

UNDAF ACTION PLAN GUIDANCE NOTE

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**UNITED NATIONS
DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

UNDAF ACTION PLAN GUIDANCE NOTE

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Table of Contents

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|---|---|
| 1. Introduction..... | 3 |
| 2. Purpose of the UNDAF Action Plan | 4 |
| 3. Expected Benefits of the UNDAF Action Plan | 6 |
| 4. Expected Process for Developing the UNDAF Action Plan..... | 7 |
| 5. Additional Resources | 8 |
| 6. Content/Format of an UNDAF Action Plan..... | 8 |

1. Introduction

1.1 This guidance note outlines a process for preparing an UNDAF Action Plan. Where a UNCT decides to prepare an UNDAF Action Plan it would **replace** UN system agency-specific country programme action plans (CPAPs) and other similar operational documents with a single document for the coordinated implementation of the UNDAF.¹

By replacing the operational documents of multiple UN funds, programmes or specialized agencies (hereinafter referred to as “UN system agencies”) with a single operational document, the UNDAF Action Plan advances the harmonization and simplification of UN operations.

1.2 This guidance note complements but does not replace existing UNDG guidance on common country programming and the UNDAF guidelines “How to Prepare an UNDAF: Part (I) Guidelines for UN Country Teams” and “How to Prepare an UNDAF: Part (II) Technical Guidance for UN Country Teams”. It is also based on the experience of the Delivering as One pilots, as well as from other UNCTs, that have implemented actions intended to enhance UN coherence at country level.

1.3 The development of an UNDAF Action Plan is **voluntary**. However, given the benefits derived from adopting such an approach, UNCTs are strongly encouraged to develop an UNDAF Action Plan as part of the common country programming process.

1.4 UNCT experience highlights the importance of strong government and UNCT commitment to common country programming processes. The following have emerged as a set of basic conditions for success in making strategic choices and implementing change initiatives together, including the UNDAF Action Plan:

- Strong government leadership of the development process and an indication that the Government is supportive of greater UN coherence;
- Strong alignment among the donor community and indications that donors support greater UN coherence;
- Strong and vibrant civil society/non-governmental sector (including the private sector and trade unions) with whom the Government and donors will engage in the development process;
- Strong UNCT with a high level of commitment among its members to UN coherence.

1.5 The UNDAF Action Plan covers the same time period as the UNDAF, usually three to five years, and is drafted in year five (or the last year) of the programming cycle. Details are provided in section 4 below. The UNDAF Action Plan is signed by UN system agencies and the Government (although it may also refer to other national partners) and outlines basic commitments made by all signatories.

1.6 For those UN system agencies which currently prepare a CPAP, the UNDAF Action Plan would replace this – i.e. where an UNDAF Action Plan is signed, there is **no need to prepare a CPAP**. The UNDAF Action Plan **may** also substitute some programme or project documents for UN system agencies which do not prepare CPAPs; individual UN system agencies should advise on whether this is the case. UN system agency country level strategic planning documents will continue to guide UN system agencies’ country level programmes.

1.7 This guidance sets out, in the sections below, the purpose, objectives and benefits of an UNDAF Action Plan; the process for developing an UNDAF Action Plan; and suggests a format indicating mandatory text.

¹ The UNDAF Action Plan does not replace legal frameworks for cooperation or any partnership agreement or project document between a UN system agency and a partner. If signed, the UNDAF Action Plan only replaces the CPAPs. For UNDP and others, where the UNDAF Action Plan is used, it constitutes the CPAP.

2. Purpose of the UNDAF Action Plan

2.1 Depending on the country context and the concerned UN system agencies' specific accountability requirements, an UNDAF Action Plan may serve several or all of the following purposes:

- A programming document which ensures that the strategic priorities identified in the UNDAF are operationalized in a coherent way through UN system agencies' programmes.
- A planning and monitoring tool for implementing partners, donors and UN system agencies.
- A document which anchors the actions of UN system agencies within the accountability frameworks and legal agreements concluded between those UN system agencies and the concerned Government.
- An operational document that includes a common budgetary framework (CBF) for implementing partners and UN system agencies, and for the information of donors and other partners.²

2.2 The UNDAF Action Plan is, in respect of each of the UN system agencies signing it, read, interpreted, and implemented in accordance with and in a manner that is consistent with the basic agreement between such UN system agency and the Host Government. It will be up to the Government to determine a signatory/ signatories on behalf of Government.

2.3 As the UNDAF Action Plan will serve as an accountability mechanism among UN system agencies, each participating UN system agency is required to sign the UNDAF Action Plan.

2.4 The UNDAF is a strategic programme framework and does not specify details of implementation of programme actions; as such the UNDAF alone cannot ensure coherent and comprehensive

operationalization. An UNDAF Action Plan reduces the risk that UN system agencies' programmes become fragmented, and together with the UNDAF it provides the opportunity for government to determine how UN system agencies will best support the achievement of national development priorities.

2.5 There must be a logical relationship between the UNDAF, the UNDAF Action Plan and work plans (such as AWP) or project documents. These documents, collectively, should maintain the results chain and clarify how the UN is supporting the achievement of national development priorities.³ The UNDAF Action Plan reflects the results already specified in the UNDAF results matrix. In accordance with the UNDAF guidelines,⁴ UNCTs have the flexibility to either keep the UNDAF results matrix at the outcome level (Option 1a), or develop a fuller results matrix that includes outputs (Option 1b). If the UNCT keeps the UNDAF results matrix at the outcome level (Option 1a) and decides to prepare an UNDAF Action Plan, then the outputs are specified in the UNDAF Action Plan.

2.6 The UNDAF Action Plan complements the UNDAF by setting out "how" the UN system agencies will work with national partners and each other to achieve the results identified in the UNDAF. It therefore focuses on resource requirements and indicative resource commitments, governance structures, management and implementation strategies, and monitoring and evaluation. It also gives further detail of how programme results will be delivered, outlining how the UN system agencies organize themselves and work with government and other national partners to deliver those results. The UNDAF Action Plan is an agreement between the Government and participating UN system agencies identifying

² It is understood that agency participation in a common budgetary framework (CBF) may depend upon the rules and regulations of each individual UN system agency. (See Annex 3, Common Budgetary Framework).

³ For some UN system agencies (UNDP, UNICEF) the UNDAF Action Plan together with the annual work plans (AWP) equals the project document in legal terms. The minimum requirement may therefore be the UNDAF Action Plan+annual work plan (AWP); however, the project document can still be used where relevant and the project document would then be used in lieu of the AWP.

⁴ "How to Prepare an UNDAF: Guidelines for UN Country Teams", January 2010, page 13.

the commitments required of each party to ensure delivery of the UNDAF results; these are not only quantifiable commitments, such as human and financial resources, but also less quantifiable but equally important commitments, such as coordination, governance, management, implementation and monitoring arrangements.

2.7 Work plans (such as AWP) and project documents⁵ set out specific tasks to be implemented in the short term, allocating resources and responsibilities associated with these tasks. This guidance note will not go into detail regarding the format of work plans/project documents but it is important to stress that these are the key tools in translating the UNDAF and the UNDAF Action Plan into results delivered. Therefore, the results logic of the UNDAF and UNDAF Action Plan must continue to the work plans (such as AWP) project documents.

2.8 Most work plans/project documents are likely to be specific to UN system agencies. In the case of joint programmes, work plans (such as AWP) project documents would of course be common to two or more UN system agencies but will still specify particular UN system agencies' responsibilities (see the [UNDG Guidance Note on Joint Programmes](#) for further details). The UNDAF Action Plan results matrix should clearly identify joint programmes, whether they are defined at the outcome or output level. Country Teams developing an UNDAF Action Plan may wish to review the scope for further simplification, e.g., reviewing for any duplication between the UNDAF Action Plan and joint programme documents.

2.9 The proposed format for the UNDAF Action Plan results matrix follows the RBM process as set out in the latest [UNDAF guidelines](#). Following on from the UNDAF results matrix and the UNDAF M&E plan, the UNDAF Action Plan results matrix is intended to provide

additional detail of: (i) outputs (if not already included in the UNDAF Results Matrix); (ii) what resources will be provided to implement those actions; and (iii) what monitoring processes and mechanisms will be used to assess progress. As noted in the UNDAF guidelines, attention should be given to the importance of aligning monitoring processes and mechanisms with national monitoring systems. The UNDAF Action Plan results matrix establishes those linkages and needs to be clear on how the Government is meeting its own responsibilities in terms of monitoring national development priorities, including how resources provided by UN system agencies are being applied to achieve those priorities. The UNDAF guidelines already explain the importance of aligning monitoring processes and mechanisms with national monitoring systems.

2.10 UN system agency responsibilities need to be clearly specified in the UNDAF Action Plan results matrix. This will help UN system agencies to manage the specific resources for which they are accountable.

2.11 It is useful to clarify that an UNDAF Action Plan is not a tool for approval or allocation of resources (both core/regular and non-core/other/extra-budgetary) by governing bodies for UN system agencies' country programmes.⁶ Other documents such as biennial work plans and country programme documents serve this purpose and will continue to do so. An UNDAF Action Plan may, however, serve as the basis for joint resource mobilization by the UNCT or for accessing specific funds which require a coordinated operationalization of the UNDAF, e.g., the [Expanded 'Delivering as One' Funding Window for Achievement of the MDGs](#).

2.12 The UNDAF Action Plan is not intended to be a short-term document or work plan. It does not set out specific tasks—work plans (such as AWP) and project documents serve this purpose.

⁵ Not all UN system agencies use work plans; project documents are usually of a similar level of detail – annualized actions, targets and resources.

⁶ For UN system agencies that have no country programme documents or country-level biennial work plans, approval/allocation of resources may be made through other instruments such as project documents.

3. Expected Benefits of the UNDAF Action Plan

3.1 UNCTs which have developed common operational documents similar to an UNDAF Action Plan have given an indication of the benefits—and some of the costs—of such an approach. There may be some initial increases in transaction costs to the UN system agencies mainly due to the application of new programming approaches and increased coordination. Transaction costs due to new programming tools and approaches are expected to decrease over time as UN system agencies and staff become more familiar with them.

3.2 Experience also suggests that there are significant immediate benefits to developing an UNDAF Action Plan, particularly for governments. These benefits include:

- Greater clarity and transparency of the full extent of the UN system's activities and resources in the country;
- Simplification in documentation through a single reference document which includes legal and financial agreements with the Government; this should significantly reduce transaction costs to the Government;

- Increased coherence between UN system agencies but also increased UN system agency accountability for specific results;
- Increased synergy and complementarity between UN system agency country programmes and reduced duplication of interventions;
- A clear link between the UNDAF and UN system agency programmes;
- A stronger link between the monitoring and evaluation of UN system agency projects and programmes, UNDAF monitoring and evaluation and national monitoring and evaluation processes; and
- Potentially the possibility to identify opportunities for common working practices and increased harmonization of business practices.

3.3 An UNDAF Action Plan provides a clearer identification of resource requirements for the UN system agencies' programme activities and, together with a coherent resource mobilization strategy, may make resource mobilization efforts easier, though there is not yet any evidence to this effect.

3.4 The common budgetary framework (CBF) included in the UNDAF Action Plan helps to ensure a comprehensive and results-based projection of financial resources and identified funding gap for the entire programme cycle.

4. Expected Process for Developing the UNDAF Action Plan

4.1 When to do it: it is suggested that the processes of UNDAF development and the development of the UNDAF Action Plan be sequential and ideally seamless. In particular, the development of the results matrix for both the UNDAF and the UNDAF Action Plan may be completed in the same exercise (note that the national development priorities and outcomes will be the same for both matrices). Nevertheless, the UNDAF Action Plan results matrix can only be finalized once all governing bodies have approved the necessary resources for the UN system agencies' programmes.

4.2 A suggested timeline is that, following on from the completion and signing of the new UNDAF at the end of the ongoing cycle, the UNCT moves straight into the drafting of the UNDAF Action Plan. The country programme documents and other documents required for governing body approval are drafted at the same time as the UNDAF Action Plan and are, in effect, synthesized from the UNDAF Action Plan, rather than being developed before the UNDAF Action Plan. The UNDAF Action Plan is finalized after governing body approval of resources for the country programme, making any amendments necessitated by governing body decisions. The UNDAF Action Plan can only be signed once the governing body decisions have been taken. This means the UNDAF will be signed earlier (or whenever completed) and then the UNDAF Action Plan will be signed subsequently.

4.3 For those UN system agencies working with a two-year programming cycle, indicative commitments may be made as is done for the UNDAF itself. Note that for all UN system agencies, the resource commitments noted in the UNDAF Action Plan are indicative, and dependent on the UN system agencies' ability to raise funds.⁷

4.4 How to do it: a strong joint programming process is key to the success of this approach. Theme groups or programme coordination groups are accountable for elaborating the specific details required for the UNDAF Action Plan in relation to each specific outcome and for showing what each UN system agency will be delivering through its own programme. Additional working groups may focus on the UNCT coordination and decision making mechanisms (e.g., Country Management Team), on mechanisms for increased coherence in business practices (e.g., Operations Management Team) and on monitoring and evaluation. More details on how theme groups or programme coordination groups may be established, together with draft terms of reference for such groups, can be found in the [UNDG Toolkit for a more effective UN](#). It is important that the UNDAF Action Plan spells out these management and coordination mechanisms – not only to be clear about what they are but also to make clear to the Government and other partners how the UN system agencies are working together.

If a UNCT decides to develop an UNDAF Action Plan, all UN system agencies which have signed the UNDAF should ideally also participate in the process of developing the UNDAF Action Plan – particularly the details of the results matrix. Depending on the make-up of the UNCT, the mechanisms to ensure that the UNDAF process is inclusive should also be used to ensure that the development of the UNDAF Action Plan is also inclusive.

⁷ Such resources may also come in the form of technical advisory services.

5. Additional Resources and Support

5.1. UNCTs may find it useful to refer to similar operational documents and processes which have been developed by other country teams. Links to such documents can be found at <http://www.undg.org>.

6. Content/Format of an UNDAF Action Plan

See Annex 1 "How to Complete the UNDAF Action Plan and the UNDAF Action Plan Results Matrix", Annex 2 "Template of an UNDAF Action Plan" and Annex 3 "Common Budgetary Framework."