ACC Guidance Note
for the
Resident Coordinator System
on Field Level Follow-up
to Global Conferences

Approved on behalf of ACC by the
Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ)
at its 12th Session, Geneva, 2-6 March 1998
The recent series of United Nations global conferences and summits forged a consensus on global social, economic and environmental issues which collectively constitute a holistic, internationally agreed, development agenda for the 1990s and beyond. While governments have primary responsibility for implementing the Programmes of Action of the conferences/summits, the latter, at the same time, provide an opportunity for the UN system to strengthen and intensify its collective contribution to national development efforts.

In order to ensure the coherent and integrated support of the UN system to field level follow-up of conference objectives, the ACC Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) along with the United Nations Development Group Office (DGO) and the UN Staff College jointly sponsored a workshop in Turin in December 1997 to develop concrete advice and guidance for the Resident Coordinator System building, inter alia, on the work of the three ACC task forces on conference follow-up.

At its twelfth session (2-6 March 1998), CCPOQ endorsed the recommendation of its Working Group on the Resident Coordinator System to convert the guidance contained in the report of this workshop into an ACC Note to be distributed to all UN system country teams.

We trust that this ACC Note on field level follow-up to global conferences, approved by CCPOQ on behalf of ACC, will provide the appropriate guidance to the Resident Coordinator system for utilizing the comparative advantage of the respective agencies and organisations of the UN system to maximize their collective contribution in support of the implementation of Plans and Programmes of Action adopted at these conferences.

Mary Chinery-Hesse
Chairperson CCPOQ
1. Taken together, the series of United Nations global conferences that have taken place in the 1990s on key dimensions of economic and social development (Appendix I) constitute an integrated international development agenda. Their findings and recommendations, as contained in individual Plans and Programmes of Action call for a key role of governments and represent an important basis for UN system normative and operational activities at the country level. They contain negotiated commitments on the part of all UN member states and specific strategies derived from the collective experience of governments, representatives of civil society, and UN system agencies. In a context of agreed values, they identify common cross-cutting themes underlying the broader goals of sustainable development and poverty eradication thus providing a powerful basis to enhance the quality and impact of country-level development efforts. They also provide an opportunity to revitalize and intensify the UN system’s contribution in a more coherent and integrated manner, building on a new holistic view of development in all its dimensions.

Policy dialogue

2. The recommendations emanating from the global conferences have established an important basis for dialogue with the government at the country level on national development priorities and needs. They also provide for (a) effective linkages between the normative and operational activities of the UN system; and (b) coherence and integration between the macro-economic and social policy framework and other cross-cutting policy dimensions such as gender, human rights and environment.

3. The process of translating such policy/normative dimensions into effective operational programmes at the country level calls for an on-going process of review and adaptation based on progress achieved and lessons learned. In this process, regional policy frameworks must also be taken into account in complementing country programmes and in facilitating a policy dialogue with regional and sub-regional entities.

The role of ACC

4. Since 1995, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) have underscored that there are strong linkages and common themes among the programmes of action of the various UN global conferences, and that these call for a coordinated and integrated follow-up. At the same time, in view of the specificities of country situations and agency expertise, there is a need to allow for a degree of diversity in the response pattern at the country level.

5. ACC established in October 1995 three ad hoc inter-agency task forces in relation to (a) basic social services for all; (b) full employment and sustainable livelihoods; and (c) an enabling environment for social and economic development, with a view to providing the resident coordinator system and country teams with coherent system-wide guidance and support for the promotion of integrated follow-up. At its April 1996 session, ACC furthermore approved the launching of an inter-agency project on universal access to basic communication and information services, which was designed to provide a horizontal back-up to the work of the Task Forces, leading to the adoption in April 1997 of an ACC Statement on the subject.
6. The three task forces and the inter-agency project, for which UNFPA, ILO, the World Bank and ITU respectively served as lead agencies, have now completed their work. Their outputs include: (a) identification of key elements of the policy framework; (b) recommendations and guidelines for UN system programming; (c) country reviews and case studies; (d) identification of other areas requiring attention (such as the role of civil society; the elaboration of statistics and indicators; and the use of information technology); and (e) institutional arrangements for follow-up.

7. In October 1997, ACC reviewed the work of the task forces and other parts of the subsidiary machinery and stressed the need to put to best use the lessons learned. ACC noted that, while differences existed concerning the suggested priorities and sequencing of policies, there was a large degree of consensus and consistency of understanding on the key requisites for a sound macroeconomic and social policy framework for promoting sustainable growth. There was also a clearer sense of agreement between the Bretton Woods institutions and other organizations of the UN system on the core elements of the development agenda at the country level, together with an appreciation of the legitimacy of variations in perspective and approach.

8. ACC affirmed that the challenge before each organization, as well as the system as a whole, was now to maintain, in cooperation with governments, the momentum that had been created for an integrated and coordinated follow-up to the global conferences. Supporting the translation of conference outcomes into concrete national policies and programmes remains a key priority.

National follow-up

9. The provision of consolidated UN system support at the country level to coordinated and integrated action by national authorities is a key responsibility of the resident coordinator system. Based on established UN system development programmes and processes, this involves:

   (a) appropriate inter-agency dialogue with national authorities on the cross-sectoral implementation of the global agendas;

   (b) alignment, as appropriate, of the global agendas with country-specific circumstances;

   (c) extension to and involvement of the broader constituencies for the different agendas, including local actors of civil society and other external partners;

   (d) monitoring of progress and provision of feedback on constraints;

   (e) elaboration and dissemination of best practices, for the benefit of all.

10. Follow-up at the country level by the resident coordinator system is a matter of both substance and methodology. Resident coordinators and country teams should exercise appropriate judgement in assessing timely entry points to national programming processes and in determining the optimal sequencing of actions to be taken in the context of the country-specific situation. A matrix approach to "vertical" action programmes and "horizontal" or cross-cutting themes is often necessary. The use of thematic teams to ensure coherence in these approaches is encouraged. So is the inclusion in such teams of representatives of government, civil society and other relevant partners.
11. By separate distribution, the products and substantive case studies of the ACC task forces will be made available to the resident coordinator system. Technical guidelines regarding the implementation of specific global programmes at country level, such as those emanating from the International Conference on Population and Development and Habitat II, have or are also being developed for circulation to the resident coordinator system.

12. An in-depth review by an inter-agency workshop held in Turin in December 1997 and comprising key lead agencies, resident coordinators and other field representatives, as well as representatives of relevant ACC bodies helped identify more specific ways of strengthening follow-up action at the field level. These are attached for the guidance of the resident coordinator system and appropriate action by country teams (Appendix II).

Overall guidance and monitoring

13. The follow-up to global conference is an on-going and evolutionary process. Implementation of individual programmes of action is the subject of established responsibilities and reporting to designated intergovernmental bodies.

14. With regard to institutional arrangements at the global level, the UN Development Group Office (DGO) will be a focal point for collecting information, through the resident coordinator system, on UN system activities in the implementation of conference goals at the country level and will pursue work on the identification and dissemination of lessons learned and best practices.

15. Under the overall guidance of CCPOQ, the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) and the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE), networking arrangements led by task managers will seek to develop frameworks to underpin policy advice and programmes of assistance on specific issues. Task managers or core groups will be responsible for such functions as maintaining electronic database sites, disseminating information on experiences and best practices, and making the outcomes of joint action accessible to the rest of the UN system and relevant partners of civil society. CCPOQ, IACSD and IACWGE, with the support of DGO and UN/DESA, will facilitate reporting by ACC to ECOSOC on coordination on cross-cutting issues as well as on the activities of the resident coordinator system.

16. As an integral part of the follow-up continuum, the Regional Commissions will, as mandated by the General Assembly and ECOSOC, assist in the follow-up and coordination of activities at the regional level, advising resident coordinators as appropriate.

17. At the country level, the coordination and integration of action will continue to be guided by the resident coordinator system. Periodic feedback and reporting in the context, inter alia, of established national reporting systems (such as those on Agenda 21 and on gender issues) and the resident coordinators’ annual reports, will assist in identifying progress and lessons learned, sharing best practices, and determining if constraints or common problems exist which can be resolved by back-up support.

18. In reinforcing best practices, sustaining advocacy in support of global conference goals, providing training on the use of programming tools such as CSN and UNDAF and strengthening inter-agency coordination, the UN Staff College - which has already developed related training materials - will play an important facilitating and supporting role.

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## UN World Conferences and Summits

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Inter-agency Workshop on Field Level Follow-up to Global Conferences,
Turin, 10-12 December 1997

Key Action Points

A. Situation analysis

1. Where it has not been done, the resident coordinator system should initiate, in partnership with government, a situation analysis on where the country stands in its follow-up to global conferences in terms of:

   - congruence of national policies and priorities with policy commitments included in conference outcomes;
   - measures taken with reference to key goals and targets included in the global programmes/platforms of action;
   - nature and effectiveness of institutional structures and mechanisms for follow-up, monitoring and review of progress, and reporting; and
   - involvement/participation of other actors (e.g. non-governmental organizations, representatives of civil society, private sector, trade unions, etc.).

B. Policy dialogue

2. Building on existing processes, the resident coordinator system should pursue the policy dialogue with the government aimed at facilitation of national progress in the implementation of the global agendas. A flexible approach should be adopted in this dialogue with national priorities serving as preeminent entry points. The policy dialogue may include, among others, the following:

   - identification, in a coordinated matter, of “nation-wide” priority areas within the “menu” offered by the conference outcomes, on which the UN system could focus its concerted efforts;
   - discussion of existing frameworks for follow-up of particular conferences, selected themes and cross-sectoral issues, including institutional constraints;
   - coordination among relevant lead ministries/agencies for different conferences; and
   - the potential of such coordination structures as “national sustainable development councils”, etc.
3. The policy dialogue should be participatory in nature and should involve implementing agencies and all relevant parts of the national government. The participation of the Bretton Woods institutions (BWIs), the UN regional commissions and donors in the policy dialogue should be promoted whenever possible. In addition, the participation of representatives of civil society, NGOs, and the private sector should be further encouraged.

C. Programming frameworks

4. The situation analysis and the policy dialogue should provide the appropriate context in which the UN system would:
   - review its specific role in relation to the harmonization of national priorities with conference outcomes and promote and advocate strategic goals and objectives;
   - reexamine the existing framework of activities and identify well-defined goals and criteria to guide operational activities and areas which present the best opportunities for synergy; and
   - determine the nature of assistance for the next steps the government and other stakeholders will take.

Thus, the two processes should facilitate and lay the groundwork for a common framework for UN system programmes and underpin the existing programming processes at the country level, particularly with regard to the inclusion of global conference commitments in the strategic priorities of Country Strategy Notes (CSNs). They should furthermore assist governments in aligning national priorities and programmes with policies and programmes of action adopted by the global conferences.

5. The existing guidelines for CSN preparation would need early revision to include the follow-up of global conference outcomes as a key factor in future programming. Country offices would require considerable support by way of information on best practices, good reference material, cross-country experience and, particularly on the technical side, through professional and timely backstopping.

6. In a selected number of countries\(^1\), the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) exercise has been launched on a pilot basis. The major objective of UNDAF is to achieve goal-collaboration, programmatic coherence and mutual reinforcement through a common framework for all development funds, programmes and agencies of the UN system. UNDAF would also serve as one of the instruments to implement coordinated follow-up of global conference outcomes and consequent decisions of the General Assembly on the same subject. Where the government has undertaken the preparation of a CSN, UNDAF will reflect CSN strategic priorities, and, as appropriate, complement the CSN in establishing the UN system parameters of action. Provisional guidelines have already been issued for this exercise\(^2\).

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1 There are 19 pilot countries. In addition, some other countries have expressed interest in undertaking the UNDAF exercise

2 Provisional guidelines for the formulation of UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), UNDG0, 19 August 1997
7. In countries with neither a CSN nor an UNDAF, pilot exercises based on a situation analysis could be launched to facilitate and accelerate the implementation of conference outcomes. The following options could be considered:

- broad-based exercises on a number of selected overarching objectives or cross-cutting themes and related national priorities;

- exercises focused on one or more areas of action identified by the ACC task forces, e.g. full employment, governance; and

- exercises focused on selected specific themes or sub-themes, e.g. those identified by the ACC Task Force on Basic Social Services for All.

The scope of the exercises should be defined in consultation with respective headquarters and specific expertise and resources sought for the purpose. Particular attention should be given to the identification of appropriate “entry points” for such exercises, in the context of a common framework for UN system programmes and other institutional mechanisms.

D. Mainstreaming gender

8. The new emphasis on coordinated conference follow-up has the potential to contribute greatly to the goal of gender equality:

! Gender equality and women’s empowerment strategies should be incorporated in the CSN and UNDAF processes; The CCA should include gender analysis in priority areas. Efforts to gather and disseminate data disaggregated by sex, and gender-sensitive studies, guidelines and checklists, should be supported.

! In programme formulation, implementation and evaluation, full use should be made of the expertise and support of UN gender focal points, gender units, gender advisors as well as of the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and INSTRAW. It is important to continue and deepen on-going efforts to strengthen the access of UN country teams to expertise and technical backstopping on gender. With the assistance of such gender specialists at country level and headquarters, efforts should be made to build the competence of UN system staff, Government and NGO partners, in gender-responsive programming.

! Examples of appropriate action at country level would include:

- convening of inter-agency thematic groups on gender;

- inclusion of gender issues in all thematic or working groups;

- development and sharing of action plans of different agencies related to the conference most relevant to their activities;
regular reviews on the extent to which gender impact and gender equality are an integral part of technical assistance activities, programme evaluations and assessments;

- consultations with and support to NGOs and national machineries for the advancement of women that are supporting the implementation of conference agendas (inter alia, through use of networks involved in the preparation of the conferences);

- identification of cross-cutting sectoral areas that support recommendations on women’s empowerment and gender equality in the plans, platforms, and declarations of several conferences, possibly for collaborative programming activities.

E. Human rights

9. The resident coordinator system/UN country teams should support ratification of human rights treaties (as recommended by the World Conference on Human Rights) and reporting on and implementation of these conventions. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should forward the conclusions and recommendations of treaty monitoring bodies to the resident coordinator system and advise on material required in respect to a country’s situation.

10. Efforts to integrate human rights issues into UN system programmes should be considered in the context of the CSN, UNDAF and other programming frameworks, for example along the lines of UNICEF’s policy to promote and integrate the convention on the Rights of the Child in all the organization’s policies. UNDP’s policy document on “Human Rights and Sustainable Human Development” provides a useful tool for mainstreaming human rights at country level. Dialogue should be pursued with governments to identify areas for further assistance.

F. Institutional frameworks

11. The resident coordinator system should directly interact with national institutional frameworks for the follow-up of global conferences. In some countries, these frameworks remain weak for a variety of reasons. In addition, there is fragmentation of institutional arrangements for follow-up among lead ministries/agencies due to the different intergovernmental monitoring structures and time frames established for each global programme of action. Moreover, these arrangements are often affected by political shifts, policy changes and staff turnover.

12. An important task of the UN system at country level is to build on existing institutional mechanisms:

! It should encourage greater policy coordination among national agencies and ministries involved in conference follow-up;

! It should fully utilize the potential of existing national coordination structures and mechanisms and promote their participatory character;

! It should promote further institutional development including competence building, training and capacity building, in support of conference follow-up. Joint training programmes, especially on overarching objectives and cross-cutting themes, should prove particularly useful in this context;

! It should revisit the existing capacity-building activities in this regard.
G. **Multiple entry points**

13. The follow-up of global conference outcomes should serve to provide multiple entry points for the UN system at the country level to strengthen the development dialogue.

- Such opportunities would arise during the situation analysis, policy dialogue, collaborative programming, CSN and UNDAF exercises.

- Discussion of national priorities and their relationship with conference outcomes, cross-cutting themes, national reporting to intergovernmental structures, streamlining of reporting, meetings of national development councils or similar bodies, would open up possibilities of follow-up efforts.

14. In the context of its continuing relationship with the government and other partners, the UN system has already been working with a wide range of entities in the government, private sector and civil society. These working relationships should prove to be useful in enhancing and accelerating the dialogue at the different entry points.

- The resident coordinator system should examine, in this context, how the process of discussing conference commitments can be transformed into an effective national response mechanism.

15. The desirability of preparing a national handbook on global agendas and national responses should be examined. The material for such a handbook should become available as a result of the situation analysis and policy dialogue.

H. **Wider constituencies**

16. The need to improve UN system interaction with civil society has been repeatedly emphasized in the recent past. It formed a part of the proposals for UN reforms. It is, however, the increasing role of civil society in global conferences which has attracted the most attention. Beginning with Agenda 21, all programmes/platforms of action of global conferences have assigned important roles to civil society in conference follow-up.

- In this context, the resident coordinator system should carefully assess the country level situation on the role of civil society organizations in conference follow-up. This assessment may include: identification of potential partners, on the basis of objectives, constituencies and thematic interests, for follow-up activities, and current levels of their participation at national and local levels in conference-related activities, particularly monitoring of progress on the implementation of global commitments;

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3 Some national handbooks on specific themes, e.g. gender, have been prepared (Australia, Canada, Egypt)

4 Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform, Report of the Secretary-General, Doc. A/51/950, 14 July 1997, paragraphs. 207-216

5 Including NGOs, private sector business and industry, trade unions, professional associations, religious and cultural organizations, etc.
Based on such an assessment, the resident coordinator system should play a facilitation role in promoting government-civil society interaction in conference follow-up activities, particularly through representation in councils established for the purpose; undertaking information-sharing on a selective basis, and, as necessary, assisting in capacity-building.

17. The main objective of this effort is to build wider constituencies in support of UN system activities for conference follow-up as envisaged in the plans of action. Drawing from recent experience, there are a number of different modalities for building alliances with civil society.

At the country level, the thematic groups and task manager arrangements for conference follow-up should seek to involve relevant partners of civil society on the specific issues being addressed.

I. Reporting

18. Governments have the primary responsibility for reporting on implementation of conference outcomes. Reporting is an important tool for monitoring progress, exchange of good practices and lessons learned, and for identifying problems and systemic constraints.

The resident coordinator system should support the process of national reporting with a view, in particular, to: inclusion of action taken on key targets/goals as well as the impact of such action; inclusion of progress on cross-cutting themes; ensuring the involvement of civil society; and promoting circulation of national information to avoid duplicative reporting.

19. The resident coordinator system/UN country teams should use and benefit from improvements in information/communication technology, in particular network-based information and database systems for conference follow-up within the UN system (e.g. www.unsystem.org/agenda 21, www.un.org/womenwatch). Headquarters units should keep the country offices fully informed of new/expanded databases in this regard.

J. Analytical frameworks, statistics and indicators

20. At the country level, a variety of analytical frameworks, models and indicators have been used in the general development context as well as in the context of global conferences. The resident coordinator system should encourage regular exchange of information between UN agencies (e.g. ILO, IFAD, UNICEF), the Bretton Woods institutions, and governments in this regard. The Common Country Assessment (CCA) as conceived in the context of UNDAF is a good model for highlighting a country’s development challenges.

21. Two different types of indicators are relevant for conference follow-up: (a) global indicators for monitoring global and national progress; and (b) indicators for country-specific programming and monitoring.

The resident coordinator system should discuss the choice of indicators with the UN country teams and take note of on-going progress in this regard by the respective headquarters units;

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A preliminary list of key global indicators has been prepared on the basis of existing experience for use in the UNDAF exercise; Provisional Guidelines for the Formulation of UNDAF, Annex 3
Efforts should be made to ensure consistency in the choice of indicators for data collection for specific activities, e.g. common country assessment and for conference follow-up and monitoring, in particular between the Minimum National Social Data Set (MNSDS) and the indicators used in the CCA;

The use of key indicators should also be discussed and agreed upon with national authorities. In this connection, the resident coordinator system should be responsive to needs for national capacity-building for data collection and analysis.

K. Best practices

22. The identification of best practices should cover a wide range. More importantly, best practices should reflect the lessons learned from past and present programmatic experiences, tools used and results obtained.

In the specific context of global conference follow-up, this could include collaborative programming, use of entry points, development of databases and indicators, interactions with civil society, etc.;

The resident coordinator system/UN country teams should initiate systematic action to identify, document and disseminate examples of best practices. In 1998, there should be systematic dissemination of best practices in implementing the outcomes of the global conferences and the ACC Task Forces.

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