

INTRODUCTION

In March 2005, the United Nations Development Group⁴ (UNDG) signed as participating organization the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (PD) jointly with 91 countries, 25 other participating organizations and 14 civil society organizations.

The main feature of the PD is that effective partnerships among development partners and recipient countries are based on the recognition of national leadership and ownership of development strategies and plans. Within this framework, sound policies, good governance and effective mechanisms are recognized to be needed at all levels to ensure that development assistance produces development results.

While the PD has a strong focus on monitoring, it also highlights the importance of exploring cross-country evaluation processes. The Declaration states that evaluation should provide a more comprehensive understanding of how increased aid effectiveness contributes to meeting development results and that it should be applied without imposing additional burden on partner countries.

Against this background, donors and partner countries agreed to evaluate the implementation of the PD between 2007 and 2010 using a two-phased approach. The first phase consists of a *formative* evaluation concentrating on

inputs, the implementation process, and to the extent possible, outputs. The second phase will be a *summative* evaluation focusing on the results of implementation, to the extent possible, at the outcome level. The results of the first-phase evaluation will be a contribution towards the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness to be held in Accra, Ghana in 2008.

Ten countries and 10 development partner agencies⁵ have volunteered to conduct an evaluation of their own performance under the PD as an input into the first-phase evaluation. They agreed to use a common framework terms of reference,⁶ adapting it to their specific requirements. The countries are Bangladesh, Bolivia, Mali, Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Viet Nam and Zambia. The development partners are Australia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, United Kingdom and UNGD.

UNDP Evaluation Office conducted the evaluation on the PD in line with Executive Board decision 2007/24. Since UNGD was a participating organization in the PD, UNDP Administrator as chairman of UNGD invited all its principals to conduct a joint evaluation. Within UNGD, it was agreed that the evaluation would be carried out jointly by IFAD, UNAIDS, UNECA, UNIFEM and UNDP.

4 For a list of members of the UNGD, see Annex 2.

5 The PD's terms 'partner countries' and 'donors' will be used throughout this paper except when reference is made to documents that use different terms like the ones applied here (from 'Evaluation of UN Contribution to the Implementation of the Paris Declaration Terms of Reference, 12 July 2007).

6 'Framework Terms of Reference for the First Phase Evaluation of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration', 25 April 2007.

1.1 GENERAL EVALUATION CONTEXT

According to the framework terms of reference developed for the first-phase evaluation of the implementation of the PD, its purpose is to “strengthen aid effectiveness by assessing what constitutes better practices for partner and donor behaviour in regard to implementing the PD.” The scope of the first phase of the evaluation will begin by establishing “how far political support, peer pressure and coordinated action (from partners and donors as appropriate) are working to get the behaviour changes to which signatories have committed.”⁷

Given the limited time period under review by evaluation—approximately two and a half years—a formative type of evaluation was conducted. A formative evaluation is a method for reviewing programmes while the programme activities are still forming or occurring reviews, thus the focus of the evaluation is on ways of improving and enhancing programmes rather than rendering definitive judgement about effectiveness.

The design of the first phase of the evaluation (2007-2008) comprises: country-level evaluations, donor headquarter evaluations, thematic studies, and a synthesis of the three. In addition, the first phase is intended to help design the second phase of the evaluation, which seeks to assess outcomes and aid and development effectiveness.

1.2 AGENCY-SPECIFIC EVALUATION CONTEXT

UNDG’s membership consists of 27 UN agencies, programmes and funds; 5 regional economic commissions; and 5 observers. After UNDG volunteered to evaluate its performance for the formative first-phase evaluation, it developed its own inter-agency evaluation context: after internal

consultations it was agreed that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would carry out the assessment jointly with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM).⁸

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide guidance to improve UNDG’s contribution to the implementation of the PD based on an assessment of lessons learned. The emphasis is on learning and providing recommendations to strengthen national ownership, harmonization of aid efforts, alignment to national development strategies, managing for results and mutual accountability.

The objectives of this evaluation are to:

- Assess UNDG initiatives in support of the implementation of the PD, identify where the UNDG comparative advantage has been proven, identify gaps, and provide recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness of current approaches to aid modalities and aid effectiveness and their implications for long-term development.
- Assess how United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) have used partnerships at local, national and international levels and positioned themselves vis-à-vis other actors to bring greater coherence and relevance to their initiatives related to aid effectiveness.
- Provide substantive insights on how to ensure that lessons learned from initiatives and strategies implemented by UN organizations at corporate and country levels can be institutionalized within the organizations through systematic monitoring and evalua-

7 ‘Framework Terms of Reference for the First Phase of the Evaluation of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration’, 25 April 2007, page 5.

8 It should be noted that two UNDG member organizations that agreed to carry out the joint assessment are direct signatories of the PD: UNECA and IFAD. This was additional to the commitment made by UNDG.

tion, adapted and made more relevant to country needs.

A related objective is to shed light on the challenges and opportunities facing UN organizations in fostering the development effectiveness agenda as the UN reform process continues towards ‘Delivering as One’ (though there is no overlap between the One UN pilots and the countries included in the assessment).

The scope and focus of this evaluation has been designed around the following three dimensions that were identified as principal contributors to development partner behaviour:

- **Commitment:** The PD calls for a new way of delivering aid whereby country strategies are no longer to be formulated by individual development partners. Instead, the emphasis is on partner country ownership while donors’ cooperation strategies are to be guided by partner government needs-based demands in an aligned and harmonized manner.
- **Capacities:** Development partners and national coordinators have called for more effective interactions on PD issues between headquarter policy advisers and operations staff. This is to overcome uneven capacities (and uneven commitment) between different staff employed by the same development partner. Indeed, a single UNCT might represent very different approaches to aid effectiveness.
- **Incentive Systems:** Development partners’ incentive systems have been reported as critical for efficient development partner behaviour. Pressures for disbursements,

lack of flexibility on staff time, and high staff turnover may create incentives rewarding short-term benefits over longer term and collective gains.

The assessment gives special attention to four cross-cutting subjects: gender equality, HIV/AIDS, rural development and capacity development. Gender equality is essential to the achievement of the mandates of all UNDG agencies.

The Terms of Reference for the evaluation of UNDG contribution to the implementation of the PD are included in Annex 1. They are based on the ‘Guidance for Management of Development Partner Evaluations’ developed by partner countries and development partners participating in the joint evaluation.⁹

In addition, this assessment seeks to recognize the distinctive UNDG contribution to the implementation of the PD while also acknowledging the broader UN contribution,¹⁰ emphasizing the following:

- UNDG is not a donor. Its primary contribution to development is not financial.
- UNDG constituencies are member states. This enforces United Nations neutrality as well as its normative role in following up international conventions and intergovernmental agreements.
- UNDG has a broad presence in countries.
- The UNCT at country level includes United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes, whether resident or non resident.
- The evaluation includes assessments both at headquarters and at the country level.

9 ‘Framework Terms of Reference for the First Phase Evaluation of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration’, 25 April 2007.

10 “The bedrock principles of operational activities of the United Nations system derive from their universal, voluntary and grant nature and their neutrality and multilateralism. Operational activities are therefore strongly anchored in the normative mandates and roles established by the United Nations system. The knowledge, skills and resources made available to developing countries by some 40 funds, programmes, agencies and other entities of the United Nations development system are of unparalleled breadth and depth. But challenges remain to making the United Nations development system more coherent and efficient.” From the General Assembly ‘Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review’, August 2007, pp 4-5.