

21 October 2009

Dear Resident Co-ordinators and UN Country Team members,

As the strategic framework for the UN Country Team, the UNDAF embodies our collective response to national development priorities. It focuses the UN Country Team's resources on issues where we can make the biggest difference. The UNDAF is a vital expression of what the UN stands for at the country level, and it is critical that it is a quality document.

To do that, the UNDG will be relying on Resident Co-ordinators and UN Country Teams to make a step change in the relevance and quality of the next generation of UNDAFs; review ongoing UNDAFs; and ensure that the right capacities are in place to deliver on the UNDAFs.

Between 2010 and 2013, some ninety countries will establish new UNDAFs. This provides us with a significant opportunity to position our joint efforts much more strategically in support of the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development.

Resident Co-ordinators and UN Country Teams are more than ever operating in fast changing environments where they are expected to respond to emerging and unforeseen challenges. The food, fuel, climate change, and financial and economic crises and the flu pandemic of recent times are clear evidence of that.

New UNDAFs should focus first and foremost on concerted action toward MDG achievement as part of national development frameworks, and on addressing the central development challenge of climate change. Strategically positioning the UN development system in the context of the new UNDAFs is imperative. With fewer than 6 years left until the 2015 target date for achieving the MDGs, we must act now to accelerate progress.

It is equally important that, where UNDAFs are in mid-cycle, UNCTs don't wait until a new one is developed to evaluate their efforts. At this time a critical look should be taken at existing programmes. In consultation with your national counterparts, it may be appropriate to reposition ongoing interventions, where the financial crisis, deceleration in MDG achievement, and under-performance against other strategic challenges require urgent attention. The UNDAF annual review mechanism provides a good opportunity to do this.

All United Nations Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams

In my 3 September letter to you on the UN System Joint Crisis Initiative, I noted that our support should be rapid and relevant to emerging needs, and that we must apply our programme guidance in a flexible manner to reposition our interventions on the ground as required. To remain a relevant partner in the countries where we work, we must improve our responsiveness.

Even the most strategic UNDAF will be a lost opportunity if the right capacities are not lined up to deliver the goals and targets set. I am therefore asking each UN Country Team to review its current capacity mix as it develops or repositions its UNDAF.

The UNDG is now working on simplifying the process of preparing UNDAFs - something UNCTs have been calling for. This new guidance will shortly be available to country teams preparing new UNDAFs.

The nations and peoples we serve all benefit from a UN development system which is focused, co-ordinated, and responsive, and has relevant capacity in place. This will require strong commitment from all levels of the UN system.

The UNDAF process enables us to act much more strategically in response to new development challenges. We should take every opportunity through the establishment of new UNDAFs, or the regular reviews of existing ones, to do just that.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Helen Clark". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Helen Clark  
Chair  
UN Development Group

cc: Regional Directors Teams