M&E Guidelines for UN Coherence, Effectiveness, and Relevance (CER)

NOTE:

1. This tool/guidance has been developed by the Global Change Management Support Team under the guidance of the Inter-Agency Task Team for Change Management. It has not been tested at the country level and there are no examples of its application from any country office at this time.
2. Action holder: M&E Working group(s)

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1   Introduction and Context

M&E for UN Coherence, Effectiveness, and Relevance (CER) is an integral part of the change initiative, and relevant throughout Steps 3-9. It is based on the results matrices developed in Step 3.

These guidelines are a copy of Part 4 of the UNDAF Guidelines, extended to include M&E of Business Operations.

The CER M&E approach is very similar to UNDAF M&E. It can be regarded as an extension of the latter because it includes M&E for Business Operations
- M&E for UNDAF or common programming tool follows UNDAF guidelines 1:1.
- M&E for UN Business Operations (Common services and harmonized business practices, Common premises (if applicable), Joint Communication, Common Budgetary Framework) follow the same process, and therefore the guidelines apply as well. The difference here is that the content of M&E is slightly different, because it is based on the Business Operations Results Matrix developed in Step 3.

2   Objectives

- Provide a comprehensive overview of the M&E Process for UN Coherence, Effectiveness, and Relevance (CER)
- Show that CER M&E follows essentially the same process as M&E for UNDAF and is based on the latter
- Amend the M&E UNDAF guidelines to include M&E for UN Business operations

3   M&E Guidelines for UN Coherence, Effectiveness, and Relevance

1 Purpose

1. CER Monitoring and CER Evaluation are linked but distinct processes. Monitoring tracks progress towards the results agreed in the matrices, and checks if the assumptions made at the design stage are still valid and if the risk identified are actually occurring or not. Thus it helps the UNCT and implementing partners to make mid-course corrections as an integral part of programme management. Evaluation determines whether the results made a worthwhile contribution to national development priorities, and the coherence of UNCT support and business operations. It feeds into management and decision making processes. While it makes an essential contribution to managing for results, it is an external function that should be separated from programme and operations management. In line with the principles of Managing for Development Results, UNCTs should ensure that they 1) capitalize on existing national M&E systems whenever possible and feasible, 2) provide support in areas in which further strengthening of national systems is required, while avoiding to put an excessive burden on partner countries with UNDAF specific M&E requirements.

> **M&E: Minimum requirements**
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> 1. **M&E Plan** as detailed in section 4.4
> 2. **Annual progress reviews** be carried out and brief reports produced for each UNDAF and Business Operations Outcome (see paragraph 114 bullet 8)
> 3. **Annual UN CER Reviews** be carried out to enable UNCT and partners to make decisions based on evidence of results that will enhance subsequent performance (See paragraph 116 and 117).
> 4. **A UN CER Evaluation** be commissioned in consultation with national partners to feed its findings into the development of the next UNDAF or common programming tool. (See section 4.5)
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> Programmes are delivered through constituent programmatic initiatives/projects which are managed by individual UN agencies. Each programmatic initiative/project should have its own M&E system, reflecting what is mandatory for that UN agency, and what has been agreed with the other project partners. M&E and RBM for the UNDAF or common programming tool do not replace these M&E systems, but use the results and information from them.
> Each operational initiative should have its own M&E system as well.

2 Expected results

2. The results expected from CER **monitoring** are:
- Regular assessments of progress towards the results in the matrices, and that human rights principles are being respected in programme implementation;
- Continued identification of partners' capacity development needs, particularly for data collection, analysis, monitoring and reporting;
- Improved results-based reporting on system achievements; and
- Improved teamwork among UN agencies and greater ownership of the UNDAF or common programming tool among implementing partners
- Improved coherence, effectiveness, and relevance of the UN system in country

3. The results expected from the CER **evaluation** are:
- A considered judgement about the worth of CER results and strategies, as well as alternatives that could have made more effective use of UNCT resources and comparative advantages, particularly for capacity development;
- Improved positioning of UNDAF or common programming tool results and lessons to influence the national development framework, and inform country analysis and planning in the next cycle;
- Effective use of evaluations and studies conducted by agencies and partners during the cycle
- Lessons for Business Operations

4. CER results (at all levels) must be tracked through a manageable set of key performance indicators. Indicators are objectively verifiable and repeatable measures of a particular result. They are essential for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on achievement.

Figure 1: Baselines, targets, and performance
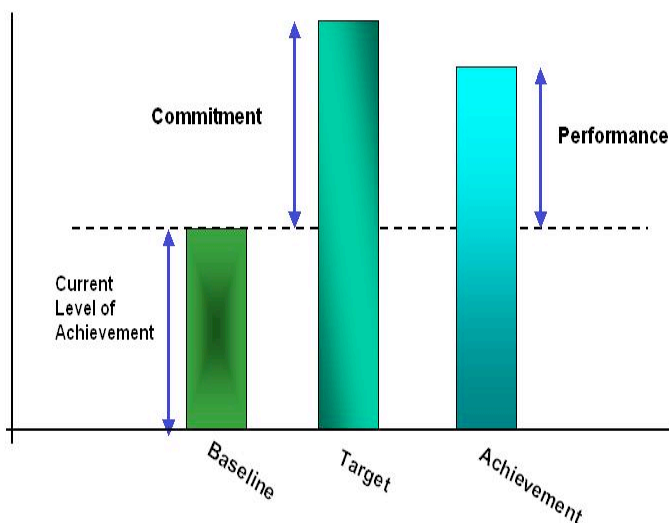
5. All indicators must be accompanied by **baselines** and **targets**. Without these, measurement of change over time is not possible. In the diagram:

Baselines establish the value of the indicator at the beginning of the planning period;

Targets describe expected values upon completion of the plan;

Performance monitoring of the indicator tells us about actual achievement, compared to the original target.

6. To ensure consistency, indicators, baselines and targets should not normally be changed retroactively, and if so, only by consent of all partners.

7. The **human rights standards** that guided the development of results must also guide the selection of indicators. An indicator must be as rights-based and **gender-sensitive** as the result it is intended to measure. Averages hide disparities thus hindering the identification of discrimination such as gender and racial discrimination, so indicators must be specific to the change expected, and to the subject of change, either the rights holder or the duty-bearer. This means disaggregation - as much as necessary - by sex, age, ethnicity, language, urban and rural areas. But there are trade-offs. The large sample sizes needed to provide quantitative data which are statistically reliable for different regions and population groups can increase data collection costs dramatically. The UNCT and partners will have to target the use of scarce M&E resources to address the most pressing data needs.

3 Getting it done

8. The **CER M&E plan** helps the UNCT to document what needs to be monitored, with whom, when, how, and how the M&E data will be used. It also helps to coordinate the different types of studies and evaluations conducted by agencies and their partners. The plan helps to focus the M&E activities of the UNCT, and it aligns them more closely with national mechanisms. It should be designed with the full involvement of government and other partners.

9. The M&E plan is prepared at the same time as the Results Matrices for Programmes and Business Operations. Like the matrices, the M&E Plan is a live instrument, to be updated as needed. **Results in the M&E plan** must be identical to the results in the matrices to ensure

consistency and accountability during monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, the M&E plan must be updated every time a Results Matrix is.

10. **Assumptions and risks** are critical elements of the CER process. They are first identified during the prioritization exercise, and then refined during the development of the M&E plan. The monitoring section of the plan should state how the validity of risks and assumptions will be checked regularly during implementation, and how the information generated will feed into management.

11. The UNCT should form new inter-agency groups around each UNDAF or common programming tool outcome and around each Business Operations outcome. These groups are responsible for using the results matrices and the M&E plan as the basis for joint monitoring with programme partners. Results of that monitoring will be used to report to the UNCT about progress. Outcome groups will also draw on reviews and progress reports that agencies undertake with their implementing partners. The challenge of inter-agency monitoring should not be under-estimated. CER outcome groups need practical and manageable Terms of Reference. The UNCT should prepare an annual progress report using an agreed common reporting format under the direction of the Resident Coordinator. UNDG Executive Committee agencies presently use an agreed Standard Progress Report for programme components for their agency specific reporting purposes.

12. As a minimum, CER outcome groups will:
- Meet regularly with partners to assess progress towards UNDAF or common programming tool results and business operations results;
- Conduct joint field monitoring missions to gauge achievements and constraints;
- Identify any lessons or good practices;
- Reflect on how well results are addressing human rights and gender equality concerns;
- Identify capacity development needs among partners, particularly related to data collection, analysis, monitoring and reporting;
- Report regularly to the individuals leading the UNCT on the issues listed above, and help them bring lessons and good practices to the attention of policy makers;
- Support UNCT action that assists the Government in reporting to international human rights bodies on the progress made by the State; and
- Organize **Annual Progress Reviews** for CER Outcomes. These should focus on (i) identifying if the required outputs have been delivered, and whether progress has been achieved, and (ii) what the UNCT and partners propose to do in cases where progress is less than intended.
- Prepare one annual progress report, using the M&E plan as a template, as an input to the CER annual reviews, and to help prepare agency and the Resident Coordinator's annual reports.

13. The individuals who lead the UNCT must support group members to fulfil these roles. This means the staff members' monitoring and reporting responsibilities must be included in their performance appraisal instruments, and CER groups must have adequate resources and secretariat support.

14. The **CER Annual Review Meeting** should be carried out during the last quarter. The Review provides the basis for tracking and reporting on the overall performance of the UNCT. The meeting's purpose is to:
- Review overall progress towards the results in the Results Matrices;

- Validate conclusions, including lessons and best practices, that should feed into preparation of new annual work plans and for policy advocacy;
- Make decisions based on evidence of results that will enhance subsequent performance.

15. The CER annual review meeting:
- Builds on reviews of by agencies and their implementing partners at the technical level;
- Uses common tools, mechanisms and processes such as the M&E plan and calendar and CER group reports;
- Provides information for the annual reports of agencies, the Resident Coordinator and donors, and may reflect on issues such as development effectiveness, priorities for national capacity development, and joint resource mobilization for CER;
- Provides data and analysis for the CER Evaluation.

16. Wherever possible, the annual review process should link to reviews of the national development framework. The UNDG guidance note on the UNDAF Annual Review provides more detail.

4 Structure and content of the M&E Plan

17. The M&E Plan has three components:

a) narrative component, that describes the M&E management plan: how the UNCT and partners will undertake and coordinate CER monitoring and the CER evaluation, with clear accountabilities for agencies and partners; and efforts to strengthen national M&E capacities. In developing the M&E management plan, the UNCT should estimate the human, financial and material resource requirements for its implementation. For example, the UNCT should consider the establishment of an interagency working group consisting of agency M&E Officers. The working group would be responsible for tracking and coordinating the implementation of the CER M&E plan and for promoting joint CER monitoring and evaluation.

b) M&E framework consolidating monitoring information in one table (for both Programmes and Operations) for easy reference by the UNCT and partners. The first column repeats the results from the Results Matrix. The remaining columns list: indicators, baselines and targets; means of verification; and assumptions and risks (see table 2).

c) M&E calendar to improve the coordination and use of M&E activities. The calendar provides a schedule of all major M&E activities. It describes agency and partner accountabilities, the uses and users of information, the CER evaluation milestones, and complementary partner activities (table 3).

Table 1: CER Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (one table per outcome)

UNDAF or common programming tool outcome	Indicator(s) and Baselines	Means of verification	Assumptions and Risks
UNDAF or common programming tool outcome1	Indicators; Baselines, targets[1]	Sources: Responsible agencies/ partners	At the interface: (1) Between national priorities and UNDAF or common programming tool outcomes; and (2) UNDAF or common programming tool outcomes and agency outcomes
1.1 Agency outcome - Output 1.1.1 - Output 1.1.2 - Output 1.1.3 …	Indicators; Baselines, targets	Sources: Responsible agencies/ partners	
1.2 Agency outcome - Output 1.2.1 ….	Indicators; Baselines, targets …	Sources: Responsible agencies/ partners	
Business Operations Outcome	**Indicator(s) and Baselines**	**Means of verification**	**Assumptions and Risks**
Business Operations Outcome 1	Indicators; Baselines, targets	Sources: Responsible agencies/ partners	
1.1 Agency outcome - Output 1.1.1 - Output 1.1.2 - Output 1.1.3 …	Indicators; Baselines, targets	Sources: Responsible agencies/ partners	
1.2 Agency outcome - Output 1.2.1 ….	Indicators; Baselines, targets …	Sources: Responsible agencies/ partners	

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[1] Note that targets for outcomes are to be reached by efforts beyond those specified of the UN

Table 2: The M&E Calendar[2]

		1 YYear 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
UNCT M&E activities[3]	**Surveys/studies**	Investigations of a problem or assessments of the conditions of a specified population group. They can help to identify root causes, and findings are used to develop or refine programme strategy and/or define baseline indicators.				
	Monitoring systems	Typically this will include UNCT support to national information systems, with regular and fairly frequent reporting of data related to CER results. In particular it should include UNCT support for national reporting to Human Rights treaty bodies.				
	Evaluations	An evaluation attempts to determine objectively the worth or significance of a development activity, policy or programme. This section includes all evaluations of agency programmes and projects contributing to CER, and the CER evaluation				
	Reviews	Reviews will generally draw on agency and partners' monitoring systems as well as the findings of surveys, studies and evaluations				
Planning references	**CER evaluation milestones**	Timing and sequence of the milestones in preparing and implementing the CER Evaluation. These should make use of the M&E activities above.				
	M&E capacity development	A list of the major, planned capacity development activities to strengthen partner M&E capabilities.				
	Use of information	Any decision-making processes or events that will draw on the findings, recommendations and lessons from the M&E activities above. For example: conferences, MDG reporting, reporting to human rights bodies, preparation of the national development framework, the prioritization exercise, and preparation of CER				
	Partner Activities	The major M&E activities of Government and other partners that use and/or contribute to the M&E activities above.				

18. In developing the M&E Plan, UNCTs should consider the following key factors:

1. Most of the information on results must be drawn from other systems. As each UN agency is responsible and accountable for monitoring and evaluating its own programme and operations outputs and outcomes, information should be drawn from the M&E systems put in place by the agencies for their respective contributions to the CER Outcomes. Wherever possible, information on results should be drawn from national monitoring and evaluation systems, in line with the principles of national ownership.

2. When preparing the M&E Plan, UNCTs should therefore determine whether the UN agencies' and national M&E systems will provide the results information

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[2] See country examples of M&E Calendar.
[3] For each activity list: Short name of activity; focus vis-à-vis UNDAF or common programming tool results; agencies/partners responsible; timing.

required for the annual progress reviews and CER Evaluation. Major gaps in terms of required data should be highlighted.

3. The M&E Plan should then spell out how these gaps will be filled, e.g. through strengthening M&E in key projects or building government's capacity to operationalise its own M&E systems, wherever feasible.

4. The focus of the CER M&E Plan and its components should be on the additional value and effectiveness of joint policy dialogue, joint UN programming, coordination and collaboration to support the government achieve national MD / MDG goals.

5 The CER Evaluation

19. The Evaluation is an assessment exercise, which is managed by the UNCT in cooperation with government and other partners. The UNCT should schedule it to assess the current UNDAF or programme and related country programme/projects, and to inform the design of the subsequent UNDAF or common programming tool and country programmes and projects by individual agencies. The evaluation must therefore be completed before the Prioritisation Workshop of the subsequent UNDAF or common programming tool process. Studies, surveys and evaluations conducted by UN agencies and by their partners during the cycle are the building blocks for the evaluation. The evaluation has the following main purposes:

- To assess the relevance of the UNDAF or common programming tool outcomes, the effectiveness and efficiency by which UNDAF or common programming tool outcomes and Country Programme outcomes are being achieved their sustainability and contribution to national priorities and goals.
- To determine how the UNDAF or common programming tool helped UN agencies to contribute more effectively and efficiently to national development efforts and capacity building.
- To learn from experiences of the current programming cycle, and identify issues and opportunities emerging from the implementation of the current UNDAF or common programming tool, to inform the design of the next UNDAF or common programme and country programmes and projects by individual agencies, as well as adjust the current programming, as relevant.
- To assess the relevance of the Business Operations outcomes
- To determine how the Business Operations plan helped the UN system in the country to become more effective and efficient
- To learn from experiences on current Business Operations arrangements, and identify issues and opportunities emerging

The CER evaluation will normally be completed by the middle of the penultimate year of the UNDAF or programme cycle. Since it overlaps with the preparation of the next UNDAF or common programme, the evaluation should be a major input to country analysis and planning. Clear terms of reference are needed for the evaluation. Its scope will depend on the kinds of evaluations and studies conducted during the cycle, and by the nature of UNCT involvement in each country. The individuals leading the UNCT and government may opt to establish a working group to oversee the preparation and implementation of the evaluation. Please see the guidelines for the "UNDAF evaluation Terms of Reference".

20. Key issues in development of the CER evaluation are the following:

- Agree on the purpose of the CER evaluation with key partners as part of developing the CER M&E Plan. When doing this, remember that most of the information government and other partners need on UN performance will be delivered through the individual UN agency and project M&E systems and therefore, the evaluation should not be used to substitute for these systems. Also, discuss with government whether a credible Annual CER Review in the final year of the programme, and building on results data from agency programme /project/government systems will meet government's needs for a report on final results.
- For the CER evaluation, the major partner in government is likely to be a national evaluation entity or association, or a government structure, either charged with donor coordination, or reporting/monitoring overall government performance, or within the Ministry of Finance.
- Collection of evidence for such evaluations is very expensive. For example, most UN agency level country programme evaluations cost at least US$100,000 and the costs for donor and IFI country programme evaluations is often significantly higher. Therefore, an evaluation must rely on results data collected from other M&E systems, and will only be as good as those systems. Wherever possible, it may be useful to look for opportunities for the CER evaluation to be done as part of a larger evaluation, such as of a PRSP. This both can cut costs and increase the chances of influencing others.
- If the evaluation is to be delivered by the middle of the penultimate year, the UNCT should plan to launch it at the beginning of that year.

The UNEG Norms and UNEG Standards for Evaluation in the UN System provide very good guidance regarding the evaluation process, the selection of evaluation teams, the competencies and ethics required of evaluators, the conduct of evaluations, the implementation of evaluations, the reporting and follow-up, as well as the recommended structure of evaluation reports. This guidance can considerably simplify the task for the UNCT, and make the CER evaluation a very significant and useful exercise for learning, accountability, as well as planning and programming for the next phase of the CER cycle.

Besides feeding into the next cycle and providing lessons learned from past cooperation, the evaluation will call for some management response by the UNCT.