

UNFPA Response to MOPAN discussion November 2008

1. Overall comments on MOPAN:

As mentioned during the meeting, UNFPA is in agreement with the overall findings of the report. As a general comment however, there is an important lesson learned from the methodological point of view. Even though the MOPAN surveys represent a rapid and very useful assessment tool that can help us identify challenges and opportunities, aggregated questionnaires may sometimes provide an incomplete picture.

Other weaknesses noted in relation to the methodology were the mixed knowledge level of the MOPAN members filling out the questionnaire and the few samples of questionnaires filled out.

UNFPA welcomes assessments from donors as it not only increases the understanding of our work but also keeps us accountable and helps us review our modus operandi on the ground. While such assessments are welcomed, we are also concerned by the added transaction costs. Most MOPAN members are also members of the Executive Board and as such, already approved a four-year strategic plan for UNFPA with a set of indicators against which we will be reporting. In addition, there are a number of parallel assessments currently carried out by different donors. We would welcome further discussion with the MOPAN team on how these assessments could be better streamlined with a view to achieve greater harmonization among donors in line with Paris and Accra.

We also welcome the efforts from MOPAN to improve on the methodology for future assessments. We understand that the 2009 survey will include other stakeholders, which will no doubt broaden the scope of the survey and allow for more informed opinions.

It was also reported by our offices that the country reports were not always discussed/reviewed or that this was done through brief meetings only. In some instances MOPAN countries reported no bilateral relationship with UNFPA while the same were funding programmes (e.g. Norway and Denmark in Nepal). Within Embassies it is important to involve persons from different levels to ensure overall knowledge of UNFPA.

Looking ahead, we wish to recommend instituting a feedback communication plan for the countries assessed by the MOPAN and to ensure that information is shared within Embassies to involve the relevant people.

We also wish to recommend that future MOPAN surveys also look at middle-income countries and to what extent UNFPA is promoting South-south cooperation.

2. Specific issues

2.1 Visibility versus delivering as one

The report notes that UNFPA's visibility is decreasing, particularly in the 'delivering as one' countries. We note an inherent contradiction as follows:

- UNFPA is acknowledged as being strong in inter-agency coordination. This means that the Resident Coordinator will speak on our behalf. The dilemma is to reconcile the need for visibility with the need for a unified message from the UN country team. Achieving both simultaneously is difficult.
- UNFPA promotes national ownership and implementation by government counterparts. Visibility by UNFPA cannot be maintained and championed if our aim is to ensure Government ownership.
- UNFPA plays an active role in Sector Wide approaches, however its financial contribution is minimal compared to that of other development partners. Again visibility is hard to achieve with small resources brought to the table.
- Through its current regionalization effort, UNFPA is committed to building knowledge hubs in the regions. This means building capacity of regional institutions through our technical advisers so that they may become champions and centers of excellence to mainstream the ICPD agenda. UNFPA's technical advisers will manage those knowledge hubs but delivery of technical assistance will be channeled through the regional institutions. UNFPA's role will be to mobilize and facilitate, at the expense of visibility, but with the aim of mainstreaming ICPD.
- The "delivering as one countries" have been the subject of a number of reviews and discussions, which have been documented and shared with the Executive Board, the ECOSOC and the General Assembly. Agencies have been conducting internal meetings to share lessons learned and document experiences. We will perhaps need to be more proactive in sharing these findings to ensure that the work on the ground is well documented.

2.2 Policy dialogue and capacity development of Civil Society Organizations (CSO)

We note with appreciation that UNFPA's role in policy dialogue and advocacy is well recognized in the document. We also note that there is room for improvement in UNFPA's role in capacity development of CSO. The Executive Board of UNFPA has repeatedly reaffirmed that UNFPA should work at the policy level but that we also need to create demand at the community level through partnering with CSOs. To influence change, this has to come from within and building the capacity of CSOs within our limited means is certainly a priority for the Fund.

2.3 Delegation of Authority to UNFPA Representatives

We were intrigued by the comment that delegation of authority at country level appears mixed.

Our policies clearly state that once a country programme is approved by the Executive Board, the UNFPA Representative is given full delegated authority to ensure timely implementation. Signing of donor agreements is also delegated at country level provided the Representative follows the standard formats (unless the donor prefers to sign at the headquarters level).

2.4 Proactive Information sharing

We do recognize that there is room for improvement in the area of communication sharing. Each office has been encouraged to develop a communication strategy, including assigning resources to update their website.

2.5 Government ownership

The report painted a mixed picture of Government involvement in formulating the UNFPA-supported programmes. This might need to be further reviewed, noting that All UNFPA Country Programmes are negotiated and approved by the respective Governments and are based on Governments' national priorities. This perception will hopefully be corrected with the involvement in the survey of Government counterparts in the MOPAN 2009 Common Approach.

2.6 Contribution to local donor harmonization efforts

Notwithstanding that fewer responses were received on this issue, it should be noted that again, in the spirit of the UN reform, the UN Resident Coordinator is the one representing the UN system in donor coordination fora. It is thus difficult for the RC to be aware of all agencies programmes and funding mechanisms. On the other hand the MOPAN country teams have their own cycles and strategies that often differ from UNFPA thus making it more difficult to harmonize.

2.7 Culturally-sensitive issues

UNFPA's mandate is culturally sensitive and the report acknowledges that UNFPA addresses that well in general. In Bangladesh however MOPAN noted that UNFPA should do much more to promote safe menstrual regulation. MR is a government programme in Bangladesh and UNFPA has been supporting post-abortion care in the country programme. UNFPA will become more active in this area, particularly with respect to research and data collection and post-MR counseling, in close collaboration with WHO. At the same time however, UNFPA also needs to maintain subtleties in this regard as we are vigilant not to be seen as promoting MR as a family planning method, in line with ICPD.

2.8 Recruitment of retired civil servants (Bangladesh)

Recruitment is based on a competitive process and at times the best candidates could be retired civil servants. Many other agencies have similar instances as there is a dearth of experienced skilled technical people in our sector in Bangladesh.