

UN Reform

What it means for children

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When government leaders gathered at the 2005 World Summit, they underlined the central role of the UN in sustainable development and humanitarian response, as well as in the areas of peace and security, and human rights. They also reaffirmed their commitment to support countries and their governments in meeting the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. Following the Summit, the UN has stepped up its reform efforts to ensure greater coherence to its work, more efficiency and less bureaucracy for all its partners, more effective sharing of knowledge and data, and greater accountability for measuring and reporting results.

Reform measures must be implemented quickly and urgently. The international community has converged around the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals.¹ There are fewer than 10 years remaining to achieve the Goals; 2015 represents real time and every target of the MDGs represents real lives. The results achieved, or not achieved, in the coming years will be the measure of the effectiveness of a coordinated country approach.

Children are at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals, and UN reform is an imperative for UNICEF if it is to better fulfill its mandate and mission. Since it was first established in 1946 as an emergency agency for children, UNICEF has worked to improve the health, nutrition and education of children, extending its efforts to wherever the needs of children are greatest.

UNICEF is guided, in all its actions, by its mandate to serve and protect the best interests of children. The reality within which UNICEF works every day is a tragic and unacceptable one – where 10.5 million children under five die unnecessarily each year, where 115 million children are out of school, where millions of children do without basic health care, and unknowable numbers suffer the abuse of their rights. For UNICEF, UN reform means the opportunity to produce greater results for children and to produce them more effectively, more systematically and more efficiently.

Today, UNICEF's efforts to achieve results for children take place in cooperation with like-minded partners who have coalesced around the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, including programme and donor countries, international financial institutions, civil society, academia and faith-based organizations. The organization's ability to convene others around the common targets of the MDGs is evident as it works in extended partnerships, such as the Unite for Children Unite against AIDS Campaign, the UN Girls' Education Initiative, and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health.

UNICEF is committed to strengthening the UN system, with its principles of multilateralism, the fulfillment of human rights, and the value of cooperation and partnerships; and is eagerly exploring the wide variety of possibilities afforded by UN reform for their potential of securing concrete and measurable results for children.

¹ This convergence has come about through a series of meetings and agreements including: Millennium Summit (2000), Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development (2002), Rome High Level Forum on Harmonisation (2003), Marrakech Roundtable on Managing Development Results (2004), Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), World Summit (2005), High Level Panel on Operational Coherence (2006).

There is much discussion about greater system coherence based on three key areas: humanitarian, development and environmental. As children's issues cut across all three, UNICEF proactively works in each of them. It is a key development partner in the UN system, and 40 per cent of its resources are used in humanitarian work. UNICEF provides leadership, within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Framework, in nutrition, water and sanitation, and data communications, while continuing its substantive role in education, health and protection. UNICEF retains, also, the capacity to be the provider of last resort when national or local service provision for children has broken down.

UNICEF's role in strengthening the system

Because of its ongoing cooperation with local governments and communities and its field-based policy analyses, UNICEF will continue to bring a unique voice to international policy debates. Its experience across a range of situations – humanitarian emergencies, post-crisis transition and development – provides a broad perspective needed for peace-building and international cooperation. Its proven capabilities in communications, social mobilization, advocacy and in procurement services contribute to the entire system.

UNICEF's substantive capacity for comprehensive data collection and analyses, which are available online in DevInfo and in its flagship publications, allows a common starting point and benchmarks for measuring results in efforts to meet the targets of the MDGs. The capacity for supporting national data collection and analyses is critical as the lack of a shared database impedes the ability to accurately measure results. With the UN's commitment to the human-rights based approach to programming, evidence to measure outcomes is essential.

UNICEF's National Committees, working within donor countries to mobilize voluntary funding for development and humanitarian assistance and support for the cause of children and the work of UNICEF, are a major asset for the organization and for the UN as a whole. The Committees maintain a high public profile for the Millennium Development Goals with children at their center and are strong advocates for the UN around the world.

The fact that UNICEF is entirely funded by voluntary contributions from governments and the private sector reflects the enormous goodwill the organization has earned over its 60 years. This positive brand identity benefits the entire UN system.

'One UN' at the country level

It is not practical to expect that all committed to the 'One UN' concept will be able to change at the same pace. Nor – given the looming targets of the MDGs and the millions of lives the targets represent – is it acceptable to slow the momentum of those who can. The pace of reform should be accelerated and the specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods Institutions should be more fully integrated into the process.

Exactly what 'One UN' will look like in each country will differ depending on circumstance. UNICEF believes that the following will increase the coherence, efficiency and effectiveness that are needed to produce the best results in achieving the MDGs.

1. Programme

There should be one common country programme with a common measure of results. The programme should have one communication strategy, one financial reporting system and one annual progress report, which may be supplemented by individual agency or topical reports as needed for accountability purposes. This common programme should support the national development plan and use government systems wherever possible.

2. Leadership

The role of Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator,² as an objective leader of a country team who speaks for the UN with one voice, should be enhanced further, with the expectation that they will convene, facilitate and lead a strategic UN plan that supports national priorities for achieving the MDGs and for meeting internationally agreed norms and standards, including those on human rights.

The UN Country Team supports national development partners and works closely with civil society to achieve maximum results. The role extends beyond the agencies of the UNDG Executive Committee to specialized agencies, and should further embrace the Bretton Woods Institutions.

Inter-agency recommendations for the Coordinators and strong peer-assessments are critical to the success of the 'One UN' model. Inter-agency mobility is needed to facilitate staff from different agencies filling the role; and continued attention must be paid to ensuring that diversity is a major consideration in appointing the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator.

3. Office structures

Depending on country circumstances, the UN team might be structured in various ways. For example:

a) In those countries with a small UN presence, Joint Offices should be established where staff are accountable to a single UN representative, who oversees the interagency team, the common country programme and integrated business processes. An alternative in some other countries would be a joint/integrated office, which would allow a host agency to represent other agencies that might not require a full presence in the country. Joint offices should be co-located, with operations and administrative services provided by equitable cost-sharing arrangements.

b) In most other countries, an effective model would have agency country directors accountable to a full-time Resident Coordinator and to their own organizations for policy and programme guidance. Country directors should have full authority to act within the mandates of their respective organizations, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, as determined by what most effectively drives MDG results and supports international agreed treaties and conventions.

² In places where there is a Special Representative of the Secretary General, the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator serves as a Deputy SRSG, with overall authority in that country to bring together the peace-keeping and operational aspects of the UN's work.

4. Operations

Operations of agencies should be simplified and harmonized to the maximum extent possible, so that common services are established for support services in finance, human resources and administration.

5. Funding

This approach would benefit greatly from predictable, multi-year financial support from donors against national and international agreed goals and priorities. Regular (core) resources are critical for effective support to national capacity development, policy analyses and sustaining of results.

Implications for Regional Offices

The same commitment to simplification and harmonization that is being made at the country level should happen in the Regional Offices. Regional-level reform should aim for a high-caliber support and cooperation based on the shared agenda of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, and on a shared assessment and analysis at country and regional levels. Regional Offices should also enhance their capacity to carry out child rights advocacy with access to the highest levels of government.

Regional alignment will need to include discussions with programme and policy partners, including normative specialized agencies. Regional offices should be co-located and country coverage harmonized to the maximum extent possible. Regional hubs, such as those under way in Eastern and Southern Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean, are examples of effective collaboration. In these offices, regional UN advisers are providing common support to country programmes across organizational lines.

Implications for Headquarters

At Headquarters, the aim should be to harmonize common functions for business processes. Information technology requires particular attention as greater harmonization across agencies will facilitate the attainment of common services and provide the common database, which is especially pivotal in programme planning, monitoring and evaluating the results.

UNICEF has embarked on an intensive programme of organizational review and management reform including reviews of its business processes. Among the objectives of the review are to simplify processes so as to reduce costs and increase efficiency, apply best practices, develop new processes that will allow work to go on more fluidly across UN agencies, and, ultimately, to harmonize business processes and systems. UN organizations should share a business process framework with common regulations, rules and procedures.³

³ The planned introduction of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards, based on a full accrual system, will necessitate the substantial revision of existing financial regulations and rules by each organization.

Implications for UNICEF Human Resources

UNICEF is committed to providing suitable candidates for Resident Coordinators/ Humanitarian Coordinators. It will be vital for the system to ensure that staff will be ready with the right set of competencies and skills: technical as well as the capacity for advocacy, convening, and for building and maintaining strategic partnerships. In addition, system-wide surge capacity should be strengthened to deploy in emergency, early recovery and transition situations.

Systematic staff secondments and loans across agencies will assist the cross-fertilization of ideas and capacities. In order for this to be accomplished, there is a need to align grade structures across agencies. Incentives for inter-agency mobility should be enhanced.

Conclusions

A strengthened and reformed UN benefits children. To produce concrete and measurable results in achieving the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, the UN will need to play an ever stronger role in leveraging available resources, working in close collaboration with a broad range of development partners.

Any partnership that is effective in building national capacity and bringing a country closer to achieving the MDGs is a partnership that will mean greater results for children. A UN that is better prepared to generate and promote knowledge, ensure monitoring and evaluation, and undertake data collection and policy-related analyses will help advance the cause of children. Resources that are leveraged and better managed will yield greater improvements in children's lives.

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