



Improving System-wide Coherence: An Albanian Perspective on “Delivering as One”

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In May 2007, the Albanian government and the United Nations jointly announced the launching of Albania as a “Delivering as One” pilot country. The announcement was a direct result of recommendations made in 2006 by a high-level panel appointed by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The panel recommended the establishment of an initiative - Delivering as One UN - aimed at avoiding fragmentation and duplication of development efforts at the country-level in an overall effort to enhance the efficiency and the responsiveness of the UN development system through increased system-wide coherence. The Center for UN Reform Education recently sat down with Andris Stastoli from the Albanian UN Mission to talk about his country’s experiences, lessons learned and the future of the “Delivering as One” process as seen from New York.

Following the high-level panel's recommendations, eight countries - Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam - subsequently volunteered to become “Delivering as One” pilots, agreeing to implement and test different models of reform at country level.

Second Secretary Andris Stastoli has been in charge of the issue at the Albanian UN Mission since 2006. He has an intricate knowledge of the reform efforts and reveals that it was the personal involvement of Albanian Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, that led the country to become a pilot country. “It was presented by the UN as an opportunity to take part in concrete reforms in the field and our Prime Minister wholeheartedly supported the idea,” Stastoli says. “Increasing the coherence of UN agencies working on the ground just seemed like an interesting opportunity for Albania to be proactive and on the forefront of reform efforts.”

Overall, "Delivering as One" is based on four common elements: one UN program, one budgetary framework, one leader and one office. In each case, the basic reform model has been adapted to the unique country context, and together pilot countries are testing out different ways in which the UN family – with its many and diverse agencies - can deliver in a more harmonized and cost-effective manner at the country level. “But,” as Stastoli points out, “although there were overall goals, the immediate direction of this experiment was by no means given before we launched.”

Process Follows National Priorities

The "Delivering as One" program’s general objective in Albania is to better support the national goals expressed in the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union (EU), as well as with the national priorities expressed in the National Strategy for Development and Integration and the Integrated Planning System, and the program of international partners, and harmonization and aid effectiveness in the context of the Paris Declaration. It also builds on the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2006 – 2010, agreed between the government of Albania and UN agencies.

Following close consultations with the Albanian government and other national and international stakeholders and building on priority areas of the UNDAF, it was agreed that under the "Delivering as One" program, impact and development effectiveness would be expected to improve in the following areas: 1. More transparent and accountable governance. 2. Greater inclusive participation in public policy and decision-making; 3. Increased and more equitable access to quality basic services; 4.

Regional development to reduce regional disparities; 5. Environmentally sustainable development. It was further noted that gender equality and development of national capacity would be incorporated into all the program's priorities.

Indicating that at first, the program lacked clear priorities, Stastoli explains how frustrating this was: "It was sort of like walking in the fog," adding that the process was very much learning by doing. The process, however, was solidly anchored in the office of the Prime Minister and his personal involvement was a great help in expediting things and keeping the process on track. "The Resident Coordinator and the PM's office, especially respective individuals," he says, "quickly established direct lines of communications, which led to an excellent cooperative and interactive relationship, and greatly facilitated the process".

One of the first obstacles the process encountered was the sheer challenge of changing the mindset of the different UN agencies. According to Stastoli they seemed afraid of centralization. "Since there was no established practice on how to master this new system and culture of cooperation between the UN and the Albanian Government," he says, "it was definitely uncharted territory from the inception." Nevertheless, with time, all UN agencies on the ground started to talk a common language, according to Stastoli, and their efforts began to coalesce with those of the government, which slowly established real ownership of the entire development process.

Asked about his experiences at the New York level, Stastoli says that the continual debates in the General Assembly on the entire process of System-wide Coherence have proven very fruitful in identifying potential problems. "We thought it our duty and role to share our experiences and concerns with the rest of the membership," he says. "We have definitely been heard, and much thanks to the excellent jobs done by the facilitators of the System-wide Coherence process [Ambassador A. Mahiga of Tanzania and Ambassador P. Kavanagh of Ireland]."

Stastoli also informs us that the pilot countries meet regularly to discuss their experiences, citing for instance a recent seminar held in Mozambique. He adds that as a European country and an EU candidate country, Albania has been able to play a unique role as a bridge builder between developed and developing countries, clarifying concerns among both groups.

One of the concerns for instance of many developing countries, Stastoli says, has been a fear that increased coherence would translate into decreased funding. The developed states could counter these concerns, he suggests, by making funds available on a more predictable basis and by guaranteeing that cost savings from the reform efforts be channeled into other underfunded programs.

As such, he dispels any talk of a North/South rift in the General Assembly. "It is more about presenting different ideas," he counters. "And Member States are moving closer to a common understanding of what coherence is."

One Size Does Not Fit All

On that note, Stastoli underlines that in the context of System-wide Coherence and "Delivering as One" one size does not fit all. "Take for instance the often heated discussions in New York about a new gender architecture," he says while explaining that "Delivering as One" is about the United Nations adhering to government priorities, not the other way around. "In Albania, gender and environment are among our national priorities, and so we asked the UN at country-level to assist us in building capacities within these areas," he says. "Those were our priorities, but other pilots might have different priorities. That's the essence of 'one size does not fit all'."



On the downside, he mentions that there are still no clear guidelines for what constitutes success, a point often raised by many pilot countries. “We need a solid monitoring and evaluation process,” Stastoli observes. “We need standards and we need to look at a list of government priorities and compare them with a list of what has actually been implemented.” He adds that by 2009 it should be possible to start evaluating the different projects if Member States can agree on adequate criteria for measuring success.

But all in all, Stastoli concludes that the experience has been extremely rewarding for Albania. “We have established a good structure and a good process,” he says, “Delivering as One in Albania is a success and we expect it to continue.”