UNITAR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK, 2026-2029

Introduction

1. Over the past sixty years, UNITAR has evolved significantly, impacting millions through its diverse programmes. The past decade saw the rapid expansion of digital learning, alongside a growing network of affiliated training centres and diverse partnerships, which have enabled UNITAR to reach record numbers of learners on critical issues shaping the global agenda - from climate change and health to peace and sustainable development. More recently, the Institute's research portfolio has grown, with a focus on sustainable production and consumption. Across its training and research activities, UNITAR has shown agility and responsiveness, adapting training content to specific contexts and translating research into learning that addresses real-world needs. Through collaborations with Member States, other UN entities, regional organisations, academia and the non-governmental and private sectors, UNITAR has ensured that its programmes are relevant to local, national, regional and global priorities, and enhance individual and institutional capacities.

2. With the Institute's successes have also come challenges and opportunities. While the number of learners has surged, the Institute's outreach to the most vulnerable countries remains limited. Low course completion and certification rates raise concerns on the depth of learning outcomes in large-scale delivery. Beneficiary reach has outpaced budget growth by far—demonstrating efficiency gains—but also the need to enhance measurement systems and better demonstrate behavioural and institutional changes, aligning with donor expectations for evidence of impact. Financial sustainability remains a persistent challenge, despite the budget doubling over the past decade. And the growth of training and research providers, coupled with overlapping mandates among UN entities, has blurred organisational roles, emphasising the need for UNITAR to clarify its value proposition and strengthen its position in an increasingly competitive learning and capacity development landscape.

3. This Strategic Framework for 2026–2029 is the culmination of 18 months of reflection, consultation and engagement across UNITAR's diverse corps of professionals, and with Member States, the Board of Trustees, divisional advisory bodies, and UN and non-UN partners. Developed in the context of the few remaining years to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and against the backdrop of the UN Secretary-General's ongoing UN80 initiative to transform how the UN works, the Strategic Framework has been informed by stocktaking, strategy scanning, strategic foresight, surveys, evaluations, reviews, thought pieces and strategic retreats. The framework sets a new strategic direction for the next four years. It presents vision, mission and values statements, a new set of strategic objectives and a new operating model. In short, the framework is a response to a rapidly changing world and an evolving knowledge and learning landscape.

Navigating an uncertain, changing world…

4. The world in which we live is undergoing profound and accelerated change, shaped by multiple and interconnected forces that are testing the resilience of societies and the institutions that shape them. Armed conflict, war and rising geopolitical tensions are destabilizing regions and straining multilateral cooperation, while economic uncertainty unsettles markets, disrupts trade and undermines development. At the same time, the escalating impacts of climate change and environmental degradation threaten not only ecosystems, but also food security, livelihoods and human health on a global scale. These pressures are compounded by deep and widening social and economic inequalities, both within and between countries, fueling polarisation, eroding trust in institutions and leaving those made vulnerable further behind. Rapidly advancing technology is accelerating these trends. Together, these dynamics are creating a world that is more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous than ever before.

5. Against these pressures, the multilateral system—within which UNITAR operates—is facing an unprecedented crisis of trust and effectiveness. With only five years remaining to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, most targets remain off track. There are also new and emerging challenges as identified in the Pact for the Future which require response. Funding for development has seen drastic reductions and the remaining resources are increasingly tied to specific outcomes, yet, and pressure to achieve greater results with fewer resources and at an accelerated pace. The new funding landscape is fiercely competitive, testing UNITAR's resilience and adaptability as it strives to demonstrate clear value and measurable results.

…and an evolving learning landscape

6. As the world changes, so is the knowledge and learning landscape. Technological change is fundamentally reshaping what individuals, institutions and societies learn and how they interact. Digital transformation, driven by artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, is creating both revolutionary breakthroughs and evolutionary shifts, with likely monumental consequences in how UNITAR designs, delivers and scales its work. These dynamics will likely widen the digital divide between the developed and developing worlds, underscoring the urgency of ensuring that UNITAR remains both relevant and accessible. The future of learning and capacity development will depend not only on the adoption of digital tools but also on the Institute's ability to help countries navigate these transitions equitably.

7. The next generation of leaders is emerging with expectations that differ sharply from previous generations. Digitally native, globally connected and values-driven, these leaders are seeking learning opportunities that reflect their realities, aspirations and ways of engaging. UNITAR must evolve to meet these expectations, developing models that are adaptive, innovative, inclusive, evidence-based and future-oriented. Today's learners demand greater customization, flexibility and personalization in their learning journeys, with micro-credentialing and alternative forms of recognition gaining prominence, aligned with the need for adaptability, reinvention and innovation. With these new demands and in a world of information overload, where attention spans are shrinking and mis- and dis-information proliferates, UNITAR must rethink how it designs and delivers impactful learning experiences and supports adaptability, future-orientation and resilience of diplomats, public officials and institutions to both shape, accompany

and respond with agility to this rapid and constant change. Moreover, the nature of the global challenges UNITAR must address—from climate change to conflict to inequality and global health—are more interconnected and complex than ever. Responding to these challenges demands systems thinking and leadership, and integrated and collaborative approaches.

8. The location of knowledge and expertise is also shifting. Emerging economies and developing countries are not just consumers, but also producers of knowledge and expertise, reshaping expectations around co-design, co-ownership and equal partnership in learning and capacity development. Donors and governments, for their part, increasingly recognize that one-off interventions are insufficient to deliver meaningful change or build resilience, and emphasize the need for evidence of behavioral transformation, institutional strengthening and impact.

What this means for UNITAR…

9. Greater agility, digital capacity, system-wide coherence and results-orientation are central benchmarks against which UNITAR's relevance and performance will be assessed. If UNITAR can seize the moment and adapt, it will not only safeguard its role in global capacity development, but also redefine and elevate its contribution to global development and multilateralism as part of a stronger, reshaped United Nations system, with learning serving as a linchpin for the institutional transformations essential to achieving the SDGs. While these evolving dynamics present undeniable challenges, they also open pathways to UNITAR for innovation, renewal and growth.

10. UNITAR will modernise, innovate and scale its training and experiential learning initiatives to enhance their strategic relevance and measurable impact. Programmes will invigorate and accelerate knowledge transfer and emphasise the development of practical skills, including strategic foresight (scenario planning, horizon scanning, trend analysis) and futures skills (critical thinking, systems thinking, anticipation, adaptability, resilience), innovation, data capture and analysis, and their real-world application.

11. Within this changing environment, UNITAR's dual purpose of training and research is its greatest strength. Training equips individuals and institutions with the skills to act, while research generates the evidence, insights and foresight to guide those actions. Together, they form a continuous cycle: research feeds evidence into training content, while lessons from training generate new research questions, ensuring relevance, rigour and innovation. Anchoring this strategy in the integration of training and research, including research conducted by specialized agencies and the wider UN system, as well as with external partners, is central to UNITAR's ability to remain impactful and future-ready.

The UNITAR identity

UNITAR's vision, mission and core values and behaviours are the foundation for who we are and what we strive to achieve. Together, they guide our work in delivering impactful, accountable and results-oriented programmes, driving sustainable progress, upholding trust in our donors, clients and beneficiaries, and ensuring alignment with our strategic goals.

Our vision

We envision a world where empowered individuals and institutions advance peace, security and sustainable development.

Our mission

We bridge gaps in knowledge and skills through impactful training, research and innovative learning solutions.

Our core values and behaviours

The United Nations Charter, the UN Leadership Framework, and the UN staff regulations and rules underpin our work. Building on this foundation, we embody the United Nations values of inclusion, integrity, humility and humanity. These values are not only guiding principles, but tangible actions we practice daily through rigorous analysis and planning, collaboration, results, adaptation and innovation and learning. Throughout our activities, we remain committed to being impartial, independent, evidence-based and forward-looking.

Strategic Objectives

12. To deliver on our vision and mission, we are guided by four strategic objectives (SOs):

    SO1 Individuals are empowered with the capacities to advance multilateral diplomacy, public sector performance and the SDGs.
    SO2 Institutions in developing countries are strengthened to accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, implement the Pact for the Future and respond to national priorities.
    SO3 Countries build robust learning ecosystems to meet their learning needs and foster lasting impact.
    SO4 The quality and effectiveness of UN capacity-building efforts are enhanced through shared-learning platforms, best practices and research.

13. These objectives provide strategic direction, ensure coherence across programmes and operations, and strengthen our ability to generate meaningful change for individuals, institutions, countries and other stakeholder partners and the United Nations.

Strategic Objective 1: Individuals are empowered with the capacities to advance multilateral diplomacy, public sector performance and the SDGs.

14. In today's complex and interconnected world with pressing challenges to peace and sustainable development, a commitment to multilateralism and effective public sector performance is more important than ever.

15. To respond effectively to these challenges, targeted training and other learning initiatives are essential to strengthen the ability of diplomats, public service officers and other change agents to navigate the complex international processes and contribute to sustainable development. UNITAR will incorporate interactive methodologies, localized content, skills and competency-based approaches to support meaningful engagement in multilateral processes and advance the 2030 Agenda and the Pact for the Future. Emphasis will also be placed on inclusive participation, digital innovation and follow-up mechanisms to ensure sustained learning for durable outcomes.

16. Success will be demonstrated by increased engagement of diverse and under-represented stakeholders—particularly from developing countries—in SDG action from local to global levels, evidenced not only by successful completion of learning, but also demonstrated behavioral, performance changes from learners, contributing to the 2030 Agenda. Training content will increasingly be informed by UNITAR's applied and policy-oriented research to ensure it is evidence-based and tailored to real-world contexts.

Strategic Objective 2: Institutions in developing countries are strengthened to accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, implement the Pact for the Future and respond to national priorities.

17. Realizing global goals and international commitments—be they environmental, human rights, social justice, gender or others—ultimately hinges on the capacity of national institutions to translate them into action. Strengthening institutional systems—legal, technical and administrative—is essential to enable effective implementation, monitoring, reporting and evidence-based policy and decision-making. Supporting countries to build and equip these institutions ensures they are positioned to meet their international obligations and deliver sustainable development results. Through targeted training, professional exchanges, multistakeholder dialogues, advisory support services and other workstreams, UNITAR strengthens institutions, enhances coordination and fosters the integrated implementation of international obligations at the national and local levels to realise expected benefits.

18. Success will be demonstrated by evidence that institutions in developing countries have taken concrete implementation action by using UNITAR tools, methods and other forms of support to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, related multilateral agreements and other internationally agreed frameworks. UNITAR is recognized as a trusted partner of convention secretariats, UN Resident Coordinator Offices and UN Country Teams in driving 'engine room' actions for economic transformation—such as digital transformation, energy transition, climate action, food systems transformation, jobs and social protection, education transformation and finance—critical to growth and sustainable development. This is achieved by strengthening national capacities within governments and across wider stakeholder groups, particularly in developing countries, including support for transitions that are inclusive, just and contribute to environmental sustainability and peaceful societies. UNITAR contributes by leveraging global norms and translating them into future-proof, integrated and evidence-based implementation strategies tailored to country-relevant levers.

Strategic Objective 3: Countries build robust learning ecosystems to meet their learning needs and foster lasting impact.

19. Achieving sustainable impact requires more than one-off training events—it demands the development of robust learning ecosystems that can deliver, adapt and grow over time. UNITAR works with national training institutions, universities, regional platforms and local authorities to build the systems, capacities and networks needed to sustain learning at scale. Through training-of-trainers, institutional certification and digital platforms, UNITAR empowers partners to deliver high-quality training independently and in contextually relevant ways. By investing in partnerships and co-creation models, UNITAR reduces dependency on external actors and supports long-term capacity rooted in local systems.

20. Success will be demonstrated by evidence that national and regional training centres in developing countries become the institutional backbone for identifying and meeting the performance challenges and learning needs in their respective countries. Indicators will measure the upgrading of curricula, investment in digital skills and tools, building of skilled faculty, design of learning content and the expansion of partnerships. Through such actions, institutions enhance the quality and relevance of their training. By integrating applied research, expanding access to underserved groups, aligning programmes with emerging priorities such as digital skills, climate resilience and public health, and strengthening systems leadership and systems thinking, they also become more adaptive and future-ready. Ultimately, these learning centres are more than training and education vehicles — they drive inclusive growth, build community resilience and contribute meaningfully to national development and global sustainability goals.

Strategic Objective 4: The quality and effectiveness of UN capacity-building efforts are enhanced through shared-learning platforms, best practices and research.

21. Effective and efficient programming across the United Nations development system depends on access to high-quality learning, best practices and research as integral components of capacity development. To meet this need, the Institute strengthens system-wide efforts by offering shared learning platforms, curated best practices and research partnerships across key development fields—such as climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, health and the prevention of noncommunicable diseases, to name a few. Through this collaborative approach, UN development system entities effectively plug into the Institute's learning and research infrastructure, maximizing the value of existing knowledge and reinforcing coherence across the system. By leveraging online learning platforms and scalable capacity-development tools, the Institute accelerates the delivery of impactful, context-responsive interventions—reducing duplication, bridging UN and external ecosystems, enhancing cost-efficiency and amplifying collective results throughout the UN system.

22. Success will be demonstrated with evidence that UN agencies and partners consistently leverage the Institute's learning platforms, instructional design capabilities, curated best practices and research to accelerate and scale their own knowledge transfer and

capacity building efforts across key development sectors, establishing the Institute as a trusted vehicle for knowledge and innovation within the UN system.

Crosscutting Objective

23. As a crosscutting objective, UNITAR will promote inclusive empowerment across all four objectives by prioritizing the needs of the countries in special situations, as well as those of women, youth and persons with disabilities, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda principle of Leave No One Behind.

Workstreams

24. UNITAR will advance its mission and its strategic objectives through five interconnected workstreams that combine learning, knowledge, advisory support and research to build capacities and deliver sustainable impact:

    Learning & Skills Development. We deliver multiple learning and skills development opportunities for individuals and groups, including training and professional development, fellowship programmes, executive education, master's degree programmes and immersion programmes.

    Knowledge Platforms & Systems. We design platforms, systems and tools that scale knowledge, foster collaboration and accelerate the implementation of multilateral agreements and international commitments.

    Collaborative Knowledge Exchanges. We facilitate collaborative learning and knowledge exchanges and related dialogues and engagements, e.g., leadership retreats, scenario labs, executive roundtables, panels and collaborative think tanks.

    Advisory & Institutional Support. We help governments, organizations and other partners build lasting capabilities, including through organizational assessments, tailored training frameworks, curriculum design, certification and long-term accompaniment.

    Research and Geospatial Solutions. We conduct applied, policy-oriented and action research—including foresight studies, statistical and geospatial analyses and impact assessments—to generate evidence and insights.

A New Operating Model

25. The Strategic Framework is anchored in a new operating model that redefines how UNITAR positions itself within the UN system and the broader learning and capacity-development marketplace. While the Institute will continue to rely on paid-in voluntary contributions, small, short-term activity-based projects will be shifted increasingly into fee-for-service engagements, scaled across workstreams where possible. This transition reduces the administrative and transactional costs associated with a large pool of small projects and frees resources to support medium and larger, multi-year initiatives designed to deliver institutional changes and measurable impacts aligned with donor expectations. Resource allocation and prioritization will be guided by strategic objectives, enabling the Institute to focus its financial and human capital on initiatives with the greatest potential for sustainable results.

26. UNITAR's programmatic delivery will continue to follow a headquarters structure providing governance, strategic planning and core management services to ensure quality, accountability, financial integrity and risk management and oversight. A strategic communication function in the Office of the Executive Director will ensure aligned messaging, clear and timely dissemination of key priorities and decisions and strengthen institutional visibility. Programmatic divisions manage thematic portfolios, while select representational and project offices extend reach and facilitate delivery. Dedicated management units handle finance, procurement, human resources, and compliance, ensuring smooth operational workflows and alignment with institutional standards. A new corporate learning and knowledge unit sets standards, curates institutional knowledge and drives design, pedagogical guidance, digital innovation, and quality assurance across all workstreams.

27. UNITAR's human capital—the diverse corps of staff and professionals—remains the most critical asset. Leadership will be strengthened with a Deputy Executive Director, enhancing coherence across divisions and ensuring operationalization of the model through direct oversight of corporate functions. Staff development and talent cultivation will also be central priorities, enabling personnel to acquire new skills, innovate in delivery approaches and respond effectively to evolving global challenges. Performance management, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are embedded throughout the operating model to measure results, inform decision-making and enhance accountability and organisational learning, positioning UNITAR as a trusted, efficient and adaptable UN partner capable of delivering sustainable, high-quality learning solutions in partnership with governments, UN entities, academia and the private and non-governmental sectors.

Accelerators

28. In alignment with the UN 2.0 vision, the quintet of change accelerators—Digital, Data, Behavioural Science, Innovation, Strategic Foresight and Culture—will drive UNITAR's workstreams forward, enhancing our ability to anticipate global challenges, address the complex needs of beneficiaries and partners and achieve our strategic objectives with greater speed and impact.

29. **Digital**. UNITAR will embrace digital transformation as a core enabler of effective, inclusive and scalable learning. We will invest in user-centric digital platforms, tools including AI and processes that enhance communication, accessibility, learner engagement and impact.

30. **Data**. Data-informed decision making is foundational to evidence-based learning, planning and project design. UNITAR will strengthen its data governance and infrastructure, its data literacy and use data across all stages of programme design, delivery and evaluation, including from research and mapping analysis.

31. **Behavioural Science**. To drive real-world change, UNITAR will embed behavioural insights into the design, delivery and evaluation of learning programmes and projects. By understanding the cognitive, social, environmental and emotional drivers and barriers of decision-making and behaviours, we will co-create interventions that are not only informative but transformative and generate impact.

32. **Innovation.** Innovation will be central to UNITAR's ecosystem. We will experiment with new methodologies, technologies and partnerships to co-create solutions that are impactful, sustainable and future-ready. Our approach to innovation will emphasize practical application, ensuring that new ideas translate into improved learner experiences, better outcomes, and scalable models.

33. **Strategic Foresight.** UNITAR will together with its partners apply strategic foresight to anticipate emerging trends, risks and opportunities of sustainable development and the wider UN system. Through futures thinking and scenario planning, we will enhance the relevance and resilience of our service lines and support stakeholders in navigating uncertainty.

34. **Culture**. A culture of learning is the foundation of UNITAR's ability to serve as a trusted knowledge partner. We will invest in personnel development, peer learning, and cross-functional collaboration to nurture a resilient, adaptive, quality-focused and mission-aligned workforce.

Risks and assumptions

35. UNITAR has an established enterprise risk management framework, with policies and processes and identifies risks. This approach helps the Institute anticipate potential challenges and address them effectively. Key risks include:

36. **Uncertainty over the evolving UN80 initiative.** The framework is developed against the backdrop of the evolving UN80 initiative. Potential shifts in mandates, governance structures or institutional priorities could affect the Institute's positioning, partnerships and ability to fully deliver. The lack of clarity around reform timelines and outcomes creates uncertainty for medium-term planning.

37. **Declining funding.** With development funding declining and increased and tight earmarking of resources, competition for limited resources is fierce. This increases the

pressure on UNITAR to diversify funding sources, align resource mobilisation efforts with its mission and demonstrate tangible results. The tension between fundraising imperatives and maintaining strategic focus could stretch organisational capacity.

38. **Competitive knowledge and learning landscape.** The learning and capacity development industry is expanding rapidly, with strong competition from commercial learning platforms. At the same time, technologies—especially AI—are reshaping how learning is designed, delivered and consumed. UNITAR risks being outpaced if it cannot leverage technology effectively and differentiate its value proposition.

39. **Change management.** Successful implementation of the Strategic Framework will depend on the ability to manage significant organisational change, including adjustments to policies, systems, structures and culture. Change processes often encounter resistance, require substantial time and resources, and may initially reduce efficiency or create uncertainty among staff and partners. If not managed effectively, these challenges could undermine staff morale, delay implementation and weaken the Institute's ability to achieve its strategic objectives.

Key Assumptions

40. **Efforts will generate sufficient value to justify investment.** It is assumed that resources, time and effort devoted to strategic transformation—such as adjusting training programmes, reengineering processes and systems and strengthening staff capacity and talent—will yield benefits that outweigh the costs. These benefits include increased organisational coherence, effectiveness and efficiency, and greater evidence for sustainable, scalable impact. Their effectiveness will depend on strong implementation, staff engagement, adaptive management and alignment with strategic priorities.

41. **Parallel change processes ongoing in other UN entities will be mutually reinforcing.** Most UN entities are under-going their own strategic planning and change management processes. It is assumed that these processes will open up opportunities for engagement and collaboration, including at the country level, and reduce duplication and overlap in mandates.

42. **UNITAR can harness "AI for Good" and other emerging technologies in ways that enhance delivery, efficiency and reach.** It is assumed that advances in AI and other emerging technologies can be effectively integrated into UNITAR's programmes and operations to improve learning quality, streamline administrative processes and expand access globally. This includes personalized and adaptive learning, data-driven insights for continuous improvement and scalable delivery methods that reach remote or underserved regions. The success of this assumption depends on adequate infrastructure, staff capacity, ethical safeguards and alignment with UNITAR's mission and objectives.

Implementing the strategic framework

43. The set of strategic objectives workstreams together with indicators, baselines and targets defined in the UNITAR programme budgets will provide the operational tool to

guide the implementation of the Strategic Framework. An Integrated Results and Resources Framework (IRRF) provides the architecture for monitoring, measuring and reporting. The IRRF represents an important shift from previous results frameworks that focused primarily on programme level outcomes, by elevating the intended changes to the strategic, organisational level.

Monitoring and Evaluation

44. Monitoring will be carried out at both division and Institute levels, drawing on the indicators and performance measures set out in the IRRF. Annual performance reports will be submitted to the Board of Trustees, ensuring transparency and accountability for results achieved. To the extent possible, monitoring data will be disaggregated across gender, age and country status, allowing for more inclusive and equitable analysis of performance. Research activities will be monitored alongside training, using indicators on the production, quality, uptake and policy influence of research outputs, as well as their integration into training content and advisory services.

45. UNITAR will also contribute actively to UN system-wide reporting requirements, particularly in relation to gender, disability and youth.

46. The Strategic Framework will be subject to an evaluation in early 2029, ensuring that evidence and insights inform the preparation of the subsequent planning period. This evaluation will assess both training and research contributions, including the effectiveness of their integration and the impact of the training–research cycle on institutional strengthening and policy outcomes. Beyond serving as an accountability mechanism, evaluation will be positioned as a tool for organizational learning—helping to capture lessons and identify good practices and strengthen programming performance.