Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC)

National Execution and Implementation Arrangements

Approved on behalf of ACC by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) at its 13th Session, New York, September 1998
National execution and implementation arrangements

National execution is an over-arching priority for all United Nations development funds and programmes, and specialized agencies. Full implementation of this policy will take into account the specific nature of these organizations supporting governments in the implementation of government programmes.

Background

1. The basic role of the United Nations system development programmes and activities is to support national programmes and priorities by providing financial contributions and substantive policy advice to governments and by helping to develop skills and technology, based on the comparative advantages of the United Nations system. The essence is strengthening national capacities and skills, in order to enable the government to fully manage the development efforts of the country and to achieve national self-reliance.

2. National execution provides a framework for sustainable capacity building, sustainability and genuine national ownership of development programmes. It reinforces the central role of the government and national institutions in the formulation and management of programmes and projects supported by the United Nations system.

3. In its resolution 47/199 of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly reiterated that national execution should be the norm for programmes and projects supported by the United Nations system, taking into account the needs and capacities of recipient countries. The United Nations system encourages the application of national execution to all countries as a means to entrust the management of development efforts to national capacities, while recognizing that the pace of adoption of national execution will vary according to the local situation. It should be pursued in a pragmatic manner taking into account the needs and capacities of each programme country as determined principally by the governments themselves. The application may require that national execution be introduced with appropriate support by the United Nations system to ensure that national capacities are adequate.

4. National execution is linked to an increasing use of the programme approach. Under the programme approach, the United Nations system supports national programmes that are managed by government entities. National execution is thus the preferred modality for the national programme, including United Nations system-supported activities that form part of the larger development effort. Together, national execution and the programme approach should expand the management capacities of the government and other national entities in programming their development efforts and in coordinating the external inputs made available by the international donor community, in general, and the United Nations system, in particular.

5. National execution, the nature of United Nations support and the relationship between a programme government, its development partners, both national and international, will evolve with changing needs and circumstances, while remaining within broad policy parameters.

Objectives

6. The objectives of national execution are:

Greater national self-reliance by effective use and enhancement of the management capabilities and technical expertise of national institutions and individuals;
Enhanced sustainability of development programmes and projects by increasing national and local ownership and commitment to development activities;
Reduction of workload and integration with national programmes through greater use of appropriate national systems and procedures.
Definition

7. **National execution** is a method of carrying out programmes and projects where national entities retain the main responsibility for planning, formulating and managing the programme or project supported or funded by the United Nations system, for carrying out the activities and for the achievement of objectives and impact. The national authority becomes accountable for the formulation and management of programmes and projects by the programme country, in close cooperation with other national and United Nations entities.

Guiding principles

Management

8. National execution is considered as the norm for programmes and projects supported by the United Nations system. Governments should principally retain overall management of programmes and projects.

9. National execution includes not only government institutions but also the civil society and non-government actors. In order to ensure national capacity building, ownership and local relevance, such non-governmental entities and local NGOs should increasingly be used for carrying out United Nations system-supported initiatives, and where appropriate also be given management responsibilities.

Accountability

10. Accountability under national execution means that the government accepts responsibility for a particular action, programme or project. The government is accountable for effective use of resources made available by the United Nations system, through adequate substantive and financial reporting and achievement of programme and project objectives. Accountability requires consistency with the financial rules and regulations governing United Nations system activities.

11. In substantive terms, this includes responsibility for the overall management, supervision and assessment of progress and quality, monitoring and evaluation, production of results and attainment of objectives. In financial and administrative terms, this may include appropriate and effective use of funds, through reporting, accounting, property management and implementation activities.

12. The roles, responsibilities and accountability of each partner should be further elaborated in each programme or project document or other agreements.

Support by the United Nations system

13. The primary objective of the operational activities for development of the United Nations system is to promote, through multilateral cooperation, the self-reliance in the pursuit of sustainable human development. This is achieved mainly by contributing to building and strengthening national capacities of programme countries.

14. Governments should continue to have access to the neutral policy, technical advice and support of the United Nations system, so as to better ensure the technical viability, quality and impact of programmes and projects. Governments should be encouraged to utilize United Nations expertise for all programmes and projects, particularly as a means of discharging substantive accountability.

15. The Resident Coordinator System should provide the necessary information and support to national institutions, so that the available technical expertise of the United Nations system is adequately considered in supporting the development efforts undertaken in the country. The Resident Coordinator System should ensure the effective involvement of all relevant United Nations organizations at the programme formulation stage through adequate consultation, so that the participation of specialized agencies in implementation, monitoring and evaluation is explored under the guidance of government authorities. Special attention should be given to small agencies without field representation.
16. Specialized agencies of the system have an important responsibility as policy and technical advisers, and as sources of knowledge, and for provision of implementation services to governments. Their role includes substantive support as follows:

Support services for programme and policy development including upstream policy for the formulation of strategies and programmes; advisory services; technical assistance needs assessment; sectoral or multidisciplinary studies.

Support for technical services at the project or programme level including identification, design, formulation and appraisal of programme of project proposals and advice on implementation options; technical support and monitoring of activities during implementation through reports and participation in tripartite and other reviews; evaluation.

Implementation services related to the equipment, subcontracts; training programmes; consulting firms, personnel, experts and suppliers.

17. In undertaking national execution, governments may call upon a specialized agency of the United Nations system to carry out parts of a programme or project. Such programmes and projects should remain under the overall management and accountability of the programme government. The agency will remain accountable to the government and to the funding organization for its inputs provided and the outputs produced.

18. All programmes and projects currently being managed by United Nations system specialized agencies should, as far as possible, include specific goals and timeframes for the progressive transfer of all remaining responsibilities to the national entity. The aim is to ensure that the national entity assumes full responsibility for all aspects of the programme or project before external support comes to an end. Such an approach would enhance the sustainability and long term impact of the programme or project.

Procedures

19. National execution should be based on the use of government rules and procedures, where these are consistent with internationally recognized practices and accountability requirements as set out in paragraph 10, to ensure integration with and relevance to national programmes.

20. The United Nations system should simplify and harmonize its rules and procedures, including procedures on programme and project formulation, design, approval, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. In order to respond more effectively to the national context, harmonization of procedures should be pursued both at the level of United Nations agency headquarters and within the Resident Coordinator System, in consultation with governments.

Capacity

21. National execution is based on an expression of government’s interest and willingness to assume management responsibilities for the programme or project, as well as existing national capacities. Where such capacities are not adequate, the government with support of the United Nations system should undertake to strengthen these capacities. The formulation and appraisal of programmes and projects should identify the availability of the technical, administrative and managerial capacities of the government and beneficiary entity.

22. Some of the major constraints to the expansion of national execution are the availability of executing capacities in the country, the need for related institutional development and the improvement of national procedures. The enhancement of self-reliance calls for concerted efforts by governments themselves to strengthen national institutional capacities through, for example, the improvement of civil service structures and conditions, of conditions of employment for personnel and training programmes.
Appraisal

All proposals of programmes and projects should be reviewed by the government, the external funding organization and the stakeholders and beneficiaries with the assistance of the relevant United Nations specialized agency.

Implementation

24. Implementation involves the undertaking of programme activities, as appropriate, including the provision of services, procurement of goods, works and services; recruitment and contracting.

25. National execution should be carried out through optimal implementation arrangements to ensure timeliness and cost-effectiveness of activities and quality and sustainability of results. Under national execution, programme and project activities are normally undertaken by national entities, supplemented and supported by the United Nations System.

26. The choice of implementation arrangements could cover a range of options including national implementation, United Nations Specialized implementation, NGO implementation, contracting to national institutions, Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC), the use of national project personnel, United Nations volunteers, external contracting or a mix of these.

27. In many instances, the United Nations funds and programmes cooperate with and support national institutions in the implementation of programmes. This arrangement becomes especially important in the case of complex emergencies. The area in which such support is provided ranges from reporting and monitoring to procurement, recruitment and contracting. In addition, some of the funds and programmes operate through the provision of inputs directly to national authorities - supplies, equipment and technical assistance. In the case of the specialized agencies, such programmes and projects should remain under the overall management and accountability of the programme government.

Financial management

28. National execution includes the gradual transfer of all responsibilities to national entities, including procurement, recruitment, accounting, reporting, monitoring and evaluation. The responsibility and management of financial accounting, recruitment and procurement may vary depending on local conditions. In keeping with the objectives of sustainability and ownership, financial management by national entities through the provision of financial assistance for specific activities is encouraged. Depending on the local situation in each programme country, national execution might entail cash advances to national authorities or NGOs, alternatively reimbursing actual expenditures in other cases. This would not detract from the separate responsibility of United Nations entities to be accountable to their governing bodies or funding sources for the proper reporting of expenditure and appropriate monitoring and evaluation.

Management support units

29. In order to ensure sustainability, ownership and internalization, as a general policy, programme and project activities must be integrated into the normal tasks of the national authority. However, in some cases it may be necessary to set up management support units in order to provide temporary administrative assistance while building national capacities to assume such tasks.

30. Sustainability, cost-effectiveness and capacity building must be considered before establishing a separate donor-funded management support unit that assist with management and administration of development programmes and projects. An exit strategy should be formulated at the time of its establishment, to define how its functions will be integrated into the appropriate government entity.
Personnel

31. National execution does not mean exclusive use of national inputs, personnel or expertise to the detriment of exchange of international experience and best practice. In order to promote self-reliance and a rapid pace of development, the United Nations system supports the effective use of the best available human and technical resources in national execution and encourages adequate use of international expertise in nationally executed activities, especially from the United Nations system.

32. In keeping with aims of sustainability, the policy of the United Nations system on remuneration to Government staff shall normally be observed. Civil servants who participate in the implementation of a programme or project financed by the funding agencies of the United Nations system should be remunerated by their employer, the Government, and not receive any remuneration from United Nations programme or project funds. Where the practice of donor payments to government staff exists, the country team should develop and agree to a proposal for an exit strategy within the framework of the joint policy.

33. For programmes and projects currently being managed by United Nations system specialized agencies, the United Nations system encourages the increasing use of national professionals in management positions of external assistance activities, and use of national technical experts associated with undertaking those activities.

Monitoring and evaluation

34. The monitoring and evaluation of United Nations support should be considered as an integral part of the monitoring and evaluation of national programmes. Monitoring and evaluation of nationally executed programmes and projects should give appropriate emphasis to national ownership, sustainability and management capacity.

35. United Nations agencies should contribute to and assist with the monitoring, reporting and evaluation process, as mutually agreed with the government and the funding organization. Such assistance may include assessing capacities to monitor and evaluate programmes and projects, and if needed, the design and functioning of a monitoring and evaluation system.

Audit

36. All nationally-executed programmes and projects should be audited on a regular basis. The legally recognized auditor of the government is responsible for each audit carried out. Where sufficient capacity does not exist, assistance may be obtained from private sector auditors to support the Government auditor in carrying out this responsibility. Copies of audit reports should be submitted in a regular manner to United Nations funds and programmes in respect of those programmes and projects for which financial assistance was provided. Audit of funds disbursed directly by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes will be undertaken by the established audit mechanisms of these organizations.

Regional activities

37. National execution was conceived primarily for national projects and activities. Nevertheless, the principles of national execution may be applied to cross-border activities such as regional and sub-regional projects. In this case, a regional or sub-regional intergovernmental body or a host government could assume management responsibilities of the activity on behalf of, and in agreement with, the participating countries. Within this context, other partners, such as United Nations agencies, could implement the regional activities.

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