

# The Future of the United Nations Development System



*A Global Perceptions Survey*

The FUNDS Project, Geneva  
[www.FutureUN.org](http://www.FutureUN.org)

April 2010

## Summary of findings

### Survey process

The large sample of respondents (3,266) is broadly representative of all regions and professions. Most of those to whom the survey was sent (over 20,000) have some knowledge or experience of the UN development system. The large majority of respondents (90%) are in developing countries, for whose interests the UN development system mainly works.

### The UN development system today

**Functions:** there are significant differences of perception between non-UN and UN respondents: the majority of respondents (except those in the UN) consider research and analysis to be the most important UN function; advocacy is rated low by most (except the UN).

**Agency effectiveness:** The highest rated are: UNICEF, WHO, UNDP, WFP, UNESCO, UNEP, FAO and UNAIDS. The lowest rated are: IMO, ICAO, ECE, UNWTO and UPU. The 'soft' sectors clearly do better than the 'hard' sectors, but the ratings are influenced by individual agency visibility (regulatory agencies like ITU, UPU and ICAO are least visible). The UN view of itself is similar but with a wider dispersion of ratings.

**Relevance of domain:** Health, education, social policy and gender issues are deemed to be the most effective areas of UN concern. Drug control, transportation, services and tourism are the least effective.

**Agency effectiveness and relevance:** When relevance and effectiveness are correlated, the most valuable agencies are perceived to be WHO, UNICEF and UNAIDS. The least valuable are UN WTO (tourism), IMO (shipping), ICAO (civil aviation), UPU (postal services) and some of the regional commissions.

**Factors of effectiveness:** respondents ranked three factors which are in descending order of importance: UN neutrality, staff competence and absence of alternatives to the UN. The UN respondents are the least convinced of the uniqueness of their services.

### The UN development system in 2025

**At the global level,** there is overwhelming support for NGO and private sector representation in UN agency governance and in changes in the mandates and functions of the system as a whole. Over 70% "agree" or "somewhat agree" that there should be fewer UN agencies by 2025. A similar proportion (68%) think that a single overall global head of the UN development system will be needed (similar to the UN Director General proposals from the 1950s). Views are mixed on whether UN salaries should be higher and whether there should be a single location for all agencies.

**At the country level,** there is overwhelming support (79%) for a single development system representative, similar to the unified country offices established in 1992 in the former Soviet Union, and for a single UN country programme (77%). Views are mixed on whether the UN development system should only be present in fragile and reconstructing states, and mostly negative on eliminating regional UN structures.

## Introduction

**This report is based on the preliminary analysis of 3,266 responses to a global perceptions survey undertaken in February and March 2010. The survey used a trilingual (En/Fr/Sp) questionnaire, which was developed by the Future of the United Nations Development System (FUNDS) project (<http://www.FutureUN.org>), with guidance and advice from a global polling company. It is one of the largest global surveys of the UN in recent years and is intended to provide indicators for long-term reform of the 30 agencies of the UN development system, and as a contribution to a review of global governance arrangements.**

**The analysis of the survey will be refined further to yield more detailed perceptions of the UN, especially with respect to specific regions and professional groups.**

**As the project proceeds, further surveys and analysis are envisaged at the individual country and regional levels.**

**The FUNDS project welcomes feedback on this preliminary report.**

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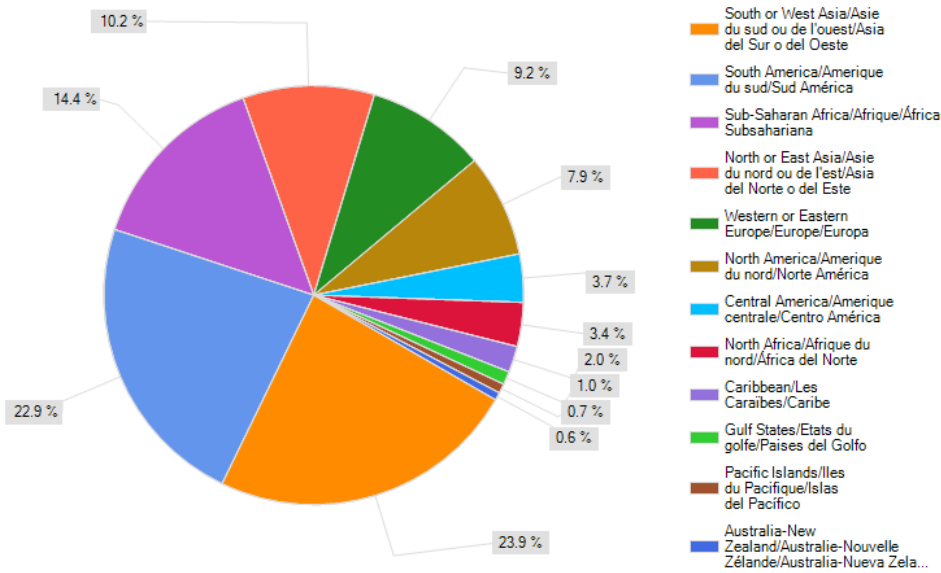
## Location of respondents

- **The largest numbers of respondents come from South and West Asia (24%) and South America (23%).**
- **The North:South split is 10:90, implying a strong representation of the UN programme countries.**

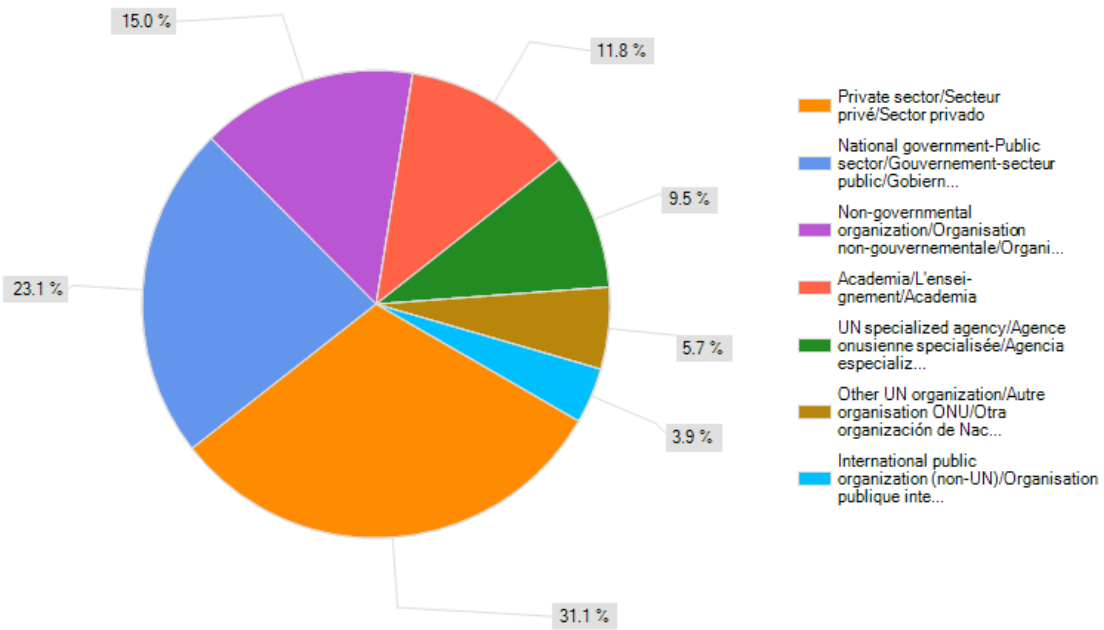
## Professions of respondents

- **Nearly a third of the respondents are from the private sector (31%); the next largest cohorts are Governments (23%), NGOs (15%) and Academia (12%).**
- **The UN (5%) and specialized agencies (10%) account for 15%.**

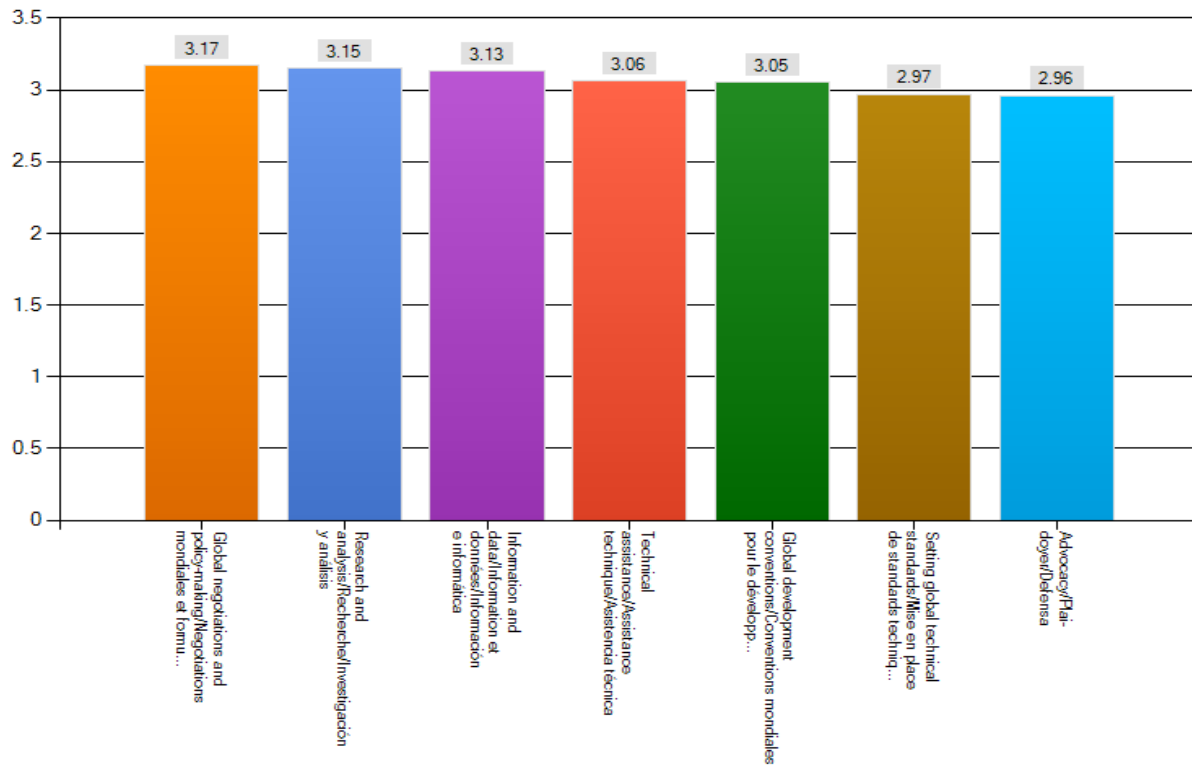
### Location of respondents



### Professions of respondents



### Importance of the functions of the UN development system



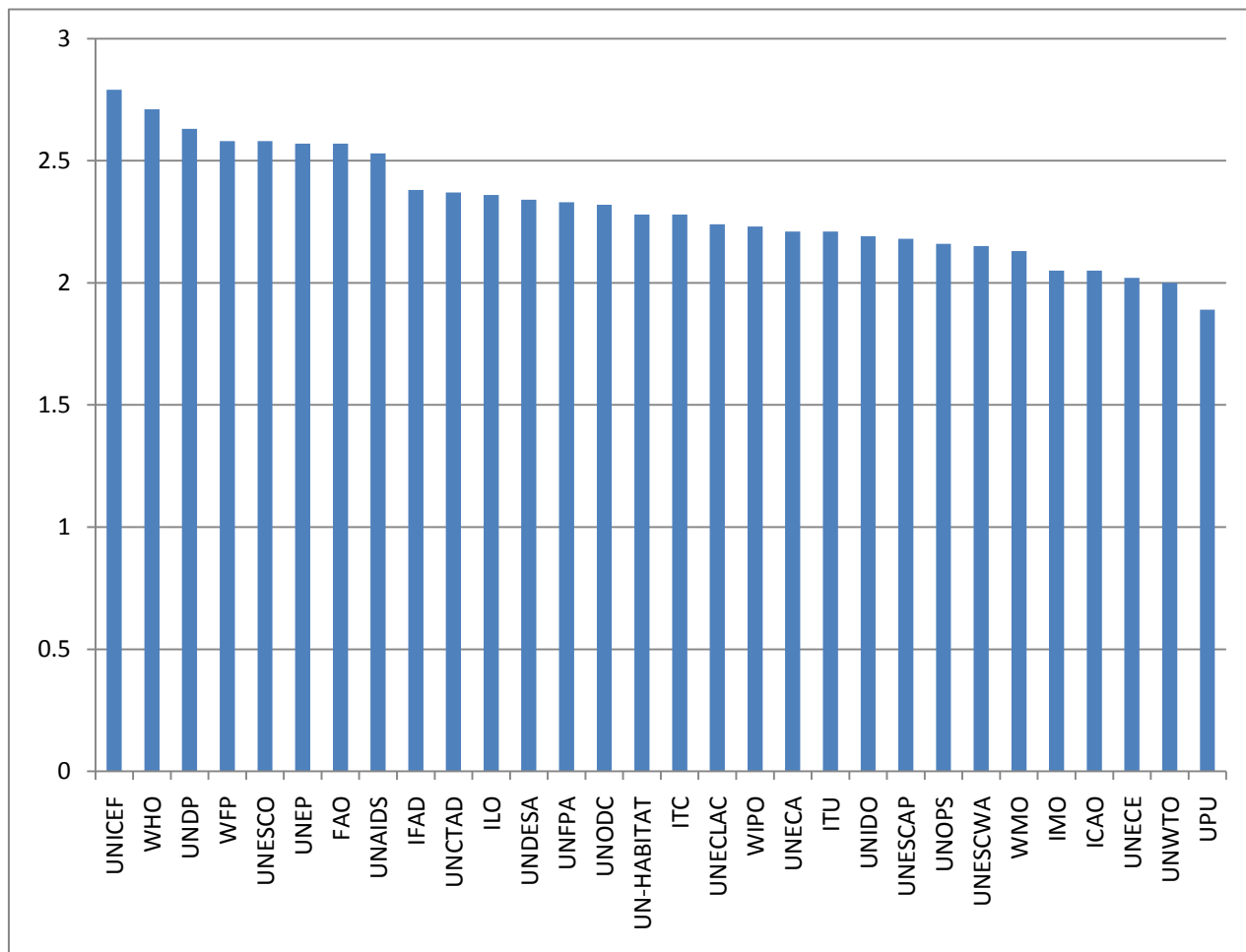
- **Global negotiations and policy-making are considered the most important functions overall (38% indispensable, 44% very important). However, there are quite significant variations among different professional groups, with weighted score as follows (maximum: 4.00)**

	All	Private sector	Governments	NGOs	UN
Global negotiations/policy making	<b>3.17</b>	3.18	3.14	<b>2.92</b>	<b>3.23</b>
Research and analysis	3.15	<b>3.19</b>	<b>3.24</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>2.88</b>
Information and data	3.13	3.13	3.17	3.10	3.04
Technical assistance	3.07	3.03	3.14	2.98	3.19
Global development conventions	3.05	3.05	3.01	3.05	3.16
Setting global standards	2.97	2.93	2.99	2.93	3.05
Advocacy	<b>2.96</b>	<b>2.89</b>	<b>2.87</b>	3.03	3.18
AVERAGE	3.07	3.05	3.08	3.02	3.10

Highest Lowest

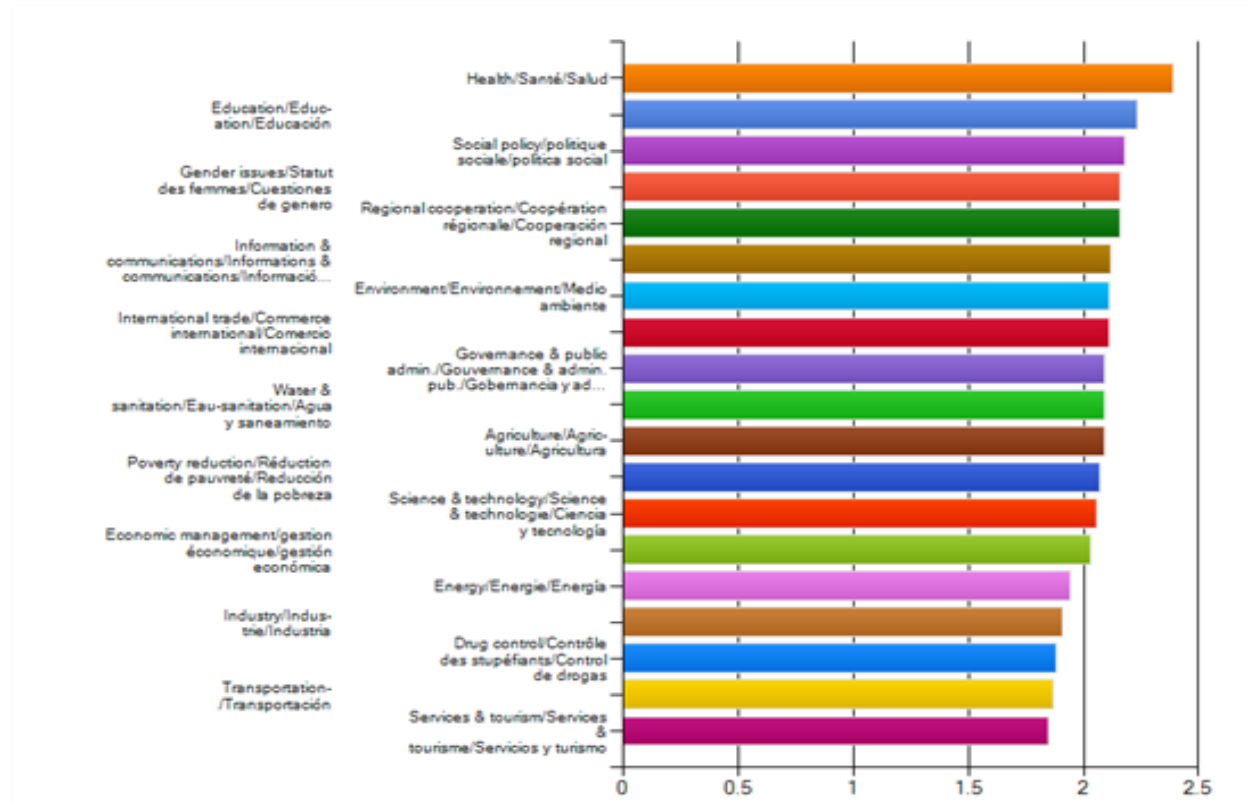
- **Global negotiations/policy making is lowest ranked by NGOs, highest by UN.**
- **The private sector values the UN’s research and analysis, but the UN has a much lower opinion of this function; technical assistance gets a medium rating, except from the UN respondents.**
- **UN advocacy and setting global standards get lower ratings from non-UN respondents.**

## Relevance of UN agencies to today's development problems



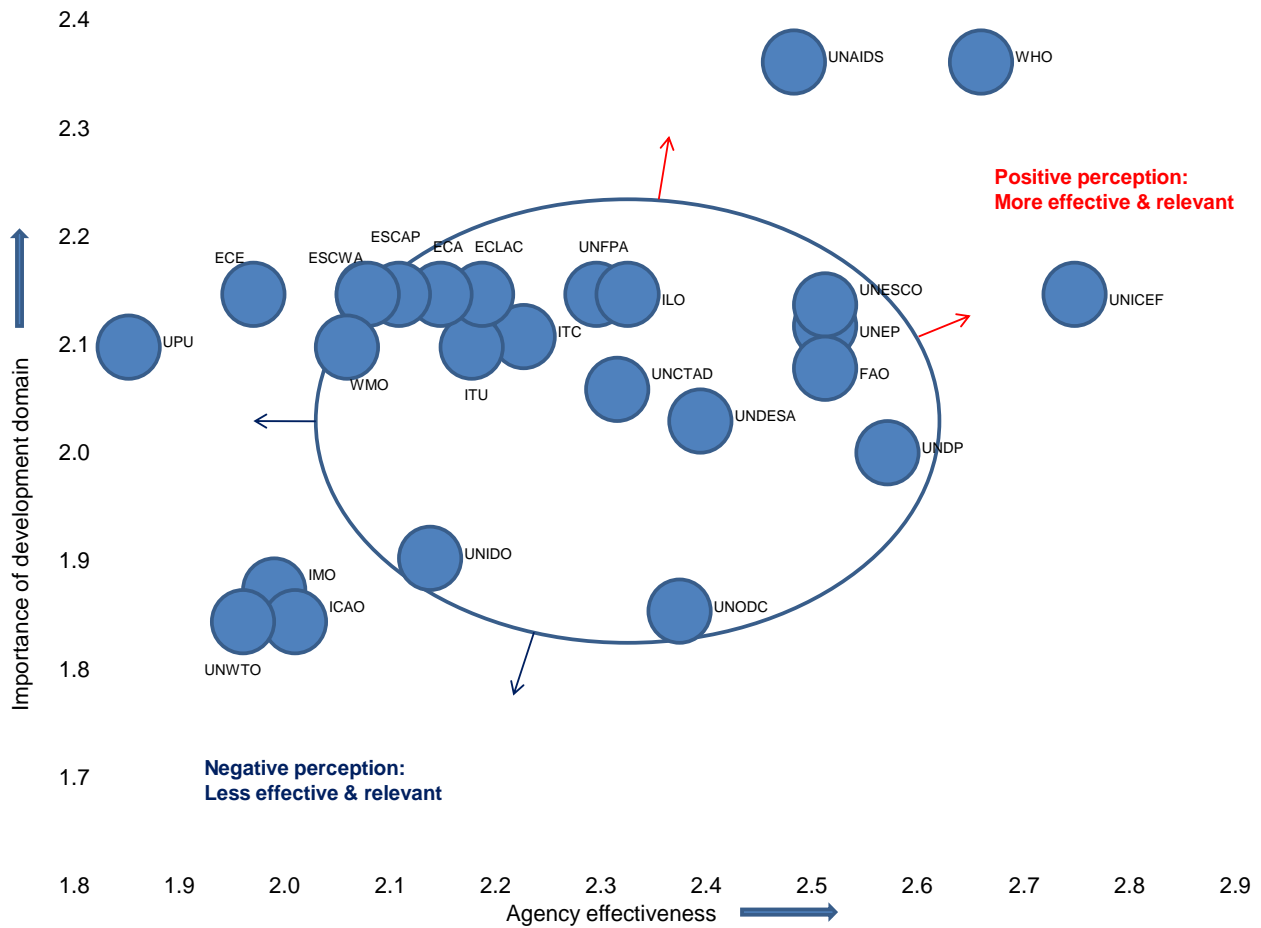
- **For the sample as a whole, the top-rated (most relevant) agencies are UNICEF (weighted score 2.79 out of 3.00) and WHO (2.71). The next-ranked agencies ( $\geq 2.50$ ) are UNDP (2.63), WFP (2.58), UNESCO (2.58), UNEP (2.57), FAO (2.57) and UNAIDS (2.53).**
- **UNIDO (2.19), UNWTO (2.00) and the regulatory agencies do relatively poorly: ITU (2.21), ICAO (2.05), IMO (2.05), UPU (1.89).**
- **The regional commissions are also modestly rated: ECLAC (2.24), ECA (2.21), ESCAP (2.18), ESCWA (2.15) and ECE (2.02).**
- **The private sector, government and NGO responses are similar, with UPU receiving a significantly lower ranking than other agencies in each case.**
- **The UN system's view of itself are very similar, but with wider dispersion of ratings. UNICEF (2.82) and WHO (2.79) are ranked at the top with even higher ratings. The lowest ranked (below 2.00) are: UNWTO (1.77), ITC (1.96), UPU (1.79), UNOPS (1.95) and four of the five regional commissions: ECA (1.99), ESCWA (1.92), ESCAP (1.91), ECE (1.86).**

## Effectiveness by development domain



- **This question complements the previous one on the agencies. Together, they provide a clearer picture of the perceived effectiveness of the UN development system by substantive area and there is generally a good “match” between area and corresponding agency.**
- **The UN is perceived to be most effective in the social policy areas, headed by health (2.39) and education (2.23) – which mirror the high rankings of UNICEF and WHO. The next most effective areas are considered to be social policy (2.17) and gender issues (2.16), but also regional cooperation (2.16). The latter score probably reflects an appreciation of the UN’s work in fostering cooperation among developing countries in general (rather than the specific work of the regional commissions, which have a low rating).**
- **The lowest ratings are for energy (1.94), industry (1.91), drug control (1.88), transportation (1.87) and services and tourism (1.88).**
- **Similar patterns apply when the group filters are applied. Governments give higher marks to trade, but the UN itself marks it down. Poverty reduction is middle-ranked by governments, NGOs and UN, but marked down by the private sector.**
- **The UN’s role in drug control is marked down heavily by Central America.**

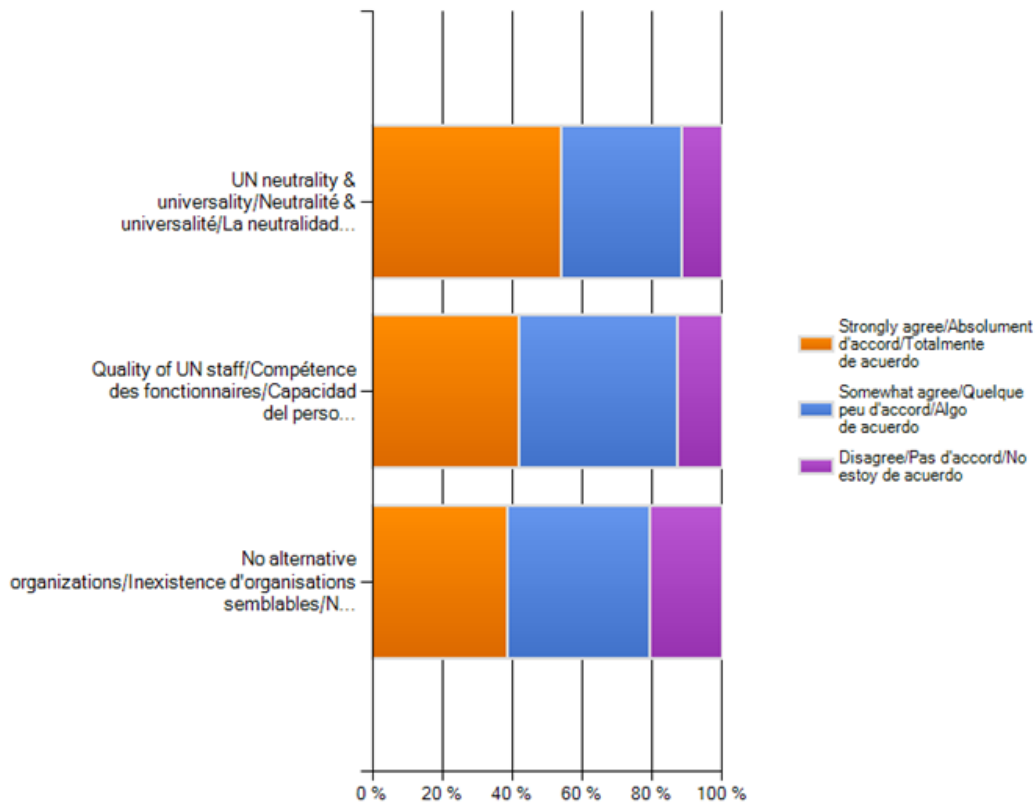
**Agency effectiveness and relevance**



- **This graphic combines the findings of the previous two : agency effectiveness combined with the relevance of the domains. For WHO, the relevant domain is health and water and sanitation; for UNICEF it is health, water and sanitation, education, social policy; and so on.**
- **The most positively perceived agencies are WHO, UNICEF and UNAIDS; the least positive are UNWTO, IMO, ICAO, UPU and some of the regional commissions (which score lower than ‘regional cooperation’)**



### Factors of UN effectiveness

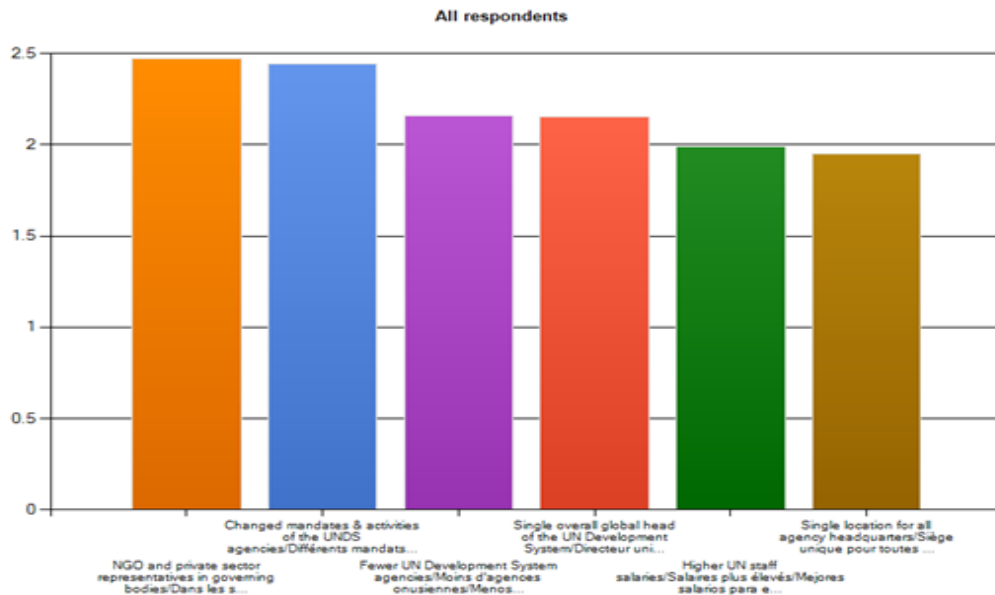


- **There is overall endorsement of the three factors perceived to enhance UN effectiveness. In descending order these are (across all respondent groups): neutrality, staff competence and absence of alternative organizations.**
- **However, there are important variations among respondent groups:**

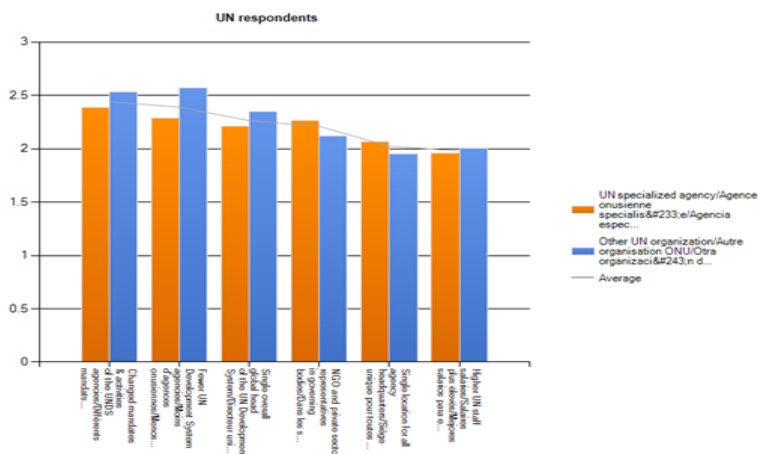
	All	Priv.Sect.	Govts.	NGOs	UN
Neutrality/universality	2.43	2.35	2.40	2.47	2.64
Quality of staff	2.30	2.27	2.38	2.33	2.29
Lack of alternatives	2.19	2.20	2.16	2.27	2.04

- **The UN is the strongest believer in its own neutrality/universality.**
- **Governments rank staff UN competence higher than the private sector does.**
- **The UN is least convinced of the uniqueness of its services.**

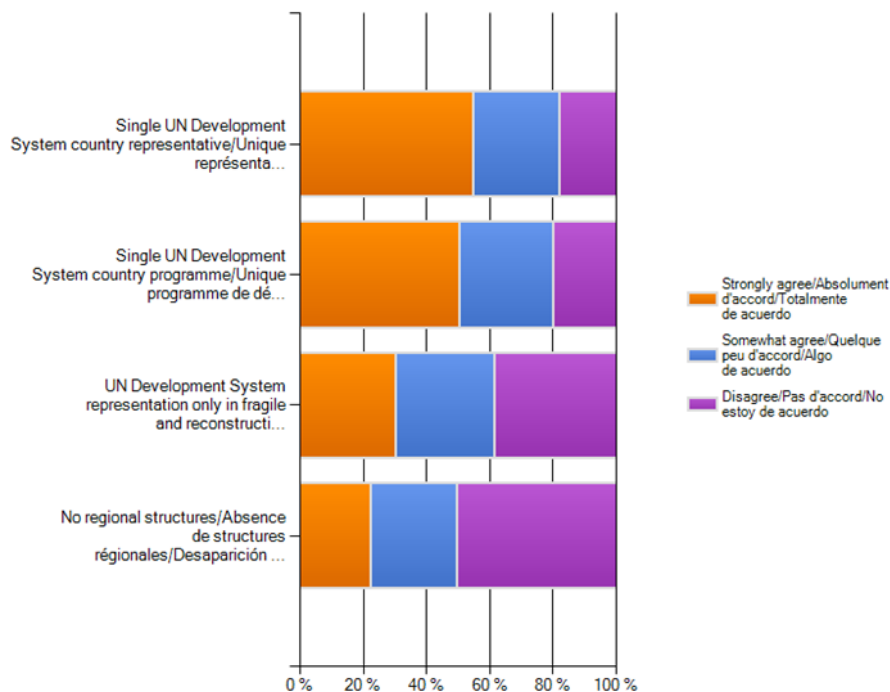
## Changes needed to the UN by 2025: global



- **There was overwhelming support for changes in the mandates and functions of the agencies (87% agreement, weighted score of 2.44 out of 3.00) and for NGO and private sector representation in UN governance (86%, weighted score of 2.47). The government respondents were equally strongly in favour of both, and more so than the UN respondents.**
- **There was also strong support for fewer UN agencies within 15 years (2.16) and a single overall head of the UN development system (2.15). The UN views were even stronger on both counts.**
- **The views on higher staff salaries and a single location for all agencies were more varied, but in each case there was a majority who agreed strongly or partially. One third or respondents, however, disagreed with the single location.**



## Changes needed to the UN by 2025: country and regional levels



- **There is strong support for a single UN development system country representative (2.38). This goes beyond the One UN target, and recalls the Unified UN offices established in the early 1990s in what were formerly the Soviet republics. There is almost equally strong support for a single unified country programme (2.31).**
- **There is less support for a UN country presence confined to fragile states (1.92), and a preference for the continuation of regional structures for the UN (1.72).**
- **Among UN respondents, there is even stronger support for country unification; less support for selective country presence and abolition of regional structures.**

## Selected comments by respondents

**Over 3,000 individual comments were provided to one or more of the questions. This very small sample illustrates some of the common themes, from diverse sources:**

### Agencies and mandates

Too many agencies, some with overlapping responsibilities. Why not merge UNCTAD, ITC, UNDESA, UNDP and UNIDO; WHO and UNAIDS; FAO, WFP and IFAD? Better organization of the system can halve the number of agencies and increase effectiveness and relevance. *(Academic, Africa)*

There is a lot of cross-cutting among the agencies. Some of the agencies can be merged with others. Some could be added to other bigger agencies. The terms of reference of UNDP are much broader than most of the other smaller agencies which could be absorbed in the UNDP mandate, for example the Regional Commissions, where there is duplication and conflict of work (tug-of-war). *(Public sector, Africa)*

Cut down on the number of agencies; cut down on the procedural bureaucracy of agencies; work more with national procedures; sharing of structures, systems personnel; harmonizing across agencies on procedures, funding. *(UN specialized agency, Africa)*

A smaller UNDS is an excellent idea. Smaller and smarter group of people with genuine interest and capability to work in making the world a better place and show results. Put in place a better mechanism to make decisions - be knowledgeable (not pretend to know), practical, transparent and faster. Have 360 degree performance appraisal to avoid bullying at the workplace. *(UN, Europe)*

While most of the UN Agencies are very relevant, there is further room for consolidating the agencies to avoid overlapping mandates. In line with the move towards Delivering as One there are opportunities for merging of agencies and further analysis of the division of labour between and among agencies. *(UN, Africa)*

Much clearer mandates! Let's take the example of HIV/AIDS, there are approximately 5 agencies (UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNIFEM, UNICEF and UNDP) that all deal with some aspect of HIV/AIDS. Very often the lines are blurred and they have the same regional partners who often get confused by the fact that there is replication and little coordination of information. The same may occur for Gender. This may also lead to some element of competition between the agencies. By lessening the number of agencies but identifying clearer mandates for each of these agencies it allows for various programmes to be established under one agency. This is particularly important in UN fundraising activities but even more importantly, providing a one-stop shop for regional or local partners requesting funding. *(Private sector, Caribbean)*

Cut the overlapping of agencies, making them more flexible and proactive, and first of all, cut the enormous bureaucracy and over staff. *(Public sector, Europe)*

Regardless of whether there are regional frameworks in the future or the System operates on a purely global level, it needs to be simplified. To the average person, there is a blinding array of organizations that are largely indistinguishable from each other, yet operate separately. This is counter-productive. *(NGO, North America)*

Phase out the non-relevant agencies, funds and programmes from countries where they do not add value and/or have lost relevance in the national development debate. *(UN, Africa)*

There are far too many individual UN agencies and organisations. Several could be merged (e.g. UNCTAD and UNIDO; or FAO and WFP). Some serve little purpose. Indeed, many could be rolled into some kind of "super UNDP", thus reducing overhead costs, eliminating multiple parallel country programmes, offices and staff, and eliminating overlaps and gaps: thus freeing up greater resources for implementation. *(International public organization, North/East Asia)*

### Country and regional presence

Penser à revoir la lourdeur administrative du système en supprimant certains intermédiaires (bureaux régionaux et sous-régionaux). *(NGO, Africa)*

It is not evident that in 15 years sufficient progress will have been made with the reduction of poverty and improving governance as to limit UN presence only to reconstructing states. A case can be made for more upstream policy and advocacy work in non-reconstructing states with the bulk of resources focussed on reconstructing states for both downstream and upstream interventions and with a concentrated presence. Given the progress with capacity development, more emphasis should be placed on South-South cooperation. The regional structures should become leaner and more linked to the country structures. Right now there is too little linkage between Regional UN Commissions and country and corporate work. If the UN is transformed with one leader at the corporate level as well as the country level, then regional UN presence could be reconstructed at the level of the current Regional Economic Commissions and reconstituted with fewer but higher calibre staff drawn from across the UN organizations and economic commissions and be headed by one UN regional leader. *(UN, Africa)*

Avoir un seul bureau national. Faire un développement unique pour chaque pays en étudiant d'abord les problèmes et les besoins du pays. Avoir une ingérence total dans les affaires politiques et économiques du pays lorsque la démocratie est en peril pour sauver les ressources qui sont pillées par une minorité du pays. *(NGO, Africa)*

### **Policy-making**

I am finding that linkages among UN organizations and agencies are weak in terms of uniform messages on global issues, or perhaps if not weak, not promptly systematic in terms of timing and frequency of action. *(Private Sector, South/West Asia)*

More capacity to influence governments. *(Private sector, South America)*

The developmental challenges facing nations are interlinked - poverty, crime and health are linked to education, employment and industrial development. These days, nations are interlinked not only by trade and investment linkages but increasingly by environmental linkages - carbon emissions, impact of large scale resource development projects etc. Agencies can delivery effective services on the ground, but the overarching policy needs to be set first, one that integrates and aligns the activities of all agencies towards a single goal. *(Public sector, North/East Asia)*

I believe the discussion of very abstract issues at high-level summits quite ineffective for improving decision-making. *(Public sector, South America)*

### **Relationship with programme countries**

Improved mandate and tailored interventions to suit local situations and not wholesale ideas that are thought to be applicable to all global situations. This calls for thorough study of the situation/factors that are being addressed and localizing the appropriate response. Then refine the mandates of the implementing agencies instead of spending a lot of time consulting back and forth before action is taken. *(Public sector, Africa)*

UN should be more demanding of programme countries, requiring results and efficiency; make its presence felt without being authoritarian. *(Private sector, South America)*

Sanction those countries that don't sign and don't respect international agreements, e.g. in environment *(Academia, South America)*

Do not work with the government agencies. Work independently. *(NGO, South/West Asia)*

### **Relationship with NGOs**

Establecer una estructura más horizontal, con participación más directa en las decisiones de las organizaciones de la sociedad civil en cada país, a nivel regional y mundial. *(NGO, South America)*

UN should pay more attention to NGOs, especially in developing countries. *(Academia, Gulf States)*

In my views UN agencies should be made more down to earth to have better understanding of the charaterstics of the problems in different communities and the localities. More and more local people should be involved at the resposible level for research and decision making. *(NGO, North/East Asia)*

### Relationship with private sector

Accommodate private sector views and players in national development and avoid duplication of programmes by UN Agencies. Assist nationals in areas where they need assistance. *(Private sector, Africa)*  
Recognize the private sector. *(Private sector, South America)*

UN agencies should also consider the investments private players need to make in development and building sustainable business models and not destroy those models by over-sharing competitive information. It is not in the interest of development for innovative companies to have their markets cut to size by over-zealous information sharing and creation of competitors who implement good ideas badly. *(Private sector, Asia)*

Insistir en desarrollar el espíritu emprendedor de los jóvenes para que inicien negocios y dejen de depender de un empleo ya sea en el sector privado o público. *(Public sector, Central America)*

### Relationship with donors

Donors agreeing to fund in a holistic way, and donors and host governments agreeing on a single format and system for reporting on expenditure and outcomes/impact. *(NGO, Europe)*

Strengthen the neutrality of the UN system which seems to be eroding due to politicization of aid policies of donors. *(UN, Europe)*

Stop being dependent on the political interests of developed countries. *(Public sector, South America)*

### Staff

Strengthening internal organisational structures - the adoption of more corporate management techniques, and more staff positions - less contract staff. The point of contracts is with a view to solicit greater organisational commitment from staff. Corporate management techniques would strengthen and support the professionals already working in the organisation. Personally, after having spent 23 years in the private sector before joining the UN, I am surprised at the lack of corporatization internally. The external image of the UN has always been one of maintaining a professional workforce and high standards. This should also be the case internally. The UN should adhere to the highest international standards in finance, procurement, admin, ICT, etc. Strong streamlined internal structures will allow development specialists to focus on core competencies. *(UN, South Asia)*

Many staff members of the UN Development System need to get out of the ivory tower...so that they can learn about the targeted people, their culture and community. Without understanding the targeted people, they cannot give them the right advice. *(Academia, North America)*

Change Human Resource Policy based on competency not on who you know. Work more as private sector, ie. delete about 75% of the current rules which do not make any sense. *(UN, North Africa)*

Reduce bureaucracy; reduce salaries so that you attract people who are interested in the work rather than in the position/status - as is the case at UNICEF; institute and commit to merit-based recruitment and promotion (with a small % exception for nationals from developing countries and small island states); increase ratio of technical experts vs. bureaucrats i.e. recruit people with real skills and experience rather than UN lifers; adopt and commit to 3-5 year contracts with succession/transition planning; remove permanent contracts. *(NGO, Australia/New Zealand)*

More effective staff that are not chosen by quota, but through merit and competition. *(Private sector, South America)*

Increase the competence of UN staff. *(Private sector, North America)*

Hire local staff and provide them with meaningful salaries. *(Private sector, South America)*

**Effectiveness and impact**

...the UN is very largely un-accountable whether at the global level, the agency level or country level. Merit based selection, recruitment and performance management is little in evidence..... *(Private sector, Europe)*

Serious, really serious, down-to-earth thinking is required to establish "effectiveness". Casual observation suggests that most agencies are INEFFECTIVE (depending on your definition). Outright honest assessment is called for, not wishy-washy political arguments. Moreover there is the survival instinct that requires institutions to defend their existence irrespective of usefulness. And so do we want to be serious or just add one more report and recommendations. I think it is now time for very serious review and impartial scientific analysis of the *raison d'être* for each and every UN agency. The costs of keeping them has outstripped their usefulness. *(Private sector, Africa)*

Concentrate on fighting poverty by providing for small industrial and agriculture projects in the poorest countries of the world. Invest in education and basic health services and help the people to help themselves. *(Public sector, Gulf States)*

UN still too compliance driven - should be measuring effective outcomes in an efficient manner. Should set in place concrete outcomes and these should be measurable ("touchy-feely" outcomes are not realistic). Real improvements in standards of living and the reduction in people below the poverty line regardless of global impacts should be used. *(Private sector, Pacific Islands)*

I believe that having a realistic roadmap (for instance the MDG), is a part of that important change. However, having a results-based evaluation of that roadmap is equally important. *(Academia, Central America)*

El cambio debe ser en términos de eficacia, las instituciones son tan o más burocráticas que los mismos sistemas públicos, los procesos son demorados, no hay opción para el cambio a fin de mejorar la capacidad de respuesta de los actores. *(UN, South America)*

Focus on the environment, children and gender, and show real results and leadership so that countries become more committed. *(Private sector, South America)*

**Information management**

The UN should be a learning organisation and for that it should be a lot less political and bureaucratic. There should be a lot of more knowledge management and knowledge sharing taking place throughout the system, both driven from the bottom and top, and sideways, and everywhere. *(UN, Europe)*

Better dissemination of results and proposals. *(Public sector, South America)*

More dissemination of information on UN activities. *(Public sector, South America)*

UN should become better known, with participative projects in universities and secondary schools. *(Private sector, South America)*

More information for the public about the work being done in each country; invite people to participate and make proposals. *(Private sector, Central America)*

UN bodies should have a more active publicity division. *(NGO, South/West Asia)*

Sometimes it is ambiguous to know about the development system with lots of projects and information sources. Therefore, the most important change should be to how the information is disseminated. *(Public sector, North/East Asia)*

To professionals like myself, the UN Development System is the only source of quality, but also neutral, development information and communications. Without it, we (in the developing world) are short of references for quality information and communications. *(Private sector, South/West Asia)*