

## OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED IN THE UNDAF PROCESSES IN 2014: Europe and Central Asia Peer Support Group

### 1. BACKGROUND

In 2014, 11 countries (*Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, FYR of Macedonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan*) and Kosovo<sup>1</sup> started the process for rolling out their new UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF)<sup>2</sup>, culminating in draft UNDAF documents in early 2015. This document provides a brief overview of the key lessons learned from these processes, towards informing the succeeding UNDAF rollouts, as well as inform the next set of UNDG policy guidance in UNDAF formulation, implementation, M&E, and reporting processes.

### 2. LESSONS LEARNED: THINGS WE CAN STILL IMPROVE ON

Let's look at the lessons learned through the UNDAF milestones.

**2.1 UNDAF Roadmap.** The roadmap aims to outline the entire process for the preparation of the UNDAF, including how the various analyses will be conducted, how government and other stakeholders would be involved, the trainings and workshops that will be conducted, the roles of various UN agencies including other support institutions and/or mechanisms such as DOCO, the UN Staff College, the Regional UNDG and the Peer Support Group (PSG), consultants, among others. What have we observed?

**2.1.1 UNCT and national ownership in drafting the roadmap.** Countries where UNCT members - in consultation with the government - were involved in drafting and finalizing the roadmap with the active facilitation of the UNRC had the easiest time. This has created strong UNCT ownership over the process, and allowed early anticipation of issues and built consensus on joint approaches as well as ensuring clear responsibility and accountability over the process, including cost-sharing mechanisms. In some cases, the roadmap was drafted by the RC Officer and endorsed by the UNRC and UNCT, but with little actual engagement of UN agencies in its formulation. This did not mean that these roadmaps at the end were of poor quality, but this rather implied that UN agencies did not see the roadmap as important enough to devote their time and attention to. Subsequently in these countries, UNDAF formulation issues were approached in a rather ad hoc manner when they arose, created more tension and pressure among the UN agencies, and tended to cause delays in decisions and processes.

**Message:** UNCT should plan early, jointly. A training on UNDAF processes should be provided to all UNCTs in the immediate beginning of their UNDAF rollout to ensure common understanding of processes, accountability, adherence to timelines, and generate ownership over the entire process.

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Kosovo are made in the context of UNSCR 1244 (1999).

<sup>2</sup> Where the text refers to UN RCs, UNCTs, and UNDAFs, it should be clarified that in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) those terms are replaced by 'UN Development Coordinator', 'UN Kosovo Team' and the 'UN Common Development Plan'

**2.1.2 Sticking to the roadmap.** All roadmaps need to be flexible, but not too flexible! Delays in some processes were observed to be due to having too flexible timelines, lack of adherence to earlier agreements with regard to completion dates, conflicting priorities of UN agencies taking precedence over previously agreed UNDAF timelines, and weak coordination among UN agencies and with national partners.

**Message:** Fix timelines early on, two of which are especially critical – the date for completion of the country analysis, and the dates for the SPR. Delays in these two had been observed to have serious implications to the timely completion of the UNDAF document. Explore possibility of shortening the UNDAF process to 8-10 months.

**2.2 Country Analysis.** UNCTs have three options for conducting a country analysis<sup>3</sup>; in practice, there appeared to be little distinction between the three options, as those that were referred to as CCAs also in general relied largely on secondary information and analysis available from national institutions, development organizations, and civil society organizations inside and from outside of the country, albeit with more detailed analysis and more comprehensive presentation of issues. Further, advances in IT has allowed broader sharing of and access to data, information, reports, etc. in many countries. In 2014, four countries (Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) conducted CCAs, while 6 countries conducted “light country analysis” which is more aligned with option 2. Two countries (Belarus<sup>4</sup> and Tajikistan) and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) conducted ‘context analyses’ which provided a different take or perspective in analysing the issues (i.e., Belarus on the socio-political dimensions of development challenges, Tajikistan a detailed HRBA-focused analysis, Kosovo through a ‘formal’ and an ‘informal’ track which prototyped innovative ways of joint programming and working on issues collaboratively among UN agencies in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)). What have we observed?

**2.2.1 UN agencies’ role in preparing the CA.** Some countries faced daunting challenges particularly in collecting quality data and information to go into the CA. UNCTs where UN agencies actively provided substantive data and information, as well as prepared initial analysis and/or white papers on various issues and development challenges relevant to the sector/s they were working in, and proactively worked with the drafters (e.g., task teams, consultant/s), were able to come up with truly informative, integrated, and substantive analysis of development challenges and recommend priority issues to address as part of the CA.

**Message:** Ensure that UN agencies are involved in the drafting and review process.

**2.2.2 Causal analysis.** A key contribution of the CA to the UNDAF formulation is the analysis of root causes to development challenges, towards allowing the UNCT to identify development support more strategically and sustainably. The absence or inadequacy of such causal analysis

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<sup>3</sup> i) Participation in Government-led analytical work; ii) Complementary UN-supported analytical work focusing on gaps in existing analysis; and iii) a full Common Country Assessment (CCA).

<sup>4</sup> Belarus conducted a context analysis, after which it also conducted a light country analysis.

could create delays in further amending/revising the document and in further teasing out key priority areas of development support for the UN.

**Message:** “Light CA” does not mean “light analysis”. Ensure that consultants and drafting teams are fully familiar with analytical tools (e.g., root cause analysis, SWOT, theory of change, etc.) including in process facilitation and consensus building.

**2.2.3 UN comparative advantage.** This is a crucial part of the country analysis and strategic prioritization processes, and needs dedicated attention. On the other hand, evidence-based analysis of UN’s strengths and comparative advantage has not received much attention in most countries, with the analysis focusing largely on generic strengths such as the UN’s neutrality and convening authority, and global knowledge access, among others. In the context of dwindling UN resources, the rise of middle-income countries and government funding of development programmes, and increasing role of other development organizations in addressing development issues, the analysis of the UN’s comparative advantage in a particular country becomes even more imperative.

**Message:** Ensure that dedicated time, tools and exercises to analyse UN comparative advantages be included in the roadmap, and applied as part of the CA. Engage an external expert/facilitator (e.g., DOCO, UNSSC, PSG, or consultant) to provide a more neutral perspective in the analysis and on internal UN sensitivities that may potentially arise.

**2.3 Strategic Prioritization Retreat (SPR).** The SPRs provided a central role in building stakeholder consensus on the key priorities for the UN in the next five years. All countries had strong government participation in the SPR exercise, even in countries where government role in previous UNDAFs was rather limited. This indicates clear proactive effort of the UNRC and the UNCT to engage their national partners in the process, as well as the willingness of the government and other partners to invest their time and resources in the process<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, there were also some challenges, such as limited time given to SPR participants in reviewing the draft CA prior to the SPR, the ‘dominant’ role of some UN agencies’ staff during the SPR creating the risk of side-lining some non-UN stakeholders (or even other UN agencies) in the process, limited time for the SPR<sup>6</sup> due in many cases to national partners’ availability and schedules, limited participation of civil society and private sector organizations, and weak familiarity with RBM principles thus creating difficulties in formulating and agreeing on outcome statements, among others.

**Message:** As noted earlier, SPR dates need to be agreed as early as possible with the government and other national partners, towards avoiding scheduling difficulties later in the year for the SPR. Guidance regarding number of UNDAF outcomes need to be provided early in the UNDAF process to

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<sup>5</sup> In some countries, the government co-organized the SPR by holding the event in government premises, providing technical and logistical support, among others. In all countries, a senior official from the government opened the event together with the UNRC.

<sup>6</sup> In some countries, the UNCT conducted a one-day SPR, particularly those that saw the SPR as a ‘validation’ exercise for the priorities and draft outcomes that had been previously discussed with national counterparts prior to the SPR). On the other hand, a few countries conducted more than one SPR-related exercise including validation and finalization of the development priorities based on the CA findings, actual SPR, and validation/finalization of SPR results (e.g., Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan).

ensure that UNCTs and national partners strive towards this end in the SPR process. Given the removal of DOCO funding for SPRs, it will be even more challenging for UNCTs to bring various stakeholders physically together during an SPR exercise. However, IT may provide innovative solutions for generating active discussions and building consensus on the key development priorities, in jointly formulating outcomes and indicators, and in co-designing the UNDAFs, in a more efficient way while bringing non-traditional partners into mainstream UNDAF discussions.

**2.4 Monitoring and Evaluation.** A traditional waterloo for many previous UNDAFs for many reasons, including poorly formulated results matrices (or lack of such), lack of clear accountability and incentive systems in M&E, inadequate attention and investments to M&E, data inadequacies, weak M&E structures and arrangements, and weak M&E and RBM knowledge and skills among UN programme staff, among others. The creation of Results Groups as provided in the new DaO SOPs provide opportunities for strengthening M&E practice, coordination, and reporting for UNDAFs. However, this structure will only be as good as the knowledge, skills, time and attention devoted to it by UN heads of agencies (who are supposed to head the Results Groups) and staff members who are members of the Results Groups. UNDAF evaluations, while mandatory, were not considered a priority given lack of resources for such, and perceptions of weak utility of such evaluations given previous experiences. Annual reviews were not conducted by a number of countries. A number of UNCTs had combined the CA with UNDAF Mid-Term Reviews/Evaluations, to inform UNDAF priorities. Moreover, scheduling of UNDAF evaluations on the third year of the UNDAF (to inform the formulation of the next UNDAF cycle, which starts on the 4<sup>th</sup> year of an existing UNDAF) rather than on its final year creates a dilemma with regard to how the remaining two years of an UNDAF would be evaluated.

**Message:** UNCT to explore incentive systems for Results Groups performing M&E functions well. Regional undg to ensure consolidation and reporting of all UNDAF Annual Reviews, and explore incentives for UNCTs that are performing well according to UNDAF targets. Make mid-term reviews mandatory, as an input to UNDAF formulation, and schedule the UNDAF evaluation at the final year of the existing UNDAF, or the first year of the next UNDAF. Explore merging of UNDAF evaluations with other UN agencies' own evaluations (e.g., UNDP Assessment of Development Results). UNCTs to provide allocations for UNDAF evaluation on Year 5 of the UNDAF.

**2.5 Programming Principles.** The five programming principles <sup>7</sup> are widely-agreed as “necessary for effective UN-supported country programming that must balance the pursuit of international norms and standards with the achievement of national development priorities”. Despite the availability of guidance notes and trainings on their integration in the UNDAF process, as well as evident efforts of UNCTs to integrate them, it was observed that in general, there remains a big room for integrating all five in UNDAF processes, in particular in the country analysis, the UNDAF document, and in the UNDAF results matrices. Of the five principles, HRBA, Gender Equality, and RBM usually received the most attention from the UNCT; on the other hand, environmental sustainability and capacity development remained rather weak. Although issues that were relevant to these principles were always often raised, adequate analysis of underlying issues, as well as more systematic, programmatic approaches to addressing them across UN agencies, need to be further strengthened.

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<sup>7</sup> Three normative principles: Human Rights Based Approach; Gender Equality, Environmental Sustainability; and two enabling principles: Capacity Development and Results-Based Management

Further, there are a number of guidance materials that had been issued to support UNDAF formulation and programming<sup>8</sup>, but there appeared to be little familiarity with these guidance documents, nor attention with regard to how integrate them in UNDAFs.

**Message:** Results Groups (or similar such) given their mandate and functions provide the opportunity for genuine integration, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the application of the five programming principles particularly in the context of joint programmes. UNCTs may designate focal points or leads for each programming principle within the UNCT, who can serve as a resource person for the results groups throughout the UNDAF process. The UNCT may explore possibility of joint planning and funding of training/learning activities on the application of the five principles during the UNDAF life cycle. DOCO may explore possibilities of consolidating and simplifying existing UNDAF guidance and policy documents, and strengthening communication of these important documents to UNCTs.

**2.6 UNCT Leadership.** Countries that were able to complete the UNDAFs in a timely manner, with the active engagement of UN agencies, and with quality results, all had one thing in common – a UNRC who was there all the way, providing catalytic roles, facilitating consensus within the UNCT, and active in building and sustaining bridges with partners in the country in the UNDAF process. Coordination Officers likewise played a critical function in communicating with the UNCT at all stages of the process, engaging relevant experts, facilitating reporting, and consulting with resource persons (e.g., PSG, DOCO, Staff College, etc.) in cases of doubt.

**Message:** UNRCs need to be fully familiar with the UNDAF process, facilitate UNCT consensus and take critical decisions in case of serious disagreements within the UNCT. UNCT should ensure that all UN staff members participating in the UNDAF processes are not only technical experts but also familiar with the UNDAF process and the programming principles.

**2.6 Peer Support Group (PSG).** The PSG has the potential to facilitate UNDAF processes through active support and guidance to UNCTs. The 2014 UNDAF rollouts demonstrated excellent cooperation between the PSG, DOCO, UNSSC, UNRCs, RCOs, UNCTs and the Regional undg.<sup>9</sup> The active engagement of the Regional undg Chair in UNDAF processes had contributed strongly to UNRC and UNCT commitment to UNDAF processes. Having two UN agencies as PSG Co-Chairs provided stronger synergies to the support process, and enabled clear backstopping arrangements between UNDP and UNFPA in providing timely support to UNCTs. Critical to this was ensuring that PSG members are trained on and familiar with UNDAF and country programming processes, regular and open communication among PSG members including regular meetings, and regular communication between the UNRCs and the PSG Co-Chairs. The use of UN Teamworks as central depository of information on UNDAF processes, including as platform for PSG review of documents, allow easy, institutionalized access to UNDAF documents and will allow the Regional undg and current and future PSG members to refer to these documents towards informing other UNDAF processes in the future.

**Message:** Where possible, regional UN agencies should nominate staff members who had been trained in UNDAF and country programming processes, as well as process facilitation, as PSG

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<sup>8</sup> These include undg guidance materials on climate change, disaster risk reduction, health, development effectiveness, HIV/AIDS, among others.

<sup>9</sup> The participation of UNCTs and PSG members in the UNDAF Regional Training-Workshop in Bratislava in February 2014 provided a catalytic role in the strong engagement between UNCTs and PSG members throughout the UNDAF processes at the country level.

members; alternatively, regional UN agencies should inform the Regional undg Chair and PSG Chair/s if their PSG nominees had not been trained, and explore opportunities for their staff member to participate in UNDAF trainings during the year at their own cost.

**2.7 Regionally-Based Agencies (RBAs).** The role of regionally-based agencies or non-resident agencies (NRA) is critical to UNDAFs, particularly in countries of focus for some RBAs. There were perceptions, on the other hand, that some RBAs were usually active only during the SPR process to take part in prioritizing and formulating outcomes, but had been unable to commit resources to support UNDAF implementation, including those the RBAs themselves had suggested.

**Message:** Explore more active engagement between RBAs and UNCTs throughout the UNDAF process.

**2.8 Delivering as One.** Among the 11 countries and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) that rolled out UNDAFs in 2014, only one country – Serbia – expressed clear intentions to apply full DaO approach. On the other hand, all other UNDAFs indicated adoption of some DaO pillars. Discussions with UNCTs revealed hesitation to go for DaO given reasons such as negative feedback from other DaO countries, lack of interest or familiarity of the government with DaO, foreseen challenges in UNCT dynamics particularly with regard to joint programming and resource mobilization, among others.

**Message:** DOCO to provide updates on recent experiences in DaO countries, including positive aspects such as efficiency gains, and approaches for addressing DaO challenges more effectively. UNCTs to conduct more discussions around DaO internally and with their national partners.