



**Global and Thematic Evaluation of the  
Millennium Development Goals  
Achievement Fund**

**FINAL EVALUATION REPORT**

Presented to:  
MDG-F Secretariat  
United Nations Development Programme

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

C&D	Culture and Development
CFSN	Children, Food Security and Nutrition
CPPB	Conflict Prevention and Peace Building
DEG	Democratic Economic Governance
DPS	Development and the Private Sector
ECC	Environment and Climate Change
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
IDP	Internally displaced people
ILO	International Labor Organization
JPO	Junior Professional Officers
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MDG-F	Millennium Development Goal Achievement Fund
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
RC	Resident Coordinator
SARC	Special Assistant to the Resident Coordinator
TSC	Technical Sub-Committee(ies)
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
YEM	Youth, Employment and Migration

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The purpose of this evaluation was to “assess the overall added value of the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MGD-F) as a model for development cooperation in the current context.” The evaluation was structured around two main levels of analysis: (1) the MDG-F model as a multilateral mechanism for development cooperation and enhancement of UN system-wide coherence; and (2) MDG-F results at the thematic level.

The overall goals of the evaluation were to determine: (1) the relevance and overall value of the MDG-F model as a multilateral mechanism for development cooperation; (2) the extent to which the Fund has contributed to UN System-wide Coherence and supported the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness; and (3) the extent to which the Fund’s Joint Programmes have reached their objectives within the eight thematic windows and, to the extent measureable, contributed to national MDG targets and other development objectives. A total of 14 specific objectives were outlined in the Terms of Reference covering aspects such as: the Fund’s design and strategic orientation; the effectiveness of its institutional and organizational arrangements; the institutional, strategic and thematic results in each thematic window; the Fund’s reach of marginalized and excluded groups; and the prospects of its replicability as a model.

### Background on the MDG-F

At the 2005 UN World Summit, leaders reaffirmed their support to meeting internationally-agreed development goals. The challenges faced in achieving progress towards the MDGs were well known. The MDG framework for accountability had inspired development efforts, helped set global and national priorities, focus subsequent actions and increase funding from many sources. This translated into an expansion of programmes to deliver services and resources to those most in need. However, the risk that these efforts would fall short was evident. While progress was possible, efforts needed to be intensified and targeted to the hardest to reach—the poorest of the poor and those disadvantaged because of their sex, age, ethnicity or disability. At the same time, the UN System was considering ways to improve the effectiveness of delivering its assistance. In late 2006 it introduced several UN Delivering as One pilots to improve UN System-Wide Coherence. Seizing on this opportunity, the Government of Spain and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed a major partnership agreement in December 2006 for the amount of US\$ 840 million with the aim of contributing to progress on the MDGs and other development goals through the United Nations System.

The MDG-F was established as an international cooperation mechanism to support Joint Programmes that seek replication of successful pilot experiences. These would assist in shaping public policies and improving peoples’ lives by accelerating progress towards the MDGs and other key development goals. While the Fund’s primary goal was to contribute to the MDGs by achieving key development results, its two secondary goals were to promote and strengthen UN system-wide coherence and foster adherence to the Principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. National ownership and leadership was a guiding principle with Joint Programmes led by national and local partners, including national and local governments and civil society organizations. These were supported by UN agencies.

The Joint Programme modality of delivery was chosen as the optimum means to fulfill the MDG-F mandate and achieve sustainable results effectively and efficiently, while strengthening UN system-wide coherence and fostering adherence to the Principles of the Paris Declaration. The UN Resident

Coordinator (UNRC) was the focal point, providing strategic direction and guiding the operations of the individual UN funds and agencies that made up the “UN Country Team”.

The MDG-F undertook Joint Programmes that encouraged partnerships among UN agencies and national/local actors to use innovative approaches for development. The Fund’s reach extended to 50 countries, through 130 Joint Programmes in eight thematic windows involving 27 UN agencies and 1,694 other partners over the programme period from 2007 to 2013. The eight thematic windows were: Children, Food Security and Nutrition; Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment; Environment and Climate Change; Youth, Employment and Migration; Democratic Economic Governance (primarily focused on water and sanitation); Development and the Private Sector; Conflict Prevention and Peace Building; and Culture and Development.

### **Evaluation approach and methodology**

The five evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability were used as the common basis for assessing and judging the development performance at the Joint Programme and thematic levels as well as results at the level of the MDG-F as a multilateral mechanism. In the view of the evaluators, as good development is development which is also gender inclusive and environmentally responsible, the evaluation team added a sixth criterion covering two cross-cutting issues not identified in the Terms of Reference. The two cross-cutting issues were the integration of gender and environmental concerns.

The evaluation approach included the development of a logic model and theory of change that helped the team to understand the linkages and relationships between the Fund’s goals and expected results, its resources and the essential risks and other factors that influence the conversion of resources to results. The logic model and theory of change then formed the basis for developing the methodology, which included the generation of qualitative and quantitative data from seven main lines of evidence. These lines of evidence include: a document review covering the vast number of MDG-F files and documents; a systematic meta-analysis of final evaluations for 93 of the 130 Joint Programmes; 221 semi-structured interviews with a range of respondents from relevant UN and non-UN stakeholder groups; 108 focus groups; an electronic survey soliciting views from a wide range of stakeholders; 12 comprehensive country desk reviews; and eight country site visits. The evaluation also constructed a two-part dataset from existing databases and other documentary sources to investigate through quantitative analysis: relationships between Joint Programme inputs, activities, context and performance, and comparisons of the MDG performance of MDG-F beneficiary and non-beneficiary countries.

As with most major evaluations, there were challenges and constraints. The most significant of these were: the short timeframe for an evaluation of this magnitude (March 19 to October 14, 2013). In addition, the unavailability of the final evaluations for 32 of the 130 Joint Programmes limited the analysis and conclusions.

### **Summary of Main findings at the Programme and Thematic Window Levels**

Overall, in terms of performance against the six evaluation criteria used to assess the quality of the investments, it was found that the majority of the Joint Programmes: were highly relevant to country MDG needs; were largely effective in achieving their objectives and results; and produced results and benefits that could be sustainable in the longer term if certain desirable conditions are present within the country. These conditions include a positive policy environment, country level capacity, funding availability and ownership at the country level. Firm conclusions about sustainability of the results and benefits are tentative given the short implementation period of three to four years, which did not allow for the changes in beneficiary countries to fully take hold and become firmly entrenched. Many of the

Joint Programmes contributed significantly to changes in policies and systems needed for MDG progress. Finally, the Joint Programmes were planned and implemented efficiently enough to contribute positively to the achievement of objectives related to the MDGs. However, some shortcomings were seen in a number of areas including the mainstreaming of gender equality and environment.

Compared with the results from recent development effectiveness reviews of three UN organizations,<sup>1</sup> which used a similar methodology to assess the results of their programmes, the MDG-F Joint Programmes performed better on most of the evaluation criteria.

In terms of the types of result, besides the immediate services-related benefits for the intended target groups at the local and community level (at which most of the Joint Programmes operated), the programmes in the various windows also contributed to capacity improvements and changes in an undetermined number of laws, policies and plans at both the national and sub-national levels in their respective thematic areas in the partner countries. At the sub-national and local levels, many of the programmes addressed pressing needs of target populations that were often among the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups in terms of their economic, geographic, ethno-cultural, political and gender dimensions.

The full effects and benefits of these policy and institutional results will extend beyond the 2015 timeline for achievement of the MDGs and augur well for the emerging post-2015 Agenda. In addition, the multi-sectorial nature of many of the programmes and their engagement with relevant government ministries and other local ‘non-governmental’ partners in the partner countries have served to demonstrate how recipient countries can leverage their own knowledge and expertise in a more “whole of government” fashion to achieve better results. In this regard, the MDG-F has provided an example of how policy coherence and coordination within partner countries can be fostered to achieve outcomes more effectively. The potential value of this benefit cannot be overstated.

In terms of performance across the different thematic windows, regions and countries, the MDG-F Joint Programmes in each window were consistent with their window Terms of Reference, which addressed global development challenges, and produced institutional, strategic and thematic results that were largely comparable across the different windows and across different country contexts. While all windows performed well overall, some windows performed better on each of the six evaluation criteria. The most likely reasons for the differences seem to be: the variations among the windows in the technical complexity, requirements for infrastructure and equipment, and levels of national/community expertise required; the country contexts for which differences are evident among the five regions relative to the incidence of poverty, and levels of peace and security; and variations on application results-based management techniques and use of management tools.

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<sup>1</sup> Information was drawn from the following three reports: the *Review of the Development Effectiveness of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2005-2011* (2012), *Review of UNICEF’s Development Effectiveness, 2009-2011: Final Report* (2013), and *Review of the World Food Programme’s Development and Humanitarian Effectiveness, 2006-2011* (2012). The MDG-F evaluation used a similar methodology to that used by these three reviews, with minor differences. It is recognized that the programmes assessed in the three reports may be of a different scope and size. Also most are not Joint Programmes.

## **Summary of Main findings at the Fund Level**

At the Fund Level, it was found that the eight thematic windows chosen by the Fund made strategic sense as the scope and areas of intervention in each helped to address challenges that were relevant then, and continue to be relevant globally. The windows all proved to be good avenues for addressing poverty reduction. With the choice of three of the eight windows in particular (Children, Food Security Nutrition; Youth, Employment and Migration; and Culture and Development), the Fund focused on issues that were not prominent on the development agenda of the international community at the time but have since become so. The MDG-F's work on culture in particular, which was not included in the MDGs, helped to enhance the evidence base on its important role in achieving the MDGs. In this sense the strategic orientation of the Fund was truly forward looking and ground-breaking.

The MDG-F model was found to be versatile as a multilateral mechanism for development cooperation. It was a good way of advancing work in developing countries on specific thematic issues by harnessing the considerable experience and expertise of UN agencies and relevant national and local partners. It also provided a good framework for the implementation of development programmes under substantially different country conditions without producing large or unacceptable differences in levels of outcome. Uncertainty remains about the degree to which the Fund was able to leverage follow-on investments in the same or similar programme areas, in the effort to scale up or replicate investments to contribute towards the MDGs. Nonetheless, without the MDG-F programmes, it is unlikely that the results achieved would have been as substantial.

Through its Joint Programmes, the MDG-F was found to have contributed to UN system-wide coherence and helped to foster a culture of 'One UN'. Designed and implemented within the MDG-F framework that required the adoption of common objectives and practices, the Fund's Joint Programmes were found to have performed well on some indicators of UN coherence, particularly alignment, development of effective partnerships and local ownership. The integration of cross-cutting issues (gender and the environment) was found to be weaker. The harmonization of management processes, streamlining of planning and execution, and simplification of procedures were found not to have occurred pervasively, contrary to initial expectations. The processes required by the MDG-F may have actually reduced efficiency at the Joint Programme and country level.

The evaluation found that the Fund's investments and activities showed a high level of adherence to and promotion of, the Principles of Paris Declaration, with the best results in Alignment, Ownership and Mutual Accountability. This is despite some missed opportunities to enhance country leadership and national execution. The weakest aspects were Results-based Management and reduction in transaction costs. Transaction costs may have been higher for MDG-F Joint Programmes than for bilateral initiatives due to the higher costs related to adjustments by UN agencies and country players to the mandated use of common management and reporting processes and tools.

## **Conclusions**

The results presented in the foregoing sections indicate that the Fund's Joint Programmes, within the eight selected thematic windows have: addressed relevant needs in the partner countries; achieved their objectives and produced results; initial indications that the results could become sustainable under the above mentioned conditions; and contributed to national MDG targets and other development objectives. It is unlikely that the results and benefits that have accrued to the partner countries and beneficiaries would have happened without the various Joint Programmes implemented by the Fund. The achievements were done in spite of challenges. The three-four year time frame for each of the Joint Programmes was relatively short. Many were implemented in country contexts that were very challenging. Many of the UN and country partners were not accustomed to the Joint Programme work

modality. In addition, many of the programmes focused on the most disadvantaged at the local level where inequalities in terms of geographic, ethnic, and other forms of exclusion are felt more or are likely to be greater.

The Fund has contributed positively to UN System-wide Coherence and adhered to and supported the Principles of the Paris Declaration. While it is difficult to quantify the exact benefit, the value in terms of advancing UN Coherence, by expanding the experience of 27 UN agencies trying to deliver as One UN in 50 additional countries, has to be considered significant. The MDG-F experience has shown how a donor can make an effective contribution by leveraging the expertise of the UN system agencies to make a difference in the lives of poor people, while also contributing to the UN reform effort including Delivering as One.

As a multilateral mechanism for development cooperation, the MDG-F has provided, through its eight thematic windows and 130 Joint Programmes, a potentially powerful demonstration of its relevance and value in terms of what can be achieved with investments from \$2 to \$12 million over short durations. The Fund's work shows how the technical expertise and comparative advantages of the UN partners can be better leveraged to deliver benefits for the poor in partner countries, acting as One UN. It has demonstrated advantages as a multilateral mechanism for development cooperation not typically found in other forms of UN programming where agencies operate on a bilateral basis. In this regard, the model is worth replicating.

Finally, the MDG-F's work through the 130 Joint Programmes in 50 countries provided an opportunity to expand the experience with Delivering as One beyond the initial pilot countries to a wider range of other countries, thus contributing an additional body of evidence and experience that should be helpful in the UN reform effort going forward. There are a plethora of guidance documents and 'how to' instruments that were developed for the Fund, covering the operation of the Fund itself as well as the life cycle of the programmes from their selection and preparation, through implementation and closure. These will prove valuable in future, should the model be replicated including joint programme modality.

### **Observed Strengths**

In trying to understand the results and success achieved, a number of strengths were noted with the model. The MDG-F was founded on a sound, albeit implicit, theory of change that took into account the knowledge, lessons and good practices in international development. The institutional and organizational features incorporated into its design proved to be a good fit with its strategic orientation, positioning its investments for success. The thematic area programmes were well targeted to the needs of the poor. A multi-sectorial approach to the investments reflected the complex reality of the challenges faced in achieving the MDGs. The focus on partnerships and engagement of local stakeholders with an emphasis on capacity building was a successful strategy. The use of Joint Programmes as the main work modality proved to be valuable for ensuring the needed expertise and experience from the different UN Partners were brought to bear on the challenges addressed. The competitive selection of the Joint Programmes ensured high quality initiatives. Well defined governance mechanisms at the Fund and country levels and the role of the Resident Coordinators as the leads on the Joint Programmes provided sound guidance.

### **Observed Weaknesses**

The above notwithstanding, there were some weaknesses. For example, in every window, there were Joint Programmes that obtained a less than satisfactory rating, indicating there was still room for improvement within each Thematic Window and the MDG-F. The weaknesses were mostly of an operational rather than strategic nature, involving issues of quality-at-entry and quality-during-implementation. Other parts of the design proved difficult. They include: unrealistic three-year

timeframe for designing and implementing the Joint Programmes; unrealistic expectations of efficiency gains in the short run, given the constraints within the UN system to work with the modality; the uneven quality of management across the Joint Programmes; uneven integration of gender and environment as cross-cutting issues in the Joint Programmes; and the high incidence of delays and inefficiency.

## **Recommendations**

The MDG-F has now come to a close. The following recommendations are directed to stakeholders interested in sponsoring, designing and implementing initiatives such as the MDG-F or the Joint Programme modality. This includes UN agencies, other donors and national entities.

### **Recommendations for stakeholders involved in designing and implementing Joint Programmes**

**Recommendation 1: Need for more realistic time frames for designing and implementing the Joint Programmes** - It is recommended that designers of future Joint Programmes, embracing the MDG-F model, allow more realistic time frames for design and implementation of the Joint Programmes based on consideration of their multi-sectoral scope and complexity, the number of UN and local partners to be involved, and the experience of the UN partners with the Joint Programme modality.

**Recommendation 2: Need for more uniformity in the quality at entry work on programme design.** It is recommended that designers of future Joint Programmes embracing the MDG-F model establish guidelines and standards for more uniform quality at entry work at the programme design stage.

**Recommendation 3: (a) Better mainstreaming of Gender Equality and empowerment of Women and (b) integrating of environment sensitivity into future programmes.** It is recommended that designers and implementers of future frameworks using the MDG-F model establish ways for better (a) mainstreaming of Gender Equality and empowerment of Women and (b) integrating environmental sensitivity in the formulation of all development programmes where they are applicable.

**Recommendation 4: Fostering country ownership and leadership through national execution of programmes.** It is recommended that a concerted effort be made to foster national execution of future Joint Programmes, instead of direct execution by the external partners. The exception would be where a risk analysis dictates otherwise. This means that sufficient time be allowed for full national government involvement in the programme from the start.

**Recommendation 5: Eliminating the high incidence of delays and inefficiency.** It is recommended that consideration be given to undertaking further in-depth work to explore and understand the factors that cause inefficiency and delays based on the aggregate of Joint Programme experiences in order to identify ways of eliminating the sources of delays and inefficiencies.

### **Recommendations for UN Agencies**

**Recommendation 6: Selection and inclusion of UN agencies to be involved in future Joint Programmes.** As a measure to improve efficiency, it is recommended that future UN agencies adopt a more systematic approach in determining the involvement of UN partners in future Joint Programmes.

**Recommendation 7: Making the Theory of Change behind new initiatives more explicit.** It is recommended that UNDP consider adopting the emerging good practice of explicitly outlining the logic model and accompanying theory of change for significant new initiatives and funds, such as the MDG-F.

**Recommendation 8: Stock-taking on the lessons about strengthening UN System-Wide Coherence from joint programming and Joint Programmes.** As a way of benefitting from the knowledge gained so far about strengthening UN System-Wide coherence, it is recommended that the UNDP consider, if it has not already done so, a stock taking exercise that distills in a short document the key lessons and findings to be shared with internal and external stakeholders.

## Lessons Learned

In trying to understand the performance of the Fund and its Joint Programmes, the evaluation team identified a number of factors that influenced the performance and may have broader applicability as lessons. Again, these are only itemized here but discussed in greater detail in the report. They include:

- **Make allowance for the unforeseen:** When establishing new mechanisms to address complex development challenges, it is important to recognize that such mechanisms would involve changes that may encounter unforeseen operational problems and allow sufficient time to iron them out.
- **The value of good up-front due diligence:** Success from new initiatives and/or mechanisms can be enhanced by doing the up-front due diligence work well.
- **The need for ongoing quality assurance:** Even with good up-front due diligence and guidance tools, the likelihood of a gap between intentions and actual implementation will exist as implementation may be done differently given differences in the experience and expertise of lead agencies, the capacity of the teams and country conditions.
- **The Joint Programme modality:** Use of the Joint Programme modality is a good way of addressing development challenges which are multi-sectorial in nature and require expertise and experience in a variety of domains.
- **Competitive selection of the investments:** The process of competitive selection of programmes can contribute value by assisting decision-makers to choose programmes that are well targeted to specific development issues that make good use of the know-how of the appropriate partners in the implementation, and therefore enhance the chances of succeeding.
- **Preparation of exit strategies:** Preparation of exit strategies for programmes can be very valuable in catalyzing thinking about the focus of activities and improvements needed to achieve successful outcomes and sustainability of the benefits from the programmes.
- **Engagement of local stakeholders:** The level of engagement of the local stakeholders and communities is a key ingredient in designing and implementing programmes, especially those that target the most disadvantaged.
- **The importance of capacity building:** Capacity building is an essential ingredient in the success of any programme but takes time. Allowing the time and resources to consolidate and institutionalize the capacities developed is a key factor in sustainability of the benefits.
- **The value of a good monitoring and evaluation system:** The achievements of MDG-F's Joint Programmes can be attributed partly to its evaluation system and the corrective adjustments made on the basis of their mid-term evaluations. The allocation of a portion of programme resources (3 - 5% in the case of the MDG-F) is a good practice that should be encouraged.
- **Importance of a good communications and advocacy strategy:** The establishment and implementation of a good communication and advocacy strategy early in the creation of future

mechanisms and Joint Programmes could prove valuable for sharing the information and lessons with other stakeholders and generate support or such initiatives.



## **1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND ON THE MDG-F**

### **1.1. Evaluation purpose and intended users**

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the independent Global and Thematic Evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F), hereafter referred to as the MDG-F or simply the Fund. The Fund was created in 2006 with a contribution of over US\$ 840 million from the Government of Spain for Joint Programmes aimed at accelerating progress on the MDGs in 50 countries. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the overall added value of the MDG-F as a model for development cooperation in the current international context, identify its main achievements and challenges, and make recommendations for future efforts in delivering high-quality development results as well as enhancing the effectiveness of United Nations (UN) coherence.

The intended users of the evaluation include the wide range of partners with whom the MDG-F collaborated in its various areas of work since its inception. These are: the MDG-F Steering Committee, the UN participating and non-participating agencies and their executive boards, UN Resident Coordinators' Offices, Spain as the donor country, other donors, partner country governments at the national and sub-national levels, civil society organizations, development and evaluation practitioners, beneficiaries and academic-think tanks. The Fund's reach through 130 Joint Programmes has extended to 50 countries, 27 UN agencies, and 1,694 other partners.

This evaluation has two separate, yet interrelated, parts: an assessment at the thematic level covering the eight thematic windows through which 130 Joint Programmes were implemented, and an assessment at the global level related to the MDG-F as a model for multilateral development.

The report is structured as follows. The rest of this chapter focuses on the MDG-F context and configuration. This provides background information about the Fund's origins, the challenges it seeks to address and programme features. Chapter 2 addresses the evaluation approach and methodology, including the scope, objectives, the theory of change on which the MDG-F planned results are founded, the lines of evidence and data collection strategies. Chapter 3 presents the findings from the Joint Programmes and the eight thematic windows by evaluation criteria. Chapter 4 then addresses the findings at the more global Fund level, including the relevance and value of the Fund, its adherence to the Paris Declaration Principles its contribution to UN system-wide coherence and the MDGs. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the overall findings and the conclusions of the evaluation. Chapter 6 presents the recommendations and ends with a set of lessons learned derived from the evaluation.

### **1.2 MDG-F Context and Configuration**

#### **1.2.1 The origins, magnitude and goals of the Fund**

The origins of the MDG-F are rooted in UN actions of 2003 that were aimed at setting out a common country programming process to support countries in their achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other international commitments. Joint programming was established as the primary modality for delivery of a common country programming process. A 2003 UNDG Guidance Note on Joint Programming, updated in 2004, defined joint programming as the collective effort of the United Nations and national partners to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate MDG activities.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Downs, *Joint Programme Mechanism Review*, Consolidated Final Report, February 2013

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) gave further impetus to the notion of delivering development aid jointly for MDG achievement at the country level. At the 2005 UN World Summit leaders reaffirmed their support to meeting internationally-agreed development goals, including the MDGs, and the commitment of the resources, partnerships and efforts required to achieve them. Seizing on this opportunity, the Government of Spain and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed, in 2006, a major partnership agreement with the aim of contributing to progress on the MDGs and other development goals through the United Nations System. In September 2008, in response to the food crisis, Spain contributed additional funds towards the launch of a thematic window on Childhood and Nutrition bringing the total contribution to US\$ 840 million. The Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F) was established as an international mechanism to support Joint Programmes that seek replication of successful pilot experiences and impact in shaping public policies and improving peoples' lives by accelerating progress towards the MDGs and other key development goals.<sup>3</sup>

The primary goal of the MDG-F was to contribute to MDGs by bringing about key development results.<sup>4</sup> The Fund also set secondary goals related to 'how' it aims to achieve results. In this regard the organization and operation of the MDG-F was also aimed at achieving reform in the way the UN system designs and delivers development assistance - promoting UN system-wide coherence and adherence to the Paris Declaration Principles. This was to be achieved by applying in all Joint Programmes the five guiding principles contained in the Implementation Guidelines for MDG Achievement Fund Joint Programmes. The goal of accelerating progress towards attainment of the MDGs in select countries was to be achieved by:<sup>5</sup>

- Supporting policies and programmes that promise significant and measurable impact on select MDGs;
- Financing the testing and/or scaling-up of successful models;
- Catalyzing innovations in development practice; and,
- Adopting mechanisms that improve the quality of aid as foreseen in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

The MDG-F was directed to Joint Programmes that encouraged partnerships among UN agencies and national/local actors to use innovative approaches for development. The intent was to strengthen inter-agency coherence and the development effectiveness of the UN system at the country level. At the same time, national ownership and leadership was a guiding and operating principle with Joint Programmes led by national and local partners including national and local governments, as well as civil society organizations, and supported by UN agencies.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.2.2 Challenges addressed by the Fund**

When the Fund was set up in 2006, the challenges faced in achieving progress towards the Millennium Development Goals were known. As noted in The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2011, although the MDG framework for accountability had inspired development efforts, helped set global and national priorities and focus subsequent actions, and increased funding from many sources had translated

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<sup>3</sup> MDG-F Framework Document dated 1 August 2007

<sup>4</sup> The Millennium Development Goals Report 2011, United Nations, New York, 2011

<sup>5</sup> MDG-F Framework Document dated 1 August 2007

<sup>6</sup> MDG-F Framework Document dated 1 August 2007

into expansion of programmes to deliver services and resources to those most in need, the risk that these efforts would fall short were evident. Many countries had demonstrated that progress was possible, but it was also known that efforts need to be intensified, and these efforts must also target the hardest to reach: the poorest of the poor and those disadvantaged because of their gender, age, ethnicity or disability. Disparities in progress between urban and rural areas also remained daunting.<sup>7</sup>

Making real progress in reaching multiple targets set for seven MDGs among 135 developing countries presented a number of challenges. Within the resource level and time window that the MDG-F had to operate, complex and multi-dimensional development issues could only be addressed by targeting specific development challenges, in a selected number of countries, using interventions that met set criteria. Thus, programmes with funding between two and twelve million US dollars each were approved for 50 of 57 eligible countries. The field of countries which would be invited to propose programmes was initially limited to 57, identified in the Spanish Master Plan for International Cooperation approved by the Government of Spain.<sup>8</sup>

Another challenge was establishing ways to accelerate progress towards the MDGs that would not accentuate inequalities and the social exclusion of disadvantaged people. Consequently, the extent of inequalities and social exclusion and the existence of limited access to basic needs and opportunities constituted some of the criteria for MDG-F initiatives.

While the MDG-F is a global initiative aimed at tackling the multiple dimensions of poverty, the Fund's creators recognized that such complex development challenges have to be addressed at the country level. They also recognized that several key development challenges are central to the achievement of MDGs and other internationally-agreed development goals. Consequently, the MDG-F focused its funding on eight thematic areas, called 'windows' that embrace the key development challenges.

It was evident that programmes had to be delivered in the most effective and efficient way possible. That meant the UN had to channel the expertise and resources from more than 27 UN agencies in a coherent manner to help national and local governments, civil society groups and the private sector in 50 different countries address complex development challenges that often cut across the mandates of individual organizations. Coherent support was needed to build the capacity of governments and institutions at the country level to address MDGs in a sustainable manner.

The MDG-F was created with the mandate to fund Joint Programmes within a framework of Thematic Windows and through a unified UN approach (UN as One) in collaboration with country partners in line with the Principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The Joint Programme modality was chosen as the optimum means of delivery.

To further provide for an efficient country level response from the UN development system operating in concert, leadership for the participation of a country in the MDG-F was assigned to the UN Resident Coordinator who became the focal point for the preparation and submission of concept notes proposing MDG-F programmes and for providing the strategic direction and guiding the operations of the individual UN funds and agencies that were involved nationally. As a group, these organizations make up the "UN Country Team".

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<sup>7</sup> The Millennium Development Goals Report 2011, United Nations, New York, 2011

<sup>8</sup> MDG-F Framework Document dated 1 August 2007

Bringing the expertise of multiple UN agencies together in Joint Programmes is efficient and effective only if those agencies are able to properly deliver on their expected role in the multilateral system. Knowing that might not always be the case, the MDG framework document provided for limited direct support for the core mandates of the UN funds, programmes and agencies entrusted with delivery:

### **1.2.3 Programme features and strategies**

Joint Programmes were formulated at the country level to address national MDG and related development priorities that form part of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the common strategic framework that guides operational activities of the United Nations system in the country. The UN agencies were involved in the formulation and implementation of the MDG-F's Joint Programmes with each programme bringing together an average of six UN agencies in a collective effort to strengthen the UN system's ability to deliver-as-one entity and capitalize on the specialized expertise of each agency.

All agencies were responsible for ensuring that the programmes were developed in consultation with country governments and civil societies because a key aim was national/local ownership. The creation of strong partnerships at the local level was regarded as critical since inequalities and disadvantages in terms of geographic, ethnic and other forms of exclusion in national development are likely to be greater at the local level.

The Fund established three key strategies: (a) monitoring and evaluation; (b) knowledge management; and (c) communication and advocacy.

- The monitoring and evaluation and communications and advocacy strategies were developed on the basis of nine focus country pilot experiences, selected in 2009 from different regions to receive additional support for the rigorous implementation of these two strategies at the national level. An allocation of 3–5% of overall programme resources was to be applied to monitoring and evaluation. New mechanisms were to be created only as needed. The Joint Programmes should build their monitoring and evaluation mechanisms from existing ones whenever possible.<sup>9</sup>
- The knowledge management system was developed in response to the demand for knowledge networks that foster dialogue and interaction among colleagues from UN agencies, Joint Programmes and national institutions aimed at increasing their access to each other's learning and experiences nationally, regionally and globally.
- The communication and advocacy strategy was conceptualized with the explicit aim of helping the MDG-F achieve its objectives on MDGs, national ownership and UN reform.

### **1.2.4 Operating principles**

With the aim of improving UN coherence, effectiveness and efficiency in supporting the realization of national goals and outcomes, the MDG-F introduced measures to simplify and harmonize programming at the country level. The exclusive use of Joint Programmes by the Fund was considered to be one means of enhancing the effectiveness of the UN system in developing countries and ensuring the system's

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<sup>9</sup> MDG Achievement Fund Secretariat, *Implementation Guidelines for MDG Achievement Fund Joint Programmes*, February 2011

combined resources were put to best use. Another means was the application of the following guiding principles.<sup>10</sup>

- In line with the Paris Declaration, the Fund supported programmes anchored in national priorities.
- The Fund aimed to ensure the sustainability of its investments.
- The Fund applied the highest standards in quality of programme formulation, monitoring and evaluation within a management framework oriented towards results and accountability.
- The Fund consolidated inter-agency planning and management systems at the country level contributing to UN system-wide coherence.
- The Fund aimed to minimize the transaction costs associated with its administration.

### **1.2.5 Governance and Administration of the Fund**

The Governance of the MDG-F at the global level consisted of a two-member Steering Committee and Technical Subcommittees (TSC) led by UN Agency Convenors who have been responsible for coordinating the review of proposals for funding submitted to the MDG-F.<sup>11</sup> The Governance structure is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

The Secretariat provided support to the Steering Committee, ensuring transparent processes and establishing clear criteria with the TSC to improve the quality of Joint Programme formulation. As the link between the Steering Committee and the UN Resident Coordinators and leads for Joint Programmes in participating countries, it provided guidance and day-to-day support. The Secretariat also played a key role in establishing and implementing the monitoring and evaluation, communications and advocacy and knowledge management strategies.<sup>12</sup> The Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), as Administrative Agent for the MDG-F, provided financial services and reporting.

At the country level, there was a three-layer structure to coordinate implementation. The levels consisted of the Programme Management Unit, the Programme Management Committee and the National Steering Committee. UN Resident Coordinators, representatives of national governments and the Spanish Government sat on the National Steering Committees providing a space in which they could mutually share information at the country level.

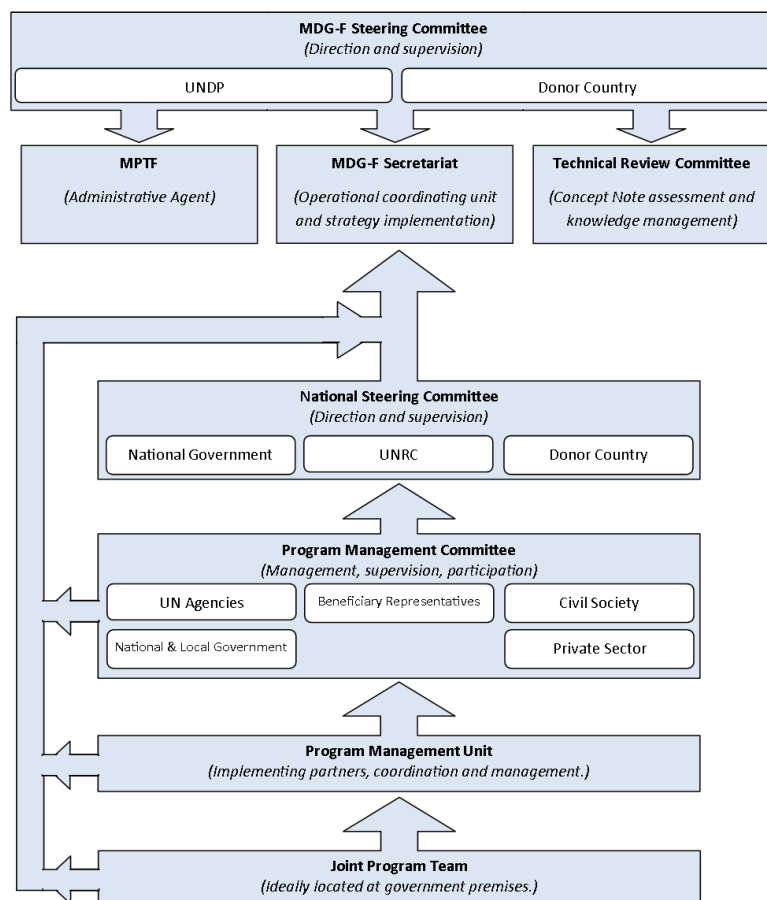
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<sup>10</sup> UNDP/Spain Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund Framework Document, May 2007

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.mdgfund.org/content/governancestructure>

<sup>12</sup> MDG-F website

**Figure 1 MDG-F Governance Structure**



### 1.2.6 Joint Programme Application and Selection Process

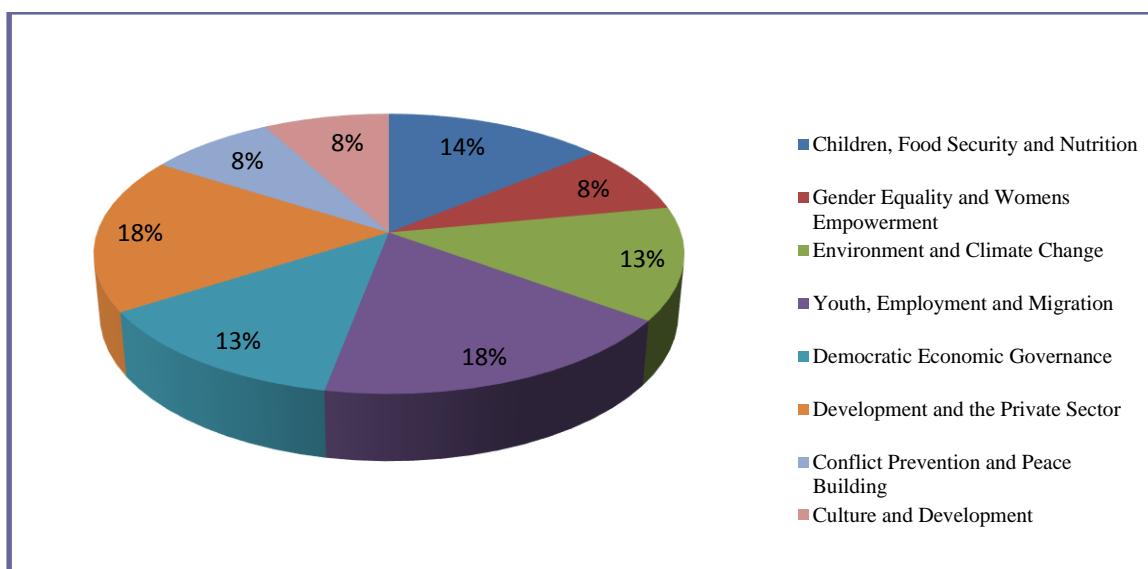
The Joint Programme application, reviews, selection and approval process was carried out in two stages to ensure that: (1) the various actors in Joint Programmes had clearly identified their problems and planned solutions; (2) ownership of the programme was accepted by the recipient countries' governments; and (3) the Joint Programmes were built around international and national priorities. A description of the application, review and selection process follows.

Applications for MDG-F funding of Joint Programmes were solicited for the different thematic windows through Requests for Proposals. The Fund applied a two-stage application process in response to the Requests for Proposals: an abbreviated 'Concept Note' and detailed programme designs in the second stage after the Steering Committee had provided preliminary approval.

The first stage yielded 396 Concept Notes requesting US \$2,862,084,050 in funding across the eight thematic windows. Of the 396 Concept Notes, 123 were from Least Developed Countries, 15 from Low Income Countries, 182 from Lower Middle Income Countries and 76 from Upper Middle Income Countries.

The second stage required submission of a detailed proposal formally by the UN Resident Coordinator. Applications for Joint Programmes had to be for one to three years, with an annual budget of one to four million US dollars. In total, 171 proposals were prepared across the eight thematic windows.<sup>13</sup> The percentage of proposals submitted in this second stage by thematic window is displayed in the figure below.

**Figure 2: Percentage of Proposals Submitted by Thematic Window**



The relevant Technical Sub-Committees for the thematic windows assessed the proposals against the substantive goals of the Fund under that theme. The Convenor of each Technical Sub-Committee facilitated a discussion among members, who applied a set of design criteria relating to the broader goals and strategy of the MDG-F to ensure a consistent approach to the assessment. The Convenors then provided a recommendation to the Steering Committee as to whether the proposals were: suitable; not recommended in their present form but encouraged to resubmit following major revision; or unsuitable.

The Steering Committee then reviewed the recommendations of the Technical Sub-Committees and approved an ‘indicative’ budget on the basis of the Concept Note. Revised proposals were resubmitted within specified time limits for the different thematic windows. In the end a total of 130 Joint Programmes were undertaken in 50 countries.

### 1.2.7 Programme funding and financial allocation

The MDG-F operated through three primary accounts.<sup>14</sup>

- A Global Account of approximately US\$ 24.1 million provided funds to the core budgets of a select number of UN agencies. This accounted for 3% of MDG-F resources.
- The Delivering-as-One UN Account provided contributions ranging from US\$ 1 to 4 million to the Coherence funds in the eight ‘One UN’ country pilots: Mozambique, Tanzania, Rwanda,

Cape Verde, Pakistan, Vietnam, Albania and Uruguay. This account had an allotment of US\$ 68.5 million, which represented 8% of MDG-F resources.

- The Country Account, the largest in which 59 countries were eligible to submit Joint Programme proposals in the eight thematic windows. A total of US\$ 700 million were allocated to this account, representing 85% of MDG-F resources.

In addition, the MDG-F Secretariat has a Budget and Interest Income Account covered all the operational costs of the MDG-F Secretariat and its Global and Thematic implementation of strategic activities and financing of several Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and Special Assistant to the Resident Coordinator (SARCs). The Secretariat operating budget represents 3% of overall MDG-F funds for the period from 2007 to 2013.

### **1.2.8 The thematic windows, Convener Agencies and Joint Programmes**

Over the 2007 to 2013 period, the MDG-F funded 130 Joint Programmes in five regions through the eight thematic windows. Each of the thematic windows was led by a UN Convener Agency, which possesses the technical expertise and experience in the area to assume the lead role. The windows Convener Agencies and numbers of Joint Programmes by region are shown in Table 1 below.



**Table 1 - Number of Joint Programmes by Region, Thematic Window and Budget Allocation (%)**

Thematic Windows	Convener Agency	Asia and Pacific	Eastern Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean	Arab States	Africa	Total	% of Programmes	Budget Allocation(\$ Million)	Proportion of Resources
Children, Food Security and Nutrition	UNICEF	7	1	8	0	8	24	18	134.5	19%
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	UNDP Gender Team	3	0	5	3	2	13	10	90.0	10%
Environment and Climate Change	UNEP	3	2	6	2	4	17	13	89.5	14%
Democratic Economic Governance	UNDP-ODS*	1	2	7	0	1	11	8	60.0	8%
Youth, Employment and Migration	ILO	2	4	6	2	1	15	11	80.0	11%
Development and the Private Sector	UNIDO	1	2	7	1	1	12	9	63.0	9%
Conflict Prevention and Peace Building	UNDP-BCPR**	1	3	10	2	4	20	15	94.0	15%
Culture and Development	UNESCO	2	3	5	3	5	18	16	95.6	14%
Total		20	17	54	13	26	130	100	706.6	100 %
* UNDP Office of Development Studies ** UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery Figures taken from the MDG-F website. Numbers may not add up to exact budget due to rounding.										

## **2. CHAPTER 2: EVALUATION SCOPE, OBJECTIVES, APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Scope and timeframe of the evaluation**

In terms of the financial scope, the evaluation covered the Country Account (US\$ 700 million) and the MDG-F Secretariat Budget and Interest Income Account (approximately US\$ 50.1 million). Geographically, it covers 50 of the 59 eligible countries in the Spanish Master Plan that were successful in obtaining Joint Programmes. Finally, the evaluation covers the period from the creation of the MDG-F in December 2006, through December 2012, at which point over 70 of the 130 Joint Programmes had closed operations, with the remaining 60 closing within six months, or less. The evaluation made use of 98 final evaluation reports for Joint Programmes that were available before July 31, 2013.

### **2.2 Evaluation Goals and Objectives**

The overall goals of the evaluation were three-fold: (1) to determine the relevance and overall value of the MDG-F model as a multilateral mechanism for development cooperation, including the effectiveness of its concept, design, organizational and governance structure in achieving the intended development results; (2) the extent to which the Fund has contributed to UN System-wide Coherence and supported the Paris Declaration through its strategic work and global portfolio of Joint Programmes; and (3) the extent to which the Fund's Joint Programmes have reached their objectives within the eight thematic windows and, to the extent measureable, contributed to national MDG targets and other development objectives.

In addition, the terms of reference also outlined 14 specific objectives for the evaluation (see Annex A1) summarized here as covering such aspects as: the Fund's design and strategic orientation; the effectiveness of its institutional and organizational arrangements; the institutional, strategic and thematic results in each thematic window; the Fund's reach of marginalized and excluded groups; and the prospects of its replicability as a model for development cooperation.

### **2.3 Evaluation Issues, Questions and Criteria**

The MDG-F Evaluation Project Authority provided a question matrix consisting of 182 questions covering evaluation issues ranging from the global aspects about the effectiveness of the MDG-F model as an international cooperation mechanism to the extent of achievement of MDGs that might be attributed to the completion of MDG-F Joint Programmes across the eight thematic areas. The 182 questions were included in an Evaluation Design Matrix (Annex B) that provides indicators which were used to guide the development of data collection instruments and suggested analytical methods

In addressing the evaluation goals, objectives and key questions, the evaluation applied the criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability, as set out in the Terms of Reference. In addition, as the cross-cutting issues of gender inclusiveness and environmental sensitivity have become recognized as essential characteristics of good development, the evaluation team added these to the assessment. Given the importance of management as a determinant in obtaining good results, the evaluators also added the use of management tools to improve the performance of programmes not as a criterion but as an explanatory variable. The theory of change discussed in the next section helped the evaluators to connect the evaluation criteria with the challenges or risks to programme goal achievement. The way in which the evaluation criteria were assessed is described below.

**Relevance:** The evaluators examined the consistency of the Fund's design with both global and national objectives and goals as reflected in the degree to which the eight thematic windows embraced the development needs and prospects of the MDG-F eligible countries as well as the extent to which the work undertaken through the Fund's Joint Programmes, partnerships, and strategic initiatives was aligned with: the MDGs and other global and national development priorities, UN mandates and the UNDAF, the Principles of aid effectiveness, and responded to capacity gaps and needs of the beneficiaries.

**Efficiency:** The organizational structure, administration, and operations of the Fund's strategic and programme work, both at Headquarters and in the field, were evaluated. The evaluators sought evidence on whether the Fund's efforts to strengthen UN coordination at the national level and engage national counterparts and other stakeholders translated into timely decisions in the selection, design and implementation to ensure that the resources and inputs translated into the intended outputs and results at the most reasonable cost.

**Effectiveness:** The evaluators assessed the extent to which the overall strategic and thematic objectives of the Fund were met through its various areas of work by examining whether its programming activities have developed effective partnerships, achieved their intended objectives and results, and contributed significant benefits for the target populations, and whether these have in turn helped to accelerate progress on the MDGs and other global development objectives. Effectiveness of the Fund was also examined in terms of its contribution to UN coherence and efforts to advance the multi-sectoral approach to development programmes, and innovation with respect to the design and delivery processes. Finally, the evaluators also examined whether the Fund's "non-programming" aspects (such as its governance, monitoring and evaluation, communication and advocacy, and knowledge management strategies) have worked to help it achieve its objectives.

**Impact:** Given the relatively short time period that the Fund has been in operation, the evaluators aimed to describe and assess the contribution to intermediate and longer term outcomes and impacts that the Fund's interventions have generated, or would, especially those related to laws, regulations, policies, and replications or scale-up of the programmes or their various components. Beyond the programme, other expected or unexpected spin-off changes of a behavioural, institutional or social nature within the country, and global dialogue that may have been triggered by the Joint Programmes were also considered.

**Sustainability:** The evaluators examined the potential for sustainability of the Fund's Joint Programmes by evaluating the commitment, capacity, and financial resources of its partners, including national counterparts and civil society organizations, as well as the enabling environment in the partner countries. At the programme level, the evaluators tried to identify interventions that show promise for replication and scale-up. UN coherence is another element that was investigated under sustainability.

**Cross-cutting issues of Gender Inclusiveness and Environmental Sensitivity:** The evaluators examined the extent to which the programmes have integrated gender equality and environmental considerations in the design and implementation of the Joint Programmes. Use of management tools to improve the performance of programmes: Finally, although not proposed as an evaluation criterion in the evaluation Terms of Reference, given the centrality of management as a determinant in the process of obtaining good results, the meta-analysis also captured information on whether managers were provided with some of the essential managerial tools, and whether they made effective use of those tools to improve programme effectiveness. The evaluation team sees this as an important explanatory variable.

## 2.4 Logic Model and Theory of Change

The evaluation used a conceptual framework based on a “3R model” that relates the Results to the Resources and the Risks, which helped the evaluators to develop the logic model and theory of change and better understand the issues and variables and group them into three broad categories of variables reflecting the “3Rs”.

In the absence of a defined logic model<sup>15</sup> for the Fund, the evaluation team constructed one, based on the team's understanding of the Fund through discussions with the staff of the Fund Secretariat during the Scoping Mission and from key documents. The logic model, shown in the diagram in Figure 2, is an attempt to describe the expected causal chain of input and activities, outputs, outcomes and global or end results for the MDG-F as it was designed and delivered. The evaluators also developed a theory of change<sup>16</sup> to better understand the MDG-F and inform the development of the evaluation methodology.

Although not explicitly stated, the theory of change underpinning the MDG-F model can be reconstructed as follows. With the resources provided by the Government of Spain for the Fund, the assumption was that the UN system could address the challenge of advancing progress towards the global MDGs by contributing to the countries' efforts to achieve their own MDG objectives through Joint Programmes in selected thematic areas in each country. The decision to use the Joint Programme modality was intended to bring to bear the considerable expertise and experience of a number of UN agencies working together as one team under the lead of the Resident Coordinator in each country. This assumed an alignment of responsibilities, accountabilities and systems at the country level. It was deemed to be the best way of addressing the multi-dimensional and inter-sectoral challenges presented by the initiatives and delivering high quality results as judged by their relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Doing this in a manner that adheres to the Principles of the Paris Declaration would also foster greater UN system-wide coherence; better alignment with the needs and priorities of the countries; build greater local ownership, commitment and mutual accountability through engagement of local stakeholders; encourage harmonization of efforts among the UN partners to improve coordination and complementarity, and reduce risks of duplication and inefficiency. These in turn would increase the chances of effectiveness in achieving the intended results – at the output, outcome and impact levels.

It is further expected that the results achieved would encourage the continuation, replication and scale up of the types of investments either with the internal resources from the countries themselves or with external resources from other partners and donors. The overall logic and assumptions behind the MDG-F model are that the results from its work would make a significant contribution to the efforts of the countries in achieving their own MDG targets which, collectively, would in turn advance progress towards achievement of the global MDGs. The work of the MDG-F would serve as a model to demonstrate how progress can be made.

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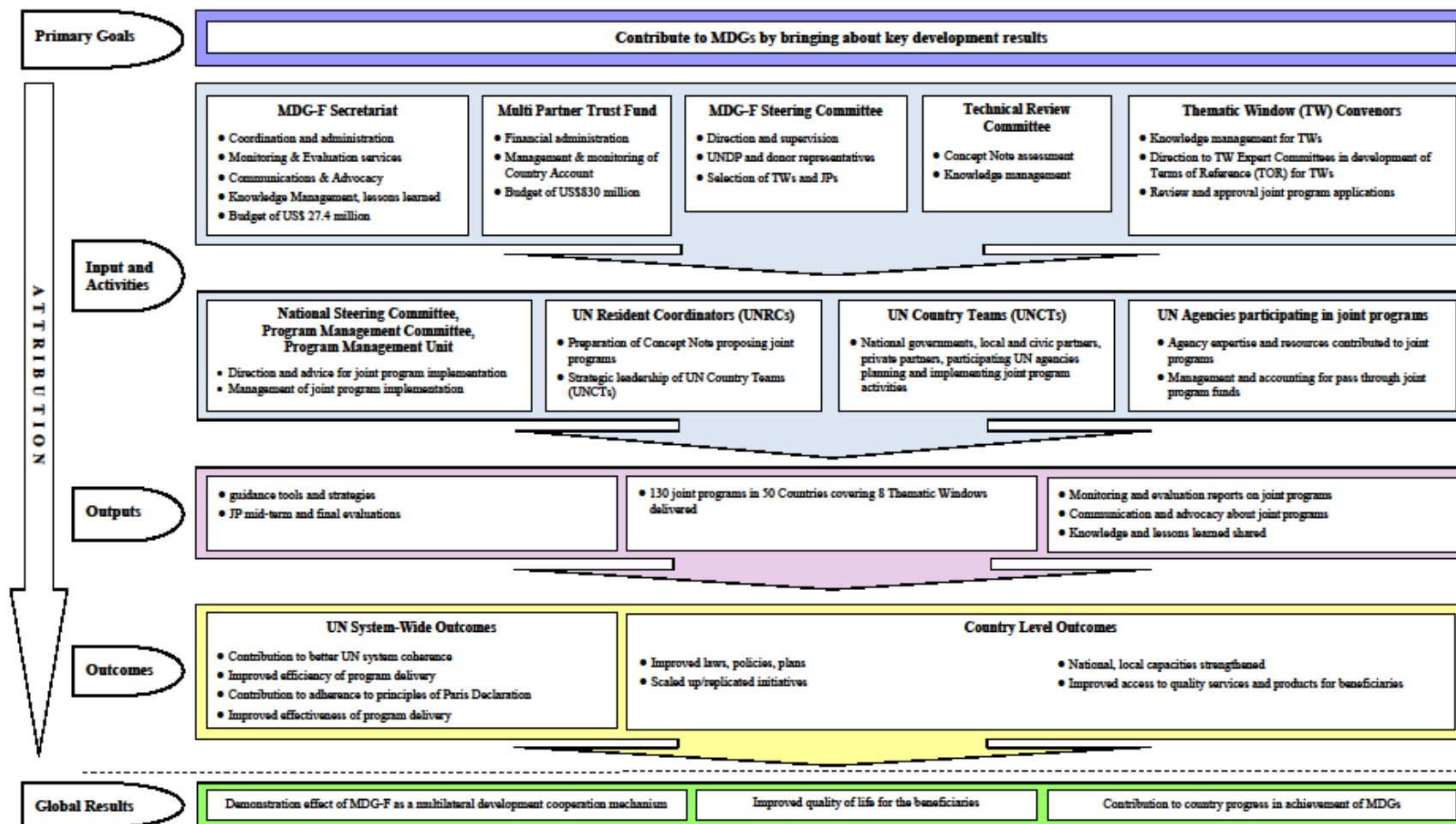
<sup>15</sup> The OECD/DAC glossary defines a results chain (logic model) as, “The causal sequence for a development intervention that stipulates the necessary sequence to achieve desired objectives, beginning with inputs, moving through activities and outputs, and culminating in outcomes, impacts, and feedback.”

<sup>16</sup> There is considerable debate over what exactly can be categorized as a theory of change. For the purposes of this evaluation, a simple theory is derived from what is known about the different ways UN development programmes are designed and delivered, and have been evaluated as achieving success. In effect, the theory of change diagram is constructed using “force field analysis” in which the various positive forces or factors stemming from the programme input and activities may be impeded or diverted by negative risk forces or factors leaving the desired outcomes and results unfulfilled.

The extent to which these assumptions and expectations are realized will depend on how well the key risks faced by the Joint Programmes are managed and/or mitigated. Some of these risks are outlined below.

- At the input-to-output level, key risks relate to the up-front “due diligence” work to ensure quality at entry: variables such as the choice of windows and initiatives, the appropriateness of the programmes' designs, assessment of the local needs and capacities, quality of baseline studies, level of engagement of agency partners and local stakeholders to secure their buy-in for implementation, etc. Failure to address such issues could lead to overly ambitious or inconsistent designs which affect programme relevance and effectiveness.
- At the output-to-outcome level, key risks would relate to quality during implementation issues such as the lack of coordination, coherence and complementarity with other initiatives to avoid duplication and overlap, the failure to harmonize agency procedures and to act as one, and engagement of local stakeholders to secure their buy-in. These risks affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes.
- At the outcome-to-impact level, the key risks relate to ownership and commitment of the local partners, their capacity, availability of resources to take over and sustain the programmes, and the existence of an environment in which the programmes can flourish and benefits can continue. Included here also is whether resources can be mobilized to support replication and/or scale up of initiatives and bridge any funding gap. These issues affect the sustainability of benefits from the programmes which is believed most likely to result when the programmes: instill national and local ownership; are aligned with national policies and procedures; are coordinated with other donors; are results-oriented and of sufficient duration to take hold before programme/intervention termination; and require mutual accountability. These elements formed some of the programme selection criteria for MDG-F support as they reflect the Principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.
- Finally, there are a series of external risks in the international domain. The obvious of these are international commodity prices and the health of the global financial system (e.g. the effects of the recent financial crisis) which has a significant bearing on the ability of the country as well as the internal and external partners to provide the necessary inputs and resources needed to sustain the gains from the investments.

Figure 2 MDG-F Logic Model



## 2.5 Methodological Overview

### 2.5.1 Overall design

The evaluation is structured around two main levels of analysis. The first is the Joint Programme and thematic level which provides the building blocks to address the second, more global level of analysis focused on the MDG-F model as a multilateral mechanism for development cooperation and enhancement of UN system-wide coherence and the Principles of the Paris Declaration.

### 2.5.2 Use of multiple lines of evidence

Data were collected through seven lines of evidence and integrated or triangulated<sup>17</sup> at various stages of data analysis to add rigor to the evaluation by providing an opportunity for the cross-checking and validating of data from one source with that from the others. Findings from a particular method that deviate from those obtained from the others were investigated and reasons for the deviation explained. A brief overview of these lines of evidence follows. A complete description of the methodology is contained in Annex A.

### Document Review

A review of documents was conducted using standardized templates to extract information relevant to the evaluation questions and levels of analysis, and to better understand the conceptualization of the Fund and its Joint Programme delivery modality, including what transpired over the six year design and delivery period. In total, more than 547 non-country specific and 1,920 country-specific documents were reviewed. The list of documents is provided in Annex C.

### Meta-evaluation and meta-analysis of Joint Programme final evaluations

A meta-analysis of the contents of 93 Joint Programme final evaluations was conducted to capture information from the evaluations and assess the quality of the Joint Programmes. These evaluations, which were conducted by independent consultants and involved data collection through interviews, focus groups, and site visits, were retained after quality screening of 98 that were available as of the July 31, 2013 cut-off date set by the evaluation for data collection. The quality of Joint Programmes was assessed on the basis of the evaluation criteria, using a balanced four-point scale with categories of Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory and Highly Unsatisfactory to rate each criterion. The process followed the approach and methodology which was endorsed by the DAC Evaluation Network for assessing the development effectiveness of multilateral organizations<sup>18</sup> and subsequently used in the development effectiveness reviews of the UNDP, World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF, allowing for a comparison of the performance of MDG-F's Joint Programmes with those agencies. The distribution of the evaluations relative to the number of Joint Programmes in each thematic window is shown in Table 2 below.

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<sup>17</sup> Defined by the OECD/DAC as “The use of three or more theories, sources or types of information, or types of analysis to verify and substantiate an assessment”. See OECD/DAC, *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management*, 2010, p. 37

<sup>18</sup>

See <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluationofdevelopmentprogrammefund/dcdndep/evaluatingmultilateraleffectiveness.htm> for the document titled: ‘Assessing the Development Effectiveness of Multilateral Organizations: Guidance note on the Methodological Approach’.

**Table 2 - Number of Evaluations Relative to the Number of Joint Programmes in each Thematic Window**

The Eight Thematic Windows	Joint Programmes in Window	# of Available Evaluations	# of Evaluations Retained	Retained as % of Window
<b>1. Conflict Prevention &amp; Peace Building</b>	20	11	9	45%
<b>2. Children, Food Security &amp; Nutrition</b>	24	13	11	46%
<b>3. Culture &amp; Development</b>	18	17	16	89%
<b>4. Democratic Economic Governance</b>	11	9	9	82%
<b>5. Environment &amp; Climate Change</b>	17	16	16	94%
<b>6. Gender Equality &amp; Women's Empowerment</b>	13	10	10	77%
<b>7. Development &amp; Private Sector</b>	12	9	9	75%
<b>8. Youth, Employment &amp; Migration</b>	15	13	13	87%
Totals	130	98	93	72%

The 93 evaluations provide a good representation of the 130 Joint Programmes from which to derive conclusions about the Fund's work<sup>19</sup> overall. At the thematic window level, however, the coverage of the Conflict Prevention & Peace Building and the Children, Food Security & Nutrition windows was 45% and 46% respectively compared with more than 70% for the others. This could introduce some bias when comparing these windows with the others as discussed in the limitations section. However, the evaluation team considers that the nine and eleven evaluations respectively provide a good critical mass and an adequate basis for drawing conclusions about those windows. In such small samples, it is more meaningful to talk about the critical mass of Joint Programmes rather than representativeness, given the variations in country contexts by the five regions, four income levels and levels of conflict.

### Key Informant Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 261 individuals, ranging from 40 to 90 minutes in length (depending on the type of organization represented) to obtain feedback from a wide range of respondents at both the Fund and thematic window and Joint Programme levels of analysis. Eleven different interview questionnaires, some with subsections containing questions specific to thematic windows, were developed and translated into seven languages.<sup>20</sup> In total 15 interviews were completed with UN stakeholders<sup>21</sup> in New York for level 1 analysis, and 246 in the field for level 2 analysis, with partner country stakeholders.<sup>22</sup> Further details are provided in Annex A2.

<sup>19</sup> The 93 evaluations (of 130 Joint Programmes) provide a confidence level of 95% and confidence interval (error margin) of 5.44. The impact of the unavailability of the remaining 32 evaluations is discussed later in the section under limitations

<sup>20</sup> Arabic, Bosnian, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

<sup>21</sup> These included staff of the MDG-F, UN agencies involved, UN country teams and Resident Coordinators.

<sup>22</sup> These included: Officials in national and local governments, private sector, civil society partners and beneficiaries.



## Focus Groups

A total 134 focus group sessions involving 1,080 participants were conducted during the field visits. Roughly 70% of the participants were partner country stakeholders mentioned in footnote 25. The rest were from the UN stakeholder groups involved in the programmes. Further details are provided in Annex A2.3.

## Electronic Survey

An electronic survey was developed to obtain information for both the Level 1 and the Level 2 analyses, with questions tailored for different categories of MDG-F stakeholders as shown below in Table 3. The survey was directed to these stakeholders, except those that otherwise participated in interviews or focus groups to avoid “double counting” of views. Of the 1456 invitations, 44% were directed to partner country stakeholders mentioned above. The survey resulted in 574 responses, an overall response rate of 39%, which provides an acceptable margin of error<sup>23</sup>. Partner country stakeholders accounted for 33% of the 574 responses, but roughly 50% of the responses to questions related to the level 2 analysis.

**Table 3 - Categories of Survey Respondents Targeted and Response Rates**

Categories of Survey Respondents	Contacts Supplied	Responses	Response Rate <sup>24</sup>	Margin of Error*
Staff of the MDG-F Secretariat	9	11	122%	
MDG-F Technical Sub-Committee members	1	4	400%	
Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office	2	3	150%	
UN Resident Coordinators (UNRCs)	141	42	30%	12.7
UN Agency Partners for the MDG-F	241	157	65%	4.6
Thematic Window Experts	58	7	12%	
Private Sector	110	13	12%	
National Governments	363	110	30%	7.8
Local Governments and Civil Society Groups	172	51	30%	11.5
UN Country Teams in specific countries of Joint Programmes (JPs)	359	176	49%	5.3
Total	1456	574	39%	3.2
*Calculated at the 95% confidence level				

<sup>23</sup> At the 95% confidence level (certainty), with confidence interval of +/- 5 (margin of error).

<sup>24</sup> Note that in some cases, the responses were greater than those contacted. This is due to the fact that the participants were asked into which group they belonged. However the participant list was categorized by the various field offices that supplied the data. So, if there were ten people on the list, and the people who set up the list said that only two were members of Group B, but eight people self-identified as being part of that group, the result would be 400% response in that group.

## Country Site Visits and Comprehensive Desk Review

The MDG-F Evaluation Project Authority and Capra International Inc. agreed on criteria for the selection of countries and Joint Programmes to include in the country visits and the desk reviews. The criteria included coverage of regional, thematic, and budgetary aspects. A description of the criteria and selection process is contained in Annex E. The eight countries of the ten that had been selected for site visits, and which were able to receive the evaluators (covering 33 Joint Programmes), as well as the 10 countries for desk reviews plus Egypt and Ethiopia that had not been available for site visits (covering 39 Joint Programmes) were chosen because, taken together, they covered 55% of funding and activities. The site visit<sup>25</sup> and desk review countries are listed in Annex A2.5 and A2.6. The country visits involved data collection through document reviews, site observation, interviews and focus groups. The desk reviews covered a wide range of internal MDG-F external documents as referenced throughout the report but too extensive to list here.

## Database Development and Analysis

A two-part data set was constructed from three existing databases and four other documentary sources to serve as the master data file for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis using Minitab.<sup>26</sup> The first part, developed for analysis at the Joint Programme level (to investigate relationships between input, activity, context and performance as determined through the meta-analysis) contains a list of all 130 MDG-F Joint Programmes and a listing of other UNDP programmes that covered the same time period. The second part, developed for analysis at the country level to compare the MDG performance of MDG-F beneficiary countries with countries that were not beneficiaries of the Fund, contains data for 106 countries grouped as: (1) MDG-F programmes in a country; (2) non-MDG-F programmes in a country; and (3) no relevant UNDG programmes conducted in a country.

## 2.6 Data Analysis

A mix of qualitative and quantitative techniques was used as appropriate to analyze the data. Data from all sources at the country level (interviews, focus group and document review) were integrated into the NVivo quantitative and qualitative software analysis system as the repository of data from the evaluation evidence matrix. Quantitative data (from the meta-analysis, the MDG performance data for countries to compare the MDG performance of beneficiary and non-beneficiary countries,) were subjected to multivariate statistical analysis using Minitab as explained in Annex A.

## 2.7 Limitations

No evaluation is without limitations, especially one as complex as this. Following are some of the major challenges and constraints encountered, with commentary on their impact on the evaluation.

The initial six-month period from signature of the contract on March 19, 2013 to the expected delivery of the first draft report by the end of September (subsequently changed to October 14, 2013) was very tight to complete an evaluation of this magnitude.

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<sup>25</sup> Countries visited involved eight countries: Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Philippines and Vietnam. Data was collected from all eight countries through interviews, focus groups, site visits, and surveys.

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.minitab.com/en-CA/products/minitab/default.aspx?WT.srch=1&WT.mc\\_id=SE005663](http://www.minitab.com/en-CA/products/minitab/default.aspx?WT.srch=1&WT.mc_id=SE005663)

The Final Evaluations for all 130 Joint Programmes were not available for sampling and analysis when the evaluation started. Consequently, the evaluation team decided to cover all evaluations available by a July 31, 2013 cut off set by the evaluation team for data collection. The reasons for the unavailability of the remaining 32 evaluations are unclear. Regardless of the reasons for their unavailability, the results from the meta-analysis could reflect a positive bias if the 32 Joint Programmes are of poorer quality than the 93 included, or a negative bias if they are of better quality than the 93. At the thematic window level, the coverage of the Conflict Prevention & Peace Building and Children, Food Security & Nutrition windows was 45% and 46% respectively compared to over 70% for the others. This could also introduce some bias, especially when comparing these windows with the others.

Given the large number of factors that likely influenced the effects and outcomes of the MDG-F and the complexity of their interactions, the evaluators sought to determine the possible “contributions” of the Joint Programme activities to the effects and impacts rather than “attributing” those effects/impacts to the presence of the Joint Programmes.<sup>27</sup> Attribution was analysed mostly at the output and (to some extent) outcome levels of the results chain.

Finally, most of the information available on the Joint Programmes was qualitative, limiting the ability of the evaluators to make inferences within a known degree of statistical certainty. Nonetheless, some of the qualitative data were rated and coded for use in limited quantitative analyses. Where such analysis was done, the potential threats to the validity of inferences are discussed.

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<sup>27</sup> *Attribution* refers to the establishing of a causal linkage between a given development intervention and an observed result. There is a very broad literature on causal attribution which is predominantly tilted to the evaluation of projects or discrete interventions, and to the use of quantitative methods (inferential statistics and econometrics). Evaluation practitioners prefer the word *contribution*, meaning that the results cannot be attributed entirely to one single actor only: each actor plays a role in the joint intervention and the evaluator’s task is to explain how each actor contributed to the observed results.

### 3. CHAPTER 3: KEY FINDINGS – PROGRAMME AND THEMATIC LEVEL

#### 3.1 Performance by Evaluation Criteria

##### 3.1.1 Relevance

Given the multi-dimensional nature of relevance, and the importance of the issue of capacity, four sub-criteria were identified to capture information on the relevance of the Joint Programmes. The results based on the final evaluations in the meta-analysis are outlined in the table below.

**Table 4 - Relevance of the Joint Programmes Derived from Meta-Analysis of Final Evaluations**

The Relevance Sub-Criteria	HS	S	U	HU	N/A
1. The programme is suited to the needs and/or priorities of the target group/beneficiaries.	49 53%	40 43%	4 4%	-	-
2. The programme is aligned with national development priorities and goals.	63 68%	29 31%	1 1%	-	-
3. The programme is aligned with the MDGs, UN priorities and the UNDAFs.	69 74%	23 25%	-	-	1 1%
4. The programme responded to capacity needs and gaps at different levels in the country.	47 51%	40 43%	4 4%	2 2%	-
Number of Joint Programme final evaluations reviewed = 93					

HS = Highly Satisfactory; S = Satisfactory; U = Unsatisfactory; HU = Highly Unsatisfactory; N/A = Not Addressed

As the table above indicates, the four relevance sub-criteria were well covered in the final evaluations of the Joint Programmes. The picture that emerges from the Final Evaluations of 93 of the 130 Joint Programmes is a set of investments which have performed quite well on relevance, with the majority of the 93 programmes rated as either Highly Satisfactory or Satisfactory on each of the four sub-criteria assessed. Of particular note, is the large proportion of programmes that rated Highly Satisfactory on alignment with the countries' national development priorities as well as the priorities of the UN, the UNDAFs and the MDGs.

The overall positive assessment on the relevance of the Fund's Joint Programmes that emerged from the meta-analysis is consistent with the views of interviewees in the country visits that emphasized a strong alignment to the needs at the local level and to national development plans. As well, 90% of 394 survey respondents indicated that the model and programmes were mostly or entirely consistent, when asked about the consistency of the Joint Programme objectives with the priority areas and outcomes specified in the country strategies and the UNDAF.

However, there was still significant room for improvement. The room for improvement was particularly obvious in the four cases where the programmes were considered less than satisfactory with respect to suitability to the needs and /or priorities of intended beneficiaries, and the six which were rated as less than satisfactory in terms of addressing the capacity needs and gaps in the country. Further investigation reveals that the issue was less one of alignment and more one of appropriateness of the design to achieve the intended outputs and outcomes. Unlike the highly rated programmes, the poorly rated programmes exhibited one or more of the following weaknesses: a poor design to reach their intended target groups and results; resources thinly spread over too many locations; the absence of a clear monitoring and evaluation matrix with a reasonable number of well selected indicators that could be tracked; and weak engagement of the local partners in the design and implementation process. In short, those programmes seemed to have been designed for the beneficiaries without their input rather than with them, and reflect an underlying weakness in the discipline of managing for results. The short time frame for the design of the Joint Programmes may have contributed to these weaknesses.

At the Thematic Window level, the question of whether the various thematic windows were relevant can be answered in the affirmative if it can be shown that they gave rise to Joint Programmes that addressed relevant needs in the countries. As many of the global challenges are reflected in the various MDGs, the extent to which the Joint Programmes address the MDGs and the areas outlined in the Terms of Reference for the thematic window is an indication of their relevance in addressing global challenges. The previous discussion clearly shows that the Joint Programmes addressed relevant needs in the countries. It also showed that they were aligned with the MDGs. A further breakdown of the relevance ratings by thematic window revealed no appreciable difference among the eight windows, as the aggregate percentage of Joint Programmes that rated satisfactory or better in each window fell within a narrow range of 93 to 100%.

Additional supporting evidence for the preceding statements is found in evaluation survey responses. Asked about how well the objectives and activities of the Joint Programmes matched up with the general objectives, priorities and challenges posed in the thematic window Terms of Reference, 87% of 395 respondents indicated they did so to a fair or great extent.

An indication of whether the thematic windows each addressed global development challenges comes from the country partners (national and local governments as well as civil society level), who considered the Terms of Reference for each thematic window to have addressed real global challenges in their respective areas, and to have effectively guided the design, development and implementation of Joint Programmes. According to Thematic Window Convenors and the Technical Sub-committee representatives, the Terms of Reference for the thematic windows provided useful guidance for the selection of Joint Programmes in each of the windows. Besides being aligned with national priorities of the countries and the UNDAFs, each Joint Programme was also fully aligned with its window Terms of Reference, a fact that was also confirmed in many of the Joint Programme final evaluations.

It is evident that many of the beneficiaries were among the most disadvantaged and hard to reach.

In the **Children, Food Security and Nutrition (CFSN)** window, the 24 Joint Programmes aimed at contributing to achieve the MDG goals of reducing child mortality and eradicating extreme poverty and hunger through interventions ranging from providing low cost nutritional packages that can save lives and promote healthy development to engaging with pregnant and lactating mothers to ensure they are healthy and aware of key nutrition issues. Despite progress over the past 20 years in reducing the number of stunted children under the age of five by about 88 million, roughly a quarter of all children are still stunted, and poor nutrition causes approximately 3.1 million child deaths each year. Reducing extreme poverty and hunger and halting preventable deaths caused by poor nutrition thus continues to be a global challenge today. The MDG-F initiatives targeted the poorest and most vulnerable populations, including indigenous communities, as 18 of the 24 programme countries hosted more than a third of all the under-nourished people in the world in 2010-2012.<sup>28</sup>

Regarding the **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE)** window, the 13 Joint Programmes aimed at contributing to achieve MDG 3, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, by adopting a more comprehensive approach that addresses issues of access to opportunities and the guarantee of rights. Some of these include improving legal systems to respect women's rights, particularly those of marginalized indigenous and ethnic minority groups, strengthening participation in economic life and in decision making processes and reducing the incidence of violence that women suffer. These issues continue to be global challenges as roughly one third of the world's illiterate adults are female and over two thirds of its poorest people are women and girls. Across the

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<sup>28</sup> MDG-F website.

world, gender-based inequalities continue to deny women a say in the decisions that affect their lives. The MDG-F's recognition that gender equality and women's empowerment are vital for the realization of human rights for all and the necessity to build a society in which women and men share equally in the distribution of power and influence and have equal access to education, health, decent work and livelihoods was a key driver in its GEWE Joint Programmes to achieve gender equality. Having this gender perspective incorporated into programmes across all our other thematic windows was also important.<sup>29</sup>

In the **Environment and Climate Change** (ECC) window, the 17 Joint Programmes aimed at contributing to achieve MDG 7 on environmental sustainability, particularly the target of integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reversing the loss of environmental resources. MDG-F efforts embraced recent discourse on climate change, emphasizing its impact on poor people thereby ensuring that the initiatives remain inextricably linked to issues of poverty and inequality. Its recognition that progress on the MDGs can only be sustained by a healthy planet and that poor people's livelihoods rely heavily on natural resources, and environmental changes and fluctuations often have a devastating effect on their ability to survive, preventing them from fully accessing basic services like water, sanitation and energy were key factors in its motivation for the Joint Programmes. Environmental issues have been increasingly visible in the development agenda in the last few decades. The loss of forests and other natural habitats, overexploitation of natural resources, chemical contamination and lack of safe water and sanitation in a large proportion of the developing world continue to affect societies and hinder development.<sup>30</sup>

In the **Youth, Employment and Migration** (YEM) window, the 14 Joint Programmes aimed to contribute to the MDG target of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people. Interventions range from increasing the awareness of young people on the right to decent employment, building their skills and brokering partnerships with cooperatives and the private sector to secure concrete work placements to prioritizing employment in national policy-making as a central concern in national economic and social policies and developing national policies and programmes dedicated to increasing employment opportunities for young people. The MDG-F recognized that there are more young people in the world today than ever before, that 1.3 billion of them living in developing countries, and that they face incredible challenges as they transition into adulthood, particularly in finding decent work. The global financial crisis and economic downturn have resulted in the largest cohort ever of unemployed youth, with 80.7 million young people struggling to find work in 2009. Many migrate in search of better opportunities. The MDG-F programmes sought to improve young people's chances of securing decent work, self-employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, as well as promoting socially inclusive development and respect for youths' fundamental rights. Initiatives created community employment services, encouraged new job opportunities, promoted legal frameworks and tackled migration with new policies and awareness-raising campaigns.<sup>31</sup>

As for the **Democratic Economic Governance** (DEG) window, the 11 Joint Programmes aimed to contribute to the MDG target of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to affordable and safe drinking water by 2015, one of the targets of MDG 7. The programmes sought to do this strengthening the capacity of national institutions to design and implement water policies and regulations and provide communities with efficient water and sanitation services. They also tackled the barriers that indigenous populations and women face in accessing water and sanitation services by involving communities, civil society representatives, women and youth in the planning, management and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> MDG-F website

maintenance of water services. By encouraging investment in services to poor communities, the programmes helped develop new and innovative mechanisms to finance water supply and sanitation infrastructures and services to the most marginalized populations. Lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation may constitute a barrier to achieving several MDGs and good governance ensures that the voices of the poor and vulnerable are heard in this critical area.<sup>32</sup>

In the **Development and the Private Sector** (DPS) window, the 12 Joint Programmes aimed to contribute to the MDG goal of eradicating extreme poverty, halving between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day, by supporting development of pro-poor growth policies that increase the participation and benefits of the poor in private sector development, bolstering economic sectors where the poor are strongly represented, and improve access and support to small and medium enterprises. The MDG-F recognized that poverty in its many dimensions persists stubbornly worldwide, and that the private sector can play a role in efforts to reduce poverty through economic growth as a means to human development. The programmes thus encouraged the development of pro-poor growth policies that increase the participation and benefits of the poor in private sector development, particularly women, and bolster economic sectors where the poor are strongly represented. They supported pro-poor business in some of the poorest regions and with vulnerable groups that often suffer multiple dimensions of poverty, including women, youth, ethnic minorities and indigenous communities. They also sought to increase net income and employment for poor households.<sup>33</sup>

In the **Conflict Prevention and Peace Building** (CPPB) window, the 20 Joint Programmes aimed to contribute to MDG goals of eradicating extreme poverty and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment by addressing conflict both as a cause and symptom of poverty and hunger, and recognizing it as a precondition for MDG fulfillment. Interventions range from developing local violence prevention plans that address causes and responses to conflict to using sports, arts and culture as a creative tool to channel young people's energy away from violence and towards the construction of positive relationships. The recognition that violent conflict is often a symptom of deep rooted inequality and social exclusion, and that some 1.5 billion people live in areas where violent conflict limits their ability to live, work and get educated, the MDG-F's work addressed conflict both as a cause and symptom of poverty and hunger. Conflict can reverse developmental gains by decades. Hence the programmes worked on solutions to overcome conflicts by promoting access to justice, providing peaceful dispute resolution and legal mechanisms, forging intercultural dialogue and building a culture of peace. A common aim across the programmes was ensuring that people know and exert their rights as an important component of a peace building and conflict prevention strategy.<sup>34</sup>

With respect to the **Culture and Development** (C&D) window, the 18 Joint Programmes aimed to contribute to all MDGs, particularly with regard to halving the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day by 2015, giving special attention to the participation of women in these efforts and addressing key challenges related to education, health and the environment. The programmes focused on cultural rights, social inclusion and increasing the cultural heritage and tourism potential of countries to reduce poverty, increase employment and improve socio-economic opportunities for the marginalized segments of the population. The MDG-F recognized that respect for cultural diversity promotes vibrant and inclusive societies, and that strengthening creative industries and protecting natural and cultural heritage have proved to be effective instruments of economic development. The programmes thus sought to harness the potential of the creative sector for job creation, economic growth and poverty reduction and supported efforts to promote the inclusion of minorities and marginalized segments of the population in

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> MDG-F website

social, political and cultural life. The programmes worked extensively with indigenous communities to safeguard their cultural heritage and to build health and education services that respond to their worldviews.<sup>35</sup>

With the needs so great and the gap to be closed still wide to achieve the MDG targets when the Fund was created in 2007, it is difficult to argue with the choice of the eight thematic windows and the priorities for focus within each as outlined above. The justification provided in each of the Terms of Reference for each Thematic Window made sense then as they do now, given that the challenges that the Fund sought to address are still priorities to be addressed in the current context. The process the Fund used to finalize the scope, detailed objectives and types of intervention in the eight thematic windows brought together five to seven thematic experts from within and outside the UN system in committees to elaborate the Terms of Reference for each window, under the leadership of newly formed Thematic Window Convenor agencies. This helped to ensure that development challenges that were relevant to the MDGs (at the global and country levels) were given priority.

**In summary**, the relevance of the MDG-F's Joint Programmes has been solid, with some room for improvement among the significant proportion that were rated as Satisfactory and the few that were rated as less than Satisfactory. From a theory of change perspective, the high level of relevance of the Joint Programmes is a validation of the appropriateness of the choices which can be linked to the front end "due diligence" and preparatory work of the Fund in developing Terms of Reference for the respective thematic windows which were then used to guide the selection of the Joint Programmes. The process of competitive selection of the individual Joint Programmes appeared to have lessened the risk of poor alignment and ensured that the 130 initiatives chosen for funding and subsequent development into Joint Programmes were the best choices in each of the thematic windows and from the 396 concept notes overall. Where there were weaknesses, these were less related to the choice of the investments and more to the designs of the programmes – unrealistic objectives, unclear results frameworks, etc. that reflect an underlying weakness relating to the discipline of managing for results as will become more evident later when the criterion of use of management tools is discussed. Insufficient time and effort to involve local level partners in the actual planning of the ways and means to implement some the programmes was also an issue.

### 3.1.2 Efficiency

In order to capture the complexity of the efficiency concept at the level of the Joint Programmes, the evaluation team identified and rated four aspects as outlined in the table below.

The picture that emerges here is less positive than that of relevance, but still positive overall, with a majority of the programmes performing satisfactorily or better on each of the four sub-criteria. However, a significant proportion of the programmes performed poorly on each of the sub-criteria and was rated as less than satisfactory. The less than satisfactory category included 19% of the programmes that were not considered cost/resource efficient with their inputs, and 24% that did not achieve their objectives on time. Perhaps most striking was the efficiency of systems and procedures for programme implementation and follow-up, where 40% of the programmes performed at a less than satisfactory level, registering deficiencies which contributed to delays in achieving their objectives. Related to this was the issue of harmonization and simplification of operational procedures, where 30% of the programmes were rated as less than satisfactory. Although individual programmes recognized the need to do this and made some effort to do so, these efforts were not successful.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



**Table 5 - Efficiency of the Joint Programmes derived from Meta-Analysis of Final Evaluations**

The Efficiency Sub-Criteria	HS	S	U	HU	N/A
1. Programme activities are evaluated as cost/resource efficient	23 (25%)	52 (56%)	16 (17%)	2 (2%)	-
2. Evaluation indicates implementation, objectives achieved on time	19 (20%)	52 (56%)	21 (23%)	1 (1%)	-
3. Systems, procedures for programme implementation and follow-up	18 (19%)	36 (38%)	35 (38%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)
4. Efforts to harmonize, simplify UN Agencies' operational procedures	21 (23%)	42 (45%)	24 (26%)	4 (4%)	2 (2%)
Number of Joint Programme final evaluations reviewed = 93					

HS = Highly Satisfactory; S = Satisfactory; U = Unsatisfactory; HU = Highly Unsatisfactory; N/A = Not Addressed

The evidence from the surveys, focus groups and interviews, country visits and document reviews is consistent with the picture obtained above from the meta-analysis. Asked about the extent of harmonization and simplification achieved in the planning and execution of MDG-F programmes (e.g. by integrating reporting where possible with existing national/local programmes), 70% of the 151 survey respondents indicated that the Joint Programmes harmonized and simplified things either “not at all” or “to some degree” only. Comment at the country level consistently indicated that there was limited evidence of simplification of processes and harmonization. Many examples were also found in the document reviews of the Joint Programmes to suggest that both management decision-making and the management of operations (planning, execution, financing and reporting) were not harmonized to a significant degree, or at least not to the degree expected through the mandatory adoption by the UN partner agencies, national and local partners of the Fund governance structure, the management model and processes, and the financial administration model (pass-through funding).

When asked if participation in the Fund’s Joint Programmes was less burdensome in terms of resources, effort and costs than other UN, bilateral or multilateral (e.g. International Financial Institutions) initiatives, 43% of the 238 country-level survey respondents indicated that MDG-F programmes have increased their transaction costs/level of burden, while 30% indicated the MDG-F programmes were somewhat less burdensome and 27% said they were about the same as other types. Similar patterns were indicated during the country visits.

It is perhaps worthwhile to note here that many of the final evaluations may have understated the true costs associated with the delays, given the way that most of them dealt with and reported on the efficiency aspect. There were considerable delays in many of the Joint Programmes, which had to seek time extensions to implement needed changes recommended in the respective mid-term evaluations to achieve their objectives. Because the time extensions (of up to a year in some cases) were approved as “no cost” extensions by the Fund (i.e. no increase to the Joint Programmes’ budgets), the evaluations did not take into consideration the costs to the other partners or the opportunity costs of delayed outputs, as the intended outputs were realized within the original budget. In doing so, the true unit costs for the outputs were understated (and the resources/cost efficiency was commensurately overstated). Thus, some of the ratings reflect a generous assessment. The value of the time of staff and stakeholders who have been engaged during this delay was not taken into consideration, nor were the opportunity costs associated with later delivery of the benefits. This resulted in more generous rating of the sub-criteria relating whether programme activities were to cost/resources efficient, and the overall effectiveness of the Joint Programmes.

At the Thematic Window level, a breakdown of the ratings by thematic window revealed significant difference among the eight windows. The percentage of Joint Programmes rated as satisfactory or better

on the sub-criteria ranged from a low of 53% to a high of 86% among the windows, with an average of 70%. This was the second lowest average rating among the evaluation criteria, with only the gender inclusiveness and environmental sensitivity rating lower. The windows where the ratings were lowest were: Democratic Economic Governance, Children, Food Security and Nutrition, Youth Employment and Migration, and Environment and Climate Change in that order. Various issues were seen. For example, in the Children, Food Security and Nutrition area 45% of the ratings were less than satisfactory, with poor ratings on systems and procedures for implementation, and harmonization and simplification of procedures. The programmes in this window took a multi-sector approach and involved a large number of UN partners which, while needed for the required expertise, adversely affected their efficiency.

Looking at the evidence on efficiency from the Joint Programme final evaluations as well as the other sources, it is evident that: (i) Harmonization and simplification was not achieved in MDG-F operations as expected, and (ii) Transaction costs and burden on countries did not decrease at the country level as expected. Instead, the Fund model at the country level tended to increase transaction costs or leave them unchanged. In trying to better understand the reasons for the weaknesses in efficiency, several factors emerged as possible explanations and these were common to all windows:

- Some programmes had activities that were thinly spread over several sites;
- The process and negotiations to set up the One UN approach were long and difficult;
- Decision-making was slow on the part of some key players and was particularly pronounced when the number of partners was large (e.g. more than six UN agencies);
- The extent to which different UN partners worked together toward common Joint Programme objectives varied, as staff of the partner agencies struggled to balance their own agency's procedures and requirements with those required when working in a more harmonized way as required by the MDG-F; and
- The inclusion of non-resident UN agencies as Joint Programme partners was not handled the same way in different countries or for different thematic window Joint Programmes. In some cases the non-resident agency contributions were critical and not considered too costly in view of the need for the expertise; in other cases the costs of either travel or installation of temporary offices was considered too high for the value of the contributions made by the non-resident agency. In several cases, the non-resident agencies were less successful in delivering efficiency and effectiveness, particularly when they had a major/lead role.

The efficiency of Joint Programme delivery was an area where there was considerable room for improvement. In addition to the significant proportion of programmes that has been rated as less than satisfactory on the four efficiency sub-criteria, roughly half of the programmes fell in the Satisfactory category where there was still room for improvement. Harmonization and simplification of operational procedures was not achieved in MDG-F operations, and the transaction costs and burden on partner countries did not decrease at the country level as expected. Instead, the Fund model at the country level tended to increase transaction costs or leave them unchanged. The overall efficiency was negatively affected by the challenges that the different agencies faced in trying to respect their own organizations' procedures while also trying to harmonize and coordinate efforts with other agencies. This incurred significant delays in implementation with a resulting loss of efficiency. There was evidence of this in every thematic window. The issue was partly systemic and partly due to the increased number of partners in the Joint Programmes, both in terms of UN agencies involved and ministries and other entities in the partner countries.

But a more significant issue may be one of unrealistic expectations of the Fund that efficiency gains would be realized within the relatively short time period of three or four years, given the kinds of

complex, inter-sectorial challenges being tackled by the Joint Programmes, the relatively new use of the Joint Programme modality by the UN partners, and involvement of a large number of partners who are still learning and adjusting to work in this new way with the systemic, procedural and cultural constraints posed by their respective organizations.

### 3.1.3 Effectiveness and Impact

For the effectiveness analysis, three sub-criteria were reviewed: objectives achievement, target group benefits and partnerships, (given the importance of partnerships to effective development). For the impact aspect, two other factors were reviewed: significant changes to national development policies, programmes and/or to system reforms as well as other noticeable changes beyond the programme.

**Table 6 - Effectiveness and Impact of the Joint Programmes derived from Meta-Analysis of Final Evaluations**

Effectiveness and Impact Sub-Criteria	HS	S	U	HU	N/A
<b>Effectiveness:</b>					
1. The programme developed effective partnerships with governments, and other Agencies for planning, coordination and implementation	52 (56%)	38 (41%)	3 (3%)	-	-
2. The programme achieved its stated objectives and expected results	43 (46%)	45 (48%)	5 (5%)	-	-
3. The programme resulted in positive benefits for target group members, made differences for substantial number of beneficiaries	52 (56%)	38 (41%)	3 (3%)	-	-
<b>Impact:</b>					
1. Contributed to significant changes in national development policies and programmes and/or to needed system reforms.	45 (48%)	39 (42%)	7 (8%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
2. The programme resulted in noticeable changes beyond the programme	41 (44%)	48 (52%)	4 (4%)	-	-
Number of Joint Programme final evaluations reviewed = 93					

HS = Highly Satisfactory; S = Satisfactory; U = Unsatisfactory; HU = Highly Unsatisfactory; N/A = Not Addressed

#### 3.1.3.1 Effectiveness – Partnerships, Target Groups and Objectives Achieved

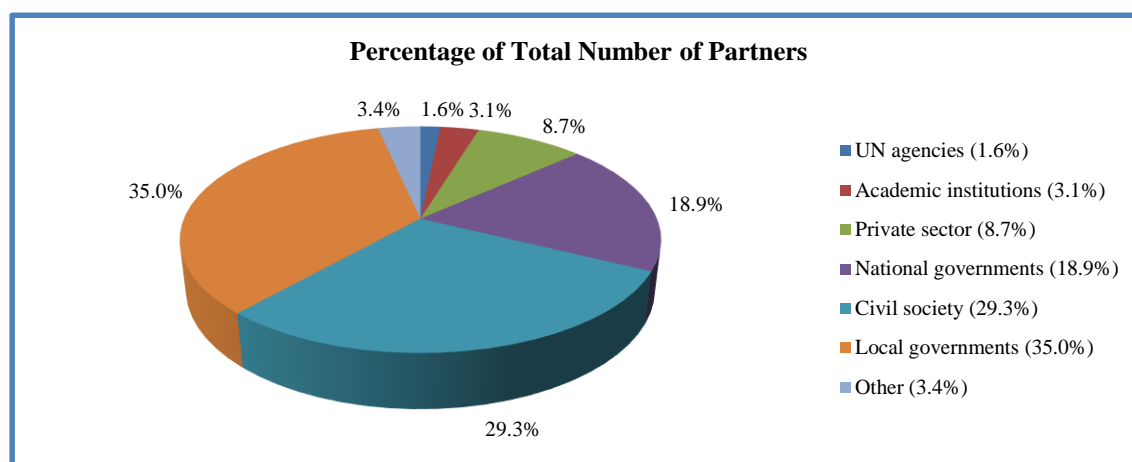
In the context of the MDG-F, partnerships are referred to in two ways. First, the focus on partnerships for specific aspects such as the thirteen partnerships to mobilize support with internal and external entities and create strategic alliances to broaden the reach of the Knowledge Management and Communications and Advocacy strategies as well as initiatives with eight focus countries to help deepen and refine the Monitoring & Evaluation and Communication & Advocacy strategies. Second, more generally, is the focus on partnerships to promote the participation of governments, citizens, local institutions and civil society in the funded Joint Programmes in which they can play an important advocacy role and participate in the implementation of activities.<sup>36</sup>

To date, the Fund developed partnerships with over 600 local governments, national governments and civil society groups. These partnerships have facilitated the implementation of the Joint Programmes.

<sup>36</sup> MDG-F Framework Document dated 1 August 2007

Together the total of these national and local partnerships constituted roughly 83% of all MDG- F's partners as shown in Figure 3 below.<sup>37</sup>

**Figure 3 Partners by Type**



Through this collaborative approach, the Fund was able to increase dialogue and coordination not only among the different UN agencies, but also among government partners at the national and subnational levels, civil society organizations and communities. The feedback received was that the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders and partners was an important contributory factor in the success of the programmes, as their commitment and the different types of knowledge, expertise, experience they brought to the programmes helped to shape their design and implementation.

The data from the Meta-Analysis suggest that the programmes gave appropriate attention to developing effective partnerships for planning, coordination and implementation with 96% performed at a satisfactory level or better. Those rated as Highly Satisfactory consistently achieved a high level of partnership during the period evaluated, while those rated as Satisfactory improved the effectiveness of their relationship with partners during the life of the programme. This was further confirmed by the country visits where the importance of the partnerships developed was cited as an important factor for success. This was particularly the case where groups which had not been previously involved in planning and implementing initiatives were brought into the process.

In terms of the reach of the programs to the targeted beneficiaries, the Meta-Analysis showed 97% of the programmes were performed at a satisfactory level or better. Here again, the range of 40 - 48% of programmes with a Satisfactory rating depending on the sub-criteria is an indication that some room for improvement existed. Only a few programmes (three to five, depending on the sub-criterion) performed poorly and were rated as less than satisfactory.

As indicated earlier, marginalized and disadvantaged groups were specifically targeted in the objectives of many of the Joint Programmes across the various windows. The Joint Programmes in all windows reached a wide range of target groups and beneficiaries. Evidence from the meta-analysis, survey and country visits confirmed that many of the Joint Programmes in each of the windows were able to reach these marginalized and disadvantaged groups and communities in terms of their economic (inequality and lack of opportunities), geographic (rural/urban or hard to reach locations), ethno-cultural (based on

<sup>37</sup> Data for graph taken from MDG-F website

discrimination and exclusion), and political (lack of voice and representation) situation. The results also indicated that the Joint Programmes were believed to have succeeded in making a difference in the lives of these targeted beneficiaries but that quantitative measurements of those impacts were not made. In every thematic window, interviewee and focus group participants noted that the level of achievement in reaching the poor and disadvantaged groups fell below expectations, and that more could have been done to target the interventions to those groups. Document reviews also provided similar findings that results were commendable but more needed to be done.

In terms of meeting its objectives, 94% of the programmes performed satisfactorily or better, achieving a majority of their stated development objectives at the output (and some at the outcome) level. However, roughly half of these performed only at the satisfactory level, indicating there were some shortfalls relative to planned results. A similar picture emerged on whether the programmes resulted in positive benefits for target group members.

There was no appreciable difference among the various windows in their performance on the effectiveness criteria as the aggregate percentages of programmes that were rated as satisfactory or better ranged between 91% and 97%.

### **3.1.3.2 Impact Contribution to National Policies and Other Changes**

Two areas of impact were reviewed—contribution to national development policies and programmes and/or to needed system reforms; and changes beyond the programme.

With some exceptions, the Joint Programmes contributed in a significant way to the development and implementation of policies, laws, regulations, action plans and the like, all of which were seen to be key enablers of the effective implementation of concrete interventions and laying the foundations for more long term improvements. The Meta-Analysis showed that approximately 90% of the programmes were rated as satisfactory or better as their activities were seen as making a significant contribution to either re-orienting or sustaining national policies and programmes in the given sector or area of development. Country visits also indicated that the policy was strengthened and policy dialogues, in some cases, became more inclusive with wide range of participation.

As well, behaviour and institutional culture were influenced and countries contributed resources and continued to adapt their organizations to continue the Joint Programme interventions. This finding, which emerged from the evidence in the evaluations of the Joint Programmes across the eight thematic windows, is consistent with that received in the 253 survey respondents, of whom 59% indicated that the Joint Programmes contributed to a fair or great extent to the development of national and/or local public policies in the countries. Similar patterns were seen with the country visits where there were examples of local and national governments mobilizing resources to continue the work after the programming ended. Some results were also being seen with marginalized groups in terms of improved access to services.

Capacity building was also a key feature and part of the objectives of the Joint Programmes in all thematic windows, for which substantial progress was made in achieving the intended objectives. The results could have been greater if the Joint Programmes were in place for a longer time frame. Hiring outside experts to ensure good quality results are obtained was seen to be necessary in the short term, but allowing for consolidation and institutionalization of that capacity to improve the partners' effectiveness within the country, whether at the national, sub-national or community level, enduring success. Also, the short time frame did not allow several of the Joint Programmes to assess the capacity of local partners with whom to work, and this resulted in unwanted situations of questionable ownership situations and resentments on the part of local partners.

Focusing on the policy and capacity dimensions has, in terms of the overall achievement of objectives within the Fund's eight thematic windows, strengthened the countries' own ability to address their challenges and improve their performance. In addition to the meta-analysis findings, some indications are provided by the survey results in response to two relevant questions that were asked: First, asked about the extent to which the Joint Programmes contributed overall to improving the recipient countries' capabilities and motivation in terms of setting their own strategies for poverty reduction and improving their institutions, 64% of 383 respondents indicated they did so to a fair or great extent. Secondly, asked about the extent of contribution to improvements in the target countries of the achievement of their MDG objectives, 60% of 382 respondents indicated the programmes did so to a fair or great extent.

While not overwhelming, the survey findings give a picture of fair to good overall achievement, consistent with the meta-analysis findings in which the aggregate average score of satisfactory or better ratings on the effectiveness criterion is in the mid-80% range. The country visits confirmed that progress had been made in areas such as building capacity and the prospects for change were good. However, the short timeframes of the programme meant that many anticipated results had not manifested to date.

The MDG-F Secretariat development results reports on the thematic windows have begun to provide aggregate information on the results to date. These reports are based on information within the MDG-F monitoring system and aggregate the results across countries on key indicators. This information was reviewed during the evaluation and cross-referenced to other sources of evidence including the Joint Programme evaluations and country visits.<sup>38</sup> Some highlights from the development reports follow.

In the **Children, Food Security and Nutrition** window:<sup>39</sup>

- Approximately 1.6 million children and 800,000 mothers have better nutrition through low cost nutritional packages and targeted supplementary feeding programmes.
- Approximately 454,426 families, 23,437 local food producers and 226 indigenous organizations benefitted from training, technical assistance and nutritional support services.

In the **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment** window:<sup>40</sup>

- Roughly 630,000 women and girls gained access to violence prevention and protection services.
- Approximately 24,000 women increased their income and 3,000 took on public decision-making positions.

In the **Environment and Climate Change** window:<sup>41</sup>

- Approximately 1.4 million citizens have organized themselves to effectively participate in natural resource management initiatives.
- Approximately 113,000 people gained access to improved sources of water.

In the **Youth, Employment and Migration** window:<sup>42</sup>

- Approximately 642,000 people directly improved their lives as a result of the programmes, among them 127,000 youth, 24,000 migrants and 365,000 boys and girls.

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<sup>38</sup> A summary of the results is contained in Annex L9.7.

<sup>39</sup> MDG-F, Children Food Security and Nutrition – Thematic window development results report, October 2013,

<sup>40</sup> MDG-F, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment– Thematic window development results report, October 2013,

<sup>41</sup> MDG-F, Environment and Climate Change – Thematic window development results report, October 2013,

<sup>42</sup> MDG-F, Environment and Climate Change – Thematic window development results report, October 2013,

- 214 public-private partnerships (PPP) supported and 296 partners strengthened including schools, training institutions and academia, to provide services to youth and migrants.

In the **Democratic Economic Governance** window:<sup>43</sup>

- Approximately 440,000 citizens gained access to safe affordable drinking water.
- 669 community organizations and 665 local providers were strengthened or created to promote community empowerment and participation in water management.

In the **Development and the Private Sector** window:<sup>44</sup>

- Technical assistance services reached 21,500 farmers, entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- 85 cooperatives and 182 farmers associations were created or strengthened.

In the **Conflict Prevention and Peace Building** window:<sup>45</sup>

- Approximately 63,000 citizens accessed conflict resolution and reconciliation services.
- Approximately 78,000 people gained increased access to justice.

In the **Culture and Development** window:<sup>46</sup>

- 12,300 cultural entrepreneurs have increased their income by accessing new markets.
- The capacities of 1450 cultural institutions and nearly 14,200 civil servants were strengthened.

### 3.1.3.3 Summary and Conclusions about Effectiveness and Impact

It is clear from the information in the preceding sections that the majority of MDG-F Joint Programmes across all thematic windows performed well on both the effectiveness and impact dimensions. Regardless of window, many of the programmes were successful in targeting and reaching a variety of beneficiaries as part of their stated objectives, including some of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups within the respective countries, and the results achieved in these areas were largely in line with what was planned and expected. As indicated in the theory of change, aspects such as local ownership, partnership (both as a means to the end and an end in itself), capacity development and the policy environment are some of the fundamental constraints or risks affecting the conversion of outputs to sustainable longer term results. These were central areas of focus of each of the thematic windows and most of the Joint Programmes. By making them central, the Fund has effectively minimized the risks and increased the likelihood of the programmes being successful. As with the previous criteria, however, the few programmes that performed poorly and were rated as less than satisfactory as well as the significant proportion that were rated as satisfactory, are indications that there was still room for improvement. The major areas of weakness were: over-ambitious and unrealistic designs, weak engagement with the local partners and beneficiaries, the specialized nature of the work, the available capacity and expertise, and the difficulty of effectively targeting and working with the most disadvantaged.

### 3.1.4 Sustainability of the Results and Benefits

A number of factors affect sustainability of the benefits from development investments. The analysis focused on five aspects considered by the evaluators to be essential factors as indicated in the table below.

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<sup>43</sup> MDG-F, Democratic Economic Governance – Thematic window development results report, October 2013.

<sup>44</sup> MDG-F, Development and the Private Sector – Thematic window development results report, October 2013.

<sup>45</sup> MDG-F, Conflict Prevention and Peace Building – Thematic window development results report, October 2013.

<sup>46</sup> MDG-F, Culture and Development – Thematic window development results report, October 2013.

**Table 7 - Sustainability of the Joint Programmes' Results and Benefits derived from Meta-Analysis of Final Evaluations**

<b>Sustainability Sub-Criteria</b>	<b>HS</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>HU</b>	<b>N/A</b>
1 Benefits continuing or likely to continue after programme/investments end	30 (32%)	47 (51%)	16 (17%)	-	-
2. The programme and investments are reported as sustainable in terms of institutional and/or community capacity	37 (40%)	43 (46%)	10 (11%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)
3. The programme contributes to strengthening the enabling environment for development.	39 (42%)	44 (47%)	9 (10%)	-	1 (1%)
4 .The programme is reported as sustainable in terms of the continued commitment and ownership of the local community / partner(s)	41 (44%)	43 (46%)	9 (10%)	-	-
5. The programme is reported as sustainable in terms of financial resources to carry on after programme ends.	19 (20%)	40 (43%)	22 (24%)	8 (9%)	3 (3%)
Number of Joint Programme final evaluations reviewed = 93					

HS = Highly Satisfactory; S = Satisfactory; U = Unsatisfactory; HU = Highly Unsatisfactory; N/A = Not Addressed

At the Joint Programme level, as can be seen from the table above, the sub-criteria have been very well covered in the evaluations. On whether the benefits of the Joint Programmes are continuing, or likely to continue, the findings from the evaluations project an overall positive picture indicating a high or likely probability that benefits would continue after completion. A portion, however, saw a low probability of sustained results. This split was also reflected in the country visits where in some cases there was strong commitment and pledging of resources to continue the work and in a few cases skepticism about the prospects.

In the evaluation team's theory of change, the other four sustainability sub-criteria in the table above are considered as explanatory factors – factors which influence sustainability in that they either enable or constrain it, and thus pose a risk if not addressed. As the Meta-Analysis shows, they were evidently addressed and with a good measure of success. In terms of the local institutional capacity to sustain the benefits, 86% of the programmes were rated as satisfactory or better as they contributed to strengthening institutional and/or community capacity to varying degrees. The other 13% (10 programmes) that were rated as less than satisfactory had much less success or failed to address the issue in their programme designs, increasing the risk to their sustainability. The results from the efforts to build commitment and ownership of the local community and partners to carry on after external support ends also met with substantial success, as 90% of the programmes were rated as satisfactory or better.

The enabling environment also proved to be an important factor. The contribution to improving the enabling environment through one or more of improved policies, the overall framework and process for national development planning, and governance structures and the rule of law all contributed to the success.

Perhaps the most uncertain of the enabling factors was the financial resources to carry on after programme ends. Success here was more challenging. The meta-Analysis showed a modest 63% of the programmes were rated as satisfactory or better, indicating that the issue has been addressed by the programmes, but the likelihood that financial resources will be available to carry on after external support ends was positive. A significant proportion (33%) of the programmes was rated as less than satisfactory as the likelihood that financial resources will be available was low or very low.

The country visits provided more insights into the success factors as well. Where there was strong ownership by the local community, active participation in the Joint Programmes and a strong enabling environment, sustainability appeared to be more likely. In a range of cases, the resourced had been



secured from within the country or from outside donors. In ones where there was less likelihood of continuation, the issue consistently raised was whether the prospects could have been improved with a longer timeframe. The initial designs were an issue as well as the fact that many of the exit strategies were only put in place at the end and this did not allow enough time to gather the support for continuation.

At the Thematic Window level, there were differences across the various windows in their performance on the sustainability sub-criterion. The greatest challenges were seen with Conflict Prevention and Peace Building and Democratic Economic Governance. Both of these areas are difficult ones within which to make progress. For Conflict Prevention and Peace Building it proved more difficult to make progress in strengthening the enabling environment, building the capacity of the communities and local partners, and securing the necessary financial resources to continue the programmes. In the Democratic Economic Governance window, the main challenges were weaknesses in the institutional and community capacity, the enabling environment as well as the financial resources to carry on.

Securing the necessary financial resources to continue after the programmes end was the most prevalent weaknesses in the windows. Some of the programmes tried to cope with this through different types of revenue generation. Outcomes reported included: (1) increase in sales volume and income due to improvement in production processes and/or better producers' business skills, better knowledge and access to national and international markets; (2) obtaining microcredit, loans, grants and small grants for starting businesses; (3) savings through the introduction of leaner and more efficient mechanisms. For example, in Ecuador, under the Democratic Economic Governance window, it is estimated that a new law that was enacted partly as a result of the Joint Programme is projected to result in savings of US\$300 million. In Albania under the Youth Employment and Migration window, additional tax revenues of US\$1 million were reported as attributable to the Joint Programme activities.

Among the four factors, commitment and ownership of the local community / partner(s) was the least problematic. In the thematic window analyses, evidence was seen and illustrations provided to suggest that, on average, at least one half of the national, regional/provincial, local governments or communities had shown their intentions to continue the Joint Programme interventions in one form or another. With respect to financial resources, however, future funding was said to be a limiting factor for about one-third of the programmes. Several of the Joint Programmes made direct interventions in the productive and economic sectors that might have been expected to generate revenues of some sort.

The survey respondents indicated that more could have been done in the Joint Programmes across all thematic windows to improve the prospects for sustainability by intentionally developing exit strategies early in the life of the Joint Programmes. Of the 390 survey respondents, 52% indicated that exit strategies were prepared for a fair number or most interventions. This rather mixed picture on exit strategies is consistent with that obtained from the final evaluations and the country visits which also revealed that many did not have one until the mid-term evaluations recommended that one be prepared.

The conclusions on sustainability show the complexity the issue. It is challenging to clearly specify the extent to which programme interventions and their outcomes might be continued after MDG-F termination because of the relatively short implementation period of only about three to four years. Definitive conclusion at this point would be premature. However, the evidence above points to the potential for sustainability of the results and benefits from many of the Joint Programmes under certain conditions. This is true across all of the windows, although the potential varies among the windows. Looking at this in terms of the theory of change and the knowledge gained from other previous development investments, some of the conditions needed for sustainability were observed to be in place in the beneficiary countries by the end of the Joint Programmes. These include: the strengthened local capacity and expertise to carry on after the programmes end; the strong commitment and ownership

demonstrated by the local partners and communities; the cultural and technological appropriateness of many of the programmes and fit within the context; a strengthened policy environment; and future funding possibilities in some cases. For situations where programmes have exhibited a low probability of sustainability the most prevalent weakness among these factors were the local capacity to carry on and uncertainty about future funding.

### **3.1.5 Gender Inclusiveness of the Joint Programmes**

As good development is development that is also gender inclusive an important question was the extent to which the Joint Programmes have incorporated gender equality in their design, implementation and results. The picture that emerges is mixed. In terms of the Meta-Analysis, 12 evaluations did not cover gender equality (excluding evaluations of the GEWE window). Of those that did include an analysis of the integration of gender equality, 25% of the evaluations (18 of 71) suggested that the programmes addressed it at a Highly Satisfactory level in that they included gender equality and women's empowerment objectives and achieved most of these. Another 45% of the programmes (32 of the 71) achieved more than 50% of their stated gender equality and or women empowerment objectives. For the nearly 30% (21 of 71) that were less than satisfactory, the programmes either lacked gender equality and empowerment objectives, or achieved less than half when they existed.

Information from interviewees and survey respondents reveals a divergence of views between those at the global and country levels about the extent of gender mainstreaming in the design and implementation of Joint Programmes in the various thematic windows other than the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment window. At the global level, interviewees and survey respondents were more positive, indicating that the interests and needs of women were included most of the time and to a fairly high degree in the Joint Programmes. Interviewees and survey respondents from within the country were less positive about the degree of inclusiveness, indicating that gender issues were included "to some degree" only. The evaluators consider the views of respondents who were closer to the reality on the ground, to be more in line with the findings from the independent evaluations and a more accurate reflection of the reality.

One of the areas of weakness identified in the thematic analysis of the various windows was the uneven incorporation of gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in the Joint Programmes across the windows, except the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment window. In the meta-analysis of Joint Programme final evaluations for each thematic window, the percentage of Joint Programmes rated as highly satisfactory or satisfactory on this aspect ranged from a low of 31% to a high of 72%. While there have been many good examples of success, there are definitely opportunities for improvement in this area.

The uneven incorporation of gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in the Joint Programmes across the windows was also noted in the "Two Roads One Goal" report,<sup>47</sup> the results of a study which shows that MDG-F Joint Programmes averaged 10.8 of a maximum possible score of 21 on a unique scale developed for the comparison of MDG-F Joint Programmes in all thematic windows except Gender with those in the Gender window.

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<sup>47</sup> Two Roads One Goal, Dual Strategy for Gender Equality Programming in the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund, MDG Achievement Fund Secretariat, UNDP and UN Women, 2013, p.1

The variability across the different windows in mainstreaming gender is rather surprising in light of the commitment of the MDG-F commitment to gender equality and the decision to adopt a dual strategy for achieving gender equality that supported both targeted gender programming and gender mainstreaming as a part of its overall funding portfolio. Beyond being a UN priority, including gender equality as well as targeting marginalized and excluded groups in MDG-F thematic window Joint Programmes was hypothesized to positively influence programme effectiveness. Asked about this, 55% out of 237 survey respondents indicated that programmes were more effective or much more effective if they tackled inequality issues. Half of the 84 interviewees that responded to a similar question had a similar response to that of those surveyed. A synthesized response might be stated as follows. ‘The MDG-F Joint Programme design and implementation model exemplifies the Fund’s approach to addressing gender-related inequalities by factoring in their fundamental causes and prioritizing concrete interventions to empower the most excluded and vulnerable.’

“The Joint Programmes aimed at reducing inequalities and poverty that focused not only at the national but also at the sub-national level and the programmes were more effective in influencing national and sub-national policies and strategies. Taking inequality into account is important in selecting those areas which have the most needs but are also ready and able to benefit from the programme and be sustainable.”

In light of the above, one would have expected a more positive picture from the Joint Programmes overall and less variability across the windows. A main reason for the differences in the thematic window scores, with which the current evaluation team agrees, was highlighted in the aforementioned report. “While MDG-F explicitly mandated including a gender perspective in funded programming, the terms of reference that guided each window’s selection of programmes among multiple proposals varied significantly in the degree of gender inclusion. Many lacked explicit requirements or incentives to address gender equality as a part of programme design, while others received concrete guidance that, in turn, corresponded to higher overall gender performance scores.”

It was felt that because the programmes were directed at meeting needs in developing countries there would automatically be a focus on marginalized groups including women. The indication here is that plans and intentions did not always turn into concrete action in the non-gender specific windows and programmes. Obviously, this was an area where the Terms of Reference for the various thematic windows could have provided better guidance.

### **3.1.6 Integration of Environmental Issues**

On the environmental sensitivity of the Joint Programmes, the integration is more troubling. Excluding the 16 Joint Programmes in the Development and Environment window, only 36 of the remaining 77 evaluations addressed the issue at all. From the 36 evaluations that provided information to rate the Joint Programmes on this issue, 69% (25 of the 36) were rated as satisfactory or better, indicating that they included some planned activities and design criteria to ensure environmental sustainability, and these activities were implemented successfully with results that were environmentally sustainable. The other 31% rated as less than satisfactory either did not include planned activities or programme design criteria intended to promote environmental sustainability or they included planned activities to promote sustainability but these have not been successful. The country visits revealed similar patterns. The awareness of the need to integrate environmental sustainability was not seen across the board.

At the thematic window level, the small number of evaluations in each window that addressed the environmental sensitivity issue does not provide a meaningful basis to discuss the issue comparatively across the windows, other than to reiterate what was already mentioned above that this is an area deserving closer attention for the non-environment windows.

Overall, the extent to which environmental issues were integrated into the Joint Programmes was limited. More can be done both in terms of ensuring that the issue is given greater consideration in the up-front due diligence work when selecting and designing future programmes as well as inclusion in the terms of reference for their evaluation. The 30% that rated as less than satisfactory among the 36 Joint Programmes in the non-environment window suggests that this was an area that required a more proactive approach to the issue by the Fund. Including this as an issue to be addressed in the evaluations would also be more helpful in future.

### **3.2 Other Considerations at the Programme and Thematic Levels**

This section reviews some other aspects relating to the performance of the Joint Programmes and the thematic windows, including comparisons with other agencies' programmes as a way of benchmarking the performance, well as internal comparisons among the thematic windows to flesh out areas of difference and possible reasons for these.

#### **3.2.1 Performance of the MDG-F Joint Programmes Relative to other UN Programmes**

In an effort to put the performance of the MDG-F Joint Programmes in perspective, the evaluation team looked at recent assessments of programmes of other UN organizations where a comparable methodology was used. Information was compiled from three such recent assessments of the programmes of UNDP (other than those of the MDG-F)<sup>48</sup>, UNICEF<sup>49</sup> and the WFP<sup>50</sup>. Despite differences in the scale and magnitude of the programmes, and the fact that the three Agencies have complex mandates that in some cases included humanitarian action, the evaluators consider the comparisons as valid for a number of reasons. All of the organizations operated within the rules and working environment of the UN system. The methodology used in the MDG-F evaluation is similar to that used by the three reviews and focuses on development effectiveness criteria. The sample of evaluations reviewed in each case was recent and covered roughly the same period covered by the Fund. The evaluations reviewed also showed programs that operated in difficult country contexts across the various regions, including a mix of countries at different levels of income and fragility and conflict.

Two significant differences about the programmes are the fact that the MDG-F Joint Programmes were more concentrated in lower middle-income countries than the other three agencies and its exclusive use of the joint program work modality. The concentration of programmes in lower-middle income countries may account for part of the difference seen in the assessments. The fact that the programmes did not use the Joint Programme work modality is a point of interest in this analysis. One difference in the methodology is the inclusion of additional sub-criteria under some of the main criteria for the MDG-F evaluation.

The results of the comparison are contained in Annex L10. The conclusion of the analysis is that the performance of the MDG-F programmes compares favourably on most of the criteria and sub-criteria where information was available for the programmes of the other organizations. In terms of the relevance of the programmes, The MDG-F was on par or better than the other three groups. In terms of the efficiency of the programmes, MDG-F performed better than the other three organizations. However, this could be partially the result of the more focused approach undertaken under the MDG-F with the

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<sup>48</sup> *Review of the Development Effectiveness of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2005-2011* (2012)

<sup>49</sup> *Review of UNICEF's Development Effectiveness, 2009-2011 Final Report* (2013)

<sup>50</sup> *Review of the World Food Programme's Development and Humanitarian Effectiveness, 2006-2011* (2012)

Joint Programmes methodology. On the effectiveness and impact criteria, the MDG-F programmes again performed better than the other three organizations including in the area of sustainability.

Overall, the comparison indicates a difference in the performance of the MDG-F programmes and those of the other organizations. In trying to understand this difference, one possible explanation is the use by the MDG-F programmes of the Joint Programme modality, which brought with it other associated features such as the added experience and expertise of other partners, the inter-sectoral nature of the programmes, and other elements that formed part of the MDG-F operation. Survey respondents also expressed the view that the MDG-F Joint Programmes performed better than other forms of multilateral programming. In response to the question of whether the Fund's Joint Programmes were more or less efficient than bilateral or other forms of multi-lateral programming, 55% of a total of 171 respondents indicated they were more efficient to a marginal or greater extent, but 67% indicated they were more effective, and 67% said more sustainable. This survey response to efficiency is surprising in that it varies from findings in other lines of evidence.

In the supporting evidence of whether the Joint Programme work modality was a main reason for the findings, interviewees and focus group participants (most of whom were country partners) commonly noted that bilateral work in the past on similar development issues did not typically bring in all of the relevant expertise as was done in the Joint Programmes. They indicated that inclusion of that expertise expanded the technical, know-how aspects of the programmes. Moreover, country partners at the national and regional-provincial levels and in some programmes at the local level, actually participated in the decisions made about design and implementation activities. This came at the price of taking longer to reach decisions and having to suffer some duplication of effort and inefficiency.

### 3.2.2 Relative Performance of the Thematic Windows

An overview of the performance of the different thematic windows on the evaluation criteria is provided in the table below. As can be seen, the variation of the percentages across the windows of programmes rated as satisfactory or better is fairly narrow and insignificant on some criteria whereas for others it is more significant.

**Table 8 - Aggregate Scores, in Percentage Terms, by Evaluation Criteria for Thematic Window Joint Programme that rated as Satisfactory or better in the Meta-Analysis**

Evaluation Criteria	Thematic Windows*							
	CPPB	C&D	CFSN	DEG	ECC	GEWE	DPS	YEM
Relevance of the programmes	94	97	93	97	97	98	97	100
Efficiency of the programmes	86	81	55	53	75	85	72	56
Effectiveness of the programmes	96	100	91	96	94	93	96	97
Impact of the programmes	94	100	82	100	88	95	83	100
Sustainability of the benefits	73	86	75	76	81	92	82	92
Cross Cutting Issue: gender**	39	72	50	61	44		67	31
Use of management tools	78	81	75	67	70	68	86	72
* CPPB = Conflict Prevention and Peace Building; C&D = Culture and Development, CFSN = Children, Food Security and Nutrition; DEG = Democratic Economic Governance; ECC = Environment and Climate Change; GE/WE = Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment; DPS = Development and the Private Sector; and YEM = Youth, Employment and Migration. ** The Environment as a cross-cutting is not included as the number of evaluations (36) that addressed the issue was small and does not provide for a meaningful comparison when distributed across the eight windows.								

The areas that show more significant differences are the efficiency of programmes, integration of gender equality and environment and sustainability. In terms of relevance, the performance was comparable. The most likely reasons for the differences seem to be: the variations among the windows in the technical complexity; requirements for infrastructure and equipment; levels of national/community expertise required in the different windows; the country contexts for which differences are evident among the five regions relative to the incidence of poverty; past progress in MDG developments; levels of peace and security; and variations in the application of results-based management techniques and use of management tools.

It should be noted that the information on the Children, Food Security and Nutrition and Conflict Prevention and Peace Building windows was less extensive than for the others as the evaluation team had the benefit of independent final evaluations for only 11 of the 24 and 9 of the 20 Joint Programmes in the Children, Food Security and Nutrition and Conflict Prevention and Peace Building windows respectively. This could have introduced an unknown amount of bias in the findings. This bias could be either positive, if the performance of those Joint Programmes that were not included in meta-analysis were worse on average than those included, or negative if they were better.

### **3.3 Factors Influencing Performance of the Joint Programmes**

A number of factors influenced the performance of the Joint Programmes and thematic windows. In our theory of change, these are referred to as both the up-front “due diligence” work to ensure quality at entry and those that relate to quality during implementation. Collectively, they form part of the Fund's institutional, organizational and operational model and attest the relevance of its design. Those that have been discussed previously, such as its overall strategic orientation, its operational principles, the process followed to define the scope and areas of intervention of its eight thematic windows, will not be elaborated further.

#### **3.3.1. Governance mechanisms at the Fund and country levels**

At the Fund level, role of the Steering Committee and Technical Committees led by UN Agency Convenors in the selection and design of the thematic windows and preparation and approval of the Terms of Reference of the windows were essential elements. At the field level, the inclusive governance and management structure (the National Steering Committees and Programme Management Committees) provided opportunities to partner countries and UN agencies to be involved in the decision-making at different stages of the Joint Programmes and fostered UN system-wide coherence and aid effectiveness at the country level. This is discussed further under section 4.3.

#### **3.3.2 The multi-sectorial approach and use of the Joint Programme work modality**

The MDG-F founders recognized that the complex and multi-dimensional/multi-sectorial nature of the challenges that needed to be addressed could best be addressed by bringing to bear the knowledge, experience and expertise of different actors that had something to offer in a joint effort. One of the best ways of addressing these challenges, if not the best, was the Joint Programme work modality focused on partnerships among the players. Interview, focus groups, country visits and documentary evidence related to the Joint Programmes in all eight thematic windows suggest that the MDG-F's multi-sectoral approach was among the main contributors to the high relevance of programmes.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> This statement or a facsimile of it is found in the summary of findings for five of the eight thematic windows.

Observations were made previously that the Joint Programmes, in all thematic windows, were highly relevant to the development needs of the partner countries and were very effective in addressing those needs. In the supporting evidence it was clear that the Joint Programme work modality was a main reason for the positive findings. Interviewees and focus group participants (most of whom were country partners) commonly noted that bilateral work in the past on similar development issues did not typically bring in all of the relevant expertise as was done in the Joint Programmes. They indicated that inclusion of that expertise expanded the technical, know-how aspects of the programmes. Moreover, country partners at the national and regional-provincial levels, and in some programmes at the local level, actually participated in the decisions made about design and implementation activities. This came at the price of taking longer to reach decisions and having to suffer some duplication of effort.

UN partner agencies, national, local and civil programme partners were asked in the evaluation survey if they thought the joint work modality improved the capacity of national and local stakeholders to design and implement the programme. The answer from 61% out of 252 respondents was that it did to a fair or great extent and 79% of 250 respondents indicated that having the “know-how” of all relevant UN agencies involved in the programmes contributed to a fair or great extent to a high level of achievement.

### **3.3.3 Competitive selection of the Joint Programmes**

Competitive selection of programmes for funding involved issuing a call for proposals in each of the eight thematic windows, with those calls directed to the UN resident coordinators in the 59 eligible countries. The two-stage process was the concept note submission followed by the development of technical proposals for those cases tentatively approved with notional budgets. This meant the burden of preparing detailed proposals was limited to those cases with the prospect of being funded. The proposal guidelines required proponents to show how they would design and implement their programmes in partnership with other relevant UN agencies and national/local partners within the fixed MGD-F governance structure.

Competitive selection was reported by interviewees to be atypical of the way UN programmes are funded, as programmes were typically developed bilaterally between a UN agency and a national government. In establishing the original guidelines for the Fund, the competitive selection of programmes for funding was considered to be the best way to stimulate thinking about innovative approaches and to encourage UN agencies partner with other UN and national organizations in the development of programme concepts. It was a means to firmly establish the notion that only partners who brought something to the table in terms of their expertise and track record would be recognized as essential to a programme.

According to interview respondents involved at the outset of the Fund, there was some opposition to the requirement that programmes operate within the fixed governance model and use common administrative processes. A few of the larger UN agencies had their own procedures and were reluctant to move to the common one. This was reported by some agencies as having made programme administration and decision-making cumbersome but was viewed by managers and advisers to be central in ensuring UN coherence and Joint Programmes actually operating jointly.

The interview responses, country visits and documentation identified five elements that were critical to the success of the competitive process in MDG-F programme selection.

- Joint Programmes were proposed to meet development needs that were clearly identified in thematic window Terms of Reference. These documents were carefully developed by subject experts and reviewed by MDG-F thematic window Convenors. They contained specific types of interventions to be considered along with ideas about the kinds of outputs and results targeted.

- The field for selection was sufficiently large. An iterative process was used to first encourage concept notes that did not require detailed work, with subsequent rounds of review and approval to afford ample opportunity for the preparation of detailed submissions. This process brought in 396 Concept Notes. The Fund subsequently approved 130 Joint Programmes from among 171 detailed technical proposals covering 50 countries and the eight thematic windows.<sup>52</sup>
- The whole selection process was transparent. All proposal data were contained in a newly developed software programme (OPAS) designed for easy tracking of proposal processing.
- The UN Resident Coordinators took on a key role in the proposal preparation and submission process. First, they were named as the providers to the MDG-F Secretariat of the first Concept Note. Then they led the development of the full technical proposals. Later, they were, according to some 80% of interview and focus group participants, instrumental in moving the Joint Programme design and implementation process forward, exercising a neutral and facilitating role with respect to different positions and interests expressed by participating UN agencies.

Setting out the Fund “rules” and process in advance allowed the Fund to select the proposals offering the most promise for success.

As with the guidance tools for evaluation, other tools (referenced in different parts of the report) providing guidance on other aspects of the Fund’s operation such as the preparation of the Concept Notes, implementation, monitoring and closure of the Joint Programmes were essential for the success of the Joint Programmes.

Competitive selection of the Joint Programmes was found to be a significant contributor to the value of the model as a multilateral mechanism that provided development aid well targeted to specific development issues and that made good use of the know-how of the appropriate UN agencies.

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<sup>52</sup> [www.undpegov.org/opas/en/user/1](http://www.undpegov.org/opas/en/user/1)



## **4. CHAPTER 4: KEY FINDINGS – GLOBAL (FUND) LEVEL**

In the evaluation, the relevance and value of the “model” was considered as encompassing:

- The quality of the Fund’s development work defined in terms of the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability of benefits, gender inclusiveness and the environmental sensitivity of its investments;
- The model’s ‘versatility’ in achieving results in a variety of thematic areas and development contexts;
- The extent to which the Fund adhered to, and reinforced, the Principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the subsequent Accra Agenda for Action;
- The contribution of the Fund to system-wide coherence in development programming that was started through the UN Delivering as One pilot initiative; and
- The contribution of the Fund to UN development programming and practice as a demonstration of the efficacy of adopting an approach to multilateral, multi-sectoral development that is both somewhat novel and prescriptive;

The first item, the quality of the Funds’ development work, has been addressed at length in the previous chapter. The rest of this section of the report examines evidence related to the other four items identified above.

### **4.1 Versatility of the model in achieving results in different development contexts**

An important question for the evaluation was whether the MDG-F model was relevant in different development contexts within which the Fund has operated including differences by region, level of political stability, human development indicators, etc. To answer this question, it is useful to recall that the 130 Joint Programmes covered a range of very different contexts as exhibited by the 50 countries in which they were implemented across the different geographic regions. A significant number of the Joint Programmes operated in countries with challenging political environments such as the instability of the governments (e.g., Egypt, Tunisia), difficult environmental circumstances (e.g., Haiti, Bangladesh), and/or those with complex social issues.

From the results and performance of the Joint Programmes in the different thematic windows that were presented in the previous chapter, it is clear that the model is relevant to, and produced good results, in a wide range of development contexts. This was further explored through multivariate analysis involving a number of development context factors that potentially influenced the “success”<sup>53</sup> of the model.

The factors, selected for use in analysis because they were among those suggested in the literature to have influenced directly or indirectly UN programme outcomes, include: 1. Thematic window; 2. Number of UN partner organizations; 3. Region a country is in (as designated in the UN Master Database for UNDG Programmes); 4. Level of the Country on the Gender Inequality Index or GII (value for each country in 2010, the first available data after general programme start up in 2007); 5. Human Development Index or

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<sup>53</sup> “Success” of the model is addressed as the adequacy of outcomes from the MDG-F in all its activities (globally and at the country level) achieving satisfactory results in terms of its: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, gender equality, implementation and use of monitoring and evaluation, communications, partnership and knowledge management systems; and progress in MDG achievement.

HDI (value for each country in 2007); 6. Global Peace Index or GPI (value for each country in 2009, the first available data after general programme start up in 2007); 7. Programme expenditures; 8. The number of UNDG programmes conducted in a country; and 9. The number of MDG-F programmes conducted in a country.

From the results of quantitative analysis (using Joint Programmes as the unit of analysis and the meta-analysis criteria ratings as dependent variables and the first seven predictor variables), it was found that:

- Joint Programme efficiency was influenced by where the country was on Human Development Index;
- Joint Programme impact was influenced by the thematic window;
- Sustainability of Joint Programme benefits was influenced by region; and,
- Monitoring and evaluation systems was influenced by thematic window, number of UN partners and programme expenditures'

Analysis using the second data set involved seven predictor variables (all of the preceding variables except number of UN partners and programme expenditure, because country constitutes the unit of analysis and because the number of UN partners and programme expenditure relate to individual programmes) and two variables not used in the first analysis – number of MDG-F and/or other UNDG programmes conducted in a country. For this second analytical approach, MDG progress scores constitute the dependent (outcome) variable.

As a result of the analysis, it was found that progress in MDG achievement was influenced by region and where the country was on the Global Peace Index (2009).

The MDG-F model is seen from the foregoing to provide a framework for the successful implementation of development programmes under different conditions, including different approaches to gender equality, varying status with respect to human development, and different levels of freedom from internal or external conflict. This finding that the country context did not prevent the MDG-F model with its thematic window approach from being relevant to different contexts is supported to some degree by the survey responses to the question: Was the MDG-F model equally relevant in different development contexts within which the Fund has operated? Out of 171 respondents 52% indicated “generally or entirely equally relevant”.

Although the model is applicable to different country contexts, its performance as measured by ratings of its investments on the six criteria was variable in the different country contexts.

- Sustainability of the Joint Programmes was observed to be considerably higher in Latin America and the Caribbean than in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Countries that were lower on the human development index in 2007 did not implement their Joint Programmes as efficiently as those higher on that scale.
- Implementation of monitoring and evaluation systems varied depending on thematic window, number of UN partners, amount of programme expenditures and the region. This subject is discussed more fully in section 4.4.
- Greater progress in the achievement of MDG targets seemed to have occurred during the programme period in East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean than in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- Countries labeled as being more peaceful and secure seemed to make greater progress in achievement of their MDG targets during the programme period than those less peaceful and secure. Comments in the surveys support this empirical observation, where respondents said progress was slowed in middle-eastern recipient countries because of security issues.

A note of caution needs to be injected with respect to the last two bullets. They should not be interpreted as meaning that the MDG-F is responsible for, or the cause of, the progress. That could not be ascertained through the statistical procedures, given the number of influencing factors at work that could not be controlled for (the magnitude of investments by the countries themselves and by other donors, the differing policy environments, levels of expertise in the countries, and the complexity of the relationships of these to progress in achieving the MDGs, etc.). However, it is not unreasonable to argue that the results from the MDG-F initiatives, relatively modest as they were in comparison to the totality of other investments, have contributed.

## **4.2 The Fund's contribution to UN system-wide coherence**

### **4.2.1 Relevance of the model in reinforcing UN system wide coherence**

The MDG-F model represents an institutionalization of coherence in development programming by requiring inter-agency planning and management of all Fund programmes and the exclusive use of Joint Programmes. The latter form of programme was specifically defined as one that involves two or more UN organizations and (sub-) national partners who together prepare a Joint Programme document containing the objectives, strategy, work plan and related budget of the programme along with a statement of the roles and responsibilities of partners in coordinating and managing the joint activities.<sup>54</sup>

The MDG-F commitment to the use of Joint Programmes as the main work modality was seen by survey respondents to be a key element in the Fund's achievement of system-wide coherence, as 71% of 173 respondents agreed that the Joint Programme work modality was appropriate to a fair or great extent for achieving coherence. Overall, the Fund's thematic windows, which were mostly designed to tackle multi-sectorial issues, and the mechanism of Joint Programmes were appropriate if well implemented. Similar responses were seen at the country level where there were indications of greater coherence in approaches and greater transparency in some circumstances.

The MDG-F further articulated the notion of coherence in programming by defining it in practical terms. When UN agency contributions are mutually reinforcing, there is a reduction in overlaps and duplications in their work supporting (sub-) national initiatives. The added value of programme partners forms an integral part of partner selection.<sup>55</sup> This practical definition of coherence in programming provided a benchmark for the Fund's Joint Programmes selection and operation.

The evaluation confirmed there were significant start-up problems associated with the Joint Programme modality as it was applied for MDG-F programmes, leading to significant delay in programme implementation. This was seen for all thematic windows. The Joint Programme modality was blamed for the delay because the UN partner agencies and their national counterparts had little experience in working jointly with multiple partner agencies whose contributions had to be made in the right sequence, all within

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<sup>54</sup> UNDG Guidance Note on Joint Programmes (2003)

<sup>55</sup> An Evidence-based Review of MDG-F Experiences to Date: A Contribution to the QCPR Process, MDG Achievement Fund, April 2012

a new and unfamiliar decision-making and management structure. The chief consequence of the inexperience with this type of work modality was an increased length of time to get the necessary agreements in place and to design the Joint Programmes, including the scoping of issues, identification of appropriate players and establishing ways to deal with various country contextual factors (political, social and economic). Many interviewees suggested that steps could be taken in the future to reduce the delays by reducing the number of representatives in decision-making forums, decentralizing some decisions, and simplifying procurement and tendering processes by relying on national procedures. The latter would also enhance country ownership.

#### 4.2.2 Contribution to UN system-wide coherence

The Delivering as One initiative was developed by the UN to bring system-wide coherence in five “ones”: one programme, one leader, one budget, one office and one voice. Evidence from the meta-analysis, interviews, surveys and country visits pertaining to the MDG-F operations in relation to the five ‘ones’ is presented below to assess whether and how the MDG-F contributed to UN coherence.

Looking at the evidence from the final evaluations, the meta-analysis contains a number of sub-criteria which are relevant to the characteristics of UN coherence as indicated in the UN as One initiative. These are shown in the table below. The insights into the Fund’s performance on specific UN coherence characteristics from the final evaluations are corroborated by observations from other documents, the interviews, focus groups, and survey as discussed below.

**Table 9 - Ratings from Meta-Analysis Sub-Criteria Related to UN Coherence/UN as One Initiative**  
**Characteristics Derived from Joint Programme Final Evaluations (sub-criterion number shown in brackets)**

<b>Extent of UN Coherence in Joint Programme Design, Implementation and Reporting</b>					
Indicators of UN Coherence	HS	S	U	HU	N/A
The programme is aligned with national development priorities and goals (1.2)	63 68%	29 31%	1 1%	-	-
The programme responded to capacity needs and gaps at different levels within the country (1.4)	47 51%	40 43%	4 4%	2 2%	1 1%
Efforts to harmonize and simplify UN Agencies’ operational procedures (2.4)	21 23%	42 45%	24 26%	4 4%	2 2%
Systems and procedures for programme implementation and follow-up are effective (2.3)	18 19%	36 38%	35 38%	2 2%	2 2%
The programme developed effective partnerships with governments, and other Agencies for planning, coordination and implementation (3.1)	52 56%	38 41%	3 3%	-	-
The programme is reported as sustainable in terms of the continued commitment and ownership of the local community / partner(s) (5.4)	41 44%	43 46%	9 10%	-	-
Extent supported activities effectively address gender equality (GE incorporated as a cross cutting issue in the Joint Programme’s design, implementation and results) (6.1)	18 25%	32 45%	18 25%	3 5%	22* 24%
Extent changes sought by the supported programme are environmentally sustainable (6.2)	7 19%	18 50%	10 28%	1 3%	43* 54%
Results Based Management (RBM) systems are effective (7.3)	14 15%	45 48%	28 30%	3 3%	3 3%

S = Highly Satisfactory; S = Satisfactory; U = Unsatisfactory; HU = Highly Unsatisfactory; N/A = Not Addressed

\* Note that the numbers for the N/A (not addressed) column were excluded in the calculation of the percentages for the HS, S, U and HU columns for the GE and Environment sub-criteria.

## One Programme

The One UN Programme is encapsulated in a revised UNDAF guidance which provides for a common UN country team approach to programming. “The revised UNDAF guidelines reflect some key elements common to the One UN Programmes of the pilots, including: national ownership of the process; alignment with national development priorities; inclusiveness; integration of programming principles related to cross-cutting issues, results-based management and capacity building; and mutual accountability for results.”<sup>56</sup> In practical terms, the intention is that the “One Programme brings all members of the country team together under one nationally-owned strategy that draws on the full range of UN expertise.”<sup>57</sup>

An examination of the percentage of programmes that were rated as ‘highly satisfactory’ or ‘satisfactory’ on indicators related to UN coherence/UN as One indicates that overall the Fund’s Joint Programmes performed very well with respect to programming aspects such as alignment with national development priorities; capacity building; partnership and local ownership of the process. The performance on integration of gender and the environment was weaker but still good overall at the 70% satisfactory level. There weakest areas were the operational aspects such as the systems and procedure for programme implementation and follow-up, efforts to harmonize and simplify UN Agencies’ operational procedures, and systems to manage for results, although the overall proportion of programmes rating satisfactory or better was still positive.

The positive picture from the meta-analysis is supported by the other lines of evidence. More than 75% of interviewees at the global level and 74% of survey respondents expressed the view that the Fund has exemplified UN coherence – fostering a culture of ‘One UN’. This begins with the programme (Fund) design based on the “operating principles” outlined earlier in section 1.2.4. In the view of some interviewees, the MDG-F constitutes the first time UN agencies were required to work as one in country-level programming with a predetermined governance structure and specific guidelines requiring unified management and accounting processes for the programmes. Thus, the model’s requirement for multilateral development within a Joint Programme framework served as a sound base for “delivering as one”.

In the *Joint Evaluation of Joint Gender Programmes in the UN System*,<sup>58</sup> the evaluators had the opportunity to note comparisons between joint programming done in general (24 of these and five case studies) and five MDG-F Joint Programmes conducted in the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Thematic Window. They observed that the MDG-F’s fixed and universal programme requirements such as governance by a National Steering Committee, requirement for participation of partners in programme design, need to include relevant UN agencies and work with a single set of administrative procedures and having written guidelines on what it means for a programme to operate jointly, all contributed to higher levels of synergies among the UN partner organizations and between the UN and national organizations.

The overall evidence reviewed for this evaluation suggests that the MDG-F has contributed to strengthening UN Coherence under the One Programme aspect, as the UN country teams seemed to have

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<sup>56</sup> Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One, Main Report, United Nations, September 2012, p20

<sup>57</sup> [www.undg.org](http://www.undg.org) (Delivering as One/One Programme)

<sup>58</sup> Joint Evaluation of Joint Gender Programmes in the UN System: Synthesis Report, IOD PARC for UN Women Evaluation Management Group, September 2013

capitalized on the opportunities to draw on the comparative advantage of each agency to develop initiatives that were in line with national interests.

## **One Leader**

The One Leader strategy was pursued in all Delivering as One pilots, although with varying degrees of emphasis. According to the UNDG, “The concept of One Leader is for an empowered Resident Coordinator (RC) and an empowered UN Country Team to work together with clear accountability. Under the One Leader concept, the empowered Resident Coordinator is expected to provide strategic leadership throughout the development programming process, bringing together relevant analytical capacities, both national and international, developing synergies between various UN ‘assets’, and linkages between the UN entities with their respective mandates and other partners.”

The MDG-F Framework Document clearly set out the mandate of the UN Resident Coordinator as the “central driver of success for MDG achievement”.<sup>59</sup> That role included the strategic leadership of the UN Country Team and responsibility for the overall programme as well as oversight of the Fund’s activities, drawing on the experience and technical expertise of the lead agency for the design and implementation of the Joint Programmes with other UN partners. Comments derived from the final evaluations demonstrate that the UN Resident Coordinators indeed played a key role in the implementation of the Joint Programmes, although that role varied significantly from one country to the next, depending on the country situation, and the leadership capabilities and management styles of the Resident Coordinator.

The strong leadership role of the Resident Coordinators was also confirmed in many of the interviews and several focus group sessions that indicated without the Resident Coordinators’ active involvement as champions of the MDG-F, the Joint Programmes would never have started. In the majority of countries that had site visits, the Resident Coordinators actively participated in all stages from programme formulation to inauguration to closing events. Among those commenting on the issue of MDG-F leadership, more than half said that the Resident Coordinators did not get excessively involved in the detailed operations of the programmes to infringe on the role of the lead technical agencies, which were in charge of the design, implementation and management.

Having the UN Resident Coordinator as the focal point and overall leader of the UN Country Team, providing the strategic direction and guidance for the individual UN funds and agencies that were involved in the country, was a key element for an effective country level response from the UN development system operating in concert. So too was the role of the Convener agencies as the technical leads. Given the technical requirements of most of the Joint Programmes, the technical expertise and coordination role of the lead technical agencies in their design and implementation were also key. The role of the Resident Coordinators has been enhanced through the process.

However, the evaluators noted that the strong leadership role and responsibility envisaged for an empowered Resident Coordinator was not matched with a commensurate level of authority within the accountability system. Resident Coordinators have no formal authority over the heads of other organizations within the UN country team who are immediately accountable to supervisors in their respective organizations’ hierarchy and executive heads. The success of the One Leader aspect has largely depended on the “moral” authority of the Resident Coordinators, their ability to achieve consensus and rally support around the strategic vision, and on the perspective of UN country team members.

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<sup>59</sup> MDG-F Framework Document dated 1 August 2007, p2

## One Budget

“Under One Budget, the UN country team’s agreed, costed results are presented in one financial framework, showing each organization’s planned input together with the funding source. Unfunded results are also identified. Each participating UN organization identifies the resources it expects to provide—whether in-kind or monetary—subject to funds being available. The results in the financial framework can be funded by agencies’ core resources, national government contributions, direct contributions from donors, and a specific country coherence fund established for interested donors.”<sup>60</sup>

The evidence from the final evaluations showed that costed results for each Joint Programme were presented in one financial framework with a breakdown of the resource requirements and planned results of each participating UN organization. The role played by the MPTF in providing consolidated financial information on Joint Programmes was also reported as facilitating financial management of the programmes by the administrative agencies at the country level.

However, the absence in some cases of a consolidated budget for the Joint Programme that was linked to the UNDAF for the country tended to increase the difficulty of providing the players with an overview of the financial inputs and outputs of all of the agencies taken together. In several Joint Programmes, the financial processes and procedures followed by different participating agencies at the country level remained different, and the Joint Programmes were not able to streamline them in a consistent manner. Besides the slowness of the overall process, the existence of different procedures threatened the objective of harmonizing and simplifying procedures as well as the full achievement of development goals. The financial and coordinative management of the Joint Programmes received a weak endorsement from survey respondents.

Joint Programmes within the MDG-F have been exclusively managed through pass-through funding. With pass-through funding one agency receives funds from one or more donors, is responsible for fiduciary management, and passes those funds through to the various partner agencies as instructed. This modality provides strong management of funds between the UN and donors, yet leaves programmatic accountability within each separate partner organization. It requires joint planning and coordination of work as well as providing clear responsibility for consolidated annual reporting to stakeholders.

At the beginning of MDG-F Joint Programme implementation UN partner organizations had difficulty setting up a system to ensure that the funds were transferred to the field in a timely manner, and also for many of the participants in the field and/or non-resident agencies to work effectively due to limited field capacity. The *Joint Evaluation of Joint Gender Programmes in the UN System* noted that the pass-through financial mechanism was “complex and onerous, causing delays and high administrative burdens for partners. These barriers have generated resentment from national stakeholders; undermined programme ownership; compromised the UN’s reputation; and restricted the willingness of government to co-operate.”<sup>61</sup> Some of these weaknesses were also reported to varying degrees in some of the final evaluations of the Joint Programmes.

Although the evidence paints a somewhat mixed picture on the One Budget aspect, it has worked well overall and has contributed to strengthening UN Coherence under the arrangement.

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<sup>60</sup> [www.undg.org](http://www.undg.org) (Delivering as One/One Programme)

<sup>61</sup> Joint Evaluation of Joint Gender Programmes in the UN System: Synthesis Report, IOD PARC for UN Women Evaluation Management Group, September 2013, p21

## One Office

The One Office strategy, according to the UNDG, is intended to unite “agencies working at the country level through harmonized business processes, common services and often common premises or a UN House. By establishing common services and clustering operational activities of agencies together the UN aims to reduce operational costs considerably and become more effective and efficient in supporting programme delivery.”<sup>62</sup>

The management practices employed were reported as varying significantly among the Joint Programmes with each member agency that was part of the country teams applying its own corresponding management practices, depending on the Joint Programme and country. Looking at the combined highly satisfactory/satisfactory ratings in Table 9, it is seen that harmonization and simplification of operational procedures had relatively lower ratings after those related to cross-cutting issues and results-based management. Although these operational aspects were weakest areas, the overall proportion of programmes rating satisfactory or better was still positive as mentioned above under the One Programme section. Country visits also highlighted this issue.

Harmonization and simplification are cornerstones of the MDG-F coherence efforts. It was expected that having a common management structure and approach would increase efficiency. It was said in some interviews that when more than one UN agency was involved due to the multi-dimensionality of development issues, the agencies would have just two choices: (1) each do their own thing in their own way at incremental costs and with weaker outcomes, or (2) design and implement the interventions together, interventions that would cover all of the issues in an integrated way, using common procedures and financing to reduce duplication and costs, providing better outcomes. Agencies opted for the latter choice, but not necessarily because it promised to reduce their overhead costs by increasing efficiency. It is more likely the prospect of a sizeable project budget was the incentive to change long-established patterns of behaviour and work toward adopting a common set of procedures.

The harmonization of management processes through UN as One and the MDG-F may not have streamlined things, improving efficiency as expected. The *Joint Evaluation of Joint Gender Programmes in the UN System: Synthesis Report* found that expected increases in efficiencies from operating jointly did not materialize for the joint gender programmes in general or the MDG-F Joint Programmes as well. In fact, the evaluation reported that joint programming “commonly left the total volume of burdens (on government and civil society partners) unchanged and in some cases (that of UN agencies) increased them – particularly where the programme has been the first of its kind.”<sup>63</sup>

A final observation is made here on the extent to which MDG-F Joint Programmes actually saw harmonized and simplified implementation versus UN agencies simply implementing their projects in much their own way under the common MDG-F umbrella. The risk to the Fund’s success in achievement of UN coherence on the ground was always that Joint Programme activities would simply be a set of parallel initiatives implemented by different UN agencies without any efficiency or effectiveness gains and with few synergies among themselves. In fact, about a fifth of survey and interview responses to a question about the extent of harmonization indicated that parallel rather than truly joint execution of activities occurred. Country visits confirmed this issue regarding parallel structures. These responses were tied in many cases to countries whose national governments were characterized as being resistant to

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<sup>62</sup> Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One, Main Report, United Nations, September 2012, p. 32

<sup>63</sup> Joint Evaluation of Joint Gender Programmes in the UN System: Synthesis Report, IOD PARC for UN Women Evaluation Management Group, September 2013, p23



joint or integrated activities and whose own internal organizations/ministries continued to act bilaterally with partnering UN agencies.

### **One Voice**

One Voice, although not mandated in Delivering as One pilots, became a logical follow on from the other 'Ones', with some offices developing a common communication strategy in support of coherent programming as well as for internal communication among agencies' staff. The pilots and other countries have flagged a shift towards issue-based communication and upstream policy advocacy. By jointly promoting issues, the UN Country Team can advocate more effectively, contribute to development goals and enhance the reputation and visibility of agencies.<sup>64</sup>

Looking at the evidence, the One Voice aspect of the MDG-F complemented the One Leader aspect, supported by the Fund's Communications and Advocacy Strategy. At the country level, this has helped to inform UN country team members, government stakeholders, donors and civil society about what has been promoted and achieved under the MDG-F. Some programmes also developed a common communication strategy through which lessons and experiences on the Joint Programmes were disseminated from the Resident Coordinator's offices and Convener Agencies, increasing the prominence and specific concerns of individual organizations via their association with a broader effort under the MDG-F/UN banner.

At the more global Fund level, there is evidence of concerted effort to implement the Communication and Advocacy Strategy approved by the Steering Committee in December 2012. Examples of outputs include the dissemination and sharing of the results and lessons from the Fund's work through a number of knowledge management events and side events coinciding with relevant UN meetings and conferences. Examples include side events at the 2013 sessions of the Commission for Social Development, the representatives from the UNDP, Convener Agencies and the Government of Spain participated in the release and presentation of the findings from key reports on thematic aspects of Fund's work to a wide range of stakeholders.

#### **4.2.3 Summary and Conclusions about UN system-wide coherence**

It is evident from the Delivering as One pilot that the Joint Programme modality was not new to the UN system when the MDG-F was established. However, as noted in the interviews and documents, the form and the requirements for the MDG-F Joint Programmes sought to hasten the progress on UN system-wide coherence and the agenda of delivering as one UN. The evidence from the different sources suggests that the efforts of the MDG-F have indeed contributed to advancing progress in the area of UN system-wide coherence, albeit with more success in some areas than others. While there was good coherence on the One Programme, One Leader, One Budget and One Voice dimensions, some of the operational aspects (such as harmonization and simplification of procedures, results-based management) under the One Office component revealed areas where weaknesses were evident.

#### **4.3 The Fund's adherence to and support for the Principles of the Paris Declaration**

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) outlines the following five fundamental Principles for making aid more effective: ownership, alignment, harmonization, results, and mutual accountability. The Accra Agenda (2008) focused on strengthening and deepening implementation of the Paris Declaration,

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<sup>64</sup> Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One, Main Report, United Nations, September 2012, p. 10

on taking stock of progress and setting the agenda for accelerated advancement towards the Paris Declaration targets. It also gave added emphasis to capacity enhancement.

The five core Principles have gained support across the development community and changed aid practice for the better. They now constitute the norm for: aid recipients to forge their own national development strategies with their parliaments and electorates (ownership); donors to support these strategies and use national systems and procedures (alignment) and work to streamline their efforts in-country (harmonization); development policies to be focused on achieving clear goals and for monitoring progress towards these goals (results orientation); and for donors and recipients alike to be jointly responsible for achieving these goals (mutual accountability).

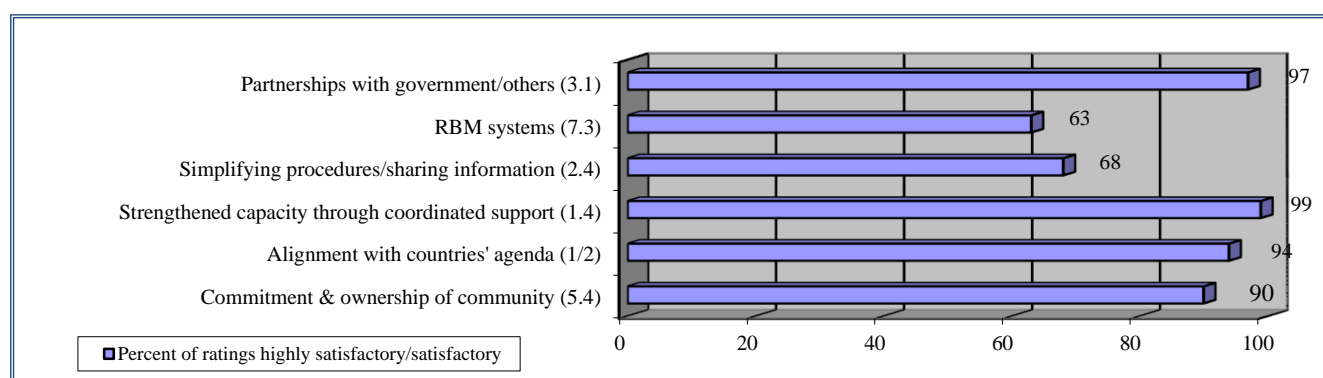
Table 10 below contains the Principles and related normative statements that were included in the meta-analysis as sub-criteria have the sub-criterion number shown in brackets.

**Table 10 - Principles of the Paris Declaration and related Meta-Analysis Sub-Criteria**

Principle	Norms Statement
Ownership	Continued commitment and ownership of the local community partner(s) (sub-criterion 5.4)
Alignment	Aligning with partner countries' agenda (sub-criterion 1.2) and use of national systems and procedures (not covered by any sub-criterion)
Harmonization	Strengthened capacity through co-ordinated support (sub-criterion 1.4) Simplifying procedures, sharing information (sub-criterion 2.4)
Results orientation	Results Based Management (RBM) systems are effective (sub-criterion 7.3)
Mutual Accountability	Partnerships with governments and other Agencies for planning, coordination and implementation (sub-criterion 3.1)

The meta-analysis ratings for the six evaluation sub-criteria identified in the above Table as forming part of the normative statements for the Paris Declaration Principles can be used as one way of showing the degree of adherence to the Principles. As seen in Figure 4, the level of adherence to the five Principles varied. The share of Joint Programmes that were rated in the final evaluations as meeting the norms of the Principles in a highly satisfactory or satisfactory manner ranged from a low of 63% to a high of 99% with the average percentage of adherence being 85%. But overall it is observed that most of Joint Programmes embraced the fundamental Principles of the Paris Declaration and gave capacity enhancement the importance it deserved.

**Figure 4 Ratings on Meta-Analysis Sub-Criteria Related to Principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness**



Survey data support this finding. In response to the question “How appropriate was the MDG-F model as a means for promoting the implementation of the Paris Declaration Principles?” 67% of survey respondents (out of 173) replied that it was appropriate to a fair or great extent. However, at a deeper

level, about one quarter of those surveyed expressed some reservations about how well the Fund was able to implement some of the Paris Declaration recommendations.

A fair degree of adherence to and promotion of the Principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness was found, with the best results in strengthened capacity of national and local players through coordinated support and the weakest results in the use of reporting tools for results-based management and reductions in transaction costs.

### **Ownership**

A full 77% out of 372 survey respondents said necessary players were mostly or fully involved in design of the Joint Programmes. That involvement was perceived as improving effectiveness to a fair or great extent by 89% out of 264 respondents, and as improving the potential for sustainability of the programmes to a fair or great extent by 84% out of 263 respondents.

National Ownership in the case of the MDG-F means ownership of the programme design as well as the implementation. The Joint Programmes provided opportunities for the ownership of partner countries through the in-country governance and management committees. What is less clear is whether the countries used those opportunities to exercise country leadership because examples of situations where the countries have exercised their leadership in helping to shape the Joint Programmes are limited. One such case is Ethiopia in the Private Sector thematic window where the country insisted in having a more limited number of UN agencies than proposed, according to the final evaluation of the programme.

### **Alignment**

National government ownership of the programmes was marginally inhibited by the very fact that the Joint Programmes had to fit within pre-determined themes (the windows), very specific guidelines on the objectives and, types of interventions contained in the window Terms of Reference, all aggravated by having to design and implement the programmes in a very short timeframe. It was noted in a number of country visits that the areas of focus were complementary to national policies but did not follow those policies.

If the MDG-F had conformed to the Paris Principles, technically only the National Execution modality, through which the financial and operations managements follow the national system, should have been used whenever feasible. In reality, the programmes used the Direct Execution modality whereby the responsibility for programme's execution was mainly entrusted to the UN agency as opposed to the national counterpart.

### **Harmonization**

As noted above, harmonization of administrative and financial procedures was frequently not achieved in practice as most of the UN partners, and almost all of the national partners, maintained their own procedures. While progress was made toward the Delivering as One, there were still areas where harmonization remained an issue at the country level.

Transaction costs remained at least as high as for other programmes before MDG-F with those costs higher in some instances. This was said to be the result of the UN and national government partners having to form new units for programme management rather than using units and premises already in place for other programmes, and to use new and separate programme reporting tools and processes rather than simply adapting existing ones such as those already established for the One UN Plan and One Plan Fund. This concern about the high level of transaction costs running counter to the Principles of the Paris

Declaration was also voiced in interviews and country visits. The processes required by the MDG-F may have actually reduced efficiency at the Joint Programme and country level.

## **Results**

As will be discussed in the next section, the results based management approaches faced some difficulties. Even with weaknesses in the results based management and the monitoring and reporting systems, the use of monitoring and evaluation information at the Joint Programme level helped to foster mutual accountability overall, which was seen to be strong. Despite this, the overall picture that emerges from the Joint Programmes is that they have achieved results as described above in 3.1.3.

## **Mutual Accountability**

Some of the key ingredients of a good accountability system are whether: (i) there is an appropriate mechanism or body for decision-making; (ii) there is a system in place to get the information that decision-makers and managers need; (iii) that the system in place produces the right types of information needed in a timely fashion; and (iv) information is acted upon to make the needed decisions. The accountability system established by the MDG-F, and how and whether it has worked, was examined at two levels: at the level of the Fund, and at the level of the Joint Programmes in partner countries.

At the level of the Fund, the Steering Committee provided a robust mechanism for decision-making and mutual accountability between Spain and the UNDP. The MDG-F Secretariat, the Technical Sub-committees, and the MPTF were all part of the system to support the Steering Committee in providing the necessary information and implementing its decisions, whether it was about the competitive process, selection of the Joint Programmes to be funded, the allocation of resources, or other aspects. Steering Committee meetings minutes and accompanying documents provide evidence of quality information for decision-making and timely decisions.

At the country level, the National Steering Committee, co-chaired by the Resident Coordinator and a senior representative of the partner country with representation from the Government of Spain, other key stakeholders, and members of the Programme Management Committee (which involved a wider representation of the key stakeholders), provided a robust and inclusive mechanism for mutual accountability, decisions and action on individual Joint Programmes. The monitoring and other technical reports provided information for decisions, although the quality of information and periodicity of reporting was found to be variable depending on the Joint Programmes and the country context. The findings from the Joint Programme final evaluations clearly pointed out that needed corrective action was taken to improve the programmes based on information from the monitoring reports and especially from the mid-term evaluations. In terms of the principle of mutual accountability, 65% out of 381 survey respondents indicated that donors and partners felt they were mutually accountable for development results in the recipient countries.

## **4.4 Monitoring & Evaluation, Communications & Advocacy and Knowledge Management**

### **4.4.1 Monitoring and Evaluation**

According to the MDG-F policy and strategy document “The MDG-F Monitoring and Evaluation strategy is formulated in accordance with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards as well as with the OECD/DAC evaluation principles. Thus the strategy responds to the needs

of accountability, organizational learning, and advancing knowledge through evidence-based results reporting. The strategy is built on four distinct levels of analysis: 1) Joint Programme, 2) focus country, 3) thematic window, and 4) the MDG-F.”<sup>65</sup> The strategy was observed to build on the information needs and interests of the different stakeholders, balancing their accountability and learning needs. The decision to allocate three to five percent of programme resources to monitoring and evaluation was a key enabling factor and good practice to be emulated.

The MDG-F investments have been subjected to a rigorous series of different types of evaluation including:

- Nine Focus Country evaluations that were used to assess the initial design and tools for the Fund’s monitoring and evaluation system;
- Mid-term evaluations for all 130 Joint Programmes;
- Final evaluations for all Joint Programmes;
- Eight thematic studies;
- Ten country evaluations consisting of participatory case studies; and,
- This Global and Thematic Evaluation of the Fund.

The nine focus country evaluations, thematic window studies and 10 country case study evaluations were reviewed and key data extracted. In that process, it was found that all of the aforementioned evaluations/studies were done with a depth and level of rigor not typically found in other similar programmes. Although not all of the final evaluations were completed on schedule as expected, the high proportion that was and passed the quality screening (93 of the 98 reviewed) is an indication of that rigour. A key success factor was the Secretariat’s useful guidance tools on the evaluation process and products (e.g. for preparation of Terms of Reference and Evaluation Reports).

As discussed previously, all the Joint Programmes were subjected to systematic evaluations during implementation and at the end. The mid-term evaluations, in particular, were critical in improving the effectiveness of the programmes, as evidenced by the kinds of adjustments that had to be made to many as part of the Improvement Plans in response to the recommendations in their respective mid-term evaluations. In this regard, the mandatory requirement in the Fund’s Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy for a mid-term evaluations of each Joint Programme, and the investment of time and resources by the Secretariat in developing and providing good guidance tools (for preparing evaluation Terms of Reference, Evaluation Reports, etc.) to facilitate these evaluations has paid off. Such mid-course corrections are an essential part of ensuring quality during implementation.

Each country was responsible for designing a monitoring and evaluation system for each of its Joint Programmes, establishing baselines for quantitative and qualitative indicators. In addition, the MDG-F Secretariat established a monitoring and evaluation methodology with a set of common indicators, all included in the monitoring and evaluation policy and strategy document.

Monitoring of the Joint Programmes was carried out mainly through biannual monitoring reports. While the main framework for those reports was developed by the Secretariat in 2009 the first reports were not

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<sup>65</sup> MDG Achievement Fund Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Strategy: Learning to Improve - Making Evidence Work for Development, approved February 2009 and updated October 2012

generated until 2010 when an online software tool was introduced. Those reports were to contain data that reflected the real status of Joint Programmes and their trends (indicators on financial and substantive execution, Delivering-as-One, Paris Declaration and thematic window indicators). A review of the biannual reports on Joint Programmes found that the reports were to a great extent incomplete with a significant amount of data missing, so much so that they were not considered useful in this evaluation. In addition, Fund Secretariat staff confirmed that there was no validation of the data submitted from the field.

From 2010 to early 2013 there was improvement in the completeness of the biannual monitoring reports. However, nothing could be done about the absence of baseline information. Moreover, the metrics used to gauge progress were not consistent among the reports making their contents difficult to use in measuring outcomes against objectives.

One of the outcome areas examined through the meta-analysis focused on the effectiveness of the systems and processes for monitoring and evaluation, and the extent to which the systems were used. The rating scale used was: highly satisfactory=4; satisfactory =3; unsatisfactory=2; and highly unsatisfactory=1.

Given the centrality of management as a determinant in the process of obtaining good results, the meta-analysis also captured information on whether managers were provided with some of the essential managerial tools, and whether they made effective use of those tools to improve programme effectiveness. The table below summarizes the data gleaned from the final evaluations about this.

**Table 11 - Use of Evaluation, Monitoring and RBM to Improve Programme Effectiveness derived from Meta-Analysis of Final Evaluations**

Sub Criteria	HS	S	U	HU	N/A
7.1 The systems and process for evaluation are effective	30 (33%)	55 (59%)	7 (8%)	-	1 (<1%)
7.2 Systems and processes for monitoring and reporting on programme results are effective	21 (23%)	37 (40%)	32 (35%)	2 (2%)	1 (<1%)
7.3 Results Based Management (RBM) systems are effective	14 (15%)	45 (48%)	28 (30%)	3 (3.5%)	3 (3.5%)
7.4 The organization makes use of evaluation to improve development effectiveness	30 (33%)	43 (46%)	14 (15%)	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.5%)
Number of Joint Programme Final Evaluations Reviewed = 93					

HS = Highly Satisfactory; S = Satisfactory; U = Unsatisfactory; HU = Highly Unsatisfactory; N/A = Not Addressed

Nearly all the final evaluations contained information that enabled the evaluation team to rate the sub-criteria. A great majority (92%) of the Joint Programmes were rated as satisfactory or better on the systems and process for evaluation, indicating that they were subjected to systematic evaluations during implementation and at the end. The mid-term evaluations, in particular, were also used to varying extents to improve the effectiveness of the programmes, as evidenced by the kinds of adjustments made to many of the programmes in response to their mid-term evaluations. In this regard, the mandatory requirement in the Fund's Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy for a mid-term and final evaluations of each Joint Programme, and the investment by the Secretariat in developing and providing guidance tools (for preparing the Terms of Reference, Evaluation Reports, etc.) has led to evaluations which have contributed positively to improving the programs. As the distributions of the ratings suggest, this was overall satisfactory or better although there was considerable variation. Where there were weaknesses, these stemmed not from the availability of good evaluation tools but from how the evaluations were implemented and used by managers.

The picture was less positive regarding the effectiveness of the RBM system and the adequacy of the monitoring and reporting systems. In both cases, only in 63% of the programmes were rated as satisfactory or better. With respect to the RBM system, 15% of the programmes had what would be considered a good system in place, with clear objectives and a results framework with SMART (specific, measureable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) indicators that served as a useful to measure progress and manage for programme effectiveness. In the other 48% where the programmes were rated as satisfactory, it was noted that an RBM system was in place and produced regular reports, but programme objectives were not realistic and results frameworks were unclear. In the remaining 37%, the effectiveness of the RBM system was less than satisfactory: while a system was in place, or being developed, the objectives were unrealistic, expected results were poorly articulated, and the system did not produce the needed information on programme performance.

With respect to the monitoring and reporting system, the 23% of the programmes that were rated as Highly Satisfactory had well-established systems that reported regularly with good quality information. The other 40% that were rated as Satisfactory had an established system with regular reporting, although there were questions about the appropriateness, quality and usefulness of the information and how these reports were used. In a third of the programmes, rated as less than satisfactory, while monitoring and reporting systems for the programmes existed, they either did not report on a regular basis or the reporting was inadequate in frequency, coverage and quality to inform decisions and adjust as necessary.

Implementation of the evaluation systems across the different windows was fairly uniform, as all made good use of, and benefitted from, the mid-term evaluations. However, implementation of the RBM and monitoring and reporting systems varied across the different windows as indicated the ratings. Less than satisfactory ratings were obtained on both in nearly 50% in the Environment and Climate Change window programmes (7 of the 16); nearly 40% in the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Youth Employment and Migration, and Democratic Economic Governance windows; and between 20 - 30% in the other four windows. The fact that all windows exhibited similar problems with the RBM and with monitoring and reporting systems and the degree to which these occurred would seem to suggest that the problem was at least partly systemic and partly operational and management-related.

Relatively few interviewees were familiar enough with specific aspects of monitoring and evaluation to discuss monitoring needs and issues. However, those that were able to offer comment agreed that the online reporting system and indicator framework was complex, and UN country team members and Programme Management Unit staff with responsibility for the reporting found the system and tools challenging. All expressed concern about the absence of baseline information from the Fund's start point and felt that putting such information in the systems in 2011 was a little too late, even when it was said that some of the earlier information could be recovered.

Country level interviewees indicated that the monitoring and reporting structures were burdensome. Nonetheless, they said that information on Joint Programme progress toward indicator achievement was essential in decision-making and they looked for ways to better manage the monitoring and reporting tasks. A review of documentation for a number of the Joint Programmes showed that external consultants were hired to collate and enter data into the systems. For at least one Joint Programme, funds were used to conduct a survey of 872 homes at the national level to rebuild some of the baseline information they felt was needed. The exact extent of the preceding types of actions by Joint Programme players could not be determined but a great many similar examples were found in documentation. This provided some evidence that finding ways to handle the burden of the new MDG-F monitoring and reporting system was not hampered by a lack of funding. This was confirmed in interviews. The following synthesis of some comments drawn from mid-term evaluations presents a somewhat negative picture of monitoring and reporting up to the middle of 2011, a situation that the final evaluations show improved after that point:

There was a paucity of reporting measures, poorly written progress reports, a weak monitoring instrument, poor monitoring capacity and processes, failure to take into account time involved in planning, design and formulation of the baselines of each of the individual outcome areas within the sectors and thematic areas missing, and poor conceptualization of the multidimensional aspects of the programme plague the Joint Programmes.

The overall picture that emerged from the meta-analysis, interviews and documents is that the evaluation system for the Fund's Joint Programmes was quite well developed, and fairly effective use was made of it to improve programme performance in each of the thematic windows. The monitoring and reporting aspect was less well developed in each of the thematic windows, especially in the first few years, and was not as effective as the evaluation system in helping to improve programme performance. There were significant weaknesses in the results-based management system and its implementation in the Joint Programmes across all thematic windows. The challenges relating to the RBM and monitoring and reporting aspects seem to be partly systemic and partly managerial.

The monitoring and evaluation average ratings for the 93 Joint Programmes were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). It was found that the average ratings varied significantly by thematic window, region, number of UN partners and programme expenditures. Follow up statistical analysis revealed that:

- The Joint Programmes in Development and the Private Sector did better than Joint Programmes Environment and Climate Change and Culture and Development in implementing monitoring and evaluation systems and the other Thematic Windows fell in between;
- The monitoring and evaluation performance of Joint Programmes operated in Europe and Central Asia was marginally lower than for other regions;
- Increasing numbers of UN partners in Joint Programmes was related to decreasing monitoring and evaluation performance; and,
- Increasing programme expenditures seemed marginally related to improved monitoring and evaluation ratings.

#### **4.4.2 Knowledge Management and Partnerships**

Knowledge management was established in the design of the MDG-F as one of four support domains. The others were: monitoring and evaluation, communications and advocacy, and partnerships. The knowledge management system has two pillars:

- Pillar 1: Knowledge network or forum – provision of various means to foster dialogue and interaction among colleagues from UN agencies, Joint Programmes and national institutions, increasing their access to each other's learning and experiences nationally, regionally and globally, with funding for these activities allocated from MDG-F; and,
- Pillar 2: Knowledge repository – funding support for approaches to consolidate lessons learned and good practices generated through Joint Programme implementation with storage of information in various forms accessible for use in future initiatives.

The five main actors in terms of Knowledge Management in the MDG-F were: the Fund Secretariat, the Thematic Window Convenors, the 13 institutions with which the Fund developed partnerships for



knowledge management in several areas<sup>66</sup>; Resident Coordinator Offices, and the Joint Programmes themselves. Interviewees familiar with the Fund's knowledge management components explained the notions behind the initiative. The concept was that every activity can contribute to the body of knowledge about the organization, processes and/or content of UN development programming. UN corporate knowledge needs to be retained and passed on and this can be achieved if a good knowledge management strategy and the right tools are developed. A platform (s) and/or archival system has to exist for storage of knowledge, its retrieval, and sharing among players.

At the time the data collection for the evaluation was completed in August 2013, many of the Fund's knowledge management activities were still in progress, having been initiated late. For example, the Fund only started to use the Teamwork platform in March 2010, and the knowledge management strategies of many of the Convener agencies and the 13 partnerships were only put in place after that.

Despite the late start, country level interviews, focus groups and document reviews suggest that the knowledge management role of the convener agency was important for the exchange of knowledge at regional, thematic and global levels. Knowledge management was important in ensuring adequate and broad stakeholder participation, through the exchange of good practice, lessons learned, and relevant knowledge-oriented partnerships. In some cases (e.g. in Eastern Europe) the knowledge management process could have been enhanced by more targeted awareness campaigns at programme start up directed to Joint Programmes in order to attract more relevant stakeholders, and upon completion to ensure the dissemination of good practices/results and provide continuity.

The evidence reviewed indicated the activities undertaken through several workshops, the lessons and good practices documents, the publications, the exchange of information through the Teamwork communities of practice established for each thematic window, and several studies were relevant and contributed to the MDG-F's efforts in advancing the MDG agenda. A good example of this was a lessons learned paper, shared at Montevideo in 2011, indicating that "findings from mid-term evaluations and feedback from UN Country Teams have shown that having a high number of agencies participate in a Joint Program can result in burdensome coordination and inefficiencies. With a large number of partners the time spent on establishing programme management mechanisms, coordinating operational issues and meetings etc. takes away from time which needs to be spent on development work".<sup>67</sup>

The MDG-F formed knowledge management partnerships with several UN agencies and academic institutions to analyze the good practices and lessons learned from the MDG-F joint programmes and share these with a variety of stakeholders at various meetings and fora. These partnerships allowed the MDG-F to leverage the expertise and networks of these partners and contribute the knowledge from its work to the wider international community for the post-2015 development agenda. A number of publications were produced on the knowledge and lessons emerging from their work. For example, the "Two Roads One Goal" study<sup>68</sup> cited earlier, provided valuable information on gender mainstreaming. The Stockholm International Water Institute/UNDP partnership resulted in research which suggested ways forward to help overcome socio-cultural clashes between communities, service

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<sup>66</sup> Civil Engagement; International Indigenous Women's Forum; Latin American and the Caribbean Gender Equality; Millennium Campaign; Millennium Film Festival; Pan American Health Organization; Post 2015 (and Post 2015 Project Revision); Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger; Stockholm International Water Institute; UN Women; UNEG; UNIDO; University of Girona.

<sup>67</sup> "MDG Achievement Fund: Lessons Learned," Montevideo, Uruguay, November 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Two Roads One Goal, Dual Strategy for Gender Equality Programming in the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund, MDG Achievement Fund Secretariat, UNDP and UN Women, 2013.

providers, development cooperation actors and local authorities, and the resulting ineffectiveness of the sanitation and water supply systems in indigenous communities. In the Private Sector and Development area, a report by UNIDO, the Convener Agency, on Networks for Prosperity: connecting development knowledge beyond 2015, discusses the significance of knowledge networks in economic policy and private sector and development and points to the important benefits of networks for the creation of knowledge. Finally, in the Culture and Development area, the partnership with the University of Girona in Spain (and the Technological University of Bolivar in Colombia) produced research which would contribute to systematization, retention and transfer of knowledge from the management practices and experiences of the MDG-F's joint programmes by designing a set of practical project management tools in cultural approaches to development.

Judging from the level of effort, activities and resources devoted to the Partnerships, Monitoring and Evaluation, Communications and Advocacy and Knowledge Management Strategies, a tremendous amount of attention and importance was rightly given to all of these areas by the MDG-F. Feedback during the evaluation confirmed that there was also good synergy and complementarity among the strategies, with each contributing to the Fund's programmes and work overall.

#### **4.4.3 Communication and Advocacy**

The overall advocacy and communication approach for the MDG-Fund was first published in 2008 and was to guide this activity for the duration of the Fund. The policy articulated a need for:<sup>69</sup>

- Engaging in advocacy on the goals and guiding principles of the MDG-F;
- Creating and strengthening strategic alliances with key players within the UN system, civil society organizations, Governments, the international development community and Spain; and,
- Designing an advocacy and mobilization plan to achieve greater MDG results.

The strategy and its implementation was the responsibility of the MDG-F Secretariat. The policy covered all aspects of communication and advocacy whether at the global, national or sub-national level. The strategy was an integrated approach that combined techniques in advocacy, communication and social mobilization.

The aim of the strategy as implemented was to increase awareness, advocate and mobilize support for the MDGs, using examples of Fund-supported activities to give a tangible and human face to communications. Activities were also targeted at influencing, on a long-term basis, sectorial policies such as those related to youth and employment, while promoting certain broader policies related to accelerating progress toward achievement of MDG targets. The policy required that "One Image" of the MDG-F be presented in all communications and advocacy tools used in recipient countries". The aim was to ensure a high level of consistency in the messages and images portrayed.

Evidence from interviews, focus groups and document reviews indicate that the Fund's Communication, Advocacy and Partnership Country Initiative and related investments was successful in establishing partnerships and strategic alliances with a broad range of stakeholders. However, since this was introduced late in the process, the jury is still out on their usefulness. In some cases such as the piloting of the UN as One, the efforts to strengthen the UN country team communication capacities produced mixed results. A particular reference was made to the approach of having a One Image communication strategy, covering all active Joint Programmes. This approach deprived individual Joint Programmes and

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<sup>69</sup> MDG-F Advocacy and Communication Strategy, December 2008

their UN agencies from adapting the strategy to make it more suitable for specific target audiences to help those audiences better understand individual Joint Programmes. While generally successful, the One Image communication approach did not make reference to a clear exit strategy following windup of the MDG-F, increasing the risk of poor sustainability and continuity after the end of the Joint Programmes.

Some examples were found in which the UN partners, national and local players worked together to adapt the MDG-F strategy to fit their regional, national or local setting. This approach was said by interviewees to produce longer lasting effects than the more generalized approach.

The MDG-F made important contributions to fostering a dialogue in the international development agenda. This achievement was specifically noted in some Culture and Development Joint Programmes where the dialogue was generally more international. However, it was found that other Joint Programmes also involved the development of a large number of partnerships with resulting dialogue that addressed relevant development agenda issues not only nationally but internationally.

Some of the challenges in implementation of the Advocacy and Communication Strategy and Policies identified by interviewees and focus groups included:

- A weak advocacy and communication culture within some UN agencies and particularly among national and local governments;
- The low profile of the MDG-F in relation to the external MDG reality characterized by a lack of relationship between the MDG agenda of some international organizations and the objectives and goals of some of the Joint Programmes; and,
- Resistance to use of the MDG-F logo at the country level from the UN agencies, which preferred to use their own logo (although most national authorities requested the MDG-F logo be used).

#### **4.4.4 Summary and Conclusions**

The contributions of monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management, and communications and advocacy to MDG-F performance

- The MDG-F has a rigorous evaluation system constructed on UN Evaluation Group norms and standards and fully compliant with OECD/DAC evaluation principles
- Results from mid-term Joint Programme evaluations contributed significantly to programme improvement.
- Monitoring and reporting effectiveness was diminished by the late introduction of the monitoring and reporting system and tools, by the added burden placed on country level partners to adapt to a new process and tool, and in some cases by the large number of UN partners (more than six).
- UN agencies and national partners in the countries made reasonable use of monitoring and evaluation results to improve programmes.
- The knowledge management initiative contributed to a sharing of knowledge that would be useful for improving the design, planning, and implementation of Joint Programmes in the future. As most of the MDG-F Joint Programmes were already designed and under implementation by the time it was put in place, the contribution of the knowledge management initiative would likely have been greater if the initiative was implemented earlier in the programme period.
- Although communication and advocacy activities were reasonably successful in establishing partnerships, the outcome of these relationships is too early to tell.

## 4.5 Contribution of the Fund to progress towards achievement of MDG targets

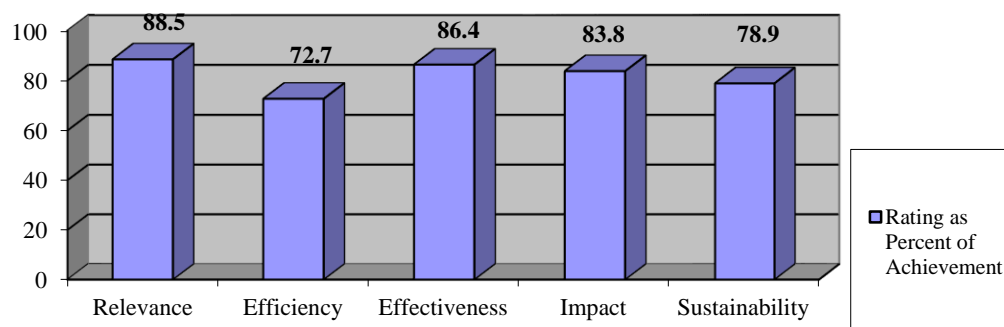
### 4.5.1 Evidence from analysis

Two methods were used to ascertain the degree to which the MDG-F contributed to the achievement of short and medium term objectives and progress towards MDG targets: (1) development and analysis of outcome ratings for Joint Programmes based on meta-analysis of Joint Programme final evaluations; and (2) comparative analysis of country level progress in achievement of MDG targets.

#### Analysis of Joint Programme outcome

The previous analysis in Section 3.0 indicated that the MDG-F has contributed to progress on the MDGs. The aggregated ratings from the final evaluations provide a positive impression of the outcomes of the Joint Programmes as can be seen in Figure 5. The design of the thematic windows was consistent with the MDGs. The Joint Programmes were designed to address these thematic issues and have begun to produce results at the country and global level. However, a series of factors may have tempered the extent to which they could achieve these results. For example, the situation within the country prior to the MDG-F interventions may have provided a strong base for success or issues for implementation. The success of the arrangements for implementation may have helped or hindered the results.

**Figure 5 Aggregate Final Evaluation Ratings in Five Areas for MDG-F Joint Programmes (n=93)**



As shown in Figure 5, the analysis of final evaluation ratings indicate that overall the JPs performed well on the criteria of relevant, effective and having impact and therefore should be contributing to the MDG targets. This means that 88.5% performed satisfactory or better on relevance, 72.7 % performed satisfactory or better on efficiency. There are a number of contextual factors that may have contributed to higher or lower programme performance as reflected in the meta-analysis ratings. Through the use of statistical analysis, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to investigate the possible relationships between the five area outcome ratings and these contextual factors: thematic window; number of UN partner organizations; region; Gender Inequality Index or GII (2010); Human Development Index or HDI (2007); Global Peace Index or GPI (2009); and programme expenditures. It was found that thematic window had a significant effect on achievement of the MDG targets<sup>70</sup> However, the effect was not directly identifiable because of other variables that influence the relationship such as differences among regions and the number of UN partners.

<sup>70</sup> The standard approach in statistical testing was used in this evaluation for which “significance” is declared for probability or p-values less than or equal to 0.05

As discussed in section 4.1, using statistical analysis to establish which combination of thematic windows, regions and number of UN partners seemed to result in the highest MDG-F performance, it was found that impact of the Joint Programmes was weakest in Children, Food Security and Nutrition, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, and Environment and Climate Change. Sustainability was higher in Latin America and the Caribbean than in Sub-Saharan Africa. The number of UN partners appeared to influence programme effectiveness.<sup>71</sup> Regarding the relationship between the number of UN partners and effectiveness, the analysis suggests that fewer rather than larger numbers of partners increased programme effectiveness. The optimal number of partners cannot be identified through statistical analysis. No other relationships were found to be significant for the five ratings areas.

### **Comparative analysis of country level data**

As previously mentioned under the discussion of relevance to different contexts, regression analysis was first used to investigate the possible contribution of a number of factors (including the presence of MDG-F Joint Programmes) to country progress in the achievement of MDG targets (measured using MDG progress scores).

As noted there, region and level of peace and security as indicated by score on the Global Peace Index (GPI) were found to significantly predict MDG progress scores across the 94 countries included in the analysis. The regression analysis revealed that the existence of MDG-F programmes within a country was a significant predictor of MDG progress scores.<sup>72</sup> However, the analysis also showed that the number of non-MDG programmes conducted (which occurred in both MDG-F and non-MDG-F countries) was a significant influencing factor. This suggests that, in addition to the influence of region and GPI, the operation of both MDG-F and non-MDG programmes in a country plays a role in a country's progress toward achievement of MDG targets.

### **4.5.2 Model Replication, Scale Up and Leveraging Additional Resources**

A comment frequently heard in interviews was that the Fund has proven to be catalytic in terms of other development initiatives imitating its approach. This sentiment is substantiated to a degree in data provided in the MPTF Gateway website, which show that 92 other programmes worth US\$197 million were implemented from 2009 to 2012 as Joint Programmes modeled along the lines of MDG-F.

MDG-F partner organizations agreed almost unanimously that procedures and staff in many of their other development programmes have been reorganized to fit the MDG-F model. For example, an ILO representative noted that the Joint Programme modality as applied in the Fund is being replicated, in its entirety in most ILO programming. Even when arrangements are bilateral, many elements of the Fund's model are applied, especially the use of common procedures and joint planning with national/local players.

Replication and/or scale up of the MDG-F model and its initiatives require additional investment on the part of the country and/or from donors other than the MDG-F given that the Fund ends December 2013. While the MDG-F was to be a catalyst for additional investment in Joint Programmes, no direct evidence was found that additional donors have contributed to specific Joint Programmes as they neared their end. Instead, it was seen that some donors began investing in new programmes that paralleled or extended Joint Programme activities in a similar direction at some point during the operation of the MDG-F.

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<sup>71</sup> Lawley-Hotelling significance of  $p=.05$

<sup>72</sup> See Annex 4.4 for more information.

Uncertainty remains about the degree to which the Fund was able to leverage follow-on investments in the same or similar programme areas, in the effort to scale up or replicate investments to contribute towards the MDGs. Asked about the extent to which the Fund fostered follow-on innovations and/or leveraged additional investment, 59% of 159 respondents indicated “to a fair or great extent”. There was unfortunately no monitoring by the MDG-F of leveraging and, therefore, there was no method to validate the extent of investments generated. The evidence that does exist on leveraging of additional resources provides a mixed picture in the sense that additional funding was not actually leveraged to any great extent, but there seemed to be some interest from other donors to do so. Information from interviews and the survey indicate that additional funding for the Fund’s Joint Programmes was not leveraged to any great extent because most donors and UN agencies saw the Joint Programmes as part of the “Spanish Programme” and the funding directed to specific countries for specific thematic initiatives was far larger in concentration than ever done previously. Also, the Fund was being rolled out during the international economic crisis of 2008 and this is believed to have prevented potential donors from committing resources to the already huge amount funded by the MDG-F.

That said, a few examples where Joint Programmes successfully attracted the investment of additional resources were cited in interviews and focus groups. Examples include:

- In Serbia, the government directly allocated US\$1.7 million to the implementation of the Youth Employment and Migration Joint Programme;
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, US\$2.5 million was allocated by the government for the restoration of cultural heritage under the Culture and Development thematic window;
- In El Salvador, under the Private Sector thematic window, US\$3 million was allocated from the government and donors for housing and infrastructure improvement; and,
- An environment Joint Programme in Egypt attracted some US\$78 million in parallel financing, much of it from the World Bank.

Interviewees in several countries visited indicated that there was solid commitment from various donors to invest in furthering some of the Joint Programmes once the MDG-F funding ends. The extent of such commitments was said to be encouraging and it was believed that there was a high likelihood the donors would come through with subsequent funding. This sense of confidence that the Fund had successfully set the stage for future investments in the Joint Programmes areas is seen in the response to a survey question: “To what extent did the MDG-F foster follow-on innovations and/or leverage additional investment?” Of 159 respondents, 58% indicated that follow-on investments were likely to a fair or great extent but these had not taken place at the time the evaluation was being completed.

#### **4.5.3 Summary and Conclusions about contribution to MDG targets**

- The Joint Programmes were found to be: highly relevant to country MDG needs; largely effective in achieving programme objectives related to the MDGs; contributors of benefits which have a good chance of being sustainable in the longer term; and contributors to significant changes in policies and systems needed for MDG progress.
- Although efficiency ranked lower than other criteria, the Joint Programmes were found to have been planned and implemented efficiently enough to contribute positively to the achievement of objectives related to the MDGs. However, efficiency was among the weakest areas of performance along with the cross-cutting areas of gender and environmental sustainability.

- The MDG-F Joint Programmes were found to have contributed to progress in the achievement of countries' MDG targets, but the degree of that contribution could not be isolated from the contributions of other UNDG non-MDG-F programmes which were also implemented in almost all of the MDG-F countries.
- Uncertainty remains that the MDG-F was able to leverage follow on investments in the same or similar programme areas, although some indications that it has done so were found.
- A number of internal and external obstacles to a fully successful implementation of the Fund were found and need to be addressed if an initiative like the MDG-F is repeated by the UN.

#### **4.6 Internal and external obstacles to attaining institutional and organizational changes**

A summary listing of the obstacles encountered in achieving the institutional and organizational changes needed for the successful implementation of the Fund as a whole is provided here to help explain why progress was made in some areas and not in others. Only those obstacles cited by at least one third of survey and interview respondents are included in the listing. The internal and external obstacles are interwoven and inseparable within the three levels Joint Programming, Thematic Windows and Fund levels.

##### **Internal obstacles:**

- The three-year timeframe for many Joint Programmes was much too short to achieve the kind of behavioral and institutional changes sought at the country level when up to five years is normally required.
- Substantial transaction costs for UN Lead, other UN agencies and national players were evident.
- Long and difficult negotiations to set up the One UN approach, simplify and harmonize processes delayed the start-up.
- Slow decision-making or the absence of decisions on the part of some key players was particularly pronounced when the number of partners was large (e.g., more than six UN agencies).
- Entrenched UN agency procedures that hindered common implementation approaches.
- Great variability existed in the extent to which different UN partners worked together toward Joint Programme objectives.
- Complexity and level of added burden to Joint Programme management and reporting that resulted from implementation relatively late in the process (2010) of the monitoring and evaluation system.
- Late implementation of the knowledge management component of the Fund resulting in some lessons learned and important ideas not available to Joint Programmes that started their implementations later (2010 to 2011).
- Inclusion of non-resident UN agencies as Joint Programme partners was not handled the same way in different countries or for different thematic window Joint Programmes. In some cases the non-resident agency contributions were critical and not considered too costly in view of the need for the expertise; in other cases the costs of either travel or installation of temporary offices was considered too high for the value of the contributions made by the non-resident agency. In several cases, the non-resident agencies were less successful in delivering efficiency and effectiveness, particularly when they had a major/lead role.

### **External obstacles:**

- MDG-F communicated that the funding belonged to the national level. The concept was fine but some national government ministries took this so literally that they wanted to micro-manage some areas and make decisions that ran counter the financial management responsibilities of the lead agency.
- While great effort was put into developing the capacities of the relevant UN agencies, national and local governments and civil organizations to continue Joint Programme interventions after Fund termination, there was insufficient time and effort on the part of country level players for the planning the ways and means to do it.
- Commitment and support remains an uncertainty going forward from other donors, including the allocation of financial resources.

### **4.7 Summary and Conclusions about the MDG-F as a model for multilateral development cooperation**

- The model was found to be a good way of advancing work in developing countries on specific thematic issues with participation from UN agencies having relevant expertise and experience, and with participation from relevant national and local partners.
- The MDG-F model was seen to provide a good framework for the implementation of development programmes under substantially different country conditions without producing large or unacceptable differences in levels of outcomes. The most salient context factors influencing outcomes were: thematic window, region, and level of peace and security in a country.
- The MDG-F, as an entity that funded and administered 130 individual Joint Programmes, was seen to be fully relevant to the needs and/or priorities of targeted beneficiaries, aligned with national development priorities and goals, the MDGs, and UN priorities and the UNDAFs.
- The MDG-F Joint Programmes seemed to have contributed to progress in the achievement of countries' MDG targets. However, the extent of the contribution cannot be quantified easily or separated out from the contributions to MDG progress of other UNDG non-MDG-F programmes which were also operated in almost all of the MDG-F countries.
- The MDG-F commitment to the use of competitively selected Joint Programmes as the work modality was found to be a key element in the Fund's contribution to UN system-wide coherence and adherence to and promotion of the Principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. A key element of the MDG-F as a relevant development model has been its focus on specific thematic areas with limited objectives – large enough to make a contribution (in terms of funding) and focused enough to cover specific aspects of an issue while not try to solve everything.

These findings complement the findings presented in the previous chapter about the quality and performance of the Joint Programmes and the thematic windows.



## **5. CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

From the information presented in Chapters 3 and 4, a picture has emerged about the achievements of the MDG-F as a model for multilateral development and of the Joint Programmes subsumed under the eight thematic windows.

### **5.1 Main Findings at the Joint Programme and Thematic Levels:**

The MDG-F model represents an institutionalization of coherence in development programming by requiring inter-agency planning and management of all Fund programmes and the exclusive use of Joint Programmes. It was found that the MDG-F has delivered Joint Programmes which were highly relevant to the MDG needs of the countries and largely effective in achieving their objectives and expected results. The 130 Joint Programmes funded through the eight thematic windows were in line with the Terms of Reference for the respective windows, which addressed important global challenges and priorities, as well as needs which were in line with national development goals and priorities of the countries, the MDGs, UN priorities and the UNDAFs for the countries.

The MDG-F Joint Programmes were found to have been planned and implemented efficiently enough to contribute positively to the achievement of their objectives, although efficiency varied among the windows and was among the weakest areas of performance, with gender inclusion and environmental sustainability. With the exception of the gender-specific programmes in the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment window, the level of gender inclusion in MDG-F programme planning and implementation was lower than expected at Fund inception, especially in light of various UN commitments (e.g. United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing). The issue of environmental sensitivity in the thematic windows other than the Environment and Climate Change window is certainly an area requiring more attention.

Firm conclusions about the sustainability of the results and benefits would be premature at this point given the short implementation period of three to four years. This has not allowed for the changes in beneficiary countries to become consolidated and well entrenched. Despite this a vast majority of the MDG-F Joint Programmes have produced results and benefits that could be sustainable if certain conditions are present within the country. This assessment of the MDG-F programmes is based on the observation that many have addressed to varying extent some of the key conditions that have proven in the past to be essential for sustainability. These include aspects such as the cultural and technological appropriateness of the interventions, the level of local commitment, ownership and capacity to carry on after the programmes end, the extent to which the policy environment is conducive to continuation of the activities and benefits, and future funding possibilities. Several of the programmes were successful in addressing some of those aspects, but doubts remain about the ability of local partners to provide the financial resources necessary for continuation and /or replication and scale up of the interventions when MDG-F funding ends.

In terms of types of result, besides the immediate services-related benefits for the intended target groups at the local and community level (at which most of the Joint Programmes operated), the programmes in the various windows contributed to behavioral changes, capacity improvements, and changes in a number of laws, policies and plans at both the national and sub-national levels in their respective thematic areas in the partner countries. At the sub-national and local levels, many of the programmes addressed pressing needs of target populations that were often among the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups and communities in terms of their economic (inequality and lack of opportunities), geographic (rural/urban or hard to reach locations), ethno-cultural (based on discrimination and exclusion), political (lack of voice and representation), and gender situation.

Consistent with the Terms of Reference of each thematic window, the MDG-F programmes in each window produced institutional, strategic and thematic results that were largely comparable across the different windows and across different country contexts. While all windows performed well overall, some windows performed marginally better on each of the six evaluation criteria used (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and gender inclusiveness and environmental sensitivity). The best results in terms of performance on the evaluation criteria were achieved in the Culture and Development window, followed by Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment; Conflict Prevention and Peace Building; Youth, Employment and Migration; Development of the Private Sector; Environment and Climate Change; Democratic Economic Development; and Children, Food Security and Nutrition. The most likely reasons for the differences were: the variations among the windows in the technical complexity, requirements for infrastructure and equipment, levels of national/community expertise required; the country contexts for which differences are evident among the five regions relative to the incidence of poverty, past progress in MDG developments, and levels of peace and security; and variations in the application results-based management techniques and use of management tools. It should be noted that the information on two of the windows (Children, Food Security and Nutrition and Conflict Prevention and Peace Building) was less extensive than for the others as the evaluation team only had the benefit of independent final evaluations for only 11 of the 24 and 9 of the 20 Joint Programmes in the Children, Food Security and Nutrition and Conflict Prevention and Peace Building windows respectively, which could have introduced a sample bias in the findings.

On the country context aspect and achievement of MDG progress by thematic window, statistical analysis revealed that greater progress in the achievement of MDG targets was found to have occurred during the programme period in East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean relative to Sub-Saharan Africa. Looking at the percentage of Joint Programmes operated in each of the regions, it is seen that the Children, Food Security and Nutrition window had 10% more of its programmes in sub-Saharan Africa than did the Culture and Development window.

The full effects and benefits of these policy and institutional results, which are more long term in nature, will extend beyond the 2015 timeline for the achievement of the MDGs and augurs well for the emerging post-2015 Agenda. In addition, the multi-sectorial nature of many of the programmes and their engagement with relevant government ministries as well as other local 'non-governmental' partners in the partner countries have served to demonstrate how recipient countries can leverage their own knowledge and expertise in a more "whole of government" or "whole of country" fashion to achieve better results. In this regard, the MDG-F has provided an example of how policy coherence and coordination within the partner countries can be fostered to achieve outcomes more effectively. The potential value of this benefit cannot be overstated.

## **5.2 Main Findings at the Fund Level**

At the Fund Level, it was found that the eight thematic windows chosen by the MDG-F made strategic sense as they all proved to be good avenues for addressing poverty reduction and contributing to progress towards the MDGs as indicated earlier by the Joint Programme results in the eight windows. Besides, the scope and areas of thematic intervention all helped to address global challenges that were relevant then, and continue to be relevant now. The evaluation team notes that, through the choice of three of the eight windows in particular (Children, Food Security Nutrition; Youth, Employment and Migration and Culture and Development), the Fund focused on issues that were not prominent on the agenda of the international development community at the time but have since become so. For culture, which was not included in the MDGs, the MDG-F work helped to enhance the evidence base on its important role in development for achieving the MDGs. This was explicitly recognized at the global level through the UN General Assembly acknowledgement of the need to integrate culture in all development strategies and policies

(Resolutions A/RES/65/166, A/RES/66/208 and A/RES/68/223). In this sense the strategic orientation of the Fund was truly forward looking.

Through funding and administering 130 individual Joint Programmes in eight thematic windows, the MDG-F model was found to be versatile as a multilateral mechanism for development cooperation. It was a good way of advancing work in developing countries on specific thematic issues by harnessing the considerable experience and expertise of UN agencies and relevant national and local partners. It also provided a good framework for the implementation of development programmes under substantially different country conditions without producing large or unacceptable differences in levels of outcomes. The Fund's results have contributed to progress in the achievement of countries' MDG targets, although the degree of that contribution could not be isolated from that of other UNDG and non-MDG-F programmes which also operated in almost all of the MDG-F countries. Uncertainty also remains about the degree to which the MDG-F was able to leverage follow-on investments in the same or similar programme areas, in the effort to scale up or replicate investments to contribute towards the MDGs. Nonetheless, the evidence indicated that without the MDG-F programmes, it is unlikely that the results achieved and their contribution to the countries' MDGs would have been achieved, especially given the global financial crisis. Through its Joint Programmes, the MDG-F was found to have successfully promoted the principle of UN system-wide coherence and helped to foster a culture of 'One UN'.

The integration of cross-cutting issues (gender and the environment) was found to be weaker, and harmonization of management processes, streamlining of planning and execution, and simplification of procedures were found not to have occurred pervasively, contrary to initial expectations. The processes required by the MDG-F may have actually reduced efficiency at the Joint Programme and country level.

With respect to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the evaluation found that the Fund's investments and activities showed a high level of adherence to and promotion of, the Principles with the best results in Alignment, Ownership and Mutual Accountability. They were also seen to be strong overall with the focus on strengthening the capacities of national and local players and the inclusive governance and management mechanisms promoted by the Fund's Joint Programmes, despite some observed weaknesses in the use of monitoring and reporting tools at the Joint Programme level and some missed opportunities to enhance country leadership and national execution.

The weakest aspects were Results-based Management and reduction in transaction costs. In fact, it was found that transaction costs may have been higher for MDG-F Joint Programmes than for bilateral initiatives with the apparent reason for the higher costs being the adjustment required by UN agencies and country players to the mandated use of common management and reporting processes and tools. Harmonization of management processes, streamlining of planning and execution, and simplification of procedures were found not to have occurred pervasively, contrary to initial expectations. Instead, the processes required by the MDG-F may have actually reduced efficiency at the Joint Programme and country level and increased transaction costs, although this did not seem to have a major negative effect on the overall outcomes and results of the programmes.

## **5.3 Conclusions**

### **5.3.1 Overall Conclusions**

Overall, it is the view of the evaluation team that the MDG-F was well conceived and designed to deliver on the intentions stated in the agreement between the UNDP and the Government of Spain. In light of the performance of the Joint Programmes on the evaluation criteria, the results achieved by the MDG-F have to be considered significant, especially when one takes into account that the three-four year time frame for each of the Joint Programmes was short, that many were implemented in country contexts which were

very challenging, and that many of the UN and country partners were not accustomed to the Joint Programme work modality. In addition, many of the programmes were focusing on the most disadvantaged at the local level where inequalities in terms of geographic, ethnic, and other forms of exclusion are felt more or are likely to be greater. This is a very difficult challenge, but the efforts of Fund have good results.

Through its eight thematic windows and 130 Joint Programmes, the MDG-F as a multilateral mechanism for development cooperation, has provided a potentially powerful demonstration of what can be achieved with investments of between US\$ 2 and 12 million over short durations when done well, regardless of thematic area, region, or country context. The results from the Joint Programmes across each of the thematic windows point to the types of result that can be achieved not only in terms of the poverty reduction benefits for the target populations served, but also how it can be done in a way that can advance UN coherence as well as the Paris Declaration Principles. The Fund's work shows how the technical expertise and comparative advantages of the UN partners can be better leveraged to deliver benefit for the poor in partner countries, acting as one UN. The MDG-F has demonstrated advantages as a multilateral mechanism for development cooperation not typically found in other multilateral forms of UN programming where agencies operate on a bilateral basis.

Finally, the MDG-F's work, through the 130 JPs in 50 countries, provided the opportunity to expand the experience with Delivering as One beyond the initial pilot countries to a wider range of other countries, thus contributing an additional body of evidence and experience that should be helpful in the UN reform effort going forward. There is a plethora of guidance documents and 'how to' instruments that were developed for the Fund, covering the operation of the Fund itself as well as the life cycle of the programmes from their selection and preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and their closure. These will no doubt prove valuable for other Joint Programmes going forward, should this model be used.

The way the MDG-F was conceived shows vision and commitment to the MDGs, UN reforms and the Paris Declaration Principles. The MDG-F experience has shown how a donor can make an effective contribution by leveraging the expertise of the UN system agencies to make a difference in the lives of poor people in the partner countries, while also contributing to the UN reform effort.

### **5.3.2 Factors influencing the performance of the Fund and its Programmes**

In trying to understand the kinds of result and success achieved, the first thing that became obvious to the evaluators was that the MDG-F model was founded on a sound, albeit implicit, theory of change which took into account the knowledge and good practices in international development. Where there have been weaknesses, for the most part these were related more to how the ideas and approach underpinning the model were implemented, rather than the appropriateness of the theory of change and ideas behind the model. These weaknesses will be discussed later, after considering some of features of the Fund that were important in helping it to achieve the kinds of results it has achieved. The following are some of the key features that contributed to the success.

- **Well defined governance mechanisms at the Fund and country levels:** Mechanisms at the country level such as the National Steering Committee, co-chaired by the Resident Coordinator and a senior representative of the partner country with representation from Spain and other key stakeholders, as well as the Programme Management Committees which involved a wider representation of stakeholders, provided inclusive mechanisms for engagement of local partners in decisions and action on individual programmes. The value of inclusion in helping to build local ownership and mutual accountability that translate into better results cannot be overstated.

- **Contribution to UN System wide coherence:** The decision to set up the Fund in a way that incorporates provisions to foster UN system-wide coherence and the Principles of the Paris Declaration made logical and synergistic sense.
- **Competitive selection of the Joint Programmes:** The process of competitive selection of the Joint Programmes was found to be a significant contributor to the value of the model as a multilateral mechanism. This was a novelty that likely contributed to the high success rate among the 130 Joint Programmes selected from the 396 Concept Notes as those with the best likelihood of success.
- **Guidance provided by the Window Terms of Reference:** The up-front guidance provided in the Terms of Reference for each of the thematic windows, which outlined the global challenges and priorities that the Joint Programmes should address in the respective thematic areas, was a valuable tool in helping to focus the efforts of the Joint Programmes in the respective windows.
- **The level of engagement of local stakeholders:** The level of engagement of the local stakeholders, which gave them voice and instilled a greater sense of trust and ownership, especially for programmes which target the most disadvantaged who often feel neglected and have feelings of mistrust, helped to build that trust and bring about collective solutions to the priorities.
- **The focus on capacity building:** This was a key feature of the JPs and substantial progress was made in achieving the intended objectives. The results could have been greater if the JPs had a longer time frame. Hiring outside experts to ensure good quality results are obtained was seen to be necessary in the short term, but allowing for consolidation and institutionalization of that capacity to improve the partners' effectiveness within the country, whether at the national, sub-national or community level, was the ultimate test of enduring success.
- **The technical expertise and experience of the UN Partners:** The value of the technical expertise and experience from the different UN partners that were brought to bear on the initiatives cannot be overstated, especially the role of the lead agencies in the design and implementation of the Joint Programmes and coordination with other UN partners involved. Without this, most of the initiatives would not have succeeded.
- **The role played by the MDG-F Secretariat:** The Secretariat played a key role in supporting and enabling the governance and management of the programmes at all stages, including: the Review Committee approval of the Concept Notes, advice to teams as the Joint Programme Documents and Inception Phase progressed, development of the Monitoring and Evaluation, Knowledge Management and Consultation and Advocacy Strategies, monitoring missions to the countries, and developing the guidance documents for the mid-term and Final Evaluations.
- **A strong focus on monitoring and evaluation:** The MDG-F's evaluation system was a key element in the success of many of the Joint Programmes. In particular, the mid-term evaluations and implementation of the corrective adjustments proposed in the improvement plans to address the recommendations of their mid-term evaluations marked a turning point in many of the Joint Programmes, as many were designed within a short time frame without the benefit of good baseline information and adequate consultations with local stakeholders. The Joint Programmes also benefitted from close monitoring, although monitoring and reporting effectiveness was diminished by (a) the late introduction of the monitoring and reporting system and tools, (b) the added burden placed on country level partners to adapt to a new process and tool, and (c) the large number of UN partners in some cases (with more than six partners).

- **Knowledge management:** Although the knowledge management initiative contributed to a sharing of knowledge, the contribution would likely have been greater if the initiative had been made operational earlier in the Fund's existence.
- **Communication and advocacy:** The Fund also invested in communication and advocacy activities, which were also reasonably successful in reaching a wide range of stakeholders, although it is too early to assess the full benefits from these efforts as they too became operational later in the Fund's.

While some elements of the MDG-F were not in place until later in the process, all the elements were fully functional before the Fund closed.

### 5.3.3 Observed Weaknesses in the MDG-F model

As mentioned earlier, the Fund was not without weaknesses. There were a number of areas where improvements could have been made to further enhance performance. While some of these were within the control of the Fund, others were related more to broader UN system and the UN Agencies that partnered in the various Joint Programmes. These correspond to some of the quality-at-entry and quality - during-implementation risks in our theory of change.

- **Unrealistic timeframe for implementing the Joint Programmes:** The initial three-year time frame set by the Fund for the design and implementation of the Joint Programmes was unrealistic given their scope, their multi-sectorial nature, the relative inexperience of UN partners with the Joint Programme modality, and the number of UN as well as local partner involved. A four or five year time frame would have been more realistic.
- **Unrealistic expectations of efficiency gains in the short run:** The expectation that efficiency gains would materialize in such a short time frame through the MDG-F model's emphasis on UN coherence and harmonization and simplification was unrealistic, given the challenges within the UN system and the unique mandates, accountability and procedural requirements, and cultural characteristics of the individual UN agencies. These reforms will require a sustained effort over a much longer period.
- **Overly ambitious designs of some Joint Programmes:** Several of the Joint Programmes were overly ambitious in their designs. Weaknesses include dispersion of effort in too many locations, inadequate analysis of existing local capacity, objectives and expected results which were too ambitious, and results frameworks were often deficient in terms of what is referred to as SMART results (i.e. Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) a baseline against which to measure change.
- **Uneven assessments of capacity needs and availability locally:** Some programmes benefited from existing studies and consultations with the local stakeholders that helped to better understand the needs and challenges, especially the local capacity that can be counted on. Some did not have access to such studies and took the time up-front to incorporate this in the process to inform the JP's design, even at the risk of delays. This decision paid off in the end in the form of more appropriate designs, better buy-in from local stakeholders and better programme results. Others that did not have access to such information and went ahead without it, resulted in designs where the "fit" with local needs and existing capacity was sub-optimal, and had to make remedial adjustments and request time extensions following the mid-term evaluations.
- **The large number of UN agencies involved in some Joint Programmes:** There have been several instances where the high number of UN agencies involved, some with relatively small roles in the Joint Programmes, seemed to be counterproductive and did not facilitate joint management of the initiatives. Their relatively minor roles did not justify the expenditures and

additional overhead costs. While some partner countries may take a more proactive leadership role in requesting a reduced number of UN partners, other may feel less inclined to do so for various reasons.

- **Uneven integration of gender and environment as cross-cutting issues:** As indicated earlier in our analysis, the extent to which the programmes effectively incorporated gender equality as a cross cutting issue in their design, implementation and results was lower than expected at Fund inception and required by various UN commitments (e.g. United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing). The Terms of Reference for the non-Gender Equality and non-Environment windows could have provide better guidance on mainstreaming environment and gender into the Joint Programmes.
- **The high incidence of delays and inefficiency:** There were numerous cases where the Joint Programme final evaluations remarked about delays due to administrative and financial obstacles such as: heavy bureaucratic processes, the differing culture and procedures across agencies, staff turnover, slow or late staffing of replacements, procurement and contracting processes, slowness of financial transfers, local partners being asked to provide separate reports to each UN agency, and the time needed to get agreements in place.
- **Missed opportunities to foster Local Ownership:** Some instances were identified where local ownership was low because of the perception in partner countries that the Joint Programme was a 'donor programme' rather than a 'donor funded programme of the country'. This stemmed from situations where Direct Execution was used instead of National Execution by the government with support from the UN partners, and where external procurement was used contrary to government procedures that required procurement from local sources before external sources.
- **The uneven quality of management across the Joint Programmes:** The quality of management across the Joint Programmes varied in terms of the level of involvement of key people such as the Resident Coordinators in the design and implementation of the JPs, the treatment of guidelines and procedures, and use of essential results-based management tools such as results frameworks, monitoring and evaluation, and preparation of improvement plans in response to the mid-term evaluations. Where this issue surfaced in the mid-term and final evaluations, much seemed to depend on the styles and management capabilities of the Resident Coordinators as the programme lead and the relationships with other key staff such as the Programme Management Unit and Coordinators from the different agencies.
- **Weakness in Delivering as One:** Instead of "Delivering as One" as anticipated at the outset, a more common occurrence seemed to be "Delivering as Four, or Five or Six", depending on the number of UN partners involved in the Joint Programmes. The parallel implementation of the different Joint Programme components by the different UN agencies involved seemed to be partly a function of the compartmentalized programme designs that provided separate roles and activities for the different UN agencies, and partly a function of the different culture, regulations, operational requirements and procedures of the agencies. The latter no doubt reinforced the former.
- **The match between the Authority of Resident Coordinators and their Accountability:** While the role of the Resident Coordinators as the key leads of the JPs has been enhanced, there were still problems with the broader system of accountability and enabling environment for them to exercise the requisite leverage and control over all members of the UN country team involved in the Joint Programmes. The Resident Coordinator's mandate does not include authority over UN agencies making it potentially difficult to effect changes in the participation of sometimes up to

12 UN agencies. Designing and implementing the Joint Programmes depended more on the moral authority of the UN Resident Coordinator and the goodwill and commitment of UN agencies.

- **Uncertainty about funding to continue and/or expand successful initiatives:** Although a few of the Joint Programmes were able to secure commitment for additional resources to continue or expand the programmes, this is an area where more could have been done. The question of resources is also relevant to the sustainability issue, where doubts were raised about the ability of partners at the national and local levels to provide the financial resources needed to ensure continuation the benefits from the programmes. Good practice has shown that successful outcomes require that considerations about sustainability have to be addressed up-front at the design stage of initiatives. Preparation of exit strategies early in the process is essential.



## **6. CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

### **6.1 Recommendations**

The MDG-F has now come to a close. In light of the weaknesses identified, the evaluation offers the following recommendations.

#### **6.1.1 Recommendations for stakeholders involved in designing and implementing Joint Programmes**

The following recommendations are directed to stakeholders interested in sponsoring, designing and implementing initiatives such as the MDG-F and future programmes using the MDG-F model. This includes UN agencies, other donors and national entities.

**Recommendation 1:** Need for more realistic time frames for designing and implementing the Joint Programmes.

It is recommended that designers of future Joint Programmes, embracing the MDG-F model, allow more realistic time frames for design and implementation of the Joint Programmes based on consideration of their multi-sectoral scope and complexity, the number of UN and local partners to be involved, and the experience of the UN partners with the Joint Programme modality.

**Recommendation 2:** Need for more uniformity in the quality at entry work on programme design.

It is recommended that designers of future Joint Programmes embracing the MDG-F model establish guidelines and standards for more uniform quality at entry work at the programme design stage. The guidelines and standards should address the assessment of local capacity, sustainability planning and results-oriented frameworks with SMART indicators that reflect more realistic programme designs and allow for better performance oriented tracking and monitoring of progress.

**Recommendation 3:** (a) Better mainstreaming of Gender Equality and empowerment of Women and (b) integrating of environment sensitivity into future programmes.

It is recommended that designers and implementers of future frameworks using the MDG-F model establish ways for better (a) mainstreaming of Gender Equality and empowerment of Women and (b) integrating environmental sensitivity as cross-cutting issues in the formulation of all development programmes where they are applicable. This includes following through to see that actions outlined in programme proposals are indeed enfolded in programme design, implementation and monitoring. The issues of gender mainstreaming and environmental sensitivity need to be integrated in the terms of reference for the evaluations of the programmes.

**Recommendation 4:** Fostering country ownership and leadership through national execution of programmes.

As a way of enhancing country ownership and leadership, it is recommended that a concerted effort be made to foster national execution of future Joint Programmes, instead of direct execution by the external partners. The exception would be where a risk analysis dictates otherwise. This means that sufficient time be allowed for full national government involvement in the programme from the start.

**Recommendation 5:** Eliminating the high incidence of delays and inefficiency.

It is recommended that consideration be given to undertaking further in-depth work to explore and understand the factors that cause inefficiency and delays based on the aggregate of Joint Programme experiences in order to identify ways of eliminating the sources of delays and inefficiencies, only some of which have been identified in this evaluation. This exercise was beyond the scope of the current evaluation but would be informative for future implementers.

**6.1.2 Recommendations for UN Agencies**

The following recommendations are solely aimed at UN agencies.

**Recommendation 6:** Selection and inclusion of UN agencies to be involved in future Joint Programmes.

As a measure to improve efficiency, it is recommended that future UN agencies adopt a more systematic approach in determining the involvement of UN partners in future Joint Programmes. This should take into account the benefits such as whether they will have a major role to play and add significant value through their expertise and experience. It should also weigh the costs associated with dispersion of the budget such as additional administrative expenses and the overall proportion of the resources that will be taken up with overhead and administration instead of going to support development initiatives on the ground.

**Recommendation 7:** Making the Theory of Change behind new initiatives more explicit.

It is recommended that UNDP consider adopting the emerging good practice of explicitly outlining the logic model and accompanying theory of change for significant new initiatives and funds, such as the MDG-F.

**Recommendation 8:** Stock-taking on the lessons about strengthening UN System-Wide Coherence from joint programming and Joint Programmes.

As a way of benefitting from the knowledge gained so far about strengthening UN System-Wide coherence, it is recommended that the UNDP consider, if it has not already done so, a stock taking exercise that distils in a short document the key lessons and findings from a number of sources (this evaluation, the Delivering as One evaluation, the Two Roads One Goal report and other relevant documents and publication on the lessons from the MDG-F Knowledge Management and Communication and Advocacy partnerships) that can be shared with internal and external stakeholders to help advance the thinking on the issue and inform adjustments needed for improvement.

**6.2 Lessons Learned**

In trying to understand the performance of the Fund and its Joint Programmes, the evaluation team identified a number of factors that influenced the performance and may have broader applicability as lessons.

- **Make allowance for the unforeseen:** When establishing new mechanisms to address complex development challenges such as advancing progress towards the MDGs, UN coherence and the PD Principles, as the MDG-F has done, it is important to recognize that such mechanisms would involve behavioral as well as systemic changes that may encounter operational problems, or even resistance to new ways of doing things, and allow sufficient time for inter-Agency discussion to iron out these operational problems that are likely to be encountered.

- **The value of good up-front due diligence:** The work of the MDG-F has shown that success from new initiatives and/or mechanisms can be enhanced by doing the up-front due diligence work well, including clearly articulating the underlying concepts and ideas behind the initiative and establishing good guidance tools for staff to ensure consistent implementation of the approach, processes and procedures for key elements. An explicit theory of change would have made it even better.
- **The need for ongoing quality assurance:** Even with good up-front due diligence and guidance tools, the likelihood of a gap between intentions and actual implementation will exist as implementation may be done differently given differences in the experience and expertise of lead agencies, the capacity of the teams, and country conditions. It is therefore important for designers and implementers to identify and include mechanisms and responsibilities for quality assurance and periodic reviews that would inform beneficial adjustments and corrective actions that may become necessary.
- **Joint Programme modality:** Use of the Joint Programme modality is a good way of addressing development challenges which are multi-sectorial in nature and require expertise and experience in a variety of domains as shown by the work of the MDG-F.
- **Competitive selection of the investments:** The process of competitive selection of programmes, introduced as a new feature by the MDG-F, can contribute value to any future multilateral mechanism for development cooperation. This assists decision-makers to choose programmes that are well targeted to specific development issues, that make good use of the know-how of the appropriate partners (be they UN agencies, other donors or local organizations) in the implementation, and therefore enhances the chances of succeeding.
- **Preparation of exit strategies:** Preparation of exit strategies for programmes can be very valuable in catalyzing thinking about the focus of activities and improvements needed to achieve successful outcomes and sustainability of the benefits from the programmes.
- **Engagement of local stakeholders:** The level of engagement of the local stakeholders and communities is a key ingredient in designing and implementing programmes, especially those that target the most disadvantaged who often feel neglected and have feelings of mistrust. Working with local stakeholders in a participatory and inclusive way is helpful in giving them voice, instilling a sense of ownership, building trust, and bringing about a collective and integrated solution to local priorities, which can be valuable to help programmes succeed.
- **The importance of capacity building:** Capacity building is an essential ingredient in the success of any programme. But it takes time. Hiring outside experts to ensure good quality results are obtained is very useful in the short term, but allowing the time and resources to consolidate and institutionalize the capacities developed by the partners within the country is one of the best insurance against failure and a key factor in ensuring the success and sustainability of the benefits.
- **The value of a good monitoring and evaluation system:** The achievements of MDG-F's Joint Programmes can be attributed partly to its evaluation system and the corrective adjustments made during implementation on the basis of their mid-term evaluations. The allocation of a portion of programme resources (three to five percent in the case of the MDG-F) is a good practice that should be encouraged. This kind of mechanism is particularly important when the time for designing the initiatives is short and/or good baseline information is not available, and adjustments may be required. In the international development business where the external environment can introduce shocks that thwart the best laid plans at any point, the need to be open to making adjustments and to have mechanisms in place, such as mid-term evaluations, to identify needed corrective actions cannot be overstated.

- **Importance of a good communications and advocacy strategy:** The establishment and implementation of a good communication and advocacy strategy early in the creation of future mechanisms and Joint Programmes could prove valuable for sharing the information and lessons with other stakeholders and generate support or such initiatives.