

# UN Country Coordination

## *working together for development*

### Executive Summary

The Synthesis of Resident Coordinator Annual Reports for 2007 marks a decade since the United Nations Development Group was created to help coordinate the UN's operational activities for development. In that time, the UN system has made real progress in responding to the General Assembly's mandates to work together as a coherent, effective and efficient system that delivers valuable development assistance in the 180 countries where it works.

The Synthesis report summarizes 135 annual reports from UN Resident Coordinators to give an overview of the UN system's efforts to deliver more coordinated development assistance. Through concrete examples, it shows how UN country teams are applying and translating policy innovations to strengthen the UN. It also describes how UN country teams have identified the challenges and constraints they face, and notes their recommendations on ways in which their work could be better coordinated and, ultimately, how UN development operations can deliver more for the people who need the UN's support the most.

### Working Together for Development: Ten Years of Progress

For the past ten years UN country teams have been trying to work together in more coordinated ways, be more responsive to national priorities, build national capacity, and promote national ownership of the development process. The UNDG, the Resident Coordinator System and UN country teams have passed several milestones of progress, and these improvements are leading to more effective country operations. UN Development Assistance Frameworks are increasingly helping country teams plan together more strategically and draw upon the full range of expertise available in the UN system to respond to national development priorities. Thanks to harmonized and simplified programming cycles, tools and procedures, agencies are working together more closely, and the Resident Coordinator System is becoming stronger and more accountable. Country offices have also made progress on common premises and services, and the number of UN Houses has increased from four to 60.

### Delivering as One

In 2007 the United Nations launched the "Delivering as One" pilot initiative to test in eight countries — Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay, and Viet Nam — how the UN family can provide development assistance in a more coordinated way. The pilot countries have agreed to work with the UN to capitalize on the strengths and comparative advantages of the different UN agencies. They are experimenting with ways to increase the UN's impact through more coherent programmes, reduced transaction costs for governments and lower overhead costs for the UN.

Important initial findings from the first year of Delivering as One include increased government leadership and ownership of the UN Programme, UN priorities that are more closely aligned with national development priorities, more participation by a wider range of UN agencies (including specialized and non-resident agencies), more examples of joint programming, and many more joint programmes in which multiple agencies combine their resources for common goals. By encouraging UN country teams to leverage the full range of technical expertise available in the system, including from agencies not resident in the country, the Delivering as One pilots are providing governments with a wider and better selection of high-quality technical assistance. There has also been progress in developing 'One Programme, One Budgetary Framework and One Leader' with mutual accountability between the Resident Coordinator and UN country team, as well as agreements on the division of labour between agencies.

The Governments of the pilot countries have been very supportive. It is clear that one size does not fit all, as each pilot has been finding its own way to deliver more relevant, demand-driven assistance. This has improved the UN's response to national priorities in areas such as support to the productive sector, employment, trade, protection of the environment, and adaptation to climate change. There are also promising signs that donors are ready to reward more coherent programming with more coherent funding. An independent evaluation of the pilots will begin in 2009.

While Delivering as One is very much a 'bottom-up' approach, it is also driving wider improvements in how the

UN system works. The pilots are inspiring agencies to examine their own internal coherence and business practices, to learn from each other, and initiate reforms.

## Accelerating the Response to the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) continue to give a much sharper and more coherent context for UN country-level interventions. More than 110 UN Country Teams have reported on a wide range of activities in support of the MDGs, most notably in the area of integrating these goals in national development strategies. Two initiatives were launched in 2007 — the MDG Africa Steering Group and the Spanish MDG Achievement Fund — to accelerate progress toward the MDGs, especially in countries and regions where progress lags.

## Promoting Development Effectiveness

UN country teams have made concerted efforts to improve the development assistance they provide through new aid modalities and by working with national partners to implement the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. By the end of 2007, 56 country teams had fully aligned their UN Development Assistance Frameworks with national priorities and development cycles; 65 UN country teams reported engagement in the development and/or implementation of national development strategies including poverty reduction strategies; and more than 30 country teams played either a lead or co-facilitator role with national governments in aid coordination mechanisms.

Participation in other aid modalities — such as sector-wide approaches or direct budget support — and utilizing national systems proved more challenging for UN country teams. Some 120 country teams are now employing the harmonized approach to cash transfers to implementing partners. However, until more UN agencies adopt it as a common tool and harmonize their financial rules and procedures more closely, transaction costs for national partners, in terms of the time they expend dealing with different UN procedures, will remain high.

## Greater Operational Coherence and Coordination

The UN Development Group has developed a set of common processes and instruments that have significantly improved the coordination of efforts among UN agencies at

country level. These tools, of which the most prominent is the UN Development Assistance Framework, have also improved the strategic positioning of UN operational activities and aligned them more closely with national priorities and strategies. Some UN Country Teams also report that they have produced common operational documents, such as common Country Programme Action Plans, to help UN agencies work together more coherently at the implementation stage of the programme and to reduce transaction costs.

## Programming and Coordination in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries

UN country teams working together with national partners in challenging environments are using flexible programming frameworks such as transition plans and post-conflict needs assessments to address current crisis situations while laying the foundations for long-term sustainable development. The Resident Coordinator's Office plays an indispensable role in sustaining critical links between the security, political, humanitarian and development dimensions of post-crisis UN assistance.

## The Challenge of Mainstreaming

UN country teams have integrated key principles and some thematic issues — such as capacity development, gender equality, human rights and HIV/AIDS — with their operational activities, identifying both successes and challenges. Many country teams have emphasized that they need more systematic and ongoing support from headquarters and regional offices in these areas.

## Conclusion

The UN General Assembly's 2007 Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review reaffirmed Member States' support for a more coherent, effective and efficient United Nations and a stronger Resident Coordinator System. In the years to come, the UN's challenge is to apply the lessons gained from the pilots, continue to improve the Resident Coordinator System, and apply the necessary simplification and harmonization to procedures and business practices throughout the UN development system. Carrying out these essential changes, with the agreement of all 192 UN Member States, will be a long-term process. But as the 2007 Resident Coordinator annual reports indicate, it will lead to a UN development system that is more responsive, accountable, and effective, and that delivers more for the people and governments that it serves.



**UNITED NATIONS  
DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

[www.undg.org](http://www.undg.org)

**UN Development Operations Coordination Office**

One UN Plaza, DC1-1600, New York, NY 10017 USA

Telephone: (212) 906-5500

Fax: (212) 906-3609