STRATEGY FOR FAST-TRACKING UNDP’S CRISIS RESPONSE

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Section I  Background  1

Section II  Fast-Track Policies and Procedures  2

Section III  Fast Track through Preparedness  5

Section IV  Fast Track Across-the-Board  8

Section V  Strategy Implementation Plan  9

Section I  Background

Within the framework of the corporate Early Recovery Policy Implementation Plan, the Bureau of Management (BOM) and the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) have partnered to establish mechanisms for improving the speed and timeliness and UNDP’s response to crisis and other special situations. Throughout 2009, a set of recommendations for such mechanisms was developed in broad consultation with UNDP Country Offices, Regional Centers, and HQ Bureaux.

The Strategy for Fast-Tracking UNDP’s Crisis Response was reviewed and endorsed by the Management Group (MG) on December 17th 2009. This paper describes in detail the Fast Track Provisions as approved by the MG. This paper also serves as a guide for practitioners while prescriptive content is being developed to encompass the changes inherent in the MG decision.

The Fast Track Strategy outlined key recommendations which covered:

- A set of Policies and Procedures that would come into effect during well-defined Fast Track situations (FTP).
- Recommendations on Fast Tracking through Preparedness.
- A set of recommendations for changes in policies and procedures ‘across-the-board’.

The provisions contained in these three categories are presented in the following three sections.
Section II  Fast-Track Policies and Procedures (FTP)

1 – FTP Activation Triggers
The FTP may be triggered and formally activated online\(^1\) by the Resident Representative if at least one of the following three events has taken place:

i. A crisis has been declared by the Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) or the UN Country Team (UNCT);

ii. An emergency grant has been approved by BCPR;

iii. SURGE support has been activated.

The FTP may also be formally activated by the Resident Representative outside the context of an acute crisis, e.g., when a strategic and/or time-critical response is needed to maintain UNDP’s credibility and relevance. In such a case, the respective Regional Bureau (RB) is informed by the Resident Representative that the Fast Track procedures are initiated, and the RB would have 48 hours to object if necessary. If the Regional Bureau does not concur with the Resident Representative’s assessment of the situation, direct contact must be made by the Bureau with the Resident Representative within this 48 hour period. Fast Track Procedures will then be put on hold pending approval or rejection by the Regional Bureau, which retains full oversight accountability.

The following definitions apply for the terms ‘strategic’ and ‘time-critical’;

**Strategic:**
Used in this context to describe situations where UNDP involvement in a crisis, or rapid expansion of UNDP programmes in a specific context, is considered essential for delivering development results, to remain relevant, and to maintain or build the organization’s reputation;

**Time Critical:**
Used in this context to denote the need to deliver development results within a very short or medium-term timeframe within which UNDP must make a contribution or impact in order to remain a relevant player in the development arena.

2 – FTP Limitations and Duration

The FTP apply to the entire UNDP operations in programme and management areas, as in the case of a crisis affecting the entire country such as an earthquake. The FTP may also be applied to projects which are specific to a crisis response, or those projects that fall within the framework of the ‘strategic and time-critical’ response. In rare circumstances, they may be applied more broadly to a specific business area when a crisis has affected Country Office (CO) operations or national mechanisms (e.g., no operational banking system, in which case FTP may apply to all payments). The FTP scope and limitations must be specified at the time of activation, while also taking into account any potential impacts on UNDP’s role and relationships within the UN Country Team. It should be noted that an ongoing focus on crisis preparedness by country offices will ensure an accurate assessment of the required scope and duration of FTP at the onset of any Fast Track situation.

The FTP may initially be activated for any period of time up to 12 months, with the RB having the authority, in consultation with BOM, BCPR and the CO, to discontinue it at any point, as part of its oversight role. At the end of 12 months, a joint review between the CO and the RB must take place, based on which the RB, in consultation with BOM and BCPR, may approve an extension if required.

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\(^1\) A global system has been developed for activating FTP, which requires completion of an FTP Activation Form, and a CO Capacity Assessment Form. It enables on-line tracking and monitoring of the use of this facility.
3 – Automatic Delegation of Authority

Once the FTP is activated, a pre-defined package of delegations will immediately become available to the Resident Representative. This will entail:

i. A single-level up-scaling of existing procurement authority (i.e., if current level is US $100,000 then the new level would be US $300,000; if current level is US $300,000 then the new level would be US $500,000; and if current level is US $500,000 then the new level would be US $1,000,000);\(^2\)

ii. Authority to use the direct execution (DEX) and/or direct implementation (DIM) modality;

iii. Within the first 90 calendar days following activation of FTP, authority to waive competitive recruitment process for up to 5 recruitments under the Temporary Appointment (TA) modality (all other recruitment criteria must be met).

4 – Modified Operational Procedures

The following deviations to existing procedures will be allowed when FTP is activated:

i. Automatic utilization of other UN agency's Long Term Agreements (LTAs) permitted for procurement, even if based on direct contracting (under normal circumstances this is possible only once a verification by Advisory Committee on Procurement (ACP) of the LTA approval process undertaken by the other agency was done, and it was confirmed that a competitive bidding process was followed);

ii. "Delivery time" may be included as a key driver for best-value-for-money;

iii. Use of flexible Invitation to Bid (ITB) or Request for Proposal (RFP): a fast track procurement methodology will be developed to facilitate turning around procurement process within 5 working days (this mechanism is under development by Procurement Support Office (PSO/BoM));

iv. Waiver of ACP/BoM review, in cases where a competitive procurement process has been followed but less than 3 responsive and qualified bids are received, for procurements above $30,000 and within the authorized delegated procurement authority applicable at the time (i.e., a Contracts, Asset and Procurement (CAP) review will suffice);

v. Virtual participation of the requesting CO in the ACP meeting to enable immediate clarifications on the proposal submitted (ACP will inform the CO of the date and time to make video or audio participation possible, when deemed useful);

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\(^2\) Practitioners are reminded of the applicable procedures available for crisis situations in the Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP), under “Procurement Methods, Direct Contracting, 4.2 Procurement in crisis situations”, which provides options to the Resident Representative to undertake direct contracting and request direct Chief Procurement Officer (CPO) approval to waive Invitation to Bid/Request for Proposal (ITB/RFP) requirements in specific circumstances. The introduction of fast track policies and procedures do not affect the applicability for this option which continues to be available.
vi. Waiver of a CAP review for cases that will be submitted for ACP and Regional ACP review;

vii. Shortening of vacancy announcement time to 1 week for Fixed Term Appointment (FTA) positions (instead of 2 weeks)\(^3\);

viii. Direct recruitment of national staff of other agencies who may be phasing down their presence;

ix. Urgent time-bound payments can be approved by one signatory staff member\(^4\) if a second signatory staff member is not assigned. Once a second signatory staff member is assigned then approval of payments will be based on two signatures.

x. Low-value shopping threshold increases from \(2,500\) to \(5,000\);

xi. Creation of TA positions up to P5 level directly by the CO, rather than requesting Office of Planning and Budgeting (OPB/BOM)). For FTA positions, OPB to create/extend positions based on CO assurance of funding rather than confirmation of actual funds availability;

5 – Modified SURGE Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

As part of the Fast Track Strategy, the following modifications to the SURGE deployment mechanism were approved. Revision of the SURGE mechanism to incorporate these modifications will take place in 2010. The key elements include:

i. Immediate release of SURGE Advisors based on the release agreement already signed, informing the releasing office but without any further need for clearance (the roster process will be modified to ensure that a staff member updates her/his availability regularly for the upcoming 3 month period). As part of the revision of the SOPs, the compensatory mechanism for releasing offices will be reviewed. This is to ensure that offices are equipped to backstop released advisors and incentives to sign the release agreement are strengthened;

ii. Establishing one or more remote SURGE support teams, covering all business areas, which become immediately operational from their current locations. This will include capacities available in any part of UNDP, i.e., Regional Service Centers (RSCs), Global Procurement Unit, neighboring countries, Headquarters (HQ), etc.;

iii. Adjusting the triggers for the SURGE SOPs so that the level 1 procedures would come into play as soon as the first SURGE Advisor is requested and deployed, and the recommendation for escalating the crisis to level 2 or 3 would be made to the RR by the Advisor on the ground;

\(^3\) It is possible under normal circumstances to advertise for only one week for Temporary Appointments. This is why only FTAs are referenced here.

\(^4\) Staff members must hold an active Temporary Appointment, Fixed Term Appointment, Permanent Appointment or Activity of Limited Duration appointment.
iv. Automatically putting the SURGE team on standby for support as needed when FTP is activated;

v. Ensuring that a crisis level has formally been designated before any further deployments take place to ensure a coordinated response; and

vi. Widening the scope of SURGE activation to include the situations representing strategic and time-critical needs of a CO.

6 – Predictable and Guaranteed Turn-Around Times from HQ/RSC

When FTP is activated, the following turn-around time will be guaranteed by the respective lead offices, which will also coordinate with other HQ offices, as necessary:

i. Staff Administrative Services, OHR/Copenhagen: 24 hours
ii. ACP or Regional ACP: 48 hours
iii. Partnerships Bureau: 48 hours

Section III Fast Track through Preparedness

The following initiatives are to be undertaken by UNDP at both the corporate level and the country office level in order to set the stage for COs to respond quickly in special situations. These initiatives must be facilitated by the roll-out of a Fast Track Preparedness Plan which shall begin implementation during 2010.

1 – Develop a Tailored Approach for Engaging International and National Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and non-commercial private sector entities

NGOs and certain private sector organizations play a critical role in a crisis situation, especially those that are non-commercial in nature. While current policy allows for engagement of such entities as implementing partners or responsible parties, in the latter case either as a Grant Recipient or Subcontractor, the requirement to follow the normal procurement and selection process to engage them has proven ineffective. A more tailored and flexible approach is therefore required. Such an approach will need to acknowledge the substantive “like-mindedness” of the NGO that has a development agenda in line with UNDP’s mandate, and thereby be respectful of their development value-added vis-à-vis the challenges faced in the field in a post-crisis situation. Such an NGO would be responsible as provider of substantive project inputs.

A working group has been convened on this issue, with participants from various bureaux and the group should present a recommendation on a tailored approach for engagement of NGOs and non-commercial private-sector entities in 2010.

2 – Finalize LTAs with Select International and National NGOs for Immediate Engagement

Once the specific approach for engaging NGOs has been designed, UNDP should solicit interest for the most typical substantive inputs required in projects designed for crisis response. The process must be carried out at HQ for international NGOs, and initially in high-priority countries, with the objective of finalizing as many LTAs as feasible with as many of the partners as are found eligible, using the new tailored approach. The process should inherently fulfill requirements relating to capacity assessment and best-value-for-money appraisal, and should also ensure clearance from national counterparts where feasible.
3 – **Consolidate and Expand Rosters**

Significant strides have been made recently in terms of having functional rosters of pre-vetted, competitively selected, ACP-approved candidates who can be contracted immediately and deployed for crisis response. This is mainly within BCPR in its Experts Roster for Rapid Response (ExpRes), which includes the SURGE roster. However, there are several other rosters that exist in the organization managed by various offices, with many different substantive and operational expertise profiles. Having a consolidated roster will significantly facilitate the quick identification of personnel required in emergency situations.

In addition, there are a significant number of qualified persons who are already “known” to the organization, but are not placed in any roster. This huge resource goes untapped currently, and provides a quick way of widening the pool of available expertise for quick deployment. A dedicated effort must be undertaken to consolidate the rosters and expand them in the first place with the following pools of potential personnel:

i. UN System retirees;
ii. Candidates who are found eligible, but ranked 2nd and 3rd in any UNDP recruitment process which go through the Corporate Review Board (CRB);
iii. UNVs with crisis response expertise.

Further, “stand-by” arrangements must be negotiated with other agencies and institutions, whereby their staff could be made available at short notice for supporting UNDP response.

4 – **Map, Assess, and Endorse other UN LTAs for utilization by UNDP**

Prioritizing the goods and services which show up as a recurrent need in crisis situations, a dedicated effort must be undertaken to map the LTAs of other UN entities. After assuring that a procurement process compatible with that of UNDP was followed, those LTAs found eligible must be made available and accessible for utilization by COs.

5 – **Prepare and Document Pre-Written and Classified Generic Job Descriptions for the Most Common Terms of Reference (TOR) and Expertise Requirements**

Based on a review of deployments effected in responding to crisis over the past few months, the most common Terms of Reference (TOR) and expertise requirements must be selected to develop generic job descriptions which can be classified and used as a standard for similar requirements, allowing recruitment to be initiated in crises without any delay.

6 – **Revise Standard Operating Procedures for customs clearance at CO level to ensure they are updated and applicable to crisis situation**

This will ensure that the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) makes the necessary provision for timely import/customs clearance. Import/Customs clearance has been identified as a major delay in crisis situations.

7 – **Insert a regular output into CPAP for crisis preparedness, mitigation, and response, specifying implementing partner**

While this is expected to become a standard element in new CPAPs, which will eliminate the need for government negotiations at the time of crisis, and enable immediate response, it must be specifically addressed in existing CPAPs.
8 – Prepare generic project and annual work plan proposals for responses to high probability natural and man-made disasters

This should be applicable for CPAP and Non-CPAP contexts. Standard project templates should be prepared based on best practices.

9 – Develop section in Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP) to cover options for Cash Management in crisis situations

Options must be prepared for situations which require UNDP to operate on a cash basis. Lessons and models to be learned from that of UNICEF should be incorporated.

10 – Assign a Dedicated focal point in Office of Finance and Administration (OFA/BOM) to support CO

One person in OFA should be designated as one-stop-shop for CO to call to get support on financial issues.

11 – Establish Long Term Agreements (LTAs) for goods/services relevant to Crisis Prevention and Recovery (CPR) procurement with suppliers/other partners

Existing gaps not covered by other UN agencies LTAs should be identified, and opportunities for UNDP to subscribe to separate LTAs to cover remaining CPR needs should be explored.

12 – Facilitate access to generic specifications and Terms of Reference for goods and services required in crises

Initial stages of procurement process must be streamlined by facilitating access to standard and generic technical specifications (goods) and ToRs (services).

13 – Implement Preparedness measures to support increased Procurement Delegation

Capacity assessment missions should be undertaken to match authorized delegation of procurement authority to selected COs to the optimal identified level. Recommended actions should be presented to bridge identified gaps. COs must receive support and monitoring with the implementation of recommendations, leading to approval of increased procurement delegation.

14 – Conduct Bank/Financial service review to establish services available during crisis situations, including potential costs

This must be done with a focus especially on issues of making disbursements in remote locations.

15 – Negotiate a Service Level Agreement with the Medical Division to process medical clearance, especially when FTP is triggered

An agreement with the UN Medical Division should be finalized which guarantees a 24-hour turnaround when FTP is triggered.
Section IV  Fast Track Across-the-Board

The third category of recommendations in the Fast Track Strategy approved by the MG related to those that do not entail any additional risks but represent streamlining of current policies and procedures which either need to be adjusted in light of the Fast Track Strategy implementation, or will improve the organization’s responsiveness across-the-board as part of its “normal” way of doing business. These policies and procedures, presented by business category below, will be developed and introduced into the Programmes and Operations Policies and Procedures where appropriate.

Fast Track changes in Policies and Procedures Across-the-Board

Programme and Project Management

1 - Programming in Special Development Situations:
- Section on Programming in Special Development Situations to be taken out of Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP)
- Introduce new section on UNDP & Crisis Situations (Annex 1) which brings together SURGE Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), Deployment Mechanism, Tool Kit, Fast Track procedures, Crisis Preparedness; Provision of suspension of policies under special development situations will be retained from current section.
- Definition of four types of situations that may require fast track mode (immediate, slow onset and protracted crisis, strategic / time-critical imperatives)

2 - Accountability and Delegation of Authority:
Delegation of Authority (DoA) to be amended to include DoA under fast track

3 - Release of UNDP core and Government cost sharing resources from active projects to address crisis needs:
Based on consultations with Government, RR to take decision on postponement of delivery of specific outputs for reprioritization of resources to address crisis.

Finance

4 - Flexibility in petty cash availability:
Increase limit to $1000, and per transaction limit to $100. This doubles the current limit, and is effective immediately.

5 - Direct Execution (DEX) Project Advances:
Develop guidance which allows UNDP to work in cash in regions where banking facilities do not exist. Include guidance on working with third-party cash providers where available.

6 - Risk Management Guidelines:
Review/Revise risk management guidelines and detail in POPP, allowing RR to authorize spending against signed agreements with donors considered to be reliable, including:
- Streamlined Donor Assessment
- Remove requirement for written assurance from Donor that payment is in progress
- Remove restriction on disbursement
**Human Resources**

**7 - Streamlining of special operations entitlements:**
Consider lump sum payments in all Country Offices ensuring that payment procedure is streamlined.

**8 - Process of International Temporary Appointment (TA)/Fixed Term Appointment (FTA) position establishment/classification/vacancy announcement approval:**
Currently Country Offices are required to send documentation for new positions to three different HQ units. i.e., Request OPB to establish the post in Atlas; Request Organization Design Unit (ODU/OHR/BoM) to classify the post; Submit Vacancy Announcement for approval to the Recruitment Section. These three units will establish a simplified and streamlined process that allows the CO to submit one set of documents per post. The option of a systematized workflow process will be examined.

**9 – Creation of Website/Workbench for documenting staff details:**
All forms to be completed once by the staff member with all required documents to be saved on one website (workbench) and be updated if necessary for another contract issuance. Creation of one form that will contain all personal information required for a single staff member.

**Partnership**

**10 - Introduction of Partnership Review Group processes into POPP including partnership library:**
Introduction of already approved text into POPP by end of second quarter 2010 and corporate agreement on the function of the Partnership Review Group

**Risk management**

**11 – Decision Making Framework:**
The framework for decision-making related to risk must ensure a balanced consideration of the expected gains from an activity, the opportunity cost of non-action, and the risk exposure.

**12 – Escalation of Risk:**
Clarify/refine the use of the option to ‘escalate a risk’. Regional Bureaux/Headquarters to respond to escalated risks in due time to ensure that significant risks can be taken with a clear obligation for Headquarters and Regional Service Centers (RSC) to support the CO.

**Result management**

**13 – Adjustment of Results Framework to reflect Fast Track Policies and Procedures:**
At an appropriate time and in discussion with the regional bureau, the unit’s results framework in corporate tools and systems (Atlas and Enhanced Results Based Management (ERBM)) needs to be adjusted to reflect the new and changed results.
Section V  Strategy Implementation Plan

1 – FTP

The implementation of FTP will require the development of clear policy statements, supplemented by detailed procedures. However, in the meantime, it is possible to implement it immediately based on the provisions of this paper when a Country Office needs to react swiftly to a crisis. Country Offices will use an online system to officially trigger FTP, a process which will automatically notify their Regional Bureau and other HQ units of such a decision. The full Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP) related to FTP will be made available by the end of the second quarter, 2010, in conjunction with a new platform being piloted for the next generation of POPP.

2 – Fast Track Through Preparedness

Fast Track through Preparedness entails several strategic decisions for improving UNDP’s preparedness for responding to a crisis. A corporate effort will be undertaken by HQ during this year to implement the decisions either within the framework of the “lead” unit’s 2010 workplan, or as a special initiative. A selection of 4-5 priority countries will be made for the initial phase. Country Offices should include in their own 2010 workplans the implications of those decisions which are to be implemented at the local level, specifically, items 4 – 8 in Section III above.

3 – Fast Track Across-the-Board

Fast Track Across-the-Board will be addressed as part of the overall migration of the current POPP content onto the next generation. In the meantime, items 3, 4, 6, and 7 outlined in Section IV above are immediately available for use.

4 – Monitoring and Support

The implementation of the fast track policies and procedures will be closely monitored by BOM and BCPR. Lessons-learned, together with any further changes required, will be implemented at future review points. For Country Offices that use such policies and procedures, both BoM and BCPR will also offer support in their implementation. Please contact Dennis Curry, Management Specialist, BOM (dennis.curry@undp.org), or Nazim Khizar, Operations Specialist, BCPR (nazim.khizar@undp.org).