

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## A JOINT EVALUATION

This evaluation was carried out by an independent team of consultants on behalf of the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the United Nations Evaluation Group. Its objective was to assess the relevance and effectiveness of cooperation between South Africa and the UN system within the three-tier strategic policy priorities of the country: a better South Africa, a better Africa, and a better world. Thematic evaluations were conducted in four mutually agreed-upon areas – development, peace and security, the environment and humanitarian assistance – from which conclusions were drawn. In addition, three cross-cutting issues were assessed, namely gender equality, HIV&AIDS, and human rights and democracy.

The evaluation was carried out between September 2008 and March 2009. An evaluation report was prepared for each of the focus areas, outlining the specific analyses undertaken, findings and recommendations. This report is a synthesis of those four studies.

While South Africa was generally excluded from the UN system during the era of apartheid, the introduction of democracy in 1994 enabled the country to enter the international arena as an important political and economic contributor to UN bodies and the Non-Aligned Movement. South Africa also became active regionally, in the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). UN specialized agencies, funds and programmes could now offer assistance to the new government formed by the African National Congress (ANC). However, both sides had to assume new and unfamiliar roles: The ANC, once a liberation movement, was now a government with an ambitious agenda; and the UN, once a political supporter and platform was now a development

partner to a middle-income country that was, in many ways, different from other African states in which the UN was working. This proved to be a challenge for both sides.

The role and contribution of the UN system in South Africa subsequently came into question, and the government and the UN Country Team found that the time was right to enter a new phase that sought a larger vision for the UN in South Africa. The nature, strength and weaknesses of the UN-Government of South Africa relationship at this strategic juncture therefore became the subject of investigation.

## FINDINGS

### A BETTER WORLD

South Africa plays an important role in the UN as a leader in international debates and decisions, not least of which concern the African continent. In addition to serving of late on the UN Security Council, the country makes important financial contributions to UN funds and programmes, including the Central Emergency Response Fund, and sits on a number of expert panels. As a consequence of being a middle-income country, South Africa, like other major economies, engages in such UN agencies and bodies as the World Trade Organization, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the International Telecommunications Union, the World Meteorological Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the International Atomic Energy Agency. This is in contrast to most other African countries, which tend to relate more to UN agencies concerned with development or humanitarian affairs. In addition to being a member of the Group of 77, the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Group in the UN General Assembly,

South Africa is also a member of the Group of 20, which, since November 2008, has been considering responses to the global financial crisis at the level of heads of state and/or government, thereby underscoring its place as an important player not only in Africa but in the world. In these areas, South Africa, through the UN system, is an important provider of global public goods.

### **A BETTER AFRICA**

The two-way nature of the UN-South Africa partnership manifests itself clearly at the regional level. It was through regional channels that the UN system provided political support to the country during the pre-1994 liberation struggle and capacity-building thereafter. Today, South Africa assists the UN in humanitarian relief through funding and serves as a regional hub and a major supplier of food for the World Food Programme (WFP). South Africa has been successful in its involvement in mediating the crises in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and has directly supported UN peacekeeping efforts. South Africa also plays a dominant role in SADC, based on its interest in supporting stability and development in the subregion. It has funded a number of initiatives in SADC countries aimed at strengthening their positions: For example, it worked with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and WFP in relation to food security and capacity-building in several sectors, and with the UN Environment Programme and the UN Human Settlements Programme on issues such as sustainable land-use planning and water management to reduce vulnerability and prepare for disasters in the region. Government officials in South Africa are aware that the country's economic strength may be viewed as arrogance by its neighbours; therefore they try to avoid sensitive situations in which South Africa dominates. In the same context, the government often asks UN agencies in South Africa to assume the role of a neutral convenor of conferences, facilitator of initiatives, or catalyst, in relation to SADC, thereby providing an equal platform for participating countries. Hence, in Africa it is in the national interest of South Africa to be a key provider of regional public goods.

### **A BETTER SOUTH AFRICA**

Within the borders of South Africa itself, the relationship is predominantly one in which the UN provides assistance to the country rather than the other way around. Such assistance is primarily in the field of development, guided by the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). Development assistance, including environmental management, is typically funded through official development assistance (ODA), while other areas of cooperation are funded by the Government of South Africa. UN agencies assist South Africa through their individual mandates and capacities, and try to engage in strategic policy debate as they do in many other countries. They tend to find South Africa difficult to work with in that regard, due to the lack of access to high-level officials who can take strategic decisions. Strategic debate in the country therefore tends to be weak, if not absent altogether.

Many cases of missed opportunities where the UN and South Africa could have benefited from closer collaboration were mentioned by officials met during this evaluation. The relationship at the country level seems to suffer from mutual lack of knowledge and confidence, and sometimes contradictory ways of working. The cluster system developed through UNDAF has not resolved this, and opinions on the usefulness of UNDAF vary.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the four thematic evaluations.

### **RELEVANCE**

A synthesis summary across the four focus areas shows that:

- Almost all the interventions evaluated were in line with national needs and strategic government priorities as outlined in Vision 2014.
- The interventions were also consistent with UN organization mandates and international standards.

- UN capacity-building activities addressed real gaps and helped introduce new approaches.
- However, some major issues were addressed only by small projects with limited impact; in such cases, the UN response did not meet expressed national needs, which called for a more comprehensive response.
- These major needs persist in most areas.

The UNDAF and its broad programmatic priorities are aligned with the government's strategic priorities in Vision 2014 as well as with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This relevance does not, however, always permeate to the level of detailed programming due to the absence of real dialogue between the UN agencies and their counterparts in government. The factors that contribute to poor communication include a level of mistrust on the part of some government officials about assistance offered by the UN and a lack of openness to external advice.

The UN sometimes sends mixed messages about ownership of the UNDAF and programmes within it. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which South Africa was actively involved in, refers to country ownership of the UNDAF. But on a practical level, it has been the UN that is the primary driver of UNDAF content in South Africa. The relevance of the UNDAF as the main mechanism of UN-South Africa cooperation can therefore be called into question, for several reasons:

- The UNDAF has not been able to ensure high-level communication and strategic debate between the government and UN clusters.
- It is limited to development cooperation and does not cover many other fields of UN activity, such as those assessed for this evaluation.
- Major UN-implemented programmes are outside the UNDAF, such as those funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), by far the largest investments going through the UN system in South Africa.

- As only a 'framework', UN agencies along with government departments do not always feel bound by it or by the Common Country Action Plan, and often develop activities that are not included within them.

To be relevant in South Africa requires a more individually tailored and comprehensive response to the country's international position and national interests, which takes into account South Africa's triple role as a provider of South-South assistance to other developing countries, financial contributor to the UN system and a recipient of ODA on the international scene. Some of the looming international issues that South Africa can be expected to deal with in the future include climate change, the financial crisis, food insecurity and international trade. The UN system plays a significant role in many of these areas.

## EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of cooperation between the UN and South Africa was deemed fairly positive overall. Many activities were found to be *highly effective* in reaching their objectives, the majority were *effective*, and a smaller number were *less than effective*.

A number of constraints in terms of effectiveness have also been highlighted. As mentioned previously, strategic dialogue between the UN and the government has generally not been effective, and access to government officials at higher levels has proved difficult. Such officials have limited awareness of UN mandates and capabilities. The fact that most activities were assessed as being effective is more due to the extraordinary efforts by determined individuals within the government, civil society and the UN system than to an enabling partnership framework.

**The United Nations system.** Constraints on the effectiveness of the UN system arising from poor understanding of the basic structure of the South African government in accordance with the Constitution is a recurring theme throughout the focus area evaluation reports. UN interventions cannot be fully effective without a good understanding of relations within the government, and

without being able to integrate proposed interventions into government systems for budgeting, planning, and monitoring and evaluation.

It is widely recognized that not all UN experience is appropriate to middle-income countries such as South Africa (One size does not fit all). Cooperation is sometimes hampered on both sides by competition among UN agencies, and by lack of communication among government departments. Administrative procedures of both the government and the UN are slow and constrain effective cooperation. UN agencies have administrative requirements that are different from those of the government and not fully in line with Paris Declaration Principles.

Whereas the UN Country Team is small, the UN system as such is large and complex. It is understandable that many people outside the system find it difficult to fully understand its normative, operational and analytical capacities. The UN Country Team could do more to 'market' itself to South Africa – the government, the private sector, civil society and institutions of learning – to make itself better known and thereby contribute to stronger partnerships and a higher degree of effectiveness.

Fundamental questions have been raised during the evaluation. Does the UN system at the country level have the required capacity to engage with the government on strategic matters? Will the UN system at the country level be able to effectively support South Africa in its engagement in wider international issues where the country has a natural role to play? Is the UN system at the country level able to effectively support the government in implementing UN norms, conventions and resolutions, not least in the area of human rights? Does the impact of small and scattered operational activities justify the cost and time invested in them? And, if not, should the UN engage at all in operational activities in a country such as South Africa?

None of these questions can be answered fully in the affirmative, and two basic options emerge. One is to conclude that the potential value-added

is insufficient justification for keeping a permanent country presence, since it is unlikely that such value-added will substantially improve. If this option were to be chosen, UN country offices would gradually be closed down, and future contacts would be carried out directly with UN headquarters and regional offices.

The other option is to say that the potential contribution of the UN system in South Africa remains important, but essential improvements are necessary for it to be realized. For this to happen, the UN must establish itself as a body that can effectively engage with the government, civil society and research institutions at a strategic level, based on a better understanding of South Africa as a middle-income country. This would involve more realistic priority-setting. It would also move beyond small joint operational activities and evolve into a broader, long-term partnership process. Major institutional steps forward in the implementation of UN reforms are fundamental if these changes are to occur.

The independent evaluation team concludes that the second option deserves to be given a chance. The studies overall show that UN activities in the country are highly relevant, and the positive statements from respondents are many.

**The Government of South Africa.** The constraints on effectiveness on the government side include continuous leadership changes at the administrative and technical levels, lack of continuity and institutional memory, and weak knowledge management, which often makes for poor responses to opportunities and slow progress. South African government departments have significant shortages in numbers of skilled staff. This impacts the ability of departments to absorb assistance and skills transfer. It also puts a strain on the small number of people who are available to work with the UN.

Structures and processes can undermine effectiveness. Bureaucracy also slows down decision-making and implementation. Like the UN cluster system that has not been functioning fully, the government experiences its own challenges within

government clusters. Little attention is given to managing logical synergies among various focus areas, such as peacekeeping, development, defence reform, justice reform, police reform, human rights, humanitarian assistance, social development and the environment.

Technical entities and officials responsible for implementation in government departments are often not sufficiently knowledgeable of the UN system to allow them to realize the opportunities that it presents. Moreover, focal points in the provincial sphere of government often appear to be marginalized or weak. Lack of interdepartmental coordination is also a constraining factor.

Government entities sometimes express antagonism to the possibility that expertise from somewhere else can contribute to identifying and solving problems in South Africa, or within the domestic organization concerned.

In summary, the evaluation has produced evidence on the UN-South Africa partnership as follows:

- **Lack of a comprehensive framework for Government of South Africa-UN cooperation.** South Africa engages with the UN system in a number of ways that are not reflected in the UNDAF. The UN development framework is basically limited to ODA-funded activities at the country level, although some major ODA-funded activities are not included in the UNDAF. The whole range of activities pertaining to the provision of regional and global public goods, to which South Africa actively contributes, are not captured in the UNDAF.
- **Ineffective institutionalization of partnerships.** Within the current UNDAF and Common Country Action Plan, the rules of engagement are not clear to all of those government officials involved in their implementation. The government has not provided the necessary leadership to make the cluster system effective.
- **Limited understanding of roles and mandates.** Some government officials involved in the implementation of programmes do not have

a solid understanding of the UN system and how it works. Conversely, there is a strong sense from government officials that international UN staff do not always fully understand the complexities and nuances of working in the South African political environment.

- **Coordination challenges.** The various UN agencies and government departments have different planning and budgeting time frames and different lines of accountability. On neither side is there a 'single entry point' to the system (be it UN or government). The UN Resident Coordinator should perform that function, but for some time this post has been filled by various agency heads acting as Resident Coordinators. On the government side, the roles of the National Treasury and the Department of Foreign Affairs are not always clear to UN officials.
- **Inability to attract national staff.** It is a challenge for the UN to attract and retain national staff. The UN has to compete with the South African public sector and other development partners who may offer more attractive career opportunities.
- **Mixed success in partnering with civil society and non-governmental organizations.** The UN system appears to have developed good partnerships with research and academic institutions in various fields. Partnerships with South African non-governmental organizations (NGOs), however, do not appear to be strong.

## THE POTENTIAL OF THE UN IN SOUTH AFRICA

The UN system has long experience in working with middle-income countries, especially in Latin America and Asia, and recognizes the huge structural differences that exist between middle- and low-income countries, and well as among middle-income countries themselves. However, it has been difficult for UN agencies to fully draw upon this existing experience to establish working relations with South Africa that take into consideration the historical, geographic, political, economic and cultural specificities of

the country. Instead, emphasis has been given to development cooperation for which the UNDAF has been jointly prepared. In this context, the UN is often seen as just ‘another donor’, or as a service provider, thereby narrowing the perception to a one-way relationship rather than one in which both sides can make important contributions to the other.

The UNDP has repeatedly recognized that middle-income countries play an important role in providing global public goods such as peace-building, public health, financial stability, drug-trafficking interdiction, trans-border crime control and measures to avert climate change. Examples of UN cooperation with developing middle-income countries are plentiful, and include the following examples:

- Keeping constituencies for development strong in international fora such as meetings of the G-20, by giving a voice to the 150 or so countries that are not members of this elite group
- Helping middle-income countries access sources of support such as the GEF, the Clean Development Mechanism, and other funds to develop specific global public goods
- Assisting developing countries in preparing for negotiating sessions in the run-up to the Copenhagen Climate Conference in December 2009 by providing in-depth analyses and organizing preparatory sessions
- Facilitating experience-sharing between developing middle-income and low-income countries in the context of South-South cooperation.

The UN reform process is long overdue as a consequence of resistance by some Member States and UN bodies, for political, economic and other reasons. The continued relevance of the UN as a forum for international negotiations in a multi-polar world will depend on its ability to adapt to changed conditions. Although contested, the 2005 ‘Delivering as One’ report

was a bold step forward towards much needed UN reforms. One size does not fit all, and South Africa should develop its own model for cooperation with the UN system. There is no need to wait for an intergovernmental mandate to embark on such a process that could be helpful to the UN as well as to South Africa. The process will, by necessity, require strong involvement by UN headquarters, and care should be taken to ensure not only transparency but also pluralism and flexibility that will facilitate access by the Government of South Africa to the expertise of non-resident UN agencies working outside UNDAF. In recognition of South Africa as a middle-income country that contributes as much to the UN as it receives, the two-way nature of the relationship would perhaps be better captured under the heading ‘Delivering and Receiving as One’, thereby underscoring the need for mutual streamlining of procedures.

There are four ‘ones’ at the country level in the ‘Delivering as One’ approach: one programme, one budgetary framework and fund, one leader, and one office. Of these four, the most urgent one to be addressed would be ‘one leader’. The unsatisfactory situation with regard to UN Country Team management has long been a major obstacle to UN-Government of South Africa cooperation and needs immediate attention.

In conclusion, the constraints and challenges outlined in this report could be mitigated through a determined transformation of the UN presence in South Africa towards a more cohesive, coordinated and cooperative model suited to South African conditions, fully recognizing its middle-income status and its role in the provision of regional and global public goods.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the overall conclusion by this evaluation that South Africa can benefit substantially from close cooperation with the UN system; that South Africa is an important contributor to UN mandates regionally and globally; that the potential of

government-UN cooperation is currently not fully realized; and that the government-UN relationship should be located within the totality of South Africa's interests in the provision of public goods at home, in the region, and in the world, rather than be limited to development cooperation.

The recommendations should be considered in the context of enormous global challenges, including the financial crisis, climate change and threats to food security, which might impel the UN to review its modalities for country operations, and the Government of South Africa to review its foreign relations to counter the negative impact of these challenges. In this light, the recommendations are modest and doable. General elections are imminent in South Africa, which will bring about changes in executive as well as senior officials, and 2009 may indeed offer an opportune juncture to review government expectations and priorities in relation to its partnership with the UN system.

### **GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA – CREATING A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC GOODS AT HOME, IN AFRICA, AND IN THE WORLD**

**1. Develop a comprehensive cooperation framework.** It is recommended that a strategic planning process be initiated jointly by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the National Treasury with the participation of all other government departments that interact with the UN system. The goal would be the creation of a flexible, permanent structure that will effectively cover the range of international relations related to the provision of national,<sup>1</sup> regional and global public goods and reflect South Africa's position as a middle-income country. Contributors to this new structure would include a number of government departments with regional or international outreach, South African embassies abroad, academic institutions that contribute to the

body of global scientific knowledge, private sector corporations that provide new technologies, as well as UN and other development partners.

The purpose of the cooperation framework would be to ensure coherency and systematic monitoring of overall South African engagement. This framework should take into full consideration an approach to manage regional interventions in consultation with structures such as SADC, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Union, along with individual country representatives. The new cooperation framework should be closely aligned with South Africa's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework and medium-term programmes of national departments; it should also be integrated with the objectives of the National Framework for Sustainable Development. The UN's partnership with civil society, especially non-governmental organizations, should be strengthened through a planned programme that moves beyond one-off events to building the capacity of NGOs as partners in development. The ways in which cross-cutting issues and synergies with related initiatives will be managed should be clearly defined.

### **THE UN AND THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA – MOVING TOWARDS A REAL PARTNERSHIP**

**2. Enter into a joint strategic planning process.** It is recommended that, within the philosophy of the framework described above, the government (in national, provincial and local spheres) and the UN system (at the local, regional and headquarters levels) enter together into a strategic planning process. Assistance would be provided by external consultants to determine the scope and rules of engagement governing future cooperation that would extend beyond the UNDAF

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1. Provision of national public goods is the task of most government departments at central and decentralized levels. The present context only includes national public goods where international relations are involved, through external funding or other collaboration, such as ODA. Commercial activities by the private sector are not included.

concept. The government should define a sound and comprehensive policy and process to manage UN assistance within the broader framework of international cooperation to South Africa and the region. The process should produce clear guidelines for roles and responsibilities that are spelled out in a Memorandum of Understanding that will keep parties mutually accountable.

### **GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA - TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE UN'S POTENTIAL AND CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCTIVE TO COLLABORATION**

- 3. Review the roles of key government departments in relation to the UN.** It is recommended that the current roles and responsibilities of the National Treasury and Department of Foreign Affairs as key contact points for the UN be reviewed. While the Department of Foreign Affairs is mandated as the first point of entry for all foreign engagements, and the National Treasury deals with inward ODA flows, the complex set of relationships between the government and the UN requires interaction at strategic as well as technical levels with many government departments. As the evaluation demonstrates, this interaction does not function in ways that facilitate the full utilization of mutual resources. It is therefore recommended that clearer and more flexible mechanisms be developed.
- 4. Improve coordination.** It is recommended that government departments take the initiative to improve their coordination with UN agencies through bi-annual round-table discussions in which priorities and programmes can be reviewed. Such discussions could also serve to deepen mutual understanding of each party's mandate. Furthermore, it is recommended that the government take steps to improve the knowledge and skills of international relations focal points in departments regarding the UN system. This could be accomplished by securing the assistance of the Department of Foreign Affairs, the

National Treasury and the UN to design a programme to build such capacities. The government should demonstrate ownership of the expanded UN-government cooperation framework by ensuring that consultations are not relegated to officials who lack the mandate and skills to participate in such consultations, possibly under the auspices of the Consultative Forum on International Relations, an inter-governmental structure comprising senior officials. The current system of focal points should be evaluated and structured to become more effective, especially to improve the integration between the official focal points in the international relations entities and the technical entities within and outside of departments responsible for implementation.

### **THE UN – STREAMLINING THE UN COUNTRY TEAM TO ADD VALUE**

- 5. Adapt the UN Country Team to the specific needs of South Africa.** It is recommended that the UN at country and headquarters levels take steps to develop a unique model of 'Delivering and Receiving as One' for South Africa, taking into account its status as a middle-income country and aiming to support national priorities in a comprehensive manner. For inspiration, it is recommended that the UN Country Team and government representatives monitor the experience of the 'One UN' pilot programme as it unfolds, possibly including a joint visit to some of the pilot countries, as well as through the forthcoming evaluation.
- 6. Create one budgetary framework.** It is recommended that the UN Country Team, in collaboration with the UN Secretariat and agency headquarters, review the option for integrating budgets at the country level. It is further recommended to encourage bilateral development partners, in the spirit of the Paris Declaration, to avail funds to the UN Country Team rather than earmarking them for specific projects implemented by agencies. This process can be painful for some agencies



and care should be taken not to negatively impact the agencies' ability to make use of their comparative advantages.

**7. Strengthen UN leadership at the country level, focusing on the Resident Coordinator.**

It is recommended that the UN strengthen its leadership in South Africa in order to embark on strategic interaction with the government and South African civil society, drawing on the full register of UN capacity, while helping to channel South African expertise to the UN. This will require a streamlining of the UN Country Team's mode of operations. It is recommended that the Resident Coordinator become the 'chief executive officer' of the system at the country level, with a separate office, instead of serving the dual role as Resident Coordinator and head of agency simultaneously. In accordance with the practice in an increasing number of countries, it is recommended that the UNDP country office be led by a country director. The Resident Coordinator should be endowed with executive powers for the whole system, including the budget. He/she should be the central contact point for the Government of South Africa, have easy access to senior levels of government, and ensure that the UN system always speaks with one voice. He/she should be supported by two senior deputies, namely a strategic development manager responsible for connecting the mandates and capacities of the UN with relevant government departments, and a public diplomacy manager, responsible for UN external relations in South Africa (with the government, academia and civil society). Care should be exercised to ensure the correct balance of competencies in the recruitment of the three officials. Recruitment should be a joint process, and applicants from outside the UN system, including South African nationals, should be encouraged to apply. To the extent that the setting up of the new Resident Coordinator's Office will require additional funding, the UN and the Government of South Africa should share the responsibility to ensure that such funding

will be made available for three years on an experimental basis.

**8. Add value.** The UN should focus on high-end value-added activities that generate knowledge and information for policies and programmes: activities where it has strength, such as providing technical assistance for monitoring and evaluating areas that cut across government departments (for example, human rights, gender equality, social protection and employment creation); and activities that promote South-South dialogue. The partnership should formulate and implement clear and effective strategies for all the sectors reviewed in this report, and create a governance arrangement that assures progressive adaptation and flexibility in the face of emerging knowledge and constraints. Small projects that are demanding in terms of time and resources and not necessarily suitable for cumbersome UN procedures should only be approved when particularly strong cases can be made for them by the government.

**9. Enhance the specialized expertise of UN staff.** It is recommended that UN agencies, funds and programmes ensure that career staff posted to South Africa are experts or researchers in their respective areas of expertise. They should also have advisory capabilities and be able to engage on an equal footing with government officials. Likewise, the UN should provide South Africa with high-level, short-term international expertise in selected fields upon request.

**THE UN AND THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA – WORK TOWARDS MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING**

**10. Strive to understand South Africa.** It is recommended that the Resident Coordinator's Office strengthen its briefing of staff to better communicate the specificities of South Africa, the intergovernmental relations at three levels, and the role of civil society. This would include attendance at annual sessions of the National Treasury/International Development Coordination Directorate as well as special modules on understanding

the South African context, government priorities and the Programme of Action; the machinery of government; and how development cooperation in South Africa works. It is further recommended that UN agencies be encouraged to strategize, individually and together, about how they will engage with government counterparts in a decentralized setting with overlapping competencies, using intergovernmental relations structures as far as possible.

**11. Strive to understand the UN system.** It is recommended that more attention be given to UN public diplomacy in order to increase understanding of what the UN is and does. This should include:

- The marketing of services that can be offered by the UN system to South Africa and the region, with clearly defined processes on how to access these services
- Bi-annual briefings to the government to discuss major policy developments and initiatives from UN headquarters and strategic issues pertinent to the implementation of the joint cooperation framework. These briefings should

preferably follow on the bi-annual Cabinet Lekgotla

- Briefing sessions and conferences for wider audiences (including national and provincial legislatures, the private sector and civil society) on global and regional issues of special importance where the UN is involved. Examples include climate change in the lead-up to the Copenhagen Conference, the food security crisis and peace-building in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

**12. Follow up on these recommendations in 2012.** It is recommended that an independent follow-up evaluation be conducted in 2012 to ascertain if the strengthening of the UN Country Team has taken place: if the new roles of the Resident Coordinator and his or her deputies have enabled them to become trusted advisers to the government; if a comprehensive cooperation framework has been established covering the whole range of potential UN services; and if communication and mutual understanding have substantially improved. Based on the outcome, the evaluation should make recommendations with regard to further strengthening or, alternatively, reducing the UN presence in South Africa.

## Chapter 1

# THE JOINT EVALUATION

In 2006, the Government of the Republic of South Africa requested the collaboration of the United Nations Evaluation Group in undertaking a joint, country-level evaluation of the role and contribution of the UN system.<sup>2</sup> Initially, the evaluation was meant to focus only on the contribution of the UN to the country's national development objectives. It was to explore the relevance and effectiveness of this contribution, the use of UN development assistance by South Africa, and lessons learned in capacity development. The evaluation was intended to inform the preparation of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the Common Country Action Plan (CCAP) for the period 2007-2010.

The UN Evaluation Group subsequently conducted a pre-scoping mission from 15-19 May 2006 and a scoping mission from 4-15 February 2008. In a dialogue between the parties, it was proposed that the scope of the evaluation be expanded beyond that of the UN's traditional development assistance to South Africa. The Government of South Africa suggested including activities implemented within the UN system in line with the country's three-tier strategic policy priorities: working for a better South Africa, a better Africa, and a better world. The terms of reference that were subsequently agreed upon can be found in Annex 1.

The objective of the current evaluation was to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the cooperation between South Africa and the UN system within these three policy priorities. Thematic evaluations would be conducted in four

focus areas – development, peace and security, the environment and humanitarian assistance – with a view to using those findings to inform the conclusions of this synthesis report.

The evaluation was to be responsive to the needs and priorities of South Africa and serve as an accountability and learning mechanism for the UN system. It was also to be consultative and to engage the participation of a broad range of stakeholders. It was to be guided by a Joint Evaluation Management Group.

This evaluation constitutes a 'first' for both the UN system and South Africa. For the UN it is the first time that a country-level evaluation is carried out jointly with a host government, and involves the entire UN system rather than a single UN agency or programme. For the Government of South Africa, it is the first time that it has embarked on an evaluation of this nature. Funding for the joint exercise was shared equally by the two parties.

The joint evaluation was country-led and carried out by an independent evaluation team comprising:

- Mr. Shauket Fakie, Team Leader (South Africa)
- Mr. Iraj Abedian, Deputy Team Leader (South Africa)
- Mr. Erik Lyby, Deputy Team Leader (Denmark)
- Ms. Angela Bester, Development Specialist (South Africa)

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2. The UN system comprises all entities of the UN Secretariat as well as funds, programmes, specialized agencies and other organizations. The Bretton Woods institutions are not considered part of the system. The UN Evaluation Group is a system-wide network of UN evaluation offices endowed with its own norms and standards.

- Mr. Fred Kruger, Environment Specialist (South Africa)
- Mr. Peter Wiles, Humanitarian Assistance Specialist (United Kingdom), replaced by Mr. Greg Moran (South Africa) towards the end of the mission
- Mr. Pieter du Plessis, Peace and Security Specialist (South Africa).

Overall strategic guidance for the evaluation was provided by a Joint Evaluation Management Group, co-chaired by the Government of South Africa and the UN Evaluation Group. On the South African side, membership included the Presidency of the Government of South Africa, through its International Relations and Trade Policy Coordination Unit; the Department of Foreign Affairs; The National Treasury, through its International Development Cooperation Unit; the Office of the Public Service Commission; the Department of Provincial and Local Government; and Statistics South Africa. On the UN side, membership included the Evaluation Office of UNDP; the Evaluation Office of UNICEF; the Evaluation Service of FAO; and the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination (of the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, known as UN DESA). The Joint Evaluation Management Group prepared the terms of reference, appointed the evaluation team, guided the process, provided the team with substantive comments on the inception report and final draft reports, and appointed an external advisory panel<sup>3</sup> to comment on the draft reports.

The evaluation team wishes to thank all the officials of the Government of South Africa, the UN system as well as members of South African civil society who shared their time, information and experience in support of the evaluation. Thanks to the staff at UN headquarters and

South African diplomatic missions in New York, Geneva and Rome for contributing their high-level perspective on key issues. Also appreciated are the many constructive comments received from the advisory panel, the Joint Evaluation Management Group and the UN Evaluation Group, which have helped strengthen the reports. However, the analysis that follows, and the conclusions and recommendations made, remain those of the independent evaluation team and do not necessarily reflect the policies, opinions or positions of any other parties.

## 1.1 METHODOLOGY

This section provides a brief outline of the methodology applied in this evaluation. For further details, see Annex 2.

### 1.1.1 EVALUATION CRITERIA

The framework terms of reference identified effectiveness<sup>4</sup> and relevance as the main evaluation criteria. The first logical step was to develop the questions that should be answered through the study. These questions are at two levels: the disaggregate (focus-area) level, and the aggregate (synthesis) level.

**Effectiveness** is defined as the extent to which agreed-upon objectives have been met, or can be expected to be met. In practice, the objectives are not always explicit, or there can be several competing objectives for the same activity. In such cases, it can be necessary to operationalize them on the basis of available oral and written documentation. In the case of cooperation between the Government of South Africa and the UN, it is particularly important to look at the roles played by various actors. External factors outside the control of these actors that may have had a significant influence on the success of the activity also need to be identified.

3. The advisory panel consisted of Ms. Inge Kaul (Germany), Mr. Matthew Smith (South Africa) and Ms. Tanja Ajam (South Africa).

4. Effectiveness should not be misinterpreted to mean an organization's internal efficiency. The efficiency of UN agencies has been subject to many evaluations by bilateral development partners over the years. However, this criterion remains outside the scope of this evaluation.

**Relevance** is determined by the extent to which the activities correspond with policies and are in line with local needs and priorities. Methodological challenges can occur when there is more than one policy to refer to, or when there is lack of consensus on the interpretation of needs and priorities.

The evaluation was complex. It was intended to be forward-looking and cover outcomes, outputs/deliverables and processes of the work that South Africa and the UN system are doing together, with a view to determining the value-added by such cooperation. Both sides of the equation should be examined, since the government's actions also impact outcomes in the context of interaction with the UN system. Since the UN system is not a significant donor in financial terms, the quality of the interaction as a strategic partnership is given special attention.

The evaluation operated at several levels and involved a mapping exercise for each focus area of the work of the UN system in South Africa as well as for South Africa regionally and globally. For practical reasons, the mapping is selective and cannot constitute a full inventory of South

Africa-UN relations over the period 1994-2008. Based on the mapping of a 'universe' for each focus area, sets of activities were chosen in order to narrow the scope. The criteria for selection included the nature of the activities: they should cover the range of typical areas of cooperation; they should include domestic, regional and global dimensions; and they should be evaluable, that is, sufficient evidence must be available to allow for sound assessments based predominantly on triangulation of qualitative information. Quantitative data would be used when available, but these were relatively few.

### 1.1.2 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

A format was devised as a tool for the selection of activities and subsequent analysis, classifying each set of activities (typically a project or programme) by type: whether its nature is mainly *normative* (for example, concerning international conventions, specific international standards, or internationally agreed protocols); *analytical* (for example, concerning strategic development in which the UN has participated, or studies that support policy analysis); or *operational* (such as

**Figure 1. Tool for Selecting and Analysing Activities, Projects, Programmes and Clusters**

Type of activity	Normative	Analytical	Operational
<b>Evaluation criteria with sub-themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ International conventions</li> <li>■ Specific standards</li> <li>■ Agreed protocols</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Strategic development</li> <li>■ Studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pilot projects</li> <li>■ Catalytic activities</li> </ul>
<b>Effectiveness</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Partnership quality</li> <li>■ Capacity-building</li> <li>■ Gender equality</li> <li>■ HIV&amp;AIDS</li> <li>■ Human rights</li> </ul>			
<b>Relevance</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Partnership quality</li> <li>■ Capacity-building</li> <li>■ Gender equality</li> <li>■ HIV&amp;AIDS</li> <li>■ Human rights</li> </ul>			

pilot projects that test new approaches on a small scale, or activities where the UN has played a catalytic role). These types were set against the evaluation criteria of effectiveness and relevance, each with a set of sub-themes: *partnership quality* (nature and strength of UN-South Africa cooperation – a central issue in all components); *capacity – or institution-building* (identified as a central goal of UN assistance); and three *cross-cutting issues*: gender equality, HIV&AIDS, and human rights and democracy. The format is shown in Figure 1.

### 1.1.3 EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation questions are placed at different levels, from very general to very specific; what is common to them is that they must be answerable to be useful. The more general questions are relevant to all (or most) of the focus areas as well as to the synthesis. The more specific ones relate to the focus areas and differ between them.

In principle, conclusions can be drawn if Figure 1 is applied to all the selected projects/activities, and all the evaluation questions are placed in the empty spaces and adequate answers to them are given. Some of the general evaluation questions applicable to all focus areas are the following (see Annex 2 for the full list of questions):

#### Effectiveness

- To what extent have agreed-upon objectives been reached?
- Has there been full agreement between partners on what the objectives are?
- Are the objectives explicit, or do they need to be deduced from the available evidence?
- Are the planned activities sufficient in terms of resources to realize the objectives?
- Have the communication channels functioned effectively?
- Have multi-agency activities been effective, drawing on strong expertise and avoiding overlap?
- To what extent has UN experience from other countries contributed to the achievement of the objectives?

- To what extent has the UN's role as strategist, centre of intellectual excellence, as a catalyst or implementer of pilot activities been effective in contributing to the achievement of the objectives?

#### Relevance

- Are the objectives in keeping with the real needs and priorities of the implementing partners as well as the intended beneficiaries? What is the extent of the fit or disjuncture and why?
- Should the direction of activities (the approach) be changed, or discontinued?
- To what extent have ratified UN conventions been turned into national legislation, and when has this happened? What was the role of the UN system in helping South Africa do this?
- To what extent did South Africa influence conventions and resolutions?
- To what extent has the UN system supported South Africa's ratification of conventions?
- In which ways has the Government of South Africa been able to use the UN system to further its agendas, for example, through the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, Group of 77 (G-77), membership in UN fora and governing bodies of UN agencies?
- To what extent, and how, has the UN system facilitated the Government of South Africa in playing a strategic and influential role in the agenda of the South African Development Community (SADC) region, in Africa, and in the global community ( the G-77 and G-8, for example)?

## 1.2 THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The preparation of the evaluation took more than two years, from the first mission in May 2006 until the start of work in August 2008. The aim was to conclude the exercise by end January 2009, in view of the 2009 national elections in South Africa, which would complicate the work if not finished well before.

The inception phase took place between 25 August and 19 September 2008, when the draft inception report was submitted for comments. The final version, with comments from the government and the UN Evaluation Group, was submitted on 22 October. By that time, the methodology had been developed, the activities for in-depth study had been selected and initial interviews had been carried out by the focus-area specialists. The selection followed a rigorous process guided by the criteria described above, by which many otherwise relevant activities regrettably had to be excluded, and several UN agencies had to be left out.

The main field data collection phase took place between October and December 2008. The Team Leader and the international Deputy Team Leader visited UN Headquarters and Government of South Africa Permanent Missions in Geneva, Rome and New York between 19 and 25 November in order to obtain high-level views on the more strategic aspects of the UN-South Africa relationship (see Annexes 3 and 4 for a list of persons consulted during the course of the evaluation and a selection of key documents reviewed). A stakeholder workshop was convened in Pretoria on 4 December in which government, UN and South African civil society representatives had an opportunity to contribute their views and help validate or criticize the team's preliminary findings.

Various versions of the focus-area draft reports were prepared in December and January and subjected to quality assurance and consistency control, in parallel with the drafting of this synthesis report. The final drafts were then submitted for peer review to the external advisory panel, consisting of three experienced evaluators. After the necessary modifications, they were sent to receive comments by the Government of South Africa and the UN Evaluation Group. This iterative process was concluded in March 2009, when the present synthesis and four focus-area reports were submitted to the Government of South Africa and the UN Evaluation Group.

The process was hampered by various events. For personal reasons, the specialist on humanitarian assistance resigned on 20 November after having carried out most of his field investigations. This dealt a serious blow to the evaluation as much research that had already been done could not easily be transferred to his replacement. South Africa provides humanitarian assistance to other countries in the region and also supports the development of their disaster preparedness capacity – hence, an important aspect of the regional dimension would be lost in the event that this focus area would have to be dropped from the evaluation. A South African consultant agreed to step in from 8 December and do as much as possible with this component within the limited time left. However, under the circumstances, the scope of the study had to be narrowed down considerably from that planned in the inception phase.

The availability of government officials for interviews proved an obstacle to all consultants. UN staff were generally accessible, and much could be achieved through desk study and Internet searches. But without the government side, triangulation could not take place. This was a source of frustration to all focus-area specialists.

### **1.2.1 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE METHODOLOGY**

The methodology as such is assessed to have been workable. However, some of the circumstances were not conducive to the efficient performance of the evaluation. Key among these were:

1. Non-availability of officials in government departments clearly hampered the evaluation. But it also served to draw attention to a problem that has consistently been referred to by UN staff faced with the same problem, and is clearly an impediment to strategic interaction.
2. The evaluation intended to cover the period 1994 to 2008. However, as programme documents and reports for the early period were not always available, and officials from the government and the UN were no longer

in the department or in the country, the majority of programmes that could be evaluated fall within the last five to eight years.

3. The evaluation time frame was too short, especially seen in relation to the long gestation period.
4. The selection and contracting of a team of consultants on an individual basis was less efficient than selecting a company or institution through competitive tendering. It was known in advance that the individual consultants had other commitments simulta-

neously with the evaluation, commitments that limited their availability for fieldwork and teamwork.

### **1.3 THIS REPORT**

The following chapters provide a brief history of the UN system in post-apartheid South Africa; summarize findings in the four focus and three cross-cutting areas; describe the two-way nature of the UN-Government of South Africa partnership; and offer general conclusions and recommendations.