

Joint Assessment of National Strategies: Special Steering Scaling-up Reference Group (SuRG)
July 16, 2009

Co-chairs: Julian Schweitzer, World Bank and Carissa Etienne, WHO

Note for the Record

Preamble

Joint assessment of national strategies is not a new idea, but reasons for renewed interest in the approach include the increased number of international health actors in recent years, and renewed efforts to get more partners to support a single national health strategy / plan. The presumed benefits of joint assessment include: strengthening of national strategies; greater partner confidence in those strategies thereby securing more predictable and better aligned funding, and reductions in the transaction costs that arise from multiple assessment and reporting processes.

Participants

ADB Tshinko Illunga; **Ausaid** Tim Poletti; **Civil Society** Sue Perez, Elaine Ireland, Lola Dare; **DFID** James Droop; **European Commission** Juan Garay; **GAVI** Carole Presern, Geoff Adlide, Craig Burgess; **Global Fund** Rifat Atun, Daniel Davies; **Germany** Jochen Boehmer; **NORAD** Paul Fife; **Netherlands** Marijke Wijnroks; **OECD** Elisabeth Sandor; **USAID** Bob Emrey; **UNFPA** Hedia Belhadj, Jacqueline Mahon; **UNAIDS** George Tembo; **UNICEF** Ian Pett, Rudolf Knippenberg; **World Bank** Julian Schweitzer, Nicole Klingen, Kate Krackenberger; Patrick Reichenmiller, Finn Schleimann; Peter Berman, Ed Bos; **WHO** Carissa Etienne, Phyllida Travis, Ini Huijts, Justine Hsu, Jane Dyrhaug, Tarik Jasarevic.

Agreements

- There is broad agreement that the tool, while complex, is 'good enough' and it is important to now move to a roll-out of the joint assessment in a few countries. This is the best way to simplify the tool and develop practical joint assessment processes.
- A number of principles will underpin roll-out: it will be country-demand driven; it will build on existing in-country processes and experience; it should be as light as possible; it should link with other relevant global processes; civil society will be fully engaged.
- The joint assessment process will be undertaken initially in 2-3 interested countries by end December 2009. The IHP+ Core Team will coordinate this initial roll-out, in discussion with country stakeholders and others.
- Joint assessment will be a dynamic process that will evolve over time, to build up mutual confidence. To be credible it must not be seen as an academic exercise; it must also be clear that it is not an immediate guarantee of additional funding.
- Brief, simple communication about the purpose and proposed process is urgently needed

Immediate Action Points for Core Team

- The IHP+ Core Team will contact countries, and develop a roadmap for initial roll-out by the end of July, and circulate to SuRG members.
- Only minor changes will be made to the tool and guidelines at this stage.

Discussions

Discussions were divided into two parts

1. How far have we come with JANS?
2. Moving forward: managing the initial JANS process at global and country level

1. How far have we come with JANS?

Introduction by the Core Team

Over the last 15 months an IHP+ inter-agency working group has developed a tool, guidelines and possible process for joint assessment. This work has included several country consultations and discussion at the IHP+ inter-country teams meeting in June. The materials being discussed by the IHP+ steering SuRG were circulated one month prior to the SuRG meeting to allow time for consultations within agency headquarters. The key questions posed for the meeting were

- JANS tool: are there any “red flags” your agency/ organization has identified, which would hinder initial application of the tool at the country level?
- Do you agree to move now rapidly to country roll-out in a few countries?
- Looking ahead, is it possible to indicate how likely your organization/agency is to support the JANS and commit not to undertake separate assessments?

Comments reinforced by all participants

- Joint assessment is the right approach to pursue. The tool is not perfect but is broadly 'good enough', and there is a need to move as soon as possible to its application at country level in order to further refine the tool, guidelines and overall approach.
- Application should build on existing processes and be linked to related efforts such as those by the Global Fund, GAVI and the joint health system funding platform by GAVI, Global Fund and the World Bank.

Additional comments from one or more participants

- Australia urged IHP+ stakeholders to advocate for this process on their own Boards, and stressed the importance of learning from the previous experience of SWAps.
- The United Kingdom reiterated its support for moving ahead in countries through IHP+ channels, and noted this should also form part of DFID's bilateral work in countries.
- Germany and OECD stressed the importance of adjusting the process to country contexts and building on existing country mechanisms.
- UNAIDS seconded the call to build off of existing mechanisms and the country-level and further noted the importance of ensuring the engagement of Civil Society in the joint assessment process.
- Netherlands emphasized the importance of including perspectives beyond the public sector in any assessment.
- Norway reiterated its commitment to use the joint assessment process, and its support of a rapid roll-out, and said there were no 'red flags' before initial application.
- UNFPA welcomed the generic tool. They noted the importance of having an appropriate skill mix among those involved in a specific country's joint assessment, that would include SRH expertise.
- Several participants (GAVI, Global Fund, United States) noted that the JANS tool, and especially the guidelines, are complex and will need adaptation. UNFPA suggested this be based on lessons learned from initial country cases, rather than keep revising at global level.
- GAVI stressed the need for links between Joint Assessment and work on Monitoring and Evaluation. This was supported by others. The co-chair of the interagency working group on Monitoring and Evaluation also mentioned the Health Metrics Network framework for assessing information systems.
- The European Commission said it was ready to gradually phase-in the process of joint assessment, as the sole mechanism for assessment. It stressed the need to avoid parallel processes of assessment, and to engage southern representatives more in the discussions. OECD stressed that it

is crucial that this process is not perceived as a new layer/condition for accessing funding, particularly in countries that have gone through a heavy process of IHP+ compact development.

- The Global Fund emphasized it strongly supports the process but that it could not make commitments with regard to funding decisions based on joint assessment, as such decisions remain with its Board. Some elements of joint assessment are being piloted as part of the Global Fund's First Learning Wave of National Strategy Applications and lessons will be fed back to the Core Team to inform 'roll-out'.
- The World Bank and WHO underlined the importance of moving forward rapidly with country application, and of learning by doing. UNICEF observed that the discussion echoed many points raised in Bamako.
- Civil Society stressed its interest in the developmental aspect of joint assessment, and ways to strengthen civil society involvement in the development of national health plans.

In summary

- There was broad agreement to quickly move to rolling out the joint assessment process using the existing draft tool, in a small number of countries.
- There is a need to simplify the tool; to ensure the approach is country driven and to build on existing processes; to learn from previous experience with SWAs and NSAs, and to link up with ongoing work on monitoring and evaluation.
- Civil Society needs to be fully engaged in this process.

2. Moving Forward

Introduction by the Core Team

Given that there is little appetite for new coordination mechanisms, it was proposed that, for initial countries, the IHP+ core team provide overall global coordination, reporting, as normal, to the SuRG. The Core team will (i) develop a roadmap and principles of how to proceed until December 2009 (ii) ensure links to other related activities (iii) facilitate dissemination of experience of countries (iv) ensure support to country teams in the JANS process. The key questions posed were

1. Do you agree with the proposed approach to overall coordination?
2. Do you agree it is practicable to complete 2-3 country assessments by end December 2009.
3. Do you have specific suggestions on countries likely to be interested?

Comments

Testing the tool versus undertaking the whole process of joint assessment

There were discussions about the pros and cons of taking these two approaches. The eventual conclusion was that in order to be credible with countries the whole exercise has to be done in an operational context. The need to carefully communicate that this may not immediately result in more funding was also stressed. Civil Society noted the need for clarity on which version of the tool and guidelines will be used.

Country selection

There was strong support for country demand as the key criterion for roll-out. The discussion about other criteria (e.g. those with a strong PEPFAR presence, recent NSA or where a SWAp exists) concluded with agreement on the ultimate primacy of demand-led selection in the first instance. Countries that have previously expressed some interest in piloting this process include Mali, Nepal, Rwanda and Ethiopia; others were mentioned by both UNICEF and GAVI. Norway noted it will be important to eventually include fragile states, even if not in the first instance.

Timing

While there were some concerns raised about the work involved, the general view was that assessment in 2-3 countries by the end of December is feasible, provided the process is kept

pragmatic and light. There were requests from civil society and others to plan beyond the end of 2009.

- **Links to funding decisions**

Norway noted the importance of linking the roll out to current and prospective funding flows. Civil Society raised a question about how any identified weaknesses will be followed up. The discussion showed that joint assessment will clearly be an incremental and iterative process, gradually feeding into different partners' decision making processes.

- **Overall approach to coordination of the roll out of joint assessment**

Participants accepted the need for a flexible approach to coordination, based on existing mechanisms. Many expressed a preference for using in-country staff and national experts where possible. External experts will also be needed, and GAVI suggested their Independent Review Committee members might be available to give inputs. There was a plea to avoid creating a joint assessment support 'industry', and to keep the process light but fit for purpose.

The Core Team was accepted as the initial mechanism for overall global coordination of joint assessment roll-out, with a need to quickly forge strong links with countries. The Road Map will spell out how the process will be taken forward. The Core Team will seek support from development partners in this work, and any required additional resources will be needed. Experiences with joint assessment will be reported through multiple channels, including annual reviews

- **Inter-agency working group on joint assessment**

There was recognition that the Working Group was given a difficult task, but has done an excellent job and completed its mandate. Members of the group will be able to continue to engage through their regular agency channels in specific countries, as these identify their support needs.

Agreed next steps

1. The Core Team will contact countries that have been mentioned in this discussion or that have previously expressed interest in rolling out this work.
2. The Core Team will circulate a roadmap for the process by the end of July that includes activities over the next five months, but also looks ahead in broad terms into 2010. It will include an outline of additional resources required.
3. Only minor modifications should be made at this stage to the tool and guidelines, together with a simple, short communication that clearly sets out the agreed principles and process of joint assessment
4. All agencies should work with their respective Boards to explain and generate support for this joint assessment process.