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UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP  
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**Innovative approaches to programme design and implementation  
to support the operationalization of the post-2015 development  
agenda**

Background paper prepared jointly by  
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## **I. Introduction**

The United Nations System is operating in an environment which is more complex, fast-changing, inter-connected and diverse than ever before. Complex development issues cannot be addressed by traditional sector approaches. To be “fit for purpose” and to support countries to implement the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, the United Nations needs to fundamentally rethink the way it does business.

The United Nations must be more flexible and adopt better ways of doing work to remain a reliable and responsible development partner. We need to discover, incorporate and demonstrate truly innovative solutions to development challenges, and apply them at every stage of our programmes, from inception and design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Achieving development goals means that we have to innovate through a process of iterations, prototyping and piloting with the willingness to risk calculated failures, while following the “do no harm principle” in identifying successful ideas that can be scaled -up.

This paper will highlight experiences of the six United Nations entities and how they can inform innovative approaches to support the operationalization of the post-2015 development agenda focusing on two specific perspectives: People’s engagement and inter-agency collaboration. In this paper, innovation is used to describe an idea or an approach that aims to satisfy a specific need or address a concrete challenge, and involves deliberate application of information, imagination and initiative to derive great or different values from available and new resources. Innovation in this context is a novel approach that adds value to the end-user.

The objective of the session will be to discuss how innovative and participatory approaches will be brought to bear on programme design and implementation, including in inter-agency collaboration.

## **II. Key issues**

### **1. Innovative approaches to promote people’s engagement:**

The entire process of designing the next development agenda has been an unprecedented innovation for the United Nations system. High- and low-tech solutions have been employed, from e-discussions, surveys to community-focus groups, in order to get the views of people on the future agenda. Millions of people from different backgrounds and walks of life have been involved in some form of consultation. The mobilization of these different groups of people must mark a new era of the way “we do business” – it must transfer over to the implementation of the new goals. People must have a say in the way the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are implemented and pursued in their own communities.

## 1.1. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) consultations on the post-2015 development agenda

UNDG consultations on the post-2015 development agenda respond to the call – including by the United Nations Secretary General - for greater participation in shaping the new development agenda. Through this exercise, the United Nations was determined to tap into the words of its founding Charter: “We the peoples”. The goals and targets of the post-2015 agenda will be determined by Member States. However, people across the world are demanding a say in the decisions that affect their lives. The consultations represent an unprecedented effort to engage with people all around the world on their priorities.

Since 2012, the consultations have been taking place at three levels:

- **National consultations** were held in almost 100 countries. Dedicated efforts were made to reach out to the poorest and most marginalized communities, those whose perspectives on global agendas are not usually asked for. The consultations involved civil society, academia, the private sector, government leaders and others.
- **The global My World survey** has enabled more than five million people to rank their priorities for the future they want for our world. This is the first time there has been such a vast grassroots consultation in the history of the United Nations.
- **Thematic consultations** were held on 11 topics covering the existing Millennium Development Goals’ (MDGs) areas and prominent challenges that will shape prospects for sustainable development in the coming decades: Conflict, violence and disasters; education; energy; environmental sustainability; food security and nutrition; governance; growth and employment; health; addressing inequalities; population dynamics and water. Consultations on the means of implementation are currently taking place through April 2015. The six themes covered are: Strengthening capacities and building effective institutions; localizing the agenda; participatory monitoring and accountability; partnerships with civil society; engaging with the private sector; and culture and development

The findings from the global consultations informed the deliberations of the Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs which was appointed by the United Nations General Assembly. The proposed 17 goals and 169 targets reflect much of what people have said they want in the new agenda, including some of the most transformative elements, such as universality and addressing inequalities. The OWG’s proposal contains a goal on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, as among the top priorities identified from the consultations. It is essential that the new agenda and the manner in which it is implemented reflect the hopes and aspirations of the world’s people. That will increase both its legitimacy and the level of confidence people have in global processes and, most importantly, its impact.

Following up on the UNDG-led consultations, eighteen country offices of UNDP experimented with a micro-grants scheme designed to address the priorities people raised during the post-2015 national consultations. These initiatives brought in citizens to co-define the problems, co-design and co-implement the solutions, and jointly monitor and evaluate the

progress. A UNCT-led initiative in Montenegro has engaged youth in defining challenges and co-creating solutions on youth unemployment, a high priority identified during the post-2015 national consultation. In Rwanda, an online platform, *Youth Connekt*, links innovative young Rwandans with the private sector and governments to help with the country's inclusive economic transformation, and the achievement of the ambitious development goals of the country. In Egypt, Armenia and Georgia, new tools including open-ended online conversations, and massive ethnography and network analysis helped identify, connect and engage local innovators to address issues identified by the post-2015 consultations.

## 1.2. Participatory monitoring and accountability

The importance of broad participatory monitoring and accountability in implementing the new agenda was a message strongly articulated through the Participatory Monitoring and Accountability Consultation, co-facilitated by UNICEF, UN-Women and UNDP. What has come through in these global consultations is that people want to be engaged in and driving the global agenda, rather than simply debating what it should be. They want to hold their leaders accountable, and they want access to the information and data which will enable them to monitor what is happening. Participatory accountability practices will better ensure that the agenda will be rooted in a human rights framework. Making sure that all people are included in all aspects of development fulfils their human right to participation. It can furthermore give a sense of hope and purpose, and can also help shift harmful attitudes and biases. It can also make development programmes and initiatives smarter, more inclusive and more effective.

A number of good practices aimed at broadening participation and strengthening participatory monitoring of development processes have been highlighted in the consultations. They include the *Citizen's Evaluation for Good Governance* in Albania, which uses a scorecard for social auditing and gender budgeting; Zambia's use of *M-WASH*, a mobile and web-based monitoring, evaluation and reporting system which reaches 1.7 million people and focuses on water and sanitation services; and Thailand's *iMonitor* application tracks and evaluates the delivery of HIV services, allowing people to log "alerts" if ARV medicines and condoms are not available in health centres, and to report discrimination against HIV-positive people in the workplace. The MDG Achievement Fund engaged citizens in carrying out participatory photo/video evaluations in Ecuador, Timor-Leste, Colombia and the Philippines.

To complement the official reporting from national governments, UNDG is intending to help people across the globe to give their own assessment of progress towards the SDGs and strengthen participatory monitoring and accountability, based on people-driven data collection. It is particularly critical to strengthen and influence the voice of women in country monitoring and accountability mechanisms, as well as the voices of those who are often excluded from the processes, including children and youth, minorities, persons with disabilities, people living in poverty, forcibly displaced and stateless persons or other

marginalized and/or excluded groups. An enabling environment needs to be created, including through legislation, so that all stakeholders can contribute systematically.

## 2. Working together to support the post-2015 agenda

Since 2012, the United Nations has organized itself to work more coherently and cohesively around the three pillars of sustainable development – social, environment and economic – using innovative tools and collaborative practices that move from the traditional silo ‘thinking’ to a more integrated approach.

### 2.1. “Fit for purpose”

The new, universal, sustainable development agenda requires an international community that is “fit for purpose” in order to support countries to implement a new development agenda. Through the QCPR<sup>1</sup> and the global consultations on post-2015, Member States left no doubt that they would like to see a strong United Nations development system, one that is relevant, nimble and ready to support countries to deliver on their sustainable development priorities. In his report *A Life of Dignity for All*, the United Nations Secretary-General expressed the commitment of the United Nations system to continue its reform and make itself “fit for purpose”. Five essential elements are at the core of the discussions in the United Nations System: Universality, equality, human rights, integration and the data revolution. Additionally, five key areas for joint United Nations action have been identified: 1) effective country level collaboration, including increased alignment with national priorities and strategies; 2) policy coherence; 3) partnerships and alliances; 4) strengthened accountability for results; and 5) leadership by Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) Principals. The six United Nations entities have been actively contributing to the ongoing dialogue on “specific actions to be taken in support of a coherent and coordinated system-wide approach to render the United Nations system competent in contributing to the transformative [post-2015] agenda”. The three pillars of the CEB: UNDG, HLCM<sup>2</sup> and HLCP<sup>3</sup>, have also conducted a series of brainstorming sessions in this regard where several consensus themes are beginning to emerge, including: Organize UNDS support in the form of specific, issue-based, inclusive, voluntary coalitions and platforms built around SDGs; pooling of resources around shared goals where it makes sense to do so; develop evidence based strategies and strengthen analytical work; develop a global highly-skilled and adaptable workforce and strengthened leadership at country level; adopt a new digital agenda to help the United Nations map data geographically and thematically; and become a leader in transparency for greater accountability at all levels. The strength of the United Nations system lies in what we can offer collectively, rather than individually, much like the sustainable development challenges we seek to address cannot be successfully tackled in silos. It must be able to

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<sup>1</sup> Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review.

<sup>2</sup> High Level Committee on Management.

<sup>3</sup> High Level Committee on Programmes.

leverage the respective expertise and specializations of United Nations agencies to work across disciplines and functions to better address complex multi-sectoral challenges.

## 2.2. The MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF)

In 2010, the UNDG endorsed the MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) in response to the call to speed up MDG achievement. The MAF is a tool that helps countries systematically identify and prioritize feasible actions that could accelerate progress towards an MDG target that is otherwise likely to be missed (off-track), through a multi-stakeholder consultative process. Formally launched at the 2010 MDG review this UNDG framework, is now in use in over 50 different countries across all geographic regions and country typologies, across a range of MDGs as well as other locally important goals that go beyond the MDG agenda. These include countries where MAF action plans are currently under development, as well as those where completed action plans are under implementation. Since 2013, the World Bank, working via the CEB, has joined the implementation effort at the highest level. Overall results from MAF countries suggest that it is effective in supporting programme countries to prioritize what works, and turn strategies into coordinated, multi-stakeholder action which will accelerate MDG progress. Key ingredients for a framework to be successful are effective partnerships, ownership and accountability. Drawing on these experiences, a next generation of a SDG acceleration framework can be developed as an important part of the United Nations' support to countries in post-2015 implementation.

## 2.3. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

The six entities are actively pursuing more coherent, effective, and efficient ways to implement the post-2015 development agenda on the ground. The SOPs for Countries Adopting the "Delivering as One" approach are a tangible step to further streamline and coordinate the United Nations development system operational approach in its policy work, program, and business operations. The SOPs provide tools and systems to make the United Nations on the ground well teamed-up, and with the agility and capacity needed to deliver high quality results. Through the SOPs, United Nations country teams organize around issues and remove institutional bottle-necks that prevent coherence, by improving standards and common operating systems, and motivating the use of shared data, policy analytics, and advocacy to support joined-up solutions.

The SOPs provide tools for enhanced coherence of UNCTs through joint programming, and the design and implementation of joint work plans. They improve transparency of the United Nations' overall contribution to countries through a common budgetary framework that features all planned and available resources for programme activities in one place, thus also facilitating joint resource mobilization efforts. Furthermore, the SOPs introduce business operation strategies to strengthen cost-effective common operations and common service support guided by a cost-benefit analysis. In communicating the SOPs and its integrated support package to their respective field structures, all the Executive Directors of the six entities confirmed their full commitment to the SG's call for a United Nations system that

works better together and deliver results. Currently adopted by over forty countries in full, and with many other countries adopting various SOPs elements, the United Nations system is accelerating the implementation of the SOPs for Delivering as One in order to achieve greater results for sustainable development.

### **Examples of inter-agency collaboration.**

The United Nations Secretary-General's campaign UNiTE to End Violence Against Women, led and managed by UN Women, is an example of an inter-agency initiative that has been proven to mobilize a range of audiences through its advocacy, and has facilitated the development of a shared and coherent approach in the work of the United Nations system at country level, creating an over-arching structure for the design and implementation of joint programs. Since the launch of the campaign in 2008, the United Nations system has stepped up its work to end violence against women and girls through an increasing number of initiatives. The number of joint initiatives has grown steadily in recent years from 35 in 2006, to 98 in 2009 and 108 in 2013. Reports suggest that this overall increase is in part attributable to the UNiTE campaign.

In Malawi, a Delivering as One country, a real-time monitoring framework to track UNDAF performance on MDG acceleration was developed by UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA. The framework ensures reliable data availability on agency focus area indicators related to health, protection, and human rights, including in humanitarian settings.

### **III. Conclusion**

Unprecedented changes in the world offer the United Nations system new ways to work on development issues together with different stakeholders and partners. Technological innovations are only one side of the coin and the way we approach development is another. People's engagement through these consultations has formed an inclusive approach to development, which generates increased legitimacy and ownership, and facilitates a higher degree of effectiveness in the subsequent implementation phase. People around the world will also have the opportunity to give their own assessment on progress towards the SDGs, which will strengthen participatory and real-time monitoring, accountability and assist us in improving results.

Flexibility and adaptability, maximizing the use of modern technology, and managing and using data and evidence effectively, transparently and openly, will be key aspects moving forward. So too will be the use of cutting-edge analytics, and strategies focused on illuminating and addressing inequalities, lack of rights, and risk and vulnerability. The United Nations system will work in partnership, co-designing policy and programmes with all relevant stakeholders, facilitating nationally led, inclusive dialogues, which provide a platform for shared capacities and operations to deliver together, upholding global norms and standards in all that it does.

#### **IV. Questions for Member States**

1. Member States have already signalled their desire to see a United Nations system that is more coherent, relevant and ready to support countries to deliver their sustainable development priorities. What can Member States do to ensure that the United Nations is “fit for purpose”?
2. The United Nations has connected with communities through the consultations.
  - a. How are we going to sustain this momentum and keep those spaces open and venues for dialogues working?
  - b. How do Member States see the value that the six entities can add to ensure continued engagement with all stakeholders during the programme design phase and implementation for the post-2015 agenda?
  - c. How can the United Nations and other stakeholders collaborate effectively to scale up new approaches for the achievement of the post-2015 agenda?
3. How can Member States help ensure that best practices and lessons learned from the above innovative approaches are scaled-up, but also embedded in the United Nations development system’s blueprint for delivering on the post-2015 development agenda?