



United Nations University
Strategic Plan 2015–2019

Our commitment is to research excellence in the service of the debate and development of policy within the United Nations system and more widely.

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Organization of the Strategic Plan

Section I of this document presents the UNU mission and focus over the next five-year period. The main elements of institutional reform are summarized in Section II. Section III presents the research priorities for the coming five years, while Section IV explores UNU's thematic programming and future institutional development. Section V discusses the implementation of the strategic vision over the next quinquennium, as well as monitoring mechanisms.

Overview of the Strategic Plan 2015-2019

The United Nations University (UNU) underwent a change in leadership in March 2013 when Dr. David Malone, former President of the International Development Research Centre, took office as the University's sixth Rector.¹

Early in his tenure, encouraged by the Secretary-General and the UNU Council, the Rector undertook a critical future-oriented re-appraisal of the University's objectives and business operations, and initiated a University-wide discussion on the priorities of UNU. This discussion elicited new ideas on possible modalities of research, capacity building, policy development and knowledge translation activities that could be undertaken by the UN University.

The five-year vision laid out in the Strategic Plan 2015-2019 is the culmination of this year-long consultation process with UNU institute directors and the University's governing Council. The Plan affirms the commitment of the University's various entities to work with common purpose over the next five years to ensure that UNU research occupies a central place in the UN policymaker's toolkit, informing decision-making on at least several key issues. By doing so, and having found a market for its ideas, UNU may also become more relevant in the wider world of higher education and intellectual endeavor.

Managing change for excellence

The Strategic Plan 2015-2019 sets out a number of institutional reforms. Chief among these is an emphasis on management excellence at every level of the University's operations. An efficient and responsive system of institutional governance will be key to achieving this goal. Here, tribute is due to previous generations of UNU leaders, who established and reinforced a culture of sound management not universally observed in all international organizations.

In April 2013, UNU Council members reviewed the existing governance structure of UNU and determined that in order for it to fulfill the required strategic oversight function for the University, it would need to meet more frequently and to remain in closer contact with the University authorities in order to oversee more effectively the University's programmes and activities. The Council proposed that it should hold two sessions each year and reduce the number of appointed members so that the overall cost of Council sessions in a fiscal year would remain roughly the same.

On 20 December 2013, at its 68th session, the UN General Assembly endorsed this proposal and approved amendments to paragraphs 1 and 3 of article IV of the UNU Charter (A/RES/68/236), reducing the number of appointed members of the UNU Council from 24 to 12.

The scientific advisory boards and committees of UNU research institutes have also been strengthened

A strategic plan from the bottom up

UNU is a constellation of 14 research institutes and some free-standing programmes working in close collaboration under the guidance of a central headquarters in Tokyo, Japan. As the University expanded over its 40 years of operations, a number of different business and research models emerged, a notable strength of the UNU.

The approach proposed in the Strategic Plan 2015-2019 is constructed on a positive appreciation of the University's diversity. The vision and recommendations set out in this Strategic Plan flow from extensive consultation with the directors of UNU research institutes and the UNU Council and represent a common vision for the future work of the UNU. It is also helpfully influenced by a thoughtful, independent evaluation of UNU during the years 2003-2012.

¹ The Rector is the chief executive of the University and in this capacity, he/she sets the overall strategic directions; oversees partnerships, institutional development, and executive recruitments; and, participates in a range of governance mechanisms aimed at evaluating and steering the work of the University. As a UN official with the rank of under-secretary-general, the Rector also serves as a bridge to some of the UN's most senior consultative and coordinating mechanisms, such as the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, in which the executive heads of the IMF, World Bank and WTO also sit. The Secretary-General also occasionally asks the Rector to lead on non-UNU institutional tasks.

by making clearer their role in providing active guidance and support to the institutes they advise, including on management issues. Especially important will be the commitment of boards and committees to championing UNU research in their own expert networks, in addition to exploring with institute directors new ways of applying UNU research expertise to persistent and emerging challenges relevant to the United Nations in their respective thematic areas of work.

Renewed attention has been devoted to human resources management since 2013. An updated personnel policy was put in place, leading to a significant renewal of human resources throughout the UNU system. Between 2013 and 2014, a number of new researchers and thematic experts joined UNU, and new teams were assigned to our offices at the United Nations in New York and at UNESCO in Paris.

Notably, through the creation of the UNU's Centre for Policy Research (based in Tokyo), a new cadre of talent succeeded in quickly demonstrating that the University is now in a much stronger position to deliver authoritative research and policy advice, particularly in the areas of peace, security and global development, where the University had become less visible in recent years.

However, UNU's bid for greater relevance and impact rests not only on new staff and structures and a strong focus on management, but equally on more rigorous strategic planning across UNU and a pro-active engagement with policy.

Existing UNU institutes are overhauling their approaches to fund-raising, eschewing small grants in favour of fewer, but larger subventions in order to implement more ambitious research projects. The Strategic Plan 2015-2019 also introduces a new benchmark financing model for new research operations, ensuring that any new research entity created within the UNU system is established with sufficient funding to ensure its financial sustainability over the medium- and long-term.

On the research front, the Strategic Plan 2015-2019 proposes a shift in the way UNU approaches the design of its research programmes and the dissemination of its findings.

A major pillar of the strategic plan for 2015-2019 coalesces around the University's plan to couple new, innovative research programming with the needs of policy-makers. UNU institutes are key in this endeavor and will be tasked with designing and implementing research programmes that have high import potential for policy discussions. These programmes will integrate medium-term 'horizon' issues, where UNU is able to identify a critical gap in policy expertise on an emergent theme of importance, as well as research projects that deliver insights on immediate policy challenges.

UNU Institutes will strengthen efforts to ensure that both research findings and UNU researchers are visible and accessible to stakeholder groups around the world. Toward this end, UNU research personnel will be encouraged actively to seek out key policy circles, generating greater awareness of UNU's policy development capacities, all the while making available evidence, insight and their individual expertise to policymakers.

I. UNU Mission

The UN University's mission is to contribute, through collaborative research and education, dissemination, and advisory services, to efforts to resolve the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare that are the concern of the United Nations, its Peoples and Member States.

The UNU is mandated to serve a number of constituencies. Over the years, its focus has on occasion narrowed in order to emphasize a specific group of stakeholders. This was the case, for instance, in the Strategic Plan 2010-2014, where a greater emphasis was given to a new thrust on postgraduate education and on continuing programming in capacity development.

Between 2008 and 2013, the University undertook an institution-wide effort to transition UNU's long-standing capacity-development activities into full-fledged postgraduate degree programmes. The concentration of resources in this pursuit allowed the University to make quick inroads in a highly competitive market.

In the Netherlands, for example, the UNU/Maastricht University double M.Sc. programme in Public Policy and Human Development was ranked number one in the category of Political Science and Public Administration, adding to the success of that Institute's internationally renowned joint doctoral programme with Maastricht University.² In Japan, the University of Tokyo, one of Japan's most distinguished universities and a globally recognized leader in science and technology, as of 2013 has partnered with the UNU to develop a joint diploma programme complementing our M.Sc. degree aimed at training future leaders in the area of sustainability science. In Germany, the Technical University of Dresden, the largest university in Saxony and recently designated by the German federal and state governments as a university of excellence, is partnering with UNU to offer an innovative joint doctoral programme on the integrated management of water, soil and waste. And in Bonn, UNU has developed an entirely new, fully accredited joint M.Sc. degree programme with the University of Bonn, combining the areas of geography, environmental change, and human security.

Gradually, however, the UNU Council became aware of an imbalance between UNU's education/capacity-development activities and its policy-oriented research activities, the former having undermined to a degree the latter. Efforts to become a leader in specific fields of postgraduate education, while meeting with some success, hampered the University's ability to contribute to some of the critical debates shaping the future of the United Nations and more specifically, those of Member States.

Over the next five years, the University's programme of work will be restructured to focus on this critical dimension of its mission. Specifically, the UNU will focus on issues of imminent concern to the United Nations: political uncertainty and instability; the Post-2015 Development Agenda; as well as, new and evolving peace, security, environmental and health crises.

UNU will continue to experiment with postgraduate programmes, to the extent that institutes wish to do so, retaining only those models that work best for our students, an exceptionally diverse, talented and committed cohort to date. UNU recognizes that its alumni are an asset to the University and collectively represent an important source of institutional strength.

² According to the 2014 *Keuzegids Masters*.

II. Institutional Change

The new operating environment

The global context in which the University operates today is fundamentally different from the climate of nearly four decades ago, when its research operations first got underway. The world's leaders are being called on to address a host of new challenges, many at a planetary scale. From pandemic health threats, to concerns over cybersecurity and the warming climate, decision makers must reckon with the ascendance of new challenges, often in hybrid policy fields.

Yet, despite the growing scale and complexity of these challenges, funding for development research continues to come under pressure as funding allocations are realigned to meet domestic priorities. In some cases, this has translated into a fatigue in hosting UN entities and in providing them with financial support. There is, indeed, little room for complacency among research organizations with a vocation in international development.

UNU has been very fortunate to be championed and hosted by Japan, which set it on a track to financial autonomy with a generous endowment gift of \$100 million in 1973. Japan continues to serve as an excellent host country, providing UNU with a fine building in the heart of Tokyo. Due mainly to contributions by other UNU host governments, the endowment has grown to \$360 million as of October 2014. During the 2012-13 biennium, it was possible, beyond income from the endowment, to raise an additional \$89.3 million from various host governments and donors for academic programming and operational expenses.

However, as Japan's circumstances have changed, we have learned that we can no longer rely as heavily on it for financial support as was once the case for core UNU Headquarters functions. While Japan remains very generous with programme funding on topics of interest to it, its new circumstances may bring about stresses and unforeseen changes in years ahead.

Similarly, the viability of each UNU institute depends critically on the level of capital and recurrent funding made available by its host country or countries. A number of UNU institutes have been established solely on the basis of government pledges of annual core funding, which in many cases has begun to decrease after the initial period of five to eight years. Without capital contributions to offer a secure safety net, several UNU institutes face challenges to their overall financial stability. There is a clear and pressing need to revisit this business model.

To ensure success in this new environment, UNU is moving away from the business and research models developed decades ago. Indeed, UNU institutes began reorienting their business operations in the earliest stages of the strategic planning process to address some of the key messages emanating from the UNU Council and the UNU Rectorate; these include: renewed efforts to develop policy linkages with the UN system; the development of larger and more ambitious research projects, and re-energized fund-raising plans. These changes are part of a broader set of institutional changes that center on several specific poles of the UNU's operations.

The institutional approach proposed in the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan charts a new course for the University that will see it realize its potential as an agile player in the research and policy development arenas, and in so doing broaden its community of donors and supporters.

Key institutional changes

(i) Strengthening management

The UNU Rectorate brings together the University's senior management at the UNU Centre in Tokyo and the Office of the Vice-Rector in Bonn, Germany. The Rectorate has traditionally played a policy-setting role for the University. Going forward, the role of the Rectorate will be redefined to encourage autonomy in management and planning at the institute level, limiting the role of the Rectorate in overseeing daily research and teaching activities. Henceforth, it will focus primarily on providing strategic guidance to institute directors and simultaneously challenging them to meet new benchmarks in research excellence, management, and entrepreneurship.

This coincides with efforts to empower institute advisory boards and committees to take a more active role in the oversight and strategic orientation of UNU institutes. Advisory boards and committees will now play an important role in identifying and selecting new institute directors. Additionally, they will be tasked with a stronger oversight role, ensuring that research programming yields projects sufficiently ambitious in scope, which integrate realistic fund-raising benchmarks and policy impact goals.

The specialist expertise and strategic guidance of board/committee members will be made more regularly available to UNU institute directors by encouraging communications beyond those relating to regularly scheduled meetings. The Rectorate will closely monitor the composition of advisory boards and committees so as to emphasize geographic, age and gender diversity. Particular attention will be devoted to appointing younger board/committee members who are actively engaged in the local and international research communities on emerging issues.

Key institutional changes

- (i) Strengthening management
- (ii) Focus on sustainable growth
- (iii) Streamlining partnerships

UNU is also redoubling its efforts to promote specific gender equality goals in recruitment. From 2015, the University will introduce new measures to ensure that more women are represented in senior positions, especially Director-level positions and above. Toward this end, all shortlists for senior level positions will henceforth include at least one female candidate with the aim of achieving a minimum of 30 percent female representation amongst UNU institute directors within eight years. UNU will also continue its practice of appointing distinguished female scientists and policy experts to the UNU Council, its highest governing body.

Where UNU institutes experience management dysfunction or other institutional problems, the Rectorate, having consulted with the advisory boards/committees, will continue to be both supportive and energetic in bringing about those changes, sometimes extensive ones, required to achieve positive outcomes. Such challenges, which should remain rare, require considerable time and care, but cannot be ignored, as this would only lead to worse results.

Our communications programme has become more focused, building on a new website that has worked quite well for us. As well, more resources are being devoted to innovative means of messaging on our website and more generally, and to activities which can raise our (limited) profile in Tokyo.

(ii) Focus on sustainable growth

The existing array of UNU institutes has resulted largely from organic growth since 1984, when UNU's first research institute, UNU-WIDER, was established in Helsinki. Since March 2013, the Rectorate has been channeling proposals for new UNU institutes within one of two structural models, operating units and research institutes, each with its respective set of financial requirements.

Operating units are smaller academic units to be established primarily as precursors to UNU institutes. The financial requirements for their establishment include a minimum of five years of assured annual

core funding, usually at least \$1.0 million per year, and an initial capital contribution to be paid into the UNU Endowment Fund for the operating unit. Having such a capital contribution, which can be paid over a number of years, helps to facilitate longer-term planning for the operating unit; it would also cover any outstanding liabilities should the initial core funding not be renewed.

The second channel relates to full-fledged UNU institutes, which can be created when an operating unit is upgraded through enhanced funding or when established directly by the UNU Council, on the basis of core and capital funding of a higher magnitude.

For the transition to a full-fledged institute or for the direct establishment of a UNU institute, a commitment of at least five years of annual core funding at a level requisite with the size of the research operations, usually at least \$2.0 million per year, is required. In addition, a capital funding contribution is to be paid into the UNU Endowment Fund over a number of years, with income reserved for the operation of the research institute. For both operating units and institutes, suitable premises, usually located on the campus of an existing local university, and coverage of the basic running costs, are required.

UNU will remain supportive of existing Operating Units in the developing world, so long as they remain financially viable and retain the support of their host countries.

Over the past few years, UNU steadily expanded its presence and programming in Africa, as a result of a determined strategy to lend priority to the continent. UNU's newest institute, the UNU Institute for Sustainable Development (UNU-IRADDA), was established in Francophone West-Africa and has a research mandate that gives predominance to research on the continent. However, several regions remain underrepresented in the UNU system and will receive renewed attention over the period 2015-2019. Following consultations with the UNU Council, several regions were identified where the University might seek to establish new research entities:

- The Gulf region
- Latin America (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay)
- Asia (China and India)

(iii) Streamlining partnerships

As a result of UNU's prior emphasis on networked research and capacity development, the University boasts a diverse web of collaborators, supporters and associated affiliates. For the most part, these associations and partnerships have proved beneficial, providing the UNU with varied means for broadcasting research outputs further than the University's resources might normally allow. This in turn has attracted larger numbers of researchers of high repute, and has helped to identify new sources of funding.

However, not all partnerships have been equally successful. Some have benefitted UNU partners to a much greater extent than they have contributed to UNU core objectives. Further, such partnerships have often proven financially unstable. Moving forward, the emphasis will be on quality partnerships; demonstrably meaningful collaborations with top academic institutions or researchers for mutual benefit. These partnerships will be outcome-oriented and will undergo regular review to ensure they further the research objectives of the University.

In many cases, it will be to the advantage of UNU institutes to work more closely with nearby top-quality universities. This approach is being applied successfully in several locations, already. In Bonn, the UNU Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) enjoys a close collaborative relationship with the University of Bonn, cooperating in both research and higher-education activities. Similarly, the UNU Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT) has a

long-standing partnership across several departments within Maastricht University. This collaboration has created a dynamic research environment that sees regular research collaborations with faculty from both institutions and that has greatly benefitted both in reputational terms. Similarly, UNU's newest institutes in Dresden (UNU-FLORES), Barcelona (UNU-GCM) and in Algeria (UNU-IRADDA) have adopted this as a core principle of their operations.

III. UNU Research, Postgraduate Education and Capacity Development

For forty years, UNU researchers have worked to shape public policy and find solutions to some of the most complex challenges faced by modern society. Today, UNU continues to be recognized as a world leader in a number of research areas.

UNU excels in producing focused research aimed at targeted audiences and debates. It does not operate as a full-service university, nor was it intended to do so. Rather, it operates as a specialized think tank: its research contributions defined by the unique vantage point it enjoys as a member of the United Nations system, combined with an uncompromising commitment to independent, high quality analysis.

UNU offers value-added analysis and a critical mass of experts to help shed light on issues which similarly interested bodies and sister agencies struggle to engage with from new, critical perspectives. Over the period 2015-2019, the University will focus its accumulated expertise on the needs of stakeholders at the United Nations and on research topics of special relevance to them.

The Rector's regular participation in the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and his presence on the advisory boards and committees of UNU institutes is a distinct advantage enjoyed by the UNU and means that the main concerns of the United Nations are able to reverberate in the UN University's key research planning groups.

Research excellence

The work of the UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) has led the field of development economics for several decades, having hosted and collaborated with the greatest minds in the area. The UNU Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT) has been similarly recognized for outstanding contributions in the economics of innovation.

From its base in Bonn, Germany, the UNU Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) has been providing technical advice to UN agencies and Member State delegations navigating climate change policy; helping decision-makers shape their response to the international treaties that will define international efforts to curb the negative effects of climate change in years to come.

Research Priorities

Over the coming five-year period the UN University will have two specific priorities relevant to its research activities: producing high-quality research and prioritizing policy-relevant research and advice. Strategies for pairing academic excellence and policy-relevant research will be the focus of discussions among UNU institutes in the annual meeting of directors of research institutes and programmes (CONDIR). These meetings will serve as a platform for sharing specific outreach and networking strategies, targeting the right level of policymaking, and identifying best practices in the formulation of evidence-based policy advice.

(i) UNU expertise and high-quality research

UNU institutes will be encouraged to continue on the trajectory of research excellence which has always been at the core of the UNU's mandate. However, greater efforts will be made to ensure visibility in leading academic journals and publishing houses. This should result in a reduction in the overall number of academic outputs in favor of fewer, more high-impact publications.

UNU researchers will also continue to be encouraged to work together across UNU institutes to leverage the varied 'in-house' expertise, thus increasing the likelihood of delivering a truly unique, multidisciplinary perspective in UNU research publications. UNU-GCM in Barcelona has already established a network among UNU institutes sharing an interest in its core fields of research, while also joining the wider Migration Group of the UN system alongside other international organizations, such as the IOM.

This in-house expertise is one of UNU's greatest assets. However, as the issues the University is called on to address change, so too must this roster of experts be renewed from time to time. In order to systematize this process of renewal, the UNU Council reaffirmed a personnel policy that calls for the rotation of academic and short-term contract personnel every six years and that of institute directors every eight years (after two terms). One of the first institutional reforms to be undertaken, it is now largely internalized and has helpfully led to the renewal of the University's research capacities in several key fields.

The policy will help institute directors plan effectively for changes in human resources while accommodating an evolving, agile, future-oriented research agenda, with staff of a highly competitive disposition. Exceptions to these rules, always driven by UNU programme needs, will remain rare and genuinely exceptional, as has been the case since mid-2013.

(ii) Prioritizing policy-relevant research and advice

The needs of policy-makers should serve as an orienting beacon for most UNU institutes, but its pull will be experienced differently across the University system. Owing to their different sizes, funding structures, and histories, not all UNU institutes can be expected to influence policy to the same degree. Some have been particularly successful in demonstrating strength in academic research and for these institutes, a quick, exaggerated course correction to refocus on the needs of UN policy-makers could sacrifice many years of careful research and planning. For such institutes, a mixed strategy is called for; one that sees a gradual move toward bridging their research portfolios to policy-making needs. However, aside from a few rare cases, the majority of new UNU research projects conceived should be able to demonstrate policy-relevance. Target audiences will be clearly identified from the outset and the United Nations will increasingly figure among these.

The active, entrepreneurial pursuit of new channels for UNU research in the UN system will be a continual challenge facing UNU institutes, but one the University is now well-structured to support. The UNU Rector is an active member of the CEB and in that capacity serves as a key conduit for policy insights to the senior most offices of the United Nations.

UNU institutes can also draw on the revitalized UNU Office in New York, and the recently established UNU Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR). The new policy and outreach team in New York is uniquely positioned to identify entry points to the UN and provide expert advice on engagement and communication strategies. Meanwhile, UNU-CPR will play a key role in ensuring that UNU can be immediately useful to policy-makers.

Likewise, UNU has redoubled its efforts to demonstrate its relevance to the UNESCO community in Paris, notably through kinetic policy seminars that have attracted large and influential audiences, relying on a talented new team at our UNESCO office to plan and implement our programming there with fairly limited resources.

Well-designed fund-raising plans will play a key part in the success of UNU research programmes, as resources directed toward research activities will need to be of a sufficient magnitude to ensure in-depth comprehensive analysis that takes into consideration the wider policy implications of research

findings. Small academic research projects aimed at very limited audiences, even those for which readily available research funding exists, will be avoided. Some policy development projects need not cost much, while others require significant funding. This factor, together with anticipated impact, will determine which ones can be funded.

For UNU research institutes, the process of linking and engagement is ultimately owned and driven by their research experts. Aided by the implementation of a more dynamic personnel policy, UNU expects it will be able to mobilize creative, and motivated researchers keen to make new inroads into United Nations policy-making hubs over the coming years.

Thematic programme of work 2015-2019

The possibility of research synergies between UNU institutes are greater when research efforts are directed toward fewer thematic areas. It was with this in mind that the UNU Council in 2013 endorsed narrowing the global UNU work programme from five overarching thematic clusters to three, recognizing that there are a number of cross-cutting research themes in the areas of science, technology, and innovation, which will need to be taken into account as will gender dimensions. UNU will nevertheless continue scanning the global agenda for emergent issues, not yet addressed and which lend themselves to niche research by the University.

Drawing on internal consultations over the last year, three following thematic clusters emerged as the principal themes for the 2015-2019 UNU work programme:

- Peace and governance
- Global development and inclusion
- Environment, climate and energy

In addition several new substantive areas of research suggest themselves, resources permitting. These could be pursued through the establishment of a new UNU institute dedicated to the theme, or through intra-institute collaboration. The themes include:

- Demography and migration
- Higher education policy

Teaching and capacity development

A key feature of the previous Strategic Plan (2011-2014) was an emphasis on teaching programmes at the postgraduate level. This emphasis will not be as pronounced in the University work programme going forward. Nevertheless, all UNU postgraduate degree programmes will receive support through the period 2015-2019, on the condition that they continue to be delivered at the highest level of quality. Preference will be given to developing degree programmes at the doctoral level, as it is recognized that they contribute and reinforce UNU research and UNU's mission to build capacity in developing countries. Similarly, programmes that include the participation and support of local university partners with reputations in research and teaching are more likely to be continued.

The accreditation of UNU degree programmes had been an obstacle for some time, as the University faced the challenge of engaging national education systems from within an international organization. Significant progress has been made in this regard and it is expected that by 2015, all postgraduate degree programmes at the master's level will hold internationally recognized accreditation.

Capacity-development activities outside of formalized degree programmes will also be measured against new standards of relevance and impact. The mere availability of funding for capacity-

development activities will not secure their place in the University's programme of work. Capacity development activities will have demonstrated that they bring added value to the UNU system, fit within the overall aims of the University, and do not consume resources that might otherwise be allocated to high-impact research and policy development. In order to consistently deliver the original, high quality research expected of it, the University may be required to give less priority to capacity development activities over time, implementing such activities only when clear value can be shown to accrue to UNU and its stakeholders. Further, we will favour capacity-development initiatives that can take place in developing countries.

IV. Implementation Plan

The Strategic Plan 2015-2019 sets out a number of institutional reforms relating to both management and research activities. Some of these measures have been quickly and successfully implemented, while others require a flexible approach and scaled implementation.

The Implementation Plan, below, explains where the need for flexibility may be greater and puts forward specific follow-up actions to accompany the remaining reform measures.

(i) Measuring influence and policy impact

The UNU has excelled at making technical contributions to different UN processes. This has been the case, in particular, where research on environmental governance, biodiversity, and climate change has been undertaken. However, the policy uptake enjoyed by these findings has often been uneven.

Influencing policy and making sure there is uptake of UNU research will be as much a process of dedicated research, as it will be creative entrepreneurship. UNU institutes—that is researchers, directors and their advisory boards and committees—should strategize and regularly discuss ways of bringing UNU research to light in key UN forums. This can involve nurturing new personal relationships with portfolio focal points and key policy figures. At the very least, it requires some knowledge of gatekeepers and key individuals controlling or contending with the policy files in the UNU institute's particular area of expertise. Requests for assistance from the United Nations system will be one key indicator of our perceived relevance.

A yearly stock-taking exercise will also help in determining whether a particular institute has been successful in influencing policy or mapping the potential avenues for influence. This will consist of presenting an overview of key figures/agencies with whom new relationships have established or will be established and describing how the UNU institute research relates to the relevant policy portfolio(s).

Evidence of UNU involvement in important UN policy processes (development, climate change, global security) will be a key indicator of success.

(ii) Benchmarking quality in research

Benchmarking of research and related indicators will need to be developed by individual institutes in dialogue with their advisory boards. Institutes and operating units are also expected to discuss with their advisory boards and committees fund-raising and publication benchmarks at their annual meetings. These benchmarks must reflect an entrepreneurial spirit and be sufficiently ambitious in scope. Directors of UNU institutes and programmes will also be invited to reflect on appropriate benchmarking measures at their annual gathering.

UNU institute advisory boards and committees play a key role in monitoring the quality of work emanating from institute research programmes. Going forward, advisory boards and committees will need to ensure that considerations of research quality feature centrally and in the earliest stages of project planning, i.e. when projects are framed and funding proposals prepared. It will be the responsibility of the institute advisory boards and committees to signal difficulties encountered in achieving the set benchmarks, along with proposals for addressing any shortcomings.

The Rectorate will undertake periodic reviews of project data collected in the UNU project management system (PELIKAN) to provide a second measure of feedback to UNU institutes and operating units. Donor and stakeholder perspectives will also be taken into account and will be important in shaping the outcome of such reviews.

(iii) Evaluation mechanisms and financial sustainability

As part of its quality assurance framework, UNU operating units and institutes will continue to be evaluated by external peers every four to five years. The terms of reference for such evaluations will include an assessment of the success of the operating unit/institute in securing its financial base, i.e., achieving at least modest growth, thereby assuring the overall financial viability of the unit for the future.

Risk analysis and risk management will remain important features of the Rectorate and Council's work, as they retain the responsibility for addressing management failures within institutes and programmes when they arise. The UNU Rectorate, in consultation with the UNU Council, must have the necessary wherewithal to close down existing operating units or institutes which are underperforming or have essentially met their initial substantive goals and objectives. We should not tolerate such units withering into irrelevance through poor quality research or inadequate funding (which are often inter-linked). In some cases, it should also be possible to re-orient or to re-start UNU institutes when a major revamping of its management and academic activities is necessary to fulfill its agreed mandate.

(iv) Managing partnerships

A few concrete actions are proposed to address dormant partnerships and to avoid entering into one-sided arrangements that offer no clear benefit to the UNU. A number of such partnerships have recently been brought to a close.

UNU will adopt a more disciplined and discerning approach to the establishment of new partnerships. These measures are to be internalized not only at UNU headquarters, which receives a number of solicitations for partnership and affiliation, but equally at the level of UNU operating units and institutes where unproductive collaborations are just as likely to draw away critical resources and attention from top quality research and programming.

An internal review of partnerships and affiliations is to be undertaken by UNU institutes and programmes after the adoption of the Strategic Plan. Attention must be paid to drawing a distinction between productive, valued relationships and those that are ancillary to the work programme and new strategic aims of the UNU. This information should be maintained in the Pelikan system and be available for review by the Rector and members of the advisory boards and committees.

Main Challenges

(v) Period of implementation

UNU institutes have sought to make significant changes in their operations in a short period of time in order to accommodate the strategic directions set by the University's management and governing Council in 2013-2014. It is essential that the resources invested in overhauling existing research and capacity development activities, not be made forfeit by introducing additional, large-scale reforms in the near future. The University will require 3-4 years for implementation of the proposed strategic directions measures without further, major changes to the University system. Results will not come overnight, but will, at best, compound over the next five years into a more credible track-record overall.

(vi) Budgetary constraints for the Office of the Rector

In recent years, UNU lacked the capacity to respond effectively to challenges in the areas of peace, security, and international development facing the United Nations and its agencies and programmes.

Recognizing the urgent need for an authoritative academic voice on many of these issues, the Office of the Rector was able to incubate a small research centre (UNU-CPR) at the UNU Headquarters with a team of policy development experts. The creation of UNU-CPR brings substantial innovation to the UNU's research and advisory capacities. However, creating and sustaining this Centre through its initial years of operation has and will continue to stress the budget of the Office of the Rector. The Office of the Rector expects to support this Centre until it develops the capacity to sustain itself through fund-raising and third party contributions. Its creation has been much welcomed in key UN Secretariat units.



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