



**Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards
of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP
20 and 23 January 2006
United Nations**

Background document

**Agenda item 4: Simplification and harmonization, with a special focus
on the programming process**

BACKGROUND PAPER FOR THE JOINT MEETING
OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS, JANUARY 2006

SIMPLIFYING THE PROGRAMMING PROCESS¹: ACTIONS AND OPTIONS TO
ENHANCE UNITED NATIONS SUPPORT TO NATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Introduction

1. This informal background paper describes a number of actions that have been taken, and presents options for consideration, to enhance the support United Nations country teams provide at the national level. Its premise is that the substantive contribution of the United Nations – to support national partners to achieve their goals as well as those agreed at the international level – can be improved if the Executive Committee agencies (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP) of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and their respective Executive Boards streamline the procedures that national partners and United Nations country teams must undertake and the different types of documentation that they must produce.
2. This premise is supported in principle by Member States (as articulated in General Assembly resolution 59/250 on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system and the 2005 World Summit Outcome); by United Nations staff at the country level; and by the development community, in order to improve aid effectiveness. The purpose of the actions and options presented in this paper is to transform the premise into practice.
3. The Executive Boards of the UNDG Executive Committee agencies have requested their respective organizations to identify steps that can be taken in this regard. As requested in UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board decision 2004/18, UNDP and UNFPA presented a report at the annual session 2005 of their Board on progress in implementing decision 2001/11: addressing the issue of the time frame for developing country programme documents (DP/2005/28-DP/FPA/2005/10). The Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF, in decisions 2005/28 and 2005/9, respectively, requested that a report, elaborated jointly, be presented for discussion at their annual sessions in 2006 on options to further improve and streamline the current harmonized country programme approval procedure. The WFP Executive Board also expressed the desire to continue to discuss simplification of the country programming process. This paper therefore acts as a stepping stone towards that end. The UNDG Executive Committee agencies welcome informal feedback and guidance.

¹ The common country programming process refers to the preparation and approval of United Nations programmes through harmonized programme cycles; the common country assessment (CCA); the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF); and, for the United Nations funds and programmes bound by the harmonized country programme approval process, the country programme document, the country programme action plan and the annual workplans.

4. In this paper, the UNDG Executive Committee agencies present a number of ideas with regard to: (a) country analytical work; (b) programme planning and preparation; and (c) the approval process for country programmes. Each section describes the objectives of each aspect of the process; the current actions being taken; and options for further discussion and feedback.

Principles

5. The arguments for simplifying the common country programming process must be considered within a set of principles. The measures proposed in this paper are consistent with these principles:

(a) The overall purpose of simplification is to enable the United Nations to unleash its substantive potential to support national priorities and to demonstrate its relevance. The primary objective is to ensure that the United Nations can make a collective, strategic contribution in response to national priorities, including the internationally agreed development goals and the Millennium Development Goals.

(b) Simplification should not undermine participation, transparency or the consultative process at the national level, nor should it hinder accountability or the ability of agencies to report on results achieved and resources used.

(c) Simplification should lead to a reduction in transaction costs for the United Nations and its partners.

(d) Simplifying the programming process does not mean diluting the substantive contribution that the United Nations can make collectively or individually through its mandates and experience, international conferences, and human rights conventions and treaties.

(e) Simplifying the documentation process is intended to better enable United Nations country teams to think strategically, and should encourage active participation from all United Nations agencies, including non-resident agencies in the country concerned.

(f) Simplification should not mean that United Nations country teams lose the gains made in inter-agency coordination and team spirit acquired to date through United Nations reform efforts.

6. As the UNDG Executive Committee agencies discuss options to simplify the common country programming process, with guidance from Member States, they will ensure dialogue with all relevant partners, especially with partner countries, and will identify and carefully assess risks. The UNDG will develop policies and procedures to ensure that risks are mitigated and will provide guidance to United Nations staff and partners.

Options for discussion

Analytical phase

7. The stated purpose of the CCA, as outlined in the current CCA/UNDAF guidelines, is to determine whether and where a development challenge exists; its intensity; who is affected; and to identify the causes of selected major challenges and the key determinants and options to address them.
8. The objectives of United Nations analytical work at country level are:
 - (a) To bring the global and regional normative agenda to the national policy dialogue consistent with the United Nations mandate and the internationally agreed goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and national priorities;
 - (b) To use national frameworks to analyse the strategic role of the United Nations in support of those priorities;
 - (c) To strengthen national processes and capacities to implement national priorities through capacity assessment and the alignment of United Nations processes with national ones.

Action

9. Currently, United Nations country teams are encouraged to undertake analytical work, such as the CCA, that strategically enhances national analytical work and supports national processes. In addition, United Nations country teams may choose to forgo the preparation of a CCA, if they feel it would duplicate national processes and if good analytical documents already exist in country or are about to be produced from ongoing national processes to which the United Nations is contributing. However, the United Nations country team must review collectively the analytical work to ensure that no key issues related to the global mandate of the United Nations are ignored, and should produce supplementary material to address any gaps.

Options for the future

10. Instead of a major undertaking every five years, one option might be to replace the CCA with continuous and strategically planned support by the United Nations to nationally led analyses of agreed indicators and key strategic issues related to the follow up of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and those articulated in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, in pursuit of national development objectives. The United Nations country team would complement the national analytical process through a strategic research support agenda focusing on policy, normative and operational issues and, where appropriate, the joint publication of analyses, results, findings and recommendations.

11. Analysis and research findings, such as those from annual progress reports on the Millennium Development Goals, would: (a) be used for both programming and advocacy purposes; (b) support national monitoring and policy formulation; and (c) be summarized to identify areas where the United Nations can best support the national development process during the preparation of the common country programme document. The strategic analysis and research agenda to be supported by the United Nations would be outlined as part of the multi-year programme framework of the United Nations agreed with government. The United Nations country team, in consultation with partners, would review and update annually the analysis and research agenda.

Programme planning and preparation

12. In preparing the United Nations programme of assistance to partner countries, the United Nations seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) To identify its strategic, collective interventions to support national development results;
- (b) To ensure that its priorities are defined through consultation with and leadership from national partners, as well as with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, including non-resident agencies and other development partners;
- (c) To ensure that the results achieved and resources used for the programme can be measured.

Action

13. Currently, United Nations country teams and their partners develop an UNDAF and an UNDAF results matrix, based on analysis reflected in the CCA, which national counterparts then approve. This serves as the framework for the development of more detailed programme support documents prepared with government by each UNDG member agency. For those United Nations funds and programmes bound by the harmonized country programme approval process, in addition to the preparation of an UNDAF and an UNDAF results matrix, a country programme document is submitted to the respective Executive Boards for approval. The country programme document is linked, via the respective Executive Board websites, to the corresponding UNDAF results matrix. In addition, each UNDG Executive Committee agency prepares a country programme action plan, based on the approved country programme document, which the agency and the government sign in order to operationalize the country programme.

The common country programme document for Cape Verde: a step towards the future

Cape Verde developed the first common country programme, linked to the pilot of the joint office model. The customary UNDAF process took place in Cape Verde. UNDG agency programme heads came together with all UNDG partners and other partners to develop a strategy for a strong, integrated presence, with support from the regional advisers of the UNDG Executive Committee agencies, followed by endorsement by the regional directors of the Executive Committee agencies. The strategy meeting with the Government – on what the United Nations could contribute to national development goals – also took place. Representatives of the four UNDG Executive Committee agencies from country and regional levels, along with representatives of the United Nations Development Group Office, attended the meeting with the Government. After the strategy was agreed, the preparation of the common document began.

Agency headquarters, in consultation with their counterparts in Praia, provided advice on a common country programme format based on an analysis of the four separate, but similar, formats for individual UNDG Executive Committee agency country programmes. Following technical consultations, the country team produced one draft document, rather than four individual documents. Another innovation followed: the team of four UNDG Executive Committee agency regional directors participated in a videoconference to jointly approve the common document. The UNDG Executive Committee agencies agreed that one Executive Committee agency, on behalf of all four, would edit the document and ensure its translation, thus simplifying the process, achieving consistency and reducing costs. In addition to the common document, each agency produced a results and budget matrix specific to its contribution, to ensure clarity on agency resources. Each agency then sought approval by its respective Executive Board.

Options for the future

14. The UNDG Executive Committee agencies have agreed in principle to simplify the programme planning process by consolidating the existing set of documents into one. This new common document would encompass the different functions of the various current documents, while avoiding duplication of content. The UNDG Executive Committee would like to introduce this new approach in 2006, for those country programmes to be approved in 2007. The document would consist of the following elements:

- (a) A statement articulating the strategic role of the United Nations in support of national priorities and how the participating agencies will work synergistically to support that role;
- (b) A United Nations results framework/matrix;

(c) Agency-specific contributions to that framework, including financial contributions;

(d) Operational provisions and clauses for United Nations operations in the country, including the fiduciary arrangements for individual agencies vis-à-vis the national government.

15. Building on the experience with the common country programme document for Cape Verde, and following consultations with Member States, the UNDG would develop more detailed suggestions on the modus operandi and provide guidance to the field.

Programme approval

16. The overall objectives of the current approval process are:

(a) To ensure appropriate national level consultation, leadership and ownership of the United Nations proposed multi-year programme of assistance;

(b) To ensure appropriate Executive Board approval of the United Nations multi-year programme of assistance, consistent with the multi-year funding framework or the multi-year strategic plan of the particular agency.

Action

17. The proposed simplification of the programme preparation process outlined above would be a major step in reducing the transaction costs of the current approval process at national and Board levels. A number of other possibilities exist for further discussion. These pertain to the current procedures agreed to by the Boards and their impact on simplifying the process at the national level.

Options for the future

Reduction in the time frame for approving country programmes

18. There may be scope, if the Executive Boards so wish, to reduce the amount of time required by the Boards between the submission and approval of country programme documentation. This period currently totals nine months, between the initial submission of the country programme document to the United Nations for translation and processing, and its final approval by the Board.

19. This nine-month interval could be shortened if the Executive Boards approved country programmes at their first Board meeting following initial submission. This would reduce the required time for approval to approximately six months. This interval could be reduced further if the Executive Boards used an electronic approval process rather than the current form of approval that takes place at the first regular session the following year. The current procedure – that each country programme document will be approved

on a no-objection basis without presentation or discussion, unless at least five members of the Executive Board have informed the secretariat in writing before the meeting of their wish to bring a particular country programme before the Executive Board – could apply to an electronic approval process.

Governance implications of a consolidated United Nations common country programme document

20. The proposal described above for a consolidated, common United Nations country programme document does not necessarily imply changes in current governance procedures by the respective Boards. Each Board would still review agency-specific contributions to the United Nations programme. However, Board Members may wish to consider whether the working methods of the Boards should be reviewed in light of this approach.

21. Members of the Executive Boards may also wish to review their working methods in light of the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, endorsed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, particularly with regard to national ownership, the use of national systems and strengthening national capacities.