Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC)

CCPOQ Guidelines on the Programme Approach

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CCPOQ GUIDELINES ON THE PROGRAMME APPROACH

Background

1. Following the adoption by the General Assembly of the landmark resolution 44/211 in December 1989, which in paragraph 17(d) advocated the programme approach, considerable discussion took place within the United Nations system in search for agreement on a definition and guiding principles for such an approach. Subsequently the General Assembly passed Resolution 47/199 which in Paragraph 13 called for an early agreement on a common interpretation of the programme approach; further, paragraph 28 of Resolution 50/120 requested the United Nations development system to continue working improving the definition and guidelines for the programme approach. At its second regular session in September 1992 the Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (Operational Activities) issued a common UN system framework for the programme approach.

2. With the announcement of UN reforms by the Secretary General in March and July 1997, there is a renewed emphasis on rationalization and harmonization of United Nations system activities at the country level. In this regard, the existing guidelines on the programme approach need to be updated so as to reflect the experience and lessons learned to-date with this modality and to better support the collaborative efforts by the United Nations system in applying this approach.

A. The Programme Approach

3. In the years since its introduction, various agencies of the system have endeavored to utilize the approach, either making their existing programming instruments more sensitive to it, or by developing new tools which better support the integrated aspects of the programme approach. Building on these experiences, some of which were reviewed at the Turin Workshop on “Best Practices in the Resident Coordinator system and related matters”, the system has increasingly moved to a clearer common understanding and acceptance of the concepts which govern the application of the programme approach. These concepts, which are outlined below, have also been reinforced through well developed training material and courses, which have been provided to both Governments and UN system agencies, by the UN Staff College at Turin.

Objectives

4. The objectives are as follows:

   To ensure a central and leadership role of government in translating the national development priorities into national programmes as well as to increase national ownership and accountability for the development process;

   To strengthen and/or develop national capacity for articulating, managing and sustaining the development process in general and national programmes in particular;

   To ensure the more effective use of external inputs by linking them to national priorities as stated in national programmes; and

   To facilitate the development of multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional national programmes, which form the basis of a coherent and coordinated UN system response, and associate other development partners.
Definitions

Programme Approach

5. The pursuit of national development goals through cohesive national programmes. Such an approach by national authorities will permit United Nations system inputs to be 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 may seek. This approach can be extended to cover situations in which countries are emerging out of crisis, and the national authorities can initiate a dialogue, which clarifies national goals, objectives and priorities.

National Programme and its role in the Programme Approach

6. A national programme outlines a coherent set of policies, strategies, activities and investments designed to achieve a specific time bound national development objective or set of objectives. Implementation of the national programme often requires external assistance, thus donors, including the United Nations system organisations, offer assistance by formulating and negotiating appropriate support programmes.

Key Features

7. The following aspects of the programme approach need to be emphasized:

(a) Recognition of the central role, “ownership” and accountability of the Government for formulating, implementing and managing the national programme;

(b) Enhancement of capacity-building, self-reliance and sustainability;

(c) Internalisation of external inputs and ensuring greater relevance, coordination, flexibility, cost-effectiveness and impact in support of national programmes;

(d) Recognition of the multi-dimensional character of many development objectives;

(e) Elaboration of a national programme into which a coherent and coordinated UN system and bi-lateral and multi-lateral donor response may be integrated.

Guiding Principles

The Role of Government

8. The setting of national objectives, goals and priorities as well as the formulation of national policies, plans and programmes is the exclusive responsibility of national governments. Furthermore, national plans, policies and programmes constitute the only viable frame of reference for programming of operational activities.
9. Governments retain the sole responsibility for coordinating all external assistance and the principal responsibility for its design and management. They are also responsible for leading the process of mobilizing and managing both internal and external resources for the implementation of national programmes.

10. Governments ensure the full and effective participation of all national stakeholders in all aspects (formulation, implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation) both of the national programme and of the donor-supported interventions.

11. Governments identify the existing and missing capacities required to implement and manage the national programme and to attain its target. Additionally they may play an active partnership role in the formulation of donor supported interventions.

The Role of the United Nations System

12. The programme approach promotes a broad ranging dialogue between development partners and Governments on national development goals, policies strategies and programmes and on ways in which development partners may support them. It facilitates a better mutual understanding of developing country aspirations and plans and United Nations system mandates and comparative advantages. It therefore provides the United Nations system with a powerful modality with which to integrate its support into the framework of national programmes. Furthermore, it also provides the United Nations system with the opportunity of assisting governments to operationalise the global mandates, which have emerged from the recent cycle of UN conferences.

13. Where national programmes are not explicitly formulated, the United Nations system may assist developing countries, at their request, in developing them. This would involve a dialogue between the Government, and its national partners and, if the Government so desires, the United Nations system and other development partners.

14. Where national programmes do exist, the United Nations system provides assistance by formulating programmes of support, which address in an integrated manner the various sub-programmes, components and elements of the national programme.

15. The United Nations system has a clear role to play in the strengthening and/or creating of national capacity for formulation, implementation, management and evaluation of national programmes.

16. Programming processes of the United Nations system organisations depend on the wide range of country-specific situations and must be tailored accordingly. The value of the system’s contributions will depend on its ability to provide a holistic response to national priorities and programmes.

17. The assistance provided by the United Nations system organisations must be placed where it can be most responsive to national priorities. The United Nations agencies/organisations must also ensure that governments take full account of the global and regional policies, strategies and related programmes that the same member states have collectively decided upon the different international fora. These considerations should be addressed in the policy dialogue with Governments in the early stages of negotiations on the elaboration of national programmes or of support to them.
The Project and its use in the context of the Programme Approach

18. The programme approach provides that development problems are treated with a multi-sectoral approach and addressed in a coherent, interrelated manner. Therefore, support to national programmes should be targeted towards meeting well-defined national goals and produce results that are meaningful in light of specific objectives of the cooperation. As a result of the dialogue between national authorities and the UN system organisations a unique pattern of planned support will emerge. In some instances, it may be that only one UN system organisation, by virtue of its mandate, will participate in the national programme. In other instances, two or more UN organisations also by virtue of their mandates, may participate, each in a unique but interrelated way, in a national programme. It is with these instances in mind that some work is being undertaken on a programme document format which national authorities and the concerned UN system organisations can use to illustrate the unique role of each organisation and the interrelatedness and collaborative features of the proposed roles of the organisation.

19. In order to reinforce the use of the Programme Approach, the United Nations system should continue to work on the simplification and harmonization of formats and procedures so as to be better able to respond in a coherent manner to government’s programme needs, as well as to reduce the burden on government. Areas for immediate attention include, for example, financial and budgetary rules and procedures and monitoring and reporting requirements.

20. In cases where assistance is requested in specific technical areas, which do not require multi-dimensional responses and which can be treated individually without jeopardizing the sustainability of the activities the use of the project modality may still be considered.

Monitoring and Evaluation in the context of the Programme Approach

21. The ultimate responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the national programme lies with the national authorities, as such is reiterated. Organisations providing external assistance are accountable to their governing bodies and funding sources. However the contributions of organisations should in principle, be monitored and evaluated within the context of the national programme, provided their accountability requirements are satisfied.

22. The United Nations system organisations should participate in the monitoring, review and evaluation of national programmes and permit reporting and other procedures to develop which, while not compromising donor requirements will allow the government flexibility in meeting UN system and other donor reporting and monitoring requirements in an efficient and cost effective manner.

23. Where capacity for monitoring and evaluation is lacking or weak, the United Nations system should support, as well as encourage other donors to assist in developing and/or strengthening it.

Accountability Issues in the context of the Programme Approach

24. The United Nations system organizations are accountable to their governing bodies for the resources that they provide to support national programmes. Thus the various kinds of suggested or required documentation that describe UN system support for a national programme, for example, Collaborative Programme and Project documents, programme support documents, programme or project documents, are prepared not only for planning purposes but also for accountability.
25. The United Nations systems organizations are required to take appropriate measures to make sure that the accountability requirements of both their governing bodies and the funding source are met. However in doing this, they must ensure that the leadership and ownership role of the government is not compromised.

**Process for applying the Programme Approach**

26. At the request of Government, the United Nations system can assist in the application of the programme approach in the following ways:

(a) assessing the development needs of the country as articulated in national plans, priorities and global goals, objectives and mandates;

(b) participating in the formulation of national programmes and in the development of donor supported interventions;

(c) facilitating the use by government of the national programme as a major tool for mobilizing, coordinating and managing external finance and technical resources;

(d) strengthening and/or creating national capacity for formulation, implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation of national programmes;

(e) providing through the Collaborative Programmes and Projects format, technical cooperation and other assistance to national programmes; and

(f) participating in the monitoring, review and evaluation of national programmes and encouraging reporting and other procedures to be applied which allow the government flexibility and ease in meeting UN system and other donor reporting and monitoring requirements.

**The Programme Approach in the Context and other Programming Tools and Instruments**

27. The Programme Approach is predicated on the existence of a national programme. A national programme may address sectoral or intersectoral issues such as Education for All or Poverty Reduction. As noted under the Definition section, it would contain a coherent set of policies, strategies, activities and investments designed to achieve a specific time-bound national development objective or set of objectives.
28. The Country Strategy Note (CSN) reflects national priorities as would be outlined in national plans, policies and programmes and presents in an integrated manner, the assistance sought from the United Nations system. In this regard the CSN focuses on key areas where UN system support will make a difference and where the UN system has a clear advantage. The CSN is prepared by the government with the assistance of and in cooperation with the UN system under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator. The link between the Programme Approach and the CSN is the national programme which operationalises the national priority in a given sector or thematic area, and as identified in the CSN. The UN support to these programmes is then captured in the individual agency Country Programmes/Country Cooperation Frameworks or similar programming mechanisms.

29. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) which is in a pilot phase, recently came to into existence as a result of the Secretary General’s reform process. The UNDAF serves as a common framework for the operations of all UN development funds, programmes and agencies at the country level. Where the Government has prepared a CSN, the UNDAF takes into account the CSN’s strategic priorities in the process of establishing the UN system’s parameters of operation. The UNDAF will serve as a basis for the preparation of the country programmes and country cooperation frameworks, of the UN funds and programmes, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator. Entities such as the specialised agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions are being encouraged to join in this preparation process. Governments are consulted in the context of preparing the UNDAF, so as to maximize UN collaboration in support of national priorities, but they do not share the preparation responsibilities with the UN country team. The link between the programme approach and the UNDAF is the national programme, which provides the operational framework for delivering the UN support in the areas identified in the UNDAF.

30. The Country Programmes and Country Cooperation Frameworks of the agency funds and programmes of the UN system, present activities, projects and other support that will be provided in the context of national programmes. The link between these instruments and the Programme Approach is that the country programmes/cooperation frameworks provide support to formally established national programmes.

Conclusion

31. The “value added” of the programme approach is that it reinforces the leadership role of national authorities in defining national policies, plans, priorities and strategies, and translating them into national programmes. Further once a national programme is articulated, it provides a solid framework for all donors including the United Nations system to provide coherent and coordinated support. It also allows the government to retain the primary responsibility for managing the external resources provided to them.

32. The absence of a national programme should not deter the United Nations system from trying to use the programme approach modality for programming and coordination. Indeed, in such a situation, the United Nations system under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, should seek to assist the government, at their request, in developing multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional national programmes.

33. Over the years, it has been seen that the manner in which the programme approach takes root in a given country depends on the specific circumstances of that country and the processes leading to the adoption of the programme approach have to be tailored accordingly. The value of the United Nations system in the context of the programme approach depends on its ability to provide a holistic response to a national programme and in this regard, the Resident Coordinator System provides a useful platform and should be used as fully as possible.

2. CCPOQ Country Strategy Note A4: C. ACC Note on The CSN 11 May 1993, P.6