The UN Secretary-General’s reform processes

An effective preparatory process leading to the UN2020 summit should support and build on the reforms initiated by Secretary-General Guterres, including:

(a) The Secretariat’s peace and security architecture,
(b) Efforts to follow up on the UNGA’s 2016 resolution on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development, and
(c) Management reforms.

(a) Peace and Security Architecture reforms

Following several recent reports, reforms to the architecture and working methods of the peace and security pillar of the Secretariat are focused on “placing politics at the center” of the UN’s peace and security operations. The objectives include reducing fragmentation for better delivery, i.e. to make the peace and security pillar more coherent, nimble and effective by prioritizing prevention, sustaining peace and delivery on Agenda 2030.

The SG has proposed restructuring of the peacekeeping, political affairs and peacebuilding departments through the establishment of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations.

The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs would combine the “strategic, political and operational responsibilities” of the Department of Political Affairs and the Peacebuilding Support Office. The new entity would concentrate on conflict prevention, mediation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, in addition to directing regional offices, SG envoys and other advisers involved in political processes.

The new Department of Peace Operations is intended to combine the responsibility of the current Department of Peacekeeping Operations and some aspects of the Department of Political Affairs.

(b) Development System reforms

On May 31st, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on the repositioning of the United Nations Development System, in order to better align with the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A major area of focus is the effort to reduce overlap and duplication in UN field operations. This is a perennial struggle for the UN. The 2006 Delivering as One reforms also aimed to reduce inefficiency and promote more operational coherence.
UN DS reforms aim to lead to UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) that better reflect country priorities and country needs. The recent resolution removes the functions of the Resident Coordinators (RCs) of the UN system in each country from those of the resident representative of the UNDP.

SG Guterres was unable to convince MS to fund the new Resident Coordinator system through the regular UN budget. Instead a new hybrid solution will increase the amount of funds to be administered centrally, but not eliminate the practice of MS earmarking programs according to particular development priorities. The target date for implementing the UN DS changes is January 1, 2019.

(c) Management reforms

The SG’s Management reforms are ongoing. They are intended to lead to a shift in the UN’s management paradigm, although they are also required by the organization’s Fifth Committee to be cost-neutral.

On May 15 UN SG Guterres presented the most recent set of proposals for reforming the UN’s management structure. The report calls for creation of two new departments, through the reorganization of the department of Field Support and the Department of Management.

Also, strategic planning, budgeting and reporting based on results frameworks are becoming more aligned to the SDGs.