



UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women Information Note Country Programme Documents and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes

8 January 2021

A. Introduction

This Information Note provides an overview of the work undertaken by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women – in close collaboration with the Development Coordination Office (DCO), the Resident Coordinator (RC) System and the leadership of the RC at the country level - to ensure alignment of their country programming instruments¹ with UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs). This Note is in alignment with the recently adopted General Assembly resolution² on Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. A number of the operative paragraphs of the QCPR resolution are of direct relevance to this note, as referenced accordingly.

B. Context / Overview

The principles underpinning the new Cooperation Framework guidance, including its emphasis on evidence-based, context-specific responses, are fundamental to strengthened programming and ensuring the realization of coherent and sustainable results. This is even more relevant as the UN Development System (UNDS) supports recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and works with countries on building back stronger to help achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As the first full year following the adoption of the Cooperation Framework guidance, 2020 was a transitional year to provide the necessary time for new approaches and ways of working to be applied and to take hold.

As part of this shift across the UNDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women have taken deliberate steps to ensure that the Country Programme Document (CPD) and Strategic Note (SN) processes have been recalibrated, in particular to ensure their derivation from and alignment with the Cooperation Framework. Moreover, at global, regional and country levels, the four entities remain steadfast supporters and strong contributors to the Cooperation Framework.

The following four areas highlight key shifts in alignment efforts by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women (where relevant).

¹ For UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF: Country Programme Documents; for UN-Women: Strategic Notes

² A/RES/75/233

1. Contribution to High Quality UNSDCFs

The country offices of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women are strongly engaged in the development of the Cooperation Frameworks and are committed to ensuring these are a step change towards UN Country Team (UNCT) integrated and context specific support for country efforts towards the Sustainable Development Goals and response to COVID 19. As members of the UNCT, the four entities support tailored analytical tools and approaches, including the Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS), and continue to contribute actively to the analysis and theory of change underpinning the Cooperation Framework.

Formulation of Cooperation Frameworks and the country programmes of UNDP, UNFPA UNICEF and UN-Women need to be advanced to an extent in a parallel and sequenced manner. Building from the Common Country Analysis, the Theory of Change and the articulation of draft Cooperation Framework outcomes, the respective country programmes are then articulated to advance the substantive contribution respectively of the four entities to those outcomes and are the means by which the Cooperation Framework is operationalized.

2. CPD / SN alignment with the UNSDCF

UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women have taken decisive steps to align their entity specific country programmes and Strategic Notes with the agreed joint results of the UN Country Team (UNCT), i.e., the Cooperation Framework outcomes. Such alignment goes further than adopting the Cooperation Framework outcomes. As an illustration, entity specific country programmes are informed by the Theory of Change underpinning the Cooperation Framework and the contribution that the respective programmes will make to achieve those outcomes, working closely with partner governments. The four entities work together at country level – with other UNCT members – to unpack those Cooperation Framework outcomes into joint work plan outputs, including joint approaches to implementation and monitoring of results. This process is instrumental to the joint alignment of resources and planning for the realization of the Cooperation Framework's shared results. The four entities are also critical partners in the various Cooperation Framework results groups for joint monitoring under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator.

UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF have committed to ensure – in accordance with OP74, QCPR 2020 – that draft country programmes can be considered alongside the current draft of the Cooperation Framework and/or its outcome matrix, prior to consideration by the respective Executive Boards for approval. As has been advised to the Executive Boards, the DCO will make draft Cooperation Frameworks or draft outcomes matrices available for information on a dedicated webpage, during the draft CPD commenting period.

Each of the four entities has established robust guidance for the development of new country programmes, which includes the requirement that country offices ensure the principle of national ownership and undertake consultations with stakeholders in country, including bilateral development partners. This is a practice that the four entities are respectively committed to continue, noting that these consultations take place at the country level, and rely on the internal channels of Member States and stakeholders accordingly to ensure a singular approach by partners on the substance of these consultations.

3. Sequencing of CPDs with the UNSDCF

UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF have well established mechanisms in place with their respective Executive Boards to ensure sequencing of Cooperation Frameworks and UN entity-specific country programmes. Extensions to existing country programmes are proactively managed and submitted to the respective Boards with the primary reason for such extensions, in recent times, being to ensure alignment with the Cooperation Framework. The entities have established regular coordination points with DCO on the sequencing of CPDs with the Cooperation Framework, particularly in relation to the maturity of Cooperation Frameworks and the expected submission of draft CPDs and/or extension of them to the Boards. These mechanisms will continue to be strengthened. Delays and extensions to CPDs create transaction costs, and occasionally, there may be a need for flexibility. UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women welcome the commitment to strengthened accountability measures put in place by DCO. This will allow Resident Coordinators to ensure that Cooperation Frameworks remain on track and can be delivered in accordance with their respective roadmaps, which can otherwise impact the respective CPDs and SNs.

In line with the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF), the respective Representatives of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women ensure that the Resident Coordinator provides confirmation to the respective regional director of her/his agreement that the document aligns to the UNSDCF, before the respective entity proceeds with sign-off. The respective country programme/strategic notes guidance of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women reinforces this requirement. This is also reviewed as part of the internal quality assurance processes of the entities before draft CPDs are made available to Member States for comment.

4. Executive Board review processes

In line with the established procedures of the Executive Boards, the draft CPDs are made available for Member State comment. Where adjustments are required to CPDs as a result of comments, these are transparently reflected when the final CPD is submitted to the Board for approval. It is important to note that making changes to CPDs after the final document is posted for the relevant Board session is rare, but there are occasions where, for various extenuating circumstances, and in consultation with the respective government, such changes may be required, in which case Member States will continue to be consulted.³

UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF note that it is important to ensure timely approval of the country programmes, informed by their alignment to the respective Cooperation Frameworks and in a manner that does not jeopardize the continuity of programme implementation.

UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF also consider that it would be a useful practice to provide a joint update to the Boards in advance of the first regular session on the expected country programmes to be submitted for approval that year, aligned with the corresponding Cooperation Framework processes. In providing this indicative information to the Boards, it is inevitable that adjustments to expected CPD submission timelines may need to be made, driven by the need to ensure alignment with national processes.

³ For Strategic Notes of UN-Women, a consultative process takes place at national level with the Government and key stakeholders before approval.

C. Conclusion

UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women re-emphasize the specific value that each entity-specific CPD/SN adds in terms of complementarity between the Cooperation Frameworks and the planning documents of the individual entities.

UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women are committed to learning and making further improvements as needed in moving forward with the overall aim to deliver sustainable results to advance the realization of the SDGs.