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**THE ROLE OF THE UN SYSTEM
IN A CHANGING AID
ENVIRONMENT:**

Sector Support and Sector Programmes



POSITION PAPER
UN Development Group
www.undg.org

1: BACKGROUND

This document spells out a United Nations Development Group (UNDG) position on sector support and sector programmes, based on country-level experiences. Its purpose is to demonstrate a common understanding of the potential benefits of sector programmes and approaches; to highlight the nature of the UN system's contribution to sector programmes; and to signal a strong commitment among the field-based UN agencies, funds and programmes to new ways of working in a changing environment for development.

2: CONTEXT

The context in which field-based UN agencies, funds and programmes are working has changed. The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals provide a framework of outcomes agreed by governments worldwide. Increasingly, national development and poverty reduction strategies (including PRSPs) are geared to the achievement of the MDGs. This greater degree of alignment between goals and strategies is further reflected in budget support as a growing share of donor funding for development. Moreover, the priorities for increased spending are dominated by recurrent costs, spent at local level via geographically scattered cost centres and difficult to support via projects without incurring very high costs. Whilst there remains a place for projects, the trend towards sector and budget support has been accelerated by the international effort to harmonize and align development assistance and technical collaboration around national policies and strategies as set out in the Rome Declaration¹. This includes a renewed emphasis on capacity development for partner countries to manage their own development processes.

3: THE UN RESPONSE

UN field-based agencies, funds and programmes recognize, and welcome, the need for a pro-active response to this changing environment. While work is currently in hand which looks at the role of the UN system in relation to direct budget support, this note focuses on support to sector programmes, including Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAps). Indeed, there is an acknowledgement that even with the move towards general budget support and poverty reduction strategies, engagement in sector wide approaches by UN country teams (UNCTs) is vital, and that they have the potential to make a positive contribution to development effectiveness - thereby fulfilling key objectives of UN reform. Whilst sector programmes must be fully embedded within overall development plans and budgets, their importance lies in providing an opportunity for identifying pro-poor strategies for improving sector performance; negotiating key policy issues; and harmonizing procedures with a growing number of stakeholders active in each sector.

¹ www1.worldbank.org/harmonization/romehlf/Documents/RomeDeclaration.pdf

4: THE ROLE OF THE UN SYSTEM IN SECTOR PROGRAMMES

The UNDG takes as its starting point - in line with the OECD/DAC working party on aid effectiveness - that a sector-wide approach is defined and bounded by clear and agreed sector policies and strategies. A SWAp will thus include activities that are financed from pooled resources, but also some that are not. Of concern in all cases is to increase the degree of alignment of all activities (regardless of how they are financed) within an overall sector strategy and resource plan, with the underlying purpose of improving sector performance.

Members of the UN Country Team have four key functions in relation to the development and implementation of a SWAp:

Conceptual/Coherence: This includes all aspects of the policy dialogue with government and other partners, including advocacy and evidence-based policy options, drawing on normative work and best practice, which helps to shape the purpose, boundaries and scope of the SWAp. This role is particularly important at the initial planning stages, but given the dynamic nature of sector programmes, policy dialogue needs to be seen as a continuous process. Capitalizing on a wide range of technical expertise, UNCTs can also help address cross-sectoral issues, such as HIV/AIDS and the environment, through SWAps.

Convening: Government should always take the lead in sectoral development processes. Nevertheless, there is often an important role - particularly early on in the process - of convening and managing critical meetings and processes. Therefore, UNCTs can play a pivotal role in supporting national leadership and in helping national partners to ensure and verify that sector-based programmes are effectively accessible to the poorest people and marginalized families. In countries where members of the UNCT are centrally involved in sector programmes, it is often because individuals or organizations have been particularly effective in this role. The UN system also has a long track record in bringing together various actors from civil society with government and other decision-makers, in not just policy development, but also the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of sector programmes. This broadens the ownership and enhances implementation of sector-wide initiatives.

Capacity development: is a quintessential role for the UN system in the development of SWAps. Demands are often country specific and may arise in the context of SWAps at different levels, including among local government and civil society actors. However, there are commonalities, such as strengthening financial and programme management systems - the key that can unlock the use of national systems by other donors, which may not be within the repertoire of

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