



UNITED NATIONS  
SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GROUP  
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# **Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes**

*October 2022*

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

AA	Administrative Agent ( <i>pass-through fund management modality</i> )
BOS	United Nations Business Operations Strategy (country level)
BS	Business sector
CA	Convening Agent ( <i>pass-through fund management modality</i> )
CBO; CBS	Common Back Office; Common Business Services
CEB	United Nations Chief Executives Board
CF	Cooperation Framework ( <i>short version of UNSDCF</i> )
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DCO	United Nations Development Coordination Office
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning systems of UNOs
FMOG	United Nations Fiduciary Management and Oversight Group
FMM	Fund management modalities for joint programmes: parallel, consolidated, or pass-through
GEWE	Gender equality and women's empowerment
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace collaboration
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IFI	International Financial Institutions, including multilateral development banks
IP	Implementing Partner(s)
JP	Joint Programme
JWP	CF Joint Work Plan
KM	Knowledge management
LNOB	Leave no one behind
MA	Managing Agent ( <i>consolidated fund management modality</i> )
MAF	Management Accountability Framework of the UN Development and UNRC System
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund ( <i>a pooled fund</i> )
OMT	Operations Management Team ( <i>country level, responsible for BOS</i> )
PUNO(s)	Participating United Nations Organization(s)
QA	Quality assurance
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
RBB	Results Based Budgeting (a key element of RBM)
RBM	Results Based Management
UNRC/ UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator/ Resident Coordinator's Office
RG	CF Results Groups
SC	Joint Programme Steering Committee
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of change
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNO	United Nations Organization
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework ( <i>see CF</i> )
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group ( <i>formerly UNDG</i> )

## 1.0 A new generation of joint programmes

This guidance is intended to make joint programmes more effective, catalytic, and easier to use. It responds to guidance and decisions by members states,<sup>1</sup> lessons from experience, and needs identified by UN Country Teams (UNCTs). It offers several important changes to make JPs lighter and more user-friendly for rapid implementation, with fewer transaction costs.

### What's new:

- » Anchoring of the JP within the Cooperation Framework (CF) and related joint work plans (JWPs);<sup>3</sup>
- » Positioning of JPs to make catalytic, SDG-related policy changes and to enable the UN system and partners to share risk;<sup>4</sup>
- » Strong ownership by government with the option to use an existing mechanism for steering;
- » Clearly defined roles and responsibilities aligned with the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF);<sup>5</sup>
- » A joint programme cycle and quality standards;
- » Objective criteria and a process to select participating UN organizations (PUNOs) when new funding is available;
- » Options to design JPs based on the scale and scope of expected results and budgets: Below certain thresholds a JP can be developed and launched by two or more UN organizations with minimal documentation;
- » Introduction of a JP team and teamwork approach to jointly manage for results; and
- » Enabling non-UN partners to join a JP and implement with their own resources.

#### Box 1 Joint programming and Joint programmes:

*Joint Programming*<sup>2</sup>: Through the CF and JWPs, UN organizations and national partners collectively prepare, implement, monitor and evaluate development activities aimed at achieving the 2030 Agenda and other international and regional commitments.

*Joint Programmes*: A JP is anchored in an approved CF, its theory of change and accountability mechanisms. It produces a *higher or closer* level of joint work than can be delivered from regular joint programming under a CF. It answers the need for more coherent, cross-sectoral approaches and it contributes to catalytic change, linked to one or more CF outcomes, country priorities and SDGs.

JPs have always served as a vehicle to mobilize resources. The changes offered in this guidance note will help UNCTs to develop more effective and higher quality JPs with the potential to increase the confidence of member states and, in line with the Funding Compact, attract greater donor investment.

The guidance is applicable to all UNDS funds, programmes and specialized agencies for JPs that are supporting the achievement of the SDGs.<sup>6</sup>

*'Joint programmes are the answer to a specific need for more coherent, cross-sectoral approaches – this has never been more urgent than under the 2030 Agenda'*<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly, Quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR), [A/RES/75/233](#), 30 December 2020. Based upon 'repositioning' resolution [A/RES/72/279](#) 31 May 2018; (2) UN General Assembly, ECOSOC, Report of the Secretary General - [Funding Compact](#), A/74/73/Add.1, 02 April 2019.

<sup>2</sup> UNSDG, CF Internal guidance, June 2019, 26, para 87.

<sup>3</sup> The CF is recognized by member states and the UN system as the most important instrument for planning and implementation of UN development activities at country level and guides the programme cycle and the contributions of UNOs. UN General Assembly, Repositioning of the United Nations development system, Resolution [A/RES/72/279](#), 31 May 2018. Affirmed in the 2020 QCPR [A/RES/75/233](#). UNSDG, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, [Internal guidance](#), June 2019.

<sup>4</sup> JPs are a way to share risk: Often JPs are the only way to address 'wicked' problems with complex inter-dependencies. JPs enable the UN system to support programmes related to normative standards and the guiding principles, especially: LNOB, human rights and gender equality.

<sup>5</sup> UNSDG, [The Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System](#), 15 Sept 2021.

<sup>6</sup> This Guidance replaces UNDG, [Guidance Note on Joint Programmes](#), 2014. Considerations for JPs at global and regional levels under development.

<sup>7</sup> GDI/DIE Earmarking in the Multilateral Development System - Many Shades of Grey, 2020, 261.

## 2.0 Joint programme: Definition & rationale

### 2.1 Definition

A joint programme is a cooperation strategy. It is a way to achieve a catalytic development result that depends upon the **comparative advantages** of two or more participating UN organizations (PUNOs) working together with partners as a **team** in a highly coordinated and integrated manner. The joint programme has a strategic intent and strong **programmatic rationale**: Expected results: a) contribute to one or more CF outcomes, national development priorities and related SDGs and b) focus on one or more **policy levers**, with *the potential* to catalyse systemic change. A JP can be at country, regional, or global levels, involving two or more regions or countries.

#### Features:

- a. The JP is anchored in an approved CF<sup>8</sup> and its theory of change and accountability mechanisms,<sup>9</sup> and integrates the guiding principles.<sup>10</sup> A JP will produce a *higher* or *closer* level of joint work than can be delivered from regular joint programming under a CF.
- b. There is strong ownership of the JP by one or more government bodies, including recognized institutional partners in the CF, through a Steering Committee (SC).
- c. The JP results contribute to catalytic change, linked to one or more CF outcomes, country priorities and SDGs (Box 2).
- d. The JP is guided by a programme cycle (*A. Design; B. Implement & adjust; C. Learn, transition and close*) with clear accountabilities and responsibilities, and quality standards.
- e. The JP has a signed JP document with a results framework, work plan and budget derived from the related CF joint work plan and funding framework;
- f. JPs use one of three fund management modalities (FMM): parallel, consolidated, or pass-through.
- g. A defining characteristic of a joint programme is **the level of teamwork**. The JP team jointly manages for results for the duration of the JP. The team monitors implementation and the achievement of results, learns lessons and makes adjustments for greater effectiveness. The team comprises responsible staff from all PUNOs and partners, as applicable. Coordination and programmatic leadership are provided by a lead PUNO. In some situations, the UNRCO may support coordination as part of the JP team (see 2.3, para 19).
- h. Implementing partners (IPs): JPs may engage with government bodies at national and local levels and other partners as IPs, depending on the rules of the PUNOs.<sup>12</sup>

#### Box 2 A joint programme is **catalytic** when:

1. It fosters stronger UN system coordination and coherence to deliver results
2. JP results help to accelerate institutional or behavioural change, contributing to SDG-related country priorities and results. This is often seen in changes to policy or policy implementation, country budget allocations, and the adoption and scaling-up of proven programme solutions.
3. JP results help to lever buy-in of partners and attract investment<sup>11</sup> AND make that investment more effective (*Partners: Governments, donors, IFIs, the business sector, civil society, families and individuals*).

<sup>8</sup> The JP results framework and work plan is derived from the relevant CF JWP and funding framework. It shows a planned contribution to one or more CF outcomes. It includes one more CF outputs, sub-outputs and related PUNO activities.

<sup>9</sup> This includes joint accountability to the CF Joint Steering Committee, including government, and PUNOs for expected JP results.

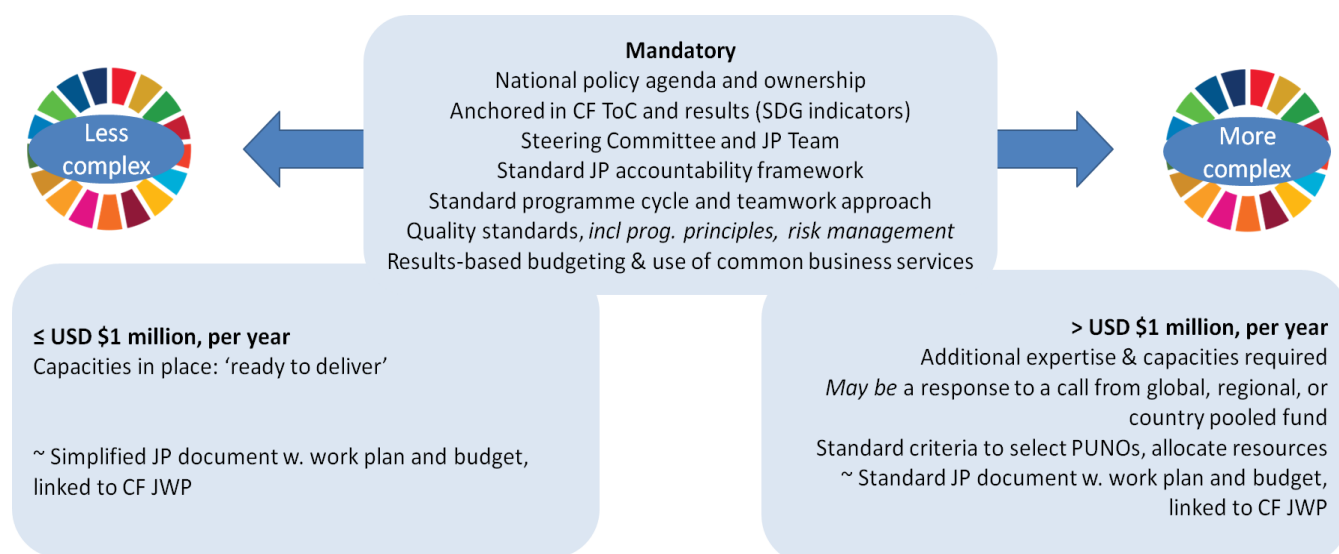
<sup>10</sup> Based upon the quality standards for the CF and guiding principles: (1) Leave no one behind, (2) Human rights, (3) Gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEWE), (4) Resilience, (5) Sustainability, and (6) Accountability, including the availability and use of quality data. UNSDG, CF Guidance, 2019, 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> Investment can include both financial and in-kind support, including staff time.

<sup>12</sup> **IPs:** National, regional or international government or non-government organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs), including employers' organisations, trade unions and business sector (BS) partners (*as permitted by the programming policies and procedures and financial regulations and rules of PUNOs*).

- i. Where there is a strong programmatic rationale, non-UN partners<sup>13</sup> may join a JP and implement, in parallel, with their own resources. This will secure more partnerships and help to lever additional resources to achieve JP results and contribute to the SDGs. The legal basis for non-UN partners is the signed JP document, including the results framework, work plan and budget. See minimum due diligence requirements (Annex B4).
- j. JPs utilise *existing* common business services<sup>14</sup> for more rapid and effective implementation.
- k. All results and related budgets under a JP are tagged as 'joint' in UN Info and UNO ERP systems for reporting on the QCPR and Funding Compact.<sup>15</sup>
- l. In line with common management features of inter-agency pooled funds requested in the QCPR and Funding Compact, JPs use mechanisms for innovative financing, visibility and transparency.
- m. Joint programmes are also relevant in settings where Humanitarian Response Plans<sup>16</sup> and CFs exist simultaneously.<sup>17</sup> Joint programmes can strengthen coherence and complementarity among development, humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts<sup>18</sup> and complement the achievement of [collective outcomes](#)<sup>19</sup>.
- n. Flexibility and responsiveness are important: The scale of a JP can exist on a continuum from modest joint results with a narrow scope up to highly complex, multi-year programmes. This is illustrated below (see Figure 1). All JPs meet mandatory requirements. At or below a total budget of **USD \$1 million** per year and so long as most resources and capacities are in place and UN organizations are ready to deliver, a JP can be developed and launched by two or more UN organizations with the minimum of a three-page JP document and one page work plan and budget.

**Figure 1. Options for joint programmes**



All results and budgets are tagged as 'joint' in UN Info and UNO ERP systems for reporting on the QCPR and Funding Compact

<sup>13</sup> **Non-UN partners** implement with their own resources and do not receive funds or supplies from PUNOs for implementation: National, regional or international non-government organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), including employers' organisations, trade unions and business sector (BS) partners. See due diligence requirements in Annex B4. See separate [procedure for business sector partners](#).

<sup>14</sup> UNSDG, [BOS 2.0 High-Impact Services](#) January 2022.

<sup>15</sup> UN GA, ECOSOC, Report of the Secretary General-[Funding Compact](#), A/74/73/Add.1, 02 April 2019. Indicator 1.3. UNSDG entities reporting at least 15% of development related expenditures on joint activities; 2.1 Donors commit to provide 10% of non-core resources through pooled funds.

<sup>16</sup> [HRPs](#) contain (1) a country strategy with strategic objectives and indicators and (2) cluster plans with objectives, activities and costing. See: [Humanitarian programme cycle](#), [HNO-HRP Step by Step Guidance 2021](#). Reporting about JP results is linked to the CF, not the HRP.

<sup>17</sup> In 2020, 159 JPs or 1 in 4 of all reported JPs were in countries with a CF and a **Humanitarian Response Plan** (HRP)

<sup>18</sup> United Nations, [Enhancing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus](#); UNSDG, [Humanitarian-Development-Peace \(HDP\) Collaboration - CF Companion Piece](#), 2020. See also: OECD, [DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus](#), 2022.

<sup>19</sup> UNSDG, [Humanitarian-Development-Peace \(HDP\) Collaboration - CF Companion Piece and UN-IASC Light Guidance on Collective Outcomes](#).

## 2.2 Rationale: When to choose a JP

JPs have a **strong programmatic rationale**. The concept for a JP emerges:

- » From the UN system, based on the country situation, the CF, and the comparative advantages<sup>20</sup> of two or more PUNOs and their partners to achieve results; or
- » In response to a request from government or donors who wish to harness the value and comparative advantages of focused effort by the UN system. This can involve a global, regional or country level pooled or vertical fund, established to address global priorities and frameworks.

When a JP emerges from the UN system, PUNOs are normally self-selecting, based upon common CF results and partners and informed by the UNCT configuration. In countries without a CF [i.e., in 'exceptional circumstances', a JP is based upon available UNCT-agreed planning frameworks.<sup>21</sup>

When a JP responds to a request from government or donors or to a call from a pooled fund, the UNRC and UNCT use objective criteria to inform their selection of PUNOs and to allocate resources (see Step 4; Annex B2). In a situation where the JP results and strategies **do not** have *obvious* alignment with the CF, the UNRC and UNCT will engage with government, donors and relevant partners to:

- (1) Review and validate the programmatic rationale for the JP based on country analysis;
- (2) Confirm links with the national plans and policy agenda and ensure that expected JP results will contribute to achievement of one or more SDGs and nationalized targets;
- (3) Ensure the UN system has comparative advantages to undertake the programme; and
- (4) Proceed to design the JP and *adjust* the CF results framework and relevant JWP at earliest opportunity.

**Minimum criteria** - Choose a JP when the concept can meet **all** these criteria:

- » Expected JP results are part of the Cooperation Framework (CF)<sup>22</sup> and respond to a complex development challenge, linked to one or more SDG-related country priorities;
- » Expected JP results have the potential to be scaled up and to 'un-lock' a systemic policy change;<sup>23</sup>
- » There is strong ownership of the JP by one or more government bodies including recognized institutional partners indicated in the CF, with clear links to a national policy priority or international commitment;
- » There are two or more UN organizations working toward the expected JP results with complementary comparative advantages AND who are committed to work together throughout the programme cycle;
- » There are strong implementing partners (IPs) at national and local levels that can sustain JP results;
- » The recommended number of PUNOs is not more than five with a preference of from two to four.<sup>24</sup>

**When NOT to choose a JP:** When the concept for a JP does not meet the criteria (above), other programming modalities would be more appropriate. In an emergency situation, depending on the context, a JP may not be a good fit for the programme context.

<sup>20</sup> Comparative advantages combine: 1) Mandate to address the development problem; 2) Technical and operational capacity as demonstrated by past results and by the availability of relevant technical, human, financial and administrative resources; and 3) Positioning to address the challenge better than others working in the same area. This is demonstrated by past results, strategic partnerships and and/or a unique role if there is no other organization doing comparable work. When two or more PUNOs have complementary comparative advantages to address a development problem, the UNCT as a whole has comparative advantage to do so.

<sup>21</sup> To align with final UNSDG guidance on exceptional circumstances.

<sup>22</sup> The JP results framework and work plan is derived from the relevant CF JWP and funding framework. It shows a planned contribution to one or more CF outcomes. It includes one more CF outputs, sub-outputs and related PUNO activities.

<sup>23</sup> This may concern the quality of policies, in line with international commitments and standards and/or tangible policy implementation.

<sup>24</sup> The number of PUNOs may exceed this recommendation based upon context and judgement of UNRC and UNCT.

A JP can be financed:

- » Directly by PUNOs using core/regular resources and other resources;<sup>25</sup>
- » Through country, regional or global pooled funds.

There is a choice of **three fund management modalities (FMMs)**: parallel, consolidated, or pass-through.<sup>26</sup> These are underpinned by legal documents that govern financial management and accountabilities. See Annex D for information about each FMM, indicative budget thresholds, and a chart to guide selection.

## 2.3 Who does what: Responsibilities and accountabilities for JPs

Responsibilities and accountabilities are best understood in terms of the three stages of the JP cycle: *A. Design*; *B. Implement & adjust*; *C. Learn, transition and close*.

### A. Design

The design stage involves preparation of the JP concept, including a theory of change and a draft JP document. The concept is prepared by a lead PUNO with programme staff of PUNOs from the relevant CF results group. The lead PUNO acts as 'pen holder'. Consultation with government and other partners is essential. The UNRC and UNCT are jointly accountable for the quality of the JP concept and its design. UNRCs coordinate UNCT-wide efforts for resource mobilization for the CF. While UNCT members (irrespective of physical location) retain their ability to fundraise locally for their own or joint programmes with other entities, they will ensure alignment to and consistency with agreed UNCT/UN Cooperation Framework Funding Framework and resource mobilization strategy through adequate coordination with the RC, to avoid (perceived or real) competition for funds and maximize the opportunities for joint programming/programmes<sup>27</sup>. The design stage ends with the approval and signing of the JP document and the establishment of the JP SC and JP team. The UNRC has final decision-making authority to approve a JP concept. When the concept responds to a call from a pooled fund, the UNRC has final decision-making authority over the selection of PUNOs (see Figure 2. The Joint Programme Cycle, step 4).

### B. Implement & adjust

The second stage involves joint work to implement the JP, monitor the achievement of results, learn lessons, and make adjustments for greater effectiveness. The **JP SC** meets to endorse the JP document and special roles and legal documents related to the choice of FMM. The **JP team** is accountable to, and has a dual reporting role to, the JP SC and to their respective PUNOs for the achievement of results. The JP team **manages for results** for the duration of the programme. This is

#### Box 3 Who does what: Key messages

##### *Design*

- » The UNRC and UNCT are accountable for a relevant, high-quality JP; resource mobilization is led by PUNOs in coordination with the UNRC
- » The design is done by a lead PUNO with programme staff of PUNOs from the relevant CF results group

##### *Implement & adjust*

- » The JP Steering Committee is accountable for results and provides strategic oversight and guidance
- » The JP team, guided by a lead PUNO, manages for results

##### *Learn, transition and close*

- » The JP team and SC work closely to sustain and scale-up results and partnerships, carry-out a final review and an evaluation (*as required*)

There are special roles related to the choice of FMM.

<sup>25</sup> This includes bilateral ODA, multilateral funding from IFIs, government funding, South-South cooperation, and private allocations (e.g. business sector, foundations)

<sup>26</sup> **Parallel**: PUNOs manage funds separately; **Consolidated**: PUNOs transfer funds to another PUNO, designated as the Managing Agent (MA); **Pass-through**: Pass-through: PUNOs appoint one UNO as the Administrative Agent (AA) to set up a common fund account in which funding from different donors is co-mingled. Financial transfers are made between the AA and PUNOs. A PUNO is selected to serve as Convening Agent (CA) to provide coordination and programmatic leadership. Pass-through mechanisms are always UN inter-agency pooled funds which can operate as stand-alone JPs and country, regional and global multi partner trust funds (MPTFs), as per UN financial data standards.

<sup>27</sup> UNSDG, MAF, section 3.5 Funding/Resource Mobilization, 18-19.



done according to the JP results framework, work plan and budget. The team comprises responsible programme staff from all PUNOs and non-UN partners *as applicable*. They sequence planned activities, monitor implementation and the achievement of results, learn lessons and make adjustments for greater effectiveness together with government and IPs. The JP team practices a set of teamwork skills: participation, effective listening, collaboration, flexibility and the ability to revise and refine. JP teams are expected to meet at least monthly. A JP team may be co-located where appropriate and feasible (Refer to Annex B.3 JP Team: Performance assessment and indicators).

**Coordination and programmatic leadership:** The **lead PUNO** provides coordination and programmatic leadership to the JP team during implementation. PUNOs are normally self-selecting. The lead PUNO is selected by other PUNOs. This is informed by the relevant CF JWP and planned results, the UNCT configuration exercise, and the capacity and positioning of the organization to provide coordination and programmatic leadership for the duration of the JP. The UNRC is informed about the selection of the lead PUNO.

- » **Coordination:** The lead PUNO: (1) Organizes and supports meetings of the JP SC; (2) Coordinates advocacy with donors and external stakeholders, and (3) Facilitates audit and evaluation (*as may be required*).
- » **Programmatic leadership** that supports the JP team to manage for results. The lead PUNO ensures programmatic coherence and quality in accordance with the JP results framework, work plan and budget and quality standards, by performing the following functions: (1) Organizing and chairing JP team meetings; (2) Updating the JP results framework, work plan and budget; (3) Leading joint monitoring and learning efforts, including joint field missions; (4) Facilitating programmatic learning and adjustments, (5) Consolidating the annual and final results-based report, based upon inputs from other PUNOs; and (6) Reporting to JP SC meetings.

There are some special roles related to the choice of FMM (Annex D):

- » **Consolidated FMM:** PUNOs select the Managing Agent (MA) and inform the UNRC. The lead PUNO is the MA.
- » **Pass-through FMM:** (1) PUNOs select the Administrative Agent (AA) and inform the UNRC. When a JP responds to a country, regional or global pooled fund, the AA is indicated by the pooled fund TOR and governance arrangements; (2) PUNOs select the Convening Agent (CA) and inform the UNRC. The lead PUNO is the CA. When the pooled fund *requires* a coordination role for the UNRC, the selection of the CA/Lead PUNO is done in consultation with the UNRC.

The **JP Steering Committee** is accountable for the achievement of JP results. It provides strategic oversight and guidance for the JP team from launch to closure (*Stages B and C*), including adjustments to JP results and strategy, progress reports and learning, and evaluation (*as may be required*). Under a pass-through FMM the SC approves fund allocations to PUNOs. The SC is co-chaired by the Government and a member of the UNCT. Members include all PUNOs, non-UN partners, as applicable, and donors. Normally, the **UN co-chair** is the chair of the relevant CF Results Group and JWP from which the JP is derived<sup>28</sup>. The UN co-chair represents and acts on behalf of the UNCT. Secretariat functions are provided by the lead PUNO. An existing coordination mechanism (*e.g. sector or thematic coordination body*) may act as the SC so long as its composition and TOR are appropriate for JP steering or can be adjusted.

**Role of the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) and Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO):** When funding is from a country, regional or global pooled fund that *requires* a coordination role for the UNRC,<sup>29</sup> the UNRC will co-chair the JP SC.<sup>30</sup> In all other situations, involvement of the UNRC to support steering and coordination **is optional**. When requested by all PUNOs, the pooled fund mechanism, or by individual

<sup>28</sup> Where a JP contributes to 2 or more CF outcomes, the most relevant CF results group will provide the co-chair. Where the substantive and technical aspects of the JP require involvement of a specific UNO to co-chair, this can be decided by PUNOs. The UNRC is informed.

<sup>29</sup> Current examples are: Joint SDG Fund; Peacebuilding Fund; Spotlight Initiative. It is important to distinguish between the country level pooled fund mechanism and the JPs that are funded by it. The steering committee for a country-level pooled fund is chaired by the UNRC or co-chaired with government. UNSDG, [UN Country-level Pooled Funds](#), 2020 6.

<sup>30</sup> As per the MAF, section 3.5: Where there is an explicit role for the UNRC, the UNRC co-signs Joint Programmes with UNCT members and chairs or co-chairs the local steering committee for joint programmes.

donors the UNRCO may support the JP team for coordination purposes<sup>31</sup>. When the UNRCO provides coordination support, the lead PUNO continues to provide programmatic leadership and, if the JP uses a pass-through FMM, the lead PUNO continues to be the Convening Agent (CA).<sup>32</sup>

When the UNRC does not co-chair the JP SC and when the UNRCO does not support the JP team for coordination purposes, the lead PUNO will keep the UNRC and UNRCO informed about progress, including: achievements, constraints, resource mobilization requirements and actions. The lead PUNO will share the JP concept, JP document, annual progress reports, notes from SC meetings, and the evaluation (*as may be required*) for information.

### **C. Learn, transition and close**

The final stage involves work by the JP team and JP SC to sustain and scale-up JP results and partnerships. They carry out a final review, final report and an evaluation (*as may be required*) and undertake operational and financial closure. Similar to stage B, the JP team is responsible to carry out programme activities and the JP SC is accountable for the quality of the work and final results.

Disagreements during the JP cycle are addressed according to the informal dispute resolution mechanism provided in the MAF and legal documents for the applicable FMM. When non-UN partners are involved, the principles and processes of the MAF mechanism will apply.<sup>33</sup>

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## **3.0 Joint programme cycle**

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A JP can be developed at any point during CF implementation. Every JP follows a standard programme cycle and adheres to quality standards aligned with those for the CF. There are three stages: *A. Design; B. Implement & adjust; C. Learn, transition and close*. Results are achieved by a JP team, with guidance and oversight by a Steering Committee. Where relevant, the JP will highlight synergies and complementarities with the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), strengthen coherence among development, humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts,<sup>34</sup> and complement the achievement of [collective outcomes](#).

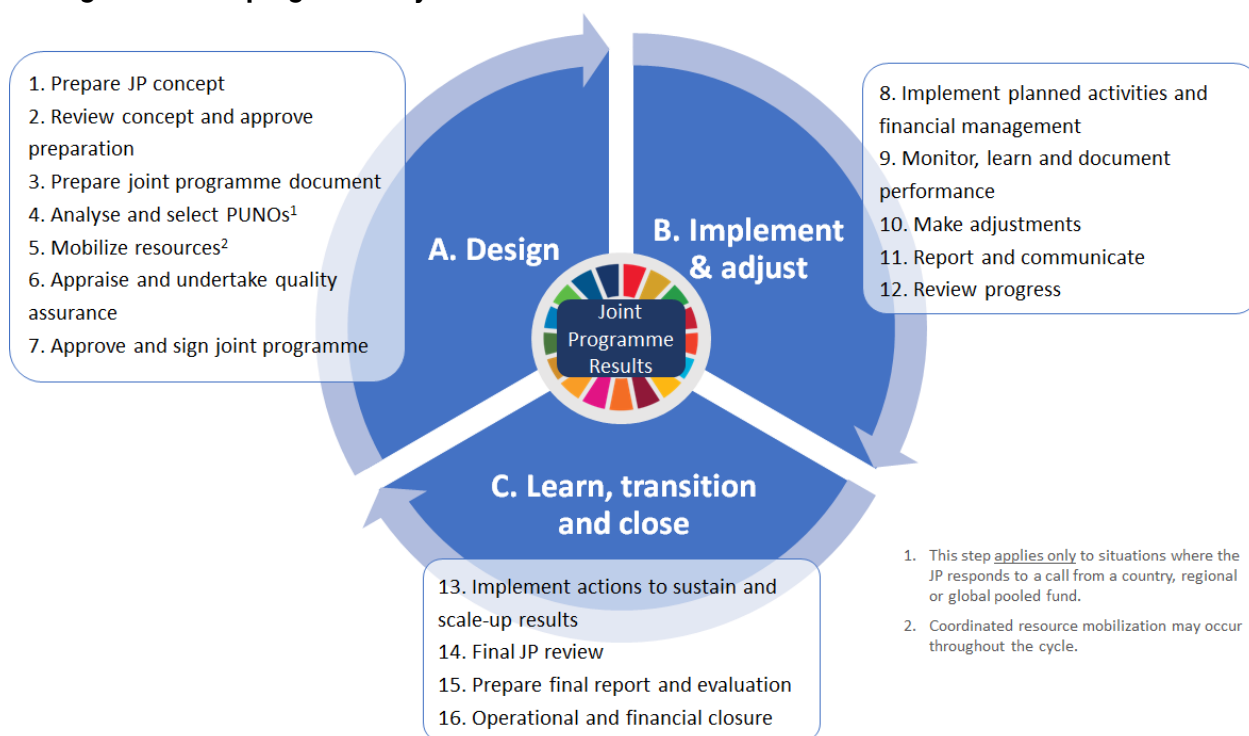
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<sup>31</sup> This adheres to: A. Mohammed (DSG), Resident Coordinators seeking additional capacities to UNRC offices beyond Special Purpose Trust Fund-funded positions, UN Interoffice Memorandum, 07 July 2020. RCOs may perform 'secretariat/coordination functions only', Para 11.

<sup>32</sup> In this situation a spirit of teamwork is essential: (1) The UNRCO will support the leadership role of the programmatic lead PUNO and ensure it is fully consulted on all advocacy efforts; (2) The programmatic lead PUNO will keep the UNRCO regularly informed.

<sup>33</sup> See informal dispute resolution mechanism in [MAF](#), Annex 2.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations, [Enhancing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus](#); UNSDG, [Humanitarian-Development-Peace \(HDP\) Collaboration - CF Companion Piece](#), 2020. See also: OECD, [DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus](#), 2022.

**Figure 2. Joint programme cycle**

## Stage A: Design

### **Step 1. Prepare JP concept**

The purpose of the concept is to explain the rationale for the JP. It is prepared by the lead PUNO with programme staff of PUNOs from the relevant CF results group and non-UN partners (*as applicable*). The concept is based upon the CF, the Common Country Analysis (CCA), and other country analytic work including the [Humanitarian Needs Overview](#)<sup>35</sup> (*as relevant*). Additional analysis may be undertaken according to guidance for the CCA. The JP concept applies the following guiding principles: (1) Leave no one behind, (2) Human rights, (3) [Gender equality and the empowerment of women](#)<sup>36</sup> (GEWE), (4) Resilience, (5) Sustainability, and (6) Accountability, including the availability and use of quality data.

Based upon the challenges to be addressed, the JP has a brief [theory of change](#) (ToC) that defines the change pathway required to achieve expected results. This is based upon the ToC for the CF, including strategic assumptions and risks. It explains how people, and especially vulnerable groups, will be engaged and benefit. Consultation with government and other partners is strongly encouraged to validate the problems and to understand the most effective and relevant results and strategy for the JP.

Five elements are important for consideration. The JP concept:

- » Describes **steering and management structures** including the JP SC, JP team, and special roles related to the FMM;
- » **Identifies the FMM**, based on how to achieve the most effective and efficient implementation and to reduce transaction costs<sup>37</sup> (Refer to Annex D: Fund management modalities)

<sup>35</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), [2023 Joint Intersectoral Analysis \(JIAF\) Guidance](#) '2023

Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF) Guidance'.

<sup>37</sup> This includes: (1) The special roles include: **Pass-through**: Administrative Agent (AA) and Convening Agent (CA); **Consolidated**: Managing Agent (MA) (Annex D); and (2) Consideration of indicative **budget thresholds**: Parallel: None; Consolidated: USD \$200,00 per PUNO; Pass-through: USD \$1 million per PUNO.

- » Offers a **sustainability plan and exit strategy** to explain how expected JP results will be sustained and scaled-up, including capacities and mechanisms needed by partners and beneficiaries;
- » Includes provision for **learning and knowledge management (KM)**; more complex JPs have KM activities in the work plan and budget; and
- » Facilitates a discussion between PUNOs and the Operations Management Team (OMT) to review available **common business services or discuss new services to enhance JP design and implementation.**

The JP concept meets the minimum criteria and adheres to quality standards, based upon a self-assessment checklist (Refer to Annex B1: Joint Programme: Quality Standards). See the CCA companion and the *Guiding Principles Companion* for specific guidance and tools. The template for simplified JPs can also be used to prepare the JP concept.

## **Step 2. Review concept for preparation**

**For all JPs:** The UNRC and UNCT meet to consider the rationale and relevance of the JP concept and to affirm that it contributes to the agreed CF results.<sup>38</sup> The review considers the minimum criteria, quality standards, and any additional criteria required by the funding mechanism. The discussion is documented as part of UNCT minutes to ensure full transparency and knowledge.

- » When the JP responds to a call from a pooled fund: Following documented discussion, the UNCT decides to either: (1) Approve the concept for further preparation, or (2) Reject the JP concept. The UNRC has final decision-making authority.
- » All other JPs: Following documented discussion by the UNCT, the PUNOs proceed to prepare the JP document. PUNOs that helped to design the JP will participate during implementation.

## **Step 3. Prepare joint programme document**

Based upon the approved concept, a draft JP document is prepared. This is done by the lead PUNO with programme staff of PUNOs and non-UN partners (*as applicable*). It includes a ToC and a single integrated JP results framework, work plan and budget. These are derived from the CF and related JWP and funding framework. Preparation of the JP document meets the minimum criteria and quality standards, including the guiding principles. The JP document outlines the composition of the SC and JP team. Involvement of government and other country stakeholders to design the JP is important to foster ownership, achieve and sustain future results.

There are **two (2) standard templates** for use by all JPs (Annex A):

- (1) A JP document for more complex programmes; and
- (2) A simplified JP document up to three pages for less complex programmes at or below a budget threshold of USD \$1 million total per year.

**JP results framework, work plan and budget:** Both templates include a single integrated JP results framework, work plan and budget. It is derived from the relevant CF JWP and funding framework and it is prepared on a rolling basis. It illustrates a high level of coordination and sequencing for complementarity and coherence between the planned activities of PUNOs and non-UN partners (*as applicable*).

Expected JP results are one or more CF outputs, sub-outputs and related PUNO activities. They contribute logically to one or more CF outcomes, country priorities, and related SDG targets. Five percent of the JP budget is allocated for monitoring, reporting, evaluation and audit, unless otherwise required by the donor or pooled fund. Normally, each PUNO will allocate five percent of its budget share.<sup>39</sup>

Key features, in line with the guiding principles and [UNSDG RBM handbook](#):

<sup>38</sup> In accordance with UNSDG, MAF, section 3.5 18-19

<sup>39</sup> Budgets for monitoring, evaluation and audit are shown in separate budget lines.

(1) JP results are measurable and focus on one or more national policy levers and engagement with new partners to attract investment (*financial or in-kind*); they also mainstream concerns for gender equality and women's empowerment, address the different ways that women and girls and men and boys experience the problems being addressed, and respond to the most pressing human rights issues, including discrimination<sup>40</sup>.

(2) JP results and activities are coded with [gender equality, human rights, and peace markers](#).

(3) Indicators are taken from CF results framework and JWP. Outcome indicators correspond to one or more SDG indicators; both outcome and output indicators are **disaggregated**.<sup>41</sup> Important tools are the UNCT-SWAP [Gender equality scorecard](#), and UNCT accountability scorecards on [disability inclusion](#) and the participation and engagement with young people: [Youth 2030](#).

(4) Indicators include at least one indicator to measure expected **catalytic changes**, for example: *Qualitative*: Extent to which JP strategy and results have accelerated policy change(s) contributing to SDG achievement in terms of scale (geographic coverage) or scope (additional sectors or themes); or

*Quantitative*: Amount of additional funding or financing ('000 USD) leveraged/mobilized by the JP.

#### **Step 4. Analyse and select PUNOs for JPs financed from a Pooled Fund**

This step applies only to situations where the JP responds to a call from a pooled fund. Based upon the JP document, the UNRC and UNCT use a set of objective criteria to inform their selection of PUNOs and to allocate resources (see Annex B2). Normally, the JP will use a pass-through FMM and the lead PUNO is the CA. When a JP is funded by a global regional or country pooled fund, the AA is indicated by the pooled fund TOR and governance arrangements.

**PUNOs are chosen when they are essential for the successful implementation of the JP and delivery of expected results.** The UNRC and UNCT will consider the comparative advantages of *potential* PUNOs and of their implementing partners to support implementation as a team. This is informed by the relevant CF JWP and planned results, the UNCT configuration exercise, and the capacity and positioning of the *potential* PUNOs. The UNRC will ensure engagement with all UNCT organizations in accord with their mandates, comparative advantages, and interests. The UNRCO will prepare the analysis and draft recommendations for consideration by UNRC and UNCT. The UNRC has final decision-making authority to approve a JP concept and over the selection of PUNOs.

#### **Step 5. Mobilize resources**

The mobilization of resources is led by the PUNOs while keeping the UNRC informed.<sup>42</sup> This is done in accordance with the CF funding framework and resource mobilization strategy and the MAF<sup>43</sup> to maximize partnerships and opportunities and to avoid (perceived or real) competition for funds. Coordinated resource mobilization may occur throughout the design stage and may occur throughout the joint programme cycle.

#### **Step 6. Appraise and undertake quality assurance**

The purpose is to review the quality and feasibility of the JP and advise on its readiness for approval. PUNOs undertake a **quality assurance** (QA) review against quality standards. The UNRC and UNCT are accountable for the quality of the JP concept and design. Attention is placed on the **programmatic rationale**, particularly the comparative advantages of PUNOs to achieve expected JP results. Consultation and information sharing with stakeholders from government, donors, implementing

<sup>40</sup> Based on the most recent outcomes from the human rights mechanisms. See UNSDG Companion Piece: Guiding Principles, on a human rights-based approach (HRBA) and normative frameworks related to human rights and human rights at work, 21.

<sup>41</sup> As far as possible, data are disaggregated by gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, disability, religion, language, caste, national or social origin, sexual orientation and gender identity, and other forms of discrimination prohibited by international law. CF Consolidated Annexes, LNOB, 17.

<sup>42</sup> This includes bilateral ODA, multilateral funding from IFIs, government funding, South-South cooperation, and private allocations (e.g. business sector, foundations)

<sup>43</sup> UNSDG, MAF, section 3.5 Funding/Resource Mobilization, 18-19.

partners and intended beneficiaries is encouraged to ensure ownership of the JP and to achieve and sustain results. No additional quality assurance is required. As needed and upon request, additional QA can be sought from the Regional Peer Support Group (PSG), [Regional Collaborative Platforms \(RCP\)](#) and related Issues-Based Coalitions (IBCs).

### **Step 7. Approve and sign the joint programme**

Upon completion of the appraisal, the JP document is approved and signed by all PUNOs, national and/or sub-national government partners, and other non-UN partners.<sup>44</sup> Approval and signature of the JP triggers the establishment of the JP SC and JP team. PUNOs proceed to establish ledger accounts and allocate resources, as per their commitments in the work plan and budget. Other specific accounting and budget requirements depend upon the choice of FMM (Annex D).

## **Stage B: Implement & adjust**

The second stage involves joint work to implement the JP, monitor the achievement of results, learn lessons and make adjustments for greater effectiveness. The **JP SC** meets to endorse the JP document and special roles and legal documents related to the choice of FMM. The **JP team** begins implementation and manages for results together with partners for the duration of the JP. The lead PUNO provides coordination and programmatic leadership. PUNOs, coordinate their start-up processes to maximize efficiency. Start-up of complex JPs can take up to 6 months and approval and start-up processes are planned to not delay implementation.

### **Step 8. Implement planned activities and financial management**

During implementation, the agreed results, strategies and activities in the JP document, work plan and budget are translated into action. The JP team, with guidance of the lead PUNO, manages for results. JP teams are expected to meet at least monthly (Refer to Annex B3. JP Team: Performance assessment and indicator). Implementation of activities is a PUNO responsibility and accountability. Based upon the JP work plan and budget, PUNOs provide the required financial resources to IPs for implementation. For some PUNOs this may require application of the [Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers](#) (HACT).

#### **Box 4 Managing for results: During implementation, the JP team engages with partners to:**

- » Sequence and monitor planned development activities for maximum synergy and coherence;
- » Track the JP budget and expenditures to ensure delivery of planned activities;
- » Monitor the achievement of JP results and track indicators to ensure a contribution to CF outcome(s), country priorities, and related SDG targets;
- » Scan the programme environment for changes and monitor assumptions and risks
- » Adapt JP activities, budgets, results and strategies to maintain relevance and effectiveness;
- » Contribute to the preparation the annual JP report and communications;
- » Identify lessons and undertake policy dialogue and advocacy with partners to identify opportunities to scale-up JP results and strategies; and
- » Share information about the JP amongst the team, the UNCT and with all partners in a timely manner.

When evaluation is required, the JP team will play the role of the management group.

### **Step 9. Monitor, learn and document performance**

Monitoring is essential to report on performance and to facilitate learning and support accountability. It is a continuous management function that provides the JP team, partners and the JP SC with regular

<sup>44</sup> Implementing partners (IPs) of PUNOs do not sign the full JP document. Once it is approved and signed, the JP results framework, work plan and budget is signed separately by Implementing partners (IPs) of PUNOs.

feedback about performance and lessons. Evidence from monitoring serves as a critical input to make adjustments, produce evidence-based reports, and for evaluation.

The JP team, under the leadership of lead PUNO, monitors implementation and results in accordance with the JP results framework, work plan and budget. Monitoring by the JP team involves: (a) tracking performance through the collection of appropriate and credible data and other evidence; (b) analysing evidence to improve effectiveness and efficiency, and to adjust JP results and strategy, as needed; and (c) checking assumptions and risks, including review of the sustainability plan and exit strategy. The JP document summarizes the methodology and arrangements for effective monitoring,<sup>45</sup> including data collection, reviews or studies, and joint field visits. Some arrangements for monitoring depend upon the choice of FMM (See Annex D).

**Gather knowledge:** Monitoring contributes to learning and enhances JP effectiveness. The JP strategy and document includes provision for KM; complex JPs have KM activities in the work plan and budget. The JP team learns from its practices and makes improvements. There are multiple entry points: routine performance monitoring, progress reports, annual reviews, evaluations, and audit. These help the JP team, partners and stakeholders to understand what is working and what can be improved, and to share lessons for corrective action, policy advocacy, and future use by other JPs.

The JP team is encouraged to provide a **mid-year progress update** to the JP SC.

### **Step 10. Make adjustments**

Effective monitoring and learning enable the JP team and JP SC to consider major challenges or opportunities and to strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of the JP. Based upon progress monitoring and learning, the JP team carries-out routine adjustments to results and activities in the JP work plan and budget.<sup>46</sup> Adjustments are discussed and agreed by the JP team and carried out by each PUNO according to its programming policies and procedures and financial regulations and rules.

- » Adjustments may include an increase or decrease of total budget and reallocations between budget categories **up to 25 percent** of the annual budget. The JP team informs the SC and the AA (*under a pass-through FMM*).
- » **Substantive changes** require review and approval by the JP SC and are recorded in minutes. They *may* also require discussion with the donors, the AA (*under a pass-through FMM*), and amendments to legal instruments (Refer to Annex D. Fund Management Modalities).

**Substantive changes** include: (1) Revisions to the JP design and approach, theory of change, and risk analysis; (2) A no-cost extension or change in the budget that **exceeds 25 percent** of the annual JP budget; (3) A change of lead or other PUNOs and implementing partners in response to changes in the development context or new evidence, results performance, and learning. Revisions may be made any time in response to evidence generated from monitoring, evaluation, audit and review activities.

For all adjustments, revisions are captured in the JP document and recorded with a note-to-file that is signed by PUNOs and appended to the JP document. There is no requirement to re-sign the JP document. The note-to-file and the revised work plan and budget are shared with the JP SC for endorsement and the AA (*under a pass-through FMM*).

**Suspension and Cancellation:** A JP may be suspended or cancelled if circumstances arise that jeopardize the achievement of the expected results and where adjustments are not expected to address constraints. The JP team will propose suspension or cancellation for approval by the JP SC.<sup>47</sup> The decision of the JP SC is confirmed in writing with all concerned parties. This is done:

- » In consultation with the government, donors, IPs, and non-UN partners (*as applicable*); and

<sup>45</sup> Under HACT, this includes quality assurance, scheduled audit and HACT spot checks, as relevant.

<sup>46</sup> This can include changes to the activity, implementation schedule, target groups and/or location of activities. These are programmatic or operational changes by PUNOs in accordance with their programming policies and procedures and financial regulations and rules.

<sup>47</sup> The decision will consider risks and a mitigation strategy to address negative effects arising from the cancellation.

» In conformity with the legal agreements for the applicable FMM.<sup>48</sup>

### **Step 11. Report and communicate**

This is about telling a compelling performance story about the JP that it is being implemented as planned and funds are being utilized for the purposes intended. Reports draws on data and analysis collected through monitoring and communicates updated performance information about results, learning, operational performance, and assumptions and risks. Annual reports form the basis for guidance and decision-making by the JP SC.

The JP team produces one consolidated, **results-based annual report** that includes programmatic and financial elements. The standard report template is applicable to all JPs. It is harmonized with the reporting template for the CF. Relevant parts of the CF annual results report may be used, unless otherwise required by the donor or pooled fund mechanism. Reports are prepared by the JP team and reviewed and endorsed by the JP SC and shared with relevant stakeholders. Other specific roles and responsibilities, including reporting deadlines, depend upon the choice of FMM and are included in relevant legal instruments (See Annex D). Reports are uploaded to UN-Info.

**Communications:** External communication about the JP are joint and harmonized, through the UN Communications Group or other communications coordination body. PUNOs, government, donors, IPs and non-UN partners are recognized in joint communications. It is encouraged to include the UN/UNCT system logo and the logos of each PUNO, non-UN partners, and of donors to ensure their individual visibility.

### **Step 12. Review progress**

There is one annual progress review.<sup>49</sup> The annual review is prepared by the JP team and conducted by the JP SC that is accountable for its quality and results. It is an important opportunity to gather JP partners and stakeholders to: (1) Share progress information, lessons and good practices; (2) Compare actual progress against expected results in the JP document; (3) Understand the *contribution* of JP results to CF outcome(s), country priorities, and related SDG targets; and (4) Review the sustainability plan and exit strategy.

The review will consider and endorse adjustments to JP results, strategy, and resources in order to respond to the evolving programme context, including new or heightened risks. Changes to planned results and strategies, agreed during the annual review, are reflected in the JP results framework, work plan and budget. The review follows the guidance for the CF joint annual performance review.

## **Stage C: Learn, transition and close**

During the final stage of the JP, the JP team and JP SC work to:

- » Sustain and scale-up JP results and partnerships;
- » Gather knowledge about performance and identify lessons and good practices;
- » Conduct a final review, prepare a final report and evaluation (*as required*); and
- » Undertake operational and financial closure.

The JP team is responsible to carry out programme activities and the JP SC is accountable for the quality of the work and final results.

### **Step 13. Implement actions to sustain and scale-up results**

A JP includes a sustainability plan and exit strategy. This is developed during the design stage and reviewed annually during implementation. It describes how expected JP results will be sustained

<sup>48</sup> Consolidated FMM: See MOU between PUNOs and the Managing Agent (MA); Pass-through FMM: See MOU between the PUNOs and the AA and CA and a Standard Administrative Arrangement (SAA) between the donor(s) and the AA.

<sup>49</sup> This may be timed to coincide with CF annual review



beyond the timeline of the programme and CF, with a focus on: (1) community sustainability; (2) financial sustainability; and (3) institutional sustainability. It describes expected roles and responsibilities of government, donors, and IPs. As part of the plan, the JP SC and JP team *remain operational* for a minimum of three months after operational closure of the JP to offer advice, and to support transition and capacity development. JPs will consider the use of UN Volunteers to carry-out sustainability and transition arrangements.

#### **Step 14. Final JP review**

There is one **final review** of the JP, prior to closure. This is an important opportunity to gather JP partners and stakeholders to: (1) Compare final results against the original plan and celebrate successes; (2) Validate the *contribution* of JP results to the CF outcome(s), country priorities and the SDGs; and (3) Review and guide the sustainability plan and exit strategy. The final review is prepared by the JP team and conducted by the JP SC that is accountable for its quality and results. The review follows the guidance and format for the joint annual performance review for the CF.

#### **Step 15. Prepare final report and evaluation (as required)**

The final JP results report is important for accountability to government, donors, and beneficiaries. The JP team produces one final consolidated, results-based report that includes programmatic and financial elements, using the standard report template. The team uses the final report to summarize its knowledge about actual performance with evidence and data, identify the contributions of the JP to the CF outcome(s), country priorities, and SDGs, and identify lessons and good practices. The report is shared with the JP SC and relevant stakeholders. Final reports are uploaded to UN-Info.

**Evaluation:** Effective, user-focused evaluation determines whether expected results have been achieved with credible analysis and evidence. It is essential for learning by the UN system and partners, and for decision-making and accountability. Evaluations demonstrate results to partners and donors and help to bring credibility and attention to joint programmes.

A [joint evaluation](#)<sup>50</sup> is conducted when:

- » The JP has a total budget of ≥ USD \$5 million; and/or
- » The JP is expected to continue into a subsequent CF cycle or to be scaled-up.

Below these thresholds, the JP strategy and results are assessed as part of the evaluation of the CF.

The joint evaluation is conducted in accordance with [norms and standards](#) from the United Nations Evaluation Group ([UNEG](#)). The evaluation examines the relevance of the JP strategy and results, the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation by PUNOs and other JP partners, the sustainability of results and their contribution to CF outcome(s), country priorities, and related SDG targets.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the joint evaluation gauges *the extent to which* the guiding principles, especially LNOB, human rights and GEWE considerations were incorporated in the design and implementation.

The joint evaluation is commissioned by the JP SC. It is prepared by the JP team, serving as the management group, in conjunction with the CF ME group.<sup>52</sup> It is conducted by an independent evaluation team. A management response is prepared by the JP team and endorsed by the JP SC.

#### **Step 16. Operational and financial closure**

A JP is closed in a timely manner to manage fiduciary risk, meet donor expectations, avoid costly extensions and enable the timely transfer of assets for the sustainability of results.

<sup>50</sup> UNEG, [Resource Pack on Joint Evaluations](#), 2014. This toolkit contains guidance and examples of terms of reference (ToR), governance and financing arrangements, management response, and follow-up strategies used in previous evaluations. Other guidance: [Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations](#) (UNEG 2014), [Handbook for Conducting Evaluations of Normative Work in the UN System](#) (UNEG 2014).

<sup>51</sup> These criteria and considerations per: The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), [Norms and Standards for Evaluation](#), 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Where the CF ME group is not present, the JP team will consult with evaluation advisors from PUNOs.

**Operational:** A JP is considered complete when the JP team informs the JP SC in writing that all activities in the JP work plan have been completed. The operational end date is the date on which the last PUNO or non-UN partner completes its activities. The JP is not closed until this is done. The final narrative report is shared.

**Financial:** No new financial commitments are made and no programmatic activities are carried out after operational closure. Between operational and financial closure, PUNOs and IPs identify and settle all financial obligations and to return any unutilized funds to the donor(s). The disposition of any balance of funds remaining at the end of programme implementation is done in accordance with the JP document and respective legal instruments for the FMM that govern financial management and accountabilities. See Annex D for information about specific operational and financial closure requirements for each FMM.



The United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) unites the 37 UN funds, programmes, specialized agencies, departments and offices that play a role in development.

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For more information or queries, please contact:  
the DCO Communications and Results Reporting Team  
([dcocommunications@un.org](mailto:dcocommunications@un.org)).