

UNCT Comparative Advantage Report
SWOT Exercise
22 July, 2010

Overview and Objective

The UNCT is required to determine its comparative advantage as an input to country analysis and UNDAF strategic planning. UN Deputy Representatives met on 22 July, 2010 to assess UNCT Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) in the national development context. The overall objective of the exercise was to define where the UN system in Bangladesh can most effectively contribute to national priorities given its current strengths and capacities (comparative advantage). The key findings and results are presented below:

1. Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ UN system as a trusted, credible partner based on UN's:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Strength of relationship with GoB including trust, credibility and long history of cooperation.○ Support and commitment to national development priorities, capacity development, technical support and national ownership.○ Access to GoB and ability to influence policy, legislation and national processes.○ Strong leadership role across the broad spectrum of UN system interventions.○ Convening authority to mobilize national and international partners.○ Joint normative work including promotion and support to implementation of international norms and standards, including MD, MDGs and human rights instruments.○ Joint analytical work on development issues: crop and food supply, food security and nutrition, child labour and education, arsenic, social safety nets, etc; analytical support to GoB: MDG progress reports.○ Neutral and impartial policy guidance.○ Access to global best practices and lessons drawn from UN agencies' experiences.○ Ability to pilot new and innovative programmes and projects and with GoB, upscale such programmes/projects when proven successful, are key strengths of UN system in light of aid environment and increasing trend toward pooled funding arrangements.○ Strong UNCT collaborative spirit and efforts along with an increasing acceptance of lead agency concept.○ Flexibility and responsiveness of UNCT reflected in unplanned activities undertaken as a result of emerging needs (2007 natural disasters and support to 2008 parliamentary elections).○ Increased overall UN system coherence: human rights, peace and security and humanitarian action.○ Humanitarian/disaster response: establishment of common UN disaster response mechanism and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).○ Comprehensive, collective UN system annual review of development results has helped to identify areas of UN complementarity and has enhanced GoB and UN system's ability to collectively monitor results.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Bangladesh's engagement, commitment and role in the UN system:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ UN Peacekeeping○ Security Council membership (1979-1980 and 2000-2001)○ Commission on Human Rights membership○ Peacebuilding Commission membership○ CEDAW membership
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Vibrancy, responsiveness and capacity of CSOs in Bangladesh and close UN system collaboration with CSOs as implementing partners.

2. Weaknesses

- UN System's institutional, structural and legal impediments:
 - Lack of common operational, programming and financial platforms/systems continues to hamper effective cooperation; UN agency headquarter structures remain fragmented.
 - Interagency rivalry, competition for resources, overlapping and exceeding mandates.
 - Competing institutional directives: increased coherence/'Delivering as One' vs. maintaining individual agencies' identities and mandates.
 - Differences in UN agencies' relationship to government results in differing levels of autonomy.
 - Excessive agency affiliation/focus among UN staff.
 - UN system aims to do too much without strong analyses of comparative advantage.
 - Joint programme constraints including lengthy, cumbersome programme development and implementation process, intensive resource investment by agency personnel, inter-agency friction, loss of focus and side-lining of GoB.
 - Time-consuming, bureaucratic processes.
 - High transaction costs and perception among development partners that the 'UN is expensive, ineffective and inefficient'.
 - Insufficient gender equality and women's empowerment focus.
 - Effectively balancing inclusiveness vs. prioritization/effectiveness.
 - Insufficient inter-agency coordination/information sharing.
 - Recent and ongoing departures and changes to UNCT members temporarily slows down UNCT decision making process; frequent turn-over of UN programme staff and resulting loss of institutional memory.
- Weak GoB ownership and involvement in UN programming processes. Key question: how much GoB involvement is needed/desired by UN system?
- Development partners are divided over 'division of labour' issues.

3. Opportunities

- Receptiveness of current government provides opportunities for further dialogue and alignment with national priorities.
- GoB commitment to maintaining political stability and democratic rule.
- The Joint Cooperation Strategy (JCS): opportunity for further alignment and collaboration with GoB and development partners. Important consideration: how much energy should UN system spend on internal coordination vs. harmonization with broader development partners' initiative?
- Recent Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) discussions on national development priorities and its emphasis on human development and the social sectors provides the UN system with a platform for further dialogue with GoB on aid modalities.
- 5-Year Plan as new national planning tool, provides a good opportunity for further alignment with GoB development priorities.
- Overall political stability and democratic rule has led to favourable conditions for further development initiatives.
- UN reform strategy in Bangladesh has led to some gains and achievements which the UN system can build on.
- GoB's increasing acceptance of decentralization of decision-making, budgeting and administration.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diversity and complexity of Bangladesh's development/humanitarian challenges and resulting programming experiences and opportunities (Bangladesh is frequently a case-study across many sectors).
4. Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ GoB human resource capacities remain critically weak.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Growing inequalities: urban vs. rural, access to education, access to rights, livelihoods, gender, maternal and neo-natal mortality, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing population: urbanization, migration, impact on resources, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of accountability, transparency and corruption.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk of political unrest: hartals, confrontational politics, change in government.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk of terrorist attacks, alleged rise of fundamentalism, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Climate change and natural disasters: cyclones, flooding, earthquake, food crises, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access to natural resources: energy, water, food, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial crises: threatens availability of resources and livelihoods.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mixed signals and shifting expectations from development partners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing perception of UN as 'expensive, ineffective and inefficient' coupled with growing trend toward pooled funding arrangements results in sidelining of UN system.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing expansion of CSO role/capacities in Bangladesh and competition for scarce resources.

UNCT Comparative Advantage

Based on the SWOT exercise results captured above, in order to optimize UN system support to GoB national priorities, building on strengths, avoiding/addressing weaknesses, capitalizing on opportunities and minimizing threats, the following areas were identified as the UNCT's primary comparative advantages:

1. UN system's **advocacy, access and leadership** should be harnessed to:
 - Continue to ensure advocacy and support to implementation of international norms and standards, MD and MDGs and human rights instruments.
 - Influence and guide national policies, processes and systems, focusing on claim holders and duty-bearers.
 - Effectively champion UN core principles of human rights, gender/empowerment, good governance, mitigation of inequalities, etc.
 - Disseminate and promote international best practices and lessons drawing on the UN system's global experiences; provide upstream policy advisory services to GoB, ensuring a contextualized approach adapted to local realities.
 - Assist with fostering partnerships between GoB, CSOs, stakeholders and development partners.
2. Capitalize on UN system's unique **capacity to develop and pilot innovative programmes, projects and social development models**, upholding international standards to:
 - Upscale effective/successful piloting results into larger national programmes.
 - Inform and influence national policies and decision making.
 - Augment and expand the UN system's body of global knowledge and expertise.
3. Strengthen UN system's role as a strong **champion and advocate of human rights** in Bangladesh, encompassing both civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights to:
 - Focus further attention on most vulnerable and marginalized, ensuring their access to justice and rights.
 - Address and mitigate inequalities across key areas among critical populations.
 - Highlight and ensure adequate linkages to governance.
 - Promote and support human rights based approach, ensuring principles of equity, accountability, empowerment and participation are addressed in country development plans, policies and processes.
4. Build on and continue UN system's excellent track-record in coordinating **humanitarian/disaster response and preparedness** to:
 - Strengthen GoB's capacities to coordinate effective national and international responses to national disasters in Bangladesh.
 - Promote and support integration of risk reduction in national disaster management plans.
 - Support enhancement of collaboration with national partners (pre-selection of NGOs for humanitarian work).
5. Expand on UN system's **gender and women's empowerment** interventions to:
 - Ensure that GoB's commitments to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment reflect international norms and standards; support GoB implementation of CEDAW
 - Enhance the UN's role as an advocate of gender equality and convener of women and gender groups, flagging gender-sensitive concerns as necessary.
 - Promote gender equality in programming as a key cross-cutting issue.

Conclusions

Building on the UNCT's areas of comparative advantage, agreement on modalities and principles for collaboration, focused on maximizing the UNCT's efficiency and effectiveness are needed. Given the above defined comparative advantages ('what'), the suggested next steps include addressing the weaknesses ('how'). The UNCT's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and comparative advantages will feed into the upcoming UNDAF Strategic Prioritization Retreat (SPR).