

The United Nations Social Protection Floor Joint Team in Thailand

A replicable experience for other UN Country Teams

The aim of this brochure is to share with the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) for Asia and the Pacific and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) in the Asia-Pacific region the United Nations Social Protection Floor (UNSPF) Joint Team's experience in Thailand and its contribution to the national social protection agenda.

This awareness raising and information tool was produced by the UNSPF Joint Team in Thailand, led by the International Labour Organization (ILO).



International
Labour
Organization



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women



World Health
Organization

CONTENTS

The Social Protection Floor: A Global Initiative Adaptable at National Levels	3
Getting Started: The Creation of the UNSPF Joint Team in Thailand	5
The Role of the UNSPF Joint Team in Thailand	8
Next Steps: Ensuring Sustainability Within the UNPAF Process	16
The UNSPF Joint Team: A Success Story	18



All photos © ILO

A good example for UNCTs in the Asia-Pacific region

The UNDG for Asia and the Pacific commissioned a Social Protection Issues Brief in order to support the UNCTs' work on social protection, highlighting common ground and encouraging coordination.

The UNDG Asia-Pacific Social Protection Issues Brief¹, produced jointly by the members of the UNDG-AP Technical Working Group on social protection, formulates a joint UN position on social protection in Asia and the Pacific and presents potential entry points for UNCTs in supporting the development of national strategies for social protection and their progressive and coordinated implementation.

Thailand was featured in the Social Protection Issues Brief as a good example of where a UNSPF Joint Team is successfully bringing together UN agencies, the Government, workers and employers' representatives, civil society organizations and academia in a collaborative effort to promote social protection.

¹ available at www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ResShowResource.do?resourceId=26321

The Social Protection Floor: A Global Initiative Adaptable at National Levels

In April 2009, the UN Chief Executive's Board launched the Social Protection Floor Initiative (SPF-I), co-chaired by the ILO and WHO, as one of nine UN joint initiatives to mitigate the effects of the global economic crisis.

Social Protection Floors are nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees. They aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. Such guarantees may be achieved through contributory or non-contributory schemes, whether means-tested or not.

Defining the components of the SPFs as "guarantees" creates the flexibility to make the concept of a Social Protection Floor compatible with existing national social protection systems. The four guarantees set minimum performance or outcome standards with respect to the access, scope and level of income security and health care in national social protection systems rather than prescribing specific architecture.

Social Protection Floors should comprise at least the following basic social security guarantees:

1. Access to a nationally defined set of goods and services, constituting essential health care, including in the case of maternity.
2. Basic income security for children, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services.
3. Basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, including in case of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability.
4. Basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for persons in old age.

The Social Protection Floor is therefore an adaptable policy approach which should be country-led and responsive to national needs, priorities and resources. It allows individual country to design social protection floors that meet their specific national needs, while pursuing the same overall objectives.

“The Social Protection Floor is flexible in approach but firm in outcomes. Each country has the freedom to use whatever tools it feels are needed to reach its objectives, but the outcome which is social protection for all at all time remains firm.”

Rebecca Hansen, UN Resident Coordinator Thailand, August 2011, Thailand



Report of the Social Protection Floor Advisory Group chaired by Michelle Bachelet²

While not all countries will be able to immediately put in place all components for the whole population, the SPF provides a framework to plan progressive implementation of a social protection system. The floor is a tool to help describe social protection and poverty alleviation programmes and to identify priority options for the short, medium and long term. Furthermore, it facilitates policy coherence across programmes and ministries, reduces fragmentation and seeks synergies with other development strategies to help ensure individuals benefit from services and social transfers across their entire life cycle.

In this framework, the UNCTs are encouraged to initiate and support a national dialogue process on social protection, build national capacity for the design, implementation, and coordination of social protection schemes, and promote a long term, systems-based approach to social protection at national level. In Thailand, this support to coordinated policy development was provided through the UNSPF Joint Team.

² <http://www.socialsecurityextension.org/gimi/gess/ResShowResource.do?ressourceId=25842>

Getting Started: The Creation of the UNSPF Joint Team in Thailand

Over the last decade enhancing social protection has become a keystone of the Royal Thai Government's development agenda.

Thailand's economic growth record in recent decades has been remarkable and has contributed to significant alleviation of income poverty. However, the benefits of growth have not been equally shared. The gap between the rich and the poor has increased, as indicated by the increase in the GINI coefficient from 0.42 in 2002 to 0.48 in 2010 (NSO).

The development of the social protection system has been fragmented to date. It has been centered on civil servants and their dependents, and workers in the formal sector. Vulnerable and poor people have only had access to ad-hoc means-tested programmes. But Thailand has recently made a significant move towards universal basic social protection by introducing two major schemes that constitute the main pillars of the Thai Social Protection Floor. The Universal Health Coverage Scheme (UCS) was introduced in 2001 to provide health care coverage to the majority of the population who were not covered by existing schemes. Secondly, a universal tax-financed 500 baht (USD 18) scheme was established in 2008 to provide income security to the elderly over 60 (except for civil servants who have their own scheme).

The need to mitigate the impact of the global economic crisis in 2008 and respond to the political unrest in 2010, focused attention on social protection as means of increasing economic resilience and reducing social and political tension. The Royal Thai Government recognized that social protection carried the potential to promote a more balanced economy and address inequality. As a result, the expansion of social protection was included as key target of the 11th National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) 2012-2016 with the objective to "create a more just society".

The UNSPF Joint Team was established in March 2010 to support the Royal Thai Government in the development of its social protection strategy through a coordinated approach.

The ILO presented the SPF concept during a meeting on social security and social protection organized by NESDB and the World Bank in September 2009. UN agencies working in Thailand agreed that the SPF concept presented a useful common framework to coordinate support to the government on social protection and identified it as one of the priorities of the UNCT. In March 2010, a Joint Team on Social Protection was established chaired by the ILO.

Several UN agencies and other actors had been working on social protection prior to the establishment of the UNSPF Joint Team but somewhat in isolation. Two years after its inception, the UNSPF Joint Team has emerged as a dynamic, efficient and effective mechanism to ensure greater coherence and collaboration in the work of UN agencies in Thailand with their partners on social protection activities.

The UNSPF Joint Team in Thailand includes seven agencies – ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO – which combine their efforts based on three principles:

- (1) contribute to building a rights-based, systematic, and adequate protection for all residents of Thailand;
- (2) provide concrete support through policy advice and dialogue, and technical assistance to the Government and implementing agencies;
- (3) coordinate action and generate synergies across the technical areas of expertise of participating agencies.



Social Protection Floor, creating interest in Thailand.

Growing interest in social protection:

- Guaranteeing the right to social security, to decent standards of living and to essential services appears as a growing necessity;
- It is more and more evident that economic growth alone is not enough to generate productive jobs, to contribute to a sustained reduction in poverty, and to facilitate structural transformation of the economy;
- Social protection is recognized as an economic stabilizer which facilitates recovery in times of economic and financial crisis, as well as natural disaster (e.g. floods);
- Social reforms (aiming at productivity improvements, reform of the education system, taking care of the children at a very young age...) seem necessary to avoid the "Middle-Income Country Trap";
- Social protection can contribute to increasing social and political-stability through redistribution.

Interest in the SPF concept:

- The SPF builds on existing schemes and institutions, it does not create parallel systems;
- Several instruments and policy options are at hand for countries to develop their own nationally defined social protection floors;
- The SPF provides a coherent framework for the design and implementation of social protection policies and programmes in a coordinated manner.

The Role of the UNSPF Joint Team in Thailand

Since its formation, the UNSPF Joint Team has conducted several activities to promote the SPF concept in Thailand.

1. Documenting Thailand's social protection experience

The UNSPF Joint Team is producing and sharing information on the GESS platform, ILO's online knowledge sharing tool on the extension of social security worldwide (www.social-protection.org). The UNSPF Joint Team has created a workspace dedicated to the Team members which allows them to share working documents, minutes of meetings, and be informed of the latest activities.

For each workshop or meeting connected to the Team's work, a dedicated workspace on the GESS platform is created where agenda, presentations, pictures and minutes are posted. The Team also created and updates the Thailand country page on GESS where publications, statistics and events are regularly posted.



- Workspace of the UNSPF Joint Team in Thailand:
www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=1015
- Thailand's country page:
www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowCountryProfile.do?cid=404&aid=2
- Sharing Innovative Experiences: Successful Social Protection Floor Experiences:
www.socialsecurityextension.org/gimi/gess/ResShowResource.do?resourceId=20840

The Team also facilitated drafting of two case studies on Thailand’s Universal Health Care Coverage Scheme and Universal Tax-Financed 500 Baht Pension Scheme. These case studies were included in the global ILO/UNDP publication “Sharing Innovative Experiences: Successful Social Protection Floor Experiences”.



Sharing Innovative Experiences: Successful Social Protection Floor Experiences³

More recently, the UNSPF Joint Team produced a video on “Building a Social Protection Floor in Thailand” which advocates for the rights of vulnerable people, and presents Thailand’s achievements and remaining challenges in making basic social protection for all a reality. The video is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgAPNHEDN3U>.



³ <http://www.socialsecurityextension.org/gimi/gess/RessShowRessource.do?ressourceId=20840>

2. Promoting social protection concepts among key stakeholders in Thailand: conferences and capacity development initiatives

In November 2010, the UNSPF Joint Team facilitated a Development Cooperation Seminar hosted by the UN in Thailand and the National Economic and Social Development Board on the theme “Social Protection: Towards Universal Coverage in Thailand”. The seminar brought together more than 70 government officials, international development agencies, civil society groups, academics, workers’ and employers’ organizations and other relevant experts to review the current social protection system in Thailand. A number of key policy recommendations for the extension of social protection coverage, with a focus on universal coverage of social protection and sustainability of the system, emerged from this seminar.

In December 2011, a conference was organized to share the conclusions and recommendations of the Social Protection Floor Advisory group’s report entitled “Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization”, in the presence of Martin Hirsch, Member of the Social Protection Floor Advisory Group, as well as to present and disseminate a regional study by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) on “The Promise of

Protection: Social Protection and Development in Asia and the Pacific”.



Panel at DCS seminar, November 2010



Mr. Martin Hirsch

Thailand’s vision and experience in the extension of social security and the Social Protection Floor were also presented and discussed. Participants at the meeting engaged in an open discussion on key cross-cutting issues related to social security extension and the implementation of the Social Protection Floor.

The UNSPF Joint Team undertook a series of capacity development initiatives to strengthen the national analytical capacity in social protection. Training has been provided to a body of social security experts from government institutions and line ministries, workers, employers, CSO representatives, academia on social security concepts, SPF assessment methodologies and tools, and the costing of social protection policies.



Participants of the ILO Executive Training Seminar, March 2012

Conferences and Training Workshops organized by the UNSPF Joint Team:

- Launch of the publication "*Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization in Thailand*" – 9 December 2011 <http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=1355>
- Training on "*SPF Rapid Assessment, Training and Costing*", 15-19 November 2010 <http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=1155>
- ILO Executive Training Seminar "*Securing Development: New Paths for Social Protection*", 13-14 March 2012 www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=1446
- Hands-on Training Course on "*How to Cost, Finance and Monitor Social Protection Schemes?*" 15 to 17 May 2012 <http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=1585>

A number of user-friendly training tools have been developed to raise awareness on social security and the Social Protection Floor. Two games "*Who wants to be a protectionnaire?*" and "*Jeopardy, special edition 2011 on the Social Protection Floor*" have been adapted from famous TV shows and are a great success. The Social Protection Floor Advocacy Tools are available at www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=1295 and can be adapted to other countries' contexts.



3. Supporting Thailand's development of a holistic and coherent social protection system

From June 2011 to May 2012, the UNSPF Joint Team engaged in a dialogue with the national Government, social partners, civil society organizations, academia and other relevant stakeholders to assess social protection situation in Thailand, identify policy gaps and implementation issues, and draw appropriate policy recommendations for the achievement of a comprehensive Social Protection Floor in Thailand.

The Assessment Based National Dialogue (ABND) consists of 3 steps.

STEP 1 – Development of the assessment Matrix

The four guarantees of the Social Protection Floor (SPF) are used as benchmarks to describe existing social security, social protection and poverty alleviation programmes in Thailand, identify policy gaps and implementation issues, and produce recommendations for the design and implementation of further social protection provisions with the aim of guaranteeing at a minimum the SPF to all the population.

The assessment matrix was compiled in close collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, using face-to-face consultations and workshops at both national and provincial levels.

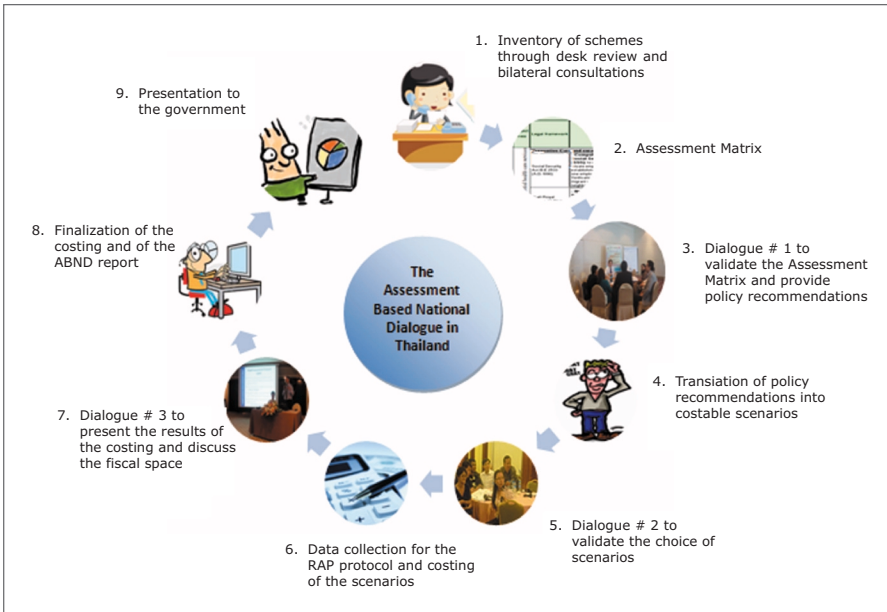
The preliminary results were presented and reviewed during the *Consultative Meeting on Social Protection Floor* on 10 August 2011, which was attended by more than 70 representatives from the Royal Thai Government, social partners, civil society organizations, academia, and the UN Country Team.



Some concrete policy recommendations emerged from this meeting, to further design and implement social protection provisions with a view to close the Social Protection Floor gaps (i.e. to provide at least the Social Protection Floor to the whole population).

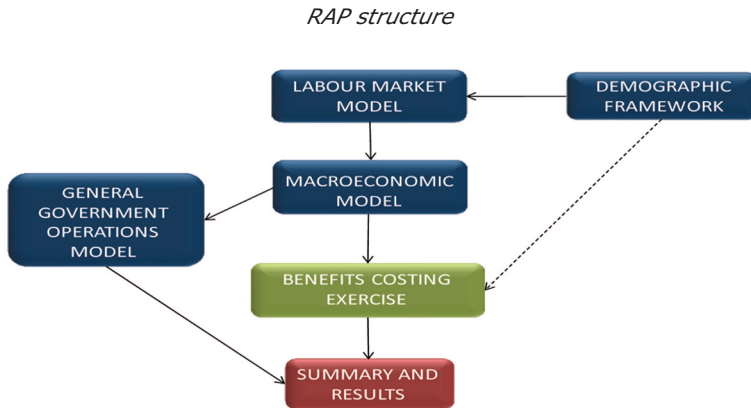


Dr. Thaworn Sakunphanit (HISRO)

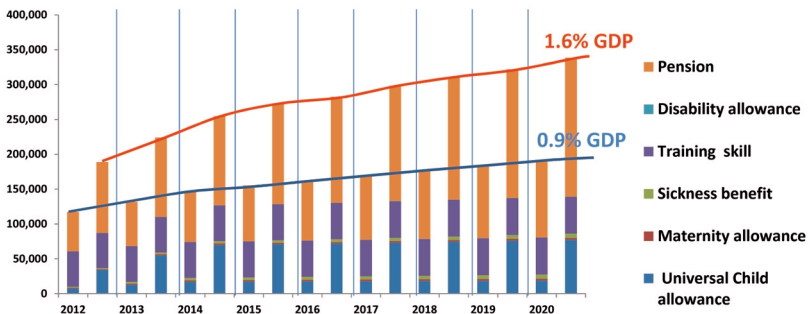


STEP 2 – Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP)

The cost of the proposed social protection provisions is then estimated and projected over a 10 year period using the ILO Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP). This costing exercise can serve as a basis for discussions on available fiscal space, Government budget reallocations, and the prioritization of different social protection policy options.



Projections for the low and high recommendations in Thailand



Preliminary results were presented and reviewed during the workshop entitled "Costing SPF Coverage Gaps: Methodology and First Results" on 30 November 2011 and at the *Civil Society Forum on the Social Protection Floor* organized in Bangkok on 23 February 2012. The recommendations from these two workshops were used in the final choice for policy options and corresponding cost calculations.

STEP 3 – Finalization

On 16 March 2012, the UNSPF Joint Team organized an “*Assessment Based National Dialogue Workshop: Final Results and Recommendations to the Government*” gathering representatives of the Royal Thai Government, social partners, civil society organizations, academia, and the UN Country Team to review the pre-final draft of the assessment based national dialogue and discuss the next steps (e.g., identification of *possible measures to increase the fiscal space for social protection*).

The assessment report will soon be finalized and the main recommendations presented to the Government. When repeated over time, the ABND exercise can become a monitoring mechanism of the extension of social protection coverage and Government’s interventions notably in the framework of the partnership on Social Protection within the United Nations Partnership Framework (UNPAF).

The main steps of the ABND exercise in Thailand:

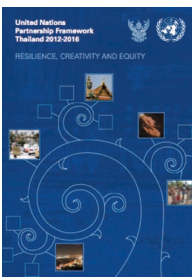
- Consultative meeting on Social Protection Floor in Thailand, 10 August 2011 <http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=1285>
- Costing SPF Coverage Gaps in Thailand: Methodology and First Results Workshop, 30 November 2011 <http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=1335>
- Civil Society Forum on Social Protection Floor in Thailand, 23 February 2012 www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=1445
- Assessment Based National Dialogue Workshop: “Final Results and Recommendations to the Government”, 16 March 2012 www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=1447

Next Steps: Ensuring Sustainability Within the UNPAF Process

Once countries have their longer-term vision for social protection strategies and development plans in place, the next step is to ensure sound design and effective implementation, in line with SPF principles and a systems-based approach.

Constraints that governments can face in keeping to these principles include: existing social protection policies and broader developmental policies (and the need to ensure integration of new policies with these); compromises required by the political economy (for instance, targeting approaches and level of resources allocated to non-contributory schemes); limited administrative capacity; sub-optimal delivery systems; limited financial resources; and institutional bottlenecks.

To support countries in maximizing what they can achieve given these constraints, and in some cases overcoming them, all UN agencies can play some roles. Some aspects of this support will benefit from a collective or coordinated approach on the part of UN agencies. Other aspects will require agencies to work bilaterally with government counterparts, but towards a shared vision of inclusive, progressive and sustainable social protection.



In Thailand, social protection was chosen as one of the six key areas of partnership between the Royal Thai Government and the UN system within the United Nations Partnership Framework (UNPAF). This partnership, for the period 2012-2016, focuses on enhancing Thailand's capacity to provide universal basic social protection and higher level of benefits through contributory schemes, with the overall objective of ensuring the financial and institutional sustainability of the system.



“Thailand understands there that there is no one size fits all approach and the social protection floor concept is not a prescriptive one. The implementing ministries and agencies, the academia, civil society organizations and the UN Team have been working jointly to find the path of development of our Thai social protection floor, relying on major components of the floor already in place such as the Universal Healthcare Scheme and the 500 baht pension scheme.”

Ms. Suwanee Khamman, National Economic and Social Development Board

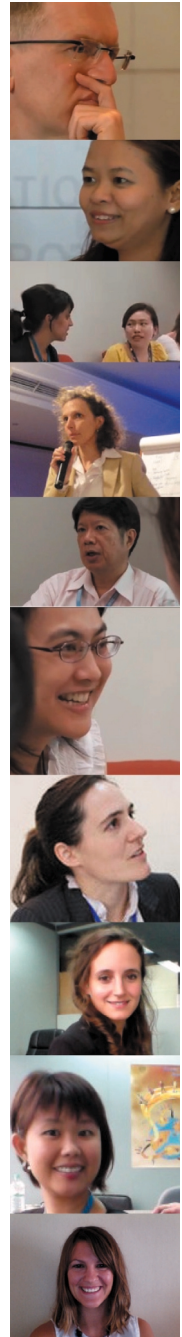
The UNSPF Joint Team: A Success Story

The UNSPF Joint Team is an example of effective inter-agency collaboration

Each agency brings its own expertise and puts forward the needs and expectations of its national counterparts. At the same time, the social protection agenda is coordinated through continuous communication, regular meetings, and the design and implementation of joint projects and activities. This long-term cooperation enhances the coherence and the relevance of interventions. In terms of advocacy, working as one team is an efficient option: the UNSPF Joint Team is increasingly recognized as the UN voice on Social Protection in the country and is the basis for partnerships with the Government on Social Protection.

The UNSPF Joint Team is a model of collaboration with the Royal Thai Government and an appropriate way to provide high-quality technical assistance

The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security acts as the principal focal point within the government for the UNSPF Joint Team and is responsible for coordinating with other line ministries (Health, Education, Labour, Finance and so on). This helps ensure that activities are designed in close collaboration with Government partners, and that they respond to the needs of the country, while increasing ownership and coordination.



The UNSPF Joint Team facilitates the creation of a critical mass of people who understand the stakes of Social Protection

The activities are led in a participatory way, involving all stakeholders of Social Protection: line-ministries, social protection institutions, social partners, civil society organizations, academia, UN agencies etc. This participatory approach contributes to the creation of a network of national experts, at policy and technical levels and among the general public, who share a vision of social protection and are willing to promote the Social Protection Floor at national level.

The UNSPF Joint Team enables greater knowledge generation and sharing

At the regional and global level, the documentation of Thailand's experience in establishing the Social Protection Floor feeds global discussions and reports, such as the recent G20 Ministers of Labour meeting; the publication "*Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization*" (known as the "Bachelet Report"); and the preparation of the upcoming *Recommendation concerning national floors of social protection*, which will be discussed at the International Labour Conference, in its 101st Session, in June 2012.



UNSPF Joint Teams could be established in other countries to support the design and implementation of national social protection floors in a coherent and coordinated manner.



“Working as one has been a mantra for the UN for a number of years now and while we talk a lot about it, it’s sometimes difficult to find how to do it and it seems to me that the SPF is a very practical example which really does help the UN to work as one.”

Bill Salter, former ILO DWT Director for Asia and the Pacific

Some tips if you are interested in setting up a UNSPF Joint Team in your country

- It is time consuming! Each participating agency needs to nominate at least one focal point and the lead agency (ILO in the case of Thailand) one staff member on a part-time basis;
- The lead agency should have a recognized leadership in the field of social protection, and preferably strong technical capacity in one or more of its components;
- Commitment of time and resources from all agencies is needed: in Thailand UN agencies on the Team assigned one staff who was the focal point and participated in all meetings... and fortunately there was no turn over!