

## **“United Nations System-wide Coherence: The Next Steps”**

4-5 March 2008  
Vienna International Centre  
Vienna, Austria

### Information Note

#### **Background**

Over the past two years, the issue of system-wide coherence has received renewed attention among Member States and organizations of the United Nations system. Since the launching of the report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence in November 2006, it has been an important subject of discussions at the General Assembly, the governing bodies of United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes and in the principal inter-agency bodies of the system – the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) as well as in the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). The launching of the “Delivering as One” initiative in eight pilot countries<sup>1</sup> towards the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007 introduced an important dimension into the drive towards increased coherence among United Nations organizations at the country level.

Progress towards system-wide coherence has been mixed. Informal consultations at the General Assembly from June to August 2007 provided an opportunity for Member States to present their views but produced no consensus on the recommendations of the High-level Panel. The Co-Chairs that led the consultations recommended that the consultative process continue and that various aspects of system-wide coherence be placed, as appropriate, on the agenda of the General Assembly, ECOSOC and the governing bodies of organizations of the United Nations system.

At the inter-agency level, the issue of system-wide coherence remained at the top of the agenda of CEB and UNDG. Inter-agency meetings have increased in frequency and new coordination mechanisms have been established to develop a common approach to system-wide coherence. Interactions have also intensified across the United Nations system to provide coordinated support to the pilot countries. In October 2007, CEB took a major step towards strengthening coherence at the inter-agency level by integrating UNDG into the CEB framework as a third pillar focusing on country-level operations.<sup>2</sup> The integration of UNDG into CEB is aimed at minimizing duplication and strengthening synergies between the two bodies and their support structures. Further work on this integration is ongoing and is expected to be finalized at the next session of CEB in April 2008.

Progress towards system-wide coherence is most pronounced at the country level. A year into the implementation of the “Delivering as One” initiative, the

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<sup>1</sup> Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam.

<sup>2</sup> The other two pillars of CEB are the High-level Committee on Programmes and the High-level Committee on Management.

process has moved rapidly but at a different pace in each of the eight pilot countries. Signs of progress are evident in:

- Stronger government ownership and leadership of the development process and in driving the “Delivering as One” initiative.
- Closer alignment of the programmes and projects of organizations of the United Nations system to national plans and priorities.
- Increased donor coordination in support of a more strategically focused and programmatically coherent response by the United Nations system to the development priorities of the pilot countries.
- Intensified interactions among United Nations organizations leading to improved mutual understanding and awareness of their diverse mandates, capacities and business practices, encouraging them to seek new ways to work together and find common ground in moving towards a common approach to “Delivering as One”.

Notwithstanding clear signs of progress towards “Delivering as One”, many challenges remain in meeting the twin objectives of achieving tangible development gains and significant reductions in transaction costs. Foremost among these are the following:

- (i) How to select the programmes and projects of United Nations entities to be included in the “One Programme” in a way that ensures a comprehensive United Nations system response to national development priorities and draws on the full range of expertise and capacities available in the system while maintaining strategic focus and programmatic coherence.
- (ii) How to fund the unfunded portion of the “One Programme” and whether or not complementary funds outside what is available in-country should form part of the funding mechanism (“One Fund”) to support the “One Programme”. For instance, should national components of regional programmes and projects form part of the “One Programme” and the funds be counted as part of the “One Fund”? Another question is how the unearmarked funds in the “One Fund” should be allocated and what the respective roles are and responsibilities of the Resident Coordinator and the country teams in the process.
- (iii) How an empowered but independent and impartial Resident Coordinator (RC) can be achieved. What should be done to ensure that the institutional firewall between the programme management role of UNDP and its management of the Resident Coordination system works as intended? What are the roles and responsibilities of field representatives of UN entities vis-à-vis the empowered RC?

- (iv) How can the diversity of business models and practices throughout the United Nations system, e.g., programme and project management guidelines, staff and financial regulations and rules, procurement rules, monitoring and evaluation systems, auditing rules, IT systems, etc., be effectively harmonized to achieve optimum efficiency and minimum transaction costs? In this context, how should the “business model” or operating modalities of the specialized agencies, including the non-resident agencies, and those of the funds and programmes be reconciled and harmonized? What policy decisions are required from the governing bodies of the organizations of the system to make this possible? What managerial decisions are needed from the executive heads of United Nations entities for this purpose? What steps are being taken to minimize operating costs at the country level through shared services and common premises, i.e., One UN House?

Beyond these questions, the fundamental challenge is one of aligning the intergovernmental decision-making and the country-driven processes to achieve a more effective and coherent United Nations system presence at the country level. The end-2007 stocktaking report of the Government of Pakistan, United Nations Country Team and Donors best sums up this challenge:

*“A clearer vision for UN reform must be forthcoming from the General Assembly. Without strong and unambiguous political commitment and intergovernmental agreements on UN reform, the pilots may be at risk. UN reform is not solely a technical matter that can be solved among UN entities; it is a political matter that needs to be supported among governments.”<sup>3</sup>*

It is against this background that UNIDO has decided to organize a high-level dialogue on the development aspects of system-wide coherence with a particular focus on country-level coherence as a contribution to a better understanding of the processes involved and ways of moving forward. The high-level dialogue will take place in Vienna on 4-5 March 2008 and follows a related event on UN reform – the High-level Panel Consultations on the Resident Coordinator System – that UNIDO hosted in May 2006.

## **Objectives**

The main purpose of the high-level dialogue is to provide a platform for interactive and action-oriented discussions on the development aspects of system-wide coherence and the “Delivering as One” initiative among representatives of governments, aid agencies and United Nations system organizations. A key aim is to reach a common understanding of the issues involved and ways of moving forward. To this end, the dialogue will review the status of intergovernmental consultations on system-wide coherence and the next steps in that process. Representatives from Member States and the United Nations family will be invited to share their views on

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<sup>3</sup> Pakistan Country Report, “Delivering as One” Pilots – End-of-2007 Stocktaking, Joint Report on Piloting UN Reform by Government of Pakistan, UNCT and Donors.

how they see the coherence and “Delivering as One” processes unfolding, what they see as the main challenges and how they see those challenges being addressed. The dialogue will also examine the experience of the “Delivering as One” pilot countries based on the stocktaking exercise initiated by the Deputy Secretary-General at the end of 2007. It is hoped that as a result of the dialogue, a better understanding of the system-wide coherence and “Delivering as One” processes will lead to the identification of ways in which those processes can be made to reinforce each other.

The specific objectives of the high-level dialogue are as follows:

1. Gain a better understanding of ongoing efforts to enhance system-wide coherence in the field of development at the intergovernmental, inter-agency and country levels.
2. Contribute to intergovernmental dialogue on system-wide coherence and the “Delivering as One” pilot initiative.
3. Identify the main issues and challenges towards further progress in the “Delivering as One” initiative and ways of addressing them.
4. Provide a forum for organizations of the United Nations system to discuss concrete ways of providing further support to the coherence process and the “Delivering as One” initiative.

### **Participation**

The high-level dialogue on system-wide coherence is expected to bring together high officials from governments, the Co-Chairs of the United Nations General Assembly Consultations on System-wide Coherence, representatives from the “Delivering as One” pilot countries, aid agencies and heads of United Nations organizations and senior officials from the United Nations system. The United Nations Deputy-Secretary-General will deliver the keynote address.

### **Background documents and contributed notes**

Background documents for the high-level dialogue will be circulated in due course. Invited speakers and discussants are encouraged to prepare and submit brief notes outlining the key points they wish to make in the course of their presentations. These notes together with the background documents will be made available at the venue of the high-level event.

### **Logistical arrangements**

A note on logistical arrangements will be circulated shortly.

**Further information and contact details**

Requests for information may be sent to:

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