United Nations University
Centre for Policy Research

Workshop on Innovative Resource Mobilization Strategies for International Organizations

17 July 2025, 11:30 - 16:00 ET

VENUE (in-person and online)

Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office
866 United Nations Plaza #120, New York, NY 10017

Convened by the **United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR)**, with support from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ) and the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC).

Summary Note on Discussions

Amid growing pressure on the multilateral system, this workshop brought together experts to move beyond broad calls for "innovative finance" and examine concrete, proven and emerging resource mobilization strategies. The conversation revealed a sophisticated and evolving landscape of financial tools and institutional mechanisms, from anticipatory humanitarian funding to digital service fees and access to capital markets.

A key question emerged: how can the United Nations (UN) scale innovations already underway in parts of the system but not yet widely adopted? These include digital micropayments, monetizing data and expertise, using AI to unlock insights from internal data, and low-barrier voice-and-pay tools to expand Global South participation. Subnational models – like user fees, congestion charges and bonds – were also highlighted for their potential.

Participants emphasized that resource mobilization is about more than raising funds; it requires realigning rules, mandates, partnerships and power. Meeting this challenge means rethinking and transforming the UN's administrative and operational systems to take advantage of new and emerging technologies, realize value from data and experience, and translate it into sustainable financial strategies.

Leveraging Market-Based Services

Many UN entities are exploring revenue-generating services such as digital subscriptions, licensing tools and specialized training. These efforts require upfront investment in IT, digital marketing and payment systems. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), for example, combines fees for private sector memberships with income from satellite filings and technical services, and is expanding its paid publications and premium data. This model protects the public mandate by keeping core content free while monetizing value-added services like real-time data and analytics tools.

Carbon markets were another area of focus. The Adaptation Fund was initially capitalized through a 2 per cent levy on proceeds from Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects under the Kyoto Protocol, establishing a pioneering model of an international levy for climate finance. However, the collapse of the CDM market forced the Fund to pivot toward voluntary sovereign contributions. Today, it is poised to receive a 5 per cent share of proceeds from transactions under Article 6.4 of the Paris Agreement, but the experience underscored the risks of relying too heavily on volatile markets and the importance of diversifying income streams.

At the subnational level, participants discussed emerging strategies like adapting Business Improvement Districts into "Resilience Districts" and introducing climate-related levies through airport charges or congestion pricing. Research suggests that such mechanisms could generate hundreds of millions of dollars for local climate action. However, local politics, legal authority and intergovernmental coordination remain major barriers, especially when revenue is directed toward international solidarity rather than local use.

Participants also highlighted city-to-city solidarity, such as the Netherlands allocating a portion of water tariffs to projects in Vietnam. Agencies like UN-Habitat see further potential in mobilizing cities to contribute to global public goods.

Catalytic, Pre-Arranged and Pooled Finance

Participants highlighted the catalytic role of targeted grants and strategic co-financing. The Pandemic Fund, as the newest example in this space, used $885 million in initial grant funding to mobilize over $6.2 billion in co-financing from multilateral development banks and domestic governments – a leverage ratio of roughly 1:7. As a forward-looking response to future pandemics, the model underscores the importance of pre-arranged finance for predictable crises.

Anticipatory action in humanitarian contexts is also delivering high returns. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), operated by OCHA, shows that acting before disaster strikes can save lives and reduce costs, although only 1 per cent of humanitarian financing is currently pre-arranged despite increasing predictability of climate and conflict-driven shocks.

In areas where commercial returns are weak – such as vaccine R&D for diseases affecting low-income populations – public and philanthropic funds remain indispensable. Organizations like CEPI and Gavi are designed to finance public goods through pooled funding and advanced market commitments that help shape pricing and distribution.

Shifting Public-Private Engagement

Private and philanthropic actors are increasingly seeking to co-design solutions that align with their values, operations and long-term strategies. UNESCO's partnership with LVMH goes beyond philanthropy to shape corporate sustainability practices. UNICEF's Child Nutrition Fund blends three types of capital: traditional grants for service delivery, a matching fund to crowd in domestic public investment and a supplier financing window supported by UNCDF to stimulate local manufacturing.

Some participants pointed to examples of UN agencies deploying first-loss capital to catalyze private or risk-averse investment. UNCDF and UNIDO have provided early-stage or concessional finance to de-risk investments in small enterprises or infrastructure, helping to demonstrate viability and draw in larger actors.

Yet, participants also noted the need for robust governance safeguards. While private and philanthropic capital can be a critical complement to public finance, deeper engagement brings new tensions around values alignment, particularly regarding the UN's advocacy role on equitable global taxation and sustainability standards.

Innovations in Guarantees, Bonds and Market Access

The International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd) demonstrates how donor guarantees can be used to multiply the value of concessional lending through multilateral development banks, unlocking as much as $7 in lending for every $1 in guarantees. The Asian Development Bank has begun replicating this approach in climate finance through its Innovative Finance Facility for Climate in Asia and the Pacific (IF-CAP).

Some UN entities are also entering capital markets. IFAD became the first UN fund to receive a credit rating (AA+) and issue its own sustainable bonds, enabling access to a broader base of institutional investors. This required significant internal reforms to strengthen transparency, governance and financial management systems.

Participants also discussed the benefits of frontloading. Gavi's International Finance Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm) has raised over $10 billion by converting long-term donor pledges into marketable securities, allowing faster disbursement and predictable demand. This helped Gavi negotiate lower vaccine prices – for instance, helping reduce the price of the pentavalent vaccine to around $2.60 per dose – supporting the transition of countries from aid dependence.

Systemic Constraints and Strategic Paths

Despite these innovations, structural challenges persist. UN agencies often face internal bylaws that restrict borrowing, cost recovery or engagement with market instruments. Even where rules permit innovation, many lack dedicated teams, digital infrastructure, or risk management systems to execute effectively. Participants also emphasized that data generated across the UN system – on programs, beneficiaries and outcomes – represents a potential asset, if made more accessible, anonymized and customizable. There may be opportunities to monetize experiences and insights in ways that serve mission-driven goals while generating revenue – for instance, by tailoring internal datasets for specific stakeholder use cases or public engagement.

The challenge is not just to raise more money, but to evolve the administrative and operational models of international organizations so that they can capture value from digital tools, expand payment and income options, and deploy novel financial instruments. Several participants pointed to AI-enabled insights, customized dashboards and subscription-based data services as examples of tools that could both serve the public good and generate sustainable income streams.

Mapping What Works, and Why: The Role of GGI

Participants recognized the value of system-wide efforts to codify and share institutional innovations. The Global Governance Innovation Platform (GGI), led by UNU-CPR, is compiling a repository of over 200 governance innovations from across the multilateral system. These case studies cover resource mobilization strategies, accountability and decision-making mechanisms, and other key governance features. By highlighting these practices, GGI offers policymakers and reform leaders practical templates and inspiration for institutional reform. The platform will launch a new publicly accessible module in late 2025, timed to support the ongoing implementation of the Pact for the Future, the UN's 80th anniversary (UN80) and COP30.

Conclusions

The workshop affirmed that innovation is already happening across the multilateral system – but unevenly. The challenge ahead is not only to raise more funds but to adapt UN administrative structures to scale emerging innovations, particularly those that:

- Monetize data, content and tailored user experiences;
- Expand use of first-loss capital, guarantees and novel financial instruments;
- Leverage AI to unlock insights and services from existing datasets;
- Enable payment models and participation mechanisms that reduce barriers for the Global South;
- Replicate subnational strategies such as city-level user fees, bonds and solidarity models;
- Learn from entities already engaged in lending and risk-sharing models, including UNCDF, UNIDO and IFAD.

Resource mobilization is not only about raising funds; it is about realigning rules, mandates, partnerships and power. The future of multilateral resource mobilization lies in embracing these operational shifts – not just to generate revenue, but to transform how the UN and other international organizations create and deliver value in a changing world.