Guidelines for Enhancing Programming Processes

Background

1. The concepts of international solidarity and interdependence are fundamental to the UN system, being based on the principles of universal values and objectives, and on the necessary cooperation between countries for their realization. Each organization of the system represents not only the collective expression of the aspirations and actions of its Member States in the definition and development of appropriate policies and programmes, but also the application of those policies and programmes by individual countries.

2. Similarly, the normative and technical cooperation functions of UN organizations are mutually supportive and inseparable. A UN organization becomes not only the international extension of a country’s goals, but its partner in assisting the country to attain them. It is this unique, common and neutral political mandate which gives the UN system its particular strength and credibility, and enables it to mobilize the will and resources of all Member States, individually and collectively, to attain international and national development goals.

3. The operational activities of the UN system are based, not on the traditional donor/recipient relationship, but on joint action and partnership of Member States cooperating among themselves or between them and UN organizations. Technical cooperation thus becomes a process whereby Member States cooperate with organizations, by making use of the UN SYSTEM to define and achieve their development objectives, through programmes that have been determined by their needs, and that are aimed at promoting their self-reliance.

Programming of UN system operational activities

4. National development plans, or policy documents defining national development goals and priorities (including the governments’ structural adjustment programmes and annual budgets) constitute the essential framework within which the range of external assistance programmes should be articulated. The elaboration of such plans and priorities is the responsibility of the government. The UN system should however be ready to support their elaboration if, and to the extent the government desires, through data collection and analysis, sectoral and multi-sectoral studies and assessments, and policy planning and advice, taking full account of globally determined goals and strategies. In doing so it would adopt a multi-sectoral rather than institutionally focussed approach. Similarly, it should actively support requests for assistance to strengthen planning capacities and mechanisms at all levels of government.

5. The evolving nature of technical cooperation emphasizes the importance of a shift from a project to a programme approach whereby UN system inputs will be effectively merged with national and other external inputs in support of programmes that have been conceived by the host country, with such external assistance as it might seek. Such an approach could, moreover, contribute to facilitating the optimal use of national capacities.

6. The programming process must be a government-led effort. Without such leadership - for which there is no substitute - external programming processes will prove illusive or, at best, transitory. Hence meaningful programming of the UN SYSTEM's operational activities is dependent on the government discharging its lead role.

7. The elaboration of a more specific national framework for external assistance is similarly the responsibility of the government. Its elaboration often involves a broader inter-action with its development partners (varying with individual country circumstances) but is a process that must remain government-led if it is to be of value.

8. The importance governments attach to the elaboration of the necessary framework for programming external assistance depends also on the volume and relative significance of the resources, and the manner in which they choose to use them, i.e. whether to meet broad "programming" requirements, or to fill gaps in the needs of their overall development programme. It should be noted, however, that the volume of resources available to a government could also depend on the coherence, logic, and general quality of its planning framework.

9. Given its multilateral character, and hence political and commercial neutrality, the UN SYSTEM is well-placed to assist governments in the process of elaborating a coherent planning framework, one that also
articulates its goals and strategies. Its actual role will, however, vary from one country to another depending on the capacities and needs of governments, and the extent to which they choose to involve the system.

10. Thus programming processes of the UN system will depend on the wide range of country specific-situations and must be tailored accordingly. There are consequently clear limitations to the degree of specificity which can, or should be attempted in elaborating, at the global level, guidelines for programming mechanisms and processes. In fact, they must be limited to principles and approaches which are broad and flexible enough to be adapted to the unique circumstances of each country.

11. The value of the contribution development partners such as the UN SYSTEM in particular can make in support of governments will depend on their ability to provide a holistic response, by way of advice and assistance, that addresses both the human and social dimensions of development, and short and long term objectives.

Agenda for action

By the system

12. Each member organization is invited to take the necessary individual and collective measures at the global and country levels to enhance the coherence and value of the UN system’s response in regard to national programming processes. These may include:

(a) at the global level
   (i) Reviewing existing capacities, internal arrangements and orientations (as in fact some are currently engaged in) with a view also to achieving the broader objective of an enhanced and sharper technical focus in the contribution of the technical agencies and entities.
   (ii) The relevant parallel measures already identified by the Committee in regard to the resident coordinator system (and country teams) including, in particular, a review of: measures to better enable the resident coordinator to discharge her/his increasing responsibilities; the background and experience of their respective field representatives who together constitute the country level team^{3}; the scope for further decentralization and strengthened capacity at the country level, in order to develop an increasingly country-focussed approach^{4};
   (iii) Ensuring the availability of the range and quality of skills and expertise assembled at the country level and/or regional levels - complemented by access to additional expertise as required from headquarters^{5};
   (iv) Simplification and harmonization of programming cycles and procedures of, essentially, JCGP members.

(b) at the country level
   (i) Country teams should act in a collaborative and fully participative spirit and approach. Such collaboration and participation in the programming process should be pursued on the basis of common goals and priorities, derived from national goals, enabling each organization to support without ambivalence the resulting immediate framework.
   (ii) Country teams should in offering substantive policy advice to governments, give full expression to global goals and strategies set by the collectivity of governments themselves, thus strengthening the linkage between those goals and strategies, and the operational activities of the system^{6}. In so doing, they should engage in a dialogue and assist individual governments in discharging their responsibility for integrating such goals with national goals and priorities.
   (iii) Resident coordinators and their UN system partners should assist governments, on request, in better integrating assistance from other donors, as well as regional programmes.
   (iv) Resident coordinators should provide professional and creative leadership in mobilizing the capacities of the system, bringing the necessary sectoral, regional and global perspectives into the programming process, and coordinating the system’s response to requests for advice and assistance.
(v) Resident coordinators should in particular take the initiative in involving their partners in such mechanisms and processes as NATCAPs, Round Tables, etc., consult with them in setting up inter-organizational advisory teams, and organize workshops and meetings around sectoral themes led by the agency or group most directly involved; they should act as catalysts of system-wide inputs to programming - making full use of the comparative advantages of each partner and facilitate the synthesizing of the system's response in a sectorally and multi-sectorally - rather than institutionally-focussed response.

(vi) Resident coordinators should ensure that they also draw fully on the expertise of organizations of the system not represented at the country level.

(vii) Country representatives should endeavour to ensure their early involvement in programme development and review processes of each other's programmes.

(viii) Country teams should give special attention to measures to strengthen national planning capacities at all levels.

(ix) Resident coordinators and their partners should give full effect to the parallel measures on coordination in general that are contained in the consolidated text of decisions relating to the enhancement of the resident coordinator text of decisions relating to the enhancement of the resident coordinator system, recommended by CCSQ(OPS) and endorsed by the ACC. These include improving information flows between organizations, and the preparation of country development profiles.

(x) Resident coordinators should consider, in consultation with governments, the usefulness of organizing some regional, sub-regional or country level workshops or meetings to consider appropriate programming processes in specific country situations.

(xi) Apart from contributing, when requested by the government, to the elaboration of national plans, or to frameworks for external assistance, the resident coordinator, and his country level partners might, as required by country circumstances, and in consultation with the government, elaborate a note on common themes and linkages which could reflect the proposed contribution that the system could make in support of governments' plans and priorities. Subject to individual country circumstances and requirements, it could consist of:

(a) A brief assessment of the current economic situation, of development trends and constraints, drawing fully on those of the wider UN community.

(b) A summary of the medium and longer term development objectives of the government covering macro-economic and sectoral issues.

(c) A description and broad assessment (i.e. a common situation and needs analysis) of present institutional and human (including managerial) resources to implement the development objectives.

(d) An analysis of the ongoing technical assistance programme in relation to (b) and (c) above. The analysis could also include various programme and project monitoring and evaluation reports, TPRs, annual reviews, as well as reports of independent and in-depth evaluations of specific projects and of the entire country programme or programmes.

(e) A broad outline of the common goals, broad themes and linkages that might provide a framework within which future UN assistance might be directed. The goal would be a set of strategies and priorities to which all can lend support, and consideration of how they can best be matched with available resources. The note may not be able to encompass all activities of the UN system but those areas in which collaborative efforts by the system are likely to have a significant impact. It must be conceived working closely with the host country on the basis of in-depth sectoral and, as required, cross sectoral analysis of the total context of national development needs and intended increments. It would also present policy options to the government.
In elaborating its response, the UN system would make full use of existing programming processes of individual organizations and maintain sufficient flexibility to permit individual initiatives that optimize the strengths that lie in their diversity; it should also make full use of data and assessments contained in ongoing processes such as development cooperation reports, NATCAPs, Consultative Groups, Round Tables, etc.

The UN system should in particular be mindful of the primary responsibility, indeed sovereignty of the government, in determining the nature and content of external assistance which is in all cases supportive of larger national undertakings.

Notes


2. Though not all such plans provide a good and sound basis for technical assistance programming; they are often capital project oriented.

3. In pursuance also of para. 16 of GA resolution 44/211.

4. In pursuance also of para. 23 of GA resolution 44/211.

5. As also envisaged in preambular para. 21 of GA resolution 44/211.

6. See in this connection the Information and Initial Guidance Note on the Operational Implications of the Fourth International Development Strategy which is being simultaneously transmitted to Resident Coordinators.

7. and are contained in the letters from DG/DIEC to Resident Coordinators dated 16.10.90, and also from each organization to their respective representatives.