UNITED NATIONS
DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONS
COORDINATION OFFICE

Delivering Together for Development

Summary brief on Standard Operating Procedures for UN Country Teams

March 2016

What is the objective of the Standard Operating Procedures?

In 2014, the UNDG launched the second generation of "Delivering as one" based on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for UN Country Teams. As called for by General Assembly resolution 67/226 on the QCPR and the Secretary-General's Five-Year Action Agenda, the SOPs seek to ensure that the second generation of Delivering as One is firmly focused on results, strengthened accountability, monitoring and evaluation, and improved outcomes.

The SOPs are about making things work better across the UN system, by removing institutional bottlenecks, which prevented coherence, improving standards and common operating systems, and motivating the use of shared data, policy analytics, and advocacy to support integrated solutions. While making the UN development system more transparent, common results-oriented, and accountable, the SOPs enable a more complete system-wide alignment of the UN contribution at the country level with national development priorities and plans.

The SOPs strike a balance between flexibility and standardization in order to be applicable and useful in a wide variety of country contexts, such as low-income or least developed countries and middle-income countries, each with its specific development challenges, normative settings, institutional capacities and UN presence. The overall objective is to ensure more strategic results and impact, with reduced transaction costs for governments, and lower overhead costs for the UN.

What do the Standard Operating Procedures build on?

The SOPs draw on the best practices and lessons learned of the Delivering as One pilot phase, which was launched in 2007 in eight countries, and the findings of the Independent Evaluation of Lessons Learned from Delivering as One, which concluded the pilot phase in 2012.

The origins of Delivering as One date back to the World Summit Outcome, when the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General to further strengthen the management and coordination of UN operational activities and to make proposals on more tightly managed entities in the fields of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. In response, the Secretary-General appointed the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence, which issued its report, "Delivering as one", in November 2006 (A/61/583).

The High-level Panel recommended that the UN system should accelerate and deepen reforms to "deliver as one" at the country level and establish unified UN country teams—with one leader, one programme, one budgetary framework and where appropriate one office, with integrated capacity to provide a coherent approach to cross-cutting issues, including sustainable development, gender equality and human rights. These objectives remain as relevant as ever in light of the universal and integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda.

What do the Standard Operating Procedures comprise?

The Standard Operating Procedures translate into five pillars:

1. The One Programme unifies the UN system under one national development strategy, underpinned by integrated policy positions and services, and real-time monitoring through joint work plans

2. The Common Budgetary Framework/ One Fund, with all planned and costed UN programme activities presented transparently in one place, provides a shared view of the UN's contribution as a whole to the country. The optional One UN Fund provides performance-based support to the UN's integrated policy approaches;
3. The One Leader and UN Country Team carry responsibility for the role and results of the UN in the country;
4. Operating as One provides options for more cost-effective common operations and service support;
5. Communicating as One facilitates coherent messaging and advocacy on normative issues.

What are the benefits of SOPs implementation?

- **Ensure greater alignment with programme country development needs and priorities:** 94% of DAO countries[1] state that DAO helps the UN better align with country development needs and priorities in comparison to 82% of non-DAO countries
- **More disaggregated data and joint analytics:** 115 UNCTs support national data and statistics[2], 50% through capacity development.
- **Better capture the UN footprint at country level:** 56% of Governments responded that the introduction of DAO made it "much easier" or "somewhat easier to deal with UN system in their country."[3]
- **Greater focus on development results and accountability:** Strategic guidance and oversight are exercised through a Joint National/UN Steering Committee with the participation of all national stakeholders as defined in the UNDG 2010 UNDAF Guidance. 83% of DAO countries have a joint steering committee while 57% of non-DAO countries have such committees.[4] 83% of all Programme Countries Governments (56% DAO, and 27% non-DAO countries) report that the One Programme/UNDAF has helped the UN achieve better results that if each UN agency had planned its country support separately.

[1] Based on 2015 DESA Survey to Programme countries
[2] Based on 2016 UNDG Information Management System
[3] Based on 2015 DESA Survey to Programme Countries
[4] Based on 2015 DESA Survey to Programme Countries

Current status of SOPs implementation

The Standard Operating Procedures have been effective since August 2014. As of March 2016, 52 Member States have formally requested the United Nations to "deliver as one" in their countries. UN Country Teams operating in these countries are required to incrementally implement the 15 core elements of the SOPs. In addition, all 131 UN Country Teams are strongly encouraged to draw on the SOPs and to implement the core elements adapted to their specific country contexts. The **SOPs tracker** on the UNDG website provides an overview of the current status of implementation across all 131 UNCTs.

Country income category does not seem to affect SOP implementation rate[5], with a slight down trend on High Income Countries.

[5] 2016 UNDG Information and Management System

What elements require accelerated implementation?

2016 UNDG Information Management System data shows a slow but positive uptrend in SOPs implementation, including with regard to those elements, which are lagging furthest behind: The Common Budgetary Framework (medium and annual terms); Joint resource mobilization strategies, and Business Operations Strategies (BOS). The common Business Operations Strategy was piloted by 19 UNCTs in 2014 and 2015. In close cooperation with the High-level Committee on Management, the UNDG has since expanded the roll-out of the BOS to 36 countries.

HQ reforms in support of SOPs implementation

To ensure that the Standard Operating Procedures have a demonstrable impact on efficiency, coherence and development effectiveness at the country level, the UNDG and the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) adopted a Headquarters Plan of Action in 2014. The Plan targeted 49 actions (30 of which were fully accomplished by end 2015) to bring about institutional change and remove remaining bottlenecks preventing the full implementation of the SOPs at the country level. In 2016, the UNDG will adopt a follow-up Headquarters Plan of Action to help the UN development system meet the demands of the 2030 Agenda. The key objectives of the Plan include:

- Harmonize agency systems and processes for programme and project management and reporting, to avoid duplicate requirements and to reduce transaction costs;
- Ensure appropriate delegation of authority from headquarters to country-level representatives for taking decisions on programmatic and financial matters as agreed with national authorities;
- Increase the number of agencies reporting financial data through IATI standards; and
- Ensure recognition and incentives for staff members leading Operations Management Teams/ Business Operations Strategies/ Results Groups within their agencies by incorporating these functions into both their job descriptions and their regular performance reviews