Guiding Principles for a Monitoring and Evaluation Methodology

in the Context of The Programme Approach

Background

1. This paper responds to General Assembly resolution 47/199 in which, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to promote an early agreement on a common interpretation of the programme approach, including an effective methodology for evaluation, to be applied by the United Nations system, with due regard to country-specific circumstances (operative para. 13). In the development of this methodology, two other key parts of Assembly resolution 47/199 should be kept in mind: the eighth preambular paragraph, in which the Assembly stressed that processes and procedures of the United Nations system should be streamlined and rationalized, especially in the interrelated areas of programming, execution, decentralization, monitoring and evaluation; and operative paragraph 33, in which the Assembly requested inter-agency coordination mechanisms, in particular the Joint Consultative Group on Policies (JCGP), to give priority to simplifying, harmonizing and increasing the transparency of their procedures relating to, inter alia, monitoring and evaluation.

2. Harmonization in the field of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in the United Nations system has been very actively pursued through the continuous efforts of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Rural Development and the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Evaluation established and managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since 1983. A JCGP subgroup is furthermore developing an action plan to pursue greater harmonization in terminology and substance.

3. In October 1992, ACC adopted a common United Nations framework for the programme approach, which includes objectives, definitions and guiding principles. At its March 1993 session, the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) reviewed the framework in the light of General Assembly resolution 47/199 and agreed on a number of considerations relating to the promotion of the approach. The framework and considerations are reflected in Economic and Social Council document E/1993/73, annex III, sections A and B. Council document E/1994/64 on the progress made on the implementation of Assembly resolution 47/199 has provided some preliminary information on the experience gained by the United Nations development system in implementing the programme approach modality.

II. Basic Assumptions

4. The basic definitions and concepts deriving from the JIU glossary on evaluation terms, as well as the current guidelines for M&E applied by all United Nations organizations, remain in force. The guiding principles for M&E in the context of the programme approach apply primarily to operational activities of the United Nations organizations and are built on these definitions and concepts, which have been improved and used at the project level.

5. The M&E principles are intended to provide a framework for responding to specific requirements of each programme. Guiding principles rather than guidelines are more appropriate at this early stage of experience with the programme approach. However, the following should be emphasized:

(a) Principles should be clear, meaningful in providing a base for operationalization, easy to comprehend and acceptable to all parties;

(b) Innovative systems based on these guiding principles should be encouraged, but lessons from proved systems should also be available to the United Nations system to help in formulating new programmes;

(c) These guiding principles constitute an early agreement among the United Nations organizations on how to develop M&E of their technical cooperation activities in the context of the programme approach. They should be refined or converted as guidelines over the years to reflect the experience gained in implementing the
programme approach after an evaluation of their relevance and appropriateness.

III. Features of an M&E System in the Context of the National Programme and the Programme Approach

6. The following paragraphs present the specific features of M&E in the context of the national programme and the programme approach.

Responsibility of the recipient countries and United Nations system organizational requirements

7. The ultimate responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation of the national programme lies with the programme country as part of its fundamental responsibility to execute its own programme. The United Nations organizations, however, are accountable to their governing bodies and their funding sources or the resources they provide in supporting national programmes. The contribution of the United Nations development system to the national programme should, in principle, be monitored and evaluated in relation to the programme approach within the framework of the national programme.

8. United Nations development cooperation programmes should include provision for the establishment and strengthening of national monitoring and evaluation capacities. Multilateral and bilateral donors should also be encouraged to channel their M&E activities in support of the national systems.

Implications of the programme approach and the national execution modality on the M&E system

9. The programme dimension entails a complex process of planning, formulation, and implementation as well as the commitment of a significant amount of resources, both more complex and larger than at the project level; that, in turn, argues for a comprehensive management system, including monitoring and evaluation functions. The national execution dimension requires a national capacity to manage the programme. The following conclusions can be drawn:

(a) There should be a clear understanding between the recipient country and the United Nations organizations on the modalities of their cooperation in the context of the programme approach. Sustainable national programme management hinges, inter alia, on the capacity of national managers to monitor and evaluate the implementation process for effective management action, especially for in-course correction. In the earliest stage of design, it is important that the United Nations development system help the national authorities to gauge the capacity of the national institutions involved in the nationally executed programmes to formulate, implement, monitor, evaluate and audit. This should be a policy issue that is addressed at the very beginning of programme design;

(b) This assessment of national capacity should be jointly carried out by United Nations development system specialists and nationals to ensure joint ownership of the conclusions and recommendations of the diagnosis.

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Linkage between the M&E and the formulation of the programme

10. The design of the M&E framework should be incorporated into the programme approach package and not treated as a separate component. From this premise, it follows that: (a) The monitoring and evaluation system should be designed during the formulation stage as a built-in component of the programme and approved with the programme itself; (b) The guiding principles for M&E should be part of the framework of the programme approach and not issued separately.

11. In formulating the contribution of the United Nations organizations to support the national M&E function, it is important to
(a) establish baseline data, benchmarks, progress and performance indicators, success criteria and means of measurement;
(b) identify data needs;
(c) assess the existing national monitoring system, including consultative and reporting mechanisms;
(d) assess existing national human resource capacities;
(e) assess the existing hardware and software facilities;
(f) define technical cooperation needs in M&E, including capacity-building initiatives; and finally
(g) estimate the required level of resources.

Expectations of the M&E system for the United Nations contribution

12. The M&E system should provide the means to address programme performance and effects, focusing on some specific important evaluation concerns:

(a) Effectiveness;
(b) Efficiency
(c) Relevance;
(d) Sustainability;
(e) Impact;
(f) Causality;
(g) Alternative strategies.

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13. Additional issues relevant to the United Nations contribution include the following:

(a) Consistency among the various components of the United Nations system contribution, the programme approach and the overall national programme;
(b) Substantive concerns specific to the contributing organizations;
(c) Responsiveness of the programme in an evolving environment;
(d) Appropriate allocation of resources;
(e) Managerial and coordination matters;
(f) Capacity-building;
(g) Comparative advantage of the United Nations system.

The M&E system should provide a qualitative as well as a quantitative assessment based on baseline data, benchmarks and targets. It should provide for transparency and accountability of the United Nations contribution.

Specific features of the monitoring and evaluation system in the context of the programme approach

14. The monitoring system should serve as a management tool, an early warning system and a means of collecting data in a cost-effective manner. The logical linkages between the different activities and time constraints should be highlighted. The system should be designed to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information for decision-making at the right level with maximum decentralization. From a data-collection perspective, the system should take into account management needs and also collect information on the progress that has been made in reaching the beneficiaries and receiving their views and in developing
national capacity-building. In some cases, project components of the overall programme might be monitored through the current practices available at the project level. However, it should be clear that a programme is generally more than an aggregate of its various project components, since all aspects of a programme are not amenable to being treated as projects.

15. Evaluations may be conducted at different stages of programme implementation and on an ex post basis. Its purposes are to draw forward-looking lessons for future programmes and ensure accountability. It is important to reach an agreement with the national authorities, before the approval of the programme, on whether or not the evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations organizations should be carried out within the evaluation of the national programme. If the assessment of the United Nations organizations contribution is not part of this evaluation, agreement should be reached on how to link these exercises in terms of timing and substance.

16. The monitoring and evaluation system should make provision for a schedule of periodic reviews based on the availability of monitoring and evaluation outcomes and reporting requirements. It should comprise provisions for internal/national as well as external agency reviews.

Use of the expertise of the United Nations system

17. National authorities may draw on the expertise of the United Nations development system at the programme formulation and implementation stages in establishing and strengthening national capacities in M&E.

18. If agreeable to the national authorities and the donors involved in the national programme, the United Nations development system could assist in the evaluation of the national programme as a single exercise responding to the requirements of each party.

Global framework

19. The roles and responsibilities of monitoring and evaluation at the levels of the national programme and the United Nations contribution are described in the appendix to the present annex.

(a) National programme: A national programme is a coherent set of policies, strategies, activities and investments to achieve a specific time-bound national development objective or set of objectives.

Programme approach: Such an approach by national authorities will permit organizing of the contribution of multi-bilateral donors within the framework of the national programme.

(b) "While there is agreement on the definition and concepts of the programme approach, within the United Nations system, the United Nations organizations follow various paths in moving from the general concepts to action, along a continuum ranging from a 'pure' programme approach to a mix of the project approach and some elements of the programme approach: global frameworks strategies, national plans, interregional and regional programmes, intersectoral and sectoral programmes, integrated development projects, clusters of projects, and umbrella projects. Each of these levels represents attempts to respond to the notion of the national programme as defined by CCPOQ, although not all the elements of the programme-approach logic may be present in every case."

"It is important to relate the existing development machineries to the requirements of the programme approach. There are countries that have comprehensive multi-year development plans, while others, especially those under structural adjustment, have often replaced these instruments with new
programming tools, as the former were too rigid to accommodate institutional and structural changes. In this latter case, strategies are defined in practical terms, and development initiatives (investment, technical assistance) are planned on a flexible, rolling basis instead of making use of a lengthy process of complex multi-year development planning. In either case, time bound objectives are identified and are used as a basis for the programme approach: the United Nations development inputs represent contributions to the achievement of those objectives."

"The existence of global plans cannot be considered a sufficient condition for the programme approach's being successfully applied. Only if the national programming machinery is fully articulated, from the macro-level to the sectoral and operational levels with built-in mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation ... do these global planning mechanisms represent a satisfactory basis for the programme approach."

"The choice between the project and programme modality for specific initiatives often depends on the relative scale of the United Nations contribution: if the contribution is modest as compared with the global investment in a specific area, projects are often the answer. However, the programme approach may still be pursued if the individual projects are conceived as catalytic elements for larger national programmes, thoroughly designed, supported also by either domestic resources or non-United Nations donors."

(c) There is a strong link between M&E and accountability. While accountability has three dimensions: substantive (relevance, impact and success), managerial (financial, budgeting, monitoring) and audit-related, this document is only treating monitoring and evaluation issues.

Appendix Responsibilities for Monitoring and Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme Type of Functions</th>
<th>Primary Responsibility</th>
<th>Secondary Responsibility</th>
<th>Topics to be considered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>National executing authority</td>
<td>Donors, specialized and implementing agencies could be invited to participate</td>
<td>Achievement of national objectives, capacity-building, impact, cost effectiveness, relevance and affordability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Programme Monitoring</td>
<td>National executing authority</td>
<td>Donors, specialized and implementing agencies could be invited to participate</td>
<td>Benchmarks, interim outputs, relevance, in-course corrections, linkages and coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations Contribution Evaluation</td>
<td>Executing authority and/or United Nations organizations</td>
<td>Implementing authority, other donors and end-users</td>
<td>Programme objectives, capacity-building, sustainability, approach and contribution to the national programme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Periodic Reviews

Executing authority and/or United Nations organizations

Implementing authority, other donors and end-users

Progress, management, allocation or resources, capacity-building, in course corrections and coordination

Monitoring

Implementing authority and/or United Nations organizations(18)

National executing agency and United Nations organizations

Benchmarks, interim outputs, linkages, target groups, resources, work plan and coordination

Note: