

The challenges of Delivering as One: Overcoming fragmentation and moving towards policy coherence

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Abstract: This paper discusses the challenges of achieving greater coherence between the economic and social policies pursued by the agencies of the wider UN system. It sets the discussion in the framework of the on-going Delivering as One (DaO) reform efforts, briefly touching upon the genesis of reform. It illustrates the processes involved in reaching policy coherence drawing upon the practical experience of two employment and social protection initiatives driven by UN agencies in two South Asian countries, Nepal and Maldives. In both cases, the paper argues, a confluence of factors led to policy coherence – e.g. most centrally the “policy moment” created by a major political shift, complemented by circumstances enabling collaboration among the UN players, including a common interest (“Zeitgeist”) in social protection, and elements of trust and mutual understanding. The paper also looks at main structural challenges and obstacles to Delivering as One, including normative, analytical and policy differences among agencies; organisational boundaries; and managerial issues. It makes some suggestions for steps to enhance policy coherence. It recommends building on the Millennium commitment and the human development concept as a unifier to guide policy discourse which has hitherto been largely omitted from the more action-oriented approaches of the past decade. The paper also suggests rethinking the notion of recipient country ownership, and for the UN to recapture its lead role in advocating for universal human rights and social justice. It makes a case for redressing shortcomings in the UN system and cautions against the risk of moving towards minimalist non-controversial policy making. The ultimate case for policy coherence and Delivering as One, the paper argues, is to improve the human development outcomes of disadvantaged groups and individuals in developing countries.

JEL Classification: F53, O19, O43

Résumé: Ce document traite des défis rencontrés pour parvenir à une plus grande cohérence des politiques économiques et sociales menées par les institutions du système des Nations Unies au sens large. Il place le débat dans le contexte de la réforme « Delivering as One », en abordant brièvement la genèse de cette réforme. Le document clarifie les processus à l'œuvre pour parvenir à une cohérence des politiques, en s'appuyant sur les expériences pratiques que constituent deux initiatives pour l'emploi et la protection sociale pilotées par les institutions de l'ONU dans deux pays d'Asie du Sud-Est, à savoir le Népal et les Maldives. Dans les deux cas, la cohérence des politiques est le résultat de la conjonction de plusieurs facteurs. Il peut s'agir par exemple de « l'instant stratégique » causé par un changement politique majeur, complété par des circonstances favorisant une collaboration entre les différents acteurs des Nations Unies, y compris l'esprit du temps marqué par un intérêt commun pour la protection sociale, ainsi que des éléments personnels de confiance et de sympathie. Le document se penche également sur les principaux obstacles structurels au « Delivering as One », notamment les différences entre institutions sur le plan des normes, des analyses et des stratégies, les limites organisationnelles, ainsi que les problèmes d'encadrement et de personnes. Des mesures visant à améliorer la cohérence des politiques sont suggérées. L'auteur recommande de s'appuyer sur les engagements du Millénaire et sur le concept de développement humain pour unifier le discours politique qui a été largement exclu des approches plus pragmatiques adoptées durant la décennie écoulée. Le document suggère également de repenser la notion d'appropriation par les pays bénéficiaires et de redonner à l'ONU son rôle de défenseur des droits humains universels et de la justice sociale. Il présente des arguments en faveur de mesures visant à remédier aux faiblesses inhérentes au système des Nations Unies et met en garde contre les risques d'une orientation vers des politiques minimalistes et consensuelles. L'idée ultime de la cohérence des politiques et de “Delivering as One”, soutient l'auteur, est d'améliorer les résultats en matière de développement humain pour les catégories et les individus défavorisés dans les pays en développement.

Classification JEL: F53, O19, O43

Resumen: El presente documento discute los retos para alcanzar una mayor coherencia entre las políticas económicas y sociales promovidas por las agencias de todo el sistema de Naciones Unidas. Encuadra la discusión en el marco de los esfuerzos de la actual reforma “Delivering as One”, mencionando brevemente su génesis. Ilustra el proceso seguido para alcanzar la coherencia de políticas recurriendo a la experiencia práctica de dos iniciativas de empleo y protección social dirigidas por agencias de NU en dos países del sur de Asia: Nepal y Maldivas. El documento sostiene que en ambos casos una confluencia de factores condujo a la coherencia de políticas –por ejemplo, principalmente el “ambiente de políticas” creado por un gran cambio político, complementado por circunstancias favorecedoras de la colaboración - entre los actores de NU, incluyendo un “Zeitgeist” común de interés particular en la protección social, así como elementos de simpatía y confianza personal. El documento también examina los principales retos y obstáculos estructurales para “Delivering as One”, incluyendo las diferencias normativas, analíticas y de políticas entre las agencias; las divisorias organizativas; y los aspectos personales y de gestión. Hace algunas sugerencias respecto a pasos para mejorar la coherencia de políticas. Recomendamos basarse en el compromiso del Milenio y en el concepto de desarrollo humano como un elemento unificador para guiar el discurso sobre políticas, que ha sido hasta ahora ampliamente omitido en los enfoques más orientados a la acción de la pasada década. El documento también propone repensar la noción de apropiación del país receptor, y que NU retome su liderazgo en la defensa de los derechos humanos universales y la justicia social. Argumenta a favor de enmendar las deficiencias intrínsecas del sistema de NU y advierte sobre el riesgo de dirigirse hacia un diseño de políticas de mínimos y no controvertido. Según el documento, la razón final para la coherencia de políticas y “Delivering as One” es mejorar los resultados en desarrollo humano de las personas y grupos desfavorecidos en los países en desarrollo.

Clasificación JEL: F53, O19, O43

The Policy Integration Department

The Policy Integration Department pursues the ILO's decent work and fair globalization agenda from an integrated perspective.

The central objective of the Policy Integration Department is to further greater policy coherence and the integration of social and economic policies at both the international and national level. To this end, it works closely with other multilateral agencies and national actors such as Governments, trade unions, employers' federations, NGOs and universities. Through its policy-oriented research agenda, it explores complementarities and interdependencies between employment, working conditions, social protection, social dialogue and labour standards. Current work is organized around four thematic areas that call for greater policy coherence: Fair globalization, the global poor and informality, macro-economic policies for decent work, and emerging issues.

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The challenges of Delivering as One: Overcoming fragmentation and moving towards policy coherence*

1. Introduction

This paper looks at the challenge of enhancing policy coherence in promoting employment and decent work as the central elements of the development agenda. The UN system in the broad sense is understood here as the Secretariat, the Funds and Programmes, the Specialised Agencies, as well as the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), since they come together under the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations and are party to the UN Secretary General's Chief Executives' Board (CEB). Policy coherence - the notion that different programmes and agencies could act on the basis of a common policy stance, or at least not undermine each other - is associated with the ambitious approach of "Delivering as One" (DaO). The two are not identical, but certainly closely related, since a genuinely harmonised UN programme delivery would need to build on common policy stances. Therefore, the paper takes as a point of departure the framework and parameters of the DaO process.

The focus is on employment and social protection, with an emphasis on the latter, and the illustrations used are from South Asia. The paper offers a critical view of how the UN "family" proceeds in development practice, and the observations made are based on practical experience. The purpose is to contribute to the efforts to overcome policy inconsistencies and fragmentation of development efforts, so that human development outcomes improve more rapidly, fundamentally and equitably.

2. The overall framework for policy coherence: the 'Delivering as One' (DaO) parameters

In the year 2000, the UN system produced the Millennium Declaration and later its "operationalization" as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are usually cast as a congealing of the developmental summits of the 1990s, although key recommendations from the 1995 Social Summit, on employment, or from the financing for development or UNCTAD and WTO processes on finance and trade issues, were not reflected in the key documents or the initial set of targets.¹

* This paper was prepared for the project on Policy Coherence for Growth, Employment and Decent Work under the ILO-Norway Cooperation Agreement. It is intended to stimulate discussion on development cooperation, stemming from the involvement of the author in some of the processes presented. Mansoor Ali, Maria Arteta, Marta Cali, Carlos Fortin, Richard Jolly, Shengjie Li, Gillian Mellsop, and Aurelio Parisotto provided invaluable insights and comments. A preliminary version was presented at the ILO-UNDESA interagency technical meeting "Building employment and decent work into sustainable recovery and development – The UN contribution" held at the ILO International Training Centre in Turin on 29 November – 1 December 2010. Participants at the meeting also provided feedback. The views expressed, however, are those of the author alone. The contribution of the Government of Norway is gratefully acknowledged.

¹ Targets and indicators on employment were introduced into the poverty goal (MDG1) in a review of the MDGs in 2005.

But there is another connection underpinning the Millennium agenda – that of a move to reconstruct a common developmentalist strategy, since the earlier process of the UN development decades had fallen into disregard at the end of the Cold War. Moreover, the MDGs as a common UN-wide and multilateral effort can also be interpreted as a response to the vehement critique of the UN during the 1990s: a critique which ranged from attacks on its political failings, especially on the human rights front, to its inflexible and clumsy bureaucracy. At the centre of the critique, however, was the disappointment over the lack of progress and the stagnation in economic and social development, compared to the resources and energy expended since the inception of development cooperation. There was a need to reassert the UN's credentials.²

While the MDGs were a response at the *programmatic* level to the laggard progress on human development, the “Delivering as One” approach was an effort to revisit the UN as an institution and examine the *operational* fragmentation which had come about over the decades. UN engagement was reconceptualised as three mutually reinforcing “pillars”: peace and security; development in the sense of economic and social development; and human rights.

By the mid-2000s, the objective of accelerating progress to achieve the agenda of the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs was pressing. This included a need to align the many programmes and projects of the UN in each recipient “programme” country, as well as globally and regionally. The impact of development cooperation was coming under question, and politicians and tax payers were scrutinising aid failures.

Pressure for reform was also shaped by the concerns of the developing countries over the patronising, inconsistent and unpredictable positions of donors. The critique by developing countries was becoming more vocal and assertive, in part because emerging new donors, such as for example China, India, Brazil or Venezuela – donors not organised in the OECD-DAC - were offering developing country aid recipients alternatives, so that at least at the margin, their bargaining position vis-à-vis donors had improved.

Overall, these changing political constellations – the political economy of “aid” - created pressure for more coherence within the development pillar of the UN and the pillars of peace and security and human rights. A series of analyses and studies followed, notably the UN Secretary General Report on Delivering as One (2006), which was presented at the UN high level panel on system-wide coherence 2006. It introduced a catchy slogan of a UN in-country format comprising “One programme, One leader, One budget, One location”. This “Delivering as One” with its attached acronym “DaO” currently covers the UN departments, funds and programmes and it is coordinated by the UN Development Group (UN DG). Interestingly, the UN DG covers 27 agencies, funds and programmes and has the World Bank as an observer,³ but the international financial institutions are not part of the DaO initiative. In some countries, however, DaO does include the financial institutions, such as in Liberia, where 16 agencies and the World Bank, the IFC and the IMF are members.⁴ On the bilateral side, the “Delivering as One” idea was mirrored in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), adopted by the OECD Development Assistance Committee in 2005, and pursued by the DAC donors in their bilateral and multilateral activities.

Yet, neither the UN Delivering as One initiative nor the OECD DAC effort at harmonisation tackled the question of policies and of policy coherence. One can argue that

² See for example Inge Kaul 2010 on the discussion on changing power constellations and their impact on UN influence and the “credibility crisis”.

³ See the listing on the UN Development Group website at <http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=13>.

⁴ See for example UN Liberia, Delivering as one. Draft concept note March 2010.

the harmonisation efforts only look at processes, in a somewhat bureaucracy-centred fashion, and do not bring out .

how development outcomes are achieved, what set of policies should frame the approaches and strategies used, and which evidence bases do agencies agree to build on. There is marginally more focus on entry points – which again is a procedural rather than a content issue.

This is striking, since the effectiveness of “aid” is ultimately a question of the particular development theories and development strategies which, consciously or unconsciously, underpin the actual development programmes and intended results. Each bi- and multilateral development cooperation effort, as well as the MDGs, makes implicit assumptions on the process of development, and each implicitly favours particular schools of development theory. To make the interventions function would therefore arguably require explicit discussions on how a coherent policy approach among all parties were to be achieved. This does not occur automatically. The following section is an attempt to describe two cases where some policy convergence on employment and social protection occurred and to identify the main enabling circumstances.

Box 1

Interagency coordination at global, regional and country levels

There are a number of mechanisms in place for interagency coordination at global, regional and country levels which could play a facilitating role for policy coherence.

Global and regional level

The ECOSOC, encompassing the UN Secretariat and the IFIs, was created precisely for policy dialogue and to bridge the economic and social practice divide. The UN Regional Commissions could be a site for interagency policy dialogue, however, they do not seem to be playing this role.

More recently created, the Chief Executives’ Board (CEB), and under it the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) is charged with the promotion of global policy coherence,⁵ and the UN Development Group (UNDG) which presides over all UN agencies, with the World Bank as an observer.

Another venue and conduit for policy dialogue is the UN Secretary General’s biannual head of agency retreats. At the regional level, the Regional UN Development Groups could play a similar role. They also meet biannually, and now cover all agencies resident at the country level or represented at the regional office level. Their meetings, however, appear to focus primarily on managerial matters and in the past devoted only a single agenda item to substantive, policy related topics.

Two specific efforts at creating policy coherence deserve mention. The first is the Policy Coherence Initiative for Growth, Investment and Employment, an ILO-initiated interagency policy network which met biannually from 2005 to 2008, in the context of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, to discuss macroeconomic policy. It was an informal group comprising the ILO, World Bank, IMF, UNDP, UNCTAD, UNICEF and other UN agencies, with the goal of creating momentum for employment as a driving development concern.

The initiative launched by the High Level Committee on Programmes and endorsed by the CEB to promote a system-wide response to the global financial and economic crisis can be cited as a second example. It resulted in the clustering of different multilateral agencies

⁵ See <http://undg.org>

around Joint Crisis Initiatives (JCIs) in 9 critical policy areas.⁶ It supported and valorised the ILO-WHO led Social Protection Floor and the ILO-led Global Jobs Pact.⁷

Country level

At the country level, the UN Country Teams would be the location of choice for inter-agency policy discussions.

Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) are tools for inter-agency and agency-government coordination on programmes, but interestingly, most documents produced in that intricate process of discussions and reflections concentrate on programmatic as opposed to policy content issues.

The process leading to more coherent, and socially progressive, policy positions could arguably be the Poverty Reduction Papers led by the World Bank, or the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility agreements papers of the IMF. They are presented as being government-led, but usually are dictated by the policy stances of the respective resident mission and headquarters regional desks. Given the larger visibility and clout, their role as lenders and donors, and their direct connections with Ministries of Finance, these are the key mechanisms used by the IFIs for their processes of policy coherence. As the IFIs are not integrally part of UNDG, regional UN DGs, and usually not members of UN CTs, the policy coherence effort is walking on one weak leg only.

Coordination between multi- and bilateral donors on policy matters could be built into the discussions preceding direct budget support or sectoral budget support. Yet, it appears that, where this mechanism exists, it is typically focused on agreed outcomes and deliverables, and does not thematise policy questions as such. This is assumed to occur via the notion of putting governments in the driver's seat so that they allocate resources in line with national development priorities which would at inception reflect a policy dialogue.

Assessment tools include the UN Evaluation Group evaluations for "One UN" countries, and at the personnel level the interaction of the Regional DGs with the UN Resident Coordinators. Again, it is likely that these processes and conversations revolve around programme outcomes rather than the question which policy approaches were selected and whether they were appropriate and effective.

⁶ See United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination, First regular session of 2009. *Summary of conclusions*. Paris, 4 Apr, CEB/2009/1

⁷ See ILO 2009 and also the ILO website devoted to the global extension of social security at <http://www.ilo.org/gimi/gess/RessShowRessource.do?ressourceId=12603>; for the Global Jobs Pact visit <http://www.ilo.org/jobspact/lang--en/index.htm>

3. **Striving for coherence - Two country-level cases in the areas of employment and social protection in South Asia**

The following section traces two recent processes at the country level which may illustrate the key features of an environment conducive to creating policy coherence around the core concern of employment and social protection.

(a) **Employment creation, labour market reform and social protection in Nepal – elements of a constructive policy coherence experience**

1. The process and outcome

In Nepal, the years 2006 and following offered a “policy moment” in the sense that policy makers, politicians, the general public, civil society and the development agencies felt a strong urge to present ideas and options for transformation, and the space for discussion and the actual introduction of new approaches was wide open. This “moment” was shaped by the end of a 10-year armed conflict.⁸ At the time of the ceasefire and peace negotiations, Nepali society was structurally challenged by the lowest per capita incomes in South Asia and high rates of poverty, malnutrition and child and maternal mortality, coupled with pervasive gender, caste and ethnicity-based exclusions. Unemployment and inactivity of the labour force was estimated at 25 per cent and underemployment at over 40 per cent, according to the Nepal Living Standards Survey 2003/4; and an estimated 800 000 youth are officially, through government channels, seeking employment outside Nepal (data from ILO 2008). Moreover, the country was politically riven and suffering from violence and impunity.

Accordingly, the UN agencies in Nepal were searching for potential interventions that could have a quick impact, address acute poverty, create employment, and help shape a sense of social cohesion – in other words, constitute what was seen then as a post-conflict peace dividend.⁹

For example, since 2006 the ILO has been providing support to the Interim Government in the context of the decent work agenda, the enormous challenges of un- and underemployment, labour relations problems, and poverty. A comprehensive survey¹⁰ was undertaken, which interviewed trade unions, employers and employees across the country, to assess the causes of labour dissatisfaction; the publication underpinned the ILO’s subsequent approach in this field.

Moreover, the ILO and DFID established an interagency working group on inclusive growth and employment to coalesce donor support for employment strategies and labour market regulations which are more conducive to retaining or attracting employment-generating investment. The process included exploring better modalities for social dialogue

⁸ As the Three Year Interim Plan put it in its introduction “The opportunity emerging after the end of a decade long conflict, enthusiasm, feelings and thoughts raised among the common people is owned as the new energy. This has created a **golden opportunity** to move forward in raising the living standard of the Nepali people living in poverty, deprivation and backwardness [...]” (TYIP p. 1), highlights by the author.

⁹ See Köhler/Cali/Stirbu 2009a and Köhler 2011 forthcoming.

¹⁰ Kyloh, R. 2008. *From conflict to cooperation. Labour market reforms that can work in Nepal*. (Geneva, International Labour Organization; Delhi, Academic Foundation).

and trade union reform; establishing a Social Security Fund; developing, together with trade unions, social insurance and micro finance schemes for the informal sector; and establishing employment information centres.¹¹ A detailed study of the enterprise sector was conducted by the ILO and delivered specific data and trends (Kyloh). It was used to inform the employment strategy developed by the Ministry of Labour with ILO support, which comprised a set of policy areas including investment promotion, enterprise development, youth labour markets strategies, and regulatory reform.

In parallel, in 2007, UNICEF began exploring options for a cash transfer programme and took the initiative to find expertise and develop an advocacy strategy. From inception, UNICEF focused on interagency cooperation, starting with UN-DESA and the ILO. The former provided models of post-conflict socio-economic development strategies from other regions, not UNICEF's area of expertise. The ILO was the obvious key strategic partner because of its technical and policy expertise as the global lead agency in social protection, as well as its experience on the ground in developing countries as an advisor on social insurance and social assistance. It was a deliberate choice because of the ILO favouring a progressive social protection stance and arguing a rights-based and universalist approach. As the repository of related expertise and similar studies, the ILO undertook a costing exercise for various conceivable combinations of social transfers – notably pensions and child benefits, and this technical paper on social protection in Nepal became a key element in the process,¹² because it provided the rationale as well as the calculations of benefits and extrapolated the associated expenditures.

A child grant was conceived in the format of a universal approach covering all children under 5, regardless of family income, and to complement the existing social pension. The idea was to create a social transfer covering the entire population, with entitlement solely based on citizenship and age, so as to convey a sense of entitlement or right.

UNICEF and the ILO, in consultation with the UN Resident Coordinator's office, together created the Social Protection Task Team (SPTT) which these 2 agencies co-chaired. It included those UN agencies and development partners in Nepal which address social protection, including the ADB, DFID, the World Bank, the WFP and UNCDF. The SPTT has been continuously providing technical and financial support to the government for the formulation of a social protection framework, beginning in 2007, with documenting the existing government and donor-agency sponsored social transfer schemes in Nepal.¹³ The social protection approach was presented on several occasions to the UN Country Team, and to visiting social protection missions from the World Bank. To move beyond the drawing table, UNICEF, in conjunction with the WFP, conducted focus group discussions and a survey with women's groups to discuss design modalities.¹⁴

In 2007, the Government formulated its Three Year Interim Plan 2007/08-2009/10 (TYIP), and the UN system together with the Government prepared the 2008-2010 UNDAF. The key concerns of the TYIP included "employment-oriented, pro-poor and broad-based economic growth", "an inclusive development process" with targeted programmes and "emphasis on social development (TYIP pp. 27 f). The UNDAF agreed on four pillars with the same overarching objectives structured in a slightly different fashion: consolidating peace; inclusive and improved service delivery; sustainable livelihoods; and human rights

¹¹ ILO: *Promoting Labour Market Governance and Social Protection for Peace Building in Nepal. Summary Project Outline*. Geneva, 12 Dec. 2008.

¹² ILO: 2007. *Affordable and Not an Illusion. Costing of basic social protection benefits for Nepal 2007-2034*. Geneva, 2007.

¹³ This triggered a region-wide inventory of social transfers compiled by the UNICEF Regional Office. See Köhler/Cali/Stirbu 2009b.

¹⁴ Details of the discussion outcomes in Köhler/Cali/Stirbu 2009a.

and social inclusion. The UNDAF livelihoods pillar, chaired by the ILO, contained an express reference to social protection for the informal sector.¹⁵

Apart from the parallel and reinforcing processes of the development plan and UNDAF, there was cooperation with the post-conflict Interim Government, notably its National Planning Commission, in the form of various consultations and briefings with the Planning Commission as stand-alones as well as under the umbrella of a donor coordination group. The arguments and findings for employment strategies and for social protection were presented at a UNDP-led MDG training programme conducted in 2007 which had a discrete session devoted to social protection where the UNICEF team introduced the idea of a child grant to a wider inter-ministerial audience and fed this back into the report to the UN Country Team.

In a related but autonomous process, the Government created a National Steering Committee on Social Protection, chaired by the Secretary of the National Planning Commission and with representation of all concerned line ministries. Government officials attended international and regional study tours and training workshops on social protection, with funding coming from bilaterals, notably DFID. The Vice Chair of the Planning Commission under a coalition government, coming from a UN background, and other policy makers were supportive of a child grant.

As tangible outcomes of these efforts, the Nepal government in 2008 introduced the Karnali Employment Program (KEP) in the Karnali zone, which encompasses its five poorest districts, designed to create 100 days of employment per household through public works schemes. Labour market reforms, which were informed by the in-depth ILO study on the labour market in Nepal, were also initiated. Some measures, such as the prohibition of dismissals from enterprises in the formal economy, were replaced with a more lenient arrangement, whereby dismissals are permitted provided that unemployment compensation is available. One among several bargaining points in this arrangement derived from the enhancements of the social protection system: the child benefit that would be becoming available to ensure basic family expenditures for young children, and the universal social pension benefits which would be augmented. The Centre for Inclusive Growth, an independent research and advisory body to be funded by DFID, is another pending outcome of the ILO's interventions.

The imminent Three- Year Development Plan (2010/11 – 2013) is being conceptualised as an employment oriented approach, framed in the inclusive growth paradigm. To be launched in 2011, it will include a quantified employment target – a significant innovation, and if realised a clear change in government commitment. Cast as productive employment which brings the wage above the poverty line, it is based on a projection of expected new labour market entrants, plus persons employed in unproductive jobs, and with an assumption of constant employment elasticity of GDP growth, stipulates a GDP growth rate of 6.35 per cent, and 4.4 per cent per capita for the plan period. The Plan is analysing sectors where employment elasticity is larger than 1 and is likely to highlight sector policies which would favour employment-intensive growth (Campbell 2010).

Indeed, in 2009, the entry age for the social pension was lowered and monthly benefits doubled from 250 to 500 rupees, and in 2010, the government began disbursement of a child benefit. The child grant introduced was more modest than originally conceived, partly for political reasons, and partly because of financial limitations in the fiscal budget,

¹⁵ United Nations Country Team Nepal and Government of Nepal. United Nations Development Assistance Framework For Nepal (UNDAF). Kathmandu 2007.
<http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=234&f=N>

but a budget line has been established in the current fiscal budget of Nepal, so that the grant is government funded and not ODA-dependent.¹⁶

In sum, the trajectory of the above initiatives can be taken as a positive example of Delivering as One and of inter-agency policy coherence in the area of decent work and social protection.

2. Lessons learnt

Were there “good practices” and enabling and fortuitous circumstances that facilitated this outcome from which one could learn? A number of factors can be identified.

The first set of contributing circumstances relates to the political constellation in Nepal, including:

- The “policy moment”: in this case, of a post-conflict search for new avenues of social cohesion and poverty alleviation;
- Timing: the idea for a quick impact, peace dividend type intervention coincided with the provision of technical and political advice;
- The successive, post-conflict coalition Governments have been interested in and needed to offer new policies, which some analysts assessed as populist, but which in any event resulted in an expanded fiscal budget with a broad range of new transfers introduced in the 2008/9 budget of the CPN(M) led government, with the child benefit then being a “natural” addition in the 2009/10 budget of the UML-led government;
- The “deal” with trade unions to introduce some labour market reforms in exchange for improvements and deepening of the social transfer system which shows the synergy which can result from a combined tackling of different policy areas;
- The increased fiscal space, provided by increasing tax revenues generated by better tax compliance. One tranche of the government’s incremental tax income was allocated to the child grant with a dedicated budget head;
- Change agents were in place, notably the successive Vice Chairs of the Planning Commission. This was important since the IMF Resident Mission was insisting on “fiscal prudence” but since the government generated its own fiscal space, government ownership was possible because of their control over fiscal resources.

The second set of circumstances relates to the favourable constellation of the UN and bi-lateral players in Nepal with parallel interests and policy ideas:

- The global “Zeitgeist”, with employment schemes and social transfers as one tool and decent work and social protection as a development strategy coming into fashion, one could say they were becoming the “flavour of the day”. For example, a broad range of UN agencies began expressly promoting cash transfers or social protection, including in the form of social pensions, child benefits, and employment schemes, in the mid-2000s, including UNICEF, the World Bank,¹⁷ DFID and the GTZ. This was in part driven by the much-reported success stories from social transfer schemes in Latin America.

¹⁶ It is for all children under 5 in the Karnali zone, and to the lowest income dalit households, with a limit of two children per household. See Government of Nepal 2009.

¹⁷ See for example the World Bank conferences devoted to social safety nets, convened in Turkey and in Arusha.

- The speedy preparation of technical documents such as the ILO analysis of social protection costs in Nepal (ILO 2008) which provided the process with an evidence base from which to undertake advocacy.
- At the personnel level, there was a continuity among the heads of agencies and staff in the UN Country Team, so that the technical expertise and the policy views grew in a process not interrupted by departures and arrivals of staff, leading to an in-group feeling around a common cause.
- The commonality of policy stance with key donors, including centrally DFID and the ADB.

Such policy coherence constellations cannot be replicated easily, so this particular experience may be unique, but “policy moments” may well present themselves *similarly* in major political power transitions in many countries. There is therefore a case for studying, and learning from, the constituent elements of a particular process which led to outcomes that measure up to improving human development outcomes.

Box 2

Tools II: Dinner table diplomacy

An under-researched factor in policy advocacy is the role of “informal diplomacy”. These are the occasional conversations among policy makers and UN staff, at receptions or formal meals. These get-togethers are a key tool in influencing options, beginning negotiations, or helping forge policy or at least programme cohesion. In the Nepal case, working lunches and dinners, as tête-à-têtes or in groups, were instrumental in creating momentum for the social protection interventions, notably the child benefit and labour market reforms, and creating a common, human development-oriented policy stance.¹⁸

(b) The social protection initiative in the Maldives – example of a work in progress

1. The process and outcome

A similar situation – a policy moment or opportunity for wide-ranging policy-oriented development discussions – presented itself in the Maldives in 2008 and 2009. Here too, the constellation propitious to policy discussions around a reform movement was due to a crisis and to a regime change. A new Constitution was adopted in 2008, and democratic multiparty elections for the Office of President and for a new Parliament were conducted in 2008 and 2009. A new government took office in 2008, after 40 years of a one-party system. As a self-declared conservative government, it was keen to introduce deep reform.

The political transition coincided with a fiscal crisis, which had been building up gradually, but was exacerbated by the ballooning of the fiscal budget as a result of the development aid inflows and government expenditures in post-tsunami reconstruction. Between 2005 and 2009, government expenditure increased by US\$ 100 million or more each year, nominally reaching 70 per cent of GDP in 2009.¹⁹ The size of the fiscal deficit

¹⁸ In a similar vein, see Duina and Needergaard 2010 on learning in intergovernmental settings, pp. 193-217.

¹⁹ For a detailed account on the fiscal situation in the Maldives, see Bonnerjee and Köhler 2009.

and government debt was aggravated by the impact of the global economic and financial crisis.

While most social indicators in the Maldives are favourable, with comparatively low rates of income poverty, very high school enrolment rates, and the lowest child and maternal mortality rates of all of South Asia, the country since the mid-2000s was starting to experience considerable social problems, including youth employment estimated at 40% for young women and over 20% for young men, and various concomitant expressions of youth disaffection including substance and sexual abuse (Bonnerjee and Köhler 2009b).

The combined impact of political change, fiscal crisis and social tensions triggered a number of policy changes. The new government was committed to a conservative agenda.²⁰ There was, for example, considerable drive to privatise key social services, including health and education, as a combined result of the political shift to conservatism, and because of the large fiscal deficit. There was also pressure from the World Bank and the IMF, with the latter advising the government to downsize the civil service to lessen the fiscal burden.²¹

From a UN perspective, the UN coordination challenging process was not as complex as in other countries, as the UN Country Team comprises only 5 resident agencies. From a policy perspective, however, it was highly complex, since the ideas and policy positions put forward in the new economic and social strategy looked at odds from the UN concerns and the MDG framework.

UNICEF therefore launched an initiative to discuss and help identify alternatives to the privatisation of public services, so as to preserve the hitherto universal and free access to health and education – which had led to positive human development outcomes in the Maldives. A UNICEF-initiated policy seminar, convened by the Ministry of Finance, with support from the Vice-President's office, brought together senior officials from all ministries and representatives from all agencies in the UN Country Team – UNDP, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and FAO. It resulted in a working document, called the Minimum Social Protection Package which listed all the services that needed to remain in the public domain, namely education and health; social transfers; and transport as a basis for inter-island connectivity; it also proposed to maintain food price subsidies. The Maldives Cabinet subsequently adopted the document.

Another policy process was the transformation of the government's political party manifesto into an operational development plan, the Aneh Dhivehi Raajje: The Strategic Action Plan which replaced the earlier 5-Year Development Plan. The Strategic Action Plan builds on the main coalition party's political manifesto and its five "pledges": (i) establish a nationwide transport system, (ii) assure affordable living costs, (iii) provide affordable housing, (iv) provide quality health care for all, and (v) prevent narcotics abuse and trafficking.²² UNDP led the drafting of this Strategic Action Plan in consultation with all resident UN agencies. Among other areas, it addressed the role of the "benevolent state" and highlighted social protection, employment and human resources development.

²⁰ The lead party was advised by and modelled its programme on that of the Conservative Party of the UK.

²¹ The IMF art. IV consultation 2009 merely recommended cuts in the civil service, but this was interpreted to mean a 50 per cent reduction.

²² Strategic Action plan, see <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/4/media/downloads/AP-EN.pdf>

From late 2008, the government began a reorganisation of the ministries and departments, combining several into one. In 2009, the government decided to embark on measures to cut the public service by 50 per cent, a step which has led to the creation of a presidential task force on civil service reform. The social protection system, including the government and social pension systems, were up for restructuring, and several new bodies were created to help shape the transition. One of these – the National Social Protection Agency - reports directly to the President's office. The government decided to revamp the civil service pensions and instead introduce a social pension, which was phased in in mid-2009. Interestingly, the Maldives also became involved in a regional initiative on social protection, advising processes in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC); this possibly fed back into domestic social protection policy reform discussions.

The Maldives UNDAF 2008-10²³ was adopted in 2007 as an agreement to help the government implement the 7th Five Year Development Plan. As this Plan was substituted by the new Strategic Action Plan, the UNDAF review processes were complicated; nevertheless, they provided an opportunity for policy coherence discussions among the UN agencies and informed the formulation of the new UNDAF for 2011-2015.²⁴ This was adopted in 2010 by the Government and 15 UN agencies and the Regional Commission ESCAP. This new UNDAF has four pillars with a resident UN agency tasked to lead each:

- Social equity, led by UNICEF;
- Environment, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction,
- Governance and economic development, both led by UNDP; and
- Gender equality and women's empowerment, led by UNFPA.

The first three pillars are carried over from the previous UNDAF, while the fourth – formerly a cross cutting theme – was elevated to a distinct pillar because of the laggard progress on gender equality.²⁵ Within these pillars there are eight UNDAF outcomes. One is devoted to social security and protection and explicitly refers to the “minimum social floor”; it will be guided by a consortium of agencies – UNICEF; ILO, UNFPA and UNESCO. The second pillar relevant to this paper's theme is that devoted to the economic sector, with an emphasis on opportunities for decent work and labour markets; it is to be guided by UNDP, ILO, FAO and WHO and a group of non-resident agencies including UNIDO, UNCTAD and ESCAP (UNDAF 2011-15, pp. 2 and 16 ff).

Thematically, these are innovations directly building on UN policy advocacy undertaken in 2008/9. The UNDAF asks the UN to work more on “upstream policy advice” and support “policy reform in the Government's Strategic Action Plan” (ibid. p 12). In terms of policy coherence, this may now, however, pose a major challenge, requiring intense policy dialogue and convergence processes among the agencies convened around the various pillars and outcomes. For instance, the interpretation of the social floor put forward in the UNDAF is limited to child and family protection services and “arrangements for social protection, especially children, the elderly and the disabled” (ibid. p 16). This angle crucially omits the entire working population from social protection policy, so that major

²³ Maldives UNDAF 2008-2010.

http://www.undp.org/asia/country_programme/UNDAF/MDV_UNDAF_2008-2010.pdf

²⁴ *Maldives United Nations Development Assistance Framework*. UNDAF 2011-2015. Republic of Maldives. Male 12 Apr. 2010.

²⁵ An additional case for putting gender empowerment more centrally into the UNDAF is the rise in Islamic fundamentalism. While this is not spelt out in the UNDAF, it is the explicit concern of the President's Office.

discussions will be needed across the different UN agencies involved to come to a common understanding, aligned with globally accepted definitions of social protection or the global social floor. Conversely, the UN's role on decent work and labour markets laid out in the UNDAF conforms directly with the ILO mandates (ibid. p. 18).

2. Lessons learnt

Which then were the circumstances in the Maldives which enabled an inter-agency effort around a coherent policy stance? Again, a number of enabling or fortuitous circumstances can be cited:

- There was a new government with an interest in reform and new initiatives, constituting a “policy moment”, and opening space for discussions with the UN agencies.
- Pressure on Government to respond to the fiscal crisis; much of this pressure was international as opposed to domestic.
- Change agents played a noticeable role. The Minister of Finance and Treasury in his role of dealing with the fiscal crisis was propelled into a lead role in social policy thinking. In terms of UN policy influence, the Vice President, as a former UNICEF staff member, facilitated direct access for the UN to the topmost decision makers.
- The preparation of publications which offered statistical data, evidence and analysis on the country's situation.
- The arrival of the ILO as an in-country partner when the government joined the ILO in May 2009 created an environment in the Country Team to take on new themes around labour markets as well as deepen its nascent work on social protection.

The confluence of favourable circumstances is always delicate. Thus, in the Maldives example, a further deepening of the employment and social protection commitments made and the social floor initiative will be difficult, seeing the limiting way in which social protection has been cast in the UNDAF. Moreover, at the procedural level, the momentum may be stalled by several events. The government recently faced a political crisis at Cabinet level. In the UN team, the ILO at the moment lacks the resources needed to prepare the technical paper necessary to calculate the cost of the various social policy and social protection interventions.²⁶ UNICEF and UNDP have put initiatives on social policy on hold due to staff turnover and restructuring in government. This hiatus carries a risk that the policy coherence efforts are watered down or cast aside.

²⁶ Since the Maldives was earlier not a member of the ILO, resources for this exercise had not been budgeted.

4. Challenges and obstacles to Delivering as One – the case for policy coherence - and examining the success of social protection initiatives.

If coherence and convergence are possible and can work under specific circumstances, as shown in the two cases above, there remain several structural obstacles and challenges to policy coherence and Delivering as One. They can perhaps be clustered into three domains – analytical and policy differences among agencies; organisational structures; and issues in people management. Of these, arguably, the first set of issues - analytical and policy stances - are the linchpin. Social protection currently appears as an area where these obstacles are easier to overcome, for reasons spelt out below. The topic of decent work and employment, on the other hand, is one where policy coherence is more difficult.

(a) Normative, analytical and technical differences

Each UN agency is based on a distinct philosophy or “ideology”. At the normative level, all UN agencies are under the aegis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which can be described as the soul and the ultima ratio for the UN system. However, there is a reluctance in many agencies to be explicit and proactive on the UN’s human rights and rights-based commitment because of their different mandates and histories. This is perhaps a lingering legacy of the Cold War and of continuing North-South divisions, with human rights perceived as a political agenda of the “West” or the “North”, not as a universally valid principle. However, if agencies do not unequivocally ground their policy development in a human rights base, it is not possible to have policy coherence at a normative level, which in turn informs all other levels. In recent years, all UN agencies have introduced sensitisation and capacity building on the human rights based approach to *programming* which is a first step towards conceptualising and situating *policy* in a rights based mode; this needs to be reinforced and deepened.

There are moreover large divergences in specific policy and technical areas, which hinder policy cohesion. The most obvious and much reviewed one is around the differences on economic or social theories, such as the Keynesian and structuralist schools versus neoliberal paradigms or the so-called Washington consensus. There is often a reluctance to openly “profess” adherence to a particular school of thought, and this can lead to a muddled policy stance where bits and pieces of policy prescriptions are selected from a variety of schools and frameworks, and the key variables that need to be tackled to structurally improve human development are not pinpointed.

Policy divergence becomes more complicated when policy rifts run vertically or horizontally through individual agencies – if, for example, “Keynesians” and “neoliberals” are represented in one department or agency of a wider system. Interestingly, there is an evolution in the traditionally neoclassical policy positions or “prescriptions” within the IFIs, both globally and at country level, primarily as a result of the lessons from the global financial and economic crisis. Examples include the position taken in 2008/9 by the Managing Director of the IMF on the need for fiscal stimuli to address the financial and economic crisis, and his higher tolerance for fiscal deficit levels – clearly a Keynesian position, which did not, however, seem to permeate the positions taken by the IMF resident missions.²⁷ The working level discussions between UNICEF and the IMF, and the ILO-

²⁷ See for example the review of fiscal prescriptions of the IMF by Ortiz et al. 2010.

IMF conference on “Challenges of Growth, Employment and Social Cohesion”²⁸ are efforts to bridge these policy rifts in a constructive and progressive fashion.

There are also divergent approaches on more technical issues, for example, because agencies resort to different evidence bases with divergent policy advice. One example is on the topic of food security, hunger and nutrition, where the FAO, WHO and UNICEF each have – marginally – different conceptions of hunger and malnutrition, and their stance on remedial action differs in the amount of importance given to availability of food, time for care, or access to health services and water and sanitation respectively as the root causes for child malnutrition.²⁹

Another aspect concerns agency subcultures and allegiances. UN agencies are often affiliated with individual, or groups of, member states that position them in the global development architecture and influence the agency’s policy positions. For example, UNCTAD is traditionally close to the G77. The IFIs’ governance structure is heavily biased towards the largest contributor countries which hitherto have been the industrialised countries which have succeeded in placing their interests at the centre of the World Bank and IMF policy logic; it now remains to see if the opening through the G-20 process to a group of “emerging” developing countries will create space for the more structuralist or Keynesian policies pursued by some of these countries.

For inter-agency policy coherence, such subcultures and allegiances offer advantages and disadvantages. For instance, close relationships with the US allows the WFP to be somewhat more open and critical of host governments’ food policies than other agencies, because it has clout from its connections with the US and that country’s emphasis on human rights. On the other hand, UN agencies can be perceived as acting as a channel for a given policy stance.

Another issue is that of relationships with the host government and country elites. For example, UNDP and UNICEF as the largest in-country multilateral development cooperation agencies need to maintain good host country relations, so as to ensure that they remain in a position to deliver their on-the-ground programmes, but as a result are frequently far less assertive on normative or policy issues than they ought to be, considering their mandates.

Policy divergence also may stem from member states and their influence in the agencies’ governing bodies, and this has become more complicated and layered because of divergences within ministries in each country, which can lead to a phenomenon whereby different ministries representing the same donor country, through their mission, insist on different political perspectives and policy stances in the various agencies’ governing bodies.

There is nonetheless space for coherence and cooperation in individual policy areas. For social protection, for example, this seems to be the case, and a certain degree of convergence on the centrality of employment and decent work also seems to be emerging in the very recent past.

Social protection, in the form of cash transfers, has become “en vogue” among bi- and multilateral agencies in a big way since 2005 (circa). The policy fault line is not on the need for social protection as an intervention, but “merely” on how best to design and

²⁸ See International Monetary Fund (IMF) and International Labour Organization (ILO). 2010. *The Challenges of Growth, Employment and Social Cohesion - Joint ILO-IMF conference in cooperation with the office of the Prime Minister of Norway*, Discussion document, Oslo, 13 Sep.

²⁹ See UNICEF ROSA 2009 for the variance in definitions of hunger.

deliver, suggesting that policy divergence for this topic occurs at the operational, not the policy, level.³⁰ Conversely, it is less easy to build consensus, and hence policy coherence, on the employment-decent work agenda which is more complicated, as there is a long history of debate on labour market policies, and positions on issues such as the pros and cons of minimum wage provisions or labour market flexibility diverge fundamentally, notably between the IFIs and the UN agencies proper. Moreover, this is a contentious area because it directly affects consolidated and organised interests in the enterprise sector, with divergent positions between capital and labour. The Nepal case described above, where labour market and social protection reform converged, is therefore particularly interesting, while it will be of interest to observe the policy evolution in the Maldives case.

(b) Organisational structures

The second major obstacle to policy coherence lies embedded in UN structures.

Each UN agency has a specific mandate organised around a particular objective. Once a mandate is fixed, it is difficult for an agency to manoeuvre its coverage and its policy line. At the same time, there is an emerging division of labour, with the inner UN “family” around the secretariat with the regional commissions, the funds and programmes and the specialised agencies concentrating on soft, “social” issues, and the other part of the larger UN, the IFIs, in charge of the tough “economic” issues. Here, there are clearly divergent policy and technical stances, but also different powers, at play.

Related to the issue of mandate is that of “turf”: agencies are identified by their mandate and their area of work, this gives them identity notably vis-à-vis their executive boards and their donors. This means, however, that agencies defend their particular area and theme, and do not necessarily welcome newcomers – other UN agencies – that join their topical area – as these may have a different position, or role, or attachment. It also means that each agency has a myopic “slice of the cake” optic, which makes it difficult for each to be comprehensive, and to develop and present comprehensive policy positions.

Some examples from other policy areas include:

- The concept of LDCs is limited to countries defined and registered as “least developed” by the Committee on Development Policy, and this is the set of countries analysed as a group and with policy advice based on the particular set of countries. Other developing countries, or regions within countries, with LDC characteristics, are not analysed, programmed or resourced in the same way, although the human development exigencies would be equally pertinent.
- The UNICEF child mandate is easily recognisable and effective in terms of programme delivery. However, there are policy clashes – such as the rights of women versus the rights of children – which are not opened to discussion. UNICEF in the past also shied away from analysing other vulnerable groups, but this has just changed with its now very pronounced focus on equity.³¹

³⁰ The differences are on two planes. The first is whether social protection is cast as a “safety net”, reactive to difficult situations and residual to policy and economic outcomes, and hence focused on the most vulnerable or conversely cast as a right. The second is the much rehearsed controversy between those agencies arguing for conditionality and targeting as a matter of principle and those arguing for non-conditional universal transfers. But neither of these planes is on the policy level of being for or against social protection.

³¹ For example: UNICEF, 2010a and UNICEF 2010b.

- The ILO is committed to employment, decent work, workers' rights, and is seen as the lead agency for this area of work. Decent work was, however, not incorporated into the first version of the MDGs, and only added in 2005.
- UNCTAD is devoted to international trade, and in the past entered into discussion on the employment impact of trade only marginally, skirted the issue of decent work, and essentially advocated for an expansion of exports or foreign direct investment without examining labour rights. An important advance here is the UNCTAD Trade and Development Report 2010 which for first time in UNCTAD history advocates domestic-driven growth and priority to employment.

Fund-raising can be a deterrent of efforts for policy coherence. All agencies compete for extra budgetary funding from donors. Delivering as One and policy coherence are therefore not necessarily popular, especially with those agencies with high visibility and who are highly reliant on fundraising. Policy differences can serve to highlight position and differentiate an agency. As one example: UNICEF was wary of the One UN idea as it worried it could lose its fundraising ability due of its unique image.

At the organisational level, too, there are several obstacles to Delivering as One and having a joint policy stance including the complexity of agency reporting lines and accountability structures. This is both because of mandates and philosophies, and because of loss of effectiveness: cooperation is time consuming, making it cumbersome and seemingly inefficient to fine-tune policies.

In the individual developing countries, the UN Country Teams have an asymmetrical shape. The “social agencies” within the inner UN – notably UNDP with its focus on human development, UNICEF with its focus on education, health, water and sanitation, and WFP with its focus on food security, are by far the largest agencies, in terms of staff, offices outside the capital, respondent NGOs, and financial resources, and hence the power to deliver on the ground. The agencies with a more economically oriented technical expertise – ILO, FAO or UNIDO - are at best small with a skeleton staff and almost entirely reliant on headquarters expertise and project resources, while the World Bank and the IMF, with their different paradigm, are powerful as donors and regulators respectively. As a result, and reinforced by the particular slant of the MDGs, a Country Team's agenda tends to be driven by the social – as opposed to the economic *and* social - issues.

Similarly, at the operational level, there are several interrelated phenomena. The first is the project mentality which creates a dynamism around delivery of concrete but discrete outcomes. Projects are, in general, managed by individual agencies or by agencies in cooperation with specific ministries which also are generally constructed in silos with intra-ministerial reporting lines, so that there is a built-in centrifugal force away from Delivering as One.

Reinforcing this tendency is the fact that budgeting procedures remain agency-specific, and despite the DaO decision to have one budget across the UN funds and programmes, this is not yet operational. While unified budgeting is not a precondition for policy coherence, the lack of it keeps agencies apart in terms of identity as well as in terms of programme.

Again, social protection may be an exception. Social protection has considerable policy traction as a “soft” area for positive impact on children, families, vulnerable groups, also for women's empowerment and social inclusion, as well as a “hard” economic area, with an impact on growth or even labour market reform, and with possible support from the organised as well as the informal sector labour. It is an area providing good visibility for all agencies concerned. The ILO has historically been the leader on this, with the WHO coming on board with regard to social insurance or universal tax-financed provisioning in the area of health. Moreover, as a new topic it offers a wide-open playing field, with new

players such as UNICEF, DFID, the European Commission, and the World Bank³² devoting increased resources to this area which was earlier a classic domain of expertise and of policy advocacy of the ILO. The policy plate is less circumscribed than in other fields. An additional factor in the increasingly vocal movement on social protection may come from the particular convening power of UNICEF which is a member of the ILO-led Global Social Floor initiative, and as an agency devoted to children, has a particular niche and the ear of policy makers, be it because it is more “difficult” to deny child rights and interests than those of say, organised labour, or be it because children are seen as the “human capital” of each country’s future decades.

(c) The people factor: personnel and personal issues

UN staff performance criteria do not necessarily assess or experience “Delivering as One” as a useful process; the own agency’s visibility and success is often seen as more important than cooperation with other agencies. This too can play against policy coherence which needs time for debate and discussion, and coming to a common position that is not watered down, but instead clear-cut and forward looking.

Finally, policy coherence is also hindered at a very personal level, when there is a lack of trust among team members – be it across or within agencies. There are power alliances, many constructed with good intentions, to reach results, but which may harden policy positions. And as anywhere, there are antipathies and ego issues, which can result in infighting or mutual undermining, not for ideological or technical reasons, but because of personality clashes.

Here, the Nepal social protection cum decent work initiative and the Maldives social protection package and employment creation processes may be seen as fortuitous counterexamples. Trust and understanding among the players made it possible to forge strong alliances and cohere around policies. The deeper outcome in the case of Nepal can also be ascribed to the fact that the government had fiscal resources with which to operate independently.

Box 3
Human dynamics in UN Country Teams

Much has been written about UN Country Team architecture, such as the need for a so-called firewall to separate the large UNDP office from the UN Resident Coordinator office, and then again the need – running in the opposite direction – for the Resident Coordinator to be endowed with some clout vis-à-vis the agencies she is coordinating, one option of which is through decision making power over financial resources. Less has been written, in the public domain, on the inter-personal dynamics on UN Country Teams. There are at least three factors that may conspire to make UN Country Teams a possible platform for inter-personal rivalry, which can hinder Delivering as One and policy coherence. They include:

* In terms of objective factors, the enormous pressure on heads of agencies, especially in difficult, low income, or conflict-ridden countries. The time needed for substantive and operational cooperation and coordination to achieve policy coherence is considerable and adds to already nearly unmanageable workloads and time pressures;

³² More recently, the ADB too is reengaging in the area of social protection.

* In terms of subjective factors, the biographical trajectory towards becoming country head of a UN agency requires, among other things, a combination of technical knowledge, good professional and personal networks, maybe a mentor, maybe elbows, and certainly resilience and ambition. Personalities with all these traits may find it difficult to share power, decision making and choices with a team, especially when they are of the opinion that their peers are not up to speed or adhere to politically opposed views and alliances.

* Administratively, performance is measured in programme delivery and budget disbursement, marginally also in outcomes. Outcomes of teamwork however are not attributable to individuals or to specific agencies, so that there is no objective incentive for inter-agency cooperation.

5. Outlook and persistent hopes for Delivering as One

(a) Key steps towards policy coherence

The above suggests that several steps are needed to move from *Delivering as One* (one leader, one programme, one budget, one location) to achieving actual *policy coherence*. One element could be coming from the Millennium Declaration and its MDG agenda, or from the concept of human development as a unifier across agency mandates and areas of work. However, there is an inherent, systematic shortcoming to the Millennium Declaration, the MDGs and the internationally agreed development goals and even to the concept of human development: these concepts and programmes are not policy specific, they are not even explicitly policy oriented.³³

Instead, they lay out overarching normative principles and then jump to intended outcomes at the activity level – they omit the policy level. To come to genuine inter-agency coherence will require a shift to a primacy of content, rather than the focus on efficiency and of scale of development work, or ODA flows.³⁴ There also needs to be a shift from the focus on *business practices, programming and operational activities* to *policy coherence and development outcomes*. Such a reorientation needs to come both from “the top”, from the apex of the UN system and of each department/agency, but at the same time needs a push from the level of technical experts who need to advocate for and engage in overt, dedicated inter-agency policy fora.

A second element is the need to critically rethink the notion of recipient country ownership if policy coherence is a goal. This is because the ultimate *raison d’être* for the United Nations is housed in its normative principles – human rights, democracy and participation, social justice, and equity. Such an overarching agenda is needed precisely because many countries have shortcomings in or even violate these universal values, and accountability mechanisms and citizenship control are weak in many developing countries. Therefore, an uncompromisable universal body is needed to instill and advocate for human rights and values of justice. The notion of country ownership without a critical assessment of each country’s adherence to universal rights does not make sense, and needs to be addressed if policy is to be coherent and consistent. Such a reorientation needs to come from the UN system, and could be led, for example, by the normative, rights-advocacy agencies such as the OHCHR, ILO and UNICEF.

³³ See for example the discussion by Fukuda Parr 2010 who lays out some of the reasons for the absence of a policy dimension in the MDGs.

³⁴ See Köhler and Stirbu 2008 reporting on an interagency workshop designed precisely to have policy debates on the individual MDG areas.

A third element is the need to address built-in shortcomings within the UN. The process of Delivering as One carries the risk of converging towards the lowest common denominator, the least imaginative approach, the most acquiescent policy or programme content. Some have argued that there is too much meekness in the UN voice, correlated to the weaknesses in UN agency leadership. There is often a lack of civil courage or willingness to push the envelope.³⁵ This may be because of allegiances, political constituencies and pressures from strong players in the UN system or in the donor community. There is therefore, conceivably, a risk built into the well-intentioned drive for policy coherence, since it may lead to policy coherence, but on a minimalist, non-controversial, non-antagonistic level. This risk needs to be countered by a push from within the UN Secretariat and could be driven, for example, by departments such as UN DESA, UNRISD, the UN University or the UN Staff College.

(b) Next steps

The UN General Assembly (GA) has completed its high-level conference on the MDGs (September 2010). The aspiration is to a “deeper”, accelerated, more effective MDG agenda. Some new elements feature in the GA outcome document, and this flags the areas where the policy coherence discussion needs to come in. The first set of issues is precisely around the themes of this paper – social protection and employment which find consideration in quite a radical form as the social protection floor and decent work. With respect to economic policy, there is a reference to sustainable and inclusive forward-looking macroeconomic policies, and to the need for a better distribution of assets and income. With regard to social policy, there is a reference to equitable services delivery, and a focus on marginalised groups and the need for efforts to reduce inequality, eliminate social exclusion and discrimination and enhance human right (paras 19, 42, 45 of the outcome document for high level plenary meeting, UN GA 20 Sept 2010). And there is a reference, even if in passing, to the concept of human security, which may be taken as a step in the direction of a more encompassing policy concept. These are openings for new processes of policy coherence which now need to be seized.

(c) Outlook

The key objective of Delivering as One and policy coherence would be to achieve more effective results for human development. Better inter-agency policy coherence, by facilitating integration between economic and social policies, is a critical tool for this. In more practical or applied terms, it is about moving out of the project mentality and embracing a strategic, systematic and transformative approach. The question to ask is whether greater interagency policy coherence could result in better policy results regarding interaction with developing country *governments*, and ultimately whether that would lead to better human development results *for disadvantaged groups and individuals* in those countries – the final objective of the MDG agenda and the Millennium Declaration, and the overarching moral imperative of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

³⁵ See Weiss 2009 on the “second UN” – its civil service, and their constraining mindset. Pp. 192 ff.

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