Chapter 4

Greater Operational Coherence, Coordination, and Harmonization

With the aim of improving UN coordination and effectiveness in supporting national development goals, the countries have focused on three important initiatives: (1) Joint Programmes; (2) Common Services and Common Premises; and (3) Joint Offices. The measures are intended to increase coherence, coordination, and harmonization of UN activities — while reducing transaction and operational costs for national governments, donors, national counterparts, and the UN itself. This simplification and harmonization programme is also central to the UN's effort to implement the Paris Declaration. While cost-efficiency is one of the motivations for these reforms, the common denominator is the facilitation and support of coherent programmatic initiatives towards increased national capacity.

Effectively Working Together: Joint Programmes

Context

To enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the UN system, UN agencies are engaging in Joint Programmes (JPs) and strengthening joint initiatives with governments and other local partners. JPs add value as a rational response to addressing national priorities in a coordinated and cost effective manner. While drawing on UN agency comparative advantages and expertise, they build capacity and maximize synergies among national partners.

Innovations

For 2006, in response to agency concerns, the UNDG Resident Coordinator's Annual Report (RCAR) matrix included a one page JP template for data collection. The template required that UNCTs specify project duration, funding modality, managing agents, national partners, total budget, and other key elements. As a result, reporting quality was notably improved.

With the understanding that the programmatic dimension should be at the heart of closer UN cooperation, UNCTs reported that they are increasingly seeking to achieve the vision of the "Three Ones" framework — One programme, one team, one leader — through the elaboration of joint programmes. UNCTs cited that collaborative programming experiences further strengthened team building across operational cadres of UN agencies' staff. Some country offices noted that JPs encouraged multiple disciplinary insights and approaches to issues with a distinctive "UN brand." While some UNCTs reported implementing programme interventions through JPs, others took steps to house "joint teams" in one location to facilitate collaboration and pooled funding.

Statistics summary

As shown in the charts and diagram below, in 2006, 76 out of the 134 UNCTs worldwide — approximately 57 percent — reported having developed or been in the process of implementing at least one joint programme. Other countries that have ongoing JPs may not have reported theme again in that year. The JP database

Theme Reported	JPs Reported (Millions USD)	JPs Reported (%)	Budget Reported (Millions USD)	Budget Reported (%)
HIV/AIDS	38	22%	141	33%
Gender	18	10%	17	4%
Health	17	10%	63	15%
MDGs	16	9%	12	3%
Children/Youth	13	8%	33	8%
Human Rights	12	7%	5	1%
Conflict/Disaster	12	7%	44	10%
Food Security	10	6%	19	4%
Education	10	6%	7	2%
Governance/Democracy	9	5%	53	12%
Poverty Reduction	7	4%	20	5%
Community Development	7	4%	14	3%
Sustainable Development	4	2%	1	0%
Total	**173**	**100%**	**429**	**100%**

currently lists a total of 345 JPs. By comparison, 71 UNCTs reported having developed a JP in 2005, and only 29 in 2004. The regional breakdown of reporting UNCTs for 2006 was: 56 percent in Africa; 35 percent in Arab States; 74 percent in Asia; 63 percent in Europe & CIS; and 52 percent in LAC.

Out of all the joint programmes reported, 173 indicated the theme of the JP. These themes somewhat overlap and subsume each other, and are thus difficult to either aggregate or disaggregate. Further, not all joint programmes listed a theme or a budget. Nonetheless, the most common themes undertaken were: HIV/AIDS, Gender, Health, MDGs, and Children/Youth. The highest budgets were apportioned to HIV/AIDS, Health, Governance/Democracy, and Conflict/Disaster.

Last year the funding modalities of 158 JPs were reported globally, and were broken down as: 76 (48 percent) Parallel; 34 (22 percent) Pooled; 21 (13 percent) Pass-through; and 27 (17 percent) a combination. As also indicated in the accompanying graphs, there was wide agency support in JP planning and implementation, including 115 cases of participation of one or more specialized agencies.

Honduras – Scaling up Capacity for Youth Development through Joint Programming

Utilizing a combined pooled and parallel funding modality, UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO – in alliance with GTZ and CIDA – established the "Programmes for the Promotion for the Development of Adolescents and Young People." The main objective of this project, which stemmed from a human rights and public policy perspective, is to promote and strengthen national efforts within the government, civil society, and youth groups to nurture youth development in Honduras.

Through this program the UNCT facilitated the approval of the Comprehensive Development of Honduran Youth Law Framework; the creation of the Alliance for Children, Adolescents, and Youth; and the signing and implementation of the Pact for Children, Adolescents, and Youth of Honduras. The JP equally contributed to the operationalization of the National Youth Institute, the strengthening of the municipal programs for youth; the strengthening of national capacities for the promotion of youth development, with emphasis on the prevention of violence and HIV/AIDS; and the increase in participation of adolescents and young people in development programmes and projects.

## Cuba – Scaling up Capacity through Joint Programming

Eight agencies participated in the Local Human Development Programme (PDHL) JP that supports local capacity building on public policy management in nine provinces. Administered by UNDP, this pass-through project is a Governance themed initiative with a total budget of $24 million. With five bilateral donors and over 300 decentralized entities, the private sector and developing countries collaborated in this initiative.

Implementing approximately 180 projects, the PDHL JP promoted innovative experiences in the achievement of the MDGs at the local level. The JP was managed in a participatory way, with 44 projects including inter-agency content. The ability to replicate some of the initiatives at the national level reflected the success of the programme, and the collected experience offered a reference for a participatory methodology in several global forums (in Canada, Spain, and Venezuela).
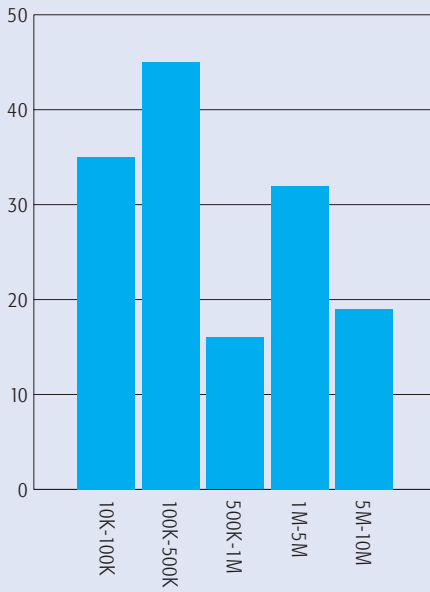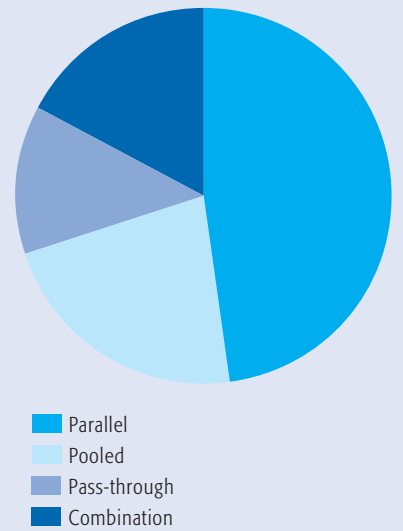
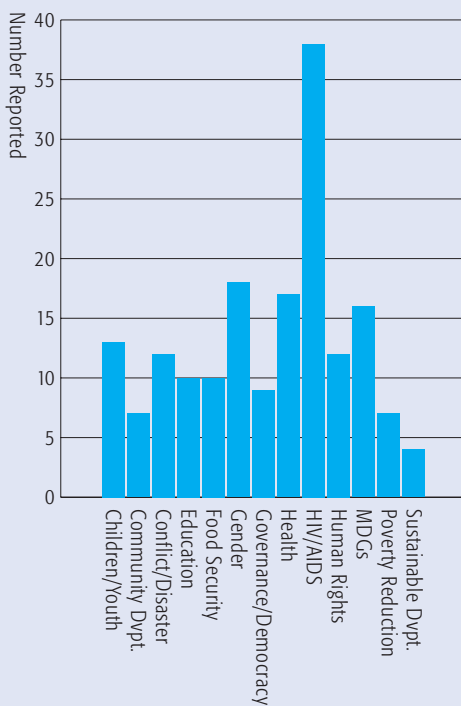# Joint Programme Statistics Summary Charts

Country JPs by Region

Legend:
- UNCTs
- UNCTs that Reported JPs
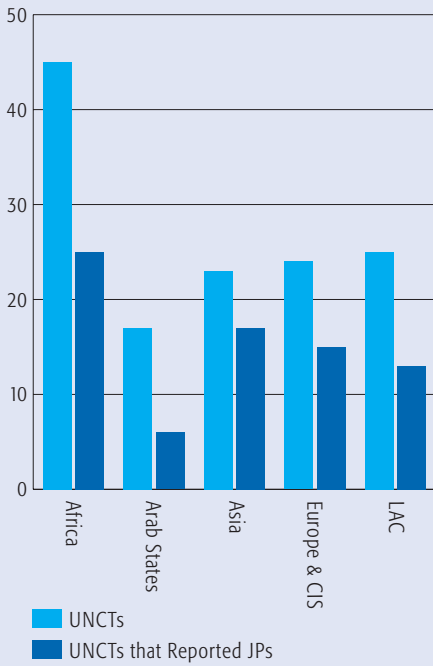
Joint Programmes Budget Size

Number of Joint Programmes Globally by Funding Modality

Legend:
- Parallel
- Pooled
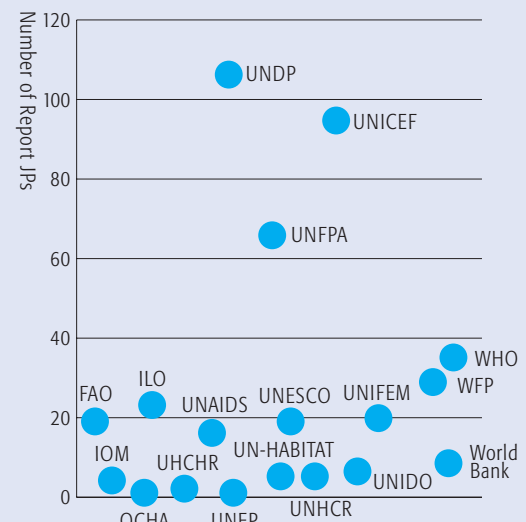- Pass-through
- Combination

Joint Programmes by Theme Globally

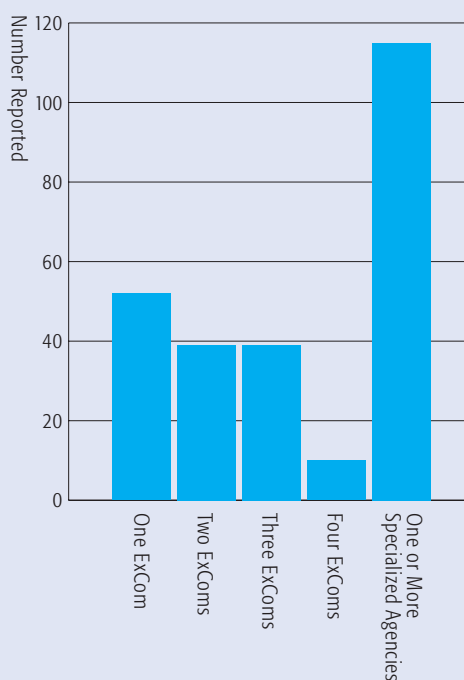## Joint Programmes Budget by Theme Globally
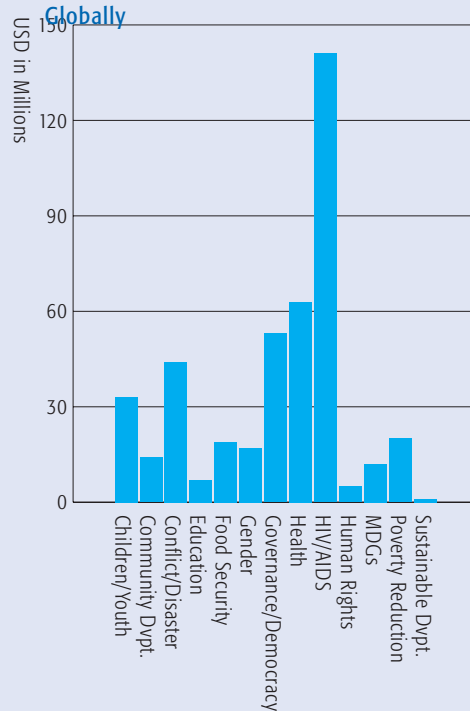
2006 Participation in JPs

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ExCom Agency Participation in JPs

- UNDP
- UNICEF
- UNFPA
- WFP
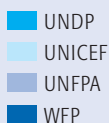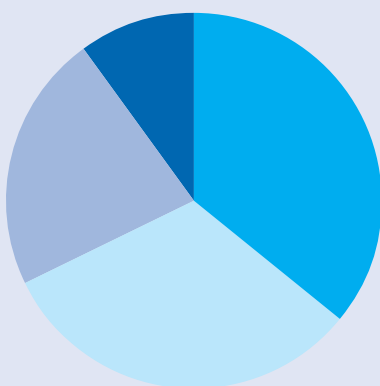
Agencies Coordination in Joint Programmes

Number Reported (y-axis: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100, 120)

Categories: One ExCom, Two ExComs, Three ExComs, Four ExComs, One or More Specialized Agencies

Reported advantages of Joint Programmes

In 2006, UNCTs continued to report on the advantages of engaging in JPs, and noted:

- Improved coordination of UN interventions among agencies, especially at field locations.

- Increased support from local authorities when dealing with multiple agencies.

- Multiplied disciplinary insights and approaches to issues, with distinctive UN branding.

- Reduced programme duplication and greater UN agency synergies in supporting same sector/priorities.

- Enhanced development impacts and strengthened team building across UN staff operational cadres.

Reported challenges in Joint Programmes

UNCTs reported numerous challenges in terms of JP development, tools, financial procedures, and donor involvement:

JP Development

- Development of JPs is time intensive, particularly in relation to working out the mode of cooperation.

- Agencies do not have formally established mechanisms/incentives to motivate staff to participate in joint activities.

- Joint activities should be reflected in staff member' annual work plans that properly assess participation. Otherwise, staff members might continue to give overriding priority to agency-specific work tasks.

JP Tools

- Although good collaboration presently exists among agency programme staff, the tendency is to shy away from full-fledged JPs. Further tools may be needed to facilitate the development of JPs.

- Some staff had insufficient knowledge of existing JP tools and cost-recovery issues.

- Current JP tools do not adequately measure the increase in efficiency and the reduction in observed transactions costs.

- Perceived institutional restrictions on co-location and pooled agency funding currently hinder JPs. Clear joint guidelines are required on how to pool resources and co-locate staff members.

- Some reluctance to participate in JPs continues due to perceived extra administrative burdens, different reporting systems among agencies, and the only modest encouragement received from the respective corporate hierarchies.

Financial Procedures

- Required agency administrative costs were an obstacle.

- Cash transfer procedures between agencies were still cumbersome and time-consuming.

- Diversity in the financial system platforms impeded rapid response.

- Agency internal administrative and financial procedures were not harmonized.

- Agencies used diverse cost recovery policies.

- There were different trends of HQ clearance for participating agencies.

- The multi-bilateral funding practice of some donors was not conducive to encouraging JPs.

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Turkey – Mobilizing Partners through a Joint Programme

The UNCT in Turkey formulated its first joint programme ever, a two-year UN Joint Programme on Promoting and Protecting Women and Girls' Human Rights. UNFPA is the management agent for this $1.5 million pooled funding project that was officially launched in March 2006 and has completed its first nine months of implementation. The JP is a product of the UN Gender Thematic Group, which agreed to use it as a pilot in six cities and expand implementation throughout the country. The preparation process was participatory and, in addition to the UN system, involved the governmental, nongovernmental, and private sectors as well as academia and donors. In line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, this programme provided leverage for combining and rationalizing bilateral aid for gender equality to avoid duplication while still providing a forum for active partnership.

Conclusion

In 2006, UNCTs across regions stressed how national partners perceive joint programmes as pooling UN expertise, promoting synergies, strengthening capacity, and streamlining efficiencies. JPs encourage multi-disciplinary insights and reduce programme duplication. Nevertheless, in 2006, UNCTs continued to stress the financial and procedural constraints and to call for more relevant JP tools.

- Several UNCTS recommended that UN financial systems and policies should be simplified and unified to facilitate JPs.

- Individual management and governance structures often hinder rather than facilitate collaboration between agencies and synchronized support to national partners.

- One UNCT commented that agencies should assess their staffing skills and competencies to best position UN technical comparative advantage. Other country offices underlined that necessary agency behavioral changes could in fact be achieved by co-locations and a single work-plan.

- UNCTs still describe problems in quantifying, attributing, and reporting concrete joint capacity development results and impacts.

- Because JPs are still very new, reported JPs also include little to no monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks. However, some UNCTs cited an M&E component for future JPs.

An evaluation of the new wave of JPs should help demonstrate whether joint programmes are more effective than single agency programmes in delivering enhanced capacity development results.

## Effectively Working Together: Common Premises and Services

A crucial component of UN reform is to increase shared and integrated operational activities. The objective is to strengthen system coherence at country level and realize efficiency gains. In 2006, UNCTs continued to focus on improving and developing common services and establishing common premises.

Common Premises

The main purpose of establishing and maintaining Common Premises (CP), including UN Houses, is to co-locate UNCTs and other relevant inter-agency staff groupings. CP creates closer ties among UN staff, facilitates cooperation and promotes a more unified, cost-effective in-country presence.

The 60 UN Houses designated up to now were comparatively easy to establish. Although there were a number of challenging cases, the process primarily consisted of designating pre-existing common premises provided by host governments.

Premises Project Inventory
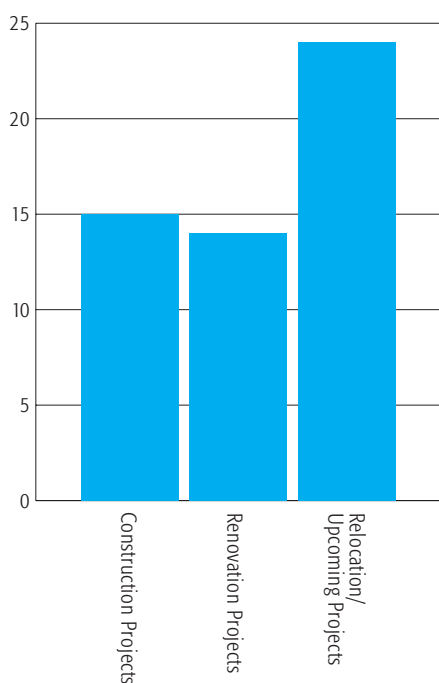
Going beyond the 60 currently existing UN Houses represents more of a challenge to the UN system, both at country level and at headquarters as it includes renovation and construction projects. The new construction-focused nature of UN House/CP projects will require further capacity to support the oversight and management of developers; comprehensive models and design standards; and on-the-ground expertise and authority.

The Working Group on Common Premises (WGCP) consists of senior facilities managers from UNDG ExCom agencies. WGCP has been tasked with providing substantive premises related guidance and support to UNCTs. It drafts and audits proposals, assesses funding eligibility, and determines support packages. The WGCP active case load at the end of 2006 included 15 constructions, 14 renovations, and 24 relocations or upcoming projects.

Common Services

In 2006 the majority of UNCTs reported on plans and achievements in the area of Common Services (CS). African, Asian, and Pacific countries reflected particularly high levels of activity.

Examples of frequently implemented internal services in 2006 included: common banking services, leading to lower bank charges and increased service level; medical dispensary services, ensuring staff and dependents access to satisfactory medical facilities; shared translation services and competitively negotiated conference and meeting arrangements, thereby reducing costs; shared travel services arrangements, facilitating travel and reducing prices; and common procurement arrangements, lowering costs and simplifying processes and supplier relationships. This list shows that the bulk of common services did not cover core business functions.

The agencies participating in the UN House (UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, UNFP, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS, ILO, UNDOC, and IOM) coordinated their efforts to develop more and better Common Services. Additional operational efficiencies were gained in the following areas:

(1) Security: A professional security company with significant experience was hired to provide daily security of the building and surrounding area.

(2) Travel: An RFP process was undertaken and a UN Travel Agent was selected. The company is well established and provides a full range of travel and hotel booking services. The location of the travel office in the UN House enabled the participating agencies to fully outsource the travel process, contributing greatly to increased efficiency.

(3) Archiving: UNDP began using the service of a professional archiving company, substantively decreasing archiving costs and freeing up office space. The participation of other agencies would lead to further savings.

(4) Maintenance: Cleaning and office maintenance services were also outsourced.

(5) Information Technology: All UN House agencies share the same IT network and common hardware and software. The IT management and system administration to the entire UN House is provided by the UNDP IT department, allowing for a) substantive cost savings for all agencies and b) better overall IT management, including constant development and upgrade of UN House hardware and software.

(6) Communications: The UN House agencies share the same phone and internet providers.

While these CS are not new, 2006 saw developments in quality, primarily through the use of more programme oriented CS intended to support efficient delivery and joint initiatives such as: shared field and sub-offices; common training/learning initiatives; commonly managed transport fleets supporting joint field missions; and common consultant rosters. In the area of common travel services, direct negotiations with the airlines resulted in better and more transparent pricing structures. In the area of procurement, UNCTs reported cost/benefit analyses, including increased buying power and time savings. Finally, UNCTs reported greater usage of common network management and service arrangements, due primarily to the availability of well managed networks with higher bandwidth at reduced prices.

Virtually all UNCTs emphasized the central role of Operation Management Teams (OMTs) in the process of developing, establishing, and managing common services. One UNCT emphasized the importance of using senior representatives from each agency to speed up decision-making processes and stressed the importance of focusing solely on core service requirements.

Another UNCT made direct reference to the lack of a well defined accountability mechanism requiring reporting on the achievement of specific and quantifiable results. The Regional Directors Team (RDT) structure could well provide the appropriate accountability mechanism.

Challenge – assessing and documenting efficiency gains from Common Services

It was expected that the pilot introduction of the Common Services Management System would result in an ability to demonstrate the overall achievement of measurable results. This was not achieved in 2006.

- Even CS pilot countries more experienced in the practice — selected based on the presence of a comprehensive common services action plan and the in-country presence of a Common Services Expert — faced difficulties in quantifying results in monetary terms.

- A key issue is that while the planning for joint expenditure for common services is undertaken on a joint basis, the resulting savings and value added are achieved internally by the participating agencies.

- Any planning for and subsequent realization of planned savings and avoided cost require internal and agency-specific action and reporting.

Conclusion

- The new construction-focused nature of CP projects requires further capacity to support the oversight of developers, comprehensive models and design standards, and on-the-ground expertise.

- While CS successfully assisted UNCTs in obtaining the necessary support tools, the tools were not used to harmonize or share core business activities. This resulted in missed opportunities for process and structure integration and joint programme implementation.

- In 2007 the One UN Pilot Countries will be supported to apply the CS approach to the central business activities such as finance, procurement, interactive communications technology, and human resources. To the extent they prove feasible, successfully tested and demonstrated practices will subsequently be shared with non-pilot countries.

- An encouraging 2006 development was the increased emphasis on CS that support and facilitate joint programming initiatives such as joint field offices.

- The Common Services Management System will be used by pilot countries to facilitate country-based management and oversight, results accountability to RDTs, and shared good practices.

Effectively Working Together: The Joint Office Initiative

In consideration of the UN reform process, the 2004 Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review and ECOSOC referred to "joint offices" as a way to respond to national needs and plans. Joint offices are intended to build on the strengths of the UN system and guarantee greater aid effectiveness and coherence at the country level.

In 2006 the first joint office, called the United Nations Office of Funds and Programmes in Cape Verde, was initiated by the four Executive Committee agencies (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and WFP). This was followed by an initiative in Viet Nam to work towards One UN, a process led by the Government of Viet Nam.

Cuba – A Joint Procurement and Importation Process

As a follow up to a consultation process in which the Operations Management Team (OMT) analyzed the amount of time, energy, and resources that each agency spent in the acquisition of equipment, furniture, and materials, the OMT realized a first joint procurement and importation process. In a national context characterized by limited offers on the local market and difficulties for commercial importations, the OMT identified and negotiated acquisitions with a sole supplier thus benefiting from economies of scale. The savings from this joint purchase amounted to an average of 30 percent. Additionally, the OMT evaluated a positive effect of a joint effort in terms of time saved in the bureaucratic, administrative, and financial processes. The opening to the international market permitted access to products unavailable on the local market as well as higher quality and faster delivery.

Achievements included: joint identification of suppliers, efficient bidding process, and a unified negotiation mechanism; economies of scale and reduction in transportation costs and delivery time; access to products not available on the national market and of higher quality; beneficial payment agreements with the supplier; and satisfaction in relation to quality and guarantee of products.

The lessons learned included: organizational learning during the process of identification, negotiation, delivery, and payment of merchandise; strengthening of joint negotiation capacities; harmonization in the area of operational processes; and the realization of financial incentives for joint negotiations on bulk purchases.

India – A Fully Operational Common Services OMT

The Operations Management Team for common services in India was fully operational in 2006. The OMT introduced a rotating Chair for a period of six months among UN agencies. The OMT also established state OMTs where UN agencies were present.

The numerous achievements include awarding a joint travel contract, institutionalizing a common UN ID card system, implementing joint procurement of Personal Protective Equipment Kits for avian flu, and appointing a stress and well-being counselor. A joint vendor database is being developed and will be ready in 2007. Along with a joint orientation for new UN staff, in November 2006 the OMT organized the first ever joint UN Administration & Finance Workshop for State Administration and Finance Assistants. Besides fully acquainting participants with a CS workshop, the event provided an opportunity to piece together a comprehensive work plan. Participating agencies included UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, and WFP.

Finally, a Local Spouse Employment Association (LESA) was formed. It commissioned a study on enabling a legal environment for spouse employment and formed partnerships with other India-based groups to increase employment options for UN spouses.

The Joint Office Initiative

The Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review in 2004 and ECOSOC resolutions describe the rationale for the Joint Office Initiative (JOI): "The United Nations…must find ways to reduce its administrative costs that hobble the delivery of development aid. Freeing up additional resources and channeling them to nationally driven programme work is imperative. In countries where the United Nations system presence is very small, the combined representation, staffing, and support costs of United Nations agencies are often excessive in proportion to their small programme budgets. The Joint Office model is designed to improve the effectiveness of the United Nations in such countries by rationalizing representation and improving the ratio of programme to support costs." (ECOSOC Resolution E/2005/CRP1)

Cape Verde – Main Findings from the Cape Verde Joint Office Review

Accomplishments:

• The common country programme (CCP) was prepared and adopted, and was translated into a Common Programme Action Plan and Annual Work Plans. Overlap and competition have been addressed and collaboration has been fostered among agencies.

• The government and donors in Cape Verde were unanimously positive about the advantages of having one representative for the four ExCom Agencies, which has led to reduced transaction costs.

• Interaction between government and donors was facilitated, leading to increased UN agency visibility in the country.

• A significant reduction in the administrative and procedural burdens of the UN and its national partners was achieved; the 2006 disbursement rate of the common country office was over 90 percent.

Challenges:

• The Joint Office was still deemed a work in progress; the UN system and agency support remain a necessity.

• Ownership is critical for successful implementation.

• Continuity of leadership and continuous dialogue with senior government counterparts, especially during Joint Office negotiation and preparatory phases, are necessary to ensure prompt and effective decisions.

• Challenges remain on how to mirror country-level business process changes with regional and headquarter-level changes in order to attain greater coherence and synergies.

• Challenges remain on how to be inclusive without undermining progress towards the agreed upon common country programme document (CPD), country program action plan (CPAP), and current operational arrangement.

Cape Verde: A milestone in reform

While still at an early stage, the pilot in Cape Verde is the first ever Joint Office (JO), representing a unique breakthrough in the history of United Nations country operations. The UNDG ExCom agencies established a fully integrated office in Cape Verde whereby one team is supporting the implementation of a common programme based on one set of business practices and systems. The RC acts as the empowered leader, and functions as representative for all four participating agencies operating in Cape Verde. Although it is too early to evaluate the programmatic impact, an inter-agency review took place in December 2006 (see box, left). The goal was to identify lessons learned for forthcoming joint offices. Overall, the review concluded that while some aspects require further improvement, the Cape Verde Joint Office model is a favorable development, providing a unified presence and allowing for more coherent and integrated programme delivery.

Other initiatives to pursue the joint office initiative

Following the TCPR request and UNDG efforts to initiate the establishment of 20 Joint Offices by 2007, many UNCTs initiated consultations both externally and internally for possible joint office implementation. Efforts were made to realign programme activities with management structure and operation costs.

Country examples include:

- **Bangladesh** prepared a strategy paper outlining key development pillars for the One UN initiative and UN agency principles of engagement.

- In **Fiji** the UN ExCom agencies enhanced the visibility and presence of UN agencies by introducing the lead agency approach, whereby UNFPA, UNDP, and UNICEF set up UN agencies in the island sub-regions.

- In **Uruguay** and **Djibouti** roadmaps on moving towards a Joint Office were developed to promote programmatic synergies and joint cost-efficient operations. Field operation arrangements were also concluded in **Bulgaria** between UNICEF and UNDP.

- In **Papua New Guinea** an important accomplishment has been the common United Nations Country Programme (UNCP). The UNCP highlights a comprehensive roadmap for programme harmonization and UN reform implementation.

- **Montenegro** showed strong interest in rationalizing the country presence of the five resident agencies. The UNCT, in close consultation with the newly independent country, agreed on key strategic programmatic areas and committed financial and human resources for the implementation plan.

- **Malawi** made significant progress towards positioning the UN in the changing aid environment. The UNCT agreed on a UN vision and undertook a capacity assessment to implement effectively their business plan. As a result, the UNDAF was turned into an UNDAF resource mobilization strategy, reducing administrative procedure.

Conclusion

In 2006 calls for enhanced UN coherence increased, as reflected in the establishment of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence. The High Level Panel Report on Delivering As One, in calling for a more strategic and effective contribution to national priorities and international commitments, substantially accelerated the pace of country-level reform in eight pilot countries: Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay, and Viet Nam.

- Challenges remain and lessons learned can be drawn from the Joint Office process, in particular:

- Government leadership and dialoguing are necessary to ensure effective decisions — especially during the initial joint office negotiation and preparation phase.

- Difficulties lie in identifying the best way of working together, while not losing individual agency ownership, visibility, and accountability. The Joint Programming concept (where agency visibility and accountability is preserved within a shared plan and added-value support) offers a potential solution.

- Challenges remain regarding the harmonization of country-level changes with existing headquarters and regional business processes.

Viet Nam – A Process Lead by the Government

While a joint office was originally deemed more appropriate for countries with modest UN operations, larger countries, such as Viet Nam, are leading the way to rationalize in-country UN presence.

The progress made in Viet Nam is largely due to the government leadership in driving the process within the context of recommendations of the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence (HLP). The "Agreed Principles, Objectives, and Instruments" and the Tripartite National Task Force (TNTF) were established at an early stage to guide the implementation of the Delivering as One/One UN initiative.

The "One Plan" was developed on the basis of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF 2006-2010). This was further complemented by the CPDs and CPAPs of the participating agencies.

The ExCom agencies (UNICEF, UNFPA, and UNDP) and UNAIDS, UNIFEM, and UNV are exploring ways to further the One Leader concept. The agencies seek to empower the RC with greater authority over the development of the One Plan and allocation of resources from the coherence fund.