General Assembly

Sixty-ninth session
Agenda item 132
Programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015

Conclusions of the High-level Working Group on Programme Criticality

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

>   The General Assembly, in its resolution 67/254 A, requested the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to submit for consideration and approval at the sixty-ninth session of the Assembly, a report containing the final conclusions of the High-level Working Group on Programme Criticality.

>   The present report provides information on the final conclusions of the Working Group.

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I. Introduction

1.   In its resolution 67/254 A, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to submit a report containing the final conclusions of the High-level Working Group on Programme Criticality to the Assembly at its sixty-ninth session.

2.   Having considered the related report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/66/720), the General Assembly acknowledged that the programme criticality framework was an instrument to assist managers in the field to take time-sensitive decisions to prioritize programme activities in specific locations in response to changes in local security conditions. It emphasized that the framework must not affect intergovernmental oversight and accountability to the legislative bodies and requested the Secretary-General to ensure coherence and consistency between the proposed framework and other related initiatives of the Secretary-General and to report thereon in the relevant reports.

3.   In his report on the conclusions of the High-level Working Group on Programme Criticality (A/66/680), the Secretary-General provided an interim update on the activities of the Working Group, which did not include the final conclusions. The present report contains those final conclusions and is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/254. It reflects the decisions of the High-level Committee on Management taken in 2013.

A. Background

4.   As outlined in the previous report of the Secretary-General, the Chief Executives Board approved the United Nations security management system guidelines for acceptable risk in 2009. In 2010, the High-level Committee on Management, under the auspices of the Chief Executives Board, established the Working Group on Programme Criticality, chaired by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The aim of the Working Group was to define four levels of programme criticality and develop a common framework for informed decision-making within the guidelines for acceptable risk.

5.   Following field testing, the programme criticality framework was approved by the High-level Committee on Management and subsequently endorsed by the Chief Executives Board in 2012. A roll-out in 12 priority countries was supported by the technical-level Programme Criticality Coordination Team, under the leadership of the Working Group, in 2012 and 2013. A slightly revised framework, based on some of the lessons learned from the roll-out, was developed and approved by the High-level Committee on Management in March 2013 and the Chief Executives Board in October 2013.

6.   The framework details guiding principles, including applicability, accountability, quality assurance, approval and the programme criticality process; the programme criticality methodology and criteria for assessment; programme criticality as part of the security risk management process; and the programme criticality support structures of the United Nations system. The framework is accompanied by a spreadsheet tool for use by United Nations teams in country to undertake programme criticality assessments.

7. The framework contributes to informed decision-making by outlining a process for determining the programme criticality levels for specific activities carried out by United Nations personnel within a given geographical location and time frame. It provides input to the acceptable risk model. The framework also makes clear that programme criticality is not a planning process or a product. As such, it does not affect intergovernmental oversight and accountability to legislative bodies.

8. Support for the roll-out has been provided on a low-cost basis. Agencies and departments that have deployed staff to support United Nations teams in country have funded such travel when the teams have been unable to do so. Seven participating agencies or departments made voluntary contributions to the cost of the independent review of programme criticality. UNICEF has contributed a larger share by funding 50 per cent of the secretariat, and other programme criticality support activities. No common fundraising strategy has been envisaged to date.

9. The revised 2013 framework instituted a programme criticality steering committee, chaired by UNICEF unless otherwise agreed, to continue to oversee the support provided to United Nations teams in country.

B. Current status

10. Under the Steering Committee, the Coordination Team continues to support United Nations teams in country (in mission and non-mission settings) that wish to undertake programme criticality assessments, on a demand-driven basis. To date, support has been provided to 15 countries and continues to be based on the programme criticality framework approved by the Chief Executives Board in 2013.

11. Training sessions on programme criticality have been carried out with United Nations teams at the country level and various Headquarters personnel, contributing to better knowledge of the programme criticality framework and its intended use throughout the United Nations system. An e-learning module has also been developed.

12. In January 2014, the Steering Committee commissioned an independent review of programme criticality. The final conclusion of that review was that, overall, the programme criticality framework was working as intended. No major immediate changes to the current framework were envisaged.

C. Conclusions

13. It is expected that programme criticality will continue to be supported by the Steering Committee and the Coordination Team at the global level and at the country level based on demand from United Nations teams in country. All support will be provided on the basis of voluntary contributions and is subject to the availability of resources.

14. Training efforts will be accorded priority to ensure that programme criticality is mainstreamed into the operations of the United Nations system.

II. Action to be taken by the General Assembly

15. The General Assembly is requested to take note of the present report.

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