

Action Plan

Harmonization and Alignment to help achieve the MDG's

Context

The [Rome Declaration on Harmonization](#), urging the development community to reduce burdens on programme countries and to help strengthen national leadership and mutual accountability for the development process, has encouraged the UN System to re-examine its past and ongoing efforts in this area. As stated in the Rome Declaration, substantial efforts are needed on the side of both donors and programme countries, if the commitments of the Millennium Declaration, notably the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), are to be met. While initially focusing on the programming, policies and procedures of the different development organizations of the UN System, harmonization with the wider development community and further alignment with national processes is now receiving renewed focus.

Governments of programme and donor countries, as well as civil society, count on the UN as a trusted partner to play a critical role in moving harmonization and alignment forward and in helping national partners strengthen their capacities in this area. We are committed to live up to these expectations, as laid out in this Action Plan.

While we provide an overview of the principles guiding our efforts below, the annex shows in detail all initiatives on each of the commitments of the Rome Declaration.

1. The UN Development Group

The United Nations Development Group¹ (hereafter referred to as UNDG) is an instrument for UN reform, created by the Secretary General in 1997, to improve the effectiveness of the UN System in development cooperation at the country level. The UNDG brings together 25 operational agencies working on development plus five observers. The Group is chaired by the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on behalf of the Secretary General.

While the development organizations of the UN System have been dealing with issues close to Harmonization & Alignment through the UNDG mechanism since 1997, a dedicated Working Group has been set up to focus on the follow-up to the Rome Declaration on Harmonization and to help advance the Harmonization & Alignment agenda collectively.

2. Strategic role of the UNDG and UN Country Teams in Harmonization & Alignment

The unique role of the member organizations of the UNDG in the area of development is widely acknowledged: Foremost, we can draw upon a global network of practitioners, which facilitates the sharing of lessons learned around the world. As a trusted partner of both governments and civil society, we are often called upon to act as honest broker and we can provide a forum for debates on development issues. Furthermore, many constituencies rely on us in helping programme countries define and maintain norms and standards in multiple areas such as human rights and environmental assessments.

¹ Click [here](#) for further information or browse our website (www.undg.org).

Equipped with these unique characteristics and strengths, we are aware that we have a potentially important role to play in Harmonization & Alignment at the country level, both in initiatives at the national and at the sectoral level. In doing this, we can draw upon our experiences with the introduction of Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), bringing together all UN agencies in a given programme country, as well as on specific experiences such as the UN System's joint response to HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS, which is a co-sponsored programme of ten different agencies including the World Bank. UNAIDS experience as a joint UN programme (including its Unified Budget and Workplan, the UN Implementation Support Plan, the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS, and the "Three Ones" initiative) constitutes an example of effective harmonisation within the UN system.

In the context of Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia and Haiti, we have learned important lessons in how to work together with the wider donor community on needs assessments and reconstruction plans in post-conflict countries. As a consequence, substantial work is being done in inter-agency fora to develop field guidelines on common conflict analysis, needs assessment and transition strategy methodologies.

At the national level, we are committed to strengthen our strategic role in areas such as the strengthening of donor-coordination mechanisms or the preparation of national poverty reduction strategies (cf. our 2003 [Guidance Note](#) on UN Country Team engagement in PRSPs). A communication strategy is currently being developed to ensure that all staff are informed about Harmonization & Alignment, including guidance to UN Country Teams regarding their specific role in this important process.

At the sectoral level, we plan to increase and strengthen UN Country Teams strategic involvement in the implementation of Sector Wide Approaches or basket/budget funding arrangements. Primarily, we focus on strategic support to such arrangements in areas where we are most likely to have an impact. For example, we can work with our national partners to strengthen their capacities to manage sector wide approaches or contribute our technical expertise in the planning phase as well as in the Monitoring & Evaluation of such arrangements, ensuring at the same time that civil society is involved and enabled to contribute. Furthermore, some agencies have also contributed financially to Sector Wide Approaches. Detailed guidance to UN Country Teams on their potential role, drawing upon experiences from several countries around the world, is planned to be issued by the end of 2004.

3. Strengthen national ownership and leadership and reduce transaction costs

We recognize that national ownership and leadership is a prerequisite for successful development processes. The members of the UNDG seek to strengthen ownership and leadership by ensuring that national priorities are at the centre of our cooperation and by giving active support to national processes through the Resident Coordinator System.

On the programmatic side, the Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and the Results Matrix of the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) are linked to national processes and plans including PRSPs, fostering a Human Rights based approach to development. As highlighted in the [CCA/UNDAF Guidelines](#), the Common Country Assessments should feed into or build upon country analytic work undertaken nationally or by other partners. Where high quality analyses of national development challenges exist already, these should not be duplicated in a CCA document. Rather, the UNCT should use the CCA process to relate those analyses to their collective concerns, reflecting the UN's unique role and mandate. The UNDAF, in return, represents the agreement of the Government and UN system agencies to collectively work towards results in three to five areas,

identified during the CCA process and derived from national priorities and goals as set out in plans and strategies such as the PRSP and in human rights instruments which Government has ratified. We are currently exploring how to effectively synchronize our programming cycles with the cycles of national plans to further strengthen the linkages described above.

On the procedural side, we are committed to reduce the transaction costs of our interventions, recognizing that cumbersome processes often impose heavy administrative burdens on partner countries. The UNDG Executive Committee agencies² are spearheading our “Simplification and Harmonization” (S&H) initiative, covering the entire programme cycle from preparation to evaluation, including the management of Country Programmes. While S&H initially focused on harmonizing UNDG internal procedures, drawing upon the OECD/DAC Good Practice Papers, we are now increasingly looking at national systems and the wider development community. The simplified and harmonized procedures give UN Country Teams more flexibility to adapt procedures to national systems.

The main challenge is to roll out the principles laid out above and to apply them in the field. We need to make sure that staff at all levels are informed and trained, and that they actively support the new approach of cooperating with partner countries and the wider development community.

A particular opportunity for the UNDG to help strengthen national ownership and leadership is the area of capacity development, where our unique characteristics come to play (cf. below).

4. Develop the capacities of partner countries in the area of harmonization and alignment

As expressed by many partner countries, most of the challenges they face in the follow-up to the Rome Declaration are linked to insufficient capacities to deal with the complexities of Harmonization & Alignment. As an experienced actor in the area of capacity development, with a great level of trust from partner governments, we are currently exploring, notably through the Resident Coordinators System, how best to help develop the specific capacities needed to successfully implement the commitments of the Rome Declaration.

At the moment, we focus our support through the Resident Coordinator System on the 14 pilot countries for Harmonization & Alignment. Specific areas in which we are already and plan to be increasingly active are, for example, aid management and aid coordination platforms. Building on the experience with the 14 pilot countries, we aim to strengthen systematic capacity development in the area of Harmonization & Alignment beyond this group and share their lessons learned and emerging good practices globally.

In countries outside the pilot group, the UN’s Common Country Assessment provides an ideal platform for UN Country Teams to help partner countries identify and specify the capacities they need to develop.

5. The way forward – Governance challenges faced by the UNDG

Since the launch of the Secretary General’s UN Reform in 1997, bringing the UNDG into existence, we have started to work on numerous challenges such as those raised in the Rome Declaration. While substantial progress has been achieved, this Action Plan shows that we acknowledge the need to move even faster in the application of principles and to tackle some

² UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP

remaining challenges in order to optimize our support to programme countries in their struggle to reach the MDGs. We have learned in the past that reaching consensus and working together on issues addressing the key interests of individual agencies poses a strong burden on our staff, making coherence within the UNDG a challenge on its own. We therefore call upon our stakeholders, the member states, to help us move forward. Coherence within the UNDG in this important process will benefit from all governing bodies of the UNDG and its members to continuously demand and also reward progress in Harmonization and Alignment.

There are some clear milestones in the process of positioning the UNDG in a changing global development architecture. The outcome of the 2004 *Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System* (TCPR) will be a key assessment of progress made in UN Reform in the area of development cooperation and it will express further changes expected from us by member states. The review is currently ongoing and results as well as follow-up action by the Secretary General are expected by the end of 2004. Another significant milestone is the first review in 2005 of progress made towards reaching the MDGs, five years after the Millennium Declaration had been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. We hope that the outcomes of these two important processes, together with the momentum around the Paris High-Level-Forum, will allow us to move forward, with the support of our member states, in areas such as systematic alignment of our Country Teams' interventions with national policies and strategies (e.g., PRSPs), further strengthening of the UNDAF as *the* contribution of the UN System to national development efforts, further simplification of our procedures and last but not least a rationalization of our field presence which needs to be much tighter and lighter than is currently the case.

Annex: UNDG initiatives taken in the area of harmonization & alignment as well as ongoing and planned action (*click on hyperlinks for more detailed information*)

COMMITMENTS OF THE ROME DECLARATION		INITIATIVES TAKEN	ACTION ONGOING/PLANNED	TIMEFRAME
Partner countries coordinate development assistance				
Ownership	<p>Partner countries assume leadership role in the coordination of development assistance</p> <p>&</p> <p>Donors support partner countries' capacity to manage development assistance effectively</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Field representatives were encouraged in a joint letter from the heads of the UNDG Executive Committee agencies to support national partners in the follow-up to Rome ✓ Introduction of DevInfo to help partner countries track and monitor the MDGs ✓ Agency specific support (mainly through UNDP) in the area of aid coordination in numerous partner countries ✓ In response to post-conflict reconstruction needs, donors have worked in concord with Government, World Bank and United Nations in the development of multi-sectoral needs assessments and results frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Give guidance to UN Country Teams on how to contribute strategically to national harmonization efforts and participate in related initiatives, focusing on the 14 OECD/DAC pilots ➔ Development of practical guidance to UNCTs on how best to strengthen the capacities of national partners to lead donor coordination ➔ Further strengthening of the role of UNCTs in PRS(p) processes, based on good practices of UN involvement and pro-poor PRS(p)'s ➔ Common guidelines being developed for post-conflict needs assessments 	June 2003
				June 2004
				Continuous
				2003 - 2004
				Ongoing
				1 st quarter 2005
				Continuous
				September '04

COMMITMENTS		INITIATIVES TAKEN	ACTION ONGOING/PLANNED	TIMEFRAME
Donors align aid with partner country priorities and systems				
Alignment	Development assistance is increasingly delivered in accordance with partner countries' priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Guidance on the relationship between MDG's and PRSPs, linkages with the CCA/UNDAF process and UNCT engagement in PRSPs focusing on support to national partners ✓ National planning processes and poverty reduction strategies are central to the UNCT's analysis and planning in CCAs and UNDAFs, as laid out in the CCA/UNDAF guidelines 	<p>➔ Principles of the CCA/UNDAF Guidelines to be put into practice in upcoming roll-out countries</p>	<p>December '03</p> <p>7 UNCTs prepared CCAs and UNDAFs in 2002, 18 in 2003 18 in 2004 49 in 2005 11 in 2006</p>
	Donors rely on partner country systems & procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Flexibility of field offices increased through "Simplification and Harmonization" of procedures of the UNDG ExCom agencies 	<p>➔ Work on simplified and harmonized resource transfer modalities, including use of national systems where possible</p> <p>➔ Identify capacity needs in Public Financial Management and methods to address them to increasingly use national systems</p>	<p>2002-2004</p> <p>December '04</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

COMMITMENTS		INITIATIVES TAKEN	ACTION ONGOING/PLANNED	TIMEFRAME
Donors streamline aid delivery				
Harmonization	Donors implement common arrangements for planning, managing and delivering aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Common Country Programming Process for UN Country Teams introduced, covering the entire programme cycle from Common Country Assessments to individual agency interventions and the management of Country Programmes, including Monitoring & Evaluation. ✓ Procedures in place for agencies to engage in parallel programmes, pooled funding or pass-through mechanisms, including sample Memoranda of Understanding and other practical tools (cf. Guidance note on Joint Programming). ✓ Common Premises and Common Services initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 58 UN Houses established • Common services (e.g. security, travel, banking, telecommunication) introduced in the majority of UN Country Teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Application of the Guidance Note on Joint Programming in the field ➔ Identify and lay out specific role of UNCTs in sector support arrangements and develop guidance for field staff ➔ Two pilots on Joint Office Models currently being undertaken; expansion to other countries to be considered 	<p>2002-2004</p> <p>December '03</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>1st quarter '05</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
	Donors reduce missions, reviews and reports where appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ UNDAF Evaluation Plan introduced with the aim to replace individual missions 		2003
	Donors are transparent about their activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ CCA and UNDAF are fully transparent processes involving all national stakeholders as well as other development partners. UNDAF Results Matrix lays out the intended amount of resources to be contributed by the UNCT over the next UNDAF cycle. ✓ Country Programmes, incl. management and implementation arrangements, as well as annual reports are public documents. 		<p>Continuous</p> <p>Continuous</p>