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Modifications to procedures for consideration and approval of country programme documentation

Summary

The present document contains proposals for the modification of the structure and content of country programme documents, and of the procedures for their consideration and approval as adopted by the Executive Board in decisions 1995/8, 2002/4, 2006/19 and 2008/17. The proposed changes respond to the call of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system to simplify and harmonize agency-specific instruments and processes and to reinforce alignment of country programmes to the strategic plans of organizations. The changes aim to further strengthen national ownership, situating cooperation programmes within national development processes. They will strengthen the commitment of UNICEF to the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and other system-wide coherence approaches and allow for systematic tracking of the global contribution of UNICEF to results for children.

A draft decision is included in chapter IV.

* Reissued for technical reasons on 13 January 2014.
** E/ICEF/2014/1.



I. Background

1. In 1995, the Executive Board approved new procedures for consideration and approval of country programme recommendations (documents) in its decision 1995/8. In subsequent decisions (2002/4, 2006/19 and 2008/17), the Board approved changes to the procedures as well as the format and content of country programme documents. The decisions affirmed, among other principles, those of national ownership, United Nations system-wide coherence, simplification and harmonization with other United Nations organizations, and Executive Board involvement in the review and approval process.

II. Modification of the format of proposals for country programmes of cooperation and procedures for their consideration and approval

A. Introduction

2. The proposed modifications were prompted by reviews of recent experience with Government and other partners as well as ongoing consultations with partner agencies in the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). The proposals respond to the call made in the QCPR to simplify and harmonize programming instruments and processes across the United Nations funds and programmes.

3. In addition, the Standard Operating Procedures for countries wishing to adopt the Delivering as One approach, issued by the UNDG in August 2013, encouraged UNDG agencies to look at ways of simplifying the overall programming process. This included the timeline, format and content of documentation for preparing new country programmes, so that they are fully aligned with national development plans and the UNDAF cycles.

4. The revisions in the procedures and format are proposed in the context of the increasing availability of information on programme strategies, results and lessons learned in each programming context. This includes greater emphasis on strengthening processes for real-time monitoring, which has proven critical to informing decision-making at all levels. Information on programme results, efficiency and effectiveness can be found in ChildInfo, country office annual reports, audit reports, evaluations, thematic reports and other knowledge-related products. These rapidly expanding data and information can deepen and broaden the review and approval process by Executive Board members and other development partners.

B. Modified format for country programme documents

5. Currently, as mandated in relevant Executive Board decisions, country programme documents are 6 to 10 pages of text, depending on the size and requirements of the proposed country programme of cooperation, and have a word limit of 4,800. The documents are shared with the Executive Board alongside a summary results matrix and a consolidated results report.

6. The proposed new format for country programme documents will set the limit to 6 pages in length, with a maximum word limit of 3,300. The main elements and headings of the document have been revised in order to be more consistent with other United Nations agencies as a way to facilitate joint analysis and review. Programmes that cover multiple countries will be granted some flexibility in the length of the text.

7. The country programme document will be accompanied by an Integrated Results and Resources Framework, which will expand the previous summary results matrix to include budget figures, thereby facilitating results-based budgeting in line with the QCPR. The Framework will also introduce *indicative* country programme outputs in line with those of other agencies. Through the indicative outputs, Member States will also be informed about results that are largely attributable to the Government-UNICEF programme of cooperation.

8. The country programme document will contain the following main elements:

(a) Programme rationale, establishing the context and basis for the programme of cooperation drawn from an analysis of the situation of children and women and lessons learned;

(b) Programme priorities and partnerships, summarizing the programme components, outcomes and strategies that will address the critical issues identified in the programme rationale and situation analysis;

(c) Programme and risk management, outlining the coordination mechanisms in relation to the UNDAF and other related national processes and structures that will guarantee results from a risk-informed perspective;

(d) Monitoring and evaluation, identifying the approaches that will be used to improve accountability and learning in the country programme.

C. Modified procedures for Executive Board consideration and approval of country programme documents

9. The proposed modified procedures set forth an overall improvement in and simplification of the process for consideration and approval of country programme documents.

10. Currently, according to Executive Board decisions noted above, draft documents containing indicative budgets are presented to the Executive Board for consideration and review at its annual session (which according to recent practice takes place in June). Within six weeks of the close of the annual session, the documents are revised to incorporate any changes proposed for the programme by Executive Board members, as well as Government and other partners, and are posted to the UNICEF Executive Board website. Within six weeks, if written requests are not made by at least five Executive Board members to review the country programme documents at the second regular session (which according to recent practice takes place in September), the documents are then approved on a no-objection basis at that session. Final approved documents, incorporating the changes made to the revised country programme documents, are then posted to the UNICEF Executive Board website.

11. The modification proposed is for the Executive Board to both consider and approve the country programme document, on a no-objection basis, in one session. Supporting the principle of national-led development, UNICEF proposes that country programme documents are presented at the Executive Board session that is most appropriate in terms of Government and country-level planning and priorities. By combining the current three-step documentation process (draft, revised, and final country programme document) into a one-step process, the proposal offers the potential for substantial savings in time and transaction costs for the relevant Governments, Executive Board members and UNICEF country, regional and headquarters offices. It also lengthens the time available for all concerned, including Executive Board members, to review and engage on the country programme document before the session.

12. The proposal takes into account the fact that both review and approval of the country programme documents by Executive Board members, and follow-up on the recommendations made by the Board members, are vital to the country programme process. The drafts would be circulated to Executive Board members electronically via the UNICEF Executive Board website approximately 12 weeks before the session at which approval is expected to take place.

13. Following current practice, comments on the country programme documents would be shared with UNICEF in advance of the Executive Board discussion through informal channels, including through discussions at country level, and formally at the relevant Executive Board meeting. Delegations would be encouraged to share their comments in formal statements if they deemed this appropriate. Following recent practice, written statements are posted to the PaperSmart portal during each session and are available thereafter as electronic archives. All comments and recommendations made by Executive Board members would be discussed by the concerned Government and the UNICEF country office and incorporated, as appropriate and agreed upon, into the UNDAF Action Plan, Country Programme Action Plan or appropriate planning instrument. These will be also agreed by the relevant Government and UNICEF office and will be consistent with the approved country programme documents. Monitoring of the follow-up on the specific recommendations made, and also of the results achieved more broadly, will be reflected in the country office annual reports.

14. In addition to the country programme document, Executive Board members will have access to the Integrated Results and Resources Framework and a wide range of information available through the Internet. This information will include the respective UNDAF, reports on humanitarian action for children, evaluations, annual reports, audit reports, key knowledge and information made available on other sites such as those featuring UNICEF publications, notably the *State of the World's Children* report, and the website of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

III. Other modifications to country programme documentation considered by the Executive Board

15. As part of the continued efforts of UNICEF to strengthen both its results-based management and its commitment to initiatives to enhance transparency on progress towards results, the proposal is to incorporate the analysis currently included in the consolidated results report into the publicly accessible country office annual report. This would be in line with the Information Disclosure Policy of UNICEF and would complement the emphasis on more systematic and continuous reporting on results. It would also complement efforts to enhance electronic platforms and leverage technological innovation to support the tracking and reporting of results and performance, including in real time. Such tracking and reporting are found, for example, on the open data space in the context of the International Aid Transparency Initiative.

16. Currently, regional reports on midterm reviews of country programmes are presented at the second regular session of the Executive Board, in September, according to Executive Board decision 1995/8, which requested the secretariat to submit to the Board “a summary of the outcome of midterm reviews”. In the context of rapid changes in information and the increased availability of reporting on results to the Executive Board, as noted above, it is no longer advisable to prepare and issue the regional reports, at considerable cost. This change would comply with the call for greater coherence among United Nations agencies.

IV. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Endorses* the report on “Procedures for consideration and approval of proposals for country programmes of cooperation” (E/ICEF/2014/P/L.1);

2. *Welcomes* the continued efforts made by the agencies of the United Nations Development Group towards further harmonization and streamlining of programming instruments and processes in support of country programmes of cooperation, in line with the recommendation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system;

3. *Emphasizes* that the programming process for UNICEF cooperation should continue to emphasize national ownership;

4. *Requests* that the country programme documents continue to be developed on the basis of national plans and priorities, within the framework of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, where applicable, and of the UNICEF strategic plan.