

# Nepal UNDAF 2013-2017 Evaluation Summary

## A. Introduction

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The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2013-2017 guided 23 UN agencies in their support to the Government of Nepal. The UNDAF originally budgeted \$634,525,000 USD to be mobilized and delivered during this period on ten UNDAF outcomes. As of the end of 2015, the UN Country Team (UNCT) has delivered \$265,975,969 USD with two years in which to mobilize and deliver the remaining \$368,549,031 USD. It should be noted however that the amount disbursed does not include funds mobilized for the earthquake response which were outside the UNDAF purview both in terms of district coverage (there was little or no overlap with the UNDAF priority districts) and type of response (the UNDAF did not have a strong focus on disaster preparedness and response).

This summary report provides details of a recent UNDAF evaluation carried out to better understand the effectiveness of developmental support provided by the UNDAF. The document serves as the end term evaluation for the 2013-2017 UNDAF and provides critical learning points and recommendations to support the UN in Nepal to develop a new 2018-2022 UNDAF.

The report is divided into three sections: strengths, weaknesses and recommendations. Each section addresses the major findings of the evaluation as they relate to the UNDAF's design, coordination, implementation and results.

## B. Strengths of the 2013-2017 Nepal UNDAF

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### 1. UNDAF Design

The UNDAF was designed in close collaboration with the national government of Nepal, resulting in the UNDAF being closely aligned with the Three Year Plan of Nepal (2013-2016). The integration of a strong Human Rights Based Approach into the UNDAF design gave the UNDAF a very robust focus on international standards on social inclusion and human rights.

In order to gauge the efficacy of the UNDAF's implementation, a Results Matrix was created with a total of ten outcomes. The Result Matrix provided flexibility for agencies in that it offered both wide ranging and narrow outcomes. This meant that larger agencies with broad mandates could attach themselves to multiple outcomes and also support the work of other agencies through technical cooperation and joint initiatives. It also meant that most of the agencies working in Nepal could find at least an outcome relevant to their mandate.

The UN County Team continued encouraging the work of the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) working group. This allowed agencies to pool data needs and coordinate together to achieve the shared objective. It also helped in the development of an M&E results matrix as well as indicator protocol sheet with specific agencies assigned responsible for reporting progress.

The country analysis identified 19 social groups and 23 districts as the most vulnerable and in need of programmatic support based on a vulnerability analysis as well as a geographic human development compository index. This was a highly effective method to identify where to focus efforts.

## 2. Coordination

The main strength of coordination in the UNDAF process was that, amongst other structures, the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) was found to have sufficient capacity to support UN Country Team coordination, including through their Field Coordination Offices. Although formal governance structures were created at the inception of the UNDAF, as a whole coordination fell below expectations as is detailed in the Weaknesses section.

### 2.1 Governance

In general, the governance structures of UNDAF coordination were able to facilitate a high level of coordination. The main successes of this governance include:

- **UNDAF Steering Group:** The group met regularly and was chaired by appropriately high level government and UN officials. This collaboration ensured ownership and establish shared understanding of the required results between the two groups.
- **Outcome Steering Groups (OSG):** Co-chaired by the lead UN agency and chaired by the corresponding ministry, the group ensured ministerial and agency coordination. The OSG established high level groups centred around UN and ministry participation which led to the creation of a framework for high level ownership. Unfortunately, the groups met inconsistently which resulted in missed opportunities for coordination and ownership development (see the Weaknesses section below).
- **Outcome Coordinator:** This role was created to support the lead agency in managing the additional workflow of coordinating UNDAF outcome results. Funded by the Government of Norway, the position was housed within the respective lead agency. Although the Outcome Coordinator role was effective in theory, it requires careful reconsideration for future application (see the Weaknesses section below).
- **Vulnerability Champions:** In order to ensure that the UNDAF was appropriately focusing on supporting vulnerable groups, the UN County Team identified key individuals to adopt this role. These individuals were tasked with identifying trends and potential shocks amongst the vulnerable groups they championed and continue sensitizing the UN County Team through updates and presentations on the status of these groups. Overall, this concept was found to be effective in helping the UN Country Team to identify vulnerable groups and keep abreast of their ongoing socio-economic reality.

### 2.2 Programmatic level

The number of joint initiatives undertaken by the UN County Team was the highest amongst all other Asia-Pacific countries. Such a multitude of joint initiatives ensured sharing of expertise to bring about the best possible results in the UNDAF process.

## 3. Results

Within Nepal, the UN is well regarded by key partners and has created impactful results within the UNDAF timeframe. Such work was especially true after the earthquakes when the Humanitarian Country team (HCT) comprising most Heads of Agencies (HoAs) acted as a focal point for emergency and early recovery interventions.

There is a strong causal link between the high quality design of the UNDAF – its Human Rights Based Approach, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion standards – and corresponding strong

results in these areas. There was a marked increase of awareness in targeted areas and the results of projects and programmes were stronger because of attention paid to these standards.

From the governmental standpoint, Government of Nepal stakeholders appreciated the UN's role in promoting international standards and norms and noted in particular that the UN's presence in Nepal provided a link to regional initiatives.

## **C. Weaknesses of the 2013-2017 Nepal UNDAF**

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### **1. UNDAF Design**

While the Results Matrix had its strengths, it ultimately became too broad and was not focused or strategic enough. The Matrix allowed agencies to find activities reflected in the UNDAF but often the scope was too broad and did not allow for them to focus on the areas of joint collaboration. Additionally, there were too many outcomes in the UNDAF and their outputs that were too restrictive.

Funding was also a shortfall of the UNDAF process as the level of funding anticipated by the agencies was too ambitious and resulted in underachievement of resource mobilization targets. The resource utilisation to UNDAF activities was also decreased due to the diversion of focus by UN agencies to a major earthquake response in non-UNDAF priority districts. Given the short timeframe remaining it will be difficult to meet the funding shortfall.

Aside from funding, ambition was generally too high in the UNDAF planning process. Although progress against outcomes is satisfactory considering the resources and timeframe, the lofty goals have artificially deflated the impact of the UN Country Team's results against the UNDAF.

The lack of funding and outcome linkages was compounded at the design phase because the M&E Working Group and Monitoring Plan was not fully explained, costed or defined within the UNDAF. The M&E working group did not meet regularly, nor did it have a fixed work-plan which resulted in missed opportunities and data gaps. In addition, the UNDAF M&E framework was somewhat reliant on primary data gathered by UN agencies. As a result, when funding streams and resource mobilization targets failed to materialize, the availability of data sets was delayed or non-existent. Looking forward, a more viable option is to utilize existing data sets produced by Government of Nepal and other organizations where needed.

### **2. Coordination**

Although as previously outlined there was strength in UNDAF coordination, the overall level of coordination was suboptimal due mainly to the number of outcomes. The large number of outcomes reflects the desire of UN agencies to have their mandate specifically mentioned in the UNDAF outcome language, as well as individual agencies being attributed at the output level.

As a result of the large number of outcomes, a silo approach to implementation and coordination emerged. Agencies also often encountered difficulties connecting the results achieved into the UNDAF results framework which stemmed from a lack of interagency coordination and planning. Further enabling this problem was the redirection of resources in the Outcome Steering Group as a result of the April 2015 earthquakes.

## **2.1 Governance**

Aside from the April 2015 earthquakes, the Outcome Steering Group did not manage to adequately implement and plan for the UNDAF work-streams. Although the Outcome Coordinator positions were meant to alleviate implementation problems, the position lacked the necessary authority and senior support to enforce regular coordination meetings and command Inter-Agency attention. Outcome Coordinators were found to be regularly performing functions most directly related to their associated agency as opposed to harmonising UN Country Team actions under one collaborative outcome. The Outcome Coordinator position was discontinued in the aftermath of the earthquakes.

Additionally, the vulnerable group champions lost focus on their specific vulnerable groups. This was due to declining levels of ownership amongst the UN Country Team and the workload on staff members who volunteered to perform the role.

## **2.2 Programmatic level**

As previously stated, the UN in Nepal has the highest number of Joint Programmes and Joint Initiatives in Asia-Pacific Region. The Asia-Pacific average is 2.9 while Nepal boasts 14 Joint Programmes; the next highest is Lao PDR at 11. Such a large number of Joint Programmes provides a great opportunity for greater coordination and inter-agency cooperation. However, opportunities for Joint Programming were missed regularly due to a lack of inter-agency coordination and cooperation. Most often coordination at the Country Office level failed to translate into field level coordination. Ultimately Joint Programmes accounted for roughly 6% of the overall UN Country Team budget between 2013 and August 2015.

## **3. Results**

The results of the UNDAF were impeded by the lack of vulnerable group targeting. Figures for the 19 social groups targeted by the UNDAF were routinely unavailable because agencies failed to gather sufficient disaggregated data. It became even more difficult after the earthquake, where there was little or no overlap between the earthquake affected districts and the UNDAF priority districts.

The results of the UNDAF were hampered by the lack of vulnerable group targeting. Despite good UNDAF design, outreach was often limited to districts in which agencies had previously operated and/or had an established network. No UN agency was operating in all 23 of the vulnerable districts identified in the UNDAF. The lowest number of vulnerable districts being operated in was 8 with 18 being the highest for any single agency. This problem could have been tackled through greater coordination and Joint Programming.

The events of the earthquake also greatly affected the ability of UN agencies to implement UNDAF activities. The shift in human and financial resources away from regular programmes in response to the urgent humanitarian crisis caused the UNDAF objectives to be temporarily superseded. This suggests that insufficient risk management was integrated into UNDAF design and the earthquakes necessitated significant reprogramming of UNDAF and Country Programmes to maintain relevance. However, this shift in programming was not undertaken due to the complexities of redefining the UNDAF's objectives and the urgency of need post-earthquake.

Financially, the results of the UNDAF were constrained by the lack of resources mobilized by the UN Country Team. As of December 2015, only 42% of the total planned budget had been delivered. This still amounts to approximately \$266,000,000 USD but is considerably below the anticipated \$685,776,784 USD with 2 years left of implementation.

Limited partnerships with civil society and low levels of government capacity affected the sustainability of programmatic gains made by the UN Country Team. Exit strategies were also under-utilized and underdeveloped with the UNDAF containing no firm guidance for the UN Country Team to develop a coordinated or agency-wise strategy. Although this can be accounted for in the remaining two years of the current UNDAF, early planning and incorporation into the next formal UNDAF development practice would be advised.

#### 4. Implementation

The failure of vulnerable group champions and UNDAF coordination governance mechanisms contributed significantly to missed implementation opportunities. The lack of coordination and vulnerability data gaps meant UNDAF implementation was neither equipped to target the most vulnerable groups appropriately nor able to anticipate needs and adjust programmatic direction appropriately.

As discussed earlier in the report, inadequate flexibility and risk management within the UNDAF prevented appropriate programmatic responses after the earthquake. The lack of flexibility stemmed largely from the UNDAF Output language being too restrictive. As a result of these restrictions, the UN Country Team was not able to address both the needs of the UNDAF and those of the earthquake victims. Instead, and to their credit, the UN Country Team focused on the immediate humanitarian and early recovery needs of those affected by the earthquake.

## D. Recommendations and Lessons Learnt for UN Agencies

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This section discusses the UN Country Team's response to the UNDAF evaluation and the lessons learnt as a result. It also addresses the revised UN Development Group's (UNDG) interim guidance on UNDAF formation. This section details how the UN Country Team of Nepal plans to adapt the UNDAF formation process to the revised interim guidance and UNDAF evaluation. Recommendations for the UN Country Team are as follows:

**Recommendation 1: Reflect and reassemble.** The UN Country Team should use the remaining two years of the UNDAF to undertake a comprehensive study to determine what has happened to the targeted vulnerable groups. Such an examination can lead to success stories that the UN can use to both celebrate and regroup agencies, external partners and the general public around the UNDAF.

**Recommendation 2: Simplify the design.** The UN Country Team should develop an UNDAF with a simplified results framework at the outcome level with a more limited number of outcomes.

**Recommendation 3: Develop a robust M&E system.** The UN Country Team should foremost make more effective use of the M&E group. The group should be charged with formulating indicators and developing and updating a robust UNDAF M&E platform. Data in the platform should be continuously updated from information sharing among UN agency programmes and projects. In addition to internal data, the UN Country Team should also encourage increased use of existing national administrative data in the development of indicators and for regular programme monitoring. An independent M&E secretariat should be formed that sits within the RCO that is solely responsible for collecting and harmonising UN Country Team's results and data. The secretariat should have the authority to call M&E working group meetings, set agendas, create collaborative work-plans and have key focal points identified within each

agency. Moreover, the position should have a fixed annual budget supported proportionally by each agency to conduct M&E activities and data gathering.

**Recommendation 4: Planning should be linked to resource availability.** The UN Country Team should strengthen its resource mobilisation, including more Joint Programming to leverage the UNDAF as a resource mobilisation tool. UN agencies should also plan and develop interventions linked to resource availability.

**Recommendation 5: Strengthen partnership with civil society.** Encourage by the UN Country Team, UN agencies should strengthen collaboration and strategic partnership with civil society partners.

**Recommendation 6: Make coordination an imperative.** The UN Country Team should ensure UNDAF coordination adds value to programme performance through the following measures:

- a) Identify areas of Joint Programming and Joint Programmes upfront during UNDAF formulation;
- b) Provide value-inputs for coordination such as joint resource mobilisation and a common M&E platform.
- c) Provide resources and budgets to the UN Country Team working groups and hold them accountable through periodic reporting.