Results of survey of civil society organizations

Preparation for the 2012 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)

UNDESA

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Introduction

This survey of civil society organizations in developing countries was carried out by UN-DESA to complement the survey of programme country governments. As with the latter survey, the aim was to obtain the perceptions of respondents on the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the support of the UN development system.

The survey questionnaire drew heavily on the survey instrument that was administered to programme country governments, a number of the questions being identical, to enable comparisons of the responses. The survey responses were received online over the period 7 February to 26 March 2012.

The survey was initially distributed by the umbrella group, Betteraid, who had collaborated with OECD/DAC on the Busan conference on aid effectiveness. The link to the survey was later distributed by UN agencies to CSOs with whom they were in contact in the field.[1] This action greatly increased the number of responses. On the other hand, it made the process less independent of the UN entities being assessed. Also, most of the later respondents mentioned that they had a financial relationship with one or more UN agencies. See question 9 below. This is a reason to treat the results circumspectly.

On the positive side, most respondents were well informed about the UN's work in their country, and sometimes in other countries too. Many had useful insights into the UN's operations.

Completed responses were received from 291 individuals, although as many as 336 answered at least one substantive question, and over 360 answered some of the profile questions.

This report summarsies the responses to each question. The full data including all the written comments are in the separate statistical annex.

Note on terminology: To make the survey questionnaire as easy to understand as possible, the expression "UN agency" was used throughout to refer to UN specialized agencies, funds and programmes, as well as departments of the UN Secretariat. For this reason, the word "agency" is used in the same way in this report.

[1] This course of action was proposed by UNICEF.

Profile of respondents

1. Please select your location:

Responses were received from CSOs in 84 countries and territories. The responses were very uneven, with numerous responses coming from a few countries, notably Pakistan (45), Mauritania (41), Liberia (20), Albania (18) and Uganda (17). The responses from these five countries alone accounted for close to half of all the completed responses. On the other end of the scale, no responses came from Brazil or Egypt, for example, and only one each from Ethiopia and Zambia. This uneven pattern is another reason to treat the results circumspectly.

2. If the headquarters of your civil society organization is located in another country, please write the headquarters country below

Approximately 58 of the responses came from CSOs which had its HQ in another country. The US and the UK accounted for over half of them.

3. Please write your job title in the box below

351 respondents answered this question. The most frequently mentioned titles were along the lines of Executive Director, President, Country Director, and Programme or Project Coordinator.

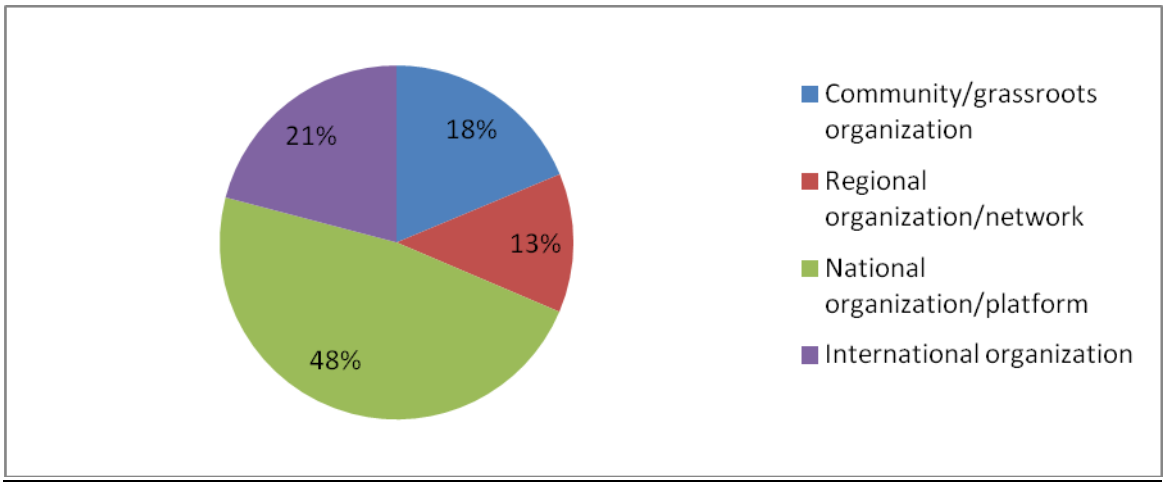
4. Which of the following best describes your civil society organization (CSO): [You may select more than one]

The most frequently selected categories were 'development organization' and 'advocacy organization'.

5. My civil society organization is primarily a:

The responses to this question are presented in the chart below:

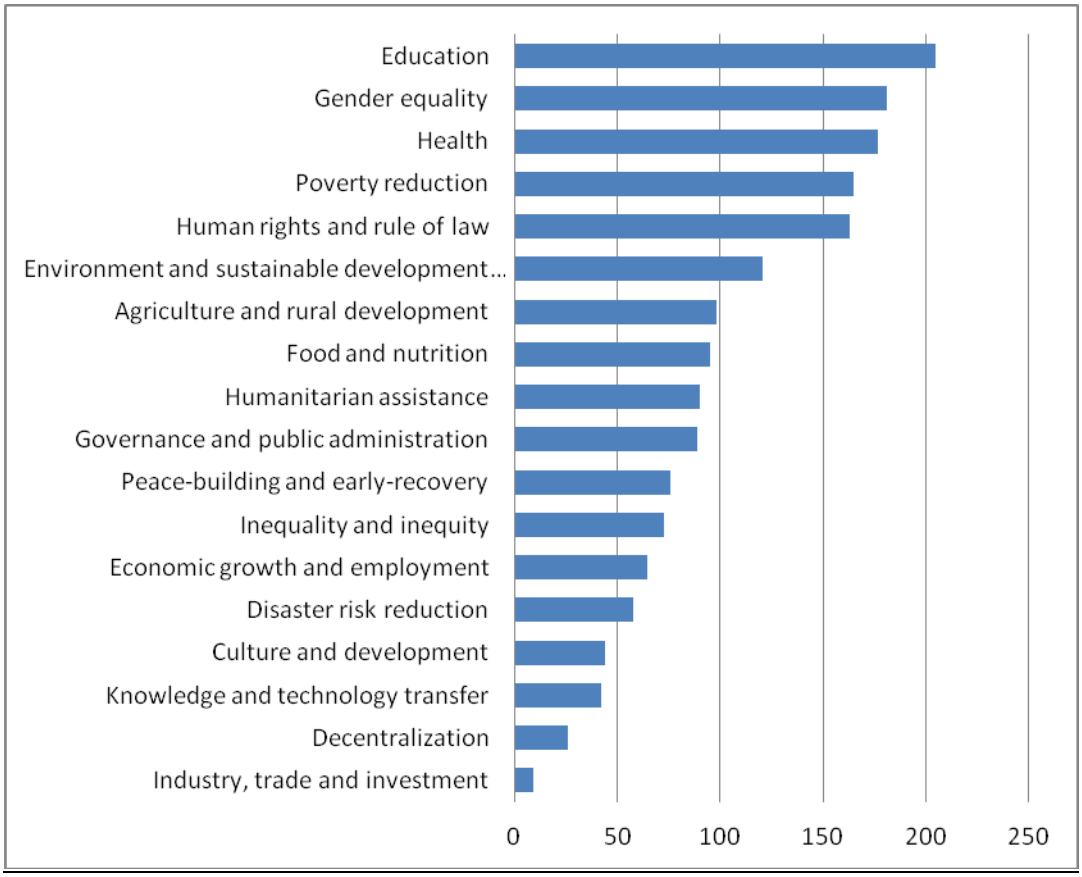
Chart 1. My civil society organization is primarily a:



6. In which areas does your civil society organization specialize:

The chart below shows the areas in which the CSOs work. There was no restriction on the number of areas that could be selected, and it is clear that many of the CSOs did in fact select several areas.

Chart 2. In which areas does your civil society organization specialize?



The numbers along the x-axis shows the number of CSOs that said they worked in the area in question. The predominant areas of activity of the CSOs are the social sectors and the areas of human rights and gender equality. Over 200 of the CSOs stated that they worked in the education sector, among other areas.

Of the 67 organizations that used the comments box to mention other areas of activity, 19 mentioned that they worked in the field of child rights, child protection or other actions for children.

7. Number of employees

40% of the CSOs that responded had more than 20 employees and 60% had less. 44.1% had between 5 and 20 employees. Only 16.9% had fewer than five employees. It seems, therefore, that the respondents were mostly from relatively large or well-established CSOs. This is not surprising considering that a significant number had their headquarters in the US, the UK or another developed country (see question 2) and many more were of a sufficient size to implement activities on behalf a UN agency (see question 8).

8. Which of the following statements best describe the relationship between your civil society organization and the United Nations:

Most CSOs stated that they were a cooperating partner or implementing partner or contractor or grant beneficiary in a project or programme supported by the UN. 68 respondents (18.8%) described themselves as an informal partner, having been invited to workshops, for example.

9. How much funding does the UN channel through your organization in an average year for use in the country selected under question 1?

27.5% (95) answered none. A small percentage (5.5%) received over $1million per year, and the remainder were in between, the average sum being most likely in the range of $50,000 to $100,000 per year.

10. How familiar are you with the work of the United Nations in the UN programme country mentioned in question 1?

Not surprisingly, most of the respondents (about 85%) were at least "somewhat familiar" with the UN. Only 15% said they were "slightly familiar" or "not familiar at all".

11. Do you know if the country mentioned in question 1 is a UN Delivering as One or self-starter country? (Delivering as One and self-starter countries are countries where the UN agencies have committed themselves to the principles of one leader, one programme, one budget, one office and one voice).

Most respondents (57.4%, or 200) did not know. Among the others, 28.2% answered yes, while 14.4% answered no. The fact that 42.6% *did* know is an indicator of being well-informed about the UN's work in the country.

12. In your opinion, is the UN a significant player in the country mentioned in question 1?

88.5% answered yes, and 11.5% answered no.

13. Is there a well-established civil society in the country mentioned in question 1?

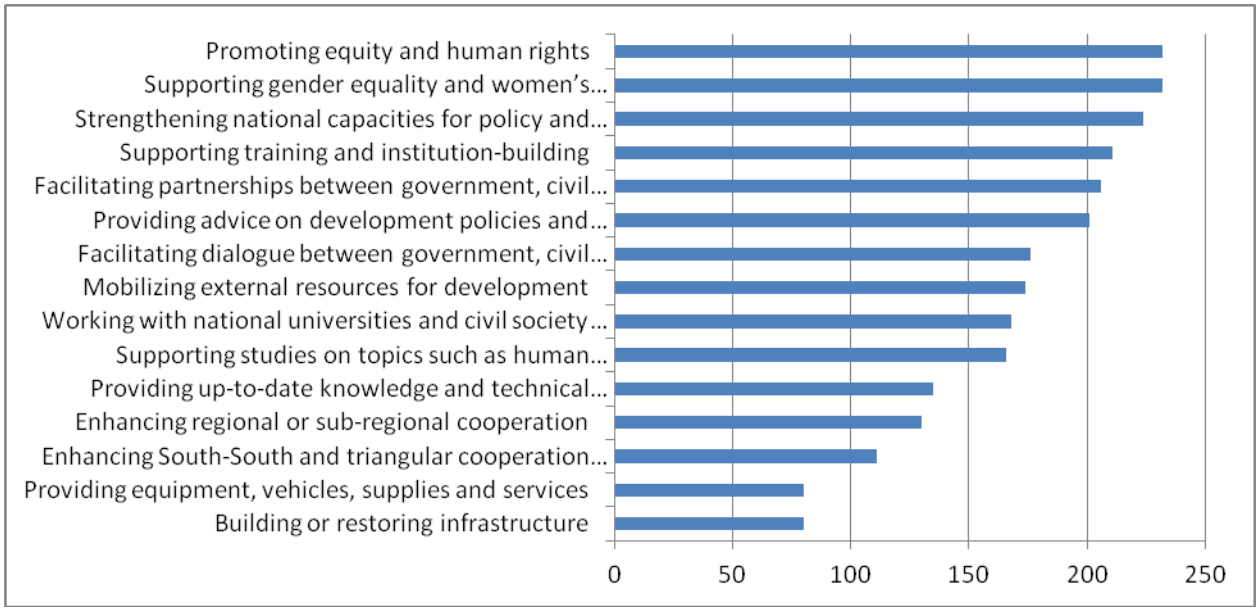
82.4% answered yes, and 17.6% answered no.

Topic 1 – Relevance

14. The following is a list of different types of support the UN may provide. Please check the types of support that in your opinion the UN should concentrate on providing to the country:

The chart below shows the number of times each "type" of support was selected by the CSOs. There was no limit on the number of "types" that each CSO could choose. When this chart is compared with the corresponding chart in the survey of Governments, the overall picture is of a remarkable similarity. Both emphasise actions in the area of capacity development, gender equality and human rights, and in both cases relatively low priority is placed on regional and sub-regional cooperation, south-south cooperation, providing equipment and supplies, and building or restoring infrastructure. The last mentioned items may nonetheless be very important in a minority of countries emerging from crisis. There was a slight difference of emphasis, as the CSOs put the most emphasis on the UN role in relation to human rights and gender equality while for Governments the most important was 'Strengthening national capacities for policy and strategy development.'

Chart 3. The following is a list of different types of support the UN may provide. Please check the types of support that in your opinion the UN should concentrate on providing to the country:

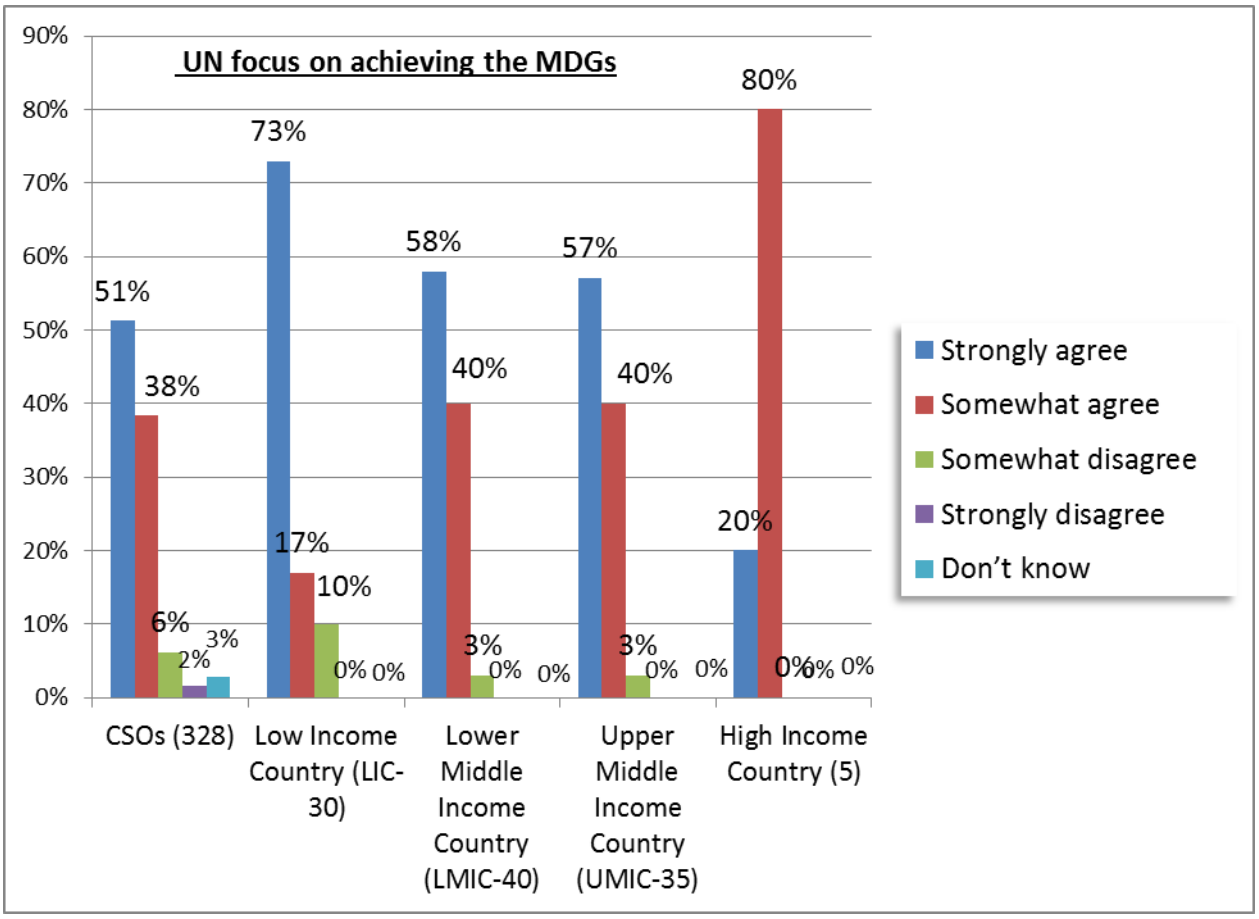


15. The efforts of the UN are focused to the maximum extent on assisting the country to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): *(The main*

areas of the MDGs are: end poverty and hunger, universal education, gender equality, child health, maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability and global partnership)

Both Governments and CSOs answered this question. The data are shown in the next chart.

Chart 4. UN focus on achieving the MDGs. Responses from the CSOs and Governments:

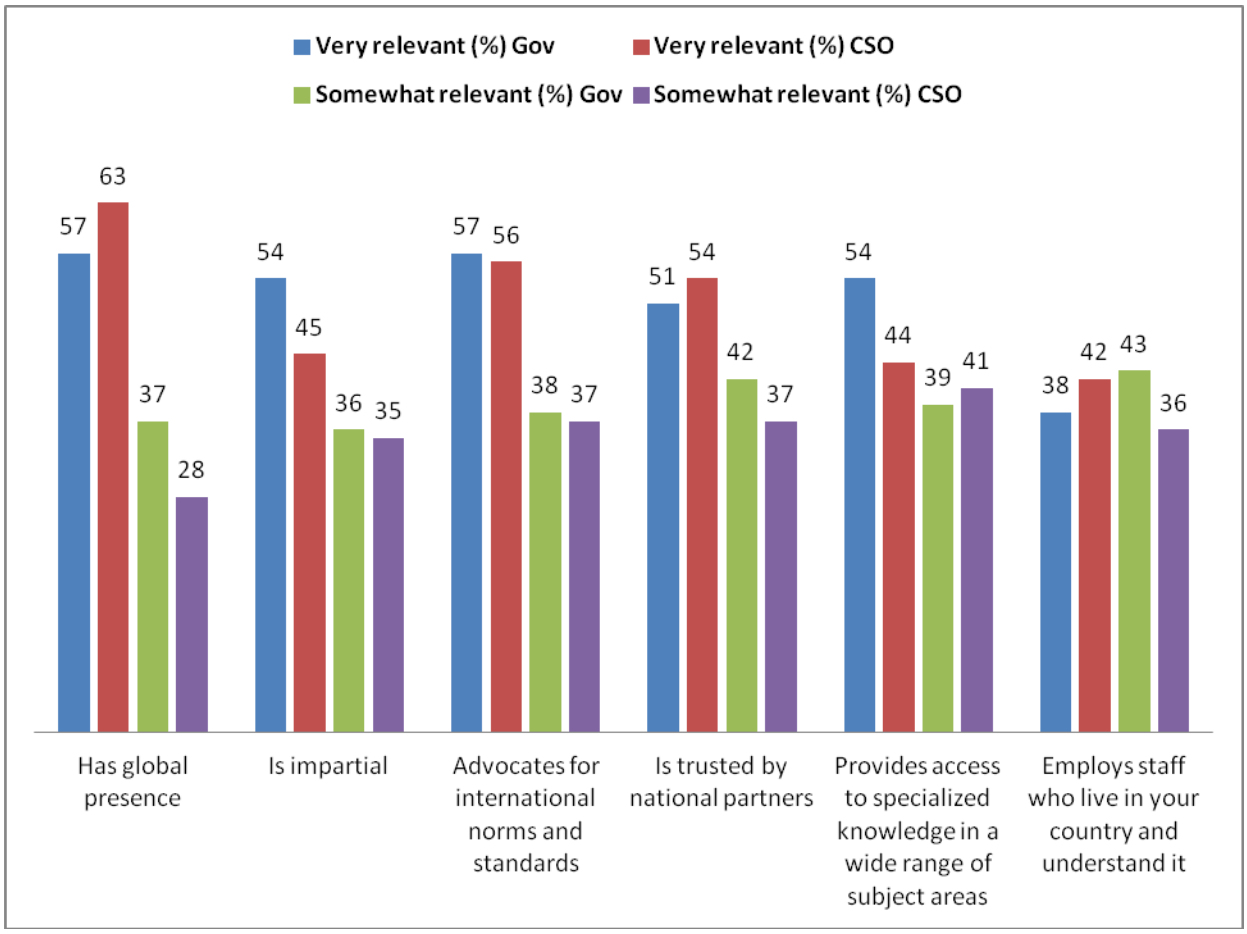


The chart suggests that the CSOs are somewhat less convinced than Governments that the UN's efforts are focused on achieving the MDGs. This appears to be consistent with the concerns expressed under other questions about UN agencies being focused too much on their own mandates and not enough on national priorities. At the same time, the responses to questions 33 to 35 (below) show that the CSOs consider the UN to be better aligned with national priorities than other external development partners.

16. How relevant are the following attributes of the UN in providing support for the country's development?

This question was also included in the surveys of both Governments and CSOs. Since nearly all respondents chose either very or somewhat relevant, the data for these responses is given in the chart below (all figures are in percentages):

Chart 5. How relevant are the following attributes of the UN in providing support for the country's development?



As can be seen, similar ratings were given to each of the suggested attributes, although Governments attached somewhat *less* importance to the employment of staff who live in the country. At the same time, several countries took the opportunity to add, in the comment box, 'supports national capacity development' as another attribute. As compared with CSOs, Governments emphasised impartiality and providing access to specialized knowledge more often, while CSOs particularly highlighted the UN's global presence.

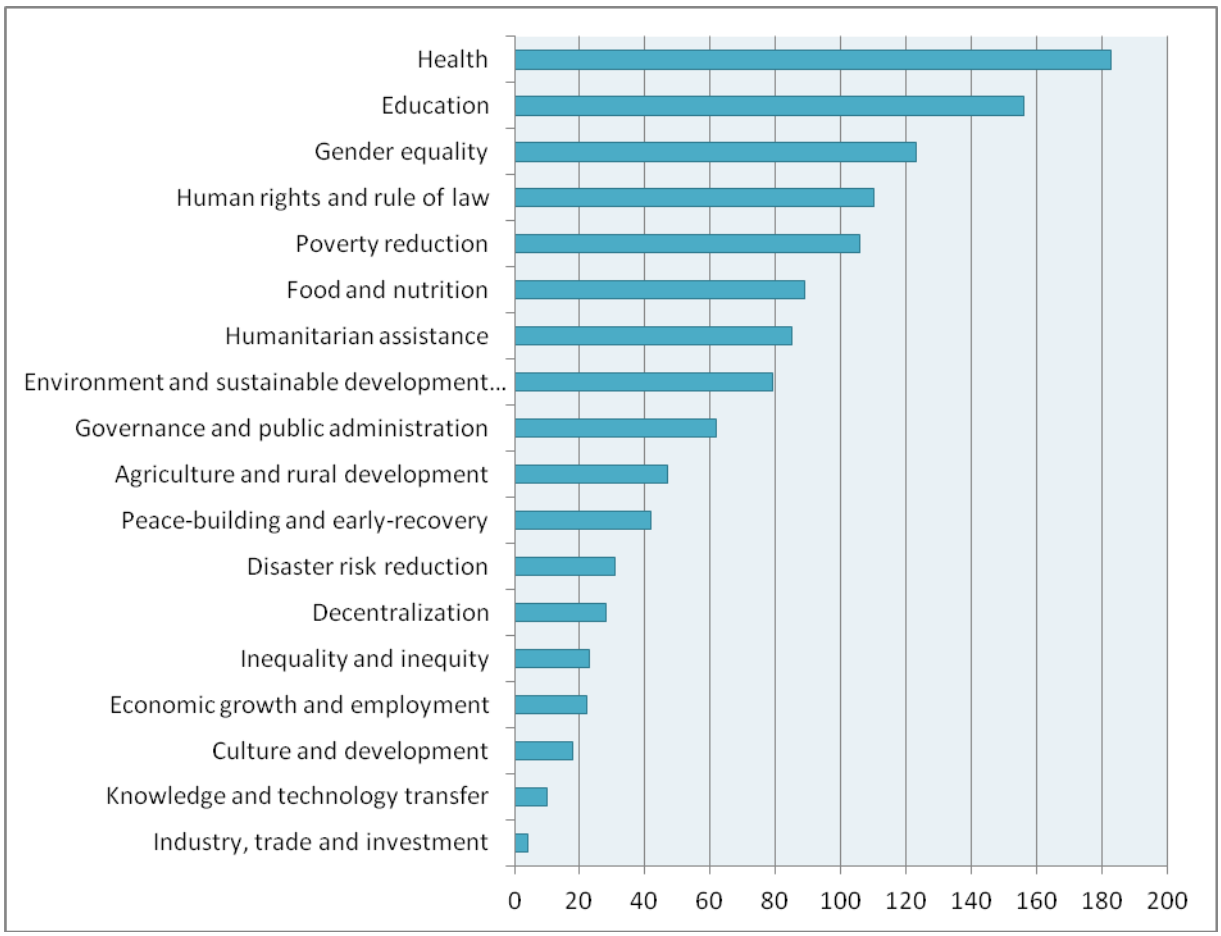
There was a negligible difference between the Government and CSO perceptions on the topic of advocating for international norms and standards. This finding is consistent with the results presented under question 14 above, where little difference was seen in how the relevance of the UN's work on human rights was assessed.

Topic 2 – Effectiveness

17. From the following list please select up to five areas where the UN contribution to the country has been especially significant:

The responses to this question are shown in the chart below. Perhaps understandably, the areas where the CSOs see a significant contribution by the UN tend to be the areas in which they themselves are active, as reported in question 6 above. The top five thematic areas are the same, although in a different order. Environment comes quite far down, although it features at the top of the Government lists (questions 11 and 29 of the Government survey). Similarly governance and public administration comes much lower on the CSO list than on the Government lists. Thus, the data below are likely to be more a reflection of the areas of UN work that the respondents were familiar with than an objective indicator of the UN's relative performance in the areas mentioned.

Chart 6. From the following list please select up to five areas where the UN contribution to the country has been especially significant:



18. In order to achieve good results in the country, the UN is collaborating as much as possible with civil society organizations in implementing programmes and projects:

The overall responses are shown in the chart below. They reflect a generally positive view of the subject, perhaps not surprising as most of the CSOs could be viewed as beneficiaries of collaboration with the UN. The data would also allow it to be said, however, that a majority of the respondents either disagreed with the statement or were only mildly in agreement. It may be instructive therefore to explore any areas of concern. In this regard, the respondents were specifically invited to use the comment box to describe any constraints encountered in collaboration with the UN in the implementation of programmes and projects. Several respondents mentioned heavy or inflexible or non-transparent procedures, and some mentioned that the UN needs to make more efforts to find out what CSOs exist and what they are capable of doing.

Chart 7. In order to achieve good results in the country, the UN is collaborating as much as possible with civil society organizations in implementing programmes and projects:

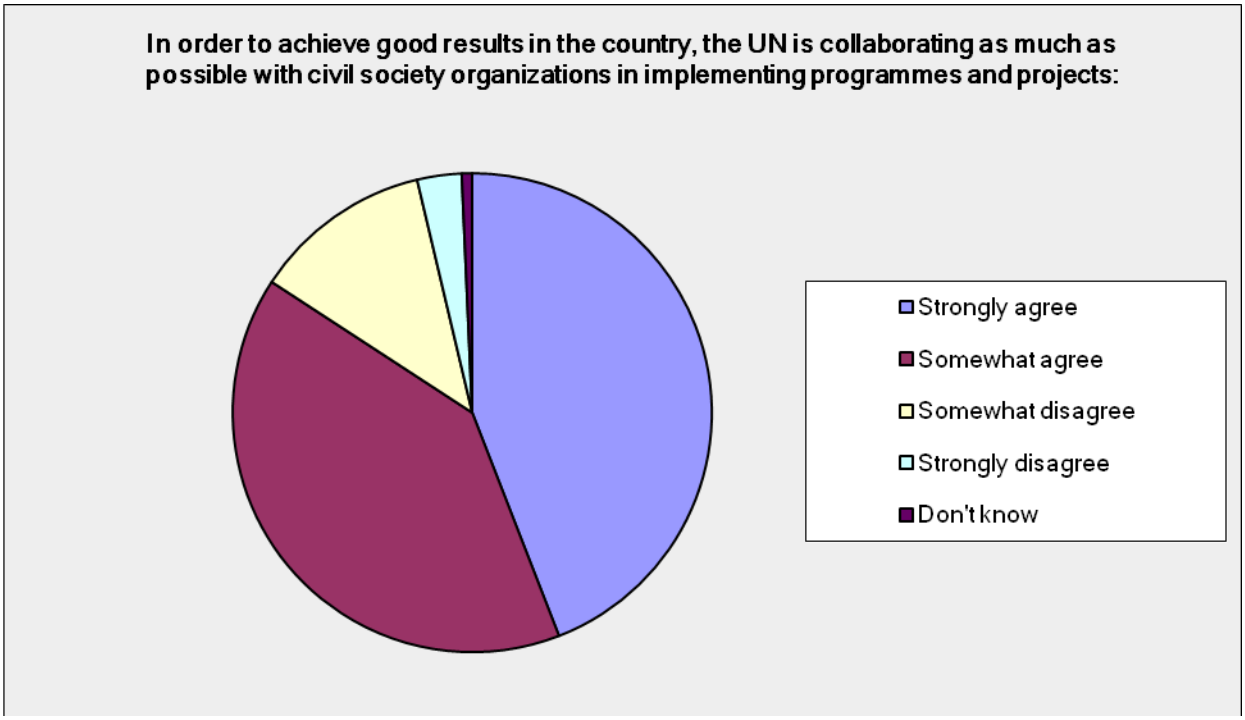
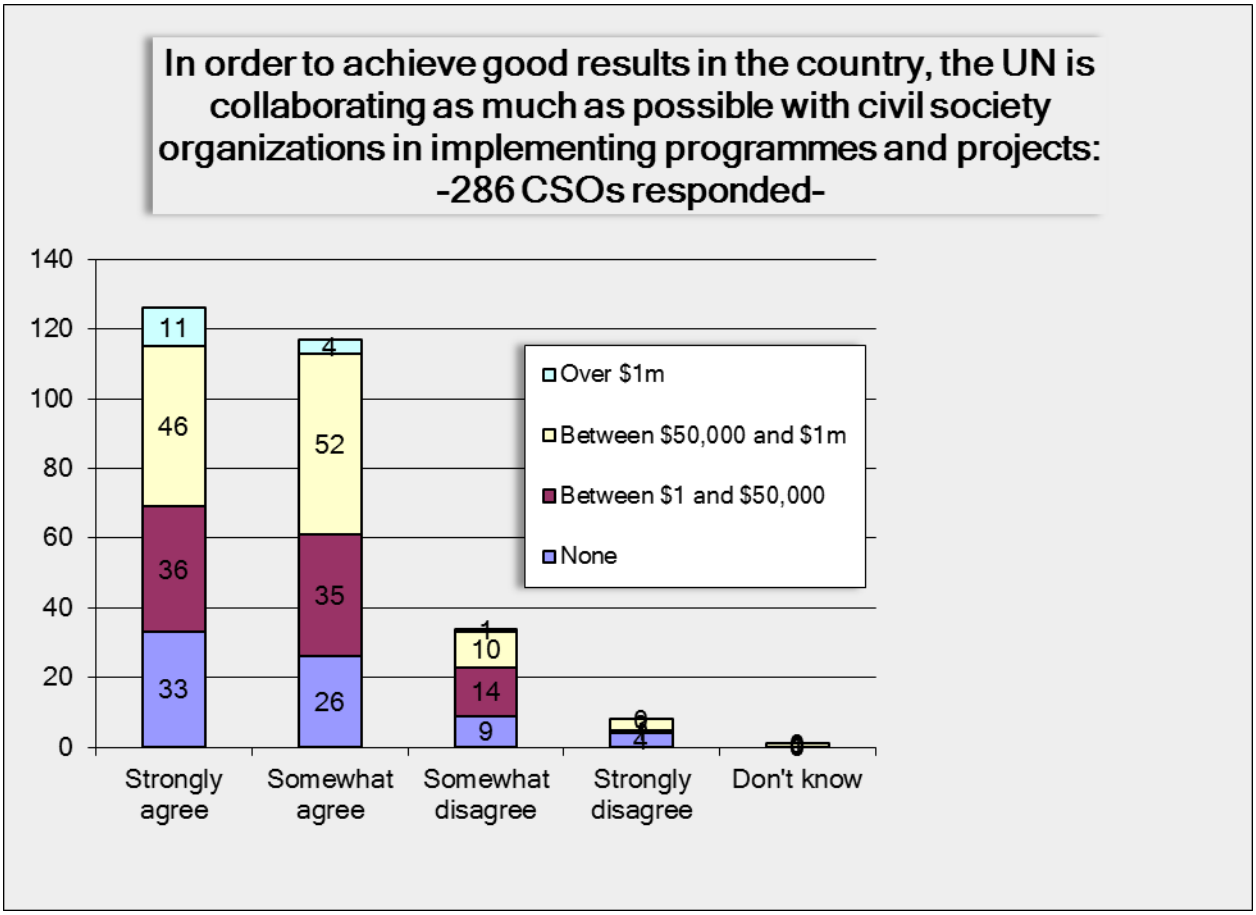
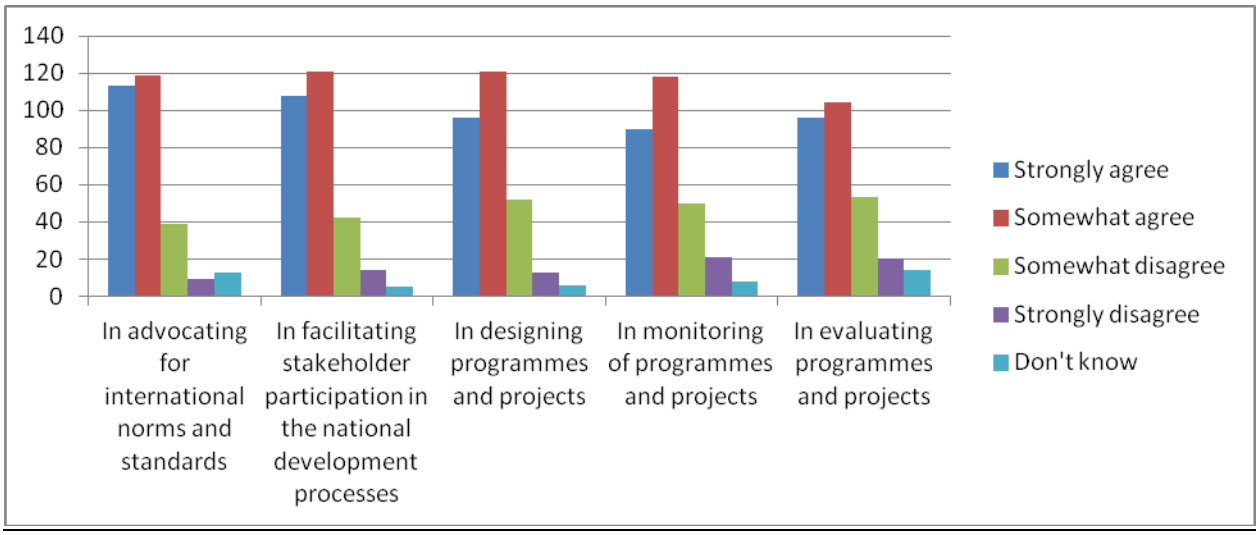


Chart 8. In order to achieve good results in the country, the UN is collaborating as much as possible with civil society organizations in implementing programmes and projects – according to the level of funding received from the UN:



19. From your observations, the UN involves civil society organizations as much as possible in undertaking the following activities:

Chart 9. From your observations, the UN involves civil society organizations as much as possible in undertaking the following activities:

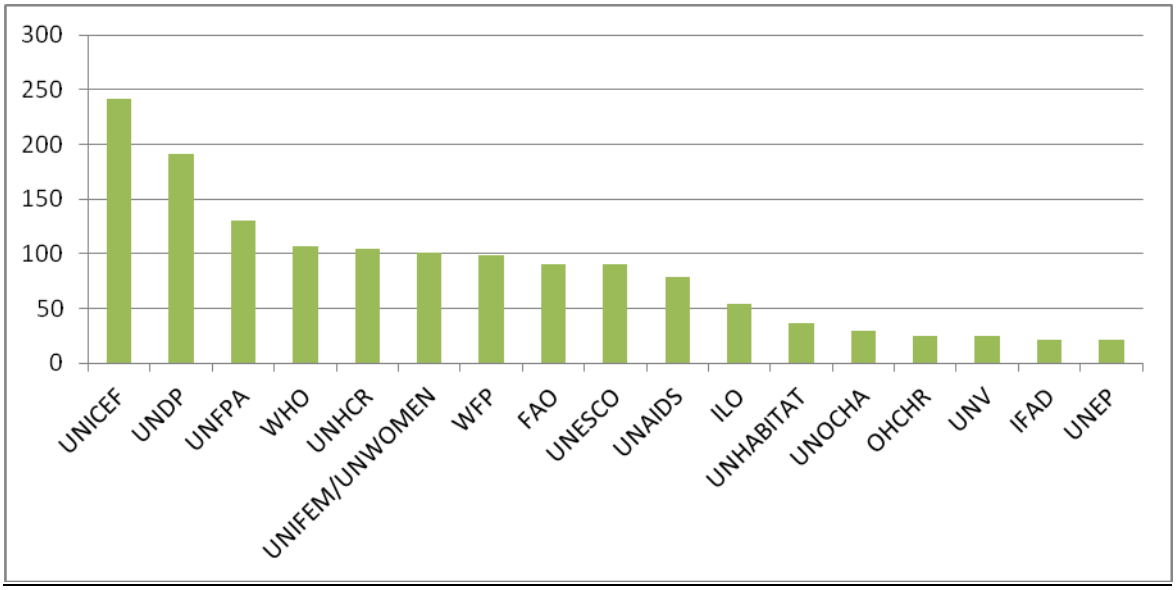


The chart shows that about one-third of the respondents fully agreed with each of the above statements. The others disagreed or were lukewarm in their agreement. Thus, in all cases, "somewhat agree" was the most frequently chosen response. Overall, the above responses were somewhat more positive than the Government responses on the corresponding question, but still not very positive. Taken along with responses to other questions in the survey, for example question 22, the overall conclusion is that respondents believe the UN could be doing more to use and to strengthen national capacities.

20. Please check in the list below the UN agencies that, from your observations, make effective use of the resources and capacities of NGOs in delivering their support in the country:

The chart below shows the responses from the CSOs. The y-axis shows the number of times an agency was checked by the respondents. The agencies along the x-axis are those that were mentioned at least 20 times. The overall impression given by these selections is clearly favourable to the UN, especially to those agencies mentioned frequently. Too much should not be read into this data, however, considering that most of the CSOs receive funds from one or more UN agencies (see question 9).

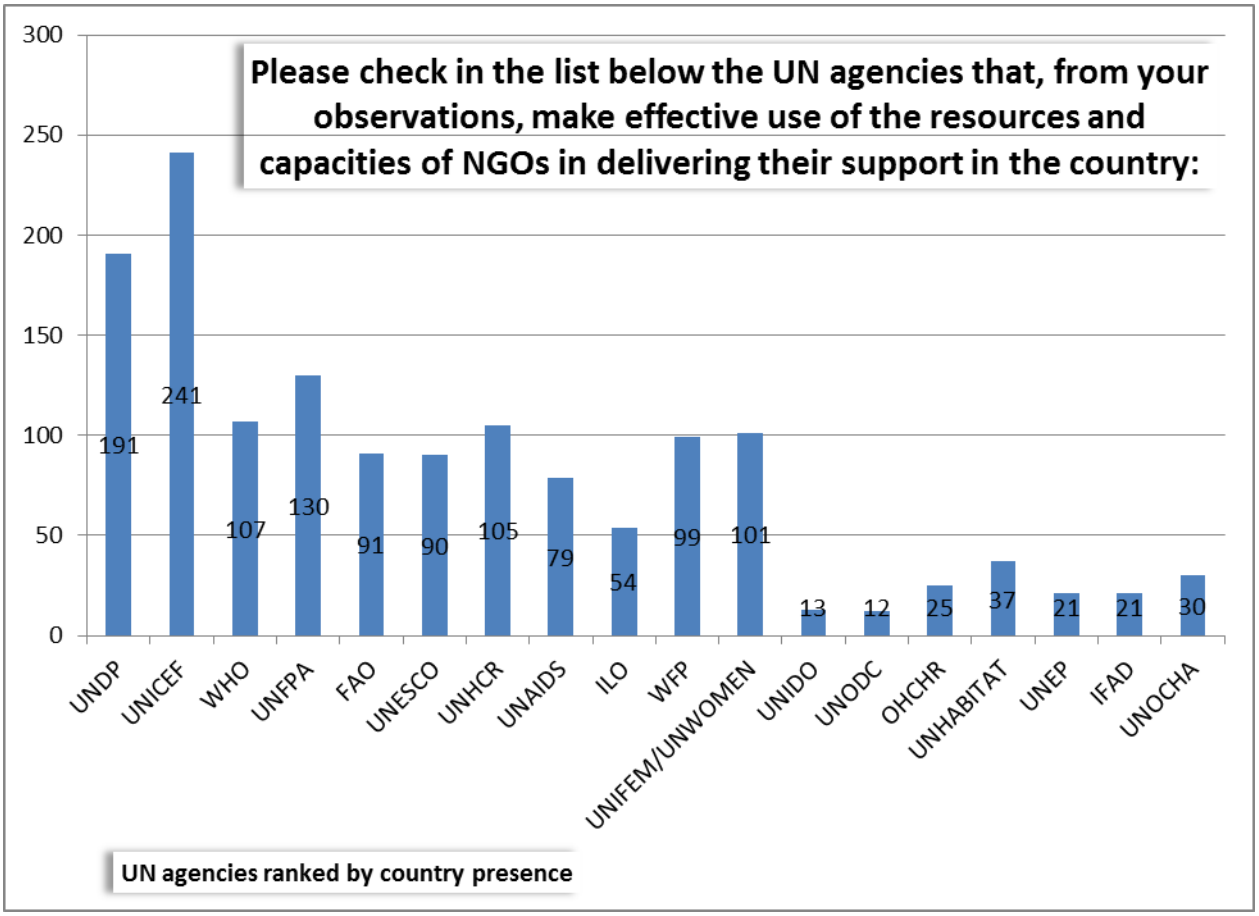
Chart 10. Please check in the list below the UN agencies that, from your observations, make effective use of the resources and capacities of NGOs in delivering their support in the country:



The above chart should not be used to judge the relative performance of UN agencies. Some agencies are present in fewer countries than others; for example, the operations of WFP are concentrated in countries where there is a need for humanitarian assistance. The following chart shows the same data with the UN agencies ranked according to the extent of country presence. The 'country presence' is defined in the same way as was done in the analysis of the results of the programme country government survey. Thus it is defined as the number of UN country teams that an agency is a member of, as reported in the 2010 RC Annual Report produced by the Development Operations Coordination Office (DOCO).

However, it would be hazardous to use even this "corrected" chart to judge the relative performance of UN agencies. Although the chart suggests that some UN agencies stand out relative to others, there could well be a bias considering that many of the CSOs enjoy a financial relationship with one or more of the UN agencies, and providing financial support would be a key way of making use of a CSO's capacities.

Chart 11. Please check in the list below the UN agencies that, from your observations, make effective use of the resources and capacities of NGOs in delivering their support in the country. UN agencies ranked by country presence:



21. Please suggest ways the UN could engage more effectively with civil society organizations at the country level:

220 respondents offered suggestions. They are reproduced in the annex, and are a rich source of ideas on how to engage more efectively. A response that sums up many of the comments is quoted below:

"The UN must consider the civil society organizations as the actual development partners not simply as implementing organizations; it means implicate civil society organizations in all process of elaborating the program, implementing program, monitoring and evaluating program. The UN must strengthen institutional capacities of civil society organizations not only financing their projects. The UN must implicate civil society organizations during meeting with government agencies on national strategies and policies. Civil society organizations are nearer population than government agencies, and they are supposed to know well community problems, so the UN must take in consideration needs of civil society organizations on communities instead of limiting to the government."

Many CSOs also expressed concerns about lack of impartiality by the UN and Governments in selecting the CSOs that they engage with: they urged that selection processes be transparent and competitive.

22. To become more effective in your country, how important is it for the UN to take the following measures?

A similar question was asked in the survey of Governments. The responses to both surveys are shown in the charts below. Many of the suggested measures were the same in both surveys, but three more possible measures were included in the CSO survey. One of these was: 'Facilitate a more active dialogue among development partners on national development challenges.' This was rated the most highly of all by the CSOs, and it echoes comments made elsewhere in the CSO survey.

Another of the measures that was only in the CSO survey was 'Pay more attention to the development of national capacities', and this was the third most highly rated. Although there was no corresponding item in the Government survey, there were other questions on capacity development in that survey, which revealed that Governments want the UN to pay more attention to developing national capacities. In other words, the Governments and CSO responses reinforce each other. Some CSOs clarified their concerns, suggesting that UN agencies are sometimes too much involved in implementation, which could be done by others, creating competition instead of complementarity between the UN and CSOs. Moreover it was sometimes seen as a conflict of interest when UN agencies play the roles of both funder and implementer.

Chart 12. Importance of measures to increase the UN's effectiveness - according to CSOs:

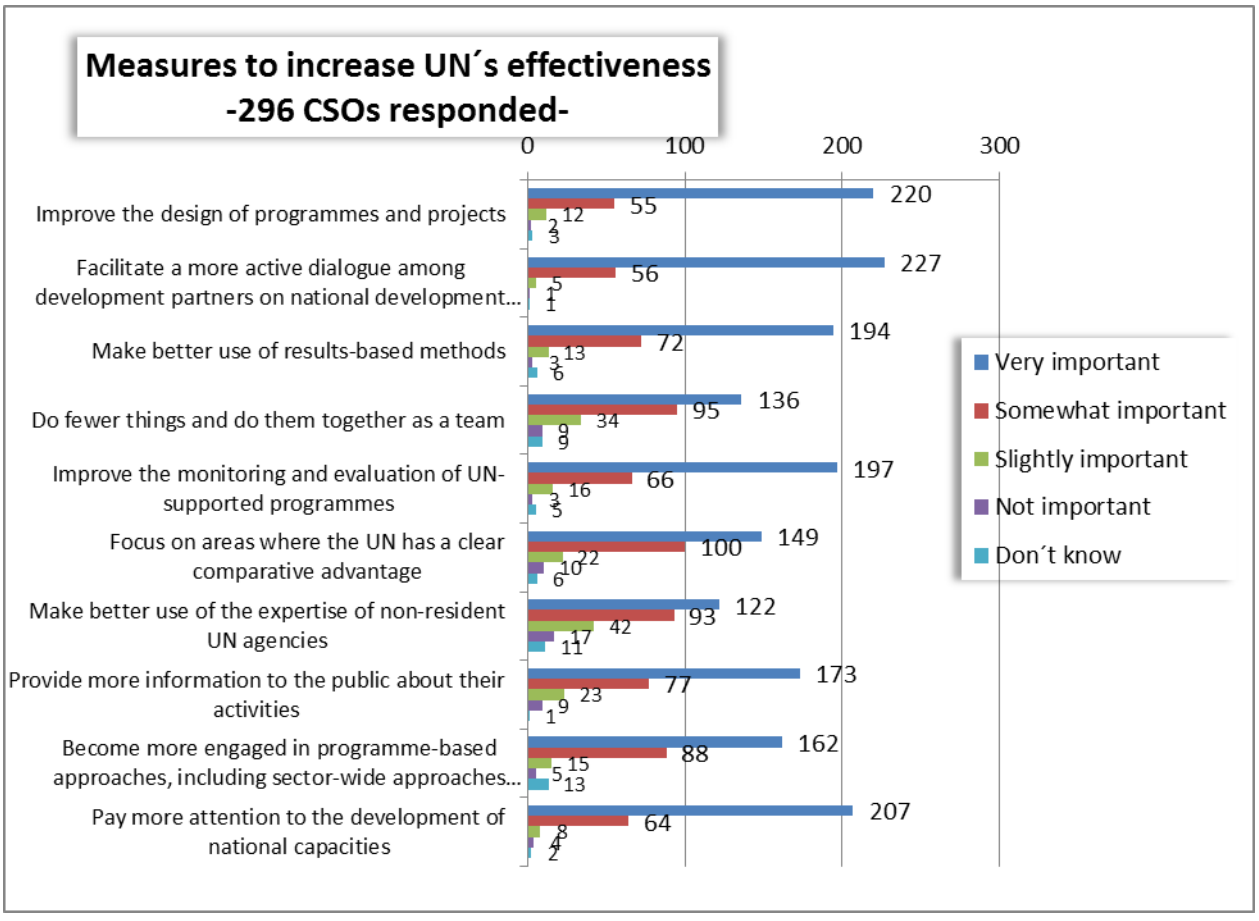
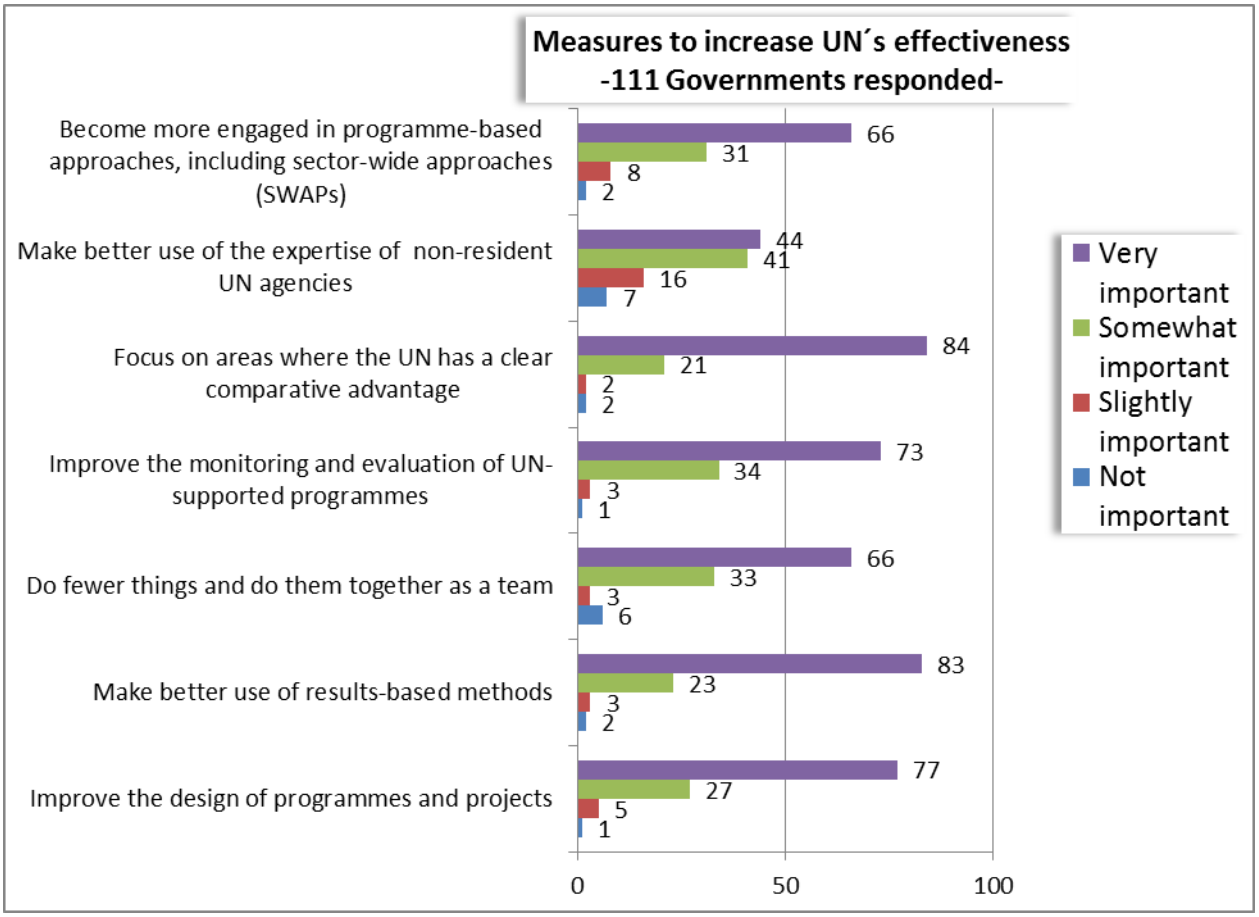


Chart 13. Importance of measures to increase the UN's effectiveness - according to Governments:



Comparing the two charts shown above, it can be seen that the CSOs are much less interested than Governments in seeing the UN become more focused. In several other areas, however, there is much in common between the CSO and the Government responses. There is very strong support from both groups for improving design of programmes and projects, using results-based methods, and improving monitoring and evaluation.

23. Please suggest any additional measures the UN could take to make itself more effective in the country

143 respondents made a wide variety of suggestions under this heading. The suggestions are reproduced in full in the annex. Many respondents reiterated points made in answer to previous questions, such as calling for better use to be made of local capacities (including CSOs) for project implementation. For example, one stated: "The UN agencies should reduce their involvement in implementation of programs and remain as facilitators (donors). Their involvement in direct implementation causes conflict of interest with certain partners. It is difficult to work together and

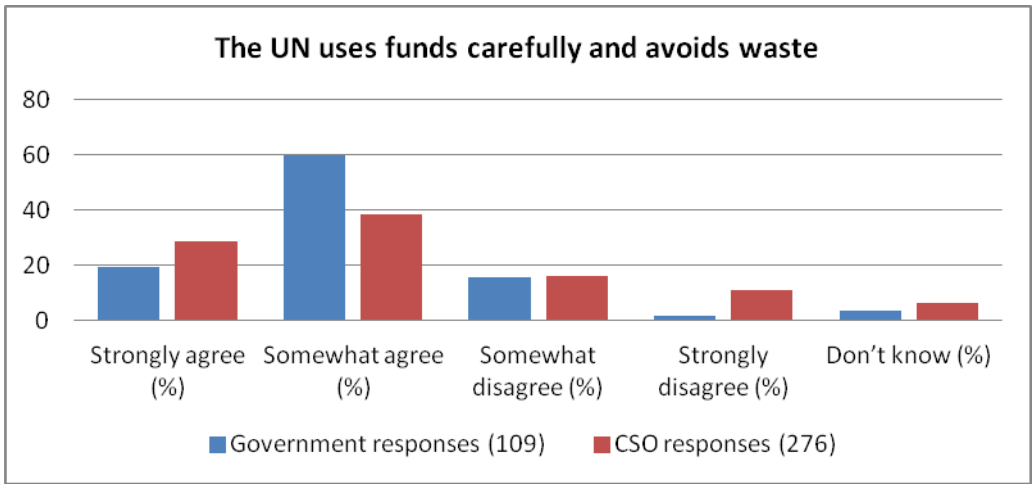
compete in different spheres at the same time." Respondents called on the UN system to make long-term commitments in order to build capacities and ensure sustainability. They also asked for be more visibility and transparency.

Topic 3 – Efficiency

24. From my observations, the UN uses funds economically and avoids unnecessary or wasteful expenditures in this country

This question was asked in both the Government and CSO surveys. The results are shown side-by-side in the chart below. As was the case with several other questions, the responses from Governments and CSOs are quite similar, thereby reinforcing the messages they convey.

Chart 14. The UN uses of funds:



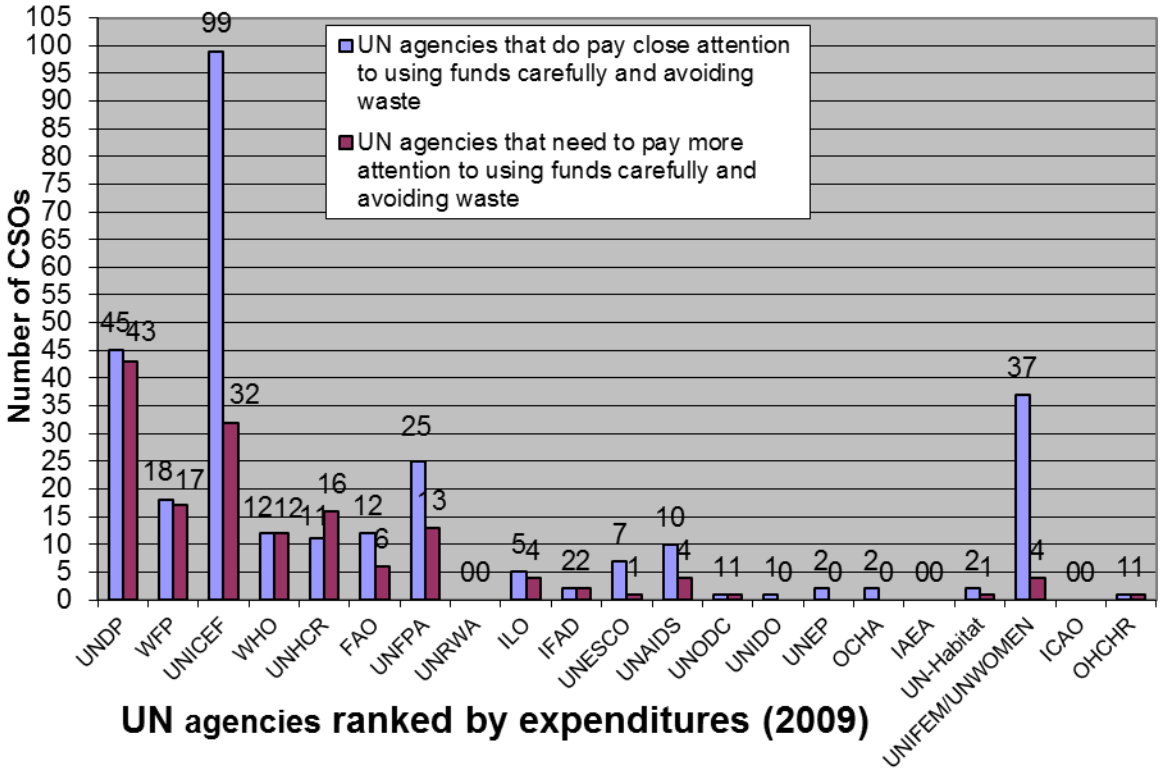
The main message from the chart seems to be that most Governments and CSOs believe only to a moderate degree that the UN "uses funds carefully and avoids waste." Taken together with the fact that 17.4% of Governments and 26.8% of CSOs either somewhat or strongly disagree, it may be concluded that there is significant room for improvement.

25. Please mention below any UN agencies that, from your observations, pay close attention to using funds carefully and avoiding waste; and

26. Please mention below any agencies that, from your observations, need to pay more attention to using funds carefully and avoiding waste.

214 CSOs responded to the first question while 179 responded to the second question. The number of times each agency was cited in response to these two questions is shown in the chart below:

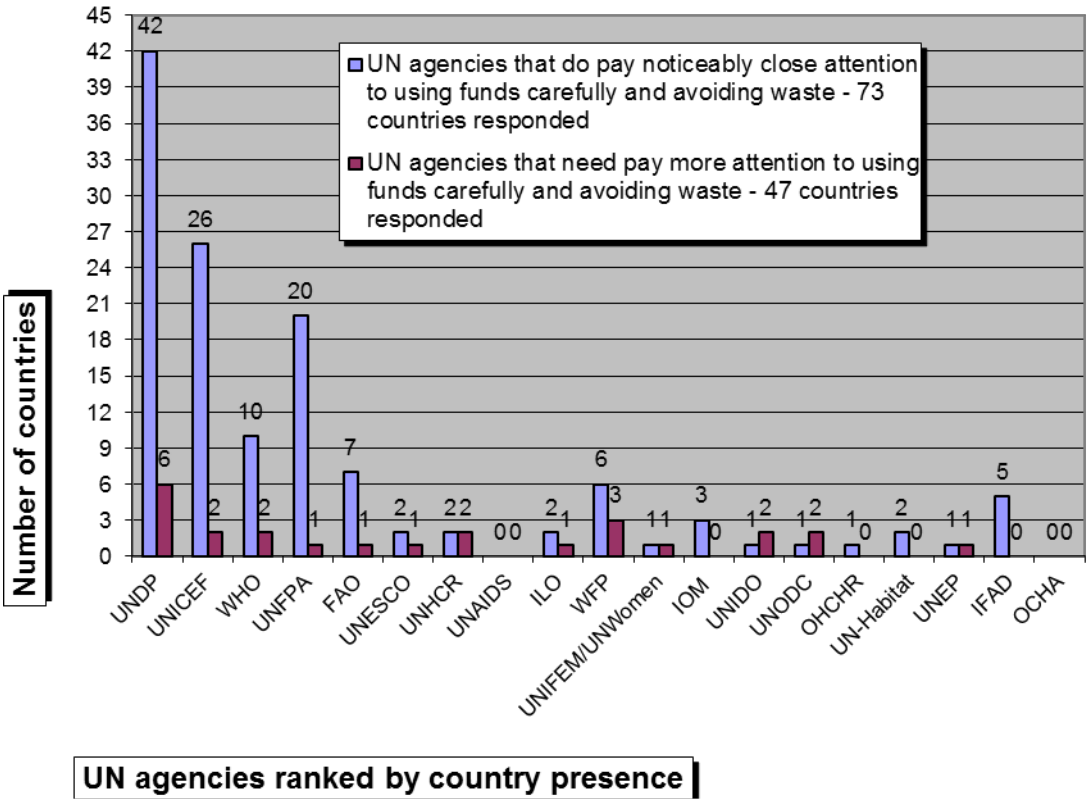
Chart 15. Using funds carefully - UN agencies listed by global expenditures:



In this question, as with the corresponding questions in the programme country Government survey, the respondent had to write the name or names of the chosen agencies individually in the comment box: it was not simply a matter of clicking on a button. In terms of interpreting the results, the frequency of mentioning an agency was evidently related to the extent of country presence of the agencies, and the extent to which a respondent was familiar with the work of an agency.

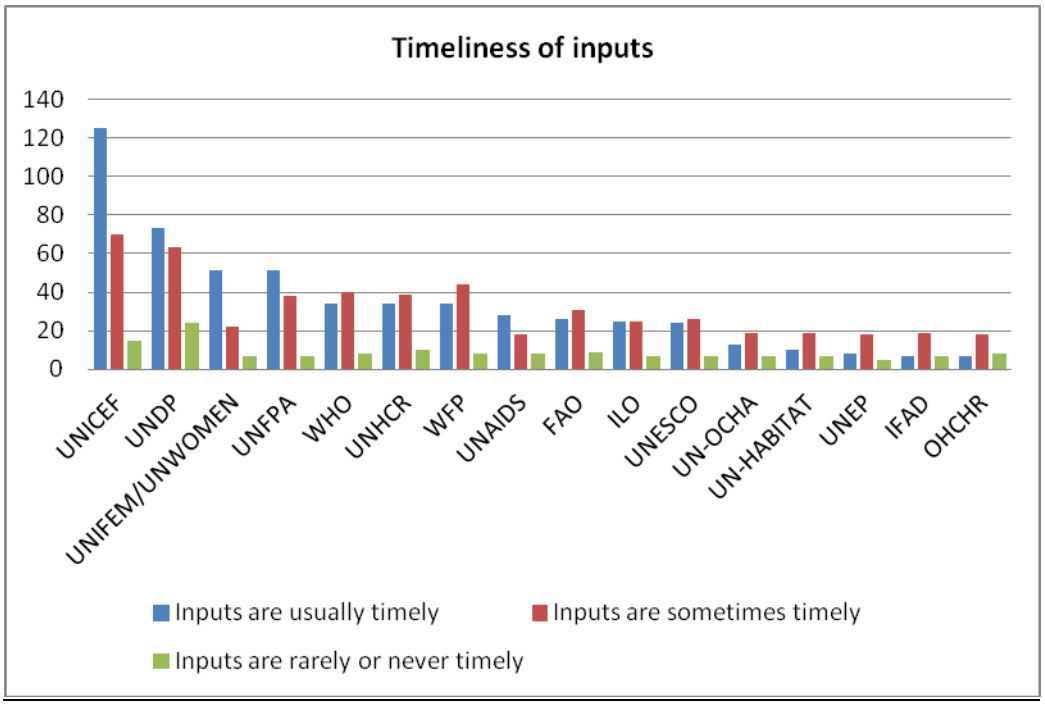
Comparing the above data with the responses from Governments, it appears that CSOs were more disposed to mention agencies negatively as well as positively. In terms of the ratio between favourable and unfavourable mentions, UNICEF and UN-Women stand out with very high ratios. However, as with the responses to question 20, it would be hazardous to use this data to judge the relative performance of UN agencies considering that many of the CSOs enjoy a financial relationship with one or more UN agencies. A higher degree of confidence could be placed in the results where they are corroborated by the results of the survey of programme country Governments. The corresponding chart from the Government survey is shown below:

Chart 16. Using funds carefully – according to Governments:



27. From your observations, please indicate how timely the UN agencies are in providing inputs such as support to operational costs, advisers and equipment for development activities: *Please check only the agencies for which you have good information, and skip the others.*

Chart 17. Timeliness of inputs:



The above chart shows the number of times each UN agency was selected according to each option: usually, sometimes or rarely/never. Only those agencies that were checked at least 30 times are included in the chart. It may be considered a favourable result if an agency was rated "usually" more often than the combined score for sometimes and rarely/never. On this yardstick, UNICEF and UN-Women received the most favourable scores, followed by UNFPA and UNAIDS. Size alone, or extent of country presence, are clearly not the main factors; UN-Women would be placed much lower if that was the case.

A similar question was asked in the survey of Governments. Using the same yardstick, the Governments assessed most UN agencies favourably, with UNICEF, UN-Women, UNFPA and UNAIDS again standing out, while UNDP and WHO also had noticeably favourable scores. As in the case of questions 25 and 26, overall the Governments tended to rate UN agencies more positively than CSOs did.

28. There is a significant amount of duplication among the activities of UN agencies in this country:

This question was asked in both the Government and CSO surveys, and the results are shown in the table below:

Table 1. Duplication among UN activities - Government responses and CSO responses:

There is a significant amount of duplication among UN activities in the country:	Strongly agree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Somewhat disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Don't know (%)
All Government responses (108)	13.9	33.3	34.3	14.8	3.7
CSO responses (270)	16.7	38.1	22.2	11.5	11.5

The above table suggests that CSOs are more aware of duplication among UN agencies than Governments are, although more CSOs also checked "don't know".

29. Do the UN agencies sometimes compete with each other for donor funding for projects?

The responses to this question are set out in the table below. The identical question was asked in the survey of Governments and in the survey of RCs and UNCT members, so the responses are shown together. It is perhaps not surprising that CSOs are the least aware of UN agencies competing for donor funding, while UN agencies themselves are most aware of it.

Table 2. Do the UN agencies sometimes compete with each other for donor funding for projects?

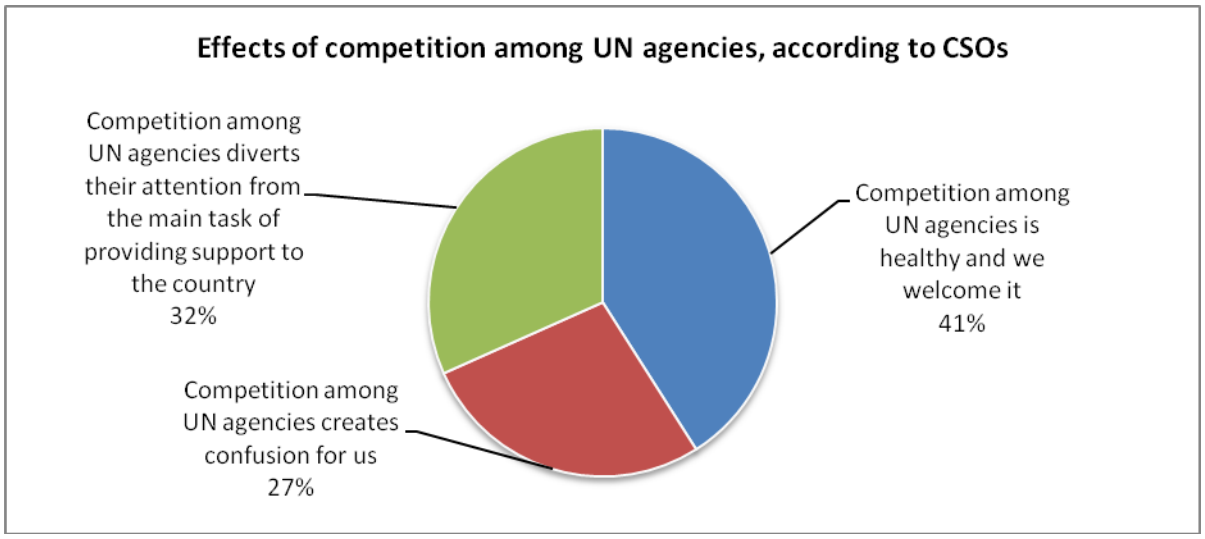
Do UN agencies sometimes compete with each other for donor funding?	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know[2] (%)
CSO responses (282)	29.1	17.4	53.5
Government responses (108)	49.1	44.4	6.5
RC and UNCT responses (501)	78.6	21.4	0

[2] The 'Don't know' option was not available in the Government survey. However, six countries used the comment box to state that they did not know. These responses are incorporated in the table. The fact that these six countries all took the trouble to do this, instead of just skipping the question, is testimony to a meticulous approach to the survey on the part of the Government respondents.

30. If the answer to question 29 was Yes, please check all of the following statements that apply:

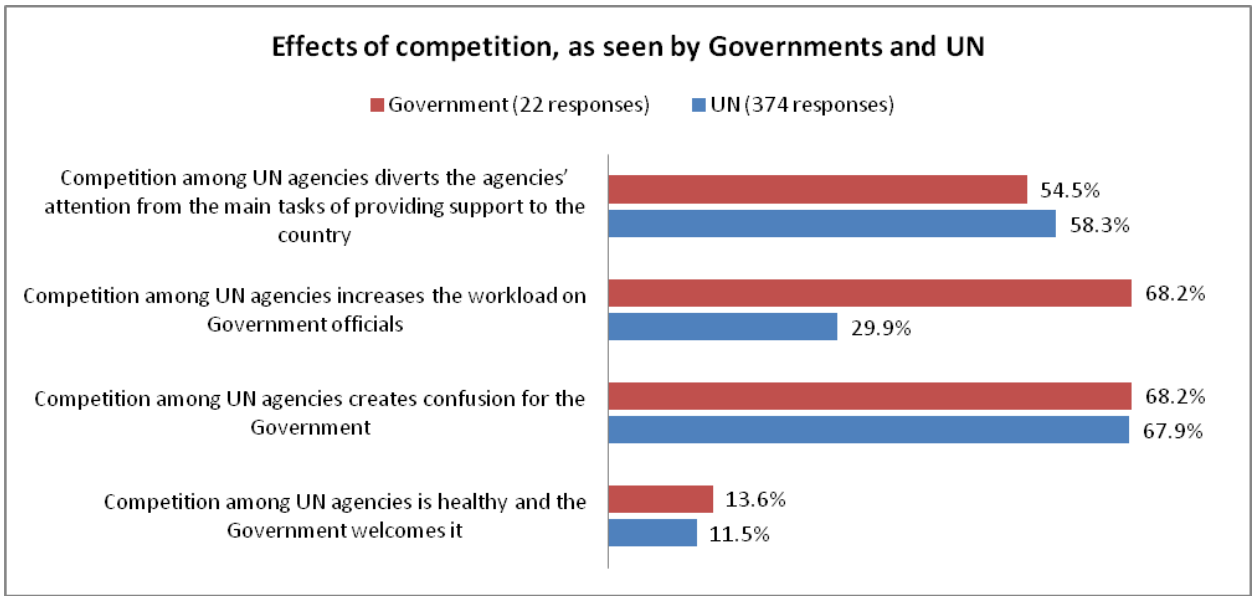
The responses to this question are shown in the chart below. It should be noted that question 30 was intended to be answered only by the respondents who stated that they were aware of UN competition: that is, by the 82 out of the 282 respondents who answered Yes to question 29. However, at least 28 of the 147 responses came from individuals who answered question 29 with Don't know, and a further 10 came from respondents who answered No. Since it was possible to check more than one of the response options, a few respondents also checked more than one option. Altogether, 147 responses were received.

Chart 18. Effects of competition among UN agencies:



A similar follow-up question was asked in the survey of Governments and in the survey of RCs and UNCT members. However, the responses were very different. The main difference was that, while nearly all government and UN respondents characterized the competition as unhelpful, over 40% of the CSO respondents appear to welcome it if UN agencies compete for donor funding. The responses from Governments and UN agencies are shown below:

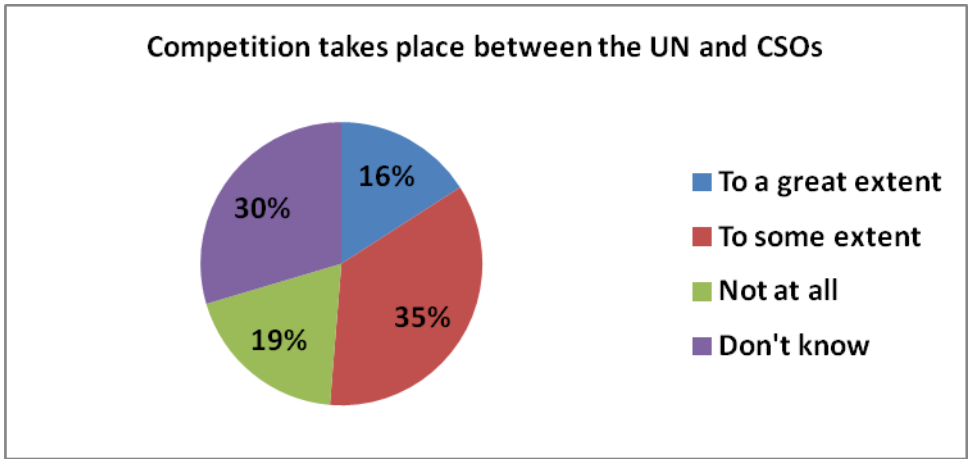
Chart 19. Effects of competition among UN agencies – according to Governments and UN agencies:



31. UN agencies compete with non-governmental organizations for donor funding for projects:

This question aimed to assess the extent to which the UN and CSOs are in competition with each other for donor funding. 277 CSOs answered the question, and the responses were as follows:

Chart 20. Extent of competition between UN agencies and CSOs:



It may be concluded that competition between the UN and CSOs is widespread. There is evidence that some donors look upon both UN agencies and CSOs as potential implementing agencies for projects that they fund.

32. Please suggest any steps the UN could take to make itself more efficient in the country:

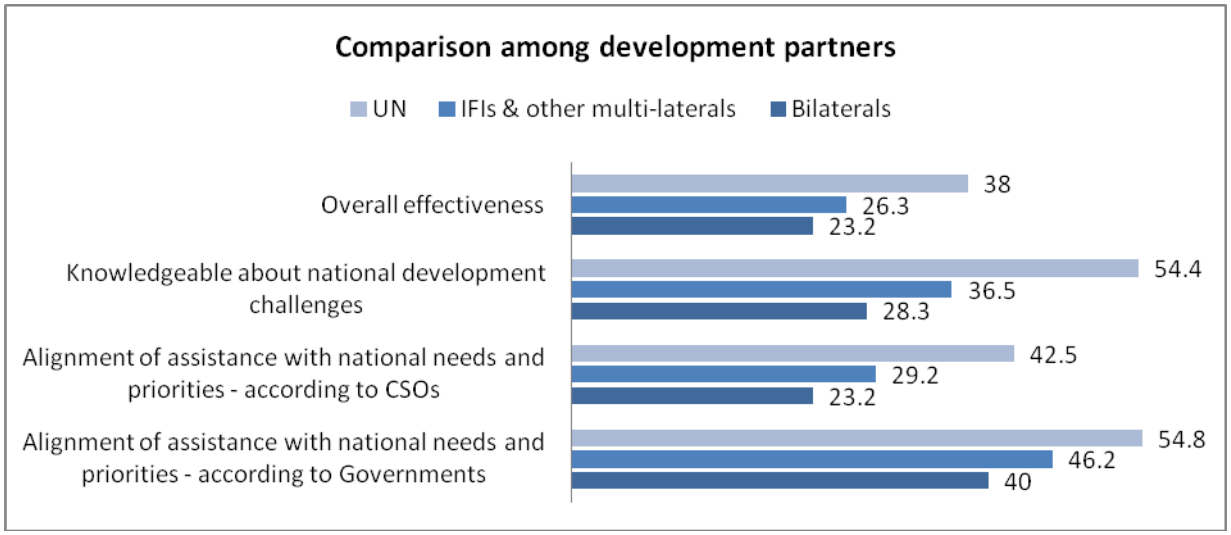
142 respondents offered suggestions under this heading. The suggestions are reproduced in full in the annex. Many respondents reiterated comments made under the previous open-ended questions. Some respondents called for more UN coherence, such as: "The UN should speak with one voice and have a clear mandate amongst them. Their outright competition raises many eyebrows and affects the overall humanitarian and development assistance." Other respondents mentioned more monitoring and evaluation, simpler procedures, and more attention to being impartial and neutral.

Topic 4 – Comparison among development partners

33 – 35. Please rate the main groups of development partners on the scale 1 to 3 (with 1 as closely aligned) on the following criteria:

The chart below shows the percentage of CSO respondents who gave each category of partner the most favourable rating (very effective, very knowledgeable or very well aligned) out of three levels of agreement (very, somewhat and not at all). The topic of alignment was also included in a similar set of questions in the survey of Governments, so the Government responses to that question are also shown.

Chart 21. Comparison among development partners:



The first point to be noted is that the UN was seen by the CSO respondents as more effective (the full question was: 'How effective is each development partner in helping the country to overcome its development challenges?'), better informed, and more closely aligned with national needs and priorities than the other categories of development partner.

The second point is the CSOs rank the external partners in the same order on all three questions: UN followed by IFIs and other multi-laterals, followed by bilaterals. On the specific question of alignment, the Governments ranked the partners the same way, but rated all partners as considerably more aligned than the CSOs did. The CSOs did not make sufficient comments that would help to clearly understand the different perception on the part of CSOs to that of Governments. Some CSOs did mention, however, that they saw the UN and other partners as focused too much on their own priorities and not enough on the country's priorities.