



2011 ECOSOC operational activities segment- Panel III
“Strengthening the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator: role of accountability frameworks, resources and results reporting”
Thursday, 15 July, 3:30 - 6:00 pm
Conference Room XIX, Building E, The Palais des Nations, Geneva

Concept Note

Background

When it conducted its 2007 Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of UN’s operational activities, the General Assembly recognized “the central role of resident coordinators in making possible the coordination of United Nations operational activities for development at the country level to improve the effectiveness of their response to the national development priorities of programme countries, including through appropriate resources and accountability”¹.

The resident coordinator performs several functions to ensure the strategic focus and coherence of UN operational activities for development and accountability to the government. The resident coordinator represents and acts as liaison between the government and the Secretary-General and United Nations country teams (UNCTs) as a whole, including non-resident agencies. The resident coordinator also leads in the development of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), takes the final decision on its strategic focus and mobilizes resources for the Framework. S/He coordinates the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Framework, and reports on its results, notably to the government.

Over the years, continuous efforts have been made to create an enabling environment for the RC to discharge effectively these important responsibilities. These include the adoption of the Management and Accountability System (MAS) in 2008, which defines the responsibilities of the multiple tiers in the UN system in supporting the RC. The MAS also envisages the establishment a “functional firewall”, which delineates the duties of the RC and the day-to-day management responsibilities for UNDP by creating UNDP

¹ Paragraph 90, UN General Assembly resolution 62/208

Country Directors. The report of the Secretary-General and the recent review of the MAS revealed positive progress on the firewall.

Nevertheless, the systemic and other challenges continue to constrain the lead role of the RC in country-level coordination.

First, reporting on UNDAF results remains to be improved. UNDAF reporting is an important way to ensure the RC and UNCT members' accountability to the government. The RC is expected to lead the annual review of the UNDAF and the preparation of the UNDAF report for the whole UNDAF cycle. Thus, it is also an important dimension of RC's lead role in coordination. Recent analysis suggests that these have not been done widely. Reporting to national government was still mostly informal. Very few UNCTs have indicated progress in reporting to the government.

Second, the RC coordinates with limited authority. The UN country team which the RC coordinates consists of representatives of UN agencies, who are directly accountable to their own organizations. There are no supervisory relations between the RC and the members of the UN country team. The RC thus defines and pursues the agenda of the United Nations country team through a consensual process in the context of UNDAF. The RC has no role in the development of agency-specific programmes/projects, which are sometimes not sufficiently anchored in the UNDAF. It should also be noted that the RC is not officially accredited to the government as are the representatives of UN agencies.

Third, the mutual accountability in the country team on results achieved in UNDAFs needs to be materialized. In the absence of direct line of accountability, alternative arrangements have been made to ensure mutual accountability between the RC and members of the UN country team. For example, the job description of agency representatives is expected to include the contribution to the work of the UN country team as a whole and in the meantime, the RC provides formal inputs to UNCT members' performance appraisal. On the other hand, members of UNCT are also invited to appraise the performance of the RC. These have been partially achieved and where achieved prove to be partially successful. The concerns about the perceived conflict of interest between the RC functions and his UNDP functions have persisted, in spite of the establishment of the functional firewall.

Fourth, the coordination function of the RC requires additional funding support. Although the concept that the RC system is owned by the UN development system as a whole is widely accepted, system-wide support for the RC function has not become a reality. UNDP continues to be the primary source of funding for the management of the resident coordinator system, with most coming from its core budget and used to support country-level coordination activities. Cost-sharing arrangements are of limited scale and exist mainly for joint programming activities. It has become clear that funding in support of coherence catalyzes coordination at country level. However, the resident coordinator has little access to and authority over programme resources, except those channeled through the multi-donor trust funds administered by UNDP.

Objective

This panel is expected to come up with practical proposals to strengthen the lead role of the resident coordinator in coordinating the support of the UN system to programme countries, based on a reflection of the main challenges from the perspective of both the government and the resident coordinator.

Suggested Questions

The following questions are intended to guide panelists in preparing for their participation in the panel discussion:

- 1) Is national ownership and leadership enhanced when the resident coordinator clearly leads and coordinates the UN country team? Is the resident coordinator sufficiently accountable to the government on results achieved through UNDAF? Is the RC playing a satisfactory role in helping national authorities coordinate overall external assistance?
- 2) Does UN system coherence at the country level depend more on national authorities or on the role of the resident coordinators? How should the RC best play its role in representing the United Nations country teams to the government, while also maintaining the UN agencies' direct lines of communication with national authorities to fulfil their mandated activities?
- 3) What are the major challenges facing the leadership role of the UN Resident Coordinator at the country-level? What are the possible ways to empower the UN Resident Coordinator, including greater use of pooled funding mechanisms (e.g. MDTFs)?