

# DELIVERING AS ONE: COULD IT HELP THE 2030 SDG AGENDA?

Sally Fegan-Wyles

Delivering as One (DaO) was the most recent comprehensive UN reform program. It is now synonymous with converging UN operations at country level through a single leader, office, program, budget, fund, and voice (six “ones”). An architect of DaO reviews the record and asks how this process could be applied, or modified, in the SDG era, especially in the next Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR).

The premise driving DaO was to increase national ownership, enhance the impact of UN support, and reduce the transaction costs on national governments generated by working with a fragmented UN. It was also intended to test different models for UN coherence. Central to this approach were three assumptions: First, national governments would be willing to play a leadership role. Second, the UN Development Group (UNDG) would provide pilot countries with strong, capable leadership, dedicated staff to support coordination, and consistent political and operational support from the headquarters (HQ) and regional levels. Third, the UNDG would move quickly to harmonize the business processes, introduce shared information technology (IT) systems, and alleviate bottlenecks.

Initially only five countries were selected, but the list was expanded to eight to provide a regional balance and cover a diverse range of UN operations: three low-income countries with large UN operations (Mozambique, Rwanda and Tanzania), three low- to middle-income countries with two large UN operations and one Joint Office (Cape Verde, Pakistan, and Vietnam), and two upper-middle income countries with relatively small UN operations (Albania and Uruguay).

Generous funding was available for the first three years of DaO (2007-2009), and \$585 million were raised from 2008-2011 through UN multi-donor trust funds that were used to meet funding gaps in the “One Programme.” This created an additional incentive for governments and UN agencies to participate. However, by 2011, the largest donors reduced funding because of the financial crisis. Meanwhile new countries adopted the DaO approach, but funding was only available for program delivery, not coordination support capacity.

An independent evaluation in 2012<sup>1</sup> found strong evidence that national ownership had increased, especially through the use of a single budgetary framework and One Fund. The least progress was

made in reducing transaction costs for national partners and UN entities because country-level UN staff did not have the mandate to change cumbersome and incompatible procedures. There was almost no progress in tackling the bottlenecks caused by a lack of common IT and reporting systems, and no incentives for staff to go beyond their “own agency results.”

The evaluation recommended that DaO must remain voluntary, as each government should choose the best partnership with the UN. To enhance program delivery, the report called for consolidating functions, and guidance on how to maximize linkages. There were considerable differences in funding for the UN Country Team (UNCT) in pilot countries, which affected the system’s ability to promote coherence in programming. The report called for donors to maintain or increase their support to the One Fund, and for the UNCTs to consistently use the one budgetary framework. Also, the report called for member states to insist on the adoption of harmonized business practices and shared IT systems to reduce transaction costs.

## MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

One of the original objectives of DaO—the search for different approaches—was not examined in the evaluation. As a result, the subsequent discussions by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the UNDG focused on improving the implementation of DaO through the “traditional” model of a resident coordinator (RC) with a UNCT composed of UN agency representatives, despite the fact that other models were included in the pilots. Established in 2004, Cape Verde was the first and only time the “Joint Office” model was piloted. The pilot was designed to provide an alternative model for UN leadership and coordination in countries where the UN support does not justify a large presence,<sup>2</sup> as there was expectation of reduced donor funding when Cape Verde would graduate from the least developed country (LDC) group<sup>3</sup>. The Joint Office had a single official as RC, who was also representative

of all of the UN agencies present: the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, UNFPA, and initially the World Food Programme (WFP). It also had a shared operational support unit, providing administrative and financial support. Cape Verde was added to the DaO pilot in 2007 as an alternative for very small countries, but the evaluation did not look closely at this experience, and it was unable to discuss the merits of the model for other small operations. An internal UNDG review in 2013<sup>4</sup> found that the Joint Office model was strongly endorsed by government staff and development partners because there was one representative for the three resident agencies who also represented several non-resident agencies. The model reduced the staff time for coordination, allowing them to focus on program content. However, some agencies felt a lack of ownership and their regional and HQ departments did not provide the necessary support.

Given that countries are moving out of LDC status, and the resulting reduction in donor funding, the evaluation failed to analyze the relationship between the cost of DaO and the level of UN investment. The report was a missed opportunity to consider different models to make the UN more coherent in large Least Developed Countries or fragile states, compared to MICs or very small LDCs.

## THE NEXT GENERATION

The UNDG tried to improve support to the DaO countries in two ways: Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to highlight linkages and provide more guidance to RC/UNCTs; and an action plan at HQ and national level to harmonize business practices and procedures, and IT systems.

The SOPs were produced by August 2014<sup>5</sup> and are currently being introduced to all RC/UNCTs. However, while countries with UN peace operations or a large field presence can manage the additional work required for the 15 recommended processes, UNCTs in countries with a very small footprint that try to follow the SOPs will have less staff time available to support government.

Good progress was made on the items included in the HQ action plan, but it did not propose any serious changes in the agency-centric incentive systems or compatibility in key IT or reporting systems, where some of the greatest efficiency gains could be made.

Currently there are 52 countries that formally have adopted the DaO approach: 19 LICs, 23 Low Middle Income (LMICs), 8 Upper Middle Income (UMICs), and 3 HICs. All 134 RC/UNCTs are urged to apply the SOPs, whether their governments are formally requesting the DaO approach or not.

There have been great changes in the development landscape over the last twenty years that are well described elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> In 1990, 95 percent of the world's poor lived in LICs, where UN funds, programs, and agencies played a major role, and around 25 percent of official development assistance (ODA) came from the UN. Only 5 percent of the poor lived in MICs. By 2012, many of these LICs had graduated to middle-income status and the number of poor people in LICs had dropped from 1.6 to 0.3 billion. The number of LICs fell from close to 100 in the 1970s to 31 in 2015. As most donors have

parliamentary mandates to focus on at least 80 percent of ODA on LDCs, in real terms ODA channeled to LDCs through the UN has fallen from around 25 to 16 percent. Along with greatly increased direct foreign investment and remittances, the net impact has been to reduce the relative importance of UN technical assistance outside the LDCs and fragile states.

These changes have enormous implications for the UN development system (UNDS) and DaO. Countries now have better capacity to solve their own development problems. Governments can access expertise online, hire management consulting companies, or partner with non-UN international organizations, NGOs, or private foundations. Consequently, UNDS operational support is increasingly marginalized while other UN functions have grown in importance, especially peace and security. The 2010, 2012, and 2014 FUNDS global surveys polled some 10,000 respondents from governments, civil society, the private sector, the aid community, and the UN itself.<sup>7</sup> Respondents judged the UN's development functions as less crucial than its work in peace and security, the establishment of global norms, humanitarian action, or human rights and crisis recovery. The surveys also found that the role of providing technical assistance was still valued, but not in higher-income countries.

## THE SDGS

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are very different to anything that has come before,<sup>8</sup> and the role of the UN in supporting their achievement will also have to change. The goals and targets cover almost every aspect of human activity, and their achievement will depend on coherent action by national governments, civil society, private sector, and international partners. In contrast, the Millennium Development Goals were selected from the internationally agreed goals, reflecting areas where there were a lot of data already available, and where UN entities had significant capacity to support national efforts.

An attempt by the UNDG to map the capacity (mandates, human and financial capacities, and physical footprint) of members against the requirements of what would likely be the new agenda was started at the end of 2014.<sup>9</sup> However, no outcome of this exercise has been made public, possibly because there are so many goals and targets in which the UNDG's operational capacity is thin or non-existent in most countries.<sup>10</sup>

The UN's normative and convening role in the development and adoption of the new agenda is accepted and appreciated, and it will be relevant in all countries for the promotion and monitoring of the 2030 agenda. However, it is not yet clear what mechanisms the UN will use to interact with HICs, where there is no shared UN presence on issues relating to the promotion, adoption, or monitoring of the agenda.

The UN is also uniquely placed for peace operations, post-conflict/post-crisis support and human rights. While human rights will be relevant in all countries, there are about 30 countries that are fragile, in which the peace and security and post-conflict functions and humanitarian assistance will be essential. Many already have UN peace missions. Aligning the work of the UN to national priorities

and ensuring coherence between the UN mission and the work of the UNCT will be crucial given the importance of the UN investment and the weak national capacity for coordination in such countries. Significant resources are usually available to support UN coherence, from the office of the special representative of the secretary-general (SRSG), the deputy (DSRSG/RC), and the emergency relief coordinator. Eight countries with UN peace missions (or with transitions under way from peace mission to development operations) are also part of DaO, but another 10 countries with UN peace missions are not. In 2005, there was little coordination between peacekeeping missions and the UNCT, but as the concept of “peacebuilding” has emerged, with recognition of the need for simultaneous investment in conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and reconstruction, there has been progress in coherence, which is still “work in progress.”

UN development assistance is largely focused in the 134 countries that are LICs or MICs. The remaining 31 LICs have substantial donor funding, with many UN agencies, and the traditional RC/UNCT model, plus the DaO approach is still appropriate to promote coherence and maximize impact. It is therefore not surprising that 19 of them are DaO countries. And of the 12 that are not formally DaO, five have UN peace missions with considerable capacity to promote coherence when the leadership is right (see Table 1).

As countries become more affluent and the relative importance of UN development assistance diminishes, the number of agencies with in-country presence will fall. While the need for coherence remains, the capacity to apply complex processes is reduced. In the UMICs, only 8 are DaO countries, probably reflecting the relatively high proportional cost of the DaO if the SOPs were fully implemented. There may still be areas in which the UN can provide advanced technical advice, or the government wants a trusted broker to ensure value for money from the market. However, specialized niche activities do not necessarily benefit from intense coordination support (e.g., safe disposal of medical nuclear waste or the application of geospatial imaging to land use planning). Interestingly, two HICs (Seychelles and Venezuela) have joined DaO, in addition to Uruguay even though their few program staff will need to spend a high proportion of time implementing SOPs.

Table 1: World Bank Income Classification of Countries, Including DaO Countries and UN Missions, 2015

Country Category	LIC		LMIC		UMIC		HIC
	Dev	Peace M	Dev	Peace M	Dev	Peace M	
In DaO	19	6	23	2	8	0	3
Not in DaO	12	5	28	3	45	2	77
Total country	31		51		53		80

Source: World Bank Country Classification 2015, UNDG list of DaO countries.

## WHAT NEXT?

As countries continue to graduate, the UN field presence must also change if the UN is to offer value for money. How can the UN best support national efforts to implement the new SDG agenda? It is time to use different models for organizing coherent UN support in different types of countries.

The UNDG decided that their “fit-for-purpose” conversation should be focused around five elements that are integral to sustainable development in any context: developing a universal agenda for both rich and poor countries; reducing inequality; the centrality of human rights; integrating UN support; and harnessing the data revolution.

As the UNDG explores these issues, it should examine alternative models for coherence. Based on the models already in place, the following four have great potential:

### 1. Fragile & Post-Conflict Countries—SRSG/DSRSG model

The SRSG and DSRSG could use their authority to prioritize and focus UN operations in the 18 UN peace missions in fragile and post-conflict states that have significant resources already in place. The DaO principles and the SOPs are relevant and useful in these large UN operations. There are currently eight UN peace operations that are DaO countries. In some of them, the SRSG and DSRSG have been able to align both the UN mission and the UNCT support behind a national “peacebuilding” plan, bring coherence and convergence between conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, and reconstruction. The examples of such coherence are still few, but they show that it is possible to realize the UN’s comparative advantage.<sup>11</sup> This model requires strong leaders appointed to ensure that the UN is focused, prioritized, and coherent in countries dealing with security and humanitarian crises. A variation of the SRSG/DSRSG model could be used in 20-25 countries (mainly fragile states), without necessarily involving the Security Council.

### 2. Poor Countries—Traditional RC/UNCT Model

In LICs and LMICs with a large UN presence and large budget, the most appropriate approach would be to continue the RC/UNCT model with the DaO and the SOPs. The cost of coordination should be proportional to the total investment by the UN. Excluding the 25 fragile or post-conflict countries, there would be around 60 countries that could still use this model. This recognizes that some LMICs are too small to justify this model, but some UMICs with a large UN presence may need it.

### 3. Very Small Countries—Modified Joint-Office Model

In some countries, the size of the UN investment is so small that the cost of the RC/UNCT model is not justified. This could include many UMICs and some small LICs and LMICs. A modified Joint-Office model, similar to Cape Verde’s, could have a single person who is both RC and representative of the funds and programs, supported by a single operations unit and including some of the specialized and non-resident agencies. This would simplify interactions with the UN for small governments and make coordination of the participating agencies less demanding. However, this modality would require agencies at regional and HQ

levels to be more committed to teamwork and coherence than in the past.

#### 4. Rich Countries—Joint-Office “Lite”

In HICs and UMICs, the UN presence is normally funded by the countries themselves. A Joint Office “lite” model could use IT to provide a “virtual UN shop window” through which countries can view the resources of the UN, including studies, data, programs, funding opportunities, and individual experts. The UN person in country would act as a kind of relationship manager, not work for any specific agency, and endeavor to enhance participation in ongoing normative processes, and support countries to access knowledge and services across the UN.

## CONCLUSION

The UN is faced with a radically changed development landscape and a newly agreed 15-year agenda, which demands rethinking of the UN’s operational presence. It should be better tailored to the different needs of fragile, poor, small, and wealthier developing countries. By adopting four different models for DaO, the UN can better arrest its progressive marginalization, enhance impact, and yield cost-effective solutions. The 2016 QCPR offers a valuable opportunity to develop a revamped DaO program.

**Sally Fegan-Wyles** retired as Assistant-Secretary-General of the United Nations in October 2015. She had worked in Africa for UNICEF and UNDP for two decades, ending as UN Resident Coordinator in Tanzania (1998-2001). She was Director of the Development Operations Coordination Office (DOCO) in New York (2001-2008); led the team within EOSG to establish UN Women (2009-2011); and was Director of the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), Geneva, (2012-2015). As DOCO Director, she was involved in designing the Delivering as One concept and putting it into practice.

## NOTES

1. United Nations, *Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One*, summary report, UN document A/66/859, June 2012.
2. Originally the idea was to have several Joint Office pilots, with Cape Verde hosted by UNDP, and the Maldives by UNICEF. The emergency response to the tsunami made that impossible, and the concept was allowed to wither.
3. Cape Verde was still an LDC according to the UN/UNCTAD classification system, which most OECD/DAC donors use for aid allocation. Under the World Bank classification, Cape Verde had already moved from LIC to LMIC.
4. United Nations, *Report of the Internal Review Mission of the Joint Office of UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA in Cape Verde* (New York: UNDG, November-December 2013).

5. United Nations, *Standard Operating Procedures of Countries Adopting the Delivering as One Approach* (New York: UNDG, August 2014).
6. Bruce Jenks and Bruce Jones, *United Nations Development at a Crossroads* (New York: Center for International Cooperation, 2013).
7. Stephen Browne and Thomas G. Weiss, “UN-fit or Unfit for 2015 Purpose? Views of the Global Public,” *FUNDS Briefing* no. 20, August 2014.
8. United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: UN, 2015).
9. United Nations, *Concept Note, “Ready willing and able?” Review of the UN Development System’s Set Up and Capacities To Support the Post-2015 Agenda* (New York: UNDG, August 2014).
10. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are not members of the UNDG, but the former has observer status.
11. See Stephen Browne and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *Peacebuilding Challenges for the UN Development System*, edited with Stephen Browne (New York: Future UN Development System Project, 2015).

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