

**Title page**

**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**

**MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN POLITICS & ADMINISTRATION**

**Title:** REFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS  
One UN - Towards Coherence in the UN Development System  
A case study of the UN Vietnam

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## Summary

The objective of this master's thesis is to understand how reforms in the United Nations (UN) development system often fail or has its original course and impact altered. The UN has been heavily exposed to criticism in the past decades and the multilateral organization is considered to suffer from paralysis and inefficiency. There are multiple causes for these conditions, and the conflicting interests of the member-states are often to blame, as consensus on reform content and procedures become increasingly difficult to agree on. The polarization among donors and recipients regarding the future aid structure influence the United Nations in a potentially negative manner. The criticism of the UN is also centred on the internal structure, where the various agencies, funds and programmes are duplicating each other and mandates are proliferated. This results in an incoherent development effort, where the resources and legitimacy are utilized to an unsatisfactory level. This has propelled a clear message from member-states and observers, demanding that the United Nations need to implement reforms sooner rather than later – a task that has proved difficult in the past, according to researchers and observers.

The latest reform initiative, initiated by Kofi Annan, was launched in 2006 and aims at creating a more coherent and harmonized UN on a global, regional and national level. The rhetoric of the reform is 'One UN – Deliver as One', indicating that the UN bodies in the developing countries, for example, must coordinate their various programmes and strategies into One Plan with One Budget under One Leader, have One Organizational structure and move in to One UN House where appropriate. This master's thesis focuses on the One UN reform and Vietnam, one of eight pilot countries, has been selected as a case study to describe and understand how the development agencies of the United Nations decides and implements the reform. The UN Vietnam has been chosen, because it is the most advanced One UN pilot countries, as well as having a progressive Government and Donor Community wishing to harmonize the performance of the UN.

Hypotheses constructed from organizational theory regarding leadership, support and authority alongside concepts such as identity and communication form the baseline for the investigation of the internal relations in the UN agencies. The implications of member-states' actions and strategies regarding the implementation of the One UN reform are analysed in relation to selected hypothesis from international relations theory where the key concepts are power and interests. The investigation is empirically substantiated through qualitative interviews with leading officials from the United Nations Country Team in Vietnam as well a representative from the donor community.

The conclusions of this master's thesis reflect that the often polarized member-countries and the UN agencies must seek a consensus and employ a stronger will to change if the One UN reform is to be implemented successfully – a difficult quest, given the conflict of interests and struggle for power in the world of international politics. The distance from UN Headquarters to the country level also proves vast – making successful implementation of the One UN reform vulnerable and too dependable on personalities, as the Vietnam case proved. The UN Vietnam case also reflects that reform must be double-sided – reform initiation from the headquarters level is critical, yet increased support and authority to the country level is essential in creating a coherent, efficient and relevant UN development system.

## Resumé (Danish summary)

Dette speciale tager udgangspunkt i at forstå, hvorfor de Forende Nationers (FN) reformer ofte mislykkedes eller bliver slået ud af sin oprindelige kurs. Gennem tiden har FN været yderst eksponeret overfor massiv kritik og betragtes i dag som en handlingslammet og ineffektiv organisation. Det findes der adskillige årsager til, hvoraf medlemslandenes modstridende interesser bærer en stor del af skylden og konsensus om reformindhold og fremgangsmåde er derfor vanskelig at opnå. En stor del af kritikken af FN er ligeledes centreret omkring den interne struktur, hvor de forskellige organisationer og programmer overlapper hinandens funktioner og mangler sammenhængskraft, hvilket ofte resulterer i utilfredsstillende udnyttelse af ressourcer og legitimitet. Det har fremskyndet en bred enighed blandt medlemslandene og observatører verden over, om at reformer i FN er yderst påkrævet. På trods af dette, har talrige reformforslag været på dagsordenen siden organisationens begyndelse, hvor forskellige medlemslande, grupperinger og Generalsekretærer har offentliggjort en lang række forslag, der har haft afsæt i alt fra ledelsesstruktur til inddragelse af civilsamfundet i organisationens virke.

Den seneste reformbølge, initieret af Kofi Annan, blev offentliggjort i november 2006 og tager afsæt i at skabe et mere sammenhængende og strømlinet FN på globalt, regionalt og nationalt niveau. Her er ordlyden 'Et FN – Levér som Én'. Det betyder, at FN organerne i udviklingslandene skal koordinere deres forskelligartede programmer og strategier til én plan, arbejde med ét budget under én leder, have én organisationsstruktur og have fælles lokalitet i én FN-bygning. Denne reform er specialets fokus hvoraf Vietnam, der er blandt de otte udpegede pilotlande, er blevet valgt som specialets case til at beskrive og forstå, hvordan FN's udviklingsorganisationer beslutter og implementerer Ét FN reformen. FN i Vietnam er udvalgt, da landeholdet bestående af FN organisationer er den fremmeligste hvad angår Ét FN reformen, samt en lang række andre tiltag, der skal harmonisere FN organisationers daglige virke og desuden har den Vietnamesiske Regering og donorerne en klar opbakning til Ét FN reformen.

Med udgangspunkt i udvalgte hypoteser indenfor organisationsteori omkring ledelse, opbakning, identitet og kommunikation danner de grundlaget for undersøgelsen af de interne forhold i FN's organisationer. Derudover er medlemslandenes betydning for, hvordan reformer i FN besluttet og implementeres analyseret i forhold til valgte hypoteser fra teori om internationale relationer, hvor fokus er på begreber som magt og interesser imellem de forskellige medlemslande. Empirisk underbygges denne analytiske tilgang gennem kvalitative interviews med ledende personer fra FN landeholdet i Vietnam samt vestlige donorer.

Specialets konklusion er, at hvis Ét FN reformen skal udmønte sig i konkrete resultater kræver det større konsensus og vilje til forandring både blandt de ofte polariserede medlemslande og de forskellige FN organisationer i udviklingslandene, der ofte er præget af interessekonflikter og kampe over ressourcer. Derudover så er distancen fra hovedkvarterne i FN til landeniveau for stor, hvilket medfører at succesfuld gennemførelse af reformer ofte er personafhængigt, som tilfældet er med FN i Vietnam. FN i Vietnam som case belyser også, at velvilje fra toppen af FN ikke er den altafgørende faktor for gennemførelse af reformen, men en dobbeltsidet vinkel er påkrævet, hvor landeniveauet får øgede beføjelser på bekostning af FN hovedkvarterne såfremt ønsket om et harmoniseret, stærkt og relevant FN skal realiseres.

## Acronyms

CCA:	Common Country Assessment
CEB:	Chief Executives Board for Country Level Coordination in the UN System
CPAP:	Country Project Action Plan
CPD:	Country Programme Document
DFID:	UK Department for International Development
ExCom:	Executive Committee of UNDG – UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP
EU:	European Union
FAO:	Food and Agricultural Organization
HQ:	Headquarters of the United Nations, New York
G77:	Group of 77
GA:	General Assembly of the United Nations
HLP:	High Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence
IGO:	Inter-Governmental Organization
ILO:	International Labour Organization
LMDG:	Like Minded Donor Group
MD:	Millennium Declaration
MDG:	Millennium Development Goals
ORC:	Office of the Resident Coordinator
SA:	Specialized Agencies (ILO, UNESCO, FAO, WHO, UNIDO etc.)
SG:	Secretary-General of the United Nations
TCPR:	Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review
TNTF:	Tripartite National task Force
UN:	United Nations
UNDAF:	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG:	United Nations Development Group
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF:	United Nations Children Fund
UNIFEM:	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNV:	United Nations Volunteers
UN CT:	United Nations Country Team
UN RC:	United Nations Resident Coordinator
UPU:	Universal Postal Union
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
U.S.:	United States
WB:	World Bank
WFP:	World Food Program
WHO:	World Health Organization
WTO:	World Trade Organization

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The United Nations (UN) witnesses a never-ending quest for improving its functions, and reform has been on the agenda since the signing of the Charter sixty years ago. The topics for discussion in the UN have always been legion and reform has been a prevalent issue when discussing management, operational functions, financial structure and membership status and the special privileges held by some of the member-states. Despite the many discussions and resolutions on changing the UN structures and proceedings, duly acknowledged in the General Assembly and other UN bodies, reform appear as a recurring, if perhaps unwanted, point on the agenda. In order to understand the concept of reform in a UN context, history lends an explanatory hand:

As an organization initially mandated to promote peace and stability in the world, the United Nations has evolved to include development and human rights issues, humanitarian assistance and environmental protection among many other areas. Today, the United Nations lists a wide range of agencies, funds, programmes and organizations each with their own distinct history, culture, decision-making process as well as programmatic cycles and frameworks. The UN organizations are present in virtually all developing countries, although the scope, level and character of development assistance varies greatly from country to country. The organizations in the UN work with issues like security, health, education, technology, environmental and economic development – the list is long, yet the overarching development benchmarks are set in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). However, there have been issues of institutional proliferation, duplication and loss of focus from the organizations, which have brought much criticism on the UN. The fact that there are UN headquarters in New York; Paris; Rome; Geneva; Copenhagen and so on can also be seen as an added burden or at least an extra layer of attention on the cooperation among UN organizations and its development partners.

An Inter-Governmental Organization (IGO) like the United Nations relies on the cooperation and involvement of its member-states as these by and large constitute the governing bodies of the UN, primarily the General Assembly (GA), the Security Council (SC), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Secretary General's office (SG). The different member-states of the UN make up a blend of impoverished countries from Sub-Saharan Africa to the rapidly developing countries in South-East Asia to the rich countries in North-America, Europe and Japan. The diverse mix of interests, cultures, identities and power relations of the member-states creates interesting coalitions and synergies that aim to promote certain interests. The Group of 77 (G77) and Group of 24 (G24) are member-state structures that seek to protect and promote the interests of the developing countries and the developed countries respectively, which often results in paralysis of the decision-making processes of the UN. Add the Group of 13 (G13) recently formed by Canada and 12 European member-states, with the objective of promoting a coherent and efficient development system and a harmonized and simpler structure of the United Nations, and there are bound to be some clashes as these diverse power structures collide on the international scene.

The United Nations has evolved into a highly complex structure, with many mandates overlapped by organizations and agencies, which call for harmonization, increased efficiency and more coherence in the UN. Critique on the UN is however as old as the multilateral organization itself,

which gives the current discussions a gist of old wine in new bottles. The United Nations has, as most bureaucracies and organizations across the world, an in-built resistance to change and reform. With changes come uncertainty and this is not a desired feature for any person or organization, as comfort zones are suddenly appearing as danger zones. Reform in the UN may be unwanted by some stakeholders, but the reform discussions have been following the multilateral organization since its inception in the mid 1940's. Critical reform reports with constructive recommendations have all to a large extent failed and the complexity of the UN system is a restraining factor of implementing reform measures. As James A. Paul, Director of the Global Policy Forum stated:

*"The UN needs reform. On that everyone agrees. But people disagree sharply on what kind of reform is needed and for what purpose. NGO leaders aim for a more democratic UN, with greater openness and accountability. Technocrats seek more productivity and efficiency from the UN's staff. Delegates favor reform that conform to national interests and promote national power. Idealists offer plans for a greatly expanded body, that would reduce states' sovereignty. While conservatives push for a downsized UN with sharply reduced powers. Agreement is exceedingly hard to come by." (Paul 1996: 1)*

Paul's statement from 1996 is still, to a very large extent, valid. A paradox exists in the sense that many of the reforms in the United Nations *have* been focusing on the areas that are emphasized by Paul but with little impact if the history of failed reform efforts is credited. One thing is for sure, the UN will have to start achieving results on its reforms - if not; it may lose its support for continued legitimacy and relevance. Advancements in these areas are central to UN reform and the support from member-states is crucial to a UN that should enjoy support across the board lending it the legitimacy and authority needed to live up to the charters and declarations that have been duly signed on by the aforementioned member-states.

In sum, reforming the United Nations has proved to be a difficult task, yet there are constant thrusts of stakeholders that seek to either push the reforms forward or restrain the efforts. The question is not reform or no reform, but the context of the reform environment, its content and the support vested in the proposals of change – the United Nations must reflect and react to the substantial criticism that focus on mandate proliferation, organizational inertia, democratic deficit and issues of efficiency and coherence. Failing to do so, could inevitably put the indispensable, yet imperfect organization into further problems and ascertain critics in the fading *raison d'être* of the United Nations.

Given the vast scope of UN agendas and working areas, this study will focus sharply on the Development Area of the United Nations, hence excluding the Humanitarian Assistance and Environment Areas. Limiting the scope of the study provides the opportunity to engage with and focus solely on the development system in the United Nations.

The premise of this master's thesis is thus to provide an understanding of first of all the necessity of UN reforms and more importantly understand why former reform efforts has shown limited success – this knowledge is critical, as understanding the many issues related to change in the United Nations will provide the answer as to how future reform, including the current One UN reform, may be successfully implemented.

## Problem area

From a development perspective, the UN can and should play a vital role, as it fills a gap that no bilateral donor, NGO or bank institution is able to satiate. It has a great policy role as the UN is the only entity in the world that has a mandate from the majority of the states globally – therefore it can move into areas that are too sensitive for individual nation-states and act as a mediator in an impartial role. The universal values and mandate of the United Nations is however often a heavy cross to bear – the UN is supposed to be the most transparent, most effective, and the most accountable organization in the world. The UN sets high standards with its rhetoric, however there have been numerous examples that suggest that it, due to many reasons, fails to the declared goals making it increasingly vulnerable to criticism on issues such as efficiency in its operations, resulting in democratic deficits, fragmented and proliferated agencies and inability to adhere to its mandates.

It is evident that the UN is under constant pressure from the member-states to deliver more for the same or less resources that are allocated to the UN. The United States has over the last couple of decades been very influential in the area of security whilst simultaneously withholding large sums of its fiscal support to the UN unless reforms regarding efficiency and accountability in the organization are implemented.

The critics also state that the UN is too bureaucratic, too big, and too powerful and far from able to fulfil the mandate of ‘peace-keeper’ that is vested in the organization. It is accused of not living up to its ‘constitutional framework’ i.e. the UN Charter and other agreements like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Millennium Declaration. The world body is furthermore criticised for not being able to adapt to the changes of the surrounding society, giving some of its institutions and sub-organizations an anachronistic character.

However, some of the biggest disappointments regarding the United Nations reflect to failure to maintain law and order – examples of this are the Rwanda genocide in 1994 and the latest interventions in Iraq that took place without a clear UN mandate. The many additions to the United Nations in the development and aid assistance areas also attract some disappointment when the delivery is lower than promised, however the UN isn’t expected per se to eradicate poverty and e.g. find a cure against HIV/AIDS.

On a positive note, the UN is seen as a multilateral organization that ideally represents all the nations in the world and is according to the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan (1997-2006):

*“...the only global institution with the legitimacy and scope that derive from universal membership, and a mandate that encompasses development, security and human rights as well as the environment. In this sense the United Nations is unique in world affairs.” (UN Secretary-General 2000a: 67-68)*

A number of reports on efficiency, accountability and the delivery of UN programmes show that the organization may encompass all the above areas – but the way it goes about this is another

case. The UN is far from perfect - it has its weaknesses and flaws and this often points to the need for reform – yet those calls on major reforms have too often been defied.

Present Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon (2007- ) explained the role of the United Nations recently in London:

*“Despite its universal outreach, the United Nations cannot be in all places, nor provide a solution to every challenge. But we can, and should serve as a forum to set a global agenda and consensus. We can, and should – given the necessary political resolve – implement the clearly defined will of the international community. We can, and should, be visionary and pro-active. In this we need dialogue and patience, resources and reform – empowering us to serve the common good, equipping us to do what we do best, from peacekeeping to development, from humanitarian work to human rights.” (UN Secretary-General 2007b 2007: 5)*

Theoretically, practically and institutionally UN reform is a central and contemporary issue within social science as well as in development studies, whilst reflecting a very critical challenge both to the multilateral system as well as to the development enterprise. Despite the contemporary reform discussions, it is obvious that the reform debate has a long history within the United Nations system:

*“By the early 1970s, it had become increasingly apparent that the United Nations system was failing to fulfil the expectations of Member States – from the North as well as the South- in the realm of economic and social development, despite the fact that some four-fifths of its outlays then went to such programs.” (Luck 2003: 11)*

Before moving into a more substantive discussion of reform in the United Nations system, a theoretically clean definition of the concept reform is required – Luck (2003) provides his views on the concept:

*“Reform is the purposeful act of modifying the structure, composition, decision-making procedures, working methods, funding, or staffing of an institution in order to enhance the efficiency and/or the effectiveness in advancing its core goals and principles. In terms of the United Nations, this would encompass those steps intended to make the Organization more efficient, more effective, and/or more capable of fulfilling the purposes laid out in...its Charter.” (Luck 2003: 4)*

While the theoretical definition is useful, it is also relevant to look into how the UN reforms are conceived from a practical perspective and Luck (2003) argues that there has been an expansion of the definition and scope of basic reform terms, which has caused some devaluation of the analytical value because:

*“Reform has taken on so many guises through the years as to be almost unrecognizable. Where there appears to be political momentum behind a reform exercise, various delegations are quick to repackage some of their favourite perennial hobbyhorses as innovative reform measures.” (Luck 2003: 4)*

## **Reforming the United Nations**

The United Nations face internal as well as external challenges on a daily basis and the different leadership regimes of international politics have tried various approaches to change or reform the United Nations. A former UN official and researcher in the field of international organizations and

development, Jacques Fomerand (2007) notes the following definition of reforms in the United Nations:

*"Would-be reformers of the United Nations as well as blueprints for change are legion. But political disagreements over the purposes and priorities of the organization have made formal reforms in the UN architecture virtually impossible (the Charter was amended only in 1965). Incremental change has been the prevailing pattern, with innovations originating from initiatives of the Secretary General or the political process." (Fomerand 2007: 269)*

The problem or dilemma regarding the UN reforms is that the abundance of working groups, resolutions and reform packages have been presented since the birth of the United Nations but too often with too little effect, and a lack of consensus on what reforms should encapsulate is often blamed for the inertia. For a brief oversight of the major reform changes and proposals from 1945 to the present, please see Appendix 1.

A controversial report on reforming the United States was authored by Sir Robert Jackson back in 1968 who felt positive as well as negative regarding the role and future of the organization he and colleagues were scrutinizing through their nearly 600-page report. Positively he was:

*"...convinced that technical co-operation and pre-investment are one of the most effective ways of assisting the developing countries in achieving economic and social progress. I believe the United Nations, despite its present limitations, has demonstrated conclusively that it is the ideal instrument for the job." (Luck 2003: 19)*

The negative aspects were mainly centred on the governments and their lack of willingness to take a chance and change what he described as; *"...the great inertia of this elaborate administrative structure which no one, it seems, can change. Yet change is now imperative."* Sir Robert furthermore pointed out that the United Nations development 'machine' consisted of about thirty separate governing bodies, yet had no central co-ordinating facility that exercised effective control at headquarters level (Luck 2003: 19). In fairness, some of the aspects that fostered the criticism have been dealt with, however many of the core dilemmas that were identified have not been eliminated and the issues of coherence and efficiency remain central in the current reform discussions.

A study by K. P. Saksena published in 1993 titled *Reforming the United Nations* also notes concern:

*"What is more disturbing is a widely held apprehension that, given the current financial and political pressures, the United Nations might lose the character it has evolved since its establishment, as non-partisan global forum to harmonize contending interests for common goals." (Saksena 1993: 11)*

14 years after Saksena had his book published; some of the notions can still be transferred to the United Nations year 2007 and hold particular relevance. A 2006 report from the United Nations High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence puts focus on the abovementioned weaknesses and points to why the general UN system has become as fragmented as it is:

*“...a lack of buy-in and mixed messages from member states between capitals and representatives in various bodies, to a proliferation of agencies, mandates and offices, creating duplication and dulling the focus on outcomes, with moribund entities never discontinued...the UN system now encompasses 17 specialized agencies and related organizations, 14 funds and programs, 17 departments and offices of the UN Secretariat, 5 regional commissions, 5 research and training institutes and a plethora of regional and country level structures. The loss of cohesion prevents the UN from being more than the sum of its parts.” (UNDG 2006e: 9)*

The interesting point here is the high number of different organizational entities that predominantly look after their own interests; this puts the painful reforms further down the agenda of the many organizations which have been institutionalized and often view change as a negative issue. Nevertheless the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, Agnes van Ardenne-van der Hoeven echoed the need for change in the development agencies at a Global UNDP meeting in January 2006:

*“In an interdependent world, it makes no sense to carve up international problems and divide them among thirty-eight UN organizations. The result is too little coordination and too much bureaucracy. Too little efficiency and too much overlap. Too little action and too much talk...Without major reforms, the UN will be little more than a memorial to people living in extreme poverty, rather than their saviour from it.” (der Hoeven 2006: 3-5)*

Another challenge regarding the UN agencies and organizations is the geographical location of both their global and regional headquarters, and the UN presence at country level is often spread all over the respective capitals instead of unified in one building or one area, hampering ambitions of a UN identity and fuelling the promotion of each agency as a single entity which is merely associated with the UN. Despite a high number of UN agencies scattered at country level, recent years have seen the establishment of ‘UN Houses’ or joint premises in some 60 countries - an important tool towards a coherent and harmonized aid assistance to the governments and NGO’s of the programme countries.

The agency headquarters developed over the years and they were formed and shaped differently in accordance with their own history, culture and structural framework. This is evident in the geographical spread of UN agency headquarters – the UNDP is located in New York alongside UNICEF and many other agencies, while FAO and the World Food Program is situated in Rome and again UNESCO headquarters is located in Paris.

So challenges that have been facing the United Nations for decades are still posing problems and seem to prevent the UN from living up to the full potential of being a truly legitimate, well-functioning and accountable organization with an aim of preventing wars and establishing and enhancing development assistance, humanitarian relief and environmental protection. However, some researchers, like Luck (2003) point to the fact that reform may not always have a negative connotation for organizations or institutions like the UN as:

*“Public institutions depend on recurring processes of criticism, reassessment, change, and renewal to retain their relevance and vitality. Reform is a sign of institutional health and dynamism, not a penalty for bad behaviour.” (Luck 2003: 1)*

Perhaps the vast scope of the United Nations activities is to blame for the inertia and criticism – is the United Nations taking on too many assignments in too many areas. The call for reforms could thus be perceived as a push towards a coherent and efficient version of the UN – a United Nations that must return to its core responsibilities, instead of wanting to grasp and influence every area of society. Luck (2003) offers an explanation on UN reform, giving the structure of the system a share of the blame:

*“Highly complex, decentralized, and multi-faceted institutions, like the UN system, offer more targets for criticism and more opportunities for change. The temptation to tinker with the United Nations is only magnified by its high visibility, symbolic aura, and broad agenda.” (Luck 2003: 1).*

### **Reforming the United Nations - Country level**

Taking a closer look at the UN system at country level it is evident that the issues of incoherence are numerous. The main issue is the high number of agencies on the ground in each country, which becomes troublesome for the national governments – they often don’t have the capacity to attend the number of meetings and workshops orchestrated by the UN. The statistics themselves call for important changes to be made at the country level:

*“More than one-third of the UN country teams include 10 or more UN agencies on the ground at any time. Several teams include 20 or more. This has led to incoherent programme interventions and excessive administrative costs. It also burdens the capacity of developing countries to deal with multiple agencies. Of 60 countries analyzed by the Panel, 17 country teams had an annual budget of less than US\$ 2 million per agency.” (UNDG 2006f: 10).*

Former Secretary General, Mr. Annan spoke to the Country-Level Practitioners at a Regional Consultation in Cairo 2006 regarding the need for reform in the United Nations system – vitally he stated that:

*“...ambitious reforms would be necessary in order to enable the UN to fulfil [its] task effectively in a variety of different contexts. Most importantly, it was recognised that a repositioning of the UN system at country level, to enable it to respond more effectively to the challenges of the new development environment, would have to be accompanied by profound reforms of the coordination, planning, and management and oversight mechanisms. The responsibility to implement the ambitious reform package at country level rests with the UN Country Teams.” (UN Secretary-General 2006b: 2)*

The complex nature of the United Nations system entails a plethora of sub-organizations and bodies and the vast spread of these are often referred to when discussing the difficulties of a coherent United Nations – Luck (2003) points to this brief explanation: *“The whole, it seemed, often acted as less than the sum of its part..” (Luck 2003: 17).*

With these figures and statements in mind, the United Nations at country-level is presented a number of recommendations or proposals in order to avoid duplication, overspending and overrepresentation of UN agencies in the developing countries. These proposals have some points in common with the “One UN - Deliver as One” reform, so a brief overview of the main guidelines and frameworks that are currently in function within the development area of UN country level presence is in order:

Since 1997 the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) has been working together to achieve one *Common Country Assessment* (CCA) framework. This provides the basis for a common results-based *UN Development Assistance Framework* (UNDAF), that has evolved from a set of good intentions with what some say, little influence on individual agency programming, to a results based management tool that provides the basis form positioning the UN at country level as a direct response to national priorities (UNDG 2006a: 3-4).

The United Nations Development Group view the UN country programming procedures, as outlined above, to be reengineering not only a framework for all UN agencies, but also to be used as the basis for more coherent, streamlined programming, building on the strengths of the existing UNDAF. The way forward according to the UNDG is to consolidate the UNDAF, which is seen to greatly reduce transaction costs, while the agencies and their programmes are still able to maintain their core function (UNDG 2006a: 4).

Despite the positive and promising words that are attached to the UNDAF, the UNDG still sees some challenges to the framework:

*“UNDAF’s are not too often nor yet as focused and strategic as expected, and nor are they used sufficiently to guide individual agency programmes for all agencies. Agencies at HQ level have their own global organizational strategies and priorities, often driven by demands from their Board members detailed results based accountability systems. This can lead to mixed signals and conflict between country level planning systems (UNDAF) and agency “requirements”.” (UNDG 2006a: 4)*

The most important outputs of a reform at country level are summed up in a need to deliver harmonization and simplification of structures, financing and management practices – somehow following some of the basic ideas behind the UNDAF. Integration and harmonization at country level is a prerequisite for an effective and efficient UN that is able to optimize use of development resources and represents a strong and unified voice in exercising its global mandate in development assistance.

The members of the Group of 13 (G13) presented their joint and individual proposals of UN reform during 2006, and these are seen as far more radical than the outcome of the more moderate HLP recommendations. The Foreign Ministry of the Netherlands, to give one example, suggests that the UN is split up into three main pillars: Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Environment. This basically entails that the existing agencies, funds and programmes be merged into one of the pillars if they have proved their worth – if not they will be gradually shut down. This and other proposals have however not been able to mobilize the sufficient support yet.

### **One UN – Deliver as One**

The former United Nations Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan presented his first reform ideas to the General Assembly in 1997. The plan, entitled *“Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform”* set out an agenda to improve coordination across the UN system and to strengthen the development, human rights promotion and peacekeeping operations (UN Secretary-General 1997a: 9-14). A series of other reform initiatives followed, including the reform strategy elaborated on in the Secretary-Generals report *“In Larger Freedom: towards development, security and human*

*rights for all*” prepared for the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly in 2005 and as a Follow-up to the Millennium Summit (UN Secretary-General 2005a).

Kofi Annan announced the appointment of a High Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the Area of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and the Environment (HLP) which was to investigate avenues for change and reform in the United Nations in February 2006 (UN Secretary-General 2006a: 1). The HLP consists of current and former heads of government, senior UN and government officials as well as two ex officio members, the UNDP Administrator and the IFAD President. The Panel met several times from April 2006 to November 2006 when they were ready to launch their recommendations to the Secretary General.

The general terms of reference for the Panel are to conduct a study that:

*“...will examine a range of options on how best to strengthen the coordination of United Nations operational activities world-wide, including, as requested by Member States, the possibility of creating more tightly managed United Nations entities in the fields of the environment, humanitarian assistance and development.”*  
(UN Secretariat 2006a: 1)

The general theme of the reform program by the HLP is *One UN – Deliver as One*, and among the main recommendations is restructuring the development assistance at country level – this involves having one programme, one leader, one budget and one UN office in each developing country. Among the many recommendations, the HLP emphasize the “One’s” as described above and furthermore outlines that all the UN programme activities will be consolidated at the country level, where the government of the respective country wishes it. The HLP claims that an empowered Resident Coordinator would manage the “One UN” Country Programme. There will be UN system-wide ownership of the RC system. UNDP will be restructured to focus and strengthen its operational work on policy coherence and positioning of the UN country team, and withdraw from sector-focused policy and capacity work being done by other UN organizations (UNDG 2006b: 1).

While the idea of streamlining and harmonizing a great deal of the programme activities of the programmes, funds and specialized agencies may seem like a move that could be implemented and allow the UN at country level to spend more resources on assisting the developing country, it remains to be seen whether this, in reality, is possible.

Among those critical towards the implementation of the One UN is a former United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Ms. Margaret J. Anstee, who displays a reserved approach to the prospect of implementing the panel’s recommendations, as she claims that these are old and originally part of the aforementioned 1968 scrutiny: “Report on the Capacity of the UN Development System” authored by Jackson. After the launch of the 2006 reform paper she asked:

*“Why were those recommendations not implemented 40 years ago...The reason lies in the entrenched vested interests of governments and of UN organizations and agencies which saw their national, bureaucratic and personal fiefdoms threatened by the proposed changes”* (Deen 2007: 1).

Historical accounts reflect that reforms or at least proposals resembling the HLP's are a recurring feature of the United Nations – thereby resembling many if not all organizations – but underneath the surface is many questions; Will this reform actually be implemented – if so, will it change the structures of the UN system or merely graze the challenges? Do the SG and the relevant agencies hold the mandate and power to see the reform programme through and will the developing countries in which the UN work gain or lose by the reform?

On top of those questions, critique has been raised on the time allocated to the HLP to conduct its survey, arguing that half a year is not enough time to produce a thorough investigation of the United Nations. Some member-countries advocated for a longer timeframe, and mentioned that the main reason for the arranged presentation of the recommendations in November 2006 was to secure the former Secretary-General Mr. Annan with a last round of applause before the end of his tenure on December 31, 2006. These accusations have been rebuffed by the Panel itself as well as other high-ranking UN officials, claiming that the arrangements of the HLP work and its commencement had nothing to do with the change of guard in the Secretariat and claimed that the time and resources allocated to the Panel on System-wide Coherence was appropriate. When deciding which members the HLP should comprise of, the Secretary-General came up with a list of names originating from both the developing world as well as the more developed countries, where he had to strike a fine balance or risk eroding the legitimacy of the HLP from its very beginning.

### **One UN – Deliver as One at country level**

The Governments of eight countries: Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay and Vietnam, volunteered in 2006 to become “One UN” pilot countries. UNDG Chair, Kemal Dervis stated that the eight pilot countries reflect a broad spectrum, both in terms of size and level of income, and all host a wide range of UN activities (UNDG 2007b: 1). The pilots have agreed to work towards a common UN presence in the country while capitalizing on the strengths and comparative advantages of the different members of the UN family. During 2007 the eight countries will pilot different models to deliver as “One”, looking at common elements, such as “One Programme” and so on as described above. The “One UN” pilot initiatives build on the existing reform agenda set by UN member states, which asks the UN development system to accelerate its efforts to increase coherence and effectiveness of its operations in the field through the establishment of Joint Offices (UNDG 2007a: 1).

The One UN reform proposal entails many areas of the United Nations system, yet perhaps has the biggest impact on the organizations dealing with Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Environment. The agencies that will feel the first impact and will have to cope with the changes on a day to day basis are the UN agencies on the ground in the developing countries and their respective headquarters. First of all, the UN presence in the pilot countries acts as a guinea pig for the whole One UN setup. These One UN reform pilots will have to establish and implement a One country programme, then further strengthen the position of the Resident Coordinator as One leader, the budgets of the agencies will be merged into One budgetary framework and where appropriate a shift into One joint office as well as creating common HR policies. These are challenges that take many resources from a country team that often find themselves working with

limited resources in terms of funding and human resources. For a brief overview of the key recommendations on country level set forth by the HLP, please see Appendix 2.

The limited resources and time available in producing this master thesis makes it impossible to follow the initial idea of including the eight One UN pilots. This limitation does, however, suit the conditions of the resources available with the state of progress in the pilot countries. Studying the reports from the pilots on One UN issues revealed that not many of them had made significant progress in the start of 2007. A preliminary inquiry at the initial stages of this study sent to the UN Country Teams in the corresponding countries clarified that only Vietnam was moving forward with the One UN reforms and had been doing so for the last year. Understanding the complex situation in Vietnam, which will be clarified later, I decided that instead of investigating all of the pilot countries, I would focus on the pilot that had seen most advancement i.e. Vietnam.

### **One UN – The case of UN Vietnam**

There are at present a total number of 12 UN agencies on the ground in Vietnam: FAO, ILO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNODC, UNV and WHO. These span a wide range of the development portfolio of the United Nations and constitute an eclectic mix of resources, policy-advice and knowledge within issues covering agriculture, labour, health, education, culture, economic development, human rights as well as humanitarian assistance and environmental support. Of the four ExCom agencies only WFP is not located with country level presence in Vietnam, while a plethora of Specialized Agencies (SA) have been working in Vietnam for considerable time.

Vietnam was the first country to be chosen as a reform pilot country and is currently one of the pilot countries that has witnessed most action regarding the One UN reform (UNDP Vietnam 2006a: 1 & BBC NEWS 2006: 1). The UN Vietnam Resident Coordinator, John Hendra explained in December 2006 why Vietnam was chosen as the first pilot country:

*“Viet Nam is always pushing us to do things better, to be ever more responsive and efficient and the UN Country Team is working to answer that call for more effective assistance. With this very exciting pilot opportunity, Viet Nam is being recognized for its openness and drive to make the UN work better. In a sense, this pilot is like bringing global reform efforts home and the world will be very interested in what happens here as Viet Nam is now literally at the epicentre of global reform efforts.” (UNDP Vietnam 2006a: 1).*

According to a paper presented by the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Vietnam, a number of factors have come together in Vietnam to produce an unusual opportunity to advance harmonization at the country level. First of all the UN has a special relationship with the Government based on mutual understanding and trust. The UN, as a long-term proponent of country ownership of development policy, is viewed as an impartial yet sympathetic actor. Vietnam and the UN share a common concern for social equity and protection of the most vulnerable (UNCT Vietnam 2006a: 4).

Background studies of the One UN initiative in Vietnam show that the recommendations in the report of the HLP was predated by over a year by a group of like-minded staff at the higher level of UNDP and UNICEF and representation in Vietnam when they published the discussion paper

*“United Nations Reform: A Country Perspective”* in September 2005. In a UN Vietnam newsletter entitled *“Common Goals, Collective Action”* dated January 26, 2007, it is explained that:

*“As early as September 2005, a discussion paper on UN reform was prepared by the then UN Resident Coordinator and the current UNICEF Representative in Viet Nam to stimulate thinking on necessary change in UN operations at the country level. The note was timed to coincide with the 2005 World Summit in New York, with UN reform being a prominent item on the Summit agenda.”* (UN Vietnam 2007a: 1)

The discussion paper did not get the desired impact at the World Summit, as leaders at the meeting failed to acknowledge the need for reform and place reform of the UN firmly on the agenda. Bilateral donor interest at the Summit was limited, yet the months to follow saw donors on the ground in Vietnam take the first steps towards understanding the potential of the paper and duly asked the writers to elaborate on their views on harmonization of UN coordination at the country level. Representatives from the three ExCom agencies contextualised the discussion paper within the *Paris Declaration* on Aid Effectiveness and importantly also in the Vietnam case of the Declaration, the *Hanoi Core Statement on Aid Effectiveness* in February 2006. The three ExCom agencies present in Vietnam, UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA stated in the report that they had a:

*“...shared belief that the UN has a vital role to play in Viet Nam’s development, and that it can fulfil its mission more effectively as a harmonized organization than as separate agencies. For the UN to deliver the best results for Viet Nam, a transformed UN with unity of purpose, coherence in management and efficiency and operations is required.”* (UN Vietnam 2007a: 1)

The One UN initiative has made considerable progress since the initial discussions, and this is according to the aforementioned newsletter, in large part due to the leadership of the Government of Vietnam, as they see the UN as a vital partner towards increased development levels. The national ownership is in other words strong in the Vietnam case and the Prime Minister have been a major driving force behind the One UN initiative, initiating and endorsing many important documents along the way such as the TOR for the Tripartite National Task Force (TNTF). This task force consist of senior representatives from the Government of Vietnam including the related ministries; the bilateral donors; and the United Nations agencies in Vietnam that are involved – its primary objective is to guide the implementation of the One UN initiative. The UN agencies that are outside the initiative are offered participation as observers. Acting as a Steering Committee behind the One UN initiative, the TNTF: *“...identified five dimensions of harmonization, or ‘Five Ones’: one plan, one budget, one leader, one set of management practices and one UN house.”* (UN Vietnam 2007a: 1).

The One UN initiative in Vietnam was initially a cooperation between the three ExCom agencies UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF – these agencies have since been joined by UNIFEM, UNAIDS and UNV. The specialized agencies like ILO and UNESCO have been involved as observers.

The first milestone on the One UN initiative in Vietnam, the One Plan for 2006-2010 has been agreed by the six participating agencies and the Government of Vietnam as of July 2007. The specialized agencies will be able to join to a limited or perhaps full extent during 2008 in a one-time-only window of opportunity. However a full inclusion of the specialized agencies in the One

Plan and other measures are not planned to be fully implemented before the next One Plan cycle from 2011-2015.

The One Budget and One Leader are closely linked with the One Plan and on the way to implementation. The One set of management practices has also been discussed heavily and are nearing a conclusion. The One UN House is in the pipeline and the TNTF are working on getting their US\$ 5 Million proposal accepted and estimate a completion by the end of 2008 or start of 2009 if the required funds and permits are granted.

Achieving an understanding of the Vietnam process and its implications for the reform of the UN is critical as the key proposition for research in this context is to investigate how the UN in Vietnam overcame the perceived external and internal bottlenecks to reform.

### **Statement of problem**

Given the inconsistency regarding policies and implementations of reforms in the United Nations this thesis seeks to answer the following research questions:

First,

- **How can the UN development system be reformed given the vested geopolitical interests of its member states and the organizational peculiarities and interests of the UN itself?**

And secondly,

- **How do the many different UN entities at the country level reconcile the external and internal challenges where previous reform initiatives failed to implement reforms?**

The UN Vietnam provides the case for this thesis and the One UN reform is in focus as it is interesting to ask how the UN Vietnam is able to account for the criticism of the former Under-Secretary, who among other states that the UN is unable to implement the recommendations due to the external pressure of the vested geopolitical interests of governments as well as internal pressure in the shape of entrenchment in the UN organizations and agencies leading to organizational and institutional inertia. By looking at the case of UN Vietnam, I am able to produce an understanding of some of the mechanisms and signposts that need to be taken into consideration when trying to implement reforms in the UN. By gaining knowledge on this area I am able to explain and understand the processes of UN reform – this information can prove to be practical and useful to the United Nations in Vietnam as well as well as contributing to new and interesting research in the studies of development and international relations, especially regarding system-wide coherence and ‘delivering as one’ in the United Nations.

### **Limitations of the study**

While the thesis aims at a thorough academic study – with practical implications – of the UN reforms, it nevertheless has the following limitations:

First of all, the timeframe of this master thesis will focus on the period from 1995 to the present day. During Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's tenure UN were centre for a lot of negative attention and the stakeholders demanded reform. Kofi Annan was appointed Secretary-General in 1997 and he has been the strongest proponent of UN reform in recent times, especially within the area of development assistance, exemplified in his 1997 report "*Reforming the UN*", which lay the ground work for a change in the reform policies of the United Nations. I will however, include proposals and actions of critical importance to the United Nations stemming from well before 1995 such as the Jackson report from 1968 as well as other important milestones in the history of the United Nations.

Secondly, while UN reform is an all-encompassing area including issues linked to the structure of the Security Council, democratic deficits etc., this thesis will not address all these issue. Issues like security, humanitarian assistance and environment are also highly important issues for the United Nations; however I deem that a thorough study of all the areas of the multilateral organization will not be possible given the limited time, scope and resources allocated to produce this master thesis. The focus will for those reasons be on the development area of the United Nations. I am aware of the potential pitfalls of such delimitation, although I would rather focus on one area where I have valuable interest, insight and experience instead of moving into areas that demand a different academic nature and scope. Given the complexity of the United Nations system some minor references can be found to issues like security and environment, as a complete avoidance of overlaps will prove impossible. I strongly believe that a focused and concentrated study on one of the major areas of the United Nations will prove itself more useful than a proliferated discussion on the entire United Nations enterprise.

## **Project overview**

Having outlined the research area, the following summarizes the structure of the master's thesis that consists of six chapters: Introduction; Methodology; Theoretical framework; Analysis; Conclusions; and Perspectives on UN reform.

### *Introduction*

Outlines the main insight into reform in the United Nations and describes the core functions of the member-states and the development agencies as well as the challenges that face these entities. Providing a brief introduction of the case for reform in the UN and why reforms in the multilateral organization often fails to be implemented as proposed, leaving the United Nations vulnerable to criticism from the various stakeholders. The latest reform proposal, the One UN – Deliver as One, is presented and issues concerning the initiative and implications on the implementations are discussed, leading to the statement of problem.

### *Methodology*

This chapter explains the research method of this master's thesis in terms of data collection, case study research and ethical reflections, whilst also explaining the function of the theoretical framework.

### *Theoretical framework*

This chapter draws on two pillars, with International Relations theory on one side, and Organizational theory on the other. The first is utilized to explain the external pressure that the UN is exposed to by the many member-states, while the latter employs the internal pressure of issues like leadership and organizational culture that are factors that among other issues may cause organizational inertia. I construct hypotheses from both pillars, which form the structure of the analysis.

#### *Analysis*

The theoretical framework and the hypotheses I construct, guide the analysis, linking the theoretical concepts to the data collected. The first research question focuses on the external pressures of the member-states that reflect the implications on UN reform. Secondly, the issue of organizational inertia constitutes the research question focusing on internal pressures found in the UN development system. The two sections are followed by brief sub-conclusions where the most important analytic issues are presented.

#### *Conclusions*

This chapter brings the major findings of the master's thesis together into a conclusion, focusing on clear and concise answers to the research questions and discusses the issues and complexities that the United Nations have to acknowledge if the organization want to implement reforms and achieve its objectives of coherence and increased efficiency in the development sector.

#### *Perspectives on UN reform*

The implications of the master's thesis in relation to theoretical, practical and policy levels of the reforms concerning the United Nations are discussed as well as presenting lessons learned. Vitaly, the implications of the study in terms of future research are also a subject of the final chapter.

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses briefly explain the role of the theoretical framework and its function in the report, whilst the following sections on data collection, case study design and ethical reflections are elaborated in depth.

### Theoretical framework

International relations present assumptions about how states interact, how power relations determine the role of states and the organization of states in e.g. the United Nations. Organizational theories investigate the world of organizations; their *raison d'être*, why and how they face constant pressures from stakeholders in their surrounding society, the different kinds of change processes implemented in organizations, whilst also focusing on how a change could be initiated and met within the organization and its related partners. I have chosen two theories that to some extent complement each other, especially in the way power and interests is an all important aspect of world politics – a field which an organization like the UN is very much a part of. From the theoretical pillars, I derived a list of hypotheses serving as guidelines for the data-collection and research questions for the interviews which lend a structure to the analysis. However, the initial identification of research questions and theoretical framework will work best where it is tentative – this approach is important as Hartley (2004) underlines *“a recognition that the issues and theory may shift as the framework and concepts are repeatedly examined against the data which are systematically collected”* (Cassell & Symon 2004: 323).

### Case study

The use of a case study in this investigation calls for a brief conceptual clarification. Hartley (2004) explains that case-studies can be *“... theoretically exciting and data rich so it is important to analyse their strengths and weaknesses as well as provide a practical guide on how to conduct and manage them”* (Cassell & Symon 2004: 323). Case study research is a detailed investigation with data-collection on a certain phenomenon in its context, aiming to provide an analysis of the:

*“... context and processes which illuminates the theoretical issues being studied. The phenomenon is not isolated from its context but is of interest precisely because the aim is to understand how behaviour/or processes are influenced by, and influence context ... There is an increasing interest in understanding context as an explanatory factor in organizational behaviour...”* (Cassell & Symon 2004: 323)

A case study is thus an empirical investigation that views phenomenon in their real-life context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear (Yin 1994: 13) and it is furthermore *“... a useful technique in capturing the emergent and changing properties of life in organizations”* (Cassell & Symon 2004: 325). From my field-trip experience in Vietnam, I learned how the reform process and change cycles rapidly took new forms and that a static picture of the UN Vietnam would be near impossible to draw.

## **Choosing the case study**

The initial questions when selecting the case study organizations were many as I considered what kind of organization I was looking for, was it intended to be typical of the phenomenon or an extreme example? Did I have the resources and interests in taking up more than one case and if so, how might these cases contrast with each other? Clarifying the kind of organization that fitted my research criteria was crucial. The UN Vietnam, I recognized early in the process, was the organization or set of organizations that I would engage with. I established contact with a representative of UNICEF Vietnam, which was, and still is, one of the main drivers of the One UN reform initiative. From initial questions of the reform progress and processes, I obtained an understanding of the research area. From that stage, I inquired as to the level of access I could be granted into the UN Vietnam. Analysing the organizational setup of the UN Vietnam, I was able to construct an initial research protocol that clarified the level and extent of involvement in the reform initiative by the various organizations and agencies. This led to a detailed schedule that outlined the function of the agencies and highlighted which officials and staff members were holding the information I wished to source. UNICEF Vietnam was helpful in establishing initial contact with the relevant stakeholders as well as partly setting up appointments for interviews. My focus for the interviews and engagement with the UN Vietnam was a systematic search for information and evidence of both negating as well as confirming the data. I crosschecked the evidence by searching for plausible alternative explanations for the data.

Ensuring a focused research protocol enabled me to collect data that was systematic rather than ad hoc. I continually scrutinized the interviews and observation points from the perspective that asked: have I questioned this behaviour/process from a wide enough set of information and are there other people who might have a different view or explanation of this (Cassell & Symon 2004: 328-329)? Interviewing most UN agencies in Vietnam and their most influential people behind the reform processes, vested a confidence of systematic research and a sound situational analysis of the reform initiative. I furthermore interviewed a First Secretary from an influential donor, which opened up opportunities for cross checking of information and evidence, whilst also shedding light on new challenges and processes that to some extent differed to the aforementioned UN agencies. Representatives from the Government of Vietnam were unable to participate in the interviews, nonetheless several documents explaining the Government's position on the One UN efforts which were utilized in the report.

Having completed the interviews outlined in the research protocol I ended the data collection although I have subsequently required and received updates on the reform initiatives, as a contemporary study of this character will keep evolving and new issues will be presented. The critical point in data collection is when to stop and I found that following a continually updated research protocol was helpful in this regard.

## **Research design**

The research design was utilized to argue for the logical steps which I made to link the research questions and issues to data-collection, analysis and interpretation in a coherent way. There are a range of issues that are – according to Yin (1994) - important to consider in terms of research

design e.g. choosing an exploratory, descriptive and/or explanatory case study (Cassell & Symon 2004: 326).

This master thesis utilized an explanatory case study, because I wanted to gain an understanding of how the UN Vietnam has reacted and acts in relation to the latest reform proposals, the One UN initiative; building on an approach where a theory or a set of theories are tested in relation to a certain phenomenon. The theoretical hypothesis was derived from international relations theory and organizational theory with a special focus on change and reforms within organizations. The basis for taking a starting point in a theory is to see whether or not its assumptions may work in real situations.

Whilst the main focus is on the explanatory case study, I do however bring in descriptive elements as it will prove difficult to achieve a solid understanding of a case without these. Even though a case study investigates a case in its entirety, it doesn't necessarily mean that the case study deal with everything about the case. There must be a focus and this can not be done without theoretical benchmarks. I will therefore focus on concepts like increased legitimacy and efficiency as well as theoretical hypotheses regarding interest and power from my theoretical framework (de Vaus 2001: 221-225).

Another critical choice when designing an investigation is whether to concentrate on single case studies or on multiple cases. I chose a single case study as UN Vietnam was my main entity of case research. It is noted by Hartley (2004) that: *"A single case study, the result of weeks or years spent by a researcher in one organization, can provide valuable information about the research question"* (Cassell & Symon 2004: 326). I spent four weeks in Vietnam, where I conducted a dozen or so interviews with the most influential UN officials on the One UN reform initiative. Vietnam was chosen in 2006 as a pilot country for the One UN initiative along with 7 other countries around the world. The UN Vietnam was considering and designing reform plans on their own initiative a year before the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence presented their reform proposals. This makes for an interesting case, as the UN Vietnam has to some extent inspired the HLP with their ideas and progress from a country level perspective. Travelling to all pilot countries and performing the same type of interviews may have proved to increase the validity and level of generalization of this master thesis; however, I had limited resources which inevitably led to a single case study. Hartley explains the reasons for choosing a single case study over a multi case study:

*"Such a study may be the only feasible option where access difficulties, resources or the rarity of the phenomenon precludes a wider study. In single case studies, the challenge is to disentangle what is unique to that organization from what is common to other organizations."* (Cassell and Symon 2004: 326)

I use the case of the UN Vietnam to generalize to the wider UN system, as the UN Country Teams and especially the pilots are able to shape the future UN operations, not only at country level, but also on a system wide level. As Yin (1994) would classify it, this master thesis uses a single-case holistic design (Yin 1994: 38-44).

## Data collection and sources

The collection and sourcing of data and information has been a continued process throughout this master thesis. Given the contemporary nature of this study, there is a never-ending stream of information as new meetings unveil new agendas, one approach is discarded in favour of another and what seemed so easy or difficult in one of the pilots may be completely different in another pilot. This is the context that many contemporary studies have to be conducted in, although my ambition has been to supply an understanding on the UN reforms from a certain perspective in time and from that explain where the major challenges are and how they may be alleviated in the future.

On a practical level, the preliminary work of the master thesis involved collection and reading of data material in the shape of reports and documents from the UN Headquarters as well as the UN Vietnam, whilst also looking at the information available from the other One UN reform pilot countries. As noted above, that was an evolving process with fresh reports, statements and documents being produced continually. The collection of documents was important to understand the decisions made, and proposals that have been presented in terms of reform policies within the United Nations. The documentation also provided a solid foundation for the interviews aimed at sourcing data from the UN Vietnam. The data collected in the preliminary stages proved vital in identifying the key stakeholders of the UN agencies and officials, as well as other related partners in the development enterprise. The documentary material collected has had a vast scope, although I ensured it was relevant to answering my research questions or at least providing a situational analysis on UN reforms. I received files directly from some of the main architects behind the reform in the UN Vietnam, as I searched several newsletters and websites in quest for information. The UN Development Group, a major stakeholder in the “One UN” reform, has provided some material, however, a great deal of the information in their portfolio is difficult to assess as it is only the reform pilot countries and involved parties that are allowed access. The United Nations Official Document System (ODS) have been valuable in attaining information regarding UN meetings on reform and the results from these meetings, especially within the High Level Panel on System Wide Coherence and the CEB.

I have also obtained material from sources outside the UN, predominantly from think tanks like Global Public Policy Institute and Global Policy Forum that have a somewhat constructive and positive view of the UN. Insights from the Heritage Foundation was also used as this has a very negative view on the UN, claiming among other things, that the UN drains the member-states for money whilst supplying little if any development for the sums allocated. Views from both sides were utilized in order to present a somewhat balanced discussion.

Researchers and independent scholars have been utilized as an academic counterbalance to the often positive or critical views from the think tanks. By collecting data from various sources, I was able to triangulate the information thus providing a thorough understanding of the UN and the way the organization implements reforms.

The data collection was a guideline in the phase leading up to the interviews, enabling me to focus on the people that had the most information and influence on UN reforms in Vietnam.

For an overview of the interviews conducted, please refer to the Interview list in Appendix 3.

I chose to conduct qualitative research interviews. According to Steiner Kvale (1997), these types of interviews are applicable when the aim is to get an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the phenomena investigated, as it supersedes the strictly factual aspects (Kvale 1997: 40-46). Through the interviews, I worked semi-structured with general questions raised to the respondents with a list of probes to extract details from the areas of particular interest. In that regard, the interview guide served as a checklist and inspiration during interviews, but was not used meticulously. For a comprehensive understanding of the interview approach and proceedings, please see the Interview guide in Appendix 4.

### **Interviews in practice**

The interviews consist of four parts: a briefing, a presentation of interview area, the interview questions and finally a debriefing. At the start of the interviews I made sure the interviewee was informed of the research area and purpose of the interview. I then asked preliminary and clarifying questions linked to their position and functions in the respective offices to make sure that they could feel at ease and be relaxed. This was something that they were familiar with and that created a natural transition to the more detailed questions. Acknowledging the pitfalls linked with questions founded in theory, I utilized my interview guide to convert the hypotheses into simpler questions that were easier to understand. There were however occasions during the interviews where I fielded a question that was not easily understandable, but those were corrected by changing the phrasing of the question. I tried to a large extent to avoid the use of closed and leading questions, as this causes a potential conflict with the validity of the investigation. I was able to note down several “red flags” or essential comments and answers to the questions or issues being discussed. These statements and expressions that signalled extra caution or interest into a subject or question were helpful in transcribing the interviews as well as for the analysis (Kvale 1997: 129-161).

### **Transcription**

I transcribed the interviews after I had had time to reflect on main points of interests – I noted the key answers and comments immediately after the interviews, before I moved on to the actual transcription. The interviews were transcribed according to the norms and values of social science, which mean that I included moans, sighs, laughs and other expressions that proved vital and had a function in the interview.

### **Analysing the data**

The key feature of a case study approach is not method or data but the emphasis on understanding processes as they occur in their context as Hartley (2004) clarifies when discussing case study research. Having chosen an explanatory case study, where I produce an outline or explanation of how UN reforms are initiated, discussed and implemented in the world organization, I was aware that:

*"Data collection and analysis are developed together in an iterative process in a case study ... This can be a strength as it allows for theory development which is grounded in empirical evidence." (Cassell and Symon 2004: 329)*

On that note, I utilized the hypothesis gathered from the theoretical framework as a set of benchmarks to build further theory on the issues of reforming the United Nations. The process that involved gathering the data e.g. conducting interviews and subsequently making meaningful sense of them in the analysis was done through a meticulous scrutiny of the interview transcripts and reports from the case study.

## **Ethical reflections**

UN reform covers a lot of issues and involves all levels of the UN system including member-states with conflicting views – given the very complex nature of the United Nations, I realised how politically sensitive this area is. In that light, the sources involved with the One UN reform have made explicit and honest comments on how the situation actually has proceeded into a very difficult situation. Some of the statements made by the respondents were very critical towards the support received from headquarters, the fierce discussions between the agencies in and outside the One Un reform initiative and also launched criticism on some of the member-states. Therefore I was not able to reveal the identity of the respondents as this could compromise their situation. The confidentiality issue surrounding this investigation poses a challenge to the validity of the report; however I choose to cover up the identity of the respondents. Their names and positions within the United Nations and the donor community of Vietnam will be held secret; however I will keep the transcripts if I am requested to prove a certain statement during the evaluation of the master thesis. The transcripts will not be included as appendices, but should interested parties request to view the data, this can be submitted to them under the norms of confidentiality.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Having presented the methodological reflections, this chapter outlines the theoretical framework that guides the analysis. The theoretical framework will consist of two theoretical pillars, International Relations (IR) on one side and organizational theory on the other. Some of the concepts of these two theoretical pillars will have overlapping features that with different backgrounds shed more light on the world of states, organizations, and individuals and the way interests and power influence the work of the United Nations.

International Relations theory is used to answer the first research question of the problem formulation. International Relations present the central links between interests and power in politics and the conception of these predominantly embedded in realism. However, there is also the normative perspective when discussing international relations and proponents of this view mainly focus on liberalism – viewed in the moral arrangements of the United Nations e.g. the Charter, the Millennium Declaration and the 8 Millennium Development Goals. The interplay of interests and power are used to explain the behaviour of member-states in a global context.

Organizational theory is accordingly used to answer the second research question of the problem formulation. Organizational theory encompasses issues related to organization and institutions, their performance and role when exposed to change. Leadership, management and staff operate on different levels in the organization, affecting the outcome of a change or reform proposal. Yet again, there are different types of culture in organizations and each level or unit in the organization plausibly has their own perception on how identity is constructed and upheld in an organizational setup like the UN agencies.

## **International Relations**

The theoretical ideas of international relations (IR) have a long history, drawing on views that often oppose each other - however they still conceptualise and investigate the way states behave and interact in a world system in constant flux due to the interests of different stakeholders.

### **Definition**

IR is the shorthand term for the academic subject of international relations. Jackson and Sørensen (2003) ascribe interest to the subject:

*"The main reason why we should study IR is the fact that the entire population of the world is divided into separate territorial political communities, or independent states, which profoundly affect the way people live. Together those states form an international system that is global in context." (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 2)*

States have the main feature of being legally independent of each other giving them their status of sovereignty; however states interact with each other in an interdependent web or system of organizations and mutual agreements. The state system is a system of social relations varying in character and scope. Dating back to the Peace of Westphalia some 400 years ago, states have been the dominant entity on the world scene – world organizations like most of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions are of much newer origin, but even they are creations of states.

The concept of international politics is much intermingled with IR – both relate to the term power. Morgenthau, Thomson and Clinton (2005) claim that there is a major struggle for power in the world and this is what international politics is all about:

*"International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim. Statesmen and peoples may ultimately seek freedom, security, prosperity, or power itself." (Morgenthau, Thomson & Clinton 2005: 29)*

Morgenthau et al. (2005) furthermore defines the concept of power:

*"When we speak of power, we mean man's control over the minds and actions of other men. By political power we refer to the mutual relationship of control among the holders of public authority and between the latter and the people at large." (Morgenthau et al. 2005: 30)*

### **IR Perspectives**

The world of IR has over the years been dominated by some main theoretical perspectives. Depending on whom one asks, a different answer will present it self as to what these main directions are. Some would say Realism, Liberalism, and Marxism. Others might claim that the best conceptualization of IR is tied to Realism, Liberalism, International Society and IPE theories. This is, however, not a discussion of right and wrong within this conceptual sphere, merely a closer look at the theories of IR that are best at answering the research questions of the problem formulation.

#### ***Realism***

Of the above, Realism is generally seen as the most influential theory of international relations, however often criticized because it is seen as an ideology that seeks to masquerade an objective

theory. Realism emphasises material forces such as state power as the key dimension of IR. Realism furthermore provides an explanation for war, which it sees as a regular condition of life in the international system.

In 1948 Hans J. Morgenthau (1904-1980) wrote the book "Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace" which is seen as a cornerstone of international politics and especially his version of realism, *political realism*. I will present some of his main ideas that are vested in philosophy, history and political science – I will use the Seventh Edition of Politics Among Nations, revised in 2005 by Thomson and Clinton, including original passages from the 1948 edition. Morgenthau divides the history of modern political thought into two contesting schools that have fundamentally different conceptions of the nature of man, society and politics. The first school will be outlined here:

*"One believes that a rational and moral political order, derived from universally valid abstract principles, can be achieved here and now. It assumes the essential goodness and infinite malleability of human nature, and blames the failure of the social order to measure up to the rational standards on lack of knowledge and understanding, obsolescent social institutions, or the depravity of certain isolated individuals or groups. It trusts in education, reform, and the sporadic use of force to remedy these defects." (Morgenthau et al.2005: 3)*

The other major path belongs to what could be viewed as more focused on the interests in society and what this means for the world as it believes:

*"...that the world, imperfect as it is from the rational point of view, is the result of forces inherent in human nature. To improve the world one must work with these forces, not against them. This being inherently a world of opposing interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully realized, but must at best be approximated through the ever temporary balancing of interests and the ever precarious settlement of conflicts...and aims at the realization of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good." (Morgenthau et al.2005: 3-4)*

Morgenthau outlines six fundamental principles regarding his views on political realism – these principles will be briefly presented here:

1. Politics is rooted in a permanent and unchanging human nature which is basically self-centred, self-regarding, and self-interested. There are objective laws that govern politics, rooted in human nature.
2. Politics is located in an 'autonomous sphere of action' and cannot therefore be reduced to economics or reduced to morals. State leaders should act in accordance with the dictates of political wisdom. Morgenthau puts great emphasis and weight on the concepts of interests and power in his explanation of political realism. The causality is according to him this: *"The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power. This concept provides the link between reason trying to understand international politics and the facts to be understood."* (Morgenthau et al. 2005: 5). The main force driving international politics is thus the concept of interests defined in terms of power.

3. Self-interest is a basic fact of the human condition: all people have an interest at a minimum in their own security and survival. Politics is the arena for the expression of those interests which are bound to come into conflict sooner or later. International politics is an arena of conflicting state interests. But interests are not fixed: the world is in flux and interests change over time and over space. Realism is a doctrine that responds to the fact of a changing political reality. Interests determine political action in a particular period of history depending upon the political and cultural context in which the policy is made. This applies to power as well – its content and the manner of its use are determined by the political and cultural environment (Morgenthau et al. 2005: 11). The key concept of interests is universally valid and objective, but does not have the same meaning fixed once and for all.
4. The ethics of international relations is political or situational ethics which are very different from private morality. A political leader does not have the same freedom to do the right thing that a private citizen has. That is because a political leader has far heavier responsibilities than a private citizen: he is answerable to the people (typically of his country) who depend on him; he is responsible for their security and welfare. The responsible state leader should strive not to do the best but, rather, to do the best that circumstances on that particular day permit. That circumscribed situation of political choice is the normative heart of realist ethics. The state, according to Morgenthau, is inspired by the moral principle of national survival (Morgenthau et al. 2005: 11). Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action.
5. Realists are therefore opposed to the idea that particular nations can impose their ideologies on other nations and can employ their power crusades to do that. Realists oppose that because they see it as a dangerous activity that threatens international peace and security. Ultimately it could backfire and threaten the crusading country. The political realism distinguishes between truth and opinion and therefore also between truth and idolatry as Morgenthau states. What is essential in this principle is looking at all nations as political entities that seek to maximize their interests as defined in power – by doing so one is able to judge all nations equally: “...we are able to judge other nations as we judge our own and, having judged them in this fashion, we are then capable of pursuing policies that respect the interests of other nations, while protecting and promoting those of our own.” (Morgenthau et al. 2005: 13). Political realism refuses to equate the moral principles of any given nation or time with the overall moral laws that govern the universe.
6. Statecraft is a sober and uninspiring activity that involves a profound awareness of human limitations and human imperfections. The pessimistic knowledge of human beings as they are and not as we might wish them to be is a difficult truth that rests at the heart of international politics (Jackson & Sorensen 2003: 79-80). There’s a real and distinct difference in the way that political realism is perceived compared to other schools of thought. The political realist has the autonomy over the political sphere – once more emphasizing the concept of interests defined as power (Morgenthau et al. 2005: 13). Political realism maintains a separation and integrity of intellectual substance, while recognizing other frameworks and the inter-relatedness of politics with other fields.

Realism in its pure form dates way back to ancient times as it resonates with scepticism about the capacity of human spirit or human reason to deliver moral progress for many years. Realism is still

valid and attracts policymakers and academics throughout the world. The years after the Cold War have however seen a revival of Liberalism, the counterpart of Realism.

### ***Liberalism***

A basic liberal assumption is grounded in a positive view of human nature. There is a conviction that international relations can be cooperative rather than conflictual. A major assumption is that people have a belief in progress. It is fairly evident from the earlier section on realism that there exists a substantial gap between the views of realism and those of liberalism. Liberals thus take a positive view of human nature, as they have great faith in human reason and are convinced that rational principles can be applied to international affairs (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 105-106).

*“Liberals recognise that individuals are self-interested and competitive up to a point. But they also believe that individuals share many interests and can thus engage in collaborative and cooperative social action, domestically as well as internationally, which results in greater benefits for everybody at home and abroad.” (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 106-107)*

It is thus evident that liberal theorists believe that human reason can triumph over human fear and the lust for power. There does, however, remain a debate whether the changes are far away or just around the corner, even between the liberalists. The many theoretical directions within liberalism suggest that the dimensions can be broadly outlined – Tim Dunne (2001) explains this in the following quote:

*“In view of the significant divergences within the liberal tradition – on issues such as human nature, the causes of war, and the relative importance different kinds of liberals place on the individual, the state, and the international institutions in delivering progress – it is perhaps more appropriate to think of not one Liberalism, but contending liberalisms.” (Baylis & Smith 2001: 164)*

These contending liberalisms can be divided into patterns of thought that together complete the traditional term Liberalism within international relations. I will name a few of the different liberalisms, but will only dwell on these occasionally to present relevant hypothesis and relevant concepts to this theoretical framework. Liberal internationalism, idealism, liberal institutionalism, sociological liberalism, interdependence liberalism and republican liberalism all constitute liberalism and will to some extent be presented in the following section:

- Sociological liberalism: IR not only studies relations between governments, it also studies relations between private individuals, groups, and societies. Relations between people are more cooperative than relations between governments. A world with a large number of transnational networks will be more peaceful.
- Interdependence liberalism: Modernization increases the level of interdependence between states. Transnational actors are increasingly important, military force is a less useful instrument, and welfare, not security is the dominant goal of states. The term ‘complex interdependence’ signifies a world of more cooperative international relations.
- Institutional liberalism: International institutions promote cooperation between states. Institutions alleviate problems concerning lack of trust between states and they reduce states’ fear of each other.

- Republican liberalism: Democracies do not go to war against each other. That is due to their domestic culture of peaceful conflict resolution, to their common moral values, and to their mutually beneficial ties of economic cooperation and interdependence (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 106-136).

A key point of liberalism is the individuals, and various groupings of individuals, predominantly the state, as they are the centre of attention followed by corporations, organizations, and various associations. Liberals thus emphasize that not only conflict but cooperation can shape international affairs. Liberal optimism is closely connected with the rise of the modern state. Modernization means progress in most areas of human life, including international relations (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 135).

### *Neo-realism and neo-liberalism*

These two siblings of realism and liberalism have their own spheres of IR in which they dominate. Neo-realism dominates the world of security studies while its counterpart focuses on the political economy and on issues like human rights and the environment. The processes of globalization have according to Lamy (2001) forced both directions to consider similar issues and address new challenges. Both are normative theories of a sort, biased towards the state, the capitalist market, and the status quo (Baylis & Smith 2001: 182-183). Although the debate has its offspring in the US, it is however still relevant for the world of International Relations as this field is seen to be highly influenced from this powerful nation. A reason for their usage is that they are predominantly problem-solving theories. They share many assumptions about actors, values, issues and power arrangements in the international system (Baylis & Smith 2001: 184). The forefathers of the neo-neo debate were seen as standing on opposite sides – the newer versions are different as they share an epistemology, focus on similar questions and agree on a number of assumptions about international politics. They do, however, study a different world of international politics as outlined earlier.

### *International Society*

This approach is one of the classical IR approaches drawing mainly on the theoretical work of Hedley Bull and Martin Wight. Its main focus is on human beings and the political values of these, and central to the approach is the world politics that are perceived to be created by ideas and ideologies. The approach lists the following basic assumptions:

“...a claim that international relations are a branch of human relations at the heart of which are basic values such as independence, security, order, and justice...a human-focused approach: the IR scholar is called upon to interpret the thoughts and actions of the people involved in international relations...acceptance of the premise of international anarchy. But International Society scholars argue that world politics is an anarchical society with distinctive rules, norms, and institutions that statespeople employ in conducting foreign policy.” (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 139)

Statespeople are described by Jackson & Sørensen (2003) as those who act on behalf of states in foreign policy, including the likes of presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, diplomats and so on. The IR scholars should accordingly try to understand what ‘inclines the practitioners’ of international relations to act as they do. This could be done by gaining insight into their ideas and thoughts (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 140). In this view, the IR scholar should try to understand that

the statespeople often are presented difficult moral choices, thus creating conflicts in terms of values and goals (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 140).

The proponents of International Society as a theoretical approach are against the behavioralists such as Kenneth Waltz, who among other notions, claim that there is a structure of international politics that is seen as operating on law like regularity. Instead it states that 'states are not things' and that states do not exist or interact on their own (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 140-141). As an elaboration to this point, it is made clear that:

*"States do not have an existence separate from the human beings – the citizens and governments – who compose them and act on their behalf. International Society theorists view international relations as a special branch of human relations that occur in historical time and involve rules, norms, and values. IR is a study of that historical human world."* (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 140-141)

The International Society approach is as mentioned, perceived as one of the classic IR approaches and it is seen as a middle way between classical traditions like Realism and Liberalism. The first is criticized as a singular:

*"...pessimistic view of states as self-sufficient and self-regarding political organizations which relate to each other and deal with each other only on an instrumental basis of narrow self-interest: international relations conceived as a state 'system' that is prone to recurrent discord, conflict, and – sooner or later – war."* (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 141)

The reverse end of the continuum, Liberalism, also receives a blow from the International Society theorists who reject the:

*"...classical liberalism's singularly optimistic view of international relations as a developing world community that is conducive to unlimited progress and perpetual peace."* (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 141)

To sum up the International Society theory, it takes a few steps back to the concept of states. In other words, international relations consist of the foreign-oriented policies, decisions, and activities of the abovementioned statespeople. These act on behalf of 'territory-based political systems that are independent of each other and are thus subject to no higher authorities than themselves, hence the expression sovereign states. The focus organization of this project, the United Nations, is known as an international organization and serves along with NGO's and multinational corporations, roles of important human organization, involved in international relations, however subordinate to sovereign states (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 142). In this light, the International Society theorists still consider sovereign states as the foundation of world politics (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 142).

#### *Institutionalism in international relations*

Institutional theory can often complement the approaches of IR and enhance the understanding of these theories. It takes its starting point in scholars having:

*"...rejected a once popular anarchic view of international relations and have explored the conditions under which international cooperation occurs, and examined the institutions (regimes) that promote cooperation. International regimes are multilateral agreements, at once resulting from and facilitating cooperative behaviour, by means of which states regulate their relations with one another within a particular issue area. Some of these international institutions (e.g., the United Nations or the World Bank) are formal organizations..." (DiMaggio & Powell 1991: 6)*

International regimes are therefore assumed to be institutions due to their ability to *...build upon, homogenize, and reproduce standard expectations and, in so doing, stabilize the international order* (DiMaggio & Powell 1991: 7). Clarifying the concepts of international institutions and its importance for international politics is one aspect; another is how well these regimes or institutions perform. To DiMaggio and Powell (1991) it is fairly evident that some of these could perform better:

*"Clearly many international institutions are not optimally efficient and, were they to be reconstructed de novo, would undoubtedly look quite different..." (DiMaggio & Powell 1991: 7)*

The questions of reform in an organization like the United Nations thus needs an understanding of the way policymakers think about international rules and standards as well as the political discourses they employ if one is to give any answers or explanations.

### **Summary of International Relations**

The issues that are central to understanding how the UN is reforming in the light of International Relations are centred on the variables power, interests and moral principles.

It is evident that nations try to exercise power over other nations in order to gain control over the way institutions and organizations e.g. the UN should work and what should be its primary functions. International organizations can therefore be seen as a field where member-states constantly launch their opinions and this leads to applied pressure on the United Nations as the major multilateral organization in the areas of security and development. The member-states are the core mediators of world politics and these are often faced with difficult moral choices, which eventually might lead to conflicts regarding values and goals. Understanding why presidents, prime ministers etc. act as they do from time to time is helpful when explaining why and how the UN should reform.

It is also clear that the interests of a certain country or countries shape their political actions that lead to pressure with a release in a particular cultural and historical setting. If the main issues of the member-states are regarded to be security policy, then the focus of the UN should accord to those interests and promote a sound framework for security policy. The same thing happens if the member-states feel that their contribution to the development enterprise of the United Nations is not being utilized as optimally efficient. This in turn leads to member-states voicing their concern on this issue and make statements of reform – member-states from the donor countries constantly express that their resources are to be allocated to the areas where they deem it appropriate. When the United Nations fails to live up to these expectations, the foundation of its existence is put under enormous pressure. The UN must therefore constantly seek the legitimacy of the member-

states and present itself as being as relevant as possible in order to uphold its mandate and right to exist. Reforms are in this way, seen as creating legitimacy as the organization signals their intent to improve and increase delivery.

Another central issue of the United Nations and its member-states is the moral principles – they are seen as ideals that the UN should strive to achieve, however the reality proves that member-states seek a balance of interests thereby aiming at a realization of the lesser evil rather than the absolute good. This schism is a dominant phenomenon of international organizations as they are never viewed as optimally efficient due to the limitations of its most vital stakeholders i.e. member-states in the case of the United Nations.

Applying IR to the study, the following hypotheses can be derived.

### **Hypotheses on International Relations**

#### **Power & Interests**

Hypothesis 1: The main force driving international politics is the concept of interests defined in power – member-states seek power over other member-states in the United Nations thus acting self-centred, self-regarding and self-interested limiting a consensus on UN reform.

Hypothesis 2: The determinant of political action in the United Nations over a particular period in history is the political interests, shaping the context, structure and culture of reform in the UN.

#### **Moral principles & International cooperation**

Hypothesis 3: Moral principles can never be fully realized, but must be a balance of interests thereby aiming at the realization of the lesser evil than the absolute good.

Hypothesis 4: A multilateral organization like the United Nations must utilize the windows of opportunity made available by the member-states in order to homogenise, harmonize and reproduce standard expectations vested in the moral principles of the various charters and declarations and thereby delivering international consensus for development

## Organizational theory

Researchers note that the world is dominated by formal organizations that are getting larger, more professionalized, more differentiated and wealthier, leading to a distinct need for control by either organizations or individuals. It is often, according to Brunsson and Olsen (1993), assumed that organizations can be controlled by their leaders, which could be politicians, top management staff or other who has been designated to control the organizations. Given this rationale, the organizations are able to be changed from above, involving reformed routines, methodologies and structures leading to better results. This leads to a different delegation of power and authority where information and responsibility are travelling from one department in an organization to another and/or from one staff member to another. The reform initiatives do seem to be present in most organizations; some even describe reforms as commonplace or a mere routine in the daily work. Reform encompasses the issues of organizational function and change whilst also involving the aspects of leadership and power (Brunsson & Olsen 1993: 1). Other researchers add to the above by introducing concepts like identity and culture into the reform equation. A general scholarly definition of reform is presented by Brunsson and Olsen:

*“Reforms are the result of attempts at modernization, shifts in administrative fashions, the existence of insoluble administrative problems in organizations, and the organizational tendency to forget previous reform experiences. The contents of reforms are determined by strong rationalistic conceptions of organizations as well as by strong administrative fashions. Reforms may stabilize and legitimize common conceptions of organizations, rather than leading to real changes and better results.” (Brunsson & Olsen 1993: III).*

An interesting definition as it dwells on what is often described as the paradox or dilemma of reform, namely the fact that real changes are pushed into the background by more stabilizing initiatives. The only outcome of such a move is often only a façade and does rarely hold long-term relevance. Some organizations are equally discussing if the best and most appropriate way of moving forward is to use small and incremental changes rather than bigger and more groundbreaking reform initiatives. The time perspective plays a pivotal role in reforms and the difference between short-term or long-term thinking constitutes the difference of success or failure.

Another interesting point when discussing organizations and change is that these two concepts are seen as contradictories. Organization is often referred by concepts such as stability and predictability, while change is the condition that will destroy the stability and the ability to predict. Despite this contradiction, organizations are changed with reforms proposed often under pressure from, or at least inspiration from, the surrounding society.

### Definition

An organization is a social system, which is deliberately constructed with the purpose to achieve certain goals (Thorsvik & Jakobsen 2002: 12). Organizations might vary in structure, size, scope, and objective but all organizations are dependent on other organizations to some extent – this is often explained as resources from the surrounding environment. Resources could be tangible such as raw materials, capital or staff. The organizations are also dependent on clients, customers or users that benefit from the results that the organization produces and are, to some extent, willing to “pay” for the products. As noted above, the organization is established to achieve a goal – there was a desire to get something or to go somewhere when the organization was designed or

inaugurated – and this was a deliberate action where the structure of the organization was aimed at efficiency.

Organizational theory deals with the question of how organizations work. The objective with organizational theory is, in brief, to describe and explain how individuals and groups think and act within the framework of what we call organizations. Organizational theory can, however, do more than explain and understand the behaviour of organizations.

Some people might claim that they don't lean towards theory, but rather use experience and intuition. Some on the other hand claim that there are no pure observations without theoretical grounding. Instead they claim that observations are based on hypotheses or assumptions – these assumptions are determining our assessment when we are dealing with decision-making. Thus theory and expectations precede our observations and tell us where to point our attention, and help us judge which observations are important and relevant (Thorsvik & Jakobsen 2002: 11-12).

### **Change and reform in organizations**

Organizations must deal with two different types of actions – stability & predictability versus change. It is however difficult for an organization to resist change – some researchers speak of organizations as having different lifecycles that include constant and comprehensive change to a certain extent. Organizations are sometimes viewed as enlarging, sometimes contracting, sometimes merging with other organizations or units and sometimes being divided, defunct or redefined. The background for the changes to occur can be found in the society – something the organization is part and parcel of. As the society is in a constant flux, there is a call for increased ability to change – the organizations must keep up with the time and it is claimed by Thorsvik & Jakobsen that organizations must develop some sort of 'competence of change' if they are to survive (Thorsvik & Jakobsen 2002: 354).

In the case of the United Nations there have been some criticisms of the global organization not being able to meet all the challenges that cross its path. This leads to what some describe as organizational inertia, where the drive for change is present but not being implemented to the desired extent. The organization is, as some view it, only producing what it needs to survive, thus creating an organizational form out of sync.

As this project has a focus on reform initiatives within the United Nations, I will list some definitions of reform which are always linked to change - however change is not always linked to reform. This can be augmented by asking how much freedom of choice the reformers actually enjoy when they decide that a reform should or should not take place, when they determine it's content and direct its implementation and its consequences (Brunnson & Olsen 1997: 3)? These questions go against the assumption that changes in organizations are the result of reform and deliberate choice by the leaders.

### *Administrative change*

A general assumption in regards to change is that it can be instigated and controlled from above – this hypothesis claims that leaders can control and change the form of the organization, with the inevitable goal of improving results. Reality gives numerous examples of these so-called

administrative reforms, which are said to be expert attempts at changing the organizational make-up. These changes are abundant and vary a great deal in scope but an important task for the leaders, according to Brunsson and Olsen is to convince their subordinates of the new ideas and ideologies (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 2).

The above assumption is related to a rational choice approach as it is concluded that organizations are dominated by a hierarchical view of leadership and power. On this note, reformers have the right to organize, which can be expressed, as authoritative binding decisions. When the decisions have been made, the implementation is relatively straightforward according to a rational, instrumental tradition. However, there must be a distinction drawn between thought and action, between making a decision for reform and implementing that decision (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 3). The different units and layers within organizations also play different roles – some would say that deciding the reforms is for the few in the top while the task of implementation is for the many or the staff members in the organization so to speak.

#### *Institutionalized organizations*

Brunsson and Olsen emphasise the term institutionalization as a key concept when discussing organizations because these are reportedly:

*“...institutionalized insofar as their behaviour is determined by culturally conditioned rules which manifest themselves in certain routines for action and which give meaning to those actions. They reflect relatively stable values, interests, opinions, expectations and resources. Every organization has a history and in the course of time it evolves its own accepted ideas about what work is important and what results are ‘good’, and about how such results can be achieved.” (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 4)*

The assumption that organizations have institutionalized environments reflects that an individual organization is part and parcel of a ‘wider system-rule in society’. These norms that are related to the term institutionalization are often formulated outside the individual organization, as they seem to be produced on a more general level with a more general applicability (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 1997). Before moving onto the concept of institutional identity, it can be assumed that:

*“A well-developed organization generates a capacity for action. It facilitates effective co-ordination. But it also creates inertia or friction in face of attempted reforms.” (Brunsson & Olsen 1997)*

The surrounding environments thus play a role in reform attempts and how well they are received – this is evident at leadership level as they seem to shape their organization and must thus react as such in decision-making. An organization face constant concrete pressure from external parties e.g. increase efficiency, merge duplicating areas and sub-units and harmonize and align its functions with the challenges ahead – if it fails to do so it loses its legitimacy and relevance.

#### *Institutional identity*

Changes have an impact on what can be described as an organizations identity – different types of changes have different impacts on the identity. Changes that for example accord with the institutional identity – as noted above: basic values, interests and opinions, are carried out as a matter of routine. These minor and incremental changes are happening at a constant rate and have a small, often unnoticed impact on the organizational identity. These changes actually contribute

to a further establishment of stability and continuity, which is key features of an organization as I have noted earlier, thus reinforcing the organizations institutional identity.

Major changes that come suddenly may harm the identity of the organization – however these are relatively rare and often follow in the wake of crisis or at least strong expectation of crisis. Brunsson & Olsen use these relatively straightforward lines to describe the potential outcome of crisis etc.:

*“...when the gap becomes too great between an organization’s performance and the expectations and ambitions that people attach to it, reforms appear on the agenda.” (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 6)*

Another hypothesis regarding institutional identity notes that there is a strong correlation between the content of the reform and the institutional identity of the organization. This correlation plays a major role in the way that a reform, or the demand for reform, is expressed and interpreted by the stakeholders. Brunsson and Olsen suggests that a reform can be a success whilst at the same time clashing with the institutional identity – it does however require a major concentration of power with the advocates for reform, as they have to outweigh the ones that are intended to be reformed. This power can be claimed from different sources, but a precondition is strong commitment from the leaders – in other words the leadership has to be united and devote considerable time and resources to the reform project. Unfortunately that is not always the case, due to various reasons – according to Brunsson & Olsen, resources or lacks of these are to blame:

*“Usually, however, the leaders are already extremely busy and can afford very little time or attention for reform activities. Other pressing commitments may all too easily distract their attention from the implementation of reform, which may come to a halt even if the reform itself does not meet much resistance.” (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 6)*

One of the explanations of inertia when it comes to reform implementation could therefore be the institutional identity of an organization. Reforms are however initiated in a continued flow with no particular restraint. The difficult part is taking decisions on the matter – although decisions are easier to make than implementations. This is bound to the assumption that reformee’s active co-operation is required or if there is a necessity for co-operation between several organizations.

The people inside organizations, often categorized as staff members, can take various stands on reform. First of all, there might be a clear-cut reluctance to the project because they disagree with the ‘good’ results or solutions as these have been defined by the leaders. If we assume that there can be correct solutions to organizational problems, then the resistance from employees might be perceived as irrational and reactionary. The leaders see that the people or organization they wish to reform, adopt a defensive stance, which hinders the reform. Brunsson and Olsen claim that this situation reflects what happens in many attempts of reform (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 6).

Should the staff take a negative stand on reform they may be doing so due to practical experience and the institutionalized structure that tells them that a proposed reform can be made on “...*faulty premises, [which] are self-contradictory or even destructive*” to the operations at hand (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 6-7).

### *Institutionalized environments*

So far we have seen that people within organizations have a very important role when reforms are looming. It is, however, also evident, both from a theoretical and practical view, that people or organizations outside the reforming organization have a fair say – these may also be conceptualized as external pressures. To some extent, organizations therefore live in partly institutionalized environments that judge and deem the action and inaction of organizations in regards to change and reform. The environment shows its interest in many ways. Shifting fashions in organizational structure decides whether or not an organization should take a centralized or decentralized approach to its operations – other structures like divisional or matrix can also be options. There are also changing demands from stakeholders outside the organizations that are difficult to avoid if the organization wants to uphold its reason to exist or to claim legitimacy in their field (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 7). In line with the different fashions of organizational structure, there exists a range of norms from the outside world that the organization is expected to live up to. This could be a sound financial accounting approach that has open and transparent budgets for the world to scrutinize. This combined with the positive qualities the organization seeks to display – qualities like efficiency and accountability – can influence the support the organization receives externally. An often heard explanation from organizations that don't perform satisfactorily is that its objectives are so high and unachievable, yet valid, that they will inevitably fall short in reaching the benchmarks (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 7).

What makes these external norms particularly strong is that they first of all apply to all organizations. No organization can claim to be independent from the outside world as it receives its legitimacy and sheer existential foundation from the society. Secondly the leaders of the organizations can be seen to share these views, meaning that they to some extent 'extra-institutionalize' the outside norms from within. These can one way or the other lead to recommendations or direct orders of reforming the organization's form and programmatic scope (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 8).

### *Decoupling*

The term decoupling may be observed if an organization somehow feels unable to adhere to outside pressures often presented as new ideas that will change or reform the organization. The organization somehow promises to adopt the required changes, yet does something else internally, and thus creates something resembling double standards for its organizational activities. Explained in a more theoretical view, it is when organizations are expected to act and then develops two sets of structures, processes and ideologies, which fit the external demand. What happens is that there are formal organizational parts that are more visible and thus should be adapted to the institutionalized norms of society, while other informal and less visible parts of the organization can establish a completely different structure for co-coordinating its activities (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 9).

### *Communication*

The concept communication can be defined as the process where people or groups send messages to each other, where the content of the message can be called the unifying term information. So communication is very briefly the process where information is intermediated between a sender and a receiver. When sending information it is important to think of a range of issues like the time

of the message, how this message may be interpreted, which symbols can be used to send out a certain type of signal and what medium is appropriate for this type of message. It is today claimed by several organizational theorists, marketing agencies and consulting corporations that communication is a success factor that organizations need to champion if they are to survive (Thorsvik & Jakobsen 2002: 273). Looking at the dangers of ill communication gives some immediate examples: An often overseen flaw regarding the sending of a message is the amount of information it contains – a lower-level staff-member may feel a communication overload if he/she receives abundant information to digest. This may lead to frustration and give an employee a sense of inconsistency by the communicators. There is also the risk of not communicating enough – this is especially a threat in times of organizational change; at a time where the structures are split up to be regrouped and staff-members are unsure of their position in the organization. From a leadership perspective, communication is a crucially important tool for guidance, control and coordination and must play a critical role if e.g. changes are to be met with satisfaction. The above characteristics predominantly cling to the internal level of communication inside organizations.

On the other hand, external communication is widely regarded as being equally relevant and important. As organizations are living in interdependent networks with stakeholders from the society in which it is embedded, it needs to keep these external powers up to date on its policies, decisions and action plans, to a reasonable level.

#### *Reform and power*

The earlier sections of this theoretical framework have seen quite a number of assumptions regarding organizations in a reform process or in a dialogue regarding reform. Basically, the main idea with reforms is to choose between certain organizational forms so that the organization will improve its operation and subsequently achieve better results. The question about who chooses the direction of the organization is often related to the leaders or management of the organizations, as these are believed to hold a certain amount of knowledge and power over the reform process or put in other words:

*“...that individuals can wield considerable power over organizational forms as well as over behaviour and results.” (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 191)*

The idea of reform can therefore be linked to the performance and activity of leaders – they hold a key role in organizational change, as the reformers' conceptions and intentions are thought to control the organizational form and consequently its operations too. Brunsson and Olsen propose that reforms are supposed to be the only possible kind of change, thus implying that organizations must be static in the absence of reforms and continue by mentioning that changes not backed by reformers are not the same thing as reforms. They suggest that different kinds of reformers are likely to produce different types of reform, making the identity of the reformer important (Brunsson & Olsen 97: 191). From this the writers state that,

*“If power is defined as the capacity of individuals to transform their intentions into practical action, then it seems that reformers must be powerful people.” (Brunsson & Olsen, 1997, p. 191)*

And at the same time, question this statement by suggesting the reverse:

*“If they are to be really powerful, reformers ought to be in a position to see that reforms occur, to determine their content, and the reforms should be implemented and should produce the intended effects. But...the reformers’ position does not tend to be that strong.” (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 191-192)*

There have been investigations into reforms that question whether or not the energy and drive of individual reformers had a great impact – they showed that in many organizations, reforms are very common and seemingly easy to initiate. Reforms are therefore perceived to be routine in large organizations, and even seen as an integral part of the institution known as the formal organization.

The initiative of the reformers does not, according to these theorists, explain why reforms happen. Instead they point to the institutionalized environments that disperse the power from the leaders rather than concentrate it – this dispersion creates reform and the fact that reforms happen is often an expression of the powerlessness rather than the power of organizations, management and reformers (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 1997).

In sum, reformers are in Brunsson and Olsen’s (1997) view, people with considerably less power than the idea of reform implies. These limitations do not only refer to what the reformers are able to do, but also what they can do, say and even think. Administrative reform is, according to some theorists, determined to a large extent by culturally conditioned rules and institutional values (Brunsson & Olsen 1997: 202).

### **Summary of organizational theory**

The central issues of organizational theory is inertia and how this persists in the shape of challenges found in leadership and authority, staff and employees, identity and culture, the external pressures and the prerogatives of modernization and legitimacy.

A rational outline would claim that reform can be instigated from the leadership of the organization where the central authority is guiding and controlling how a reform is initiated, decided and implemented. However, this gives way to another assumption, namely that reformers at the top of the organization actually don’t have the power required to go through with the reform ideas due to a number of reasons. One could be a strong organizational culture that is against the form and content of the reform, another could be that the leaders don’t have the required resources e.g. manpower and time to implement a reform proposal. Regardless of the successful outcome and enterprise of the reform, leaders and would-be reformers are however vital in ensuring that the signal of reform is expressed internally as well as externally – signalling intent of reform is a crucial step in seeking legitimacy to the organization. So the leaders are important when reforms are to be discussed and implemented, but the staff also play a significant role. Communication is an important tool in organizational change and should be regarded as such.

The organizational identity can be more or less positive towards reform and the organization can be proactive or reactive in terms of change and improvement. It is however critical that the reformers understand the internal as well as the external identity of the organization and seek to meet this when reforms are presented one way or the other. Failing to acknowledge the

organizational identity can lead to unforeseen challenges and will to a large extent play a role in how the reform is met and carried out. The same is evident when discussing organizational culture – is the culture fragmented and loose? One approach is recommended while a tightly knit unit on the other hand requires a different approach. The expectations of the organization must also be taken into account – on which areas is the organization ambitious and on what fields of the organizational setup is there a more lenient and relaxed approach? Certain rules and norms of one organization may differ significantly from another and the various units of an organization are often seen to have very different perceptions on how they work and think.

A central issue of understanding organizations is the environment in which it is embedded. A particular part of society may be strong and influential on the organizations in its proximity, shaping the parts that make up the system in e.g. the development enterprise. System-wide rules dictate the direction of one organization whilst pushing another organization in the same system in a different direction – knowledge of the external parties and the role of these is crucial when dealing with issues like change and reform, as organizations can in some situations apply a submissive character whilst taking on a more aggressive role if the situation allows it. However, the outside stakeholders are impossible to avoid if an organization wants to uphold its relevance and claim to legitimacy. The organization or outside stakeholders can achieve a more successful reform if the discourse is right – it may present itself as common sense, but if an initiative is deemed to make the organization more ‘modern’ it will, by and large, feel more positive towards it as the opposite adjectives like old-fashioned, outdated or outmoded don’t comply positively as an organizational image.

Based on this, a number of hypotheses can be derived from Organizational theory for the analysis.

### **Hypotheses on organizational theory**

#### **Leadership, Authority & Staff**

Hypothesis 5: Changes in the United Nations development area must be instigated from management at headquarter levels of the organization alongside acknowledging proposals from the regional and country level managers insofar reforms are to be successfully implemented.

Hypothesis 6: Change management in a multinational organization i.e. the UN requires specific attention to the job security of the employees if a reform is to be implemented successfully.

#### **Identity, Culture & Communication**

Hypothesis 7: A lack of a joint office for the entire UN country level presence poses a barrier for the One UN to be implemented – failing to acknowledge the importance of physical structures as identity creating often hampers a reform.

Hypothesis 8: Distinct organizational cultures i.e. behaviour, rules and expectations of the various UN agencies may prove to be a barrier for a joint One UN culture in the UN staff at country level and could pose a hindrance to effective implementation of the reform.

Hypothesis 9: Leaders and staff in organizations require information and their working abilities and subsequent reform efforts will be hampered if the communication is sub-standard – this goes for the internal and external communication.

### **Institutional environments**

Hypothesis 10: Reformers should consider the interdependent status of organizations as their role in society is largely dictated by the level of legitimacy provided by its constituents - in case a reform alters the *raison d'être* of an organization, the outcome may eventually limit the final reform effort.

## ANALYSIS

This chapter withholds the analysis, where the hypotheses form the spinal column throughout the analysis – overlapping analytic points occur insofar as they complement an answer to the research questions of the problem formulation. Views and comments from the interviews conducted with representatives from the UN agencies or the donor community in Vietnam will be cited as a source with the UN Vietnam or a source within the donor community in Vietnam as the sensitive nature of the UN reform discussions could jeopardize the position of the respondents offering critical views on UN headquarter activities, UN officials, UN agencies or member-countries.

### International Relations – External Pressures

International Relations perspectives are utilized to unveil the many complexities and layers of member-state resistance or readiness to initiate, decide and implement reforms in the United Nations development area. The member-states of the United Nations differ in history, culture, size, wealth, scope and thus have different objectives and actions. Member-states constitute the United Nations in a complex structure and influence the performance and quality of UN actions – and the idiom: ‘a chain is only as strong as its weakest link’, suggests that if there are any weak links in the member-states that could affect the strength of the chain.

### Power and Interests

Hypothesis 1: The main force driving international politics is the concept of interests defined in power – member-states seek power over other member-states in the United Nations thus acting self-centred, self-regarding and self-interested limiting a consensus on UN reform.

The first hypothesis concerns the political power clashes in the United Nations between the various member-states. Points of discussion and disagreement regarding the overall development architecture are legion – yet the member-states and their leaders are able to come to the table from time to time and discuss some headway for better coordination of the aid harmonization, the development goals and the frameworks to solicit various objectives. A prime example is the Millennium Development Goals where the world’s leaders unanimously signed on to the eight goals for increased development in the world. The Paris Declaration on aid harmonization in 2005 saw the latest rhetorical efforts combined in a framework that could be of significant value to the development support to the poor countries if its objectives are implemented in a timely and appropriate fashion. The issue with these global agreements is that they don’t come about easily – getting from the rhetoric and ‘sloganism’ of e.g. UN reform – reform implementation is an immense task. As such, many reasons behind the complexity of UN reform find their roots at the membership level. Luck (2003) describes a factor behind the impulse for UN reform and at the same time uncovers why the situation remain to be critical:

*“The universality of the United Nations has fuelled a dual pattern on the intergovernmental level: frequent calls for change by one Member State or group or another, followed by blocking moves by others with divergent interests or perspectives. At times, it seems as if every Member State is in favour of some sort of reform, but their individual notions of what this should entail differ so markedly as to make consensus on the direction reform should take hard to achieve.” (Luck 2003: 2)*

Focusing on the UN Vietnam context and the reform process will show that power relations between the developing countries and the developed countries are often conflicting. The Group of 77 is used to certain procedures and business-practices from the UN development agencies and there are very mixed feelings on reform that would by and large change the structure of cooperation with the fear of conditionalities imposed on the recipients of aid and decreased support, i.e. resources of tangible and intangible character. The major critics of the One UN reform initiative are predominantly seen as China, India, Egypt, Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba and Russia according to several officials from the UNCT ExCom agencies in Vietnam. G77 proponents of the One UN reform are obviously the eight pilot countries with Vietnam in a leading role. The G77 is therefore not understood to have a unified stance on all development issues, which is critical considering the letter it sent to the Secretary-General in 2007, advocating for precaution in decision-making and implementation of reform measures at the various levels of the United Nations (Group of 77 2007: 1). Whether the letter has the unanimous support of all the member-states can be questioned as Vietnam is a member of the G77, yet is seen as a key proponent and supporter of the One UN initiative. According to the UN Vietnam Newsletter; *Common Goals, Collective Action* from May 2007, it is evident that the One UN has great support from the Vietnamese Government:

*“The One UN Initiative has made considerable progress. This is in large part due to the leadership of the Government, who consider the UN an important partner in helping to address the development challenges ahead.” (UN Vietnam 2007d: 5)*

Disagreement is often located among the donors as well and there is a polarization between the rich countries on how development cooperation is to be carried out. The United States has been very concerned with how the United Nations works – as a response to this, resources already assigned to the UN have been withheld over the years and there is often talk of the UN’s need to facilitate cost-saving exercises in its bureaucracy and programme sectors. Naturally, talk of cost-saving is the worst case scenario for the bulk of G77 representatives as they see their resource income through the UN agencies severely decreased. This also explains the outrage heard in G77 circles before and after the HLP’s recommendations on System-wide coherence, as they got the impression from countries like the US that the One UN is a cost-saving exercise; UN bureaucrats and opinion-makers in the system also take some blame for the mixed signals regarding the cost-saving issue, which will be investigated further in relation to interests in hypothesis 2.

According to various recommendations in the HLP, many areas in the UN development sector can and should work in a more coherent, efficient and harmonized manner. According to representatives from an ExCom agency within the United Nations Vietnam, any resources saved by cutting duplication and inefficiency in the United Nations programmes, should be recycled back into the budgeting lines of the UN.

A contrast to the rhetoric from the United States is found among the states of North and Western Europe, where there is a general support for reform in the UN and the One UN in particular. The point of discussion among European Development Agencies is not so much on cost saving, but rather on a UN that should reform in order to live up to its mandates of policy-advocacy and moving out of disciplines like service-delivery, where the UN is outperformed by bilaterals and

NGO's. The UN should, according to the Like-Minded-Donor-Group (LMDG), consisting of the most radical in terms of UN reform-supportive countries in Europe, focus on a streamlined and coherent UN - that would result in increased resources from donors as they want to see the UN more effective, relevant and living up to its mandates. An example of the radical ideas that have surfaced over the last years regarding the UN system, come from the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, proposing to collapse the existing structure into three main pillars that would focus on development cooperation, humanitarian assistance and the environment respectively. Such radical ideas were also supported by other donor countries, yet the key component in making such a proposal come to life is the counterparts in the G77. If such an ambitious reform proposal is ever to succeed it, needs the absolute backing of the member-states of the UN across the board.

The Paris Declaration should provide the framework for good and mutual consensus among the countries as it has received support from most member-states, rich and poor, combined with the backing of international development organizations:

*"We acknowledge that enhancing the effectiveness of aid is feasible and necessary across all aid modalities. In determining the most effective modalities of aid delivery, we will be guided by development strategies and priorities established by partner countries. Individually and collectively, we will choose and design appropriate and complementary modalities so as to maximise their combined effectiveness." (OECD 2005: 2)*

Although the Paris Declaration first and foremost is perceived as a bilateral agreement between partners and donors, it should be acknowledged that the UN Development Group is a co-signatory and this lends legitimacy to the UN to enrol on the same aid effectiveness actions. In Vietnam, the locally adjusted strategy paper, the Hanoi Core Statement, seen as the contextualization of the Paris Declaration, provided the incentive for moving the One UN initiative further. This was largely due to a Government keen on donor harmonization and a donor community in Vietnam that had some consensus on the cooperation modalities among their aid agencies.

However in a global UN reform context, some donors, predominantly the US, believe that the best way to get UN reforms is to attack the UN. According to stakeholders in the UN Vietnam Country Team, this is the wrong approach as the UN agencies themselves, to a very large extent, are dominated or controlled by its constituents, the developing countries. From this premise, the donors should make peace with the major G77 countries in order to reach an understanding of how reform on coherence and efficiency can be installed and controlled in the United Nations development area, rather than promoting the older policy of cost-saving as the only avenue for UN to adhere to in a reform perspective. In sum, the member-states decide the actions of the UN and the more they seem to promote their own agendas, the more difficult it will be to agree on reform. So if the recipients and donors could agree to go forward, then eventually the UN will follow suit – this is the main outline of how the politics behind UN reform should be approached. Although the Secretary-General of the United Nations lacks the authority to dictate what the member-states should do, he should function as a mediator between the fragmented member-states and advocate for a consensus on the UN future. In April 2007 Ban-Ki Moon gave his endorsements to the recommendations of the HLP and signalled his intention to bring the member-states on board:

*"I intend to work and consult closely with the Member States, the President of the General Assembly and the relevant intergovernmental bodies, which will play a critical role in moving the report forward...The United Nations system is conscious of the need to urgently take steps to enhance overall coherence and effectiveness, but is equally aware of the need to ensure that efforts to act on the Panel's recommendations are guided by and respectful of the intergovernmental consideration of the Panel's report." (UN Secretary-General 2007a: 6)*

Although he lends his legitimacy to the recommendations of the report and work with the relevant stakeholders including the member-states, Moon underpins the need to respect the considerations of the member-states. Balancing the powers is difficult and the position and authority of the Secretary-General structure has been accused by interview respondents from the UN Vietnam as not having what it takes in terms of power and authority. Essentially, the big G77 members that are against the reform need to be taken seriously into account, as they hold the numeric power in the General Assembly and will not accept reform measures in the United Nations unless they are taken onboard in the initial processes. Yet the power struggles are obvious as the donors hold the fiscal resources to enhance development in the recipient countries – but unless an agreement is made on the One UN reform between the big donors and the big partners from the G77, the history of unachieved reform proposals is likely to repeat itself. Evidently the reform concept has different value and objectives to the different stakeholders as Luck (2003) points out: "...what looks like reform to one national delegation may appear regressive to others."(Luck 2003: 4).

Hypothesis 2: The determinant of political action in the United Nations over a particular period in history is the political interests, shaping the context, structure and culture of reform in the UN.

Interests are largely related to the concept power in the sense that the political strategy is about promoting your interests and thereby gaining more power if you succeed with your policies. It springs to light that the interests of the big G77 member-states such as China and India have special interests in maintaining a fragmented UN – that will enable them to keep on doing business as usual and therewith controlling the resources coming through the United Nations to their ministries. An obvious question should be asked: if the way forward in the UN is increased focus on delivering its core mandates in terms of policy advice, then why should the big countries like China and India oppose such a move? Extracting the various views on the issue gives a number of reasons, however it really boils down to comfort zones being altered and if a new approach of dealing with UN agencies is not enough, then add the major issue which is fear of losing resources with the One UN initiative. The money from the donors that is allocated to the UN, is spent in the developing countries and it is exactly that loss of resources that is blamed for the resistance within the G77. If the signals from the United Nations Development Group have been coherent throughout the One UN reform process, the concerns over resources allocated to the developing countries could have been avoided. However, there were sources within the UNCT in Vietnam that argued that the UNDG had stated that the One UN reform was a cost-saving initiative. Comments of that character show the true complexity of the UN system. On one hand, the reformers with the Secretary-General and his High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence, align themselves with the efforts already made by the United Nations in Vietnam and a number of smaller developing countries in the UN setup and on the other hand, the G77 is voicing their concerns over decreased fiscal support spurned by the mixed signals of the UNDG. Again, Luck

(2003) emphasizes the different political interests of the stakeholders concerned with UN reform as a key to understanding the issues echoed by the UNCT in Vietnam:

*“To put it crudely, much of the reform debate, at its basest level, is a struggle over political turf, over who is perceived to gain or lose influence within the Organization if the proposed changes are enacted or implemented.”*  
(Luck 2003: 5)

Asked whether or not the Vietnam case is helpful in promoting the One UN reform on a worldwide basis, a source from an ExCom agency in the UN Vietnam gave the following answer:

*“...it is also probably necessary from their perspective [SG Office] to show the member-states of the UN that reform can actually be successful and not only that it can actually be led by the recipient country government. So it is not the big guys in the G77: the Russian Federation, China, India, Brazil, Egypt that are the only ones around, there are some governments that actually take lead of UN reform processes, that’s very much the case in Vietnam and I think that kind of national ownership is very good to show.”*

The power structures not only apply to the member-states but are largely seen to be present within the UN agencies as well and this causes some complex situations which paralyse the United Nations – these power struggles will be further analysed under the hypothesis regarding leadership, authority and staff.

### **Moral principles & International cooperation**

Hypothesis 3: Moral principles can never be fully realized, but must be a balance of interests thereby aiming at the realization of the lesser evil than the absolute good – given this rationale, reform in the United Nations must be a compromise between the conflicting views of member-states.

This hypothesis draws on a core principle of realism, assuming that the idealistic nature of the One UN reform initiative will be meddled into a compromise between the would-be reformers and the conservative forces that together constitute the United Nations. The One UN initiative raises the bar on UN operations in the sphere of development. If the idea of a new and reformed United Nations conveyed by the former Secretary-General Kofi Annan is to be realised it needs the backing of not only the new SG but also of the member-states across the board. Balancing the aforementioned interests requires a delicate touch when discussing reform measures given the conflicting views of its member-states. High-level politics in a UN context is very complicated and if the moral principles of the Charter and Millennium Declaration are to be addressed a great deal of diplomacy is needed.

The challenge for the United Nations is not made easier by the continued protection of member-states’ opposing interests – and with the current power structure in mind, a unified agreement must be struck before the moral principles are to be realised in full. If that doesn’t happen the One UN reform will stand out not only as a compromise between the opposing powers but may even be perceived as a failure at the game of ‘give and take’ in international politics. The proliferation of the One UN is something that has already been discussed in the United Nations Country Team in Vietnam. The rhetoric’s of the reform process have moved from a clear-cut objective of merging

agencies into the One UN, but has faded to the notion of 'delivering as one', which is seen as a watered down version of the initial proposal. This is an example of a proposal in constant movement, shaped by the stakeholders involved with the reform and the end result is something that is far from the initial idea. It would be highly naïve to even consider a reform measure of this size to be carried out in the UN without resistance, making change of the reform setup inevitable.

The comments from various sources within the UN Vietnam reflect two issues when discussing the proliferation of the One UN initiative. First of all, the negative impact of being elected as a pilot under the HLP auspice outweigh the positive ones, because this makes them very vulnerable to criticism once they make mistakes – something that the sources deem unavoidable when piloting or pioneering changes in the United Nations development area. By having watchful eyes on you, the weaknesses of your setup are exposed and this needs to be outweighed by success stories that can balance the picture in your favour. For the UN Vietnam, there has been many success stories over the past years as much of the work carried out by the United Nations' agencies led to increased improvement in the living conditions for the people of Vietnam. An example of this was the fight against the *Avian Flu* which saw an effective roll-out in a successful cooperation between UN agencies and its counterparts. In that respect there has been criticism from the various headquarters of the UN as to why the success stories should be followed up with radical reform measures, which might project the UN Vietnam image in a slightly less positive way. And with more attention directed towards the UN Vietnam, they are increasingly prone to alterations of their concept. In fact some sources within the UN Vietnam reveal that they would appreciate being left alone for a year's time to make the changes that they have so much ownership of and then evaluate on the reform before the results are revealed. But of course, this is an illusion, an unachievable dream due to the interconnected status of the UN system. If for instance the One Leader proposal is to be implemented, the RC needs more authority. This power must find its origin somewhere and must be accepted by high-level management in the UN headquarters that are under influence from not only the member-states, but also their own bureaucratic interests – and bureaucracies are per se reluctant to change and a loss of authority is certainly not viewed positively in the UN headquarters.

Briefly summarizing the main points, it is likely that the One UN reform in Vietnam will be a compromise between the would-be reformers and the antagonists found on every level in the United Nations system. Some of the 'One's' see progress that can be viewed as successful e.g. the One Plan 2006-2010, whereas the One Leader did not get the required support from headquarters – this has led to some disappointment in the UN Vietnam as the management issue is of utmost importance if the One Plan and One Plan Fund/One Budget is to be a successful initiative. So the hypothesis of the lesser evil rather than the absolute good does have a strong explanatory value – especially if the absolute good is the initial reform package, the One UN, and the lesser evil is the actual situation in the case of UN Vietnam. The interview respondents revealed some scepticism against the prospect of glossy rhetoric's on One UN from the HLP turning into the muddled and proliferated bargaining of 'delivering as one'.

Hypothesis 4: A multilateral organization like the United Nations must utilize the windows of opportunity made available by the member-states in order to homogenise, harmonize and reproduce standard expectations vested in the moral principles of the various charters and declarations and thereby delivering international consensus for development

The former Secretary-General Kofi Annan had a great task ahead of him when he first took office in 1997 – several member-states accused the UN of being in a state of crisis. This situation needed to change and he published various reform initiatives within his first year of office, among them, the initial plans for a more harmonized and coherent development dimension of the United Nations. In that view, the window of opportunity was open as the criticism of the proliferated United Nations fostered initiatives of change. An example of change in the development sector was the designing of the Common Country Assessments (CCA's) and the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF's).

The One UN reform was not officially articulated at headquarters level before the High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence in November 2006. The One UN ideas needed time to 'mature' and gain momentum within the United Nations development enterprise. A reason behind the One UN reform initiative managing to stay on the agenda, was the groundwork laid by the United Nations in Vietnam. A number of factors are in play when analysing the processes that explain this situation. First of all, the Government of Vietnam issued a severe recommendation to the former UN Resident Coordinator of UN Vietnam, where it was presented that the Government of Vietnam had had a good and long relationship with the United Nations in Vietnam. However, as Vietnam opened up for international trade and bilateral development assistance, the socio-economic situation in Vietnam changed and the relevance of the UN was suddenly challenged as the Government now had more partners to interact with in the quest for development. In 2005, the absurdities of having twelve UN agencies in Vietnam with their own plans, budgets, projects and cars and flags in Vietnam were effectively criticised by the Prime Minister of Vietnam. This led to the initial discussions on the coherence and harmonization of UN activities from a country level perspective. So the window of opportunity for the One UN reform efforts in Vietnam was provoked by the Government, who found that the resources used to maintain the cooperation with the UN could be used in a more expedient manner. Jeffrey Sachs, economist and author, describes how UN agencies, as the case of Vietnam explains, can have a negative impact on developing countries: "...they can be as much nuisance as help. Aid flows are often small and unpredictable, while hundreds of small-scale aid projects eat up the time and attention of overstretched and impoverished government. Harmonization of aid in support of a single MDG-based poverty strategy is vital" (Sachs 2005: 285).

The UN ExCom agencies in Vietnam were thus handed a legitimate reason to pursue their ideas regarding increased coherence and common policy on development issues and followed suit with a discussion paper in November 2005 where the first One UN proposals in a country level context were presented. The authors wanted to provoke and create discussion within the UN ranks as well as provide input for the 2005 World Summit. The discussion paper received little attention in the UN headquarters and where it did receive attention, it was of negative character. According to UN Vietnam sources the paper fostered little discussion within the UN and the authors met slight resistance from headquarters and were perceived to be too radical and out of tune with the UN

development agenda. So the window of opportunity was effectively closed by the Senior Management of the agencies behind the discussion paper, UNICEF and UNDP. The likeminded donors in Vietnam had been working with the Government on the Hanoi Core Statement, the local amendment of the Paris Declaration, and viewed the discussion paper published from UNICEF and UNDP with great interest. Donors realised that there was a group of UN agencies stating a different way forward, which was very much along the lines of the Paris Declaration with harmonization of aid and more coherence in the development cooperation. So with their well-known interest for UN reform, the donors opened up another window of opportunity and the three ExCom agencies (now followed by UNFPA) produced a more detailed and updated draft of Harmonization of UN country level activities in Vietnam issued primarily to the donors and Government – both groups of stakeholders were interested in the One UN reform as it fitted the development agenda in Vietnam. Consultations at the Tripartite National Task Force in Hanoi June, 2007, consolidated the support to the One UN in Vietnam via the Joint Donor Assessment:

*“Donors welcome the comprehensive approach known in Vietnam as the ‘five ones’, and the interlinking of the One Plan Fund and the One Leader to form a single package. Donors recognize that One UN reform in Vietnam is a dynamic process, involving six agencies initially, but ultimately striving to include them all.” (UNDG 2007f: 2)*

In sum, the windows of opportunity have been opened, then closed and then opened again for the reformers of the UN Vietnam, but the cooperation between the three parties resulted in the Tripartite National Task Force which gave ownership to all parties and the Government of Vietnam especially has been very involved in the One UN reform efforts. The complex nature of the UN system signals that the would-be reformers of the UN must seize the opportunities whenever it's possible if they want to make significant progress and make the very important changes of the development structure. At the top-level of the United Nations, Kofi Annan opened up for the harmonization and coherence reform, yet the first steps to realising and crystallizing that ideology, came from one of the development success-stories of South-East Asia: Vietnam.

### **Sub-conclusion on external pressures**

From the analysis on the One UN reform in Vietnam, it is clear that the external pressures that face the United Nations on the intergovernmental level are a constraining factor for reform initiation and implementation. The external pressures facing the United Nations primarily stem from the member-states, as these are the constituents of the multilateral organization. As such, many reasons behind the complex issue of UN performance finds its roots at membership level.

According to the interview candidates from the UNCT in Vietnam and researchers, the G77 blocks most of the UN reform proposals, and have also attacked the reform initiatives because they saw in them a US plot to weaken the influence of the vast majority of poorer member-states in the United Nations. The power struggles between the member-states only weakens the current reform proposal and the content of the One UN reform has been severely diluted, which creates a sense of business as usual in the United Nations development system. Essentially the member-states need to acknowledge that they are part of an interdependent system, where the United Nations is an indispensable if highly imperfect world organization. In order to achieve the goals and objectives

of the Millennium Declaration and other development strategies, the rich donor countries must respect the influential role played by the G77 in the General Assembly. Both parties must proceed to negotiate reform terms that take the various constituents into account, whilst having the courage and ability to agree on a reform direction. Understanding these issues proves vital to any discussion in the United Nations and the leaders of the world must lend more resources and legitimacy to the United Nations development area – otherwise the UN will remain to be no more than the sum of its parts at global, regional and national level.

The UN General-Secretary and the Secretariat should provide the system that mediates between the conflicting member-states and guides the United Nations forward in terms of increased coherence, efficiency and accountability on all levels of the system. However, the leaders of these structures do not have the authority to live up to its responsibility and are thus helpless in the face of political apathy and outright obstruction from UN member-states. If there are fundamental disagreements between key member-states, the UN Secretary-General can do little to break the gridlock – in that sense, the Secretary-General structure needs to toughen up and reject the constant stream of obstructions that erode his mandate. The position of the General-Secretary is multifaceted and requires sublime skills in diplomacy, yet the irresponsible actions of the member-states have in many areas of the UN, created a widening gap between the G77, the US and other rich countries. Positively, the smaller G77-members like Vietnam stand out and are in favour of a more coherent and efficient UN and have duly backed this up at country level where the support for the participating agencies in the One Plan deliberations has been of fundamental value. Perhaps Vietnam has acknowledged that a continued obstructionist policy in the G77 in regards to UN reform will anger the rich donors and eventually lead to reduced resources.

In sum, the case study of the UN Vietnam underlined that the reform debate in the United Nations, globally as well as locally, is a struggle over political turf and a question of who is perceived to gain or lose influence from the proposed changes and implementations. The Vietnam context also stand out as, at least to some extent, a success story, where the Government and donor ownership is very strong and has positive externalities as well. The Government of Vietnam is to some extent, empowered by the level of constructive communication and interaction with their UN counterparts, whilst the people of Vietnam, the true constituents of UNCT Vietnam are given bigger and better opportunities for social and economic development.

The Vietnam case also shows that the level of international cooperation between the stakeholders reflects a compromise of the lesser evil rather than that of the absolute good – and that if the results of the One UN reform are to be positive, the national government, donor community and UN agencies must seize the day and utilize the windows of opportunity to the full, if the much needed reforms are to be implemented.

The coming years will determine the support given to the Secretary-General and whether member-states will continue to wrangle over power and prestige – if that remains the case, perhaps the SG should follow Benner's (2007) advice and remind the member-states that the UN Charter starts with "We the peoples" not "We the parochial power holders".

## Organizational theory: Internal inertia

This section of the analysis will focus on the hypothesis derived from organizational theory explaining the inertia that is present in many organizations and institutions and most often leads to a state of paralysis. Management and authority issues play a key role in reform politics, the identity of organizations is critical and the communication is an ever-present tool that, according to organizational theory, must be utilized to the full if change is to be successful.

### Leadership, Authority & Staff

The management of the UN agencies operates on different levels and the level of authority and support will be discussed in the next set of hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5: Changes in the United Nations development area must be instigated and supported from management at headquarter levels of the organization alongside acknowledging proposals from the regional and country level managers insofar as reforms are to be successfully implemented.

The One UN reform was officially endorsed at a General Assembly meeting by Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon in April 2007, although some reservations were made. The reservations take both the member-states and the various UN agencies into account – a move that is opposed by an anonymous source within an ExCom agency in the UN Vietnam:

*“My advice [to the SG] would be: Stop pleasing everybody. The UN will simply lose relevance if it continues to please all the UN agencies on an equal manner. UN reforms mean painful choices; it means getting people angry, because it makes sense from a development perspective and he [the SG] needs to learn that no matter what, there will be blood on the floor, blood on the wall and blood on the ceiling, and that’s because it is simply necessary.”*

A statement that has a clear signal – leaders must take action that can be perceived as positive or negative by the other levels of the organization. The same source reveals that: *“...reform is only useful when it hurts and it means that you have to give up something, then it is actually a reform measure that makes sense because no-one wants to let go of power”* (UN Vietnam Interview 4: ll. 165-166). A successful reform will have its costs and leaders or managers will to some extent lose power in areas if the reform is to be successful. Obviously power is not only a matter between the member-states of the United Nations. With a wide range of agencies associated and working under the UN mandate there are different opinions on reform and indeed this is the case with the One UN reform. Given the structure of the ExCom agencies and the specialized agencies respectively, a consensus is not easy to achieve on One UN. This materialises at all levels of the United Nations system from the headquarters in New York, Paris and Rome, to the Regional headquarters in e.g. Bangkok and lastly to the agencies working at country level. Taking the Vietnam case, it is evident that opinions regarding One UN in Vietnam appear different depending on which level you refer to. When UNICEF and UNDP representatives in Vietnam first launched their discussion paper on One UN in November 2005 the level of support was very limited – in fact, according to sources in Vietnam, there was a degree of hostility and resistance towards the proposal. A number of sources

from the ExCom agencies within UN Vietnam explain the level of support received from agency headquarters:

*“...a difficult problem politically speaking...is how to engage a headquarters level that looks at these problems from a very different angle than the country staff. Country staff wants to make sure that what they do is right for Vietnam; headquarters wants to make sure that they as an agency can survive.”*

The resistance from headquarters was present for many months and it is believed that the level of support changed when the High-Level Panel published their recommendations at the end of 2006. One possible reason for this could be that the legitimacy vested in the HLP was relatively strong and their signal was supported by the Secretary-General. Another could be that the UNDP and UNDG Chair visited Vietnam in December 2006, an event that to some extent emphasized that the UNCT in Vietnam had been discussing and initiated harmonization to increase UN coherence at country level a year before the HLP's recommendations were launched.

A concrete example of the power struggles behind the One UN reform initiative in Vietnam is the One Plan 2006-2010 published in July 2007 that gathers the development programmes and plans from UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNAIDS and UNV into one Plan that adheres to the development strategies of the Vietnamese Government. Work on the One Plan has been substantial, and has taken a lot of human resources from the original programme that the corresponding agencies had to deliver as well. According to the initial discussions on the One Plan all agencies present in Vietnam were invited to the discussions. The ExCom agencies were, as described before, the first in line, then came the three smaller agencies UNV, UNIFEM and UNAIDS while the Specialized Agencies ILO, UNESCO, FAO among others stated their intend to join the One Plan, yet the support from their headquarters was limited as they wanted to wait for the HLP's recommendations. The work however, continued as the six agencies and the Government wanted to consolidate the One Plan.

On June 11, 2007, a few weeks before the official launch of the One Plan project document, five UN Specialised Agencies – FAO, WHO, ILO, UNESCO and UNIDO – sent a letter to the Ministry of Planning and Investment (primary ministerial counterpart on the One UN) expressing concerns about the One UN process in Vietnam. The agencies stated particular concern that the Government and Donors appeared to be under the impression that the Specialised Agencies had refused to take part in the One Plan initiative. The agencies furthermore expressed that they had not been involved nor participated in the processes and that they had been effectively excluded from the discussions and decisions and requested that the One Plan was to be able to adapt the Specialised Agencies as soon as possible. According to an undisclosed source among the donors in Vietnam, a response to the letter was issued by donors in Vietnam that defended the process so far, as transparent and open – and pointed out that the One Plan will be open for the Specialised Agencies in 2008 when their headquarters are able to give the green light that they have not been able to do previously. The donors also see it as unfortunate that the letter was sent to the Vietnamese Government and not the Resident Coordinator, as this undermines the reform process and the credibility of the One UN, and does not adhere to the principal of the agencies in Vietnam working as One under One leader. The Government of Vietnam also responded to the letter, very much along the same lines as the donors, yet noted that the interest from the Specialized Agencies

was positive as it signalled that the five agencies behind the letter now found it attractive to join the One Plan.

The level of support from the headquarters of the various agencies has been of mixed character regarding the One UN initiative in Vietnam. Undoubtedly, the success stories from Vietnam have opened a few doors and there have been clear signals from the UN Development Group that the important issue of the One Plan was inclusion. However, the six agencies of the One Plan have already signed a legal document with the government and to alter this for the sake of inclusion would require a re-signing of the project document by the government counterparts, which would hold up the One Plan implementation and possibly result in a stalemate regarding the One UN reform efforts. A source within one of the participating ExCom agencies in the One Plan revealed some concern before the aforementioned letter was sent to the Government of Vietnam because:

*“...we actually have six agencies that have really produced a good quality One Plan and at the same time we are being forced to open it up to the other agencies. And I am not saying that these mandates of these agencies are not at least as important as the ones there are in, but what I am saying is that you can not reform the whole UN at the same time. And there is a trade-off between being inclusive and being strategic.”*

As outlined, the six participating agencies of the One Plan were given little support or attention in the initial stages of the One UN reform – the support was coming from the donors and the government. That situation has changed significantly as attention is now directed towards the UN Vietnam and their reform efforts – the signal of inclusion, inclusion and inclusion is a clear indication from the top of the UNDG to bring all the agencies onboard. The timing of the inclusion discourse has, however, been discussed among the six participating agencies and basically they understand the message but would like to conclude the One Plan, work for the rest of 2007, then evaluate the process and in 2008, open up for the specialized agencies.

The theoretical framework emphasizes the need for leaders to propel a reform. The mismatch of headquarter support given to the country level leaders in Vietnam, leaves the One UN reform in Vietnam in a fragile position if this source from an ExCom agency in the UN Vietnam is taken into account:

*“...the fact that if you don't come together at headquarters level it is hard to come together at country level, as it requires a lot of coordination and a lot of political will and willingness of staff representatives wanting to do that and commit so much and at the end of the day it is really personalities. That's a big challenge because now we have the personalities [in the six participating agencies] that are willing and able to do this, but next year they could be gone and you don't know what you will get.”*

I view this statement as a very clear signal of ‘personalities i.e. leaders matters’ in reform times and the people behind the reform in Vietnam have been proficient and able to keep the One UN reform rolling, despite a lack of headquarters’ support.

I noted earlier that the reform-critical member-states were vocal in changing the One UN to ‘Delivering as One’ – the Chief Executive Board (CEB), that oversee the UN development assistance at country level, follow suit. A critical source within an ExCom agency within the UN Vietnam explains the change of rhetoric:

*"...they [CEB] no longer want us to talk of One UN. We can only talk about delivering as one. You will see in the notes that almost everything we need to do, they [CEB] have no clue how to do it...our Senior Managers have no bloody clue of what we are doing. There is a complete mismatch between what we say to the outside world [to] what we can deliver...That's my major problem with the HLP report and many others in Senior Management, I think they understand it as an abstract concept but they never actually think it through. It never percolates down through the system and asks what does it actually mean."*

A critical comment that illustrates the level of understanding between the top-level management and the people on the ground in Vietnam – a classic discussion between top-down versus bottom-up approach. An ExCom staff member reflects on this issue in regards to lessons learned from the Vietnam experience:

*"I think one big lesson learned for other countries is that UN reform...it needs sort of a dual approach, and where it is sort of top-down and bottom-up...This is the first initiative that came from the country level and that makes it very powerful, but you can not just have the bottom-up either."*

The above comments demonstrate that the UN Vietnam is under such pressure from the Senior Management at headquarters that they decouple – their activities or the signal they communicate to the outside differs from the orders that they receive from the top-level. The above citation somehow emphasizes that the headquarters are still working on how they should actually respond to the One UN issues – the incomplete decisions restrict the UN Vietnam in proceeding legally with its actions, as it needs the support from headquarters. The Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review 2007 reflects that a plan has not yet been finalized on how the UN coherence reform is to be implemented:

*"The launch of the One UN Country Programme pilots is currently at the inception stage...the challenge is to keep the approach as light, flexible, strategic and focused as possible. Modalities for organizing support from headquarters and regional entities, more particularly from UNDG, are still under consideration." (UN Secretary-General 2007a: 30).*

Similar comments are aired when it comes to the authority of the Resident Coordinator. The agencies behind the One Plan and the One Plan Fund see the One Leader as an integrated part of a three-pronged programme under the One UN reform. The participating agencies have signed a note, stating that under the new Terms of Reference for the Resident Coordinator, s/he will be the highest UN authority in Vietnam and will report directly to the Secretary-General. RC will furthermore be accredited to the Head of State in Vietnam and will overall, be responsible for the policy-dialogue with the Vietnamese Government. This note has been pending in the UN headquarters for signature, as top management there need to disburse the authority and agree that their agency representative or director will now report to the RC. In other words the One Leader dimension of the One UN reform has not yet received the support from headquarters that is required – so again, some sense of decoupling is taking place, as some leaders from the participating agencies de facto transfer power to the RC, while they still hold the authority of their area de jure. The One Leader dispute in Vietnam is reason for much criticism in Vietnam by the Government, the donors and the UN Vietnam – RC status is that he is held responsible for the whole One UN initiative in Vietnam, yet the agency headquarters that are to allocate the authority

refuse to do so. The current discussions at UN headquarters reflect that the UN Vietnam has moved one step to far in relation to the One Leader – the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR) that was discussed in July 2007 advocates for the RC to be no more than a colleague among colleagues, refusing to acknowledge the potential of having One Leader who is de facto and de jure responsible for the One Plan, One Plan Fund and subsequently One House (UN Secretary-General 2007a: 33). This lack of headquarter support is constraining the One UN reform in Vietnam and adds to the institutional inertia of the United Nations development system.

However, there are some researchers that point to the fact that the Secretary-General may not be able to pull the reform load alone, but if the member-states are on board, the reform efforts have a better chance of progressing. Luck (2003) outlines in his analysis, that the backing of member-states is essential for reform progress: *“When the goal is clearly articulated by the Secretary-General and the Member States pull together, so do the programs and agencies.”* (Luck 2003: 18). The real barrier towards effective reform implementation, in this case the One UN, does not rule out that the SG *can* have authority over the agencies and be able to form the strategy at headquarters level, but the issue is still the member-state support – episodic support is often prevalent due to the indifference or division among the member-states, and the outcome is that different heads of agencies are left with ample room for pursuing their own objectives or agendas.

Hypothesis 6: Change management in a multinational organization i.e. the UN requires specific attention to the job security of the employees if a reform is to be implemented successfully.

An anonymous representative from one of the six participating agencies in the One UN efforts in Vietnam underlines that the general staff-members believe the initiative is well worth doing, it has legitimacy and that the leaders of the agencies involved have the support of the staff. These comments from a staff-member of an ExCom agency build that view:

*“...they trust that indeed this is an exercise to make the UN better and through making better we [UNCT] make progress and become bigger than we are now. They believe, they trust, and believe that this is not an exercise to cut jobs...”*

Naturally there are some concerns over job-security but it is believed that this is merely natural in a situation of change. Another ExCom source validates the above statement, when asked whether or not the leaders in Vietnam have the legitimacy to push UN reforms ahead at the country level, they answered: *“...yes what they [the leaders in Vietnam] are doing is not questioned, it is legitimate.”* The key to avoid discomfort among staff is to keep an open process, which is heavily linked with communication and will be further analyzed under the hypothesis on communication.

## **Identity, Culture & Communication**

Hypothesis 7: A lack of a joint office for the entire UN country level presence poses a barrier for the One UN to be implemented – failing to acknowledge the importance of physical structures as identity creating often hampers a reform.

Theoretical discussions on creating a joint identity from a number of organizations and agencies that are fragmented suggest that a formal structure or one building is critical in ensuring that the staff-members get a common identity. When asked about the importance of a joint One UN House a source from one of the specialized agencies in the UN Vietnam emphasized that:

*“I think it will be critical to put everyone under one roof for a number of reasons. First of all it is very practical, it makes sense to just have one building, it makes sense that you can share the services but it is also a very important tool in bringing teams together and make them feel as one, make UN staff feel as one in terms of their identity.”*

This view is backed up by an ExCom source, claiming that the lack of a joint structure is a challenge for the One UN reform: *“...we are not in one house yet! In other countries where they have done no UN reform, they are at least gathered in one place – that’s helpful. We are scattered so we have to go around town to meet.”*

A different source within the specialized agencies explains that having a specific agency identity does not exclude having a UN identity as well, but suggests that a dual identity is feasible: *“...I don’t think the two identities exclude one another, I think you can have both...”* From these two respondents it is evident that issues of identity have been discussed and form a premise of the One UN House which is forecasted to be completed at the start of 2009. One advantage of having the agencies come together is the internal identity, as some of the demarcations or boundaries between the different agencies will be less visible and contribute to the positive synergies that are established with the ongoing work on the UNDAF, the One Plan and the One Communications Team in Vietnam. Furthermore, the external identity of the UN is also likely to be streamlined, as the offices of the agencies at present are spread all over Hanoi, which influences the resources spent by Government representatives and donors when attending meetings and consultations with the UNCT.

Hypothesis 8: Distinct organizational cultures i.e. behaviour, rules and expectations of the various UN agencies may prove to be a barrier for a joint One UN culture in the UN staff at country level and could pose a hindrance to effective implementation of the reform.

Organizational cultures in terms of norms and values do not play that big a role yet, according to the respondents – instead they direct their attention to the systems and processes found in the framework of programmes, contracts and the diverse ways of procurement, financial accounting and reporting structures. An ExCom source from the UN Vietnam explains the tasks attached to synchronizing the guidelines:

*“In terms of systems and processes, which is one of the One’s...that’s an enormous challenge, because the way the three ExCom agencies work is different, let alone the three other [UNV, UNAIDS & UNIFEM] and possibly more in the future.”*

On the positive side, the same source recognises that there have been improvements in the way the participating agencies work together in terms of programmatic guidelines:

*“...but at the same time, by working together increasingly as we are doing at the moment, step by step, the idealistic view that I still hold, is that you increase the understanding and you will finally, ultimately discover what is the background of the different ways of working and there is in the end going to be one – one set of fixed rules but also one way of interpretation.”*

In sum, the organizational cultures are not per se acknowledged as the main challenge by the respondents – instead, the focus is on the programmatic guidelines that are very different from agency to agency as there is a discrepancy in this area. However, the continued work on the One Plan and other One’s will eventually lead to a more coherent structure in terms of systems and processes and management guidelines as well.

Hypothesis 9: Leaders and staff in organizations require information and their working abilities and subsequent reform efforts will be hampered if the communication is sub-standard – this goes for the internal and external communication.

In regards to the internal communication, the link between job-security and the One UN reform is an issue that the leading representatives behind the UN reforms have taken into account. First of all, communication is viewed as a necessary and important tool in comforting the 400 general staff-members of the UN Vietnam. A source indicates the necessity of communication when engaging in organizational change:

*“What I learned from a change-management consultant is communication, communication, communication and communication...I think there is big challenge to engage and liaise with the staff in the UN; this is a big process that may eventually lead to some retrenchment so there are big issues out there for staff like job-security.”*

The internal communication lists as a serious tool in the reform process and one of the first joint initiatives that was implemented by the three ExCom agencies in Vietnam, was the Joint Communication team. This entity produces monthly newsletters to the UN staff in Vietnam and other interested stakeholders as well as keeping the staff updated on the latest guidelines and changes in the agency procedures under the One UN reform through posters like “One to Know” that are on display on the notice boards and even in the staff toilets of the participating agencies.

The communication between the heads of agencies is described generally as good by the respondents in the UN Vietnam, however there are some reservations, as the specialized agencies at times feel that they have been left on the sidelines in the later stages of the One Plan: *“...I feel anyway, that there have been less communication and maybe we could have come in earlier to comment, to be invited to comment on the outcomes on the One Plan.”* This comment supports the content of the letter sent to the Minister for Planning and Investment by the Specialized Agencies in June 2007, as they at times felt that the processes of the One Plan were excluding the specialized agencies and making it difficult for them to add their input into the One Plan. This view conflicts with the response from the donor group in Vietnam, as I noted earlier, clarifying that the donors and the government felt that the progress had been inclusive leading up to the discussions of the One Plan.

Despite the donor and government responses, where they tried to broker between the agencies inside and outside the One Plan loop, it is evident that the distancing views from the specialized agencies do not work in favour of the One Plan nor the One UN in Vietnam.

### **Institutional environments**

Hypothesis 10: Reformers should consider the interdependent status of organizations as their role in society is largely dictated by the level of legitimacy provided by its constituents - in case a reform alters the *raison d'être* of an organization, the outcome may eventually limit the final reform effort.

The hypotheses on power and interests include the institutionalized environments to some extent, insofar as the member-states validate legitimacy of the United Nations as a universal membership organization. From my perspective, I do not view that the One UN reform in the UN Vietnam alters the *raison d'être* of the organization. Taking the various stakeholders in Vietnam into account reveals that they are fully aware of the necessity of the One UN reform. An ExCom source from the UN Country Team in Vietnam argues that:

*“...unless the UN can change the way it does business, it will go out of business...If you look at what’s going to happen with the ageing population, with the pension problems and crisis that will hit Europe in the next 10-15 years, the first thing that will go is the UN [support] because it is on annual voluntary basis...you cut the UN – Parliaments doesn’t care and it’s the first area where cuts will be, unless we make sure we simply do a much better job.”*

Evidently the support of the donors is vital and the UN Vietnam obviously seems to have figured that aspect out and accordingly, have a certain respect for the donors when it comes to the financial contributions made to the UN. Without them, the UN will be out of history.

### **Sub-conclusion on internal inertia**

The analysis on internal inertia outlined the different levels of support in the UN development system to the One UN in general and particularly the case of One UN in Vietnam. A basic rule of organizational change is that reforms will hurt – there will be sacrifices in the management structure, authority must be divided and hard work, with limited resources over a certain period of time is necessary. Regarding the leadership issues of the One UN reform in Vietnam, it is evident that in order to embrace the ideas behind the five ‘One’s’ it is critical that the One Leader is given responsibility and authority to act as a true leader of the new UN structure. The goal is a more coherent UN which the staff-members are content to work in, as well as speaking with one voice in regards to Government officials and Donor representatives. The problem is that no-one in the agency headquarters is interested in letting go of power – the position of the Resident Coordinator in Vietnam is that of a victim of the policies in headquarters. The Directors and Representatives of the UN agencies that participate in the One Plan, One Fund and One Leader nexus in Vietnam have officially pledged their support and acknowledge the RC as their leader. However, strong forces in New York and other headquarters are less positive and have a reluctant stance towards transferring power to the RC, exemplified in the RC note that has been awaiting

headquarter response for months. Strikingly, the UN RC position has some resemblance to the position and structure of the UN Secretary-General. Neither has the power and authority to implement changes, yet they both have a responsibility of uniting the forces of the United Nations in a coherent and efficient manner, that enables the organization to fulfil its mandate. In order to achieve the best possible outcome of the One UN reform in Vietnam, the participating agencies decouple when transferring power to the Resident Coordinator – despite the formal and institutionalized support from headquarters.

Conflicts between a headquarter and its sub-levels are not rare in the world of organizational theory and the Vietnam case proves that it is difficult to engage the headquarters when they have a different view on how the work is to be done at the local level. Striking a balance between centralization and decentralization in organizational activities is essential if the relevance and legitimacy is to be upheld. However, the UN Vietnam case, illustrates a clear mismatch between expectations at the central vs. decentralised level and if the United Nations is to be successful with the One UN reform, adjustments are required. Evidently, the country staff and leaders want to make sure that they do the right thing for Vietnam, while headquarters wish to make sure that they as an agency and bureaucracy can survive. The level of support and understanding from headquarters to the country level is an issue that results in organizational inertia. In fairness, the country level also needs to understand and respect the direction of its main body.

Adding to the aforementioned inertia, the development agencies are fragmented into clusters that seemingly promote their own interests. The history, geographic location and structure of these agencies reflect these divisions to some extent despite the fact that the United Nations Development Group was established in 1997 with the objective of generating a unified voice in one overarching development body. At headquarters level, the four ExCom agencies want the One UN to be a success and the message from the Chair, Kemal Dervis, is inclusion – signalling that the One UN is about getting all the agencies on board. Considering the span of events, where strategic planning outranked inclusion, it is obvious that the understanding between the agencies and their respective headquarters were not calibrated. The participating agencies would, according to sources in the ExCom agencies in Vietnam, like to have the specialized agencies onboard – but there is also a focus on strategic actions versus inclusion. Taking the different structures of the agencies into account, the Vietnam case require much work in order to harmonize the programme cycles for example; a two-track approach was the desired from the initial stages, arguing that inclusion of all the agencies in the UNCT Vietnam is impossible at the same time.

This episode was undoubtedly not the preferred outcome of any UN agencies in Vietnam; nonetheless, it provides a good example of how organizational inertia surfaces in a multifaceted organization like the United Nations.

In sum, the leaders at headquarters level need to come together if a country level reform is to succeed – this is also the case of the UN Vietnam, but the commitment of the leaders at country level, particularly from the ExCom agencies, has proven to be vital in implementing the One Plan and other reform measures. But, as one UN official mentions, the reason why the reform has progressed in Vietnam is partly linked with the personalities of the three ExCom Representatives. UN reform needs committed leaders and that has been the case in Vietnam – there is however

some concern that the pro-reform chemistry might fade if the personalities left and were replaced. This, however, is pure speculation though and as the One Plan is institutionalized over the next years it can be anticipated that it will be able to be less reliant on personalities and thus less vulnerable.

A concrete issue of the One UN reform in Vietnam is the One UN House, that is predicted to have a strong unifying effect on the agencies – with all the agencies under one roof, the outcome is destined to be positive. First of all it is very practical for the agencies as they will no longer have to spend time on transport to and from meetings with UN counterparts. Secondly it makes sense for the National counterparts as well and the donors also see it as an important step towards having greater coherence. Besides the obvious reasons that are linked to practical issues, the One UN House will create a common UN identity, based on the experiences from the One Plan and other One UN related efforts. The intra-agency communication will be improved and the level of informal meetings will increase, which could very well have a positive effect on the understanding between the agencies. Although, building a One UN House requires full ownership from all the agencies, if the physical component of the One Un reform is to be a success. UN Houses are found in other countries, however, these are mostly regarded as housing ExCom agencies and the definitions are not suggesting per se that the specialized agencies are invited to join. The Vietnam case could change this practice and it would lend increased legitimacy to the One UN reform if all the agencies of the UNCT come together physically.

The development agencies in the United Nations are forced to change their modus operandi, forget their own interests and start working for the common goal of achieving the MDG's. Taking the first steps towards increased coherence and efficiency is difficult, yet not impossible, as the UN Vietnam case duly illustrates. The UNCT Vietnam have understood that there is no way around a more harmonized and flexible approach to their efforts – the agencies not only risk losing out on resources from donors and their relevance in developing countries but more importantly, their entire *raison d'être*.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis proved that reform in the United Nations depends on the support of member-states. Having members of the United Nations that only wish to attack its actions and promote their own interests, especially cost-saving measures, is a real and serious barrier to reform in the UN. As such, the United Nations development system can not reform itself alone, unless there is a consensus on the direction of reform.

The basic principles of the One UN, coherence and efficiency, are well known aspects of the United Nations. Reports on streamlining and harmonizing UN operations at global, regional and country level are legion, yet a unified stance has never been achieved between the member-states. The political interests of distinct donor groupings has been of either pro-reform character, like the One UN that advocates coherence and 'Delivering as One' or their clear opposition, in terms of the cost-saving measures championed the United States – and these forces have been too strong to agree on a joint donor consensus.

The role of the 'partners' or recipients of the United Nations development activities has also been a restraining factor en route to a more coherent and unified UN, delivering the programmes where the UN has its core competences and comparative advantages. The G77 has its divisions as well and the One UN is a prime example that not everyone in that grouping is willing to listen to the reservations from China and India in particular. The eight One UN pilot countries have voluntarily pledged their support to the One UN reform and have agreed to try a new and enhanced way of cooperation with the UN in regards to the strategies for social and economic development. The case study of the UN Vietnam has clarified the need for a positive Government combined with a donor community that supports change and is willing to take a risk on the One UN reform. Although, the risks may prove difficult to visualise as a more coherent and efficient UN will in the long term picture benefit all parts of the development enterprise, especially the real constituents of the United Nations – the people. Unless there is the appropriate level of support from the development partners at country level, reforms in the United Nations will also meet a strong barrier. Naturally the developing countries should be able to chose and adapt their own policies on working with the United Nations as well as the donors, but it is my firm conviction that the One UN reform, if implemented with respect for national priorities, will prove very vital in reaching development benchmarks such as the Millennium Development Goals.

The concluding remarks as to whether the UN would be able to implement reform and the One UN reform in particular, must be found on two levels. First of all, the intergovernmental discussions between the member-states, rich or poor, need to be directed into a consensus on what reform should entail. I see the Secretary-General structure as critical in mediating this joint consensus. Secondly, the donors and their direct counterparts found in the national governments of the developing countries must move closer and ratify the Paris Declaration in order to facilitate the One UN reform. The tripartite nature of cooperation found in Vietnam has proved to be essential for the positive results reached so far, with the One Plan as the primary example. In sum, if member-states across the board can leave their own interests behind and work towards an improved operational status of the United Nations, reforms can be implemented.

The issue concerning the different agencies located in the UN development context resembles the above discussions to a large extent. ExCom agencies and specialized agencies must overcome their own institutional and bureaucratic interests if they want to sustain their relevance and adhere to the normative mandates that have fundamental distinctions. But unless the agencies across the board cooperate on cross-cutting issues and find a unified strategy where their comparative advantages are promoted, they will cut of the very branch on which they rest. The UN Vietnam has, with the One Plan 2006-2010 made the first vital steps to ensure that their future role will be strengthened. It is not sensible to have agencies at headquarter levels that duplicate each other and encompass the same development challenges – neither is it sensible to have agencies at country level that reflect this duplication. Examples of agency activities that proliferate without clear directions are legion. Health issues need not be undertaken by six agencies but could be dealt with by one or perhaps two agencies. The One Plan will not eradicate the problems instantly, but the fact that agencies come together and discuss their programme activities, project cycles and modalities is a big step towards greater coherence.

The UNDG provides a structure to create and propel a unified headquarter strategy on development. At the moment, the disagreement and misunderstandings between the different agencies at headquarters level make it difficult to predict that they will work in unison. However, the distance from headquarters to the country level agencies implementing the development programmes, seems to be a restraining barrier towards a coherent and efficient strategy on both levels. Having vast structures of bureaucracy and complex reporting lines at headquarters and country level makes the distance even greater. Nonetheless, I firmly believe that there are positive signals on the way. The case of the UN Vietnam proves that inertia at headquarters levels play a major role in reforming the development structure – however, change can happen without a unified stance from headquarters as the Vietnam story also exemplifies. It does, however, take a lot of resources and the right mixture of individuals and agency commitment combined with a strong ownership of the government and donors. It remains doubtful if the One UN in Vietnam would have progressed the positive way it did, had this mixture been different. When that is said, the challenges are far from over for the UNCT in Vietnam. This is merely the first small step, yet agreeing on a One Plan is extraordinary. The next six months will reveal if there are any positive outcomes in the first place that point to increased coherence and efficiency. The real struggle will be for the participating agencies and the agencies outside the One UN initiative to agree on the content and modalities in the One Plan when they will be invited to join in 2008. On the positive side, the UNDG Chair has called for inclusion of all agencies and having said that, the support and acceptance of One Plan should come about in all headquarters, particularly those of the specialized agencies.

In sum, reconciliation between the agencies across the board could be edging closer, and if that is to be endorsed in the various headquarters, the One UN reform in Vietnam has a fair chance of setting precedence in the United Nations development system. However, it requires hard work and undertakes countless discussions and compromises – and as reform doesn't come about easily, there is a great likelihood of 'blood on the floor, blood on the walls and blood on the ceiling' to use the words of a realistic yet idealistic representative of an ExCom agency from the UNCT Vietnam.

## PERSPECTIVES ON UN REFORM

In this chapter, I reflect on the challenges for UN reform and elaborate on the implications for the global development architecture in a theoretical and practical context while linking the lessons learned from this study to future research on the subject.

*Political realism* stress that nations-states protect their own interests, thus limiting international consensus and cooperation. This in turn creates a global development structure where the gap between the would-be reformers and the reform critical are widening. This polarization is evident between donors and the recipients in the developing countries, leading to further complications in the quest for a unified aid structure with common values, strategies and interests. The Paris Declaration try to solve this problem, yet there is still a passion for earmarking and new initiatives from the donors, where their own interests are promoted. As a result, the donors impose huge costs on recipients in the aid and development industry, ignoring the national priorities and strategies outlined by the developing countries. A shift towards more bilateral assistance and less multilateral assistance will prove to be critical to the United Nations - and prove a paradox as the UN and ECOSOC in particular could be the forum for multilateral discussions and decision-making. The world's leaders need to agree on a strategy for global development where multilateralism is in focus, coupled with mobilizing donor societies around a problem-solving approach. Indeed the sprawling aid and development architecture is a challenge for the donors, but the real challenges for development are found in the poor countries. The 'South' - primarily the G77 - voice their concerns over a new aid architecture that will repeat a Northern-driven development agenda. Ergo, the theoretical assumptions presented by Morgenthau provide valuable explanation to the case of reform in the United Nations in the year 2007. The practical implications based on the recurrent disagreement among member-states reflect that reform is a tough task, as the first step, agreeing on a common strategy for the United Nations development area is very difficult. Structural change does occur in some areas, as the UN Vietnam case study proved, however, there is a basic premise in change management, signalling that structure must follow strategy. And at the moment no joint strategy exists on the direction of the United Nations - which in part explains why its structures are so fragmented and uncontrollable.

Lessons learned from the One UN Vietnam case study iterates that support and communication between the headquarters and the local agency entities must be good if reforms are to be implemented. This includes a joint strategy that reflect a unified plan from the member-states on the development architecture and a strong will among the development agencies to cooperate and focus on what they can achieve in unison, rather than fight over the same resources and development mandates.

From a research point of view, this study has uncovered a number of issues that could prove useful for future research. First of all, a basic understanding of the complexity of the UN system and its problems have, to some extent, explained why reforms are such a recurring yet problematic aspect in the United Nations. Secondly, this platform can be utilized to generate more knowledge on these issues and to follow the One UN reform in Vietnam from its inception to its implementation would prove valuable in understanding the reform from country level. Many research articles about UN reform have focused on the high-level politics in headquarters,

neglecting the important 'pioneer-work' carried out on the country level. A dual relationship is in order and it can be perceived that the progress made with the One UN in Vietnam will have implications on the discussions in a number of development forums across the world.

Nevertheless, the 'One UN – Deliver as One' reform has been started and it remains to be seen how well it would fare in the pilot countries as well as in the headquarters and in the member-states. One thing remains certain, the final steps towards coherence and efficiency are years away and the intervening period will provide an indication of whether or not the United Nations can live up to its moral principles and facilitate the achievement of e.g. the Millennium Development Goals.

It is my clear conviction that this master's thesis proves useful in explaining why the UN must reform and why it hasn't yet been able to do so. The question on how the United Nations can overcome the problems encountered so far in terms of incoherence and inefficiency has not been easy to answer in a concrete and practical manner – this is, however, linked to the lack of essential agreement and consensus on a global level. Nonetheless, uncovering the constraining issues and challenges is an important task for researchers and I would recommend further investigation into the field of United Nations reform. The first step of change comes with acknowledging the need for change and the identification of the areas where change is required.

The paradox of the One UN reform is that it is UN trying to reform itself with little resources for the process. Private sector organizations and corporations in all spheres have acknowledged the need for change from time to time – however there is also a tradition that independent management companies or change consultancies are given the task to identify the vulnerable and weak areas and then outline a reform strategy. This approach presents a report that is not tangled up in politics and has a more clinical and professional approach to how changes in organizations are to be presented, decided and implemented. I do not claim that the UN is like any other private enterprise and must thus rely on these services – the point is that inspiration and help from these change consultancies could be used to a larger extent, just as the researchers of development studies could contribute a great deal. The researchers should acknowledge the impetus for a general discussion about what kinds of aid that works and how to make aid work better – there should be discussions and consultations that could provide a platform for interaction between researchers and development practitioners, effectively narrowing the gap between these two parties. Perhaps these discussions would suggest more focus on multilateralism and strengthening the institutions like the UN, World Bank and the European Union development agency. Perhaps it would foster an acknowledgement of recipient governments leading the aid coordination and to provide a simpler system - then the proliferation among donors and UN agencies may be perceived as less harmful. Perhaps the development agenda has too big challenges ahead with the polarized member-states, yet an agreement is critical if the development benchmarks like the Millennium Development Goal's is to be achieved.

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## Appendix 1: Chronology of UN Reforms

### Major reforms 1945-2007

This section will first provide the reader with a brief overview of the major reforms in the United Nations from its birth in 1945 up until 1992. The changes brought about by various Secretary Generals have come roughly every eight years and spanning over a couple of years (Paul 1996: 1).

- 1953-56: Peace-keeping forces and anti-war policies are adopted.
- 1964-66: Enlargement of the General Assembly in the wake of the great decolonization era.
- 1974-77: Social and economic restructuring etc.
- 1985-86: Implementation of a consensus-based planning, programming and budgeting process.

Secondly a brief chronology of UN reforms from 1992-present will follow – allowing the reader to seek a greater understanding of the many reform initiatives taken in the last fifteen years. I will note that the list is selective and does not entail every reformatory move, yet it highlights the most important events. The list is primarily inspired by the Global Policy Forum (GPF) - a New York based organization monitoring policy making at the United Nations.

- **1992:** Boutros Boutros-Ghali comes into office as Secretary General and changes the organization of the Secretariat. Reduces the status of UN Disarmament work. Closes down the UN Centre on Transnational Corporations. SG issues a reform plan in the peace/security area titled *An Agenda for Peace*.  
The Rio World Summit sets new and improved standards for NGO and public involvement in global conferences (GPF 2006: 1).
- **1993:** The UN General Assembly creates the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Security Council sees the “Arria Formula” give the council invitations to guests, thus providing the Council with new information. The Volcker-Ogata Commission, on request by the SG, studies UN finance and concludes that member states should pay their bills on time, in full and without conditions. UN’s reserve funds should furthermore be increased substantially.  
5 Working Groups is set up by the GA to consider reforms in the run-up to the UN 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and beyond. Relatively few important results emerge. The Working Group on Security Council reform continues its debates long after other groups wind up (GPF 2006: 1-2).
- **1994:** The General Assembly sets up the Office of Internal Oversight Services, a watchdog body to look out for malfeasance and inefficiency at the UN. SG issues another major reform document titled *An Agenda for Development*, responding to complaints that his first report gave unbalanced attention to security issues (GPF 2006: 2).
- **1995:** Conservatives in the US Congress, spurred by the Heritage Foundation and other right-wing think tanks, insist that the UN abandon work on ending poverty and universalizing health care in favour of “attainable goals and useful activities” like disaster relief and humanitarian assistance to refugees.  
A gathering of world leaders at the UN’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary General Assembly affirms broad support for the UN, but the leaders agree on few reform changes.

The UN is suffering increasing financial crisis due to large arrears of the US contribution. UN officials advocate global taxes to address the funding crisis, but this proposal is turned down by the US, where some politicians claim that the US should withdraw as a member.

The UN sets up an Efficiency Board, with leading outside experts to advise on steps towards greater Secretariat efficiency (GPF 2006: 2).

- **1996:** The South Centre publishes *For A Strong and Democratic United Nations* – a major report that sharply criticizes pressures from Washington for UN downsizing, favoring instead greater democracy, better funding and a larger development role for the UN (GPF 2006: 3).
- **1997:** ECOSOC agrees to new arrangements for NGO access, resulting in improved Ngo rights. However, shortly after, member states rebuff accreditation of NGO's to the General Assembly. Kofi Annan is presented as new Secretary General and announces a reform package and appoints an Under Secretary for Reform. Annan merges several units into a new Department for Economic and Social Affairs and seeks to reduce secretariat costs. The UN creates a new Senior Management Group to better coordinate operations.  
Responding to downsizing demands from the US, the UN reduces its regular staff and uses and increasing number of temporary consultants and staff on short-term contracts.  
In the Security Council, individual ambassadors begin to hold regular meetings with a group of NGO's (GPF 2006: 3).
- **1998:** UN accepts a ten-year gift program totalling \$1 billion from US media magnate Ted Turner, setting the controversial precedent of seeking funding from private donors for UN programming (GPF 2006: 3).
- **1999:** The Security Council decides to hold more open meetings and to organize its meetings on a more flexible basis (GPF 2006: 4).
- **2000:** NGO's held the Millennium Forum in May and make extensive proposals to the General Assembly. World leaders attend the Millennium Summit in September and adopt a statement of affirming UN policies, including support for the "Millennium Development Goals" (MDG's).  
SG Kofi Annan sets up the Global Compact, a rights-based initiative addressed to private business corporations and financed outside the UN's regular budget. The UN and its agencies begin policy "partnerships" with companies. Many NGO's protest this intrusion of business and charge that the Global Compact provide public relations for corporate malefactors.  
The Security Council's Working Group on Sanctions comes close to completing negotiation of a text to improve sanctions procedures.  
To resolve tensions with Washington over dues assessment and payment, UN member states agrees to a new scale that reduces Washington's regular dues from 25% to 22% of the budget and its peacekeeping assessment from 30% to 27. Other nations reluctantly pick up the difference.  
The "Brahimi Reforms" regarding UN Peacekeeping sees many of its useful changes accepted in the General Assembly which strengthen the Peacekeeping Operations substantively (GPF 2006: 4).

- **2001:** The UN introduces IMIS (Integrated Management and Information System) for budget and management information worldwide (GPF 2006: 5).
- **2002:** Kofi Annan begins his second term as SG and announces further reforms. Under pressure from Washington, the Department of Public Information closes nine UN information in Western Europe leaving only one in Brussels.  
The International Criminal Court begins work at the Hague, after many nations have ratified the Rome Statute of 1998. For the first time, a permanent international court can prosecute individuals responsible for gross violations of human rights and international law (GPF 2006: 5).
- **2003:** The US and UK attack Iraq in defiance of the Security Council. Many governments and UN officials – as well as the worldwide public – regret the UN’s inability to prevent war from and wonder what the UN future holds. Secretary General Annan gives speech at the opening of the General Assembly in September, saying the UN is at a “fork in the road” and calling for reforms to strengthen the organization (GPF 2006: 5).
- **2004:** A blue-ribbon panel on “Threats, Challenges and Change” studies global security issues and makes recommendations for institutional reform and policy initiatives. The report links security, development and the environment and it proposes a new Peace building Commission and a Human Rights Council (GPF 2006: 5).
- **2005:** Following intense pressure from Washington, Annan agrees to major personnel changes at the top levels of the organizations.  
Annan issues his report *In Larger Freedom*, based on the “Threats” panel report. Intergovernmental negotiations begin on the Millennium+5 summit reform document. After month of negotiations, Washington objects several passages in the official summit document effectively wrecking the negotiations. The Summit takes place with a wide range of leaders represented but only minor reforms and weak policy results emerge.  
A number of countries make bids for permanent seats in the UN Security Council. All bids falter as US and China opposes the bid as does the majority of the members in the General Assembly (GPF 2006: 6).
- **2006:** Under pressure from Washington and with only six months of UN budget authorized, the SG calls for extensive management reforms that would shift power to the office of the SG from the General Assembly. UN staff and the G-77 vigorously oppose these proposed measures.  
More transparency and accountability is requested in the process of selecting the next Secretary General. Ban-Ki Moon is chosen as the next SG to replace Kofi Annan on January 1, 2007.  
The Secretary General names a high-level panel to consider consolidation of the UN’s many agencies, funds and programs. The panel presents its reform ideas in November under the title “One UN – Deliver as One” aiming to merge a number of its internal organizations into three main areas: development, humanitarian assistance and environment. The new reform package gets a mixed welcome. Pilot countries start to implement the reform that proposes one

program, one leader, one budget, one management framework and one office at country level (GPF 2006: 6).

- **2007:** Ban-Ki Moon opens office as General Secretary, inheriting the many reform proposals of Kofi Annan, including the “One UN”, which he will try to implement on global, regional, national and local level. Despite the endorsements of the One UN, some hesitation is recorded as member-states of the United Nations express concern over the One UN initiative, especially the country level changes.

**One programme**

- Country owned and signed off by Government, responsive to the national development framework, strategy and vision, including the internationally agreed development goals.
- Building on the United Nations country team's common country assessment or national analysis and reflecting the United Nations added value in the specific country context.
- Strategic, focused and results-based, with clear outcomes and priorities, while leaving flexibility to reallocate resources to changes in priorities.
- Drawing on all United Nations services and expertise, including those of non-resident agencies, in order to effectively deliver a multi-sectoral approach to development (with due attention to crosscutting issues).

**One leader**

- Resident coordinator authority to negotiate the One Country Programme with the Government on behalf of the entire United Nations system and to shape the One Country Programme (including the authority to allocate resources from pooled and central funding mechanisms).
- Clear accountability framework for resident coordinators and an effective oversight mechanism for the resident coordinator system.
- Resident coordinator authority to hold members of the team accountable to agreed outcomes and for compliance with the strategic plan. The resident coordinator should also be accountable to the members of the United Nations country team.
- Strengthened resident coordinator capacity with adequate staff support to manage United Nations country team processes and ensure effective dialogue and communication with partners.
- Competitive selection of resident coordinator candidates, drawn from the best talent within and outside the United Nations system.

**One budgetary framework**

- Transparency, management, and the effective implementation of the One Country Programme through one budgetary framework.
- Funding should be linked to the performance of the United Nations country team preparing and implementing a strategic One Country Programme.
- The budget should be completely transparent, showing clearly the overheads and transaction costs of the United Nations and all of its funds, programmes and specialized agencies in the country.

**One office**

- One integrated results-based management system, with integrated support services.
- Joint premises (where appropriate).

Source: *UNDG 2006h: 22-23*

**Appendix 3: Interview list**

No.	Organization/Agency	Interviewees	
1.	UNDP	Mr. Koos Neefjes	Adviser, Sustainable Development Cluster
2.	UNDP	Mr. Jonathan Pincus	Senior Economist
3.	UNICEF	Mr. Jesper Morch	Representative
4.	Office of the Resident Coordinator	Ms. Kitty van der Heijden	UN Reform Advisor
5.	UNV	Ms. Ida Munck	Programme Officer
6.	Norwegian Embassy	Ms. Snøfrid B. Emterud	First Secretary
7.	ILO	Ms. Rose Marie Greve	Director
8.	Office of the Resident Coordinator	Ms. Mette Fjalland	UN Coordination Specialist
9.	Office of the Resident Coordinator	Mr. John Hendra	UNRC and UNDP Representative
10.	UNFPA	Mr. Ian Howie	Representative
11.	UNESCO	Ms. Vibeke Jensen	Representative

**Appendix 4: Interview guide**

The interview guide is divided into four parts. The four parts play a certain role for the quality and character of the data collection. The first part is the briefing, followed by a presentation where the interview persons explain his/her position in the organization, his/her tasks and so on. The third part introduces the hypotheses and interview questions. The interview will finish with a debriefing.

**Briefing**

- The interview that is to start in a little while is a substantial and important part of the investigation I am conducting regarding the “One UN” reform in Vietnam.
- In the start of the interview I would kindly like you to introduce yourself and your functions in the organization [This should make the interviewee feel more at ease and relaxed which would allow for a more free conversation as him/her starts to discuss some issues that that he/she feels confident about].
- I will record the interview, allowing my self to concentrate on a free flowing conversation. I will delete the recordings after the thesis evaluation.
- My role is to ask the questions and will also take notes when interesting points are made or there may be some statements that I would like to have elaborated later on.
- The timeframe of the interview is set to be around 30-45 minutes, hopefully allowing time to get round all the aspects and questions. [I may speed things up I feel a time pressure].
- If I ask a question that you don’t understand, please feel free to bring this to my attention and I will rephrase or elaborate accordingly. [I will to the extent that is required respect the behavioural and linguistic protocol used within the UN system].

**Presentation of initial questions**

- What is your role in the “One UN” reform process?
- What does the “One UN” reform mean for your professional position?
- What are the main challenges regarding the One UN on a political as well as a practical level?

**Hypothesis & Interview questions**

External Pressures	
<p><b>Power &amp; Interests</b> Hypothesis 1: The main force driving international politics is the concept of interests defined in power – member-states seek power over other member-states in the United Nations thus acting self-centred, self-regarding and self-interested limiting a consensus on UN reform.</p> <p>Hypothesis 2: The determinant of political action in the United Nations over a particular period in history is the political interests,</p>	<p><b>Power &amp; Interests</b> - How do you view the power relations of international politics affect the discussion on reforming the United Nations? - Are there any member-states that are more pro UN reform than others?</p> <p>- To what extent do you see the geo-political interests shape the UN? - Are the national interests of the member-states</p>

<p>shaping the context, structure and culture of reform in the UN.</p> <p><b>Moral principles &amp; International cooperation</b> Hypothesis 3: Moral principles can never be fully realized, but must be a balance of interests thereby aiming at the realization of the lesser evil than the absolute good.</p> <p>Hypothesis 4: A multilateral organization like the United Nations must utilize the windows of opportunity made available by the member-states in order to homogenise, harmonize and reproduce standard expectations vested in the moral principles of the various charters and declarations and thereby delivering international consensus for development</p>	<p>evident in their call for UN reform?</p> <p><b>Moral principles &amp; International cooperation</b> - What kind of moral principles do you view affect the United Nations and the way it should reform?</p> <p>- Are there any particular member-states that seek to stabilize the international order more than others? - How efficient do the member-states view the UN? - How does the UN Vietnam utilize the windows of opportunity in regards to reform?</p>
<p><b>Organizational inertia</b></p>	
<p><b>Leadership, authority &amp; Staff</b> Hypothesis 5: Changes in the United Nations development area must be instigated from management at headquarter levels of the organization alongside acknowledging proposals from the regional and country level managers insofar reforms are to be successfully implemented.</p> <p>Hypothesis 6: Change management in a multinational organization i.e. the UN requires specific attention to the job security of the employees if a reform is to be implemented successfully. <i>Leadership and Authority</i> Change in organizations can be instigated from above, allowing leaders to change the form of the organization.</p> <p><b>Identity, Culture &amp; Communication</b> Hypothesis 7: A lack of a joint office for the</p>	<p><b>Leadership, authority &amp; Staff</b> - How would you view the leadership of the org. involved in the reform in Vietnam? - How would you describe the resources of the management in terms of implementing the reform? (Time, staff, work-shop activities) - Does the leadership/management here hold enough power/legitimacy to achieve the reforms? - How would you describe the level of support from headquarters level of the United Nations?</p> <p>- To what extent is the staff of UN Vietnam used to reforms and how can this routine experience affect the outcome of the One UN? - How would you view the staff's ability to comply with the reform? (initiative, content, implementation) Pro – con? Why? - Is the reform compliant with the wishes or aspirations of the staff?</p> <p><b>Identity, Culture &amp; Communication</b> - How much do the reformers reflect on the organizational identity of the agencies in the UN Vietnam?</p>

<p>entire UN country level presence poses a barrier for the One UN to be implemented – failing to acknowledge the importance of physical structures as identity creating often hampers a reform.</p> <p>Hypothesis 8: Distinct organizational cultures i.e. behaviour, rules and expectations of the various UN agencies may prove to be a barrier for a joint One UN culture in the UN staff at country level and could pose a hindrance to effective implementation of the reform.</p> <p>Hypothesis 9: Leaders and staff in organizations require information and their working abilities and subsequent reform efforts will be hampered if the communication is sub-standard – this goes for the internal and external communication.</p> <p><b>Institutional environments</b></p> <p>Hypothesis 10: Reformers should consider the interdependent status of organizations as their role in society is largely dictated by the level of legitimacy provided by its constituents - in case a reform alters the <i>raison d'être</i> of an organization, the outcome may eventually limit the final reform effort.</p>	<p>- Is it possible to describe an institutional identity of UN Vietnam (UN Country team)?</p> <p>- What is the progress and future role of the One UN House here in Hanoi?</p> <p>- How would you describe the organizational culture of UN Vietnam? (Cooperative, conflictual?)</p> <p>- How do you view the level of internal communication in regards to the One UN here in Vietnam?</p> <p>- How do you view the external communication in regards to the One UN here in Vietnam?</p> <p><b>Institutional environments</b></p> <p>- Could you please define the external pressure that UN Vietnam is facing?</p> <p>- How do you view the institutional environment in which UN Vietnam is layered?</p> <p>- What role does the institutional environment play in the UN reform?</p> <p>- Do you feel that the external environment has some norms that you as an organisation should live up to?</p> <p>- Are there any indications of management within UN Vietnam institutionalizing the outside norms &amp; values?</p>
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## Debriefing

- I would like to hear if you have any comments or questions here at the end?
- Well, thank you very much for your cooperation, it is highly appreciated.
- End of Interview.