**Review and guidance on UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS**

**Executive Board field visitRes**

**Report**

**by**

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# Executive summary

**Introduction and purpose**

The Bureau of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board has commissioned a review of the programme of Executive Board field visits, including joint field visits with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UN-Women. Since 2000, the programme has included two field visits each year, one of which is held jointly with members of the UNICEF/WFP/UN-Women Executive Boards.

The purpose of this review is to make recommendations to the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board on revisions to the existing field visit guidance. Terms of reference (TORs) were developed, including questions pertaining to whether the field visit procedures are outdated as a result of technical developments and whether a more cost efficient alternative to field visits could be initiated; whether joint visits should continue for which separate guidance is necessary; whether country selection criteria need to be developed; whether visits could better target a contribution to the strategic role of the Board; how follow-up could be improved; and how joint visits could make use of evaluation reports produced by the respective organizations.

**Data collection**

The consultant reviewed the guidelines, country reports, TORs for field visits, and an information note on Board members. In addition, a survey was developed and sent to 35 people who had participated in field visits since 2011, including representatives from the secretariats and those receiving the visitors. In addition, and 25 people interviewed in connection with the TOR questions. This data provided a basis for analysis and the findings in this report.

**Findings**

1. Without exception, the respondents agree that overall the guidelines are outdated and need to be reformulated. The organizations of the United Nations system and their interventions have changed as regards strategy, policy and operations, and this needs to be reflected. Particularly important issues raised were ‘One UN’ and cohesion and coordination among the in-country organizations. Other issues included were: Operating as one United Nations; Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or post-MDGs; Focus on results achieved as the United Nations; gender equality; human rights; examining the resident coordinator system and its effectiveness, including the coordination and coherence of the United Nations system; relevance of the United Nations and national ownership; comparative advantage vis-à-vis other entities; Reference to funds such as the Global Fund or other United Nations funds.

2. Interviewees underlined the importance of flexibility in interpreting the guidelines so as to provide sufficient room for responding to specific in-country circumstances and to the particular needs of the Board at a given moment.

3. There is great appreciation for the joint field visits particularly for the way the organizations are working together to accomplish United Nations objectives and responding to country needs. Field visits provide first-hand experience to Board members, providing a broader understanding of how the United Nations works in country with civil society, the private sector, the local diplomatic community, and other development partners. It also sheds light on the workings of global United Nations programmes and contributions.

4. New guidelines should include country selection criteria. Currently, rotation of visits across the different geographical areas is already applied but additional criteria could be considered for both UNDP/UNFPA/

UNOPS and joint field visits. These include: development status of the country; particular issues that the country is facing at a given moment; stage of implementation of the United Nations Development Framework (UNDAF); United Nations-specific interventions (MDGs, human development indicators); new country programme under preparation; UNDAF; forthcoming Board approval of a new country programme; pilot programmes; and countries that reflect the programme of work of the Board(s). A specific requirement would be that all the organizations should be present in the country. In case this were a problem, for example for UN-Women, a regional representation or a regional visit in combination with a country visit could be organized. Finally, timing is considered important as the visit should synchronize with the country cycle programme and/or the programme of the Board.

5, The TORs for the field visits could be strengthened and should reflect country criteria, specifying what will be examined and for what purpose. It was suggested that his could also contribute to the quality of the mission reports.

6. The current preparation could be further developed if TORs for the field visits are more detailed. Among the key documents considered relevant for both preparation and learning are evaluations. Evaluations conducted by the organizations, as well as country and programme evaluations, are useful and could target specific activities of the TORs for the field visit. The independent evaluation offices are ready to play a role in terms of providing reports and briefings or participating in the visit.

7. Field visits cannot be replaced by other types of interaction between countries and Board members, since the visits provide significant added value. Video conferencing and workshops at headquarters could, however, help with the preparation and follow-up of field visits and reduce the length of visits, making them more cost effective. In particular they would improve interaction with government representatives, the private sector and NGOs.

8. Mission composition needs to be further improved, including the role of field visit members during Board sessions and ensuring senior representation, preferably at the ambassadorial level. This, in turn, will strengthen the link between the field visit, its purpose, the TORs and the role and responsibility of the Board members. Finally, important technical and substantive experience and skills of mission members could be included. In such case representation from the capitals or the United Nations organizations could be included.

9. Board members are often diplomats with limited development or humanitarian background, and this gap appears to be a recurrent issue in field visits. Mission selection is one way of addressing this challenge and ensuring that results from the field visits can contribute to the role and responsibilities of Board members.

10. Field visit reporting needs to be improved so that Board members can use it strategically, including stronger data and analysis; reference to the work of the Board; discussing achievements; and a systematic inclusion of recommendations and management response.

11. Follow-up is weak and needs to be improved. More needs to be done to organize discussions on the report within and outside the Board and to provide debriefings. The latter should be targeted at those who have responsibility for United Nations programmes and the organizations themselves. Issues mentioned in the report, and in particular the recommendations made, need to be systematically monitored to ensure that they translate into action. More emphasis on discussion after the report is presented to the Board is also critical and the mission leader could play a role. The secretariats’ role in ensuring follow up should also be acknowledged.

# Introduction

The Bureau of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board has commissioned a review of the programme of Executive Board field visits. The field visit programme for the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS commenced in 1992, and 78 countries have been visited to date. Since 2000 the programme has included two field visits each year, one of which is held jointly with members of the UNICEF/WFP Executive Board, and in 2012 the UN-Women Executive Board started participating in the joint visits.

These are working missions, providing direct field contacts and information for Board members. The field visits are designed to help broaden understanding of UNDP/UNFPA field activities and to enable Board members to gain further insights into the overall policies and strategies of the organizations.

In 1995, guidelines were developed for the field visit programme (DP/1995/14).

## Purpose of the review

The purpose of this review of the field visit programme is to provide recommendations to the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board on revisions to the existing field visit guidance. This report provides an overview of the findings of the consultant, and follows the set of questions outlined in the Terms of Reference (TORs).

## Key questions

Key questions that the review considered:

**First set of questions**

In the 19 years since the last guidance document much has changed with respect to how the United Nations organizations provide technical assistance. This period has also seen rapid technological and communications changes. Are the field visit procedures outdated as a result? And if so, how should they be brought up to date?

**Second set of questions**

Joint field visits by UNICEF, WFP and UN-Women are of a different type than the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS visits. Should joint visits continue? Is a separate guidance document for these joint visits called for?

**Third set of questions**

The current field visit guidance does not specify the criteria for Board decisions on which countries to visit. Should this continue to be discretionary, or should it be based on a set of protocols? And if so, what should those protocols include? How could evaluation reports on the programmes of the respective organizations be used to select countries for field visits?

**Fourth set of questions**

Is there a more cost-efficient alternative to field visits whereby Board members receive exposure to country-level experience/challenges/opportunities (such as a one or two day workshop with a select United Nations county teams at headquarters, or video conferencing)?

**Fifth set of questions**

The overriding purpose of the visits is to help the Board set policy, yet much of the time is spent visiting project sites. How could the field visits be revised to place greater emphasis on the strategic purpose of this exercise?

**Sixth set of questions**

The guidance does not explicitly set out what is expected in terms of follow-up after the visits. What would be a reasonable set of post-mission deliverables?

**Seventh set of questions**

The current field visit guidance indicates that the purpose of the visits is to afford “insight into the implementation of the UNDP/UNFPA overall policies and strategies” (paragraph 4). How could the joint visits make use of evaluation reports produced by UNFPA, UNDP and the other organizations on their respective programmes in order to gain insight into the programmes and strategies of the organizations?

## Data collection

Data collection consisted of the following steps:

**Step 1.** Review of the guidelines, documents related to the field visits, including country reports, TORs for field visits and information note on Board members.

**Step 2.** Interviews with a few persons to gain more information on the background and context of this assignment, including a Board member, the Secretary of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board, and a representative of the UNDP evaluation office. Based on those interviews the survey was developed and discussed with the secretariat.

**Step 3.** Selecting respondents for the survey and persons to be interviewed. In close cooperation with the Secretary of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board and the Corporate Strategy and Governance Unit/ Executive Office, various clusters of persons were identified.

**Cluster 1**: Board members who had participated in field visits since 2011 and who were still in New York. A list of 35 persons was drawn up. .

**Cluster 2**: A selection of cluster 1 persons who were invited for an additional interview

**Cluster 3:** Representatives from the secretariats of each of the six Agencies

**Cluster 4:** A selection of United Nations representatives in some of the countries that received field missions, including resident coordinators, resident representatives and regional directors.

**Cluster 5:** Heads of evaluation of the six agencies or their deputies.

For cluster 1, a 26-question survey was developed, including open, closed and multiple-choice questions. For the interviews, key questions of the TORs were used. In addition, the consultant was referred to other people in the course of the work. She followed up in all cases.

## Data collection results

The response to the survey was 13 out of 35. Unfortunately only 20 persons opened the email with the survey invitation, 13 of those completed the survey. Two emails were sent to remind people to complete the survey. The response was too low to use the results as strong evidence, but high or low scores on questions and responses to the open question can be used to confirm or contrast data from the interviews. The full survey is attached as annex A.

In addition, 17 interviews were conducted, in some cases with multiple participants. In total, 25 people were interviewed.

# Findings

## Introduction

The various documents consulted provided little information as to how field visits are positioned within the Board itself or how they are contributing to the function of the Board or its members. The rules of procedure do not mention field visits, although in the information note of the Executive Board mention is made of the fact that the Bureau “agrees on the composition of the teams participating in Executive Board field visits”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

At present, two field visits take place each year. The other organizations also conduct field visits on their own. WFP conducts one field visit per year, UN-Women will start its first field visit next year, and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) organizes two additional field visits per year.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Box 1. Functions of the Executive Board (from General Assembly resolution 48/162)**

|  |
| --- |
| * To implement the policies formulated by the General Assembly and the coordination and guidance received from the Economic and Social Council; * To receive information from and give guidance to the head of each fund or programme on the work of each organization; * To ensure that the activities and operational strategies of each fund or programme are consistent with the overall policy guidance set forth by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, in accordance with their respective responsibility set out in the United Nations Charter; * To monitor the performance of the fund or programme; * To approve programmes, including country programmes, as appropriate; * To decide on administrative and financial plans and budgets; * To recommend new initiatives to the Economic and Social Council, and through the Council, to the General Assembly, as necessary; * To encourage and examine new programme initiatives; * To submit annual reports to the Economic and Social Council, which could include recommendations, where appropriate, for improvement of field-level coordination |

The functions of the Board provide a useful framework for a better understanding of how the contribution of field visits could be assessed.

# The TOR questions

## TOR question 1

***In the 19 years since the last guidance document much has changed with respect to how United Nations organizations provide technical assistance. This period has also seen rapid technological and communications changes. Are the field visit guidelines outdated as a result? And if so, how should they be brought up to date?***

All respondents agree that overall the guidelines are outdated, but not every single paragraph is necessarily outdated. For example, the objectives still hold but could be reformulated to better reflect the current United Nations system at headquarters and in country and to cover such issues as ‘One UN’ (section A, paragraph 4). Another example is that respondents consider it important to maintain a minimum of protocol. (section B, paragraph 10). A final example is that reporting to the Board in order to stimulate debate in the Board (section F, paragraph 21) is considered very important, yet this does not appear to be happening. The paragraph is therefore not incorrect but may need to be expanded to ensure adequate follow-up.

### General:

Interviewees underlined the importance of flexibility in interpreting the guidelines so as to provide sufficient room for responding to specific in-country circumstances and to particular needs of the Board at a given moment.

Some of the findings could also be included in procedures rather than in guidelines. Suggestions included:

* Collect best practices for field visits so as to increase their benefit for all those who participate, including recipient countries.
* Introduce a role for each member of the field visit mission to ensure that all contribute to the joint effort, thereby increasing active participation and ensuring that interaction with stakeholders is more effective.
* Set a protocol for the mission to interact in the public domain, for example, with the media.
* Experiment with follow-up, such as presentations to different groups in New York; initiate more debate among the Board after the presentation of the report, including a more active role for the mission leader and rapporteur of the field visit.

### Purpose of the visit

Although the general purpose as outlined is clear, as Board members broadly confirmed in the survey, most interviewees suggested that these documents could be strengthened in order to reflect the relevance and role of the United Nations, the joint presence in country, and how the United Nations operates jointly as well as through individual organizations at a strategic, policy and operational level.

The current list of issues to be covered was considered outdated or too weak, and it was suggested that the following issues need to be addressed:

* Operating as ‘One UN’
* The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or post-MDGs
* Focus on results that have been achieved as the United Nations
* Gender equality
* Human rights
* Examining the resident coordinator system and its effectiveness, including the coordination and coherence of the United Nations system
* Relevance of the United Nations and national ownership
* Comparative advantage vis-à-vis other entities
* Reference to funds such as the Global Fund or other United Nations funds

In the draft new guidelines a choice may have to be made on those items that will remain relevant in the next 5-7 years while some themes, such as gender and human rights, are cross-cutting issues that will remain core concerns for all of the work of the United Nations system.

Based on the answers to the TOR questions below, all sections of the guidelines will have to be rewritten.

## TOR question 2

***Joint field visits undertaken by UNICEF, WFP and UN-Women are of a different type from the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS visits. Should joint visits continue? Is a separate guidance document for these joint visits called for?***

There is great appreciation for the joint field visits, and they should continue. The survey indicates that 46 per cent of respondents consider the joint field missions very useful while 38 per cent consider them useful. Moreover, if there were only one field visit per year the respondents give preference to a joint field missions over a UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS field visit.

Interviewees confirmed the added value of joint field missions. Survey respondents and interviewees highlighted, in particular, the following insights provided by the field visits:

* How the organizations are working together to accomplish one goal through synergies, coherence and cooperation, both among organizations and between them and the governments and people they are servicing.
* The important role of the United Nations development system in the country and the communication, coordination and coherence among organizations in the field.
* Gaining a broader perspective on the activities of United Nations organizations; establishing contacts with colleagues from other boards for exchange of best practices.
* Receiving first-hand experience of United Nations work and coordination at the country level with perspectives from both the host government and the United Nations country team (UNCT).
* Observing the ‘One UN’ model and examining the response of the United Nations system to country needs.
* Observing cooperation and partnerships with civil society, the private sector, the local diplomatic community, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other multilateral/bilateral agencies and development partners.
* Understanding system-wide issues such as the MDGs, human development, the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR), ‘delivering as one’, and joint programmes.
* Understanding the relevance and role of the United Nations and what it can achieve as a whole.

Only a few interviewees suggested that separate guidelines should be developed, and the majority indicated that guidelines should be short, flexible and practical. Having one set of guidelines is also more practical and less bureaucratic than having multiple sets, it was suggested.

Some organizations have guidelines for their own field visits, and a separate section on joint field visits is included in this report. As an example, the UNICEF guidelines are attached as annex B I, and the operational guidelines of the World Food Programme are attached as annex C.u

## TOR question 3

***The present field visit guidance does not specify the criteria for Board decisions on which countries to visit. Should this continue to be discretionary, or should it be based on a set of protocols? And if so, what should those protocols include? How could evaluation reports on the programmes of the respective organizations be used to select countries for field visits?***

The survey indicated that 62 per cent of the Board members thought that the country selection criteria should be developed. The interviewees, however, considered developing country selection criteria one of the most important elements for the new guidelines. Among the criteria mentioned in the survey, the following received relatively high scores:

* Development status of the country;
* Particular issues that the country is facing at a given moment;
* UNDAF stage of implementation;
* Challenges in terms of United Nations-specific interventions (MDGs, Human Development Index – HDI);
* Availability of specific reports, including evaluations on programmes of the organizations;
* The added value of preparing for a specific event (regional event; United Nations General Assembly, donor and other meetings); and
* The added value of strategic decisions at the headquarters of the organization.

Criteria suggested by interviewees included:

* Rotation of visits across the different geographical regions (geographical distribution );
* The security situation;
* A country has not been visited before;
* The importance of the United Nations programme in the country, including humanitarian assistance, in comparison with other development partners;
* Explicit interest from the UNCT and the government, including how the country may benefit from such a visit;
* Status of the country: for example, a country that will graduate from low-income to middle-income country;
* Forthcoming Board approval of a new country programme;
* The role and status of the QCPR;
* Specific global initiatives that are a priority for the country;
* Pilot programmes; and
* Countries that reflect the programme of work of the Board(s).

In addition to the above, the following were mentioned for joint visits:

* All organizations should be present – which may pose a challenge for UN-Women, since their country presence is limited. Most interviewees, however, thought that such issues could be resolved through regional representation on the mission or a regional visit in combination with a country visit. Some interviewees considered the presence of the six organizations less important, since joint visits should focus on responses by the United Nations system and not that of a single organization.
* Development status of the country, including the nexus of the development and humanitarian domains.
* New country programme or United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) under preparation.

Timing could also be taken into account, in particular:

* Synchronization of the visit with the country cycle programme, and
* The programme of work and upcoming decisions of the Board.

**Box 3: UN-Women criteria for country visits**

|  |
| --- |
| * Security; * Political stability; * Presence of the six organizations; * Size of the United Nations at the country level; * Regional rotation; and * Status of the UNDAF cycle |

**Box 4: UNICEF criteria (from its guidelines)**

|  |
| --- |
| The countries to be visited each year shall be selected at the end of the previous year by the Bureau, based on information provided by the secretariat and with the concurrence of the countries concerned. The destinations for joint field visits shall be agreed upon by the three Bureaus, in consultation with the respective secretariats. In principle, there should be rotation between regions in terms of the countries to be visited each year, although one visit should be to Africa, if possible, in order to focus attention on the urgent needs of that continent. |

In addition to the criteria above, some interviewees suggested that each year the two field visits should alternate between least developed countries and middle-income countries. [[3]](#footnote-3)

The discussion on country selection could also further strengthen the development of the TORs for each individual field visit. Currently these provide a general overview of the purpose of the visit; the country; the United Nations presence and procedural and logistical information. TORs could include specifying what will be examined for what purpose and defining the roles of the field visit members. This could also contribute to the quality of the mission reports, it was suggested.

### Evaluation and the use of evaluation reports

The survey indicated that 63 per cent of the respondents considered “evaluation of United Nations organizations, country programmes or other specific evaluations” the best source of information for preparing a field visit. This was the highest response, ahead of seven other possible ways of preparing the field visit. In addition, survey respondents included evaluations and evaluation reports among the best sources of information, as well as learning after the field visit.

Interviewees confirmed that evaluations should be a major source for preparing a field visit. Several positive elements of evaluations were mentioned, including: the focus on in-country results; evidence based information, which is more balanced since evaluations are conducted independently; good snapshot of what an agency or the ‘United Nations as One’ has achieved. Several interviewees thought that using evaluations for preparing a field visit would enable Board members to ask more relevant questions, thereby increasing the quality of the discussions with stakeholders in country. At the same time, caution was expressed that Board members should refrain from taking an evaluation role themselves.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Most interviewees did not think that the availability of evaluations should be a country criterion.

Heads of evaluation offices or their deputies expressed the need to include evaluation reports in field visit preparation, and most would be willing to play a much more active role in briefing the mission before departure. Different types of evaluations are available depending on the country to be visited and whether it is a single or joint field visit. In most cases material is already available, but with the help of the secretariat, a relevant reading package could be made available, for example, and briefings could be organized. Evaluations could also target specific objectives of the field visit TORs, thereby increasing understanding of the Board members’ specific knowledge before departure and covering parts of the United Nations work that Board members may not be exposed to (in remote locations or conflict-sensitive areas, for example).

It was suggested that the Independent Evaluation Office could play a bigger role in field missions. A representative of the office could join the mission; the field visit could coincide with an ongoing evaluation, or a Board member could be invited to visit a country during an evaluation.[[5]](#footnote-5)

## TOR question 4

***Is there a more cost-efficient alternative to field visits whereby Board members could be exposed to country-level experience/challenges/opportunities (such as a one- or two-day workshop with a select United Nations county teams at headquarters, or video conferencing)?***

The survey does not provide a significant answer to this issue. Some respondents indicate that video conferencing with the UNCT, the organizations and other representatives, or a one- or two-day workshop with a selection of United Nations county teams in New York and video conferencing with project representatives of United Nations organizations in field location could be considered. The interviewees, however, strongly doubted that added value of the field visits could be achieved by any of the above.

The main reasons for this perception include:

1. Providing first-hand experience of United Nations achievements;
2. Seeing the effects and implementation of Board decisions;
3. Seeing the reality on the ground;
4. Being exposed to government and beneficiaries;
5. Seeing the conditions under which United Nations staff work; and
6. Observing how the ‘One UN’ model and the organizations work.

The justification for field visits, from their perspective, coincides to a large extent with what survey respondents consider the value added by both field visits and joint field visits (see annex A answers to questions 4 and 5).

Survey respondent assessed the field visits as positive, particularly their relevance to information and learning requirements; meaningfulness with respect to the issues they are interested in as Board members; the choice of country; the reliability of the information; assessing ‘delivering as one’, and the country context and political economy.

Both before and after the field visit meetings with government representatives, the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in New York could be improved. Adequate preparation, including better use of modern technologies, could shorten the visit and make it less costly. It was noted, however, that these tools could not adequately replace field visits or face-to-face interaction with in-country stakeholders.

The majority of interviewees considered the costs worthwhile and justified field visits, but the added value and impact of field visits must be further improved. They also underlined that the preparation costs, including the contributions from the secretariat, the organizations, the Bureau, the UNCT and other stakeholders in country are considerable. This could also include evaluation office staff time in future. In addition, field visits themselves could be made more cost effective.

Overall improvements that need to be considered include:

1. Mission composition;
2. Better preparation (which could include cost-effective video conferencing and briefings);
3. Follow-up after the mission (which could include cost-effective video conferencing and briefings);
4. Improving the field visit report;
5. In country selection of projects (single organization versus joint programming projects needs to be carefully weighed, including outside the capital);
6. Smaller missions and shorter visits for UNDP/UNOPS/UNFPA field visits;
7. Economy travel and modest accommodation.

In addition, some survey respondents and interviewees suggested that only one field visit per year could be considered, and that country selection could include visiting a more remote country one year and a less distant one the following year. In the latter case, this approach could reduce travel costs, which many highlighted as a major budget item. In a few cases interviewees suggested that the number of field visits should be increased given the overall budget of the organization and the ‘value add’ of field visits.

Points 2, 3 and 4 are treated elsewhere in the report. Points 5, 6 and 7 were mentioned from time to time by the interviewees and are self-explanatory. Point 1, mission composition, was frequently raised during the preparation of this assignment and was therefore included in the survey and addressed during the interviews.

### Mission composition

In response to the question “What is your opinion about field mission membership?” survey respondents indicated that:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Question | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| 1 | The membership composition is fine | 3 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| 2 | The number of participants is too high | 1 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 2 |
| 3 | Participating mission members need to participate in Board member meetings | 8 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 4 | Other | 4 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 2 |

In the ‘Other’ section in the table (item 4), it was suggested that: participants should be the permanent representative, deputy permanent representative or senior expert; that more ambassadors should participate; and that there was a need for equilibrium between delegates and senior officers.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Question | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree |
| 1 | Should include an ambassador or senior diplomat | 6 | 6 | 1 |
| 2 | Adequate language ability | 9 | 3 | 1 |
| 3 | Role in the Board | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| 4 | Knowledge of the country | 1 | 7 | 5 |
| 5 | Other | 2 | 3 | 1 |

The third question: “Do participating mission members need to participate in Board member meetings?” received a particularly high score. This reflection could provide an opportunity to strengthen the link between the field visit; its purpose; the field visit TORs; and the role and responsibilities of the Board members. In addition, survey respondents indicated in response to the question of whether the composition of the mission members participating in the field visit should reflect experience, skills or seniority as follows:

Again the role in the Board received a sizeable score, and in combination with the previous survey question this needs to be better reflected in the guidelines.

The majority of interviewees are in favour of improving the mission composition, including the role of field visit members in the Board and ensuring senior representation, preferably at the ambassadorial level. They also considered technical and substantive experience and skills important. The principle of equitable participation was questioned in some instances: some considered it less important than other criteria and skills. Others suggested that more donors should be represented since they provide resources to the United Nations, and that participants from developing countries should be included if the country visit increases South-South cooperation.

A number of interviewees, however, thought that more flexibility was needed in inviting Board members and non-Board members to the field visits. They suggested that technical expertise and skills could strengthen the mission and the impact of the field visit. Suggestions included representation from the capitals of those who might be familiar with the United Nations or the organization, other technical experts from headquarters, and evaluators (see above).

Mission composition could be improved and expanded in section C of the guidelines, for example, by including senior representatives; ensuring that a considerable percentage of mission members are members of the Board; and including additional technical expertise to complement the experience and skills of other mission participants.

## TOR question 5

***The overriding purpose of the visits is to help the Board set policy, yet much of the time is spent visiting project sites. How could the field visits be revised to place greater emphasis on the strategic purpose of this exercise?***

Survey respondents indicated for what purpose field visits are used (see table, below).

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| # | **Question** | **Frequently** | **Occasionally** | **Not at all** |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | To learn about the in-country programmes of the organization | 8 | 5 | 0 |
| 2 | To examine new funds or initiatives | 4 | 8 | 1 |
| 3 | To monitor the performance of the fund or programme | 7 | 5 | 1 |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 4 | To approve programmes, including country programmes, as appropriate | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| 5 | To decide on administrative and financial plans and budgets | 3 | 6 | 4 |
| 6 | To prepare strategic policy decisions | 7 | 4 | 2 |
| 7 | For policymaking | 4 | 8 | 1 |
| 8 | For preparing a presentation | 2 | 5 | 6 |
| 9 | To stimulate debate among Board members | 6 | 7 | 0 |
| 10 | To influence other United Nations entities | 3 | 8 | 2 |
| 11 | Other | 0 | 4 | 3 |

Some of the above items were taken from the functions of the Board (see box 1, above). It appears that survey respondents used the field visits for several strategic objectives such as policymaking and decision-taking, but interviewees indicated that this was not very visible or measurable. Moreover, while informal meetings and discussions could contribute to the use of the field visits for such purposes, there is no way of linking these back to the field visits.

The low score of the item ‘to decide on administrative and financial plans and budgets’ (number 5) may also indicate that the function of the Board has changed in recent years. Some interviewees took the interview as an opportunity to express concerns about the role of the Board and its function. A frequent observation was that Board members are diplomats with limited development or humanitarian background. That gap appears to be a recurrent issue in field visits, they claimed, which prevents the visits from having a real impact on the strategic issues that the Board needs to address. One way to improve the effectiveness of field visits would therefore be to ask Members States to appoint field mission participants with the appropriate technical skills, who can contribute substantively to the objectives of the visit (see above mission composition section). This requirement could be reflected in a short note that accompanies the TORs for the field visit.

Interviewees indicated that during field visits the programmes are organized in such a way that project visits should not constitute more than 50 per cent of the time, and that discussions with stakeholders are increasingly important, particularly in the context of ‘delivering as one’. Survey respondents in general appreciated how well-balanced the field visits are, although a few indicated that exposure to civil society and beneficiaries is inadequate. Some interviewees shared that observation, and also considered more exposure to the private sector important.

Although it was generally believed that the field visits contribute to the Board members’ understanding and learning, there is little evidence or proof of how the field visit contributes to a better fulfilment of the role and responsibility of a Board member, A critical potential contribution to the usefulness of field visits for strategic purposes is the field visit report, its findings, conclusions and recommendations. More assistance from the secretariat and general follow-up after the field visit would be useful. This issue will be covered in the response to TOR question 6.

### The report

The section on reporting in the guidelines is no longer adequate; it is too prescriptive and limited in its concept of what the report can contain.

Survey respondents indicated that the report could be further improved.

**What could be improved in the mission report to enhance follow up activities and learning?**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Answer | Number | Percentage |
| 1 | Additional analysis | 8 | 62% |
| 2 | Additional data | 4 | 31% |
| 3 | Actions for mission members (individual or joint) after the mission | 5 | 38% |
| 4 | Joint debriefing at headquarters for interested parties | 7 | 54% |
| 5 | Other | 2 | 15% |

The other responses included: more administrative support from the secretariat, and comparative analysis with other field visit reports.

The following suggestions were made by interviewees:

* Stronger and less descriptive data and analysis;
* The report needs to link the field trip to the programme of work of the Board;
* The findings, conclusions and recommendations are not systematically discussed and used by the Board (they are not binding and should not be binding, but more could be done to make sure a discussion takes place);
* Report more adequately on what the organizations ( outcomes ) or United Nations have achieved (UNDAF);
* Systematic inclusion of recommendations and management response leading to further discussion in the Board and with the United Nations in country;
* Use the report for a side event at an in-country debriefing with the UNCT and United Nations representative;
* Use the report for advocacy purposes (donor capitals); and
* Develop internal procedures for Board meetings to use and discuss the report.

Procedural:

* More inputs from field mission members (see above re the role of the field mission members); and
* Clear division of work between rapporteur, mission team leader and secretariat

## TOR question 6

***The guidance does not explicitly set out what is expected in terms of follow-up after the visits. What would be a reasonable set of post-mission deliverables?***

The survey respondents indicated that follow-up could be improved, including:

* Mission members could discuss their findings and observations after the field visit and decide whether recommendations for improvement are needed;
* Organization of debriefings;
* Better follow-up on the issues identified in the report;
* Field visit preparation and follow-up to feature as regular item on Bureau meeting agendas;
* Follow-up meetings with the organizations;
* Debriefing with all the relevant funds and programmes, with the participation of the country visited;
* Brief follow-up meetings with representatives of the country visited (in New York and/or Rome) and respective United Nations organizations and divisions in order to share impressions/observations and exchange thoughts; and
* The UNCT should submit a response to the mission report within six months.

Almost all interviewees considered follow-up after the report weak or non-existent and considered it crucial to address this gap – in addition to country selection criteria – in order to add to the value and impact of field visits.

Their suggestions included:

* More thematic discussions after the field trip;
* Discussion of the follow-up actions while in the field;
* Reports should be discussed with programme divisions at the headquarters of the relevant organization;
* Clarify the role of mission members during and after the field visit to improve follow-up;
* Organize a discussion at the office of the respective organization; and
* Ensure discussion at the Board session subsequent to presentation.

One way forward could be to develop a ‘toolkit’ (suggested by an interviewee) that could focus systematically on follow-up. Such as initiative would require support from the secretariat.

A key challenge with a standardized set of follow-up actions is that each report has unique recommendations relevant to the country visited. A first step would therefore be to include follow-up actions in the report and ensure a management response.

At a minimum, some follow actions could be included in a more standardized way in addition to a presentation of the report at a regular session of the Board.

Consideration could be given to:

* Debriefing the organizations;
* Follow up discussion with the UNCT within three months after the visit; and
* Put the follow up actions on the agenda of the Board

## TOR question 7

***The present field visit guidance indicates that the purpose of the visits is to afford “insight into the implementation of the UNDP/UNFPA overall policies and strategies” (paragraph 4). How could the joint visits make use of evaluation reports produced by UNFPA, UNDP and the other organizations on their respective programmes, to gain insight into the programmes and strategies?***

In addition to what has been reported above under TOR question 3, there is considerable support for using evaluation reports for field visits, and in particular for providing all Board members with the same type of information.

Evaluation reports of United Nations organizations and country programmes, and other evaluations, received the highest scores in the survey when Board members were asked what the best sources of information were in order to prepare the field visit. In addition, the role and importance of evaluation has increased in most organizations, and Boards consider evaluation important.

There are various types of evaluation that are undertaken at headquarters in addition to those undertaken at the field level. Moreover, different types of evaluations are conducted for different purposes, including country programme evaluations, mid-term reviews, outcome evaluations, joint evaluations, programme and project evaluations, and UNDAF evaluations.

All the organizations indicated that evaluations are available and could be used in preparing the field visit. Given the number of reports, however, it was suggested that the lead secretariat for the field visit could coordinate inputs based on the TORs for the country visit. In some cases syntheses of evaluations are readily available, as well as briefs on country portfolios. The heads of several evaluation offices stressed that it would take additional resources to prepare such briefings.

# The way forward

1. Given the discussion above it has become clear that all sections of the guidelines will need to be rewritten. This can be done based on a discussion of the findings by the secretariat and the Bureau. Certain topics could be reflected in other procedural documents rather than in the guidelines.
2. For practical reasons, it may be best to have one set of guidelines with a specific section on joint field visits. The participating organizations should be consulted on this.
3. A draft set of guidelines will be drafted for consideration by the Bureau and the secretariat.

# Annexes

In a separate document

# New draft guidelines

In a separate document

1. Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Information note from the secretariat, no date, no author. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. One of the UNICEF field visits is for Bureau members only. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Interviewees referred to headquarters decisions of organizations to focus the bulk of their assistance on a specific group of countries, and they felt that the field visits should therefore be more balanced. In this context it should be noted that the UNICEF criteria are based on geographical rotation but suggest alternating with one specific geographical area. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Please note the monitoring role in the functions of the Board (box 1), which may be interpreted in this way. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The consultant learned by coincidence that the Director or Deputy Director of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) joins IFAD field visits. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)