20th Meeting of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board
Geneva, Switzerland
25-27 June 2007

Provisional agenda item 3.1:

UNAIDS and UN Reform
Additional documents for this item: none

Action required at this meeting - the Programme Coordinating Board is requested to:

Endorse the recommendations of the paper as contained in paragraphs 38-43

i. Current coherence efforts should be informed by the UNAIDS experience.
ii. The Global Task Team recommendations need to be accelerated and championed as a contribution to UN reform
iii. UNAIDS should have a full role in “one UN” country pilots, just as UNAIDS country coordinators are full members of the UN country team
iv. More attention needs to be paid to incentives and accountability issues in the UN system
v. Coordination around AIDS through the mechanism of UNAIDS must stay intact through the piloting of the UN reform process
vi. UNAIDS should continually document its contributions to greater UN coherence

Cost implications for decisions: none
UNAIDS was born ten years before its time. Had it been born now, it would not have faced many of the difficulties it did in the beginning.
UNICEF Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2006

By reducing overlap, focusing on results, and enhancing the effectiveness and transparency of its members, UNAIDS is a prime example of UN reform in action.
UN Reform: Harmonization and Alignment to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals¹, UN Development Group, 2005.

Introduction

1. UNAIDS has, from its start, been considered a pathfinder for UN reform, particularly because of its role in the resident coordinator system and its use of the mechanism of the theme group. Little has been written, though, to articulate the “lessons learnt” in its more than ten years of experience in striving for “system-wide coherence” in the global response to AIDS. This paper sets out to articulate these lessons.

2. No other UN entity serves such a cross-cutting function as UNAIDS, rallying disparate UN bodies, including the World Bank, around a common cause and exemplifying the potential for a reformed UN system. In spite of, or perhaps because of its unique status, the lessons of UNAIDS have remained largely untapped.

3. Because it has no precedent, UNAIDS is listed under “other UN entities” in the UN System organizational chart along with the UN University, UN Office of Project Services (OPS), the UN System Staff College and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It is not included in “programmes and funds” with its cosponsors UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR and WFP. Nor is it included under “specialized agencies” along with yet another group of cosponsors WHO, UNESCO, and ILO nor with the separate “World Bank Group” yet another UNAIDS cosponsor. Finally, it is not included as part of the UN Secretariat, where another cosponsor, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), lives.

4. Even the recent UN Secretary-General’s report on United Nations system-wide coherence, “Delivering as one” made no mention of UNAIDS in its review and recommendations despite the critical relevance of UNAIDS experience to the subject of the report.

5. While the unique configuration of UNAIDS may well distinguish it in a category of its own as “other entity” the principles of UNAIDS and how it functions—working towards system-wide coherence should become increasingly central, rather than peripheral, to all UN system entities.

6. Similarly, the risks and opportunities presented by UN reform for UNAIDS also need consideration.
7. UNAIDS has been a true pathfinder in UN reform. Principles such as the “Three Ones”, the Joint UN Programme and Team on AIDS, the Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations (CCO), the Programme Coordinating Board (PCB), the Unified Budget and Workplan (UBW), the division of labour, and mechanisms such as the Global Task Team to “make the money work”, have all evolved out of a concerted effort to improve system wide coherence. UNAIDS mechanisms have furthermore gone beyond the UN, to support coherence in global, regional and national-level responses to AIDS.

8. In December 2006, the PCB requested a report be provided to the June 2007 Board on “UNAIDS work as an example of UN reform in action in response to the report for the High Level Panel on System Wide Coherence.” The CCO, in its October 2006 meeting, also discussed areas where UNAIDS could lend experience to the recommendations of High Level Panel’s report, which was presented in draft form to the CCO prior to the reports release on 9 November 2006.

9. In an effort to get a better understanding of what the country experience of coordination around AIDS can lend to UN Reform processes, and to get a sense of perceptions of how UN reform processes may affect current collaboration mechanisms around AIDS, a series of interviews were conducted between December 2006 and March 2007. The interviews were with UN agency country representatives as well as bilateral and national government partners, representatives of civil society and regional focal points, where possible, in Ethiopia, Honduras, India, Panama, Rwanda, Thailand and Viet Nam. In addition, a number of evaluations of UNAIDS mechanisms as well as documentation on UN Reform were
reviewed. In April, 2007 a preliminary version of this report was presented to the CCO for comment. This paper expands on the CCO version, taking into account the feedback from the CCO.

“The availability of various global guidelines have been a facilitating factor, in particular, the Secretary-General’s letter, the Guidance Paper on Joint UN Teams, the Technical Support Division of Labour paper and the “Three Ones” principles, documentation on scaling up towards universal access and frameworks such as the MDGs and the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. However, it is more than just the existence of the guidelines, but the understanding and application of these documents that is important.”

“The Second Consultation on Joint UN Teams and Programmes on AIDS” (Geneva, March, 2007) Meeting Report

Lessons learnt

10. UNAIDS has demonstrated that coherence and “delivering as one” are possible, but they require sustained political, financial and institutional investments, and a focus on results-not on processes or mandates. Coherence needs to be worked at and does not happen spontaneously or merely with “good will”. Guidance from international conferences and commitments are crucial, but not enough. Incentives and accountability mechanisms need to be in place. Finally, while “delivering as one” may be important, attention to process should not distract from the substantive work that is needed. In other words, while working towards “delivering as one” we cannot lose sight of “delivering what?” The global response to the AIDS epidemic has been a rallying cause to mobilize coherence. The challenge to coherence around other development agendas will be the clarity of goals, supported by, but not driven by, operational mechanisms and mandates to “deliver as one.”

11. In the early years of UNAIDS, when focus was disproportionately on process more than substance, little real progress was made. When focus shifted more to results, both operational coherence and improved impact were realized.

12. This section will specifically address policy coherence, coherence at country level, financing and the need for strengthened accountabilities. It does not attempt to capture the full history of UNAIDS coordination efforts and their impact on the epidemic, but instead to highlight the key issues learned as relevant to the current UN reform environment.

UNAIDS achievements around coherence

- Unity of purpose around AIDS and (mostly) speaking with one voice
- AIDS as a horizontal policy theme across the UN system
- Unified substantive policies
- The Unified Budget and Workplan as a unique, harmonizing, funding and accountability instrument
- Joint UN programmes and teams in a number of countries
- A clear division of labour
- Members States and internal UN governing mechanisms that promote coherence
- Engagement beyond the UN system in particular with civil society
- Consistently working with the UN resident coordinator system
Policy coherence

13. **UNAIDS experience has learnt that system-wide coherence in substantive policy areas should be a priority.** Global consistency in policy and technical advice is not only key to an effective response to AIDS, but also for advancing the Joint UN Programme on AIDS. For example, policy coherence around a multisectoral approach to the AIDS epidemic, HIV prevention, testing, counseling, education and HIV in the workplace are among a number of important recent areas where coherence has been critical for UNAIDS and provided importance advocacy platforms for action. The role of the secretariat has been essential in securing common policies and harmonization of technical guidelines and information on the global epidemic.

14. **UNAIDS is unique in the UN system as it has both an intergovernmental mechanism—the PCB—to ensure policy coherence, as well as an internal mechanism, the Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations (CCO),** both of which have been crucial to UNAIDS progressing in moving policy coherence. They have both held UNAIDS accountable and have served as valuable platforms for discussion and systematic follow-up. There is a need for both internal mechanisms, such as the CCO, and external mechanisms, such as the PCB. The CCO ensures institutional engagement and serves as a platform for internal conflict resolution while the PCB gives strategic and policy direction and is owned by member states and civil society. Wider UN reform efforts will minimally need an efficient mechanism to ensure inputs and ownership by member states, civil society and the UN system.

15. **UNAIDS has learnt that coherence among and within member states is key.** Particularly in its early years, UNAIDS suffered from sometimes conflicting governance positions by member states in the governing bodies of its various cosponsors. In addition, financial policies by donors can either promote or undermine greater coherence and joint programmes.

16. **UN coordination around AIDS is a valuable contribution to, but cannot be a substitute for, national coordination and leadership.** It has been critical for UNAIDS to recognize national ownership, albeit with respect for the basic principles and commitments agreed in UNGASS and other international conferences, and engage all actors on AIDS, not merely looking internally at UN system coherence. One of UNAIDS critical lessons learned was that in order to be coherent as a UN system it was also crucial to look beyond the UN.

17. **For controversial issues such as AIDS, it is important to have a global mandate based on international conferences and commitments, and equally to have a dedicated champion on the UN country team.** Within UNAIDS, without the existence of a dedicated secretariat, progress would have been much slower. One of the concerns of “one leader” advocacy is that it depends on the willingness of an individual to take risks on addressing sensitive issues, while not losing credibility on other issues.

“The unified approach exemplified by successful Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS is strongly supported by the UN Secretary-General’s proposal for a UN Development Assistance Framework, which envisages joint assessment and planning of UN development work. Indeed, the Secretary-General has proposed that the Theme Group approach pioneered for HIV by UNAIDS Cosponsors be repeated in other areas of development.”

*The United Nations System at Country Level: Meeting the Challenge of HIV/AIDS. PCB agenda item 2(b), Nairobi, November 1997 [UNAIDS/PCB (5)/97.5]*
Coherence at country level

18. Many recognize that coordination around AIDS is one area which was generally working well at country level. Some attributed this to the fact that coordination around AIDS was not new and, as an issue, it had already been a leader in rallying system-wide coherence. Theme groups on HIV/AIDS are widely perceived as the most active and well attended of UN theme groups and are seen as taking the lead in the context of UN reform efforts to “deliver as one.” Acknowledgement of the important role of theme groups is documented from the start of UNAIDS, with the Economic and Social Council resolution [1994/24] which endorsed the establishment of the Joint and cosponsored United Nations programme on AIDS and explicitly noted that “This will involve a theme group on HIV/AIDS established by the resident coordinator and comprising representatives of the six co-sponsors and other United Nations system organizations”. ¹ By 1996, UN theme groups on AIDS were established in 132 countries.² Since then a number of evaluations³ have reported on the importance of the theme group mechanism for system-wide coordination.

19. Many noted that the presence of a full-time UNAIDS country coordinator was critical for supporting the coordinated response at country level. Others pointed to the importance of the UN Secretary-General’s letter of December 2005 instructing resident coordinators to establish Joint UN Teams and Programmes on AIDS as reflecting the high level of importance given to AIDS and system-wide coherence around AIDS. The lesson learnt is that a coordination mechanism is important to not only to develop but also to support the implementation and monitoring of joint programmes.

20. UNAIDS innovation of the “Three Ones” has been invaluable in forging coherence in national AIDS responses, as well as supporting national ownership, and has had a very positive impact on internal UN coherence around AIDS. National ownership is key to effective coordination. There needs to be one common plan, one coordination mechanism and one evaluation system that is locally owned and supported by the myriad UN and other development partners, rather than the national response having to adapt itself to a variety of external mandates in order to secure needed resources. The Three Ones have given UNAIDS more credibility outside the UN while also helping the UN to focus on its value added and alignment with national priorities. The lesson learnt is to embed reform in the country context and with all relevant actors.

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¹ ECOSOC resolution 1994/24. V.15.
² UNAIDS/PCB (5)/97.5 The United Nations System at Country Level, p.2.
³ See UNAIDS/PCB(13)/02.2 Five-Year Evaluation of UNAIDS
21. **UNAIDS progressed when coherence focused around results and on one joint programme over process.** In Rwanda, a “one UN” pilot country, the focus started with creating a joint plan, a coherent, results-oriented strategy, guided by the Millennium Development Goals and national development priorities instead of focusing on debates around the “one leader” role and titles of country representatives and directors. As one interviewee noted, “delivering as one” will depend on “deep personality changes” and the organizational “culture” change that is needed will not happen overnight.

> “The worst culprits are at headquarters, not at country level. Part of the problem is that we all (Joint UN team) agree at country level, than I get different orders from headquarters”
> Ethiopia UN agency head

22. **UNAIDS has learnt the importance of clarity and coherence between headquarters’ policies and country-level actions.** A number of UN officials in country offices were frustrated by the unclear and sometimes contradictory instructions from their headquarters, when, at the country level, the joint team was collaborative and ready to move forward together. Until recently, in some instances, the reverse is true and country representatives and resident coordinators were not willing to follow global agreements endorsed by UNAIDS cosponsors and the PCB, such as refusing country team membership to the country coordinator.

23. Whereas the Division of Labour is valuable in clarifying roles, we have experienced that regular communications on it is key and that assumptions should not be made that roles are clearly understood.

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<th><strong>Still facing many challenges</strong></th>
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<td>- Different systems, organizational cultures, governance among cosponsors, lack of financial and other incentives for institutions and career incentives for staff</td>
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<td>- Weak accountability in parts of the system</td>
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<td>- Lack of coherence among member states (particularly in terms of governance and funding)</td>
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<td>- Major communication gaps between headquarters and country offices, between the UN system and the world</td>
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<td>- Lack of clarity of relationship with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and malaria</td>
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<td>- Continuing high transaction costs and cumbersome processes</td>
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<td>- Further developing our work with civil society at many levels</td>
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24. **UNAIDS has learnt that genuine coherence must engage civil society at all levels.** The early years of UNAIDS focused on relationship building among the different UN co-sponsors, but quickly realized the importance of reaching out to civil society and other partners. UNAIDS is generally perceived as the most open and accessible to civil society engagement. This varies across countries, but the sense of civil society feeling some level of ownership in UNAIDS and the Joint AIDS Programme was consistently high.

25. Constant pressure to perform and be accountable to broader civil society, and not just an internal bureaucracy, has earned UNAIDS a unique relevance and credibility well beyond UN systems, while also bringing a different type of credibility to the UN system. In the area of policy development, UNAIDS has systematically included various components of civil society.

> “It has taken a long time to take down the nice philosophy of UNAIDS to understand how to really implement [the principles of it]. Now we understand, we see that we have a seat now. Now that we have a seat, we need to be trained to have more of a voice, to speak up.”
> Civil society representative, Honduras
Engaging civil society is equally important at regional and global levels, with civil society representation on the PCB being the only current example of nongovernmental organization representation on a UN entity board.

26. Against the progress in engaging civil society, challenges persist in determining the best ways to work meaningfully together and set mutually acceptable expectations. The experience of the UN High Level Meeting on AIDS in June 2006 was an example of significant engagement by civil society, but a sense that there could have been deeper involvement.

27. It is worth noting that the high level panel report only peripherally noted the importance of engaging civil society, although local and transnational civil society movements are of growing importance.

28. While UNAIDS has been working to influence others to create coherent global, regional and local responses to AIDS, it has been changing its own ways to be responsive to an evolving AIDS and development landscape. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria was set up six years after UNAIDS was established, with little attention to addressing a relationship with UNAIDS. In response to the emergence of a multitude of players as well as new financial mechanisms, we have identified “making the money work” as a key focus of its work. UNAIDS recognizes that it needs to be flexible and responsive as the world outside the UN is not moving in the direction of coherence, but is instead favoring the establishment of issue-specific initiatives without consideration of how the multitude of initiatives might work with each other. Coherence in the AIDS response—across the multitude of players—becomes even more pressing in this complex environment.

29. UN reform will need to take a critical look at the added value that the UN can bring to development concerns given the growing number of players and new available financing mechanisms, many of which have resources well beyond those available to the UN. It is a critical concern which was not addressed in the high level panel report.

30. While the global response to AIDS is UNAIDS’ core mandate, we are not trying to resolve it ourselves. This has meant that, as an organization we have generally not “done projects” or managed a lot of money. This has had 2 impacts. First, it has freed up time to talk objectively about the substantive issues at the global and country level and, secondly, it has changed the nature of the discourse away being narrowly focused on project implementation or traditional fund raising to a more strategic, leveraging role. UNAIDS has raised money for AIDS but has not been the agency spending it. We have sought to influence the use of resources, by focusing on the policy environment and “making the money work”. The lesson learned is that if your job is to coordinate, you should implement.

“Money is important for advocacy and technical work, but what we have received from UNAIDS is more important—political support, opening doors.”
Nongovernmental Organization, Honduras

“There should be one budgetary framework for the One Country Programme, reflecting all contributions. Donors should increasingly pool their contributions at the country or headquarters level, based on United Nations performance in pilot cases. They should increasingly refrain from funding country-level interventions by the United Nations system outside the One Country Programme.”
“Delivering as one”
Report of the high level panel on system-wide coherence, p.51
Financing

31. If the “one UN” reform process establishes the proposed “one budgetary framework” as recommended in the high level panel report, UNAIDS experience with the Unified Budget and Work (UBW) plan should be taken into consideration. The UBW has been a valuable budgeting tool as well as an instrument for driving policy coherence and articulating division of labor across the cosponsors. The UBW can also be a valuable accountability instrument because it addresses clarity of money flows and deliverables by agency in one document, although its use as an accountability mechanism has not been fully realized. The opening statement of the 2006-2007 UBW sums up clearly the critical role of the UBW as a framework for system-wide coherence: “The Unified Budget and Workplan for 2006-2007 of the Joint United Nation Progamme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is a reflection of UN reform in action, uniting in a single two-year strategic framework the coordinated HIV and AIDS work of 10 agencies of the UN system.” UNAIDS is also unique in that it is the only UN entity which currently raises funds for all other UN agencies well beyond the funds needed for the Secretariat.

32. Disparate financial and administrative processes continue to be an obstacle. UNAIDS functions across a number of different financial and administrative structures lent by its cosponsors, particularly WHO, UNDP and UNICEF. The transaction costs are high in terms of timeliness as well as cost-effectiveness. As noted in the April 2007 Assessment of the GTT implementation4, “Current differences in operational systems between agencies hinder joint UN working. These include differences in accounting, contracting and procurement procedures, in overhead charges, in monitoring systems and in financial and budget cycles.” UN reform and aspirations for “delivering as one” will continue to be limited as long as systems are incongruent.

33. Practices around AIDS funding of UN system organizations have not been coherent. While some have promoted coherence, others have undermined the coordination efforts by UNAIDS. Funding of the UBW and, in some cases, of joint country programmes on AIDS have supported the development of UNAIDS. In contrast, there continues to be donor financing of AIDS activities by individual cosponsors outside the agreed Unified Budget and Workplan (UBW) at global level, and for individual projects outside the joint programmes agreed at country level—even before the joint programmes and UBW are fully funded, thereby undermining joint programming.

34. The implications of new multilateral financial flows and mechanisms need to be weighed carefully, and coherence becomes even more important to ensure that seamless streams of funding are available. While the establishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria has created unprecedented opportunities for funding of AIDS programmes, it has also lead to the creation of parallel coordination mechanisms such as the County Coordinating Mechanism (CCM). It has put additional demands on UNAIDS Country Coordinators, whom now spend 25-50% of their time supporting Global Fund processes. The conditions for funding also introduce new risks, as interrupted funding flows can interrupt needed prevention and treatment supplies.

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Accountability

35. **One of the biggest concerns in UNAIDS is the need for better accountability and incentives for collaboration.** UNAIDS has learnt that in order for UN coherence to be truly realized, strict accountability mechanisms needs to be put in place. Performance measurement is key to effectively achieving “one UN”.

Implications of current UN coherence efforts for UNAIDS

36. **Current UN coherence efforts are a significant opportunity for UNAIDS to deepen its work towards a more relevant UN system.** Greater acceptance of joint programmes and streamlining of administrative procedures in the current environment should significantly help to accelerate the work of joint programmes and teams in countries.

37. **In light of the proposed “one leader” model, where the resident coordinator function becomes a strictly coordinating role across the different UN entities, will there be any implications for the coordinating function of the UNAIDS country coordinator and overall management of AIDS?** Given the multiple figures bearing some level of AIDS leadership—the UNAIDS country coordinator, the resident coordinator, the theme group chair, the head of the national AIDS programme, it will be important to re-affirm the coordinating and leadership role of the UNAIDS country coordinator.

Recommendations

38. **Current coherence efforts should be informed by the UNAIDS experience.** The growing pressures for the UN to reform its processes to be more efficient, coherent and collaborative across the system is an opportunity for UNAIDS cosponsors and partners to share and champion their experiences and commitment to coherence. The PCB itself is a coordination mechanism which is a tangible example of UNAIDS working to ensure a coherent response to AIDS.

39. **The Global Task Team recommendations need to be accelerated and championed as a contribution to UN reform.** The Global Task Team recommendations detail the most advanced mechanisms and actions towards coherence and alignment, including the engagement of non-UN entities including the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, bilateral donors and Nongovernmental organizations, and have been approved by the boards of the UNAIDS co-sponsors and the Global Fund board. The risk is that the Global Task Team process may be diluted or slowed down in UN reform efforts if the recommendations are not proactively pursued. They recommendations need to be proactively pursued.

40. **UNAIDS should have a full role in “one UN” country pilots, just as UNAIDS country coordinators are full members of the UN country team (UN Development Group decision).** While UNAIDS is not an agency per se, it has a unique legitimacy, and in fact path-finder role, in a reforming UN country team. UNAIDS engages more UN bodies—including specialized agencies and the World Bank—through its nature as a joint and cosponsored UN programme than any other UN entity.

41. **More attention needs to be paid to incentives and accountability issues in the UN system.** The performance assessment of all cosponsor and secretariat staff members should include distinct indicators on collaborative support to the joint and cosponsored
programme on AIDS as indicative of willingness towards broader UN processes. More generally, all UN system staff job descriptions, performance appraisals and career development must from now on measure performance and accountability on coherence issues and participation in joint teams. Heads of agencies should give clear instructions to their respective country offices on the need for collaborative efforts.

42. **Coordination around AIDS through the mechanism of UNAIDS must stay intact through the piloting of the UN reform process.** It cannot become the “baby in the bathwater” that gets thrown out as unnecessary in an environment trying to move towards “one UN”. Despite a changing environment at many levels, we must go on with our work (from the Global Task Team to universal access and “making the money work”) while supporting general reform. The pace and character of UN reform is highly varied across countries and, given the need for an exceptional response to AIDS, it is crucial that momentum is not lost in the global AIDS response as other parts of the UN system work towards coherence. Mechanisms and processes supporting “one UN” in the global AIDS response have been universally agreed upon by all member states, they reach well beyond a small group of UN organizations, and should not risk being lost in the still tenuous and uneven UN reform process.

43. **UNAIDS should continually document its contributions to greater UN coherence on AIDS,** and as it applies to UN coherence in general.

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“*The Resident Coordinator is very committed to UN reform and joint programming and there is no resistance to AIDS coordination. There is willingness here, but no real understanding on how (to move forward).*”

Ethiopia UNAIDS officer

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1. “Delivering as one”, Report of the Secretary-General’s high level panel on UN system-wide coherence 9 November 2006.

2. Decisions, recommendations and conclusions of the 19th Meeting of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board, Lusaka, Zambia, 6-8 December 2006. Item 3.11.