**Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of
UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP
30 and 31 January 2012
New York**

**Making United Nations operational activity work for accelerated development:
Quadrennial comprehensive policy review**

(Delivering as One, results reporting)

I.   Introduction

1.   The current triennial comprehensive policy review (TCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system provides policy guidance on key United Nations development activities, including capacity building and development, South-South cooperation, transition from relief to development, gender equality and women's empowerment, United Nations coherence for effectiveness and relevance and strengthened evaluation, among other important themes. In 2012, the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) will serve as a forum for Member States to discuss how to set shared expectations and steer United Nations operational activities during the next four years – in response to shifts in the global context for development cooperation and to reflect policy changes in the overall approach to development assistance and transition work.

2.   While the QCPR will cover a host of issues in development, this paper provides an opportunity to further discuss the experiences of the Delivering as One pilot countries and examine ways to improve results reporting as an initial input into this process.

II.   Key challenges

Context

3.   Overall, the global efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals have helped to lift millions of people out of poverty and save lives; they have ensured school attendance, reduced maternal deaths, expanded opportunities for women, increased access to clean water and provided relief from deadly and debilitating disease. However, there remain challenges in promoting sustainable development and protecting the most vulnerable from the devastating effects of multiple crises – conflicts, natural disasters, volatility in prices for food and energy, as well as climate change and environmental degradation. Accelerated and sustained development requires equitable and inclusive economic growth – growth that will enable all people, especially the poor, hungry and marginalized, to benefit from economic opportunities and essential services. Recent developments in information and communication technology, expanded partnerships, enhanced knowledge sharing, and the application of lessons learned present opportunities to accelerate development progress at an unprecedented rate.

4.   Accelerating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in all countries, where needed, is a top priority for the United Nations family. The Millennium Development Goals Acceleration Framework, adopted by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), was designed to help countries move forward towards achieving these development results. It also aims to increase development effectiveness. The Framework supports the efforts of Governments and development partners to systematically identify the bottlenecks hindering Millennium Development Goals progress and to develop tested and proven solutions that can help overcome them. It fully integrates an equity approach, and emphasizes the importance of disaggregated analyses and strategies. The Framework calls for an integrated approach, breaking down silos between sectors, disciplines and the individual Millennium Development Goals, and prioritizes an evidence-based, cross-sectoral approach. So far, 14 countries have applied the Framework and another 30 are in various stages of its application.

Delivering as One

5.   To maximize the level of support to meet Millennium Development Goals targets, the United Nations system continues to strive to be as effective and efficient as possible; this includes ensuring that agencies work together in a coordinated and collaborative fashion. The Montevideo Conference on Delivering as One in November 2011 affirmed the importance of (a) national ownership and government leadership; (b) widely sharing lessons learned; (c) providing pooled, un-earmarked, predictable, and multiyear funding; (d) recognizing the individual development contexts of different countries; and (e) further strengthening the role of the Resident Coordinator. Participants noted the significance of the independent evaluation process as an input to the QCPR. There was broad commitment to strive for the lightest, most flexible programming approach suited to specific country situations and utilizing the comparative advantages of the different agencies in the United Nations system to support national priorities and leadership. There was also a renewed undertaking of all concerned to strengthen multilateralism and to reaffirm the United Nations system as an important forum to address the development agenda.

Results reporting

6.   Achieving the Millennium Development Goals with equity requires the concerted effort of all development partners to reach the most disadvantaged as well as systematic and regular monitoring of programmes that aim to serve the most deprived populations. Consistent with the outcome of the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, a major effort will be needed to strengthen systems for monitoring, reporting and assessment of results at all levels. Therefore, Governments are being supported by the United Nations to undertake timely and rigorous assessments of programme progress in result areas that are critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. These allow for timely course corrections, and inform decisions on policy, programme, resource and management. The challenge remains how to best utilize the practical experiences of United Nations coherence in order to better report on the United Nations contribution towards sustainable and effective development.

7.   Common principles for United Nations agencies on results reporting were identified in a 2011 study by the UNDG High-level Committee on Management; it provides a basis for United Nations agencies to standardize and improve results reporting to better demonstrate the effectiveness of the United Nations. These principles reflect the need to measure and report on effectiveness and efficiency gains while at the same time reducing the reporting burden. Ensuring that common results and a development agenda are embraced and measured by all partners means that development results derive from mutual accountability. Setting quality standards in terms of accessibility, balance, and clarity is the foundation for transparency in results reporting. These are mutually reinforcing and build towards the most important principle: ensuring the United Nations role in contributing to development results pursued by national partners. These principles will be integrated into relevant guidance and reporting mechanisms and form the basis for future discussions with all partners on development results reporting – particularly its challenges and emerging opportunities – so that results reporting captures the contribution of the United Nations. Consistent with the outcome of the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, a major effort will be needed to strengthen systems for monitoring and assessment of results at all levels and in a balanced way.

III. Lessons learned

8. The independent evaluation of the Delivering as One pilot programmes, to be completed in 2012, will be an opportunity to document lessons and best practices, and will feed into the planning process on the way forward.

9. In partnership with many programme countries, national strategies for accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals are being developed and consolidated by a common framework. The strategy methodology has been imparted to national Governments at regional and country levels; over 30 countries are currently completing cross-sectoral action plans with the support of United Nations agencies. Millennium Development Goals acceleration at subnational levels is addressing equity concerns. The lessons learned from this process will feed into future programming, especially in the upcoming strategic plans of the United Nations funds and programmes.

10. While progress may be apparent in aggregate results, indicators can also easily mask existing and growing inequities. When information is disaggregated and objectives are clarified for measuring results, it is possible to begin to see significant disparities, even among the wealthiest of the nations. Often, uneven national growth has left significant groups behind, unable to share in their country's overall growth and prosperity. Discrimination and social exclusion deny many the opportunities and capabilities they need to improve their lives. There are specific areas where inequalities are widening in a considerable number of countries, even where overall progress is being made. The persistent exclusion of women, minorities, those with disabilities and other segments of the population make accelerated progress difficult and thus jeopardize development gains. Significant challenges remain: youth employment; changing climate; energy access; transparent and democratic governance; as well as participation to benefit from development. Measuring and reporting on results in these areas also remains a challenge – not least, because they are the normative areas of work where long-term and transformative interventions – in such areas as human rights, gender equality and capacity development, which are difficult to measure – are among the most promising areas for action.

11. The current focus on enhancing country-level results-based planning, monitoring and reporting offers an important opportunity. It is critical that planned programme strategies directly address issues as revealed by the common country assessments and situation analyses, are based on the comparative advantage among programme partners, and address the critical bottlenecks and barriers to achieve results for the most disadvantaged populations. Monitoring and assessing reductions in the barriers and bottlenecks, on both the supply and demand sides and in terms of the enabling environment, are equally important to gauge progress and results towards development outcomes. Validating development outcomes and estimating impact should be undertaken in ways that recognize the United Nations contribution to development objectives.

12. Intensified local-level field monitoring, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, will enable Governments and other development partners to better track the conditions that determine progress for well-being. Improving the timeliness of results information will also facilitate planning and decision-making in a number of ways: (a) informing strategic adjustments to programmes; (b) identifying areas for further policy advocacy; (c) guiding future investments; (d) prompting timely decisions by management; (e) mobilizing resources and empowering community actors; and (f) strengthening leadership and accountability. Bringing the voices and perspectives of young and

marginalized people to the planning and policy-making dialogue also remains critical to attaining identified and emergent development results.

13.   Emphasis is being placed on filling data gaps, building on the extensive progress made in using census, household and multiple indicator cluster surveys, as well as other results-gathering methods, including participatory approaches. Additional support will be provided to help collect and analyse data and information, to look beyond national averages that might conceal various dimensions of sometimes widening disparities. This may include vulnerability assessments and other tools.

14.   Broad and coordinated stakeholder engagement helps to build national ownership and aligns the efforts of all partners in action planning. In this context, partnerships provide not only a more holistic and broad-based approach in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, but also promote mutual accountability to attain development results. Key forms of partnerships include South-South cooperation, partnership with Governments, civil society, the private sector, and among United Nations organizations and other actors. For example, the Health 4+ (H4+) partnership – United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA),United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank as well as Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) – tackles the health-related Millennium Development Goals. Partnerships with civil society, among other key benefits, broaden development ownership by communities. Partnerships with the private sector are becoming increasingly important. There are some notable examples: the Secretary-General's campaign Unite to End Violence Against Women; and the Health 8 (H8) partnership, with the H4+ United Nations organizations joining forces with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the GAVI Alliance. One of the key challenges in partnerships concerns establishing accountability for results: while multiple partners contribute to common, nationally owned results, donors and audit systems often expect single-agency, short-term results attribution in a multi-actor, diversified results-area partnership environment. A greater understanding of the complex issue of contribution versus attribution is necessary.

15.   Capacity development is a key component to ensure that development gains are sustainable. The inclusion of capacity indicators in measuring development gains, including Millennium Development Goals acceleration, must be ensured, not only to achieve immediate targets, but also to sustain those targets over time.

IV.   Conclusion

16.   There is an ever-greater need for the United Nations and its partners to work together coherently and to continue to pursue sustainable approaches to development support. The QCPR provides an opportunity to create and strengthen operational modalities to achieve results by focusing on the most deprived populations and addressing bottlenecks and barriers they face in participating fully in Millennium Development Goals acceleration and development progress. The United Nations agencies support efforts to achieve the development goals, to generate disaggregated data in order to uncover disparities and to coordinate intervention efforts with a range of partners, including civil society organizations, to reach the most vulnerable. Emphasis should be placed on providing support to national efforts to reduce inequalities and to include the most vulnerable, marginalized and excluded groups, so that they are at the centre of national plans, policies and programmes. These efforts, in turn, should be captured directly by reporting results on development.

New and innovative results models, including locally based and participatory methods, could be piloted and practiced, based on the above and other lessons learned.

17.   The United Nations system will continue to move forward in a coherent manner, based on the experiences of the Delivering as One pilots, as articulated in Montevideo and the independent evaluation currently underway, and by adhering to the agreed results principles of mutual accountability, transparency, efficiency and development effectiveness. Together with sustained and inclusive economic growth, investing in the social development sector is vital to long-term growth and the future strength of societies.

18.   There continues to be an urgent need for actions that streamline reporting requirements and strengthen monitoring, reporting and evaluation mechanisms and capacities within the United Nations. Together with programme countries, lessons learned from Delivering as One pilots and results reporting can offer avenues for future results measurement and reporting of equitable and sustainable development supported by the United Nations family.

Questions for consideration and discussion

- As outlined in the Millennium Development Goals Acceleration Framework, achieving sustainable progress towards the Millennium Development Goals requires enhanced capacity to monitor and report on national and subnational results, with particular focus on equitable development results. To what extent can the QCPR be informed by country lessons learned to date and further this process?
- How can the four principles of results reporting (mutual accountability, transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness) be further mainstreamed into United Nations support and national systems through the QCPR process?
- How can the QCPR encourage the United Nations to continue to move forward with results models that best address programme country development outcomes?
- How can Delivering as One lessons learned for a coherent and coordinated United Nations be useful in the context of achieving effective development results, guided by monitoring and reporting?
- What is different in transition settings with respect to results reporting?

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