

Country Performance and Analysis

Frequently Asked Questions on Joint UN Teams and Programmes

July 2007



Preface

In order to improve AIDS coordination among multilateral institutions and international donors, in September 2005 the UN General Assembly endorsed the according recommendations of the Global Task Team (GTT). In line with these recommendations, the UN Secretary-General directed resident coordinators to establish joint UN teams on AIDS with one joint programme of support in December 2005. To support UN country teams in fulfilling this directive, the United Nations Development Group issued a *Guidance Paper on Proposed Working Mechanisms for Joint UN Teams on AIDS at Country Level*.

The progress towards establishing joint teams has been encouraging with a majority of countries establishing a joint UN team on AIDS and a number of them adapting the UNAIDS technical support division of labour to the specific country context. Furthermore, half of the UN country teams have agreed on accountability mechanisms that provide the basis for a clear definition of accountability lines to ensure a greater commitment from UN agencies.

This FAQ paper identifies issues that may impede countries from implementing joint teams and programmes in an efficient and timely manner. This paper includes outlines on work relationships with external partners, specifies a set of roles and responsibilities within the UN and provides qualitative guidance for the establishment of joint programmes. However, it recognizes that the diversity among individual country contexts may sometimes require certain flexibility in implementing the guidance for joint teams.

UN Action at Regional and Country Level
Country and Regional Support Department

Q 1: Why do we need joint UN teams on AIDS?

UNAIDS was established in 1996 for the specific purpose of improving collaboration on AIDS among UN agencies. Since that time, numerous reports have pointed out that although joint programming mechanisms such as the UN theme group on HIV/AIDS exist, interagency collaboration at the country level is not living up to expectations. In the past several years, in addition to internal UN efforts to improve collaboration on AIDS, there has been an increased commitment by all international organizations and donors to harmonize assistance “in ways that rationalize the often excessive fragmentation of donor activities at the country and sector levels” (*Paris Declaration, 2005*). Joint UN teams on AIDS are intended to respond to these challenges by catalysing renewed commitment and effective, strategic UN action in support of national responses to AIDS.

Q 2: Who belongs to the joint UN team on AIDS?

The joint UN team on AIDS in each country is made up of UN staff working full- or part-time on AIDS throughout the UN system, including UNAIDS cosponsors and other non-cosponsor agencies present in country. (This may mean converting the technical working group, where it has existed, into the joint UN team on AIDS.) Each country will determine whether or not it is appropriate to assign all staff to the team, or limit the members on a selective basis, but with representation from every agency present. All joint UN team members are officially and formally designated to the team by their head of agency. Joint UN teams on AIDS are, by definition, made up of **only UN staff** supporting national efforts. External partners will still be involved through partnership forums, working groups, designated focal points or other mechanisms to be determined on a country-to-country basis.

Q 3: Why is the joint UN team on AIDS limited to staff of the UN system?

In countries where the government convenes a national partnership forum, there is no need for the UN to organize a similar stakeholder group. The UN needs a forum in which to discuss UN-specific policies and procedures, and to build a common vision prior to engaging in dialogue with national partners. By working together internally to identify areas of strength, duplication in services and opportunities for joint programming, teams will improve the comparative advantage of the UN system as a whole. This will make working with external partners through national partnership forums or expanded technical working groups more efficient and effective.

Q 4: How will joint UN teams on AIDS involve or work with external partners?

There are many opportunities to engage in dialogue with external partners. This may be through a nationally convened partnership forum or technical working groups linked with the joint UN team on AIDS on specific issues.

Q 5: How do joint UN teams on AIDS change the way the UN works together on AIDS?

Although joint UN teams on AIDS are based on existing directives and processes, they are designed to do things differently. The main difference is that there is clear definition

of accountability lines and mechanisms for enforcing them. This means greater clarity on roles and responsibilities of individual team members, heads of agencies, the UNAIDS country coordinator and the resident coordinator, which are built into individual performance assessments and reviewed annually. From a technical perspective, there is more clarity on the roles of different UN agencies as part of the joint UN team on AIDS, especially through the technical support division of labour. This allows partners to better access technical support from the UN system. Finally, the joint UN teams on AIDS prepare and implement a joint UN programme of support involving a long-term vision with shorter-term actions that strengthen the AIDS component of the UN development assistance framework (where it exists). This programme unifies and integrates UN support within national planning frameworks, so as to strategically fill existing gaps.

Q 6: What is the difference between the UN theme group on HIV/AIDS and the joint UN teams on AIDS?

The UN theme group on HIV/AIDS is made up of heads of agencies of the UNAIDS cosponsors present in the country. The joint UN team on AIDS is made up of the professional technical staff working full- or part-time on AIDS in all UN agencies present. These are two distinct bodies with important, complementary roles. The joint UN team on AIDS reports to the UN theme group on HIV/AIDS. The theme group provides overall policy and programmatic guidance to the joint UN team on AIDS, both in terms of its operating procedures, and the content and implementation arrangements of its joint UN programme of support. This includes rapid decision-making and resolution of disputes or other impediments to effective functioning of the joint UN team on AIDS. The UN theme group on HIV/AIDS also conducts advocacy and assists with mobilization of resources for a scaled-up response.

Q 7: What is the difference between the technical working group and the joint UN team on AIDS?

The members of the technical working group, where it exists, will become members of the joint UN team on AIDS, adding additional UN staff as necessary, so that the entire team consists of all—if appropriate (see question #2)—UN staff working full- or part-time on AIDS. However, where the technical working group includes external UN partners (i.e. *extended* technical working groups), only UN staff become part of the joint UN team on AIDS (see question #3). If individual joint UN teams on AIDS determine that it is important to do so, they may subdivide the team members into smaller subgroups that tackle specific issues. This does not imply that the technical working group simply changes its name to the joint UN team on AIDS—the other crucial aspects of the joint UN team on AIDS must be addressed (see question #5), particularly the formal designation of staff to the Team, and mechanisms for evaluating their performance as a team member.

Q 8: Can our expanded theme group become the joint UN team on AIDS?

No. The UN theme group on HIV/AIDS must remain intact, separate from the joint UN team on AIDS, in order to provide the policy and oversight crucial to its effective functioning. The joint team on AIDS reports to the UN theme group on HIV/AIDS. heads of agencies are members of the UN theme group on HIV/AIDS, allowing them to

determine appropriate mechanisms for ensuring accountability of individual joint team members who represent their agency, and provide rapid decision-making and resolution of impediments to functioning. Furthermore, by definition, the joint UN team on AIDS is a UN-specific group that does not include external partners; therefore, the expanded theme group cannot become the joint UN team on AIDS if it includes external partners.

Q 9: What is the role of the UNAIDS country coordinator in facilitating the team?

Responsibility for facilitation of the joint UN team on AIDS was assigned to the UNAIDS country coordinator by the Secretary-General, in his December 2005 letter to resident coordinators. “Facilitation” in this case, means ensuring the effective functioning of the joint UN team on AIDS by convening meetings, synthesizing and disseminating information, managing finances for day-to-day operation of the joint UN team on AIDS, strategically planning and advocating the team’s collective response, and otherwise ensuring that the team’s annual workplan is implemented. The UNAIDS country office will serve as the secretariat for the joint UN team on AIDS. In addition to this facilitation role, the UNAIDS country coordinator is a full member of the UN country team, and as such provides policy and technical advice, and advocates and mobilizes effective action on AIDS by all UN agencies. This is in addition to the pre-existing terms of reference for the UNAIDS country coordinator.

Q 10: Can a head of agency facilitate a joint UN team on AIDS?

Consistent with the reasons stated in questions #6 and #8, a head of agency should not be the facilitator of the joint UN team on AIDS. Heads of agencies belong to the UN theme group on HIV/AIDS, and should remain separate from the joint UN team on AIDS in order to provide policy guidance and ensure accountability. However, in countries where a UNAIDS country coordinator is not present, this may be an appropriate option.

Q 11: Who facilitates the joint UN team on AIDS where no UNAIDS country coordinator is present?

Many countries that do not have a UNAIDS country coordinator have a UN focal point on AIDS or a country programme advisor. This individual carries out the same functions as a UNAIDS country coordinator, and may be designated by the resident coordinator to facilitate the joint UN team on AIDS.

Q 12: What is the joint UN programme of support?

The joint UN programme of support refers to the entirety of the UN system’s support to the national response to AIDS in a country, including the processes, products and resources that the joint UN team on AIDS will put to work. It consists of specific plans aimed at operationalizing the programme of support, such as a technical support plan, advocacy and communications strategies, resource mobilization strategies, etc. These plans are translated annually into an annual workplan where specific responsibilities are assigned to agencies and individuals, with clear deliverables (against the joint UN programme of support). The joint UN programme of support includes both a long-term

(three to five years, according to existing national cycles) strategic framework that complements the current UNDAF, and an annual workplan.

Q 13: Does the joint UN programme of support replace the UN Implementation Support Plan (UN-ISP)?

Yes. The joint UN programme of support is an evolution and expansion of the UN-ISP, which was designed to be a clear statement of the UN's strategic contribution in support of national AIDS priorities, focusing on those areas where the UN can bring added value and support UNDAF outcomes related to AIDS. In practice, however, the UN-ISP was usually little more than a list of existing projects from one agency to the other. The joint UN programme of support maintains the same objectives of providing strategic support based on the UN's comparative advantages, and contributing to the UNDAF, but it describes the long- and short-term workplan of the joint UN team on AIDS. Most importantly, it is the result of strategic planning processes at the country level, so that the collective results identified by the joint UN team on AIDS determine the individual and joint activities of UN agencies, to be carried out during a three- to five-year cycle. The programme of support should be aligned with UNDAF where necessary and the national strategic framework or its equivalent.

Q 14: AIDS is a major UNDAF outcome. Is this the joint UN programme of support?

Where UNDAF exists, and AIDS is one of its major outcomes, it will provide the long-term strategic framework for the joint UN programme of support. However, the other components of the programme of support as described in question #12 will still need to be developed, especially the annual workplans, identification of areas of joint implementation of activities and a technical support plan.

Q 15: There is no UNDAF (or AIDS is not a major UNDAF outcome). What does this mean for the programme of support?

Where there is no UNDAF, or AIDS is not a major outcome, the joint UN team on AIDS will work together to identify the most appropriate long-term strategic framework of support to the national response. Then they will proceed to translate that into an annual workplan with specific deliverables based on individual and joint programmes. Furthermore, in such cases an additional component of the programme of support should include an advocacy strategy to encourage AIDS issues to be addressed in the UNDAF, as well as mainstreamed into other development frameworks.

Q 16: How will performance and effectiveness of the joint UN team on AIDS be monitored and assessed?

Monitoring and evaluation of the joint UN team on AIDS' effectiveness will be carried out by the team, focusing on several levels: individual performance, team processes, and programme of support results. Individuals will have their responsibilities as members of the joint UN team on AIDS added to their annual performance review within their agency. This review will consider the time and technical contribution that an individual has made to the joint UN team on AIDS, and reflect achievement of the annual key deliverables, to the extent that the individual was responsible for specific outcomes.

Performance of the joint UN team on AIDS will be assessed internally against achievement of identified annual deliverables. This review should take place both informally during regular (monthly) joint UN team on AIDS meetings, and more formally at six-month intervals in a participatory manner (involving the UNAIDS regional support teams, regional cosponsors, theme groups and members of the joint UN teams on AIDS) that seeks to identify impediments to implementation and resolve them to enable achievement of key deliverables. Progress on the joint UN team on AIDS' annual workplan and the joint UN programme of support will also be evaluated on the basis of annual key results and intermediate milestones with clear indicators of collective achievement. In the same way, a final evaluation of the joint UN programme of support will be carried out at the end of the long-term cycle in order to prepare the development of the next joint UN programme of support as well as the next UN development assistance framework.

Q 17: Are there tools and guides available to us in establishing joint UN programmes and teams?

There are many resources available to country- and regional-level staff. First of all, there are various guidelines that could be of assistance in promoting and establishing joint UN programmes and teams:

- The UNDG Guidance Paper: *“Proposed Working Methods of Establishing Joint UN Teams on AIDS”* (May 2006)
- UNDG [*“Guidance Note on Joint Programming”*](#) (December 2003). Contains definitions of and guidelines for developing and implementing joint programmes, including different financing mechanisms.
web link: <http://www.undg.org/access-file.cfm?cat=314&doc=3642&file=5641>
- UNDG [*“Guidance on Developing UN Implementation Support Plans for country responses to HIV/AIDS”*](#) (Nov 2004). Although this refers to the implementation support plans, which no longer exist, the guidance on process and objectives are still relevant for the development of the joint UN programme of support.
web link: <http://www.undg.org/access-file.cfm?cat=314&doc=5350&file=6801>
- The final report of the [*Global Task Team on Improving AIDS Coordination Among Multilateral Institutions and International Donors*](#) (June 2005). Provides the rationale for establishment of Joint Programmes and Teams.
web link: http://data.unaids.org/Publications/IRC-pub06/JC1125-GlobalTaskTeamReport_en.pdf

Next, there are staff in the Country and Regional Support Department (CRD) of the UNAIDS secretariat headquarters in Geneva, as well as regional support teams in various countries who are available to answer questions and organize other forms of support to joint UN teams on AIDS. CRD is also looking into mechanisms for sharing country experiences, among which is a newsletter to highlight current developments and provide strategies that joint UN teams on AIDS can put into practice.