

Joint Programmes



Your Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between Joint Programming and a Joint Programme?

Joint programming is the overall process through which the UN at the country level uses a harmonized approach to work with government and other partners to prepare, support implementation, and monitor and evaluate programmes of cooperation. A joint programme is a set of activities contained in a common work plan and budget that is implemented by government and/or other partner with the support of two or more UN agencies.

As a country team, we understand that joint programming can bring development efficiencies in particular circumstances. However we're having problems deciding on how to move ahead and what should be the next steps. Do you have any advice ?

Countries have taken many different approaches towards how they identify areas that could benefit from a collaborative approach in the form of joint programming. One that is particularly useful is the UNDAF Results Matrix. The Matrix uses a logical structure, identifies the common goals, and what each agency will do to contribute to them. If you follow the Matrix, then it will be much clearer where you can work together and you will also ensure that any joint programme is firmly rooted in national and country programme priorities.

Are Joint Programmes mandatory? Are there any targets for the number of Joint Programmes a country office should aim to develop?

No, they are not mandatory and there are no targets. The decision rests at the country level and depends on agreement by national counterparts and two or more UN agencies. But staff are expected to explore opportunities for joint programmes where two or more agencies are supporting common results. Where two or more UN agencies share common results and/or partners, a common Annual Work Plan can increase effectiveness and/or reduce transaction costs, it should be put in place and will constitute a joint programme.

If government and two or more UN agencies formulate a joint programme and utilize a pass-through fund management option, where does accountability reside? With the Administrative Agent or with each of the agencies to whom the funds are passed to?

With the pass-through option, the UN agency that acts as Administrative Agent is accountable for its share of the implementation funds. The agencies to which the funds are being channeled are each accountable for the funds received, in line with the AWP and their separate financial rules and regulations.

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Three agencies are planning on working on gender issues in one particular province. It's clear that it would make sense for us to work on this together. However the agencies will all be working with different government ministries and focal points. Can we still do a joint programme and if so what is the best fund management option to use in this situation?

Certainly you can — and gender is a good example of a cross-cutting issue that lends itself to joint programming. If the agencies will all be working towards a common result and will be working in the same geographical area but with different government partners, it is likely that a joint programme would raise effectiveness and efficiency. In this case, the parallel fund management modality would probably be the most appropriate for you. Under this method, the agencies concerned develop a common work plan and a consolidated budget that shows the funds each agency will be putting towards the programme. The management of the funds is still the responsibility of each agency however and reporting, funding, and overheads arrangements follow each agencies' rules.

One of our UNDAF outcomes focuses on health and reproductive rights. In line with this strategic focus, WHO and UNFPA are working with our Regional Development Bank to develop a joint programme in this area. As we will be working with the same Government ministry, we want to establish a pooled fund management arrangement. Should the Regional Development Bank be treated as a participating UN agency and sign the MOU or not?

Because the Regional Development Bank are not part of the UN family they should not be a signatory to the Memorandum of Understanding that pooled fund partners sign with the Managing Agent. Instead they should sign a funding agreement. You can find copies of a sample MOU and funding agreement in the Guidance Note on Joint Programming, in the Annexes. If the UNAIDS Theme Group includes bilaterals, NGOs and other partners — as they do in many countries — the Bank should participate in this.

The Joint Programming Guidance Note says that each agency can collect its usual indirect costs if we use a pass-through fund management option for a joint programme — but if we add it all up it makes 35%! How does this work?

Each agency should calculate their overhead only on the amount of money they receive, NOT on the total joint programme funds. So if the total programme is worth \$1 million, and UNICEF's share is \$400,000, UNDP's is \$350,000, UNFPA's \$250,000 then they charge their overheads on those figures not on the US\$1 million.

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Is it possible to have a joint programme funded by multiple donors? We are in the early stages of developing a joint programme focusing on empowerment of women and girls which links reproductive health for girls with a sustainable livelihoods component. NORAD is interested in working with UNFPA and WHO on the reproductive rights component, whilst DfID has expressed interest in working with UNDP on the livelihoods section, but is not prioritizing the other element.

Funds for joint programmes can be sought from a variety of donors; and a combination of fund management options can be used. In this case, NORAD could channel funds using a pass-through arrangement, with for example UNFPA or WHO as an Administrative Agent. DfID meanwhile can set up an agreement solely with UNDP. Where there are a variety of different fund arrangements in place, some country teams decide to pool some of their money together to fund a coordinating mechanism.

Recent studies show that HIV/AIDS prevalence is increasing faster than anticipated. Our previous UNDAF was developed some time ago and does not identify potential areas where agencies could work together on this. Our theme group on HIV/AIDS is very active however and has identified that four of the UN agencies in country could work with youth in one of the most vulnerable provinces in order to try and address the problem. Would it be appropriate to develop a joint programme?

The deliberations of theme groups are often a good way of identifying potential areas for joint programmes. HIV/AIDS in particular lends itself to a joint programming approach because of the multifaceted nature of the development challenges. You need to identify each agencies' comparative strength and knowledge in relation to the problem and ensure that those strengths complement and reinforce each other in the programme design.

Government and UN agencies have completed the development of our joint programme on capacity building for the MDGs with three UNDG agencies and are now ready to sign the joint project document in line with the new Guidance Note on Joint Programming. We're not clear however who should sign. Should it be only the RC who signs on behalf of all the agencies, or should each agency add their separate signature?

Each agency that is participating in the joint programme should sign the joint project document. The joint programme document itself should consist of a workplan and budget that details the roles and responsibilities of the partners in coordinating and managing the joint activities. Joint Programmes have a common Annual Work Plan, so the activities of participating agencies should be described in this common Annual Work Plan

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Two small agencies in our country team developed a joint programme on youth and civic awareness. From a discrete beginning, it has been really successful and has now begun to gather a lot of positive publicity from local media. One of the members of the country team that was not previously involved and doesn't have a track record in this area is now very interested - they are arguing that joint programming should involve as many agencies as possible. The two original agencies say there is no rationale for expanding the programme right now. Who is right?

A joint programme only makes sense where agencies want to achieve a common result and where they have the expertise to add value to the process. You don't need lots of agencies to make a joint programme — just two or more. Whilst the visibility generated by joint programmes can boost the profile of the UN in the country, publicity alone is not reason enough to become part of a joint programme — an agency has to bring sound added value and expertise. It sounds right now as though the programme should be left as it is.

Our country team are keen to investigate joint programmes. From talk in the corridor, it's clear that some are worried that they will lose agency visibility if they carry out a prestigious programme together. Won't the lead agency who gets to act as Managing or Administrative Agent take all the glory?

The Joint Programming Guidance Note defines the role of the Managing Agent and Administrative Agent very rigorously — in terms of fund management and reporting. All involved agencies participate fully in a joint programme. It's perfectly reasonable that agencies want to ensure that their stakeholders know about the good work they are doing. For this reason, ALL agencies involved are obliged to give credit to all participating agencies in their publicity. In particular, Managing or Administrative Agents have to make a special effort to make sure that the joint partnership is emphasized in their communications. If all agencies do this, the joint publicity will be greater than before and reach a wider audience.

When is the Joint Strategy Meeting (JSM) held? Will joint programmes be decided at the JSM?

The JSM is held no later than February of the year in which the draft Country Programme Document is to be submitted to the Board. Joint programmes will normally not be decided at the JSM, as it is too early to make decisions about implementation arrangements. At the JSM, areas of common results should be identified, within which the feasibility of joint programmes will be assessed, as Country Programme Action Plans are prepared.

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Three agencies decided that it would make sense to develop a joint programme in the north of the country. This was months ago and we can't seem to move further on this and agree on how to move ahead and what role each of the agencies will play. We are all very tired of this programme before we have even properly started — how should we move this forward?

It is essential that when agencies sit down to plan a joint programme they are very clear about what role they will each play and how those roles will complement each other. That is why going through the UNDAF Results Matrix can help avoid many problems like those you have described. If the country team have identified a development challenge through their CCA, they will clearly see during the UNDAF Results Matrix process where agencies can contribute to a common result. Even if the team does not have a Results Matrix, they may find it useful to work through the formulation of one as it will guide their thinking and reduce problems like the one you describe.

We are unclear in our country team whether the specialized agencies — e.g. UNESCO, WHO and so forth — are part of joint programming and whether we can develop joint programmes together on the basis of the revised Guidance Note on Joint Programming.

Joint programmes can certainly be developed with specialized agencies and there are many examples. The CCA and UNDAF are common to all the UN Development Group, including the specialized agencies. While UNDG ExCom agencies subsequently prepare Country Programme Action Plans (CPAPs) and Annual Work Plans (AWPs) with their national partners, the specialized agencies have their own, distinct programming instruments — most operate on the basis of projects rather than doing a country programme. This does not present an obstacle however to implementing joint programmes/projects with specialized agencies. All the specialized agencies endorsed the UNDG joint programming guidelines issued in 2004.

How do joint programmes relate to Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs)?

UN system contributions, whether technical or financial, to SWAs can be arranged through joint programmes or individual agency programmes. However any financial contribution will always be based on an Annual Work Plan.

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A few years ago, one of our major donors gave funds to our country team to develop a joint programme in water and sanitation for a particularly district. It was a key district for our donor and we all wanted to build the relationship, but it didn't really fit with our priorities. It took a lot of time and energy to make it work. Team members are now a bit skeptical about the whole idea of joint programming as it seems to be so much more labour-intensive than the regular way of doing business.

Joint programmes that are added on after the UNDAF results matrix is completed can cause a lot of extra work. To avoid this problem, joint programmes should clearly fit in with national priorities and the UNDG priorities as expressed in UNDAFs or other commonly agreed goals and objectives.

We are developing a joint programme on poverty reduction. At the initial stage of the planning all resident agencies were included in the planning as well as non-resident agencies. We are now one year down the line in terms of planning and realizing that getting a complex multisectoral joint programme off the ground is very tough. We want to bring this process to a close but we also want to ensure that as many agencies as possible take part in this joint programme — any advice?

There is no intrinsic virtue to a joint programme having as many participating agencies as possible: bigger is not better. A joint programme can have just two agencies taking part. In fact, if the country team has never formulated a joint programme together it would be very ambitious to construct a complex programme with multiple agencies. Keep it simple when you are starting out.

Can we do multi-country joint programmes?

A joint programme is defined as having a common Annual Work Plan, i.e. it is an agreement on how to support implementation. As such, a joint programme is always country-based.



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We are developing a joint programme on capacity building for MDGs. The EU, our donor, prefers to work with only one UN agency to simplify matters, so we are developing a pass-through management option. Are all agencies who participate in the joint programme equally accountable or is it only the Administrative Agent?

Accountability for disbursement of funds and producing consolidated narrative and financial reports lies with the Administrative Agent. As a result of this accountability and responsibility, it's important to ensure that the Administrative Agent has the technical as well as operational capacity to carry out this role. Responsibility for respective inputs and implementation however rests with the participating agencies.