

ANNUAL REPORT 2006

Jesper Morch, UNICEF Representative in Viet Nam discusses the UN Reform initiative that country

Q: Discuss the experience of the 'One UN' approach that was piloted in the Viet Nam office in 2006.

The reform initiative in [Viet Nam](#) preceded the High-Level Panel and the [Delivering as One](#) by quite some time, about 12-18 months. It had to do with the particular reality of Viet Nam, which came out of abject poverty in the early 1990s, and between 1993 and 2004 reduced absolute poverty from about 60 per cent to just a little below 20 per cent; and which at the moment is the second-fastest growing economy in the world, the darling of the donors, the highest recipient of ODA [official development assistance] per capita of any country in the world, a country that will become a middle-income country in 2011, and a fully industrialized country in 2020.

In that context, in the mid-80s we [the United Nations] provided more than 50 per cent of ODA; in 2007 we provide less than 2 per cent of ODA. And while the UN has never been about the amount of money we bring to the table, that is a very significant difference. The 2 per cent probably doesn't not allow us a seat at the table where important decisions are taken, especially [in a country] that has also embraced the new global aid environment and that translated the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness from March 2005 into the [Hanoi Core Statement on AID Effectiveness](#) in May 2005. And which caught the block of the UN and said you are globally supporting these efforts towards greater coherence, towards national government ownership of development processes, towards reduction of duplication and overlap, towards greater efficiency and effectiveness. But if we look at what you're doing here in Viet Nam, we don't see it translated into practical action. We had a problem with relevance in Viet Nam, and based on that we decided to come more closely together and began talking about the Five Ones, which was One leader, One plan, One budget, One house and One set of business practices.

We are still talking in the early days, way before the High-Level Panel had produced its report. There was a concept paper in late 2005, there was a road map in early 2006. The road map was embraced by the government and translated into a set of agreed principles and objectives established by the prime minister. The prime minister then went on to establish a tripartite national task force consisting of government, of key donors and of the UN System. That coincided with the High-Level Panel and the Delivering as One initiative [so] it became natural that we became a pilot. It is very much a Vietnamese-driven and Vietnamese-based initiative.

Q: What were the specific accomplishments recorded in 2006 using this joint model?

It's probably very early to talk about real accomplishments. It will be yet some time before we see the big difference between what we would have been able to accomplish as 12 [UN agencies] and what we are now able to accomplish as one.

Q: Were there any surprises in the process?

There are couple of things that caught us a little by surprise. When we designed all this in 2006, we really geared it around two core principles: one was the notion that in the 'One UN', the [Resident Coordinator](#) would not only become the nominal, but also the real head of the agencies that participated. And the second was the notion of a two-track approach, where we said that this is an inclusive process that will allow anybody who is able and willing to join, but at the same time we realized that we can't all move at the same between all the funds and programmes and [specialized agencies of the United Nations](#), and that we will start with those who are able and keep the door open for everybody else to join when and as they wish.

And those have turned out to perhaps be the two biggest problems. There is the nominal agreement that the Resident Coordinator will have expanded authority, but in reality we see that we are talking about a number of additional responsibilities, but not necessarily expanded authority, and there's still some issues around accountability that we have not been able to resolve.

The other thing that perhaps caught us by some surprise: we assumed that the one set of business practices would be very difficult, but that in fact has turned out to go very far, very fast. That has been a very gratifying experience. Early on, because we have the two-track approach, we had a unanimous decision in the UN Country Team – all members agreed that this was a good thing that everybody was supportive of. But some of the specialized agencies said very clearly we won't be able to join early on and as a matter of fact we ended up with six agencies starting this.

Q: Was there any cross-collaboration and information-sharing with the other 'One UN' countries that also piloted the approach in 2006?

There has been a division of labour, through which perhaps it is fair to say that UNDP [the United Nations Development Programme], UNFPA [the United Nations Population Fund] and UNICEF have shared the major part of the burden, have been supported by the other three participants of what at the moment are the six agencies joining hands in the One UN – UNAIDS [the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS], UNIFEM [the United Nations Development Fund for Women] and UNV [United Nations Volunteers].

And the specialized agencies have perhaps contributed a little less to the model but we have the UN Country Team and the UN Country Team *is* the United Nations in Viet Nam. There have been informal systems set up between countries but so far we have been better at maintaining communications between the individual agencies in each of the

countries that are working on system-wide coherence or UN Reform, than we have between the UN Country Teams in the eight pilots and some of the offices. That is an important challenge for [UNDGO](#) [the United Nations Development Group office] and for all the UNDP participants, and for the UNDG participants, in particular the ex-comm agencies. Some of the websites that have been established are fine. There are possibilities of communicating, but it is important to share experiences and to learn from each other. It is at least equally important to emphasize that we are all pilots – we are not models yet. We are pilots, inspired by our national realities and the needs of the country that the UN Country Teams work in, and to the extent that we can regionally and globally draw experiences out of those pilots and apply them in building models, that would be fantastic.

Q: Of key interest to UNICEF is ensuring that the work of the UN system for children and their rights are as well, or better served through the joint approach. What programming steps were taken to ensure this?

I am completely convinced that by being part of the One UN initiative in Viet Nam, we are safeguarding the best interests of the child in Viet Nam, and we are making sure that both UNICEF's plans and the best interests of the child are being kept in the forefront of development work. I have been involved in UN Reform since '97. I was one of the first 21 UNDAF [United Nations Development Assistance Framework] facilitators that was called to New York and trained from the various agencies. I think in many ways we have not come very far in UN Reform and UNICEF has never been in the forefront of the efforts, for a variety of reasons, many of which are good.

There is a series of concerns right now, including in UNICEF, of our ability to maintain our high profile, our ability to maintain the ability to mobilize resources in the private sector and so on. I am not going to express categorical statements, neither regionally or globally, but when it comes to Viet Nam and the Vietnamese child, being part of this exercise allows us in UNICEF to spread our influence from the line ministries that we have traditionally been working with to other ministries., like the ministry of planning and investment, the ministry of finance and other key ministries that at the moment simply are central to the economic and social development of this country. Our access to those ministries will allow us to promote the interests of Vietnamese children in general, and children of ethnic minorities in particular. Will allow us to place children at the top of the United Nations agenda, and will allow us to motivate and build capacity in other agencies to speak with the same strength, or close to the same strength as we do in UNICEF around children's issues.

I think this is exclusively a win-win situation. I don't have a single moment's doubt that we will see a much higher profile, much more prominent place for children in Viet Nam's national development efforts. We cannot fail.