

165th Session of the Council

Item 13: Progress Report on Rome-Based Agencies Collaboration

Following the request from Members at the 2019 meetings of the Rome-based Agency (RBA) Governing Bodies, the RBAs developed an improved Progress Report, ensuring a more structured approach and focusing on strategic issues and lessons learned, as well as on concrete achievements under RBA collaboration and future priorities. This was done with the support of the UN Lab for Organizational Change and Knowledge (UNLOCK). This year's Report is analytical and evidence-based. Data was gathered through two surveys conducted at both headquarters and country level, the latter through the World Food Programme (WFP). Approximately 50 staff were interviewed on over 17 sectoral areas and a thorough desk review and analysis was conducted.

Furthermore, four brief case studies were included in the Report in order to help visualize the nature and the depth of the joint work of the RBAs.

The Progress Report demonstrates in detail a significant increase in collaboration at country, regional and headquarters levels, with the most tangible impact being at the country level. In particular, according to the country survey, the analysis found that collaboration is occurring in over 80 percent of programming countries, including policy setting, planning, programming and advocacy.

As requested by Members, the RBAs are carrying out a feasibility assessment on collaboration on corporate services, which will be concluded at year-end. The first phase of this assessment has informed the Report. The second phase will consist of a detailed assessment of two areas for potential strengthening.

The Report found that RBAs are fully committed to the UN efficiency agenda, which aims to achieve cost savings at country level that could be redeployed into development activities. The suggestion for the RBAs therefore is to subsume their efforts under those of the UN as much as possible rather than pursuing isolated initiatives of their own. The analysis estimates that 71 percent of the current RBA joint corporate services could potentially be delivered under the leadership of the United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs). At headquarters level, the existing RBA collaboration in corporate services was found to be significant.

Qualitative data extracted from the country level and headquarters survey responses, corroborated by interviews conducted for this report, identified critical enablers and challenges to RBA collaboration, which are complementary and reinforce one another: Together they help form the lessons learned from RBA collaboration and serve as a useful reflection for the joint forward-looking dialogue, identifying strategic priorities for the future. To cite an example, the lack of joint funding hinders collaboration, resulting in increased competition for funds among the Agencies. Notably, country office staff cited joint funding as one of the most critical enablers for collaboration.

Acknowledging the need to give a more strategic direction to the collaboration among the Rome-based Agencies, five key longer term priorities were identified where realistic progress can be made. These priorities address both the technical focus of collaboration (the "what") and the methods and tools to drive overall collaboration (the "how"), as follows: i) continue to strengthen RBA collaboration within the UN Reform; ii) the Food Systems Summit (FSS); iii) the four areas of existing collaboration in the context of COVID-19; iv) joint funding to drive collaboration; v) leveraging knowledge and operationalizing collaboration.

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