

# Sector Wide Approaches: A Resource Document for UNFPA Staff

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## Introduction

UNFPA is committed to moving towards a sectoral approach, recognising that efforts to build government capacity can have a far greater and more sustainable impact than supporting governments through a series of discrete projects. This could mean significant changes in the way that UNFPA operates. It would also require dealing with new issues and amending procedures, but should result in better reproductive health outcomes.

These materials aim to help familiarise the reader with Sector Wide Approaches (SWAp) and help prepare them face the challenges they pose. They are designed in an accessible way both to help build on existing knowledge of readers who may have some idea of what a SWAp is, or have already operated within a SWAp environment, and for those who may have not worked in a SWAp environment at all – after all UNFPA operates in well over a hundred countries many of which have not adopted a sector wide approach.

The document is structured in six sections:

**Section 1** provides an overview of Sector Wide Approaches. It explains what they are and why they have emerged as an instrument of development cooperation. It looks at what providing support to sector programmes is trying to achieve, and what the experience has been to date. The advantages of supporting a SWAp are highlighted, as well as the potential pitfalls, and what steps can be taken to avoid them.

**Section 2** looks in more detail at the core components of a sector programme, followed by an overview of alternative ways of channelling aid.

**Section 3** looks at the broad implications for UNFPA of engaging with SWAp, both as a means to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and on a very practical level, in terms of the changed ways of working required by the new approach.

**Section 4** looks at the detail – the “nuts and bolts” – of how to support a sector programme, and what this might mean for UNFPA. The components reviewed are i) sector policy and strategy; ii) partnership processes (coordination, consultation and harmonisation); iii) performance monitoring systems; and iv) financing issues.

**Section 5** goes back to the broader development context. It looks at the links between a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and a SWAp, examines whether a SWAp is possible when government is decentralised, and what happens to projects when there is a SWAp.

**Section 6** contains a list of further readings with weblinks and is provided for those wishing to explore the issues in greater depth.

## Acronyms and abbreviations

CAPs	Consolidated Appeals
CCAs	Common Country Assessments
DFID	Department for International Development
EC	European Commission
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
MYFF	Multi-Year Funding Framework
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PBA	Programme Based Approach
PFM	Public Financial Management
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RH	Reproductive Health
SWAps	Sector Wide Approaches
UN	United Nations
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

# 1. Overview of Sector Wide Approaches

This section provides an overview of Sector Wide Approaches (SWAp).

It explains what they are and why they have emerged as an instrument of development cooperation. It looks at what providing support to sector programmes is trying to achieve, and what the experience has been to date.

The advantages of supporting a SWAp are highlighted, as well as the potential pitfalls, and what steps can be taken to avoid them.

## [1.1 Background](#)

## [1.2 Stronger partnerships: a new way of working](#)

## [1.3 Why provide support to a Sector Programme?](#)

## 1.1 Background

Sector Wide Approaches have emerged in response to changes in the aid environment over the last decade. Increased emphasis has been placed on poverty reduction through the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). New mechanisms have been established, such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and Poverty Reduction Strategies. There has been intense debate on the failure of projects to address poverty in a systematic way, and around aid effectiveness generally. In addition, the importance of government ownership and government leadership has been increasingly recognised.

### A changing aid environment

It is important to place SWAp in the context of the overall aid environment, and the changes that have taken place in the last decade, such as:

- greater consensus on **goals**: a wide consensus on the need to focus efforts on **reducing poverty**
- more emphasis on **results**: leading to the identification of clear and ambitious development targets (the [Millennium Development Goals](#)) which emphasise poverty reduction;
- new **mechanisms** and initiatives to channel resources rapidly and effectively to countries in need: e.g. the HIPC initiative, the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (IMF) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Credits (World Bank);
- new approaches to improve **aid effectiveness**: the introduction of national *poverty reduction strategies* as a mechanism for explicitly linking policies, public expenditure allocations and poverty reduction goals; see [www.worldbank.org/prsp](http://www.worldbank.org/prsp) and moves towards greater harmonisation and alignment see [www.aidharmonisation.org](http://www.aidharmonisation.org)
- new **aid instruments** and approaches: disillusionment with impact using traditional aid instruments has led to increased emphasis on programme type support (budget support and sector programme support);
- stronger **partnerships**: increased emphasis on strengthening the role of governments and developing true *partnership* approaches in which donor-government relationships are increasingly based on Government ownership and leadership, broad participation, partnership, mutual accountability and long-term commitment.

All these factors have created a demand for approaches which enjoy government ownership and are set within a clear framework which focuses on the reduction of poverty and delivers development assistance in a more efficient manner. These are the basic building blocks and key objectives of a SWAp.

### 1.1.1 Definitions and terminology

A SWAp is:

- an **approach** which involves a **different type of relationship** between government and development partners;
- **a mechanism through which support** to public expenditure programmes **can be better co-ordinated**;
- **a means of improving aid effectiveness - by improving the efficiency and effectiveness** with which all resources are used, and accounted for, in the sector.

It is important to remember that a SWAp is an approach, not a blueprint. The approach is based on key principles and attempts to progressively apply them, but it is the national conditions and preferences that guide the development of the process.

**A SWAp is a form of Programme Based Approach (PBA) applied at the sector level.** A Programme Based Approach (PBA) can be defined as follows.

#### Programme Based Approaches (PBAs)

PBAs have been defined as “a way of engaging in development cooperation based on the principle of coordinated support for a locally owned programme of development, such as a national poverty reduction strategy, a sector programme, a thematic programme or a programme of a specific organisation”.

They are characterised by:

- Leadership by the host country or organisation;
- A single comprehensive programme and budget framework;
- A formalised process for donor coordination and harmonisation of donor procedures for reporting, budgeting, financial management and procurement;
- Increasing reliance on the use of local systems for programme design and implementation, financial management and accountability and monitoring and evaluation.

Quoted from OECD-DAC 2005

The key components of an effective SWAp are:

- A clear nationally-owned sector policy and strategy;
- A medium term expenditure framework that reflects the sector strategy;
- Systematic arrangements for programming resources that support the sector;
- A performance monitoring system that measures progress and strengthens accountability<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> OECD-DAC 2005

Whilst it is recommended that the above is used as the working definition, it is worth noting that there is no single agreed definition, and there are differences in the way different actors define certain concepts<sup>2</sup>.

It is important to make a distinction between the **Sector Approach** and the **Sector Programme** (or Sector Development Programme) which results from it.

A Sector Programme is defined as “a specific, time-bound and costed set of actions and activities which support a sector strategy (i.e. the “single comprehensive programme and budget framework” of a PBA, which incorporates both government and donor resources)”.

A Sector Programme includes three components<sup>3</sup>:

1. An approved **sectoral policy document** and **overall strategic framework** (such as a PRSP).
2. A **sectoral medium term expenditure framework** and an annual budget.
3. A **co-ordination process** amongst the donors in the sector, led by Government.

Sector Programmes are **dynamic**: their content needs to be challenged by regular review and refined as required. While the principles underpinning Sector Programmes are relevant across countries, both the approach to developing the Programme, and the content, may differ significantly from country to country.

## 1.2 Stronger partnerships: a new way of working

SWApS bring benefits to both governments and partners.

**Governments are able to re-take ownership of the sector.** Instead of a multitude of projects largely driven by donor preferences, donors contribute to an overall programme determined by government priorities. Duplication, fragmentation and the sheer time and effort spent in accommodating numerous donor missions are reduced. This in itself is a clear benefit. More importantly, though, a SWAp will result in a coherent strategy which is more likely to address poverty in a consistent and comprehensive manner. As a government-owned initiative it is also more likely to be implemented.

As for donors, **increased development impact** should be the key benefit. The process of a SWAp brings together development partners in dialogue on sector policy issues. The “implicit bargain” is that donors agree to give up their formal role in running projects (or small fragments of the sector), in return for a voice in the overall direction of sector policy and its management. Thus, while attribution becomes more difficult (as it is no longer possible to relate funding from a specific donor to particular activities) the greater development impact achieved through policy change should more than make up for this.

Benefits arise through **changes in the way donors and partners interact**. There is a shift from donor-led to country-led and country-owned development. Government and donors work in partnership at all stages - from strategy and policy development, to implementation and assessment.

<sup>2</sup> In the guidelines for its staff, the European Commission defines the SWAp as follows: “a way of working together between government and development partners. The aim is to broaden Government ownership over public sector policy and resource allocation decisions within the sector, to increase coherence between policy, spending and results and to reduce transaction costs. It involves progressive development of a comprehensive and coherent sector policy and strategy, of a unified public expenditure framework for local and external resources and of a common management, planning and reporting framework”. (EC 2003) In some cases a Sector Programme is called a Programme of Work (e.g. in Ghana). Also, some donors consider a SWAp to include the Sector Programme.

<sup>3</sup> EC 2003

**Changes in accountability arrangements** also take place, whereby government is no longer primarily accountable to donors for results, but to its population. Donors and government agree on a system; government is accountable for its implementation and any expenditure incurred. Donors, on the other hand, are accountable to government for delivering their part of any agreement, whether it is predictable and timely funding, appropriate technical assistance, etc. This requires donors to shift their focus (and reporting systems) away from measuring the performance of “their” inputs, towards measuring the outputs and outcomes of the sector as a whole.

### 1.3 Why provide support to a Sector Programme?

*“SWApS were the outcome of the recognition that individual projects usually only provide fragmented improvements which cannot be sustained after project termination, and draw disproportionately on scarce human capacity and funds”. (UNFPA 2004)*

As mentioned earlier, the SWAp has evolved in response to a number of changes in the international aid environment. It is seen as a more effective way of delivering development assistance than more traditional project-based approaches. As a result of the greater government ownership and the fact that the programmes developed reflect country needs, this is expected to result in faster progress towards the MDGs.

#### Why choose a SWAp?

- To **broaden ownership** by partner Governments over decision-making with respect to sectoral policy, sectoral strategy and sectoral spending;
- To **increase the coherence** between sectoral policy, spending and results through greater transparency, through wider dialogue and through ensuring a comprehensive view of the sector;
- To **minimise** as far as possible the **transaction costs** associated with the provision of external financing, either by direct adoption of government procedures or through progressive harmonisation of individual donor procedures.

(EC 2003)

As a result, programme based approaches are gradually replacing projects:

*“Donors project based approaches are being replaced by two alternatives and*

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[https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5\\_20537](https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_20537)

