related health challenges, including HIV/AIDS.

Taken together, these reviews demonstrate how independent oversight contributes to fostering institutional learning and strengthening coherence across the UN development system.

Supporting countries in special situations

Considerable efforts have been expended by the JIU on countries facing particular structural vulnerabilities, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs). By examining these challenges across multiple organizations, the JIU identified systemic gaps and recommended more coherent responses than could have been achieved through organization-specific oversight alone.

Support for LLDCs (2021): In its review of UN system support for LLDCs, the JIU highlighted the challenges faced by countries without direct access to the sea, including high transport costs and limited access to international markets. The review found that support was often fragmented and constrained by insufficient data. To strengthen implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, it recommended clearer institutional accountability and stronger results-based frameworks to measure progress.

Support for SIDS (2015, 2016): Through a series of reviews, the JIU examined how effectively the UN system supports SIDS in implementing the SAMOA Pathway and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. The reviews highlighted the particular vulnerabilities of many island nations, including climate change, disaster risks and limited institutional capacity.

They called for more coherent system-wide support, financing arrangements better suited to SIDS realities and stronger accountability mechanisms to reduce administrative burdens and improve development outcomes.

Strengthening system-wide coordination and coherence

Several JIU reviews have focused on improving the coherence of the UN development system by clarifying institutional responsibilities, reducing fragmentation and strengthening coordination among organizations. Well before these issues gained renewed prominence in current reform discussions, the JIU highlighted the importance of clear governance arrangements and well-defined institutional roles.

Implementation of the principle of mutual recognition within the UN system (2024): The review highlighted mutual recognition as a key enabler of a more coherent, effective and integrated UN development system, supporting collective action and improved delivery of results for Member States and the SDGs. It found that while there have been advances in areas such as common business operations and inter-agency collaboration, system-wide efficiency is impeded by institutional fragmentation, inconsistent operational practices and limited policy harmonization. It recommended strengthening governance, accountability and coordination mechanisms to expand the use of mutual recognition across procurement, human resources, finance, ICT and administrative services.

Cooperation among UN Regional Commissions (2015): A review of cooperation among the five UN regional commissions found that, although the commissions were uniquely positioned to connect global and national development processes, existing cooperation mechanisms were not sufficiently systematic. This sometimes resulted in overlap and duplication. To strengthen synergies, the report recommended a common online platform for knowledge management and advocacy, as well as annual analytical reporting to the General Assembly and ECOSOC.

UN system support to Africa (2009): A review on how effectively the UN system coordinated its support to Africa found that overlapping mandates and programmes often resulted in fragmented efforts and weakened coordination among institutions supporting Africa. The review highlighted challenges relating to leadership, accountability and communication and recommended a clearer division of labour, stronger strategic coordination and closer alignment of planning and budgeting processes.

National execution (NEX) of technical cooperation projects (2008): The review assessed the effectiveness of NEX as a means of strengthening national ownership and self-reliance.

It identified geographic imbalances in expenditure and limitations in national auditing and evaluation capacities. To address these issues, the report called for greater investment in national capacity-building while strengthening the roles of Resident Coordinators and regional coordination mechanisms

These reviews point to a common lesson: effective development depends on strong governance, institutional coordination, evidence-based decision-making and robust accountability mechanisms. They also demonstrate the value of the JIU's system-wide perspective in helping organizations learn from one another and identify solutions to shared challenges. This emphasis on learning and improvement has also informed the JIU's work on evidence and data.

Strengthening evidence for development

Several JIU reviews have examined how the United Nations system generates, uses and learns from knowledge and data to improve decision-making and accountability.

Policy research uptake (2018): The JIU's review highlighted the important role of research in advancing the SDGs. It found that much of the expertise informing flagship UN publications originated from institutions in developed countries and recommended broader inclusion of researchers from the Global South. The review also called for a system-wide policy on open access to data and research outputs.

Meta-evaluation of UNDAF evaluations (2016): UN Development Assistance Frameworks served as a central mechanism for coordinating development support at the country level before being succeeded by the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks in 2019. The JIU's meta-evaluation of UNDAF evaluations found significant shortcomings in evaluation coverage and methodology. Many programme countries did not complete evaluations in line with established guidance, while existing assessments often struggled to demonstrate links between UN activities and measurable development outcomes. The review reinforced the importance of rigorous evaluation for organizational learning and continuous improvement and recommended stronger Member State engagement, greater accountability for Resident Coordinators and more robust evaluation approaches.

Strengthening national statistical capacities (2016): Reliable data are essential for effective policymaking and accountability. Recognizing this, the JIU assessed how the UN development system supports national statistical capacities and found that while the UN system had contributed significantly to data production and international statistical standards, support at the country level often remained fragmented.

The review emphasized the need to move beyond data collection and place greater focus on helping governments use statistics to inform policy decisions and monitor development progress. It also recommended making statistical capacity development a strategic priority across the UN system

Together, these reviews highlighted the growing importance of knowledge, evidence and innovation in effective development cooperation. Beyond strengthening evidence, the JIU has also examined how broader social and economic priorities can be more effectively integrated into development efforts.

Furthering resilient and inclusive development

The JIU has reviewed how the United Nations integrates cross-cutting development priorities into its work, recognizing that sustainable development requires coordinated action across social and economic dimensions.

Mainstreaming decent work and productive employment (2015): The JIU's review of efforts to promote decent work and productive employment found that while decent work was widely recognized as an important objective, awareness and implementation varied considerably across organizations. The review concluded that decent work was often addressed at the country level but had not yet been fully embraced as a system-wide priority. The report recommended stronger leadership and coordination to ensure employment considerations are consistently reflected in sustainable development efforts.

Combating HIV/AIDS (2007): The review of progress towards Millennium Development Goal 6 found that efforts to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS were struggling to keep pace with new infections. It identified weaknesses in governance and coordination and recommended stronger leadership, clearer institutional roles and greater support for nationally owned strategies that integrated HIV services into broader health systems.

Together, these reviews demonstrate how the JIU has helped promote more integrated and people-centred approaches to development by highlighting the institutional conditions needed to translate global commitments into meaningful results.

Partnerships, cooperation and innovation

Achieving sustainable development requires collaboration that extends beyond individual organizations. Recognizing this, the JIU has examined how partnerships, knowledge sharing and innovative forms of cooperation can strengthen collective action across the United Nations system.

Advancing South-South and triangular cooperation (2011, 2018): The JIU has long emphasized the importance of cooperation among developing countries as a means of accelerating development progress.

A 2011 review found that although South-South and triangular cooperation was expanding across the UN system, a lack of common definitions and institutional arrangements limited its effectiveness. A follow-up review in 2018 noted important progress, including dedicated coordination mechanisms and clearer operational guidance. However, resource constraints and limited strategic investment continued to hinder broader advances. The JIU therefore called for stronger institutional commitment and dedicated funding to support these forms of cooperation

Private sector partnership (2017): As the 2030 Agenda encouraged new approaches to development, the JIU examined how the UN system engages with the private sector. The review found that such partnerships were increasingly viewed not only as sources of funding but also as vehicles for innovation and shared problem-solving. At the same time, it identified weaknesses in accountability and coordination and recommended stronger system-wide approaches to partnership management. Effective partnerships, the review concluded, require sound governance, clear accountability, and appropriate risk management.

Engaging civil society organizations (CSOs) (2002): The JIU's assessment of CSO's involvement in UN technical cooperation activities found that they had evolved from beneficiaries to active partners in technical cooperation activities. However, the review also identified the absence of a structured framework for collaboration, leading to inconsistent engagement and accountability gaps. It recommended integrating CSOs throughout programme planning processes and strengthening training for both local organizations and UN staff to support more effective partnerships.

Taken together, these reviews demonstrate that effective partnerships and innovative forms of cooperation require clear governance, shared accountability and sustained institutional commitment to translate collective efforts into tangible development results.

Looking ahead

The JIU's reviews over the past quarter century convey a consistent message: sustainable development outcomes depend on effective coordination, strong governance, reliable evidence and robust accountability mechanisms across the UN system. Whether examining support for vulnerable countries, data and statistics, partnerships or South-South cooperation, the Unit's findings have repeatedly highlighted the need to move beyond fragmented approaches and towards more integrated solutions. Through its system-wide reviews, the JIU has also supported institutional learning by helping organizations draw on one another's experiences and good practices

As the international community looks beyond 2030 and considers the future of global development cooperation, many of the issues examined by the JIU remain highly relevant. Fiscal pressures, complex global challenges and growing expectations for impact place an even greater premium on coherent, evidence-based action across the United Nations system.

As discussions on reform continue under initiatives such as UN80, lessons from decades of JIU reviews offer valuable insights into how stronger governance, improved coordination and greater accountability can enhance the effectiveness of the development pillar.

In this context, the JIU's role in generating lessons, promoting accountability and identifying opportunities for improvement will remain an important contribution to strengthening the development-oriented initiatives of the United Nations system. The impact of this work ultimately depends on the implementation of the Unit's recommendations by executive heads and governing bodies, ensuring that oversight findings translate into meaningful institutional improvements.

Year	Review title	Reference
Supporting countries in special situations		
2021	Review of United Nations System Support for Landlocked Developing Countries to Implement the Vienna Programme of Action	JIU/REP/2021/2
2016	Comprehensive Review of United Nations System Support for Small Island Developing States: Final Findings	JIU/REP/2016/7
2016	Comprehensive Review of United Nations System Support for Small Island Developing States: Initial Findings	JIU/REP/2016/3
2015	Recommendations to the General Assembly of the United Nations for the determination of parameters for a comprehensive review of United Nations System support for small island developing States	JIU/REP/2015/2
Strengthening system-wide coordination and coherence		
2024	Review of the implementation of the principle of mutual recognition within the United Nations system	JIU/REP/2024/4
2015	Cooperation among the United Nations Regional Commissions	JIU/REP/2015/3
2009	Towards more coherent United Nations system support to Africa	JIU/REP/2009/5
2008	National execution of technical cooperation projects	JIU/REP/2008/4
Strengthening evidence for development		
2018	Strengthening Policy Research Uptake in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	JIU/REP/2018/7
2016	Meta-Evaluation and Synthesis of United Nations Development Assistance Framework Evaluations, with a particular focus on Poverty Eradication	JIU/REP/2016/6
2016	Evaluation Of the Contribution of the UN Development System to Strengthening National Capacities for Statistical Analysis and Data Collection to Support the achievement of the MDGs and other Internationally Agreed Goals	JIU/REP/2016/5
Furthering resilient and inclusive development		
2015	Evaluation of mainstreaming of full and productive employment and decent work by the United Nations system organizations	JIU/REP/2015/2
2007	Review of the progress made by the United Nations system organizations in achieving the Millennium Development Goal 6, target 7 to combat HIV/AIDS	JIU/REP/2007/12
Partnerships, cooperation and innovation		
2018	Progress Report on the Recommendations Contained in the Review of South-South and Triangular Cooperation in the United Nations System	JIU/REP/2018/2
2017	UN-Private Sector Partnerships in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	JIU/REP/2017/8
2011	South-south and triangular cooperation in the United Nations system	JIU/REP/2011/3
2002	Involvement of civil society organizations other than NGOs and the private sector in technical cooperation activities: Experiences and prospects of the United Nations system	JIU/REP/2002/1