Managing Portfolios of Development Projects in a Complex Environment
How the UN assign priorities to Programs at the Country Level.

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Abstract

**Purpose:** This research intends to shed a light in the practice of project portfolio management in the non-traditional – although project oriented – aid sector. The research aim is to study the decision-making structures supporting the prioritization of projects and/or programmes in multilateral organizations, which play a determinant role in the development aid sector.

**Research Methodology:** Through an in-depth and-holistic case study, the empirical research investigated how the UN coordination practitioners perceived the role of the context in the implementation of the Delivery as One Approach, which comprehends a set of standards and procedures (SOPs) supporting the management of multiple UN entities at the country level, to enhance effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and impact. A total of 9 semi-structured interviews were conducted with current and former employees in the UN resident coordination office in a range of countries in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. From the collection of qualitative data, the researchers were able to grasp the nuances of the data set through the elaboration of templates, which based the further discussion and conclusions of the work.

**Research Findings:** The empirical findings confirmed the relevance of a number of constructs identified in the theoretical framework, defining how the context influences the decision making that takes place in the prioritization of programmes in the development aid sector. Specifically, the results highlight the relevance of the governance structure, the bounded rationality of decision makers, specific characteristics of the decision, country peculiarities, and the different sources of uncertainty. Moreover, the relationships between these factors were highlighted through a relationship network diagram that clearly identifies the complex interrelations between these factors and their sub-themes.

**Research Delimitations and Limitations:** The delimitations in this study are characterized as the choices made by the researchers on the parameters considered and mentioned, setting the boundaries for the investigation. From a methodological standpoint, by using the single case study method, the findings and conclusion of the present research applies majorly to the organization studied.

**Originality / Value:** This research advances the portfolio management literature on the field of international development aid and expands the understanding of how the aspects of this unique environment influences the decision making of assigning priorities to projects and programmes. Furthermore, the research draws attention to the different sources of uncertainties originating from the context, inherent of these types of organizations.

**Keywords:** Portfolio Management, International Development Projects, Portfolio Prioritization, Decision Making, Influence of Context, United Nations.
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Acronyms

CCA – Common Country Analysis
CAQDAS – Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
SOPs – Standard Operating Procedures
IPMA – International Project Management Association
QCPR – Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
PMI – Project Management Institute
RC – Resident Coordinator
SDG’s – Sustainable Development Goals
UN – United Nations
UNCT – United Nations Country Team
UNDAF – United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG – United Nations Development Group
1 Introduction

“Our rapidly changing world has made notable progress in recent years, such as in halving global poverty and sending many more children to school. At the same time, development gains and deprivations are unevenly distributed, and inequality is entrenched within and across countries. The sustainability of current achievements needs consistent commitment and follow-through in order to provide for the needs of current and future generations.” (UNDG, 2014, p. 2)

Development is a key concept of the 20th century – political economy and social policy, which refers to the general process of “social change or to class or state projects to transform national economies, particularly in formerly colonialized or third world geographies” (Gregory & Johnston, 2009, p. 155). Particularly, the concept of international development was introduced after World War II referring to the “ensemble of institutions, policies, disciplinary formations, and, most importantly, practices of intervention in the alleviation of poverty in the Third World recently decolonized nations” (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 155). From that moment, international development specifically refers to the intervention by governments, rich and poor, and by a range of international institutions and organizations in civil society.

Over the past 40 years, countries have tended to delegate to multilateral organizations – the World Bank, the UN, and Regional Development Banks – their varying amounts of aid for development (Hawkins et al., 2006, p. 107). This type of organizations is the result of “agreements, treaties and co-operative actions between states” (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 482). They also comprehend at least three states among their members and are subject to law as separate standings (Karns & Mingst, 2004, p. 5), meaning that they are seen as independent entities in the eyes of law. Generally, the main aim of multilateral organizations is to enhance collective welfare through cooperation (Karns & Mingst, 2004, p. 6). Particularly after World War II, multilateral institutions were established to pursue social and/or political international goals. Characteristic of this form of agreement is the coordinated behaviour of the members through generalized principles of conduct, hence a big role played by norms and rules (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 482; Karns & Mingst, 2004, p. 7). Subsequently, the alignment to these principles provides a clear structure and administrative support to increase the efficiency of collective activities. The way in which multilateral organizations provide their function depends on the members and the scope. Currently, one of the highest profiles of multilateral institutions is the United Nations, which replaced the ‘League of Nations’ after World War II with the main purpose of preventing war between states. Nowadays, multilateral action of social and international movements has a new dimension, mainly addressing human rights, global warming and other issues of the global civil society (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 482). For instance, the role of many of the UN agencies is to provide aid services such as: United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Food Programme, Pan American Health Organization, World Health Organization, among others.

Multilateral channels are claimed to provide high-quality of aid, being need-oriented, and in the interests of the recipients rather than of political utility of donor countries (Hawkins et al., 2006, p. 138). However, two thirds of aid is still given through bilateral channels that have a higher degree of control over expenditures and selection of projects (Hawkins et al., 2006, p. 107). In fact, multilateral organizations involve a number of concerns, that include the power relationships among members, the authority and legitimacy of the
global governance, the accountability and transparency of the institutions and, as common to all types of institutions, the effectiveness and ability to deliver (Karns & Mingst, 2004, p. 29). In particular, the effectiveness is affected by the complexity of the international issues and the uncertainties of the context in which they arise (Karns & Mingst, 2004, p. 33). Moreover, different types of multilateral organizations will have varying amounts of available resources and levels of bureaucracy and effectiveness (Karns & Mingst, 2004, p. 6). Debates about the functions and effects of bureaucracies in fact persist in our days, and they are mostly developed around the theories generated by Max Weber (Adler, 2011, p. 244). In his view, bureaucracy is the most efficient and rational way to organize human activity. At the same time, however, it traps people in an “iron cage” of rule-based and rational control (Waters & Waters, 2015, p. 74).

It is interesting to understand how this apparently efficient mechanistic structure of multilateral organizations allows addressing to challenging issues of society. As O’Brien et al. (2000, p. 1) quote in the introduction of their book:

“The terms of the International Monetary Fund adjustment programmes influence the life chances of the people in developing countries, a decision of the World Bank to prioritize girls’ education can open up possibilities for personal and community development, and the ability of the World Trade Organization to balance environmental concerns with trade liberalization may serve or condemn an ecological system. For hundreds of millions of people, the work of this type of institutions matter a great deal”.

Especially, we wondered how this efficient mechanistic structure of multilateral organizations for development aid issues, allows to respond to the said complexity of the uncertain context – Internal and external aspects that set the circumstances in which the organization operates; which can be perceived as the “societal role of the organization and environmental, technological and human resource factors” (Ring & Perry, 1985, p. 276). In particular, debates are taking place among practitioners and researches on the effectiveness of aid on two different levels (Ika, 2012, p. 27). On the macroeconomic perspective the question is whether aid is contributing to international development and alleviating poverty. On the microeconomic level, the question is whether projects and programs achieve their objectives. Concerning the latter, although the literature that considers project and programmes management for development is quite limited, it highlights the uniqueness of the environment in which they take place. It this sector it is claimed that “projects managers or coordinators have to deal with complexity, resistance to change, competing agendas of a large number of stakeholders, and diverse and even contradictory expectations that render compromises very difficult to reach” (Ika et al., 2010, p. 63).

Particularly, considering that multilateral organizations typically involve a large number of project and programmes at the same time, we wondered how the coordination and the joint-management of these, through portfolio practices, would be affected by the uniqueness of the environment. Particularly, we considered as a relevant matter to understand how at the operational level of portfolio management, the prioritization of projects and programmes take place. Typically, the decision making taking place at this level is claimed to be defined by a structured process, based on rational data and logics (Levine, 2005, p. 461; Rod & Levin, 2006, p. 13). However, a number of constructs in the general model of portfolio decision-making effectiveness connects to, complements,
or extends, existing concepts in the organizational behaviour management, and other literatures.

These theories suggest that decision processes and changes within organizations cannot be explained through linear cause and effect models, but they are the result of the interaction between choice and determinism (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 347). This means, that it is the result of strategic choices and changes in the external environment. Weber (1947) refers to it as a “struggle” between the organization and the environment, which changes depending on where the power resides, on the control over scarce resources, and on the emergence of different actors.

In this view, a combined set of theoretical lenses needs to be used as to advance understanding on the decision-making taking place in portfolio management (Kester et al., 2011, p. 656). In their study Kester et al. (2011, p. 641) found that "portfolio management decision making may be better understood if it is considered as an integrated system of processes that considers these decisions simultaneously, along with multiple decisions such as those to continue a project with reduced funding”. In fact, the view of portfolio management as rational decision-making process is being challenged by various authors, who are transcending more towards the empirical research, rather than the development of tools and techniques, looking at what companies carry out in the daily processes (Blichfeldt & Eskerod, 2008, p. 358).

Young & Conboy (2013, p. 1092) in their study on contemporary portfolio management claim that there are some issues concerning the literature that include the lack of clarity, theoretical glue and applicability. Particularly, Martinsuo & Lehtonen (2007, p. 63) suggested that further studies should understand what kind of actions contribute to the outcomes of portfolio management, among which the context of decision making. Müller et al. (2008, p.28) argue that much has been written on the management of programs and projects, while less attention has been given to portfolios. Moreover, there is little evidence of the implication of “good practises” of portfolio management and whether they result in good achievements (Müller et al, 2008, p. 29). Petit (2012, p. 552) suggests that further research could help understand the different types of environment in which the project portfolio must be managed, and what are the different sources of uncertainty. Martinsuo (2013, p. 794) argues that since any type of project can be part of portfolios, the peculiarities of projects types might be considered for future research arenas (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 794).

In short, the literature that considers the application of portfolio management in different contexts, argues that portfolio management decision making is influenced by a number of additional factors not mentioned in the standards, which are related to the environment (Kester et al., 2011, p. 641; Martinsuo, 2013, p. 801; Müller et al, 2008, p. 39; Petit, 2010, p. 52; Shepherd & Rudd, 2013, p. 356). However, the studies of portfolio management are limited to certain research areas and fail to consider the role of the context in its application (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 801; Müller et al., 2008 p. 39; Petit, 2012, p. 52; Young & Conboy; 2013, p. 1092).

1.1 Research Purpose and Question

The literature that considers the application of the portfolio management model in different contexts is clearly limited and there is call for research to consider the context of decision-making and the management of portfolios in different types of environment.
Taking an extreme case, we noticed that the unique environment characterizing development projects and programmes is not mentioned in the literature at the level of decision making in portfolio management. Notably, there is a gap in the literature that fails to consider how the uniqueness of the environment involved in the development aid sector, affects the management, and particularly the decision making on the prioritization of a portfolio of projects and/or programmes.

Therefore, our research intends to shed a light in the practice of portfolio management in the non-traditional – although project oriented – aid sector. The research purpose is to understand how priorities are assigned to projects and/or programmes in multilateral organizations, hence in which way the context influences the decision-making structures supporting the prioritization process. Particularly we aim to respond to the following question:

“How does the context influence the decision-making structures supporting the prioritization of development projects and programmes in multilateral organizations?”

To answer this question, first the existing literature on two macro-topics will be studied: the one of portfolio management in practice, and the one of development projects. In this way the objectives of this research are firstly, to grasp in which way the context affects the practices of portfolio management, identifying the main factors and components of it. A second objective is to find which are the peculiarities of the environment of development projects, in order to develop an understanding of the main actors and challenges involved in this sector. Lastly, this research objective is to enrich the theoretical findings with the study of the UN coordination system case.
2 Literature Review

The objective of this section is to develop a theoretical framework that fulfils the purpose of the research, which is to explore role of the context within the decision-making structures in a portfolio of development projects/programmes. The literature on the correlated topics was examined and a selection of various concepts attributed to portfolio management and its definition as a governance model is then introduced to the readers. Followed by the concept of decision-making within the operational level of portfolio management, involving the prioritization. Hereafter discussed, is the application of project management in practice and in different contexts, which is challenging the traditional standards of project management. Subsequently, the literature narrows down the focus to the specifics of the environment in the development aid sector, hence presenting the literature of development projects. A final summary is presented in the end, with a useful graphical representation of the main concept arising from this review.

2.1 Portfolio Management

This section presents an overview of portfolio management from the early adoption in the financial industry to today's common definition applicable cross-industry. The concept of portfolio management has been adopted and applied differently in various sectors. It was brought to life in the financial industry, on a paper entitled “Portfolio Selection” written by Harry Markowitz (1952). The initial intention of this method was to introduce a model to apply on the diversification of assets to optimize the return on investments while reducing the risks (Young & Conboy, 2013, p. 1092). Investment analysts identified securities that offered the most promising opportunities for gain with the least risk propensity, and then constructed a portfolio from these securities. Prior to this, investors assessed the risks and benefits of securities individually. This approach resulted in a set of securities that involved various sectors, such as the pharmaceutical and automotive industry. It took some time before the concept was adopted in the IT field, with the same main initial assumption of portfolio management conceived by Markowitz, suggesting that the collective management of unrelated projects optimize the achievement of business outcomes while lowering the organization exposure to risks (Young & Conboy, 2013, p. 1092).

Portfolio management has now reached a common definition that is shared by global standards and practice tool books (Young & Conboy, 2013, p. 1092). In 2006, the Project Management Institute issued a Portfolio Management Standard, which focuses “on portfolio management as it relates the discipline of project and program management” (PMI, 2006, p. 3), claimed to applicable to all types of organizations. This standard defines portfolio management as “a collection of projects (temporary endeavours undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result) and/or programs (a group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually) and other work that are grouped together to facilitate the effective management of that work to meet strategic business objectives” (PMI, 2006, p. 4). At an operational level, portfolio management is seen by PMI as the selection, identification, prioritization, authorization, management and control of the component projects and programs and their associated risks, resources, and priorities (PMI, 2013, p. 5).
The International Project Management Association, in line with PMI, states that portfolio management “is concerned with coordinating the projects and programs of an organization to optimize throughput, balance the risk profile of the portfolio and to manage the alignment of projects in relation to the organization’s strategy and their delivery within budgetary constraints” (IPMA, 2006, p. 15). Examples the Association gives of portfolios are: all the large project demands of a division, all the internal ICT projects of a company, all the projects of a non-profit organizations, all the construction projects of a city, among others.

Furthermost, portfolio management is one of the various governance methods used in organizations, and as such, it aims at creating a structure that supports the alignment, organization and execution of the activities in a coherent way to achieve the strategic goals (PMI 2006, p. 8). Within this governance model, the IPMA (2006, p. 15) claims that the “portfolio is overseen by an individual or body (a project director or an executive board) with the authority and accountability to sanction the use of resources and budgets to deliver those projects” (IPMA, 2006, p. 15).

In the figure representing the organizational context of portfolio management and its structure [Figure 1 - Organizational Context of Portfolio Management], it is possible to identify that portfolio management is situated between the executive board and the operations or projects, to establish the appropriate actions to be carried out at the bottom to meet the organizational goals determined from the top (PMI 2006, p. 6).

Rajegopal (2007, p. 10) reflected on the nature of portfolios and quotes that “it is the bridging that brings together the strategic and the operational” while it “attempts to straddle the gap between the projects themselves, the management process and their accountability to the business” Rajegopal (2007, p.10). He further defined portfolio management as the management of that collection of projects and programs in which a company invests to implement its strategy, for example asset programs, improvement initiatives and strategic change, work streams, among others. A portfolio process can
utilize various techniques to provide tangible results for the business, ensuring that project investments contribute directly to realizing corporate goals. One of the primary and main benefits of a project portfolio management structure is that only the right projects will be selected and/or continued (Rajegopal et al., 2007, p. 10). Thus, the projects in the pipeline will be fully aligned with the strategic business goals of the organization.

This however, might add a level of complexity to managing projects (Rod & Levin, 2006, p. 13). This notion is partially correct, once projects will no longer be conducted as isolated islands in the enterprise being that “project portfolio management is a strategic and mission-driven process that is concerned with the entire enterprise. As such, the results of the project portfolio management optimization process might not be necessarily in the best interest of a given project; rather, they are in the best interest of the enterprise” (Rod & Levin, 2006, p. 13). This might be compensated by the synergies generated from this unified management approach, once all organizational projects will be related to other projects by sharing the same technical goal, by sharing the same budget pool, by sharing the same resource pool, or by contributing to the same strategic initiative (Rod & Levin, 2006, p. 14). In general, regardless of the motivations that were the basis of the implementation, portfolio management has strong potential to result in improvement of operational efficiency; cost saving and increasing profits (Rod & Levin, 2006, p. 21).

In line with Rod & Levin, nowadays several authors claim that focusing on the execution of single projects is insufficient to achieve the business objectives, being that they only concentrate on quality, time and budget compliance as the determinants for success (Heising 2012 p.582; Martinsuo & Lehtonen 2007, p. 56). According to Meskendahl (2010 p. 817); and Heising (2012, p. 582) effective portfolio management is considered as an organization success factor that involves not only the single-projects success but also portfolio balance, strategic fit and use of synergies. In addition to that, Heising (2012, p. 595) argues that the effective management of portfolios has a critical role in encouraging innovation and knowledge creation. The benefits of portfolio management and the reasons for implementing are summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotations</th>
<th>Benefits of Portfolio Management and Motivations</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“…Lowering exposure to risk” “…balance the risk”</td>
<td>Risk management (minimize impact of uncontrolled activities)</td>
<td>Young &amp; Conboy. 2013, p. 1092; IPMA, 2006, p. 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…alignment of projects to business strategy” “…projects fully aligned with the strategic business goals”; “…strategic fit” “…effective management to meet strategic business objectives”</td>
<td>Effectiveness (ability to reach desired result, aligned to strategy)</td>
<td>IPMA, 2006, p.15; Meskendahl 2010; Rajegopal et al. (2007, p.11); Young &amp; Conboy. 2013, p. 1092,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…Optimizes business outcomes” “…operational efficiency” “…cost savings” “…use of synergies” “…delivery within budgetary constraints”</td>
<td>Efficiency (ratio of inputs/outputs)</td>
<td>IPMA, 2006, p.15; Levin (2006, p. 21); Meskendahl 2010; PMI, 2013, p. 4.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To ensure that the company’s business objectives are being supported by the right set of projects, portfolio management involves governance definition and implementation to support the decision-making process (Rajegopal et al. 2007, p. 11). At the operational level, portfolio management is embodied on decision-making, from selecting the right projects and prioritizing them according to the business strategy (Morris and Jamieson, 2005 p. 5), to determine which ones to implement so that the objectives of the organization can be achieved. This implies the continuous update and revision of the projects through a defined reporting process shown in Figure 2 - Report & Review Process Summary (PMI 2006, p. 37). The project portfolio management process assures that the portfolio includes only components relevant for the achievement of strategic goals. To do this, portfolio management involves the decision-making on whether to add, reprioritize or exclude components on the base of their performance (PMI 2006, p. 37; Meredith & Mantel, 2006, p. 44).

![Figure 2 - Report & Review Process Summary. Source: (PMI 2006, p.37)](image)

Although the change and dismissal of projects involves an amount of resources that might exceed the organization’s capabilities, portfolio management need to push towards the continuous evaluation and transformation of project priorities (PMI, 2006, p. 9). This continuous evaluation, selection and prioritization of projects based on the business strategy, leads to achieve portfolio balance [Figure 3 – Cross-Company Portfolio Management Process Relationship].
A balanced portfolio refers to the selection of a project assembly that allows an organization to accomplish its objectives through the application of risk mitigation approaches, taking into consideration the consumption of resources throughout the execution of the project and the creation of profit (Mikkola, 2001 p. 424). Adding to that, a balanced portfolio allows compensating between the short-term results of new projects with the long-term benefits of the existing ones allowing therefore to promptly reacting to the future needs. (Heising 2012, p. 595; Meskendahl, 2010, p. 817).

2.2 Project Portfolio Decision-Making

In this section, the focus is on the decision-making process within portfolio management. An overview of the standards and guidebooks is reported, followed by the presentation of a number of studies challenging those view.

Levine (2005, p. 4) states that portfolio management is about elaborating the right information through structured and consisting procedures to make the right decisions. “The project portfolio management process starts with the rational prioritization and selection of projects” (Levine, 2005, p. 4). Levine (2005, p. 92) particularly highlights the role of project portfolio management in supporting the rational analysis and decision-making of the information regarding projects and business items. In his view, Levine (2005, p. 461) sees project management, and even more portfolio management, as the natural extension of the area of study of Kepner & Tregoe (1965) which have contributed to the area of structured methods for problem solving and decision making. In fact, Levine (2005, p.461) supports that the “very nature of project portfolio management is rational decision making”.

Accordingly, Rod & Levin (2006, p. 13) claim that a “project portfolio management system will assist the enterprise by providing the data necessary to make informed and rational decisions regarding funding of projects”. Through a centralized view of the overall projects that the organization undertakes, project portfolio management assures
that the decisions on whether to initiate, continue or abandon projects will be “based on rational data and articulated logics, and not based on emotions and politics, as sometimes can be” (Rod & Levin 2006, p. 13).

In short, the literature claims that portfolio management supports the structured and rational decision making on projects/programmes prioritization and selection, based on defined criteria. The main ones mentioned are summarized in the following table:

Table 2 - Criteria for portfolio prioritization – Source: Author’s Elaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“...according to the <strong>business strategy</strong>”</td>
<td>IPMA, 2006, p. 15; Morris &amp; Jamieson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...based on the <strong>business strategy</strong>”</td>
<td>2005, p. 5; PMI, 2006, p.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...on the base of their <strong>performance</strong> (of projects)”</td>
<td>Meredith &amp; Mantel, 2006, p. 44; PMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2013, p. 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“taking into consideration the <strong>consumption of resources</strong>”</td>
<td>Mikkola, 2001, p. 434; PMI, 2006, p. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...taking into consideration the <strong>creation of profit</strong>”</td>
<td>Mikkola, 2001, p.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...involves the <strong>risk and duration</strong> of the projects”</td>
<td>Mikkola, 2001, p. 434; Young &amp; Conboy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2013, p.1092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...structured and consisting procedures”; “...based on <strong>rational data</strong> and articulated logics”</td>
<td>Levine, 2005, p. 461; Rod &amp; Levin, 2006, p. 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, this view is being challenged by various authors, which claim that portfolio management in practice, is much more context dependent. In the next section, we will examine the literature that considers this aspect of this aspect.

Martinsuo (2013) also provided relevant contribution in the research area of project portfolio management decision making, researching the extent to which it involves rational decision making. Her study focused on the limitations of portfolio management as a rational decision process, analysing empirical data on project portfolio management in practice and in context. Her findings concluded that although the literature on portfolio management provides an extensive number of tools to select the projects, allocate resources and align the portfolio to the strategy, most of companies struggle with the resource sharing issue among projects as well as to deal with the continuous changes in the portfolio (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 793). The researcher’s analysis of portfolio management in practice also demonstrated that:

i.  “The decision making on project and portfolio selection is less planned and rational, and instead more political and path-dependent than the normative models would suggest” (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 797);

ii. The competences and activities of the project and portfolio managers as well as top management, play a crucial role in the way in which project portfolio management is played out in day-to-day practice (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 797);

iii. “Project portfolio management needs to be applied appropriately to each situation, and, thereby, it is not something that can be considered static (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 798).
In summary, the managers’ actions and decisions “involve intuition, negotiation and even bargaining, not accounted for in the frameworks build upon rational project portfolio decision making” (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 799). These negotiation and bargaining skills are given by the influence between people and the organization, which go beyond the assignment of resources and responsibilities, or the senior management involvement.

Particularly, this influencing process is characterized by issue selling, charismatic power and in-depth expertise (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 800). Moreover, Martinsuo (2013, p. 801) claims that although the dynamism of the context is increasingly understood, the frameworks build on rational decision making in project portfolio do not sufficiently account for it. Evidence of the research showed that “the success of project portfolio management indeed is depended on the context, in line with the contingency assumptions”. Main issues that influence in this sense are: organizational complexity, degree of innovativeness, contextual dynamics and organizational governance type, managerial context, parent-organizational context, and business and geographical context (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 798).

Secondly, “some studies emphasized the need to understand risks, uncertainties and changes in the project portfolio or its context and that such dynamics should be taken into account in the management of project portfolios (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 798). Martinsuo suggests that the interplay that characterize the dynamism must be considered, particularly, the various inter-projects issues, between the projects and the parent organization, and changes that drive reconfiguration (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 801). Müller et al. (2008, p. 28) argue that there is little evidence of the implication of “good practices” of portfolio management and whether they result in good achievements (Müller et al, 2008, p. 29). In their research, Müller et al. (2008) demonstrate the relevance of the context, concerning the type of project, internal dynamics, governance types, and geographical location (Müller et al, 2008, p.39). Martinsuo & Lehtonen (2007, p.56) investigate the efficiency of portfolio management and the role of single-project management for achieving it. The findings show that almost half of the variance of portfolio management has other explanation than the single-project management outcome, which may include factors such as the strategic goal setting, portfolio types, and other specifications. The authors suggest further studies to understand what kind of actions contribute to the outcomes of portfolio management, among which the context of decision making (Martinsuo & Lehtonen, 2007, p. 63). Additionally, Rajegopal et al. (2007, p. 141) claims that project portfolio management operates in a very challenging business environment, characterized by: uncertain and changing information, fluid opportunities that require a quick response, multiple organizational goals and strategic issues, interdependencies between the projects and programs, and multiple decision makers across different locations.

Petit (2010) conducted a study that raises awareness on the operational challenges that portfolio management involves, and the great effort needed to continuously plan the scope, maintain optimal resource allocation and alignment in in constant changing environment. The sources of change identified are not mentioned in the literature, which suggests that this is a missing gap of the current understanding of the management of project portfolios. In fact, the author expresses that further research could help understand the different types of environment in which the project portfolio must be managed, and the different sources of uncertainty (Petit, 2010, p. 552).
Kock & Georg (2016) developed and tested a conceptual model explaining the organizational antecedents of decision-making quality and agility. They concluded that in turbulent environments, formal organizing becomes less important for decision-making quality and agility, whereas monitoring frequency and innovation climate become more impactful. A set of climate conditions that increase transparency, stability, effectiveness, and agility of strategic and operational decisions in innovation portfolio management were than formulated: “A) Strategic clarity: goals and objectives are clearly formulated; B) Process formality: operational clarity about the current portfolio and resources; C) Controlling intensity: means continuous monitoring of the portfolio to maintain the transparency and formality” Kock & Georg (2016, p.674). Shepherd & Rudd (2014, p.340) incremented with an overview of the impact of the context in the field of decision making. The authors have identified four main components of the context, which were identified through an extensive literature review and top peer-reviewed academic articles and verified by a senior academic in the field. Shepherd & Rudd (2014, p.340) categorized the following topics that are inherent to the context:

The top management team, who set the overall strategic direction of the organization, take decisions based on behavioural influences rather than to maximize the economic utility. This is referred as their bounded rationality: “decision makers’ cognitive limitations that restrict the ability to collect and analyse all relevant information to identify all possible alternatives” (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014, p. 343). Wong et al. (2011, p.1220) added that assessing top leaders’ decision-making processes is a difficult task. From analysing top management teams' integrative complexity and decentralization of decision making, they have identified that both factors increase the top management team ability to gather information on, and attend to, stakeholder needs.

Specific characteristics of the strategic decisions are label and categorizations assigned by the decision makers. Such as; decision matter, uncertainty, motive, importance and time pressure. The review of Shepherd & Rudd (2014) showed that these aspects have a significant influence on the decision making (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014, p. 349).

The external environment was mainly analysed by studies in terms of velocity, instability, and dynamism, hence referring to the extent to which the decision is subject to rapid and unpredictable change. This variable produced unexpected results in the research, having a moderate influence on the decision-making process. Some studies referred to the comprehensiveness while others to the rationality of the decision (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014, p. 356).

Lastly, the firm characteristics are widely agreed to influence the decision making significantly. Specially, power centralization influences the political behaviour, while the structure of the organization impacts on the rationality and participation. Another important dimension is the size, which relates to the comprehensiveness and political behaviour (Shepherd & Rudd; 2014, p. 359).

In the following table, we have consolidated the different aspects of the context that the authors above suggest having an impact on the decision making in project portfolio management.
Table 3 - Components influencing portfolio decision-making at operational level – Source: Author’s Elaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotations</th>
<th>Components influencing the decision making</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“...organizational behaviour”; “...power centralization, structure of the organization, the size...” “organizational complexity, organizational governance type, parent-organizational context” “...governance types”</td>
<td>Governance/ Organizational structure</td>
<td>Kestler et al., 2011, p 641; Shepherd &amp; Rudd, 2014, p. 340; Martinsuo, 2013, p. 793; Müller et al, 2008, p. 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...bounded rationality”; “less planned and rational more political and path-dependent”;</td>
<td>Decisions Makers Bounded rationality</td>
<td>Shepherd &amp; Rudd, 2014, p. 340; Martinsuo, 2013, p. 793;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...decision matter, uncertainty, motive, importance and time pressure” “...type of project, internal dynamics”</td>
<td>Characteristics of the decision</td>
<td>Shepherd &amp; Rudd (2014, p. 340); Müller et al, 2008, p. 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...Innovativeness”; “...monitoring frequency and innovation climate”</td>
<td>Degree of innovation</td>
<td>Martinsuo, 2013, p. 793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...geographical context”; “...geographical location”</td>
<td>Geographical location</td>
<td>Martinsuo, 2013, p. 793; Müller et al, 2008, p. 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...risks, uncertainties and changes”; “...sources of uncertainty”</td>
<td>Different sources of uncertainty</td>
<td>Martinsuo, 2013, p. 793; Petit, 2010, p. 552</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 Projects and Programmes for Development

In this section, we consider the peculiarities of the complex and unique environment that characterizes project and programmes in the development aid sector, which will be relevant to understand at a later stage from the point of view of the decision-making in portfolio prioritization.

A common shared definition of international development projects is provided by Yourker (1999, p. 6) as follows. The objectives of this type of projects are for economic and social development, involving poverty reduction and often with no profit motive. However, the financing agencies have motives and objectives of its own. By definition, all international development projects are carried out in developing countries, and are at least partially externally funded by: Multilateral Development Banks, United Nations Associated Agencies, Bilateral and multilateral government agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations or Government agencies in developing countries, among others. Consequently, compared with other types of projects, development ones have a much larger array of stakeholder which must be taken into consideration which often leads to
unclear roles, especially the ones of the project sponsor, which can either be an external agency or domestic party. Importantly, developing countries are characterized by difficult environment which includes: lack of infrastructure, resources (especially human resources) in short supply, local citizens may have different value structures and cultures, and external forces might be seen in negative or positive way. Moreover, there might be key differences between the donor and the country systems.

Originally development projects consisted of the “hard” type of management, i.e. infrastructure and construction. However, already at the time Yourker described it, the clear majority of projects involved social services dealing with people, being more of a “soft” type of management (Yourker, 1999, p. 6). Through the analysis of the ex post facto evaluations of the projects financed by the World Bank, Yourker (1999) identified several key issues related to the management of projects for development. Although published in 1999, these issues are still actual and referenced in the current literature, which makes it worth reporting them in the following list:

a. Lack of a shared perception and agreement on the objectives of the project by staff and stakeholders;
b. Lack of commitment to the project by the team, management and stakeholders;
c. Lack of detailed, realistic and current project plans (schedule, budget, procurement);
d. Unclear lines of authority and responsibility (organization not structured to project management);
e. Lack of adequate resources;
f. Poor feedback and control mechanism for early detection of problems;
g. Poor or no analysis or major risk factors;
h. Delays caused by bureaucratic administrative systems (approvals, procurement, personnel, land acquisition, and release of funds).

Golini & Landoni (2014, p. 124) similarly identified the distinctive features of these development projects through a systematic literature review that resulted into six categories:
The first is defined by the lack of a defined and/or powerful customer: the boundaries of the community who should benefit from the outcomes of the project are usually not well defined. In this, international development projects are very similar to the public sector, where the customers/beneficiaries don’t determine their own goals hence have little power over the control and supervision. Therefore, greater influence is exercised by other stakeholders with the risk of scope creep and impact reduction.

The second category is defined the high number of stakeholders: because of what said before, international development projects not only involve a high number of stakeholders, but also more complex interrelations between them. Stakeholder management is a key activity, and particularly, the local community involvement plays a very important role in understanding the local environment and context, through the tacit knowledge about political and cultural factors.

The third category is consisted of the difficult, complex and risky environment: the difficulties are mainly related to four type of factors: a) natural ones, like the risk of natural disasters; b) political and institutional factors, that often involve limited resources,
lack of information of local governments, bureaucratic delays, and corruption; c) social factors, include the unavailability of workforce and conflicting interests among the communities, lastly d) technological factors, in terms of suppliers scarcity and need for technological adaptation.

Following, the fourth category concerns resource scarcity: given the nature of international development projects, the funding received should be used to provide help to the beneficiaries, therefore, administrative costs and non-value adding activities receive scarce resources. Therefore, the planning phase is crucial for the effective and efficient use of resources.

The fifth category defines the cultural differences considering that international development projects often involve different countries that might have strong cultural differences to consider, these are for example: language, religion, managerial processes, and knowledge.

The sixth and last category is the intangibility of the outputs: the objectives of development projects are social and humanitarian, which are more difficult to measure, especially in the short-term impact.

More recently, Mishra (2016, p. 21) confirmed the actuality of Yourker’s and Golini & Landoni standpoints stated above, claiming that international development project has the constant characteristic of: lack of performance, malfunctioning design, poor people participation, lack of interdepartmental coordination, delay on schedule, low quality. However, “the projects continue to be implemented because of the global need of developing quality of human life” (Mishra, 2016, p. 5). With his research on the implementation of large-scale projects in India findings highlight that: beyond the iron triangle, the outcomes of international development projects are determined by the organizational design and the implementation of dynamics (Mishra, 2016, p. 21). Organizational design is intended as partnership arrangements or internalized capacity, while implementation dynamics are the interaction among stakeholders.

Additionally, Muriithi & Crawford (2003) research gives an interesting overview of the challenges of international projects in the African context, with greater focus on the cultural dimension. The research investigates the ways in which the dimensions of Hofstede impact the project management fundamentals in consideration. The results showed that to manage externalities, projects must highlight benefits to politicians to gain support, they need to be seen to deliver tangible benefits to the community and empower the population. Thus, managerial success in such an environment requires political skill. (Muriithi & Crawford, 2003, p. 316). One more finding showed that projects are a result of bargaining processes and initially are often ambiguous. Top management, planners and political leadership must continue to play a leading role throughout the project. During the initiating and planning phases the top management and stakeholders have a key role in the definition of the project scope. During the implementation phase, the main issue is to keep the project resourced (Muriithi & Crawford, 2003, p. 317). Other implications are in the project organization and communication, like the different way of the reward and recognition system that, in the African context, should overcome high power distance and use family and community networks. High uncertainty avoidance and less stable social-political environment mean that there are more likely risk avoidance rather than minimization strategies. Lastly, from a procurement and quality point of view, the
assurance of the capability of the project process is more problematic because the mean-
end chains are more blurred (Muriithi & Crawford, 2003, p. 318). Overall, the paper
highlights that the validity of western management concepts are limited to certain
assumptions of human behaviours that depend on cultural dimensions. (Muriithi &

Hermano et al. (2013, p. 22) confirm that poor performance of international development
projects is a constant feature, together with the disappointment of the beneficiaries. Given
the little attention that project management literature has given to international
development projects, with their research the authors identified the critical success factors
for this type of projects. First, team building, intended as the right selection and
motivation of the implementation team. Secondly, the local environment, intended as the
unique socio-political instability or cultural separation among actors. Thirdly, the
implementation approach is the ability to deal with the uncertain operating environment
and use a “what if” scenarios. Fourthly, the learning opportunities, and the knowledge
transfer to the beneficiaries are critical. Fifth, the policy characteristics imply that
international development projects are part of a country master plan, hence have to align
with those goals. The availability of resources is the management of the short supply and
the different sense of the time and work of the implementers. Lastly, the
stakeholders/beneficiaries’ satisfaction is a complex issue to manage as they are multiple.

Khang & Moe (2008, p. 72) in agreement with the above statement, claims that the
differentiating factors of this type of projects are significant, in particular “the social and
non-for-profit nature of the projects, the complex relationship of the stakeholders
involved, and the intangibility of the developmental results” (Khang & Moe, 2008, p.
72).In their research, the authors propose a new framework to improve international
development overall performance through the evaluation of progressive chance of project
success. The authors developed a life-cycle-based framework considering the
peculiarities of international development projects, and grouping them in 3 categories of
critical success factors: competency, motivation, and the enabling environment (Khang
&Moe, 2008, p. 73). Competences being related both to the project manager, the team
member and the institution they come from while motivation is critical as without that
even the most adequate competences of the team are useless. The project environment
instead is the relationship with the external environment, specifically with key
stakeholders such as funding and implementing agencies, governments and beneficiaries.
Other external factors that impact are the adequate resources, compatible rules and
regulations, financing facilities and more in general, the political, social, economic and
technical conditions. (Khang & Moe, 2008, p. 73).

The main concepts of the authors discussed in this section were analysed with a focus on
the role of the environment. We were able to identify the main aspects that were recurrent
in the description of the environment present in international development projects in the
following table:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotations</th>
<th>Aspect of the environment complexity</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“…Stakeholder management and local community involvement to understand the local environment”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“like in the public sector, greater influence is exercised by stakeholders and less power of customers/beneficiaries”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…determinant role of partnership arrangements and interaction among stakeholders”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…external environment, specifically with key stakeholders”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... external environment management requires political skill”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…Projects are a result of bargaining processes often ambiguous”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…technological factors”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…uncertain operating environment”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…compatible rules and regulations, and facilities”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…Technical conditions”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…resources are in short supply”</td>
<td>Resource constraints</td>
<td>Golini &amp; Landoni, 2014, 124; Khang &amp; Moe, 2008, p.72; Yourker, 1999, p.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…Resource scarcity, planning phase is crucial for the effective and efficient use”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…adequate resources”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…social factors”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…resistance to change”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…human behaviors that depend on cultural dimensions”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…cultural separation among actors”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...natural factors”</td>
<td>Natural conditions</td>
<td>Golini &amp; Landoni, 2014, p. 124.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4 Literature Summary and Framework

Even though portfolio management is claimed to be an effective and beneficial operating model for organizations, its practices and studies are limited to certain areas (Martinsuo, 2013; Müller et al., 2008; Petit, 2012; Young & Conboy; 2013)

Common shared standards claim that the decision making at the operational level is structured and follows logical steps (Levine, 2005, p. 461; Rod & Levin, 2006, p. 13). However, although limited, the literature considering the application of project portfolio management in different context, shows that the decision making is influenced by a number of factors that are not mentioned in theory, such as: governance/organizational structure (Kestler et al., 2011, p. 641; Shepherd & Rudd, 2013, p. 340; Martinsuo, 2013, p. 793; Müller et al, 2008, p. 39), decision-makers bounded rationality (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 793; Shepherd & Rudd, 2013, p. 340); characteristics of the decision (Müller et al, 2008, p. 39; Shepherd & Rudd, 2014, p. 340); degree of innovation (Martinsuo, 2013, p.793), geographical location (Martinsuo, 2013, p.793; Müller et al, 2008, p.39), and different sources of uncertainty (Martinsuo, 2013, p.793; Petit, 2010, p.552).

Moreover, the studies of portfolio management were found to be very limited sector-wise. Particularly, despite being project-oriented, the development aid industry has received the sole attention of the literature at the single-project level. This literature, of development projects, highlights the uniqueness of the environment in which they operate, which particularly involves: number, interrelation and ambiguity of stakeholders (Golini & Landoni, 2014, p.124; Khang & Moe, 2008, p.72; Mishra, 2016, p.21; Muriithi & Crawford, 2003, p. 316; Yourker, 1999, p.6); technical conditions (Golini & Landoni, 2014, p.124; Khang & Moe, 2008, p. 72; Hermano et al. 2013, p. 22; Yourker, 1999, p.6), resource constraints (Golini & Landoni, 2014, 124; Khang & Moe, 2008, p.72; Yourker, 1999, p.6), cultural dimensions (Golini & Landoni, 2014, p.124; Hermano et al. 2013, p.22; Muriithi & Crawford, 2003, p. 318; Yourker, 1999, p.6), natural conditions (Golini & Landoni, 2014, p.124).

The following representation facilitates the understanding of the literature examined showing the process and the input outputs between portfolio management and the context:

![Figure 4 - Literature Framework – Source:Author’s Elaboration.](image-url)
3 Research Perspective

The goal of this chapter is to explain the research framework, the implementation flow, and the reasons behind choosing this particular framework. It will elaborate upon the position of the authors considering the research philosophy: ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions. Thus, it will highlight the theoretical methodology by describing in detail the research approach, purposes and strategy. Those aspects will lead to the building of the research design, in which the method, ethical consideration and quality aspects of the present research will be introduced.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Philosophy in this study refers to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge. It contains assumptions on the way that the researcher views the world (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 107) and it embodies the first ideas and abstract means used to inform and develop a research work, a basic set of beliefs that guide actions (Creswell, 2013, p. 6). In this sense, it encompasses the beliefs about the ways in which data about the phenomenon should be gathered, analysed and used, underpinning the research strategy and the methodology (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 108; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 12).

The research philosophy is at the end, a sum of the practical considerations and the researchers’ viewpoint on knowledge and its development process (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 108), and these considerations, namely: ontological, epistemological and axiological; constitutes a unifying view or a paradigm of a researcher (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 14). On the following sections the philosophical stances which strongly impact the choices of the research strategy and the research design of this thesis are better explained.

3.2 World View – Ontological Standing

Research ontology is what forms the basis of a researcher’s approach to scientific enquiry; it is the researcher’s view of the nature of reality (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 119). Likewise, this reflects how we view ourselves, and what we believe to be the nature of being as well as it deals with questions related to which entities exist or may be said to exist and how such entities may be grouped, connected within a hierarchy, and subdivided according to similarities and differences (Long et al., 2000, p. 190).

In the business management and social sciences research fields, this relates to the assumptions on the nature of reality researchers have and their commitment to a view. It can also be defined as a system of beliefs that reflects an interpretation of an individual about what constitutes a fact and is generally associated with a central question of whether social entities need to be perceived as objective or subjective. Accordingly, objectivism (or positivism) and subjectivism can be specified as two important aspects of ontology normally attributed to business.

One of these two main aspects on the ontology, the objectivism “portrays the position that social entities exist in a reality external to social actors concerned with their existence” (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 110). Alternatively, objectivism “is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomenon and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors” (Bryman, 2012, p. 29), thus, the reality itself is objective (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 14). From the objectivist point of view “social entities exist in reality external to social actors” (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 110) and in this perspective,
organizations would be seen as “tangible” entities which are quite similar to each other due to their standardized norms which pressure individuals to act in a certain way (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 32). Subjectivism on the other hand, also known as constructionism or interpretivist, perceives that a social phenomenon is created from perceptions and consequent actions of those social actors concerned with their existence.

Formally, constructionism can be defined as “ontological position which asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman, 2012, p. 29). Once the objective focuses on understanding the phenomena studied, considering multiple perceptions of realities, perspectives, and considering the context in which the phenomena takes place (Carson et al., 2001, p.5), the ontological approach that best suits the focus of the research is the subjectivist or constructivist, meaning that is necessary to understand the source motivation to actions taken by social actors. On this approach, the reality will be seen as social-constructive, where the actions are seen as meaningful in the context of constructed interpretations and meanings (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 111).

3.3 Epistemological Standing

Epistemology is the branch of research philosophy that studies the knowledge, and how the researcher comes to possess this knowledge, taking into perspective the researcher’s view regarding what constitutes acceptable knowledge (Saunders et al., 2009, pp.119). In this stance, two of the main epistemological areas are contrasting positions: positivism and interpretivist.

The positivist approach maintains that there are absolute truths, and that these truths can be known and tested in an empirical manner (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 117). As suggested by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 119), the positivist approach is a mean to produce highly structured credible data, usually composed of large samples measured preferably quantitatively. On the other hand, the interpretivist emphasizes the differences between humans as social actors. It contends that only through the subjective interpretation of and intervention in reality and through highlighting the differences between social actors, as supported by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 116), by adopting empathy to address the research question can that reality be fully understood. Thus, focusing on context and the details of the actions and the motivations behind it, the researchers would adopt an interactive process of understanding, reflecting upon the context, interacting, abstracting and generalizing the observable phenomenon, always being sensible with the multiple or non-coherent theoretical concepts guiding the research (Klein & Myers, 1999, p. 72). In between them, the realism, or post positivism approach, shares similar attributes with positivism and allege that there is an absolute truth which can explain a phenomenon. This approach states that realities deal with the world in which they are situated, though in most cases the true nature of these relationships is far too complex to be measured, or the instruments and understanding of the researcher are not sufficiently developed to uncover the complete truth (Perry et al., 1999, p. 17).

The assumptions of the researchers, underlying the way they see the nature of knowledge or what is known to be true, is of an interpretivist approach, playing an important role in this study and predetermine its development and outcomes. This study aims at contributing to the theory of portfolio management in multilateral organizations, focusing on how the decision are made while assigning priorities on managing portfolios of projects and program at the UN country level. As to uncover dimensions not yet reached
by the actual studies, improving the understanding of what in the context and how it influences this decision-making structure, we strongly believe an interpretivist approach is suitable. In here, understanding the course of actions taken by individuals and the effects of their interactions is crucial for shaping the knowledge. This approach by its essence, will consider the multiple realities unrevealed by “the perspective of different individuals, the context of the phenomenon under investigation, the contextual understanding and interpretation of the collected data and the nature and depth of the researcher’s involvement” (MacIntosh & O’Gorman, 2015, p. 65). Moreover, interpretivism supports the view of portfolio management as a complex and dynamic area of research influenced by interaction and interpretations of social actors, and it aligns well with the subjectivist/constructivist ontological stance, such as the type of information the research aims to analyse. Hence, aligning with the interpretivist epistemological perspective chosen, the approach that best fits for this research is the inductive approach, which likewise, is focused on understanding the context in which the events and the behaviours occur (Saunders et al., 2008, p. 124).

3.4 Axiology

Axiology is the branch of research philosophy dealing with aesthetics, religion, ethics, and a part of the paradigm that take into consideration the researchers’ views and the role of values in the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 116). The researcher's values and its judgments play a role in the research process, and its importance should be considered once it influences the credibility of the results (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 116). Consistent with the research's philosophical assumption, it is inferred that this research is value-bounded. The researchers contribute to the meaning creation, and their values must be taken into consideration during the research analysis (Carson et al., 2001, p. 6). Moreover, Biedenbach & Jacobsson (2016, p. 137) notice a recent recognition of values in project management research that concluded that the consideration of values and the reflection upon them is of extreme importance for the research credibility.

Two contrasting axiological views were identified. The first considers research as value-free while the other states that knowledge is value-bound (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 119). Being the epistemology of this research interpretivist, the research is bound to the researcher’s subjective view on the phenomenon, which might influence choices of research area, formulating the research questions, choosing the research method, design, and data collection and analysing it, along with the discussion of the results (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 40).

Both researchers come from a project management academic background, and both have experience in international organizations in development countries, equipping them with a multicultural and complex environment perspective. They understand the dynamics taking place in the organizational context as complex and not mechanistic and believe it can have a major influence on the performances of the projects and successful achievement of social investments. Furthermore, both researchers interest in strategy and portfolio management, such as how to apply it within United Nations development projects, started on a group work of this same master in Edinburgh – UK, where both demonstrate special interest for the work developed by the United Nations and an interest of joining force to this work in the future, either working or researching on the organization. The researchers acknowledge that these elements have been a key driver for the choice of the research subject.
Despite this common background, differences as the cultural setting in which they were raised – Brazil and Italy – as well as specific professional experiences (HR Portfolio Management and Consultancy), it considered that these aspects might contribute to enrich the research’s vision as well as a mean for initiating the analysis. Furthermore, considering the active role of both researchers in the research and their awareness of the potential impact of the personal values and biases, this study was designed to be transparent on their assumptions, values and preconceptions adopted on all spheres of the work, particularly on the interaction with the social actors which are object of this study. This justifies a mean to deliver credible theoretical and practical contributions into the field connecting social investments in transformation and project management.

The chosen research approach for this thesis is explained and justified in the next chapter.
4 Defining the Empirical Study

This chapter provides a detailed description of the quality criteria observed on the case study, its description and the detailed information on the methods chosen for conducting the data collection and analysis. At the end of the chapter, some methodological limitations are outlined.

As is was defined in the introductory chapter, our research intends to: understand how priorities are assigned to projects and/or programmes in multilateral organizations, hence in which way the context influences the decision-making structures supporting the prioritization process. It has been emphasised that the importance of the context is a recurrent business research topic (Blomquist & Müller, 2006, p. 56). In this field, qualitative research is a prominent style, which leverages the point of view of the ones being studied and the sensitivity to the context (Bryman et al., 1996, p. 353). In the editorial article of the Academy of Management, Bamberger (2008, p. 843) commented that:

“Interpretative qualitative research, by focusing on the “production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings” (Gephart, 2004, p. 457), is likely to be instrumental in the generation of context theory by providing important insights into how meanings and their implications are shaped by or contingent upon contextual forces”

In this way, qualitative research raises new research questions with context-rich insights (Bansal & Corby, 2011, p. 235). These ideas are then often tested and extended in quantitative studies, which can give an advantage in considering the quality of the final work (Bamberger, 2008, p. 843). The validity of social knowledge instead is subject to change and is context dependent (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). Hence for the assessment of the quality of this research, we have followed the framework of Tracy (2010, p. 840) which brings together the quality criteria of different authors.

4.1 Quality Criteria

The Table 5 exposed below, lists the criteria described by Tracy (2010, p. 840) as the “Eight “Big-Tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research”, how they can be achieved, and how they were approached in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for quality</th>
<th>Means, practices and methods through which to achieve</th>
<th>How it was achieved in this thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Worthy topic</td>
<td>The topic of the research is:</td>
<td>The choice of studying the environment of the development aid sector is relevant socially and politically. The empirical case is based on one the most relevant multilateral organization of today, the UN, which is currently facing reform of its operations at the country level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relevant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Timely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Significant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interesting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Rich Rigour</td>
<td>The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate and complex:</td>
<td>The theoretical framework was based on the integration of the project management literature,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Sincerity</td>
<td>The study is characterized by:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Transparency about the methods and challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The previous section has provided an outline of the researchers’ perspective. In the following one, the explanation of the data collection is explained. In the final chapter the thesis explains the limitations and challenges.</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4- Credibility</th>
<th>The research is marked by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (nontextual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Triangulation or crystallization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Multivocality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Member reflections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both primary and secondary data are used. Secondary data goes deep into the details, which is than integrated with the concreteness of the interviewee perspective through direct quotes. Consultation and clarifications were made prior and post the data analysis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5- Resonance</th>
<th>The research influences, affects, or moves particular reader or a variety of audiences through:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Aesthetic, evocative representation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Naturalistic generalisations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Transferable findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The aspect of the thesis was taken care of within the boundaries of the Thesis Manual guidelines. The generalisation and transferability of the findings to other multilateral organizations can be taken into consideration.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6- Significant contribution</th>
<th>The research provides a significant contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Conceptually/ Theoretically</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Practically</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Morally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Methodologically</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Heuristically</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This thesis contributes to the project portfolio management theory as well as to the one of development projects. It has practical managerial contributions to the awareness of the decision-making process in the organization considered. It suggests further researches.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7- Ethical</th>
<th>The research considers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Procedural ethics (such as human subjects)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Situational and culturally specific ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relational ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every interviewee was asked to give the permission to record the sessions. The anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed. Interviewees were treated with respect and the sharing of the final</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Existing ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research) work was guaranteed to all of them.

8- Meaningful coherence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The study</th>
<th>The researches have committed to the achievement of the research purpose in line with the methodology adopted and described in this chapter through the use of meaningful connection of the literature and the data collected.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Achieves what it purports to be about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uses methods ad procedures that fits its stated goals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions, findings, and interpretations with each other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Data Collection Method

A qualitative approach to the research involves the collection of data through integral gathering, grouping and interpreting of written material derived from conversation or observation (Malterud, 2001, p. 483). It hence consists in examining the interpretation of the participants’ views with a degree of subjectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p. 404).

Consequently, the decision-making process at this context setting is at the core of the research. As mentioned in the previous chapter, with our ontological we embrace the view of decision-making process as valuable to understand aspects of organizational behaviour; hence we consider it a suitable empirical enquiry. Therefore, although decisions can be hard to identify and that actions might take place without a formal process of decision making (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014, p. 341), in our view we believe that we can access the nuances of this process as a response to the external environment, through the data collection methods hereby described.

Also, for the purpose of our research, we identified the case study approach to be the most appropriate design. This type of approach is “…an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when… the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). In this way, it allows understanding a phenomenon without taking it out from its context, and instead it questions how behaviours and processes are affected by it. Particularly, an explorative case study is often adopted when the current literature is inadequate; the research questions are broad and defined after commencing the data collection (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015, p.82).

Case studies can focus on one or more specific organizations, departments, individuals, and processes (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015, p.82). Within this study, a qualitative approach is used to obtain an understanding on how the context influences the decision-making process within multilateral organizations. We decided to focus the research to the UN, being that is one of the most relevant multilateral organization of nowadays, and its practices and processes are critical to the understanding of the whole sector. Therefore, a single case can be considered appropriate (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015, p.83).

In order to take a holistic view of the process studied, case studies often use multiple sources of information (Patton & Applebaum, 2003, p. 61). We have used two different
methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews and documentary secondary data. These two types of data are being discussed in the upcoming subsections.

4.3 Case Study Description

United Nations Development Group (UNDG) is the coherence mechanism, bringing together the 32 UN funds, programmes, specialized agencies, departments, and offices that play a role in development. It oversees operationalizing the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), which is the member states decision on how the United Nation shall operate on the ground. The last QCPR, released in 2016, requested the UN development system to strengthen the Delivery as One approach in the programme countries that voluntarily adopted it, to enhance “coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of country-level efforts.”

Overall the Delivery as One approach aims at strengthening the UN management and coordination of operational activities through the tight management of entities in the development, humanitarian and environmental fields. The UNGD has responded to the request of the Member States expressed in the QCPR, with the elaboration of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): a set of guidelines for the successful work of countries adopting the “Delivery as One Approach” compromising of the five pillars (see Figure 4):

- The One Program - One national development strategy plan (UNDAF);
- The common budgetary framework – planned and costed program activities;
- The One Leader – UN Country Team (UNCT) coordinating function lead by the Resident Coordinator;
- Operating as One – more cost-effective common operations;
- Communicating as one – facilitating coherent messages.

According to the SOPs guidelines it should allow to “... move forward in a more practical and harmonized way, making the most effective use of our combined ideas and skills, institutional experiences and capacities across the membership of the UNGD. With a flexible approach, and adapted to different country contexts, the SOPs are an indispensable tool in ensuring that our joined-up work is focused on the strongest possible results a UN team can deliver on the ground.” In this way, as to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and impact of the UN operational work, the UNGD introduced a set of standards and procedures (i.e. best practices) that support the management of multiple UN entities at the country level.

This is in line with the purpose of portfolio management, which involves the management of multi-projects and programmes to achieve overall efficiency, effectiveness and risk management. Furthermore, the UNGD guidelines claims that the SOPs, adopted with a flexible approach are “universally applicable”. It is the duty of the One Leader to adapt the standards to the local context. However, no exhaustive information is provided in the guidelines regarding the contextual factors that need to be taken into consideration in the adaptation of the standards.
4.4 Interview Process

The empirical data collection under the form of interviews was collected between 16 December and 26 December 2017, and throughout 6 Skype interviews and 3 phone calls. The following table summarizes the information about the interviews:

Table 6 - Respondents List -  – Source:Author’s Elaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Position within UN</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background Interview</td>
<td>16/11</td>
<td>Skype video</td>
<td>Confidential</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1hr 28min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>13/12</td>
<td>Skype call</td>
<td>Planning and monitoring specialist</td>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>56min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>14/12</td>
<td>Skype video</td>
<td>Head of Resident Coordinator Office</td>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>1hr 1min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>14/12</td>
<td>Skype call</td>
<td>Resident coordinator officer</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>57min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>15/12</td>
<td>Skype video</td>
<td>Head of Resident Coordinator Office</td>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>1hr 23min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>15/12</td>
<td>Skype call</td>
<td>Head of Resident Coordinator Office</td>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago &amp; Suriname</td>
<td>1hr 10min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 6</td>
<td>15/12</td>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>Head of Resident Coordinator Office</td>
<td>Liberia &amp; Syria (Tanz.)</td>
<td>1hr 06min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 7</td>
<td>18/12</td>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>Coordination specialist</td>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>1hr 02min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 8</td>
<td>20/12</td>
<td>Skype call</td>
<td>Coordination Analyst</td>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>1hr 08min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 9</td>
<td>20/12</td>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>Programme Analyst</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>41min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While our knowledge about portfolio management is considerably broad, the one concerning the development aid sector was limited to the literature we went through while looking towards the research gap. However, we were also aware that the UN is the main multilateral organization in the development aid system, and early at the beginning of the research we decided it to be the focus of our empirical section. This could be considered as type of purposive sampling, that is, the selection of a case based on the researchers own judgement on what best can meet the research purpose (Saunders, 2003, p. 175).

The first background interview was carried out with one of the future interviewees that gave us a great overview of the practices of portfolio management within the UN. Being that our knowledge about the specific practices was very little; the background interview has been a turning point of our research, helping us to give a direction to it. In fact, as may happen in the development of an exploratory case study, the collection of the data started prior the definition of the research question (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015, p. 83).

Interviewees were accessed through the help of the first respondent which provided us with a pool of possible participants. These ones all meet the criteria for inclusion that are to have or have had a role with exposure to the prioritization decision at the UN country level. Our sampling population represents a number of different countries, specifically 9 across Latin America, Africa and Asia. Of the participants, 5 were females and 4 males, and their responsibilities varied from long experience up to 10 years, to a minimum of 2 years. Also on the sample population, 5 of them are former UN employees and 4 currently work on the UN system. They all pursue or pursued a position within the country office, varies from head of the office, to analysts and specialists. The choice of the respondents followed one strategy that sees the parallel between current and former staff of the UN coordination system. This was done for two main reasons: first, the former employees selected have extensive and recent experience in the field, which assures the relevance and reliability of their view point. Moreover, it represents an effort of the researchers to give a greater space to unbiased reflections through respondents that are not currently involved in the process examined.

We prepared to the interviews writing an interview guide [see APPENDIX I – Presentation for Exploratory Interview and Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines]. According to Bryman & Bell (2003, p. 486) this one can either consist of a number of areas that the researcher wants to cover, or a more structured list of questions. The latter was prepared first in our case, conducting the interviews in a very flexible way, interviewees would have tackled aspects of multiple questions in one same answer, hence we were shifting among the various topics in a non-linear way. Therefore, after the first interviews, the guide mainly consisted of a list of topics to cross once we had tackled them.

Respondents were first approached through electronic email, with attached a proposal of the interview [see APPENDIX II – One Page Proposal] mentioning the background, purpose, possible managerial implications of the research. Moreover, we included in the body of the email the expected duration of the interview, which we estimated to be one hour. Hence the meetings were scheduled according to the interviewee’s availability and different time zones. In preparation to the meeting we consulted secondary sources like UN websites and guidelines which will be explained in the following section.
Considering ethical issues, the respondents were guaranteed their anonymity in the final work, which we proposed ourselves to make them feel comfortable in replying to our questions.

4.4.1 Conducting the Interviews

Being the research purpose of an exploratory nature, semi-structured interviews help understand the context and provide background information (Saunders, 2012, p. 377). Moreover, to explain the reasons for the decision of the participants and of their attitudes and opinions, the best option is to conduct semi-structured or in-depth interviews (Saunders, 2012, p. 377). Particularly, semi-structured interview allowed us to probe the participants’ answers, asking for further explanations of the responses, relevant for the interpretivist epistemological approach (Saunders, 2012, p. 378). When possible and where the internet connection allowed us to, we decided to both be interviewing the participants. According to Bechhofer at al. (1984, p. 97) two interviewers allow the use of different styles of questioning, and contribute to a more informal conversation, as it is more likely to be perceived as a discussion among three people rather than an exchange between two.

The structure of the interviews turned out to be very different one from the other, with the exception of the introductory talk in which we explained about ourselves, the master programme, the purpose of our study and how we would have conducted the interview. After that, we first asked the interviewees a brief description of the role they had, or have had, within the UN. The way in which they replied to this first question already established different ways of proceeding with the interview. In fact, some interviewees would have given a very broad explanation of their experience already linked to the focus of our research, saying that they went through the proposal and commenting about that. Others instead would have given a more impartial and objective description of their roles and responsibilities.

Over the course of the interview we made sure to not interrupt the respondent and to leave them time to think about their answer and express themselves, as one of the main ingredients of the interviewing is listening (Saunders, 2003, p. 491). As suggested by Kvale (1996, p. 133) there are 9 type of questions that should be used when interviewing, and it is useful to vary among them. In our case, we used a quite loose format, in which we mainly spaced between open questions and probing questions. The first one encourages the interviewee to provide an extensive, sense-making story following words such as: ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘why?’ Probing questions then followed helping to explore deeper the topic, exploring interesting answers, following wordings such as: ‘that is interesting… tell me more about…’. In this way, we aimed at reducing personal bias and increasing the reliability of the information, as open questions are claimed to reduce the bias, especially when followed by probing questions which help exploring deeper the topic (Saunders, 2012, p. 389).

The questions avoided too many theoretical concepts and specific terminology of portfolio management or concepts of the literature, as these might not be understood depending on the interviewees’ background (Saunders, 2012, p. 390). In fact, we made sure that the questions were well grounded in real-life experiences, by using for example terms and acronyms commonly used in the UN coordination, rather than discuss in abstract terms. As mentioned before, we informed the respondents about the expected
duration beforehand, which was one hour. Being the format semi-structured we couldn’t know a priori how much information the interviewees would have to share, but overall, we were able to address all the topics in the time established.

4.4.2 Other Research Material

As commented before, case studies often involve multiple sources of data collection. This provides the study higher degrees of comprehensiveness and validity (O’Gorman & Robert MacIntosh, 2015, p. 86). In our case, we used evidence from the documentation to reach a considerable good understanding of the UN development system, in order to ask the right questions and integrate the evidence of the published guidelines with the evidence of the interviews (O’Gorman & Robert MacIntosh, 2015, p. 86).

The documentation was retrieved from the UNDG official website (https://undg.org/), which provides an extensive number of guidelines and policies to be applied by the offices in the local/regional contexts. Among these, a certain number was selected, on the basis of their relevance to the topics tackled in the first background interview. After going through them carefully, we identified in which particular area of the work that the UN carries out at the country level would have been most significant for our research purpose.

4.5 Ethical Concerns

Except for the first background interview, all the sessions were recorded after asking the permission to the interviewees. This is particularly useful as, being a qualitative research, we are not only looking at what the respondents said, but also in the way they did (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 494). The disadvantages of recording the session are to alarm the interviewees who might become concerned about their words to be preserved (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 494). For this reason, when asking the permission, we always specified that we would have been the only ones listening to the material, for the purposes of the analysis only. Additionally, both of us took notes during each interview, first of all to keep track of the topics already discussed, to note down important reflections, and, overall, keep the level of attention high throughout the duration of the interview.

The authors previously requested the participants of the study to their agreement on being interviewed by e-mail, in order to pursue the documented consent on the data collection. The respondents were provided guarantee of anonymity through the recorded interview along with details on the analysis, data presentation and further availability were provided to the respondents (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 190). The authors tried to remain objective by first understanding the role of each participant through the semi-structured interviews and later understanding through word-by-word transcribing the details of their positions. Besides that, both authors joined together the majority of the interview to reduce the probability of personal bias. When processing and storing the interview recordings, no personal data was kept. Moreover, during the analysis and report production, the authors aimed at remaining objective as well as maintaining anonymity and confidentiality to the participants at all times, as recommended by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 199).

4.6 Presenting the Information

The empirical findings are presented based on the main themes that arose from the interviews hence analysed according to the strategy discussed in the next section. Presenting the material according to the interview guide wasn’t an option, given the flexible way in which the questions were asked, often involving jumping back and
forward from one question to the other. On one hand, presenting each interviewee answers in a narrative way would have focus on the unique features and differences their personal perceptions and context, in line with the aim of our study. On the other hand, given the long duration of the interviews and the extensive material collected, presenting each interview story wouldn’t have kept the interest of the readers. Therefore, to increase the readability and to follow one line of argument, we decided to present the findings according to the template used to analyse the data, as will be described in the next section. Subsequently, the findings are directly linked to the theoretical framework in the discussion chapter. Thus, the answer to the research question is provided in the conclusion.

4.7 Analysing the Information

As a qualitative research, associated with an interpretivist approach, we intend to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meaning of the participants studied. Going back to our purpose of the research, this one is to understand how the decision-making within the prioritization of programmes and/or projects is influenced by the context in multilateral organization. This implies that meanings depend on the human cognition, and therefore, the data collected is likely to be ambiguous and complex (Saunders, 2012, p. 546). The analysis of this type of data therefore needs to be sensitive to these characteristics.

Case studies involve gathering a considerable amount of information, and the data collection often involves finding ways of analysing the different sources, in our case, interviews and documents (Symon & Cassel, 2012, p. 362). Subsequently, the analysis of both the interviews and the documentation is carried out through template analysis technique which can be used with various stances. Relevant to our approach, template analysis can be used within a context constructivist position, putting emphasis on the various perspectives and the richness of the description produced (King, 2012, p. 427). The main procedural steps in the analysis are described by O’Gorman & Robert MacIntosh (2015, p. 147) in the following way:
One of the advantages of the template analysis technique is its flexibility hence the possibility to tailor it to the research needs (King, 2012, p. 447). In our case, we followed the main step described in the table above. Our *a priori* codes were themes that we were expecting to be relevant, based on the literature review. It is important to mention that these initial themes were used as a tentative, and of course they were re-defined and removed when necessary and integrated with *a posteriori* codes. We decided to develop the initial template after coding one third of the relevant transcripts. The template reflected the coding relationship, which mainly we identified to be both hierarchical and integrative. The final template is then used to present the findings in the next chapter.

### 4.8 Use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Tool

The application of CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis) to the qualitative research analysis is attributed to the various types of software that facilitates the process (Sinkoviks & Aldofis, 2012, p. 117). In this research, it was the tool considered to organising, prepare and manage the large set of data records collected through the research to the data analysis. The tool of choice was *Atlas.ti v8* which enabled the researchers to: A) Structure the work - easing the access to all parts of the data simultaneously and applying search criteria to the complete dataset; B) Code the Data and Retrieve Functionality - used to create the codes and retrieve the coded sections of text; C) Project Management and Organisiation – Manage the overall research project and organise the data; D) Search and interrogating the database - on analysing the relationships between set codes; E) Writing support and draft of the analysis - Memos, comments and annotations; F) Output Reports - generated to visualize the selected code.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes and codes</td>
<td>The identification of <em>a priori</em> codes. Likely to be developed from the literature and interview/focus group template.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>Careful transcription of the data. Detailed reading of the transcriptions to ensure familiarity with the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes and codes</td>
<td>A first round of coding the data. Identify those sections of the data which are relevant to the research questions. Now <em>a priori</em> codes can be attached to sections of the data. At this stage researchers can begin to identify codes emerging from the data and may need to develop new codes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing the initial template</td>
<td>The researcher can either choose to develop this following initial coding of all transcripts, or after coding a sub set. It will be necessary to provide a number of levels of codes, but not so many that the analysis becomes confusing. It is likely that during analysis researchers will also likely want to produce a hierarchy of codes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing your template</td>
<td>At this stage the template can be applied to the entire data set. However, it is still possible to adapt and add to the template as analysis progresses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting and writing up</td>
<td>At this stage the data is interpreted and the findings written up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality checks and reflexivity</td>
<td>To check the quality of analysis, researchers may want to have the coding independently checked by another researcher. Alternatively the analysis can be examined by respondents. It is important to keep a clear diary of the steps taken during analysis and to engage in reflexivity. This means to be aware of the researcher's influence over the data collection and analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6 - Main Steps in the analysis are described by O'Gorman & Robert MacIntosh (2015, p. 147)*
criteria attending specific pre requisites; G) Network Visualization and Relationship Management - Used for making sense of the data through visual maps that supported the draft of the analysis.

As to refine the previous ideas from the literature review, the codes were created on an elaborative approach. According to Auerbach & Silverstein (2003, p. 99), the elaborative coding is designated also as “top-down” coding, once it begins from the perspective of the study in mind, opposite to what is done on the bottom-up, which basically selects the ideas generated from the text on a non-preconceived manner. A similar approach is suggested by (King, 2012, p.444), which characterizes them as a template technique.

4.9 Methodological Limitations

Considering the question, we are aiming to answer:

“How does the context influence the decision-making structures supporting the prioritization of development projects and programmes in multilateral organizations?”

The methodology described in this chapter presents some limitations. Given the political level of the topic, some interviewees might not feel comfortable enough to share their complete thoughts. We noticed that every interviewee needed a different amount of time to open up and feel more comfortable in the situation. For this reason, we tried to approach more critical topics such as the prioritization of programmes in the last parts of the session for example.

The medium used for the interviews is not the most appropriate one, being face-to-face interviews always preferable once these setups elicit more information in a face-to-face format (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015, p. 120). However, it is straightforward that given the scattered location of the interviewees, this was the only one option available to us.

Using template analysis, on the one hand, implies that the approach to new transcripts is less open-minded. On the other hand, it allows focusing on the areas of relevance and avoiding repeating redundant coding. Moreover, it allowed us to manage the amount of data generated in an appropriate way, in the limited time available.

Although the CAQDAS method supported the analysis of the dataset, it is important to reinforce the non-automation of the tool on the analytical thinking process to this research. Some functionalities of the tool as to generate models, networks and diagrams, were used solely to automate to the level of making sense of the data, not being used for generating conclusions from it.
5 Empirical Findings and Analysis

To increase the readability and to follow one line of argument, the empirical findings are hereby presented based on the main themes that arose from the interviews, hence based on the template created to analyse the data, as described in the previous section and explained here further in details.

5.1 Data Analysis Strategy

The analysis of the interviews in our research started with a list of codes, or codes *a priori*, as mentioned in the Analysis of Information section. After the complete coding of 3 interviews, we have decided to generate a first version of the template from the general code themes, also defining the relations between them and starting to draft the relationship network.

During the clustering of the codes into main themes we realized that a number of the *a priori* codes where not top-level clusters and we re-organized the data based on the relevance emerging from the transcripts and the similarities between the views of the two authors. Hence the second version of the template was applied to the analysis of the remaining set of data, including the secondary data.

These processes involved the insertion of new codes as well as re-name some, such as: technical decisions and political decisions, country specifics, government involvement; as well as the deletion of code *a priori*, such the degree of innovation, creation of profit, less exposure to risk; and finally, it also included the merger of themes such as efficiency and synergies. These actions were conducted based on drafted ideas of the analysis already emerging from this phase and the clustering of themes. One relevant example to note is the code *degree of innovation* which was one of the main *a priori* teams, we disregarded based on the relevance of the data selected. Degree of innovation for instance was less grounded (mentioned on the interviews) than the other themes, and we noticed that to the development sector, innovation is less relevant compared to other traditional fields of application of portfolio management, therefore the codes associated to it were reclassified. The most difficult decision to take during the development of the analytical template was when to stop the modifying, refining and defining processes (King, 2012, p.444). Given the time constraints for the development of our research once we have coded all the text relevant for answering the research question, we determined the template was ‘good enough’ although we could have spent more time on the defining phase.

The final template represents 3 macro-categories themes, each related to a number of codes with different type of relationships. The list form of the template is reported here below:
Figure 7 - Template from the analysis of the context influence at the UN country level – Source: Author’s Elaboration.

How the context influences the implementation of the Delivery as One Approach of the UN at country level.

1. Contextual factors:
   1.1 Governance:
      1.1.1 Role of the RC
      1.1.2 Role of Agencies (UNCT)
      1.1.3 Role of Government
      1.1.4 Role of Donors and Financing Institutions
   1.2 Bounded rationality of decision makers: Head of agencies and personalities of the people involved from the side of the government.
   1.3 Characteristics of the decision: Different type of decisions, two levels
      1.3.1 Technical Level
      1.3.2 Political Level
   1.4 Country specifics
      1.4.1 Country size
      1.4.2 Income and development
   1.5 Sources of uncertainty: Ability to plan and execute, financial crises, volatile situations.

2. Prioritization criteria
   2.1 Strategic alignment to national plans
   2.2 Capacities
   2.3 Incentives
   2.4 Maximum impacts and results

3. Outputs of the Delivery as One Approach
   3.1 Impact
   3.2 Coherence
   3.3 Effectiveness
   3.4 Synergies

Given that the hierarchical and lateral relationships between the themes, it is useful to represent the template with a mind-map version that shows them more clearly (King, 2012, p.433). For this reason, we hereby report the output of the graphical representation in each of the analysed session, and carried out through the qualitative analysis software tool Atlas.ti. In order to introduce the readers to the interpretation of the coded data, as suggested by King (2012, p.445) we explain here the listing codes, the selectivity and openness, and the relationships between the codes.

5.1.1 The Code List

Hereby we report the codes that we identified as most relevant for further examination, out of the 41 total codes see [APPENDIX III – Complete List of Codes] for the complete list. On the table below, the colours in the first column represents to which section the data corresponds, being Blue (Assigning Priorities), Grey (Contextual Environment) and Green (Outputs). The code number and names are further displayed, along with the column G (groundedness) or frequency that the code is showed, and D (density), representing how many quotations is linked to it and Number of linkages to other codes, "Linking Nodes."
Table 7 - List of Selected Codes – Source: Author’s Elaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Code Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Prioritization Criteria</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Assigning Priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Governance Structure</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Contextual Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Role of Agencies (UNCT)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sub Codes of Code 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Role of Government</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sub Codes of Code 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Role of Donors and Financing Institutions</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sub Codes of Code 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Role of the RC</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sub Codes of Code 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Characteristics of Decision</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Contextual Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Technical Level</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Contextual Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Political Level</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Contextual Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Bounded Rationality of Decision Makers</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Contextual Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sources of Uncertainty</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Contextual Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Country Specifics</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Contextual Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Synergies</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Expected Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Expected Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Expected Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Expected Outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specific aspects related to the decision, the levels in which they are made: the political and high-level decisions, and the operationalization of them in the technical level decisions.

5.1.2 Relationships between the codes

We identified various and complex types of relations among the themes that we consider relevant to be highlighted. For this reason, it was necessary for us to have a mind-map representation of the template, on the basis of which we would explore and explain the findings of the analysis. The types of relations identified are:


Table 8 - Types of Links and Relationship—Source: Author’s Elaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Relation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“influences”</td>
<td>The source code plays a significant role in the definition of the destination code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“results on”</td>
<td>The destination code is a result of the source code, action vs. result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“is associated with”</td>
<td>Establish a reciprocal relation between concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“is a”</td>
<td>Relationship to link specific concepts to general concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“is part of”</td>
<td>The destination refers to a link relation to entities, or a sub-code of the source code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“- influence”</td>
<td>The destination code is negatively affected by the source code</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Findings and Initial Analysis

In order to introduce the readers to the interpretation of the coded data, we report here the visual map of the network diagram generated from the final template applied to all interview transcripts:

Figure 8 - Hierarchical (Top-Down) Network Diagram – Source: Author’s Elaboration.
On the basis of the analysis, we derived the model hereunder presented. It includes 5 out of the 6 context categories identified in the literature framework, and 8 new sub-categories arising from the coding of the interview transcripts. The prioritization criteria code confirmed only one of the a priori themes and included 3 new ones. The outcomes themes included 2 new themes. The relationships among the themes are quite complex, as is the context under investigation, to increase the readability through the use of the different labels and colours.

In the following section, we will present the interpretation of this data adapting the strategy suggested by King (2012, p. 446): “an account structured around the main themes identified, drawing illustrative examples from each transcript (or other text) as required”. Although this strategy provides a clear thematic discussion, it presents the risk to over-generalize and lose sight of the individual aspects of the participants. Therefore, to overcome this issue, we won’t report the content of every transcript related to the theme, but only the ones that fairly represent it, explaining them more into details.

5.3 Contextual Factors

The context influencing the prioritization of programmes was categorized in 5 main factors explained here below, with the use of direct quotes and description of the perspectives of the most relevant participants commenting the said aspect.

5.3.1 Governance Structure

The concept of governance is related to every form of human organization, and it mainly refers to all the means by which that organization conducts itself (Crowther & Seifi, 2017, p. 4). Aiming at managing organizations, governance systems involve political authority and control to coordinate the relations that enforce the decisions (Crowther & Seifi, 2017, p. 4). Nowadays, the term is increasingly used to refer to the “regulation of independent relations in absence of an overarching authority” which means that there is the need of some sort of governance to deal with global issues (Crowther & Seifi, 2017, p. 4). The UN is one of the bodies that aim to establish global governance to international relations, attempting to address worldwide problems. In this sense we refer to governance as the cooperative-arrangements to manage collective affairs by a variety of actors that include: states, multilateral organizations, NGOs, civil society organization, private sector organization, pressure groups (Crowther & Seifi, 2017, p. 4).

In our case, the actors that are part of the governance in consideration are: The Government, the Donors and financial institutions, and the “One Leader” which comprehends the Head of Agencies part of the UN Country Team and the Resident
Coordinator. According to the interviews, these three actors influence on the prioritization of the programmes in different ways:

The government has a major role on the prioritization and this is one of the main points of the Delivery as One reform, referred to as the ‘national ownership’. About this, Respondent 6 says that “(The government) …is a very important component both in the pilot countries and in all the other countries that have adopted delivering is one since. It's not something that the U.N. says it is going to do… It's actually the governments that have to request to the U.N. to implement the Delivery as One”. In the specific case of the respondent 6, the government of Liberia, through the ministry of finance, requested the implementation of the SOPs to the headquarters in NY. This is a fundamental aspect in the prioritization, as everything that the UN does, should be building on the national strategy, for the example in the case of Liberia, Poverty Reduction Strategy, or in the case of crisis prone contexts a Humanitarian Plan. With this reform the government is part of the design, part of the work, and that’s why it has a very critical role. When the UNCT with the RC sit down to define the strategic priorities of the UNDAF, they do it with the government, or the government has already done it. In this sense, Respondent 6 defines the UNDAF as a: “component of the bigger national strategy. It’s one of the elements of everything else the government does with other big donors bilateral”.

Adding to this, Respondent 7 argues that there might be different levels of involvement of the government depending on different countries. For example, the CCA (Common Country Analysis, on which the prioritization for the UNDAF is based) in some countries it is carried out by the UN independently. Whereas “in Bolivia we have a context that is difficult… the government is quite... they don’t really like influence from outside and they’re a little cautious with something that they can be seen as imperialism”. Therefore, in that context it was very important to start working on it together with the government, the civil society and a lot of different actors. They had many sessions and ended up proposing to the government three strategic areas, which were approved with the addition of one, “So in the end the government has a lot of power because they can really say that this has to go, or this has to be added.”

It is therefore a matter of fact that the government plays a crucial role in the definition of the development priorities and plans at country level. However, Respondent 2 gave us an additional perspective on this, claiming that it is not only about having an engagement with the government, but also what kind of relation: “You can say that you have government people there, but you have the interns that can’t decide anything”. From this point of view, the government involvement depends on the role of the UN in the country. In Mozambique, the UN agencies represent only about 5% of total aid, and considering that it is the 10\textsuperscript{th} least developed country in the world, the capacities are very low, therefore “Asking them to be involved in your process...and you want the best and the smartest, that are very few in the government in Mozambique, asking them to spend 2 hours of their week in your UNDAF, that is 7% of total aid, I mean that is absurd”. The respondent argues that the government involvement in the UNDAF process depends on the role of the UN in that particular context and on the capacity of government to be involved and the overall aid effectiveness agenda among their demands.

The Resident Coordinator system is part of one of the main pillars of the Delivery as One Reform that, as mentioned in the SOPs guidelines, is referred to as the “One Leader” together with the UNCT (United Nation Country Team). According to the guidelines, one
of the key principles of the new SOPs is the “empowerment of the UN Country Teams, under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator, to address country-level needs, based on good practises and experiences in pilot countries and voluntary adopters” (UNDG SOP Guidelines, 2014, p. 6). Accordingly, Respondent 8 explained, “the RC has the mandate of leading the country team and takes leadership at the strategic level on the UNDAF, but it is not that the decision it taken by that individual”.

In fact, although we initially thought that the role of the Resident Coordinator would have been significant on the prioritization of programmes, all the interviewees confirmed us that, the RC doesn’t have a lot of power. However, it can positively facilitate and support the coordination among agencies in different ways. According to Respondent 4 the RC influences the decisions through soft-power: “The RC can in theory go into an agency’s project and say they are not aligned with the UNDAF, but they never did that because it’s dependent on the whole UNCT, so because you only have soft power, the SOP give you some power to demand information. Often you can't do it anyways because you don't want to annoy the heads of agencies. Therefore, the RC is handling the information provision and trying to influence the best with the data on the decision making.

In line with above, Respondent 2, answering on how the synergies among agencies can be achieved said that empowering the Resident Coordinator through instruments like the One Fund would be an option. However, “The resident coordinator doesn't have the authority enough to say where the resources should be going.... there is some kind of thinking together but it is something mandated on top of agencies too”. The two respondents above, although belonging to very different countries such as Bolivia and Mozambique, see as the role of the Head of Agencies as critical in the successful implementation of the SOPs.

A different perspective is taken from Respondent 5, which speaking from the perspective of 2 countries in the Caribbean claims that: “You can take the best, brightest and intelligent RC leader but it's not going to work if you don't have that sort of commitment and buying of the government. It's not that you land in a country and you are able to Deliver as One and support the government. It's in partnership building. It's about being able to meet the needs of the government. So, the Resident coordinator is not only looking at creating a better UN but also building partnerships. Help those two needs, that's the recipe for success”. This respondent hence clearly links the successful coordination of the Resident Coordinator with his or her ability to build partnership with the government. This is further confirmed by Respondent 9, which from the experience in Turkey, supports this view, explain that the role of the government and the donors is necessary for agencies to involve in the Delivery as One reform: “I have to say that it really depends on the leadership of the government if the government is pushing the U.N., the U.N. will follow. Donors are pushing the U.N. that will follow. If there's a very strong RC that has the trust within the UN country team, the head of the agencies, there's a good collaboration.”

The Agencies and the United Nation Country Team is the other component of the One Leader Pillar mentioned before. According to the guidelines of the “Delivery as One Approach” (UNDG, 2014, p.24) all the active UN agencies in a given country ensure participation the UNCT in deciding strategic and programmatic issues. In the case of non-resident agencies, the Resident Coordinator make sure that their interests are represented. It this way, the UNCT should contribute to the reduction of “transaction costs,
duplication, fragmentation and competition for funds” (UNDG, 2014, p. 23). From the interviews, Respondent 8 in line from the standards confirms that both resident and non-resident agencies are ensured participation to the prioritization process, “Agencies have various levels of capacities, both financial and technical to deliver programmatic interventions in a country. So, you have agencies that are considered resident, that have a country office, fully accredited, they have staff complement, both financial and technical resources. Then there are agencies that don’t have a country presence per se, but they still have programmatic interventions, and they are considered non-resident. They may function out from a regional office that has the responsibility to provide support to multiple countries. Those agencies also participate as contributing agencies in an UNDAF. I would not consider they have different level of influence but in terms of capacity, because they do have various levels of capacity, it is not consistent across all agencies”. So, in terms of the contribution of the agencies to the UNCT programming, this respondent from the Caribbean region sees the different levels of capacities as a significant factor. This is confirmed by the view of Respondent 7, who claims than even in the Bolivian context “(the prioritization) ... it depends a lot of which agencies are the big ones and of course we have to see where can we do an impact”.

Moving to the African context, two respondent both referring to the Mozambique added that the agencies might have different type of power, specifically, Respondent 1 gives a clear example of it: “in Mozambique, and in many other countries as well, UNICEF is one of the biggest Agencies, they have lots of resources themselves in terms of both people, money and competences, and had a very strong leader. And that had a major impact on prioritization”. Similarly, Respondent 2 confirms that working together is sometimes difficult because “there are agencies that are moving much faster and have much easier processes than others...The empowerment at country level is different for example, bigger agencies with official representatives have more power than small agencies”.

Going back to the context of Caribbean countries on the other hand, Respondent 5 sees the contribution of the agencies very much linked to another factor, which is the push of the government “In Trinidad and Tobago there was nothing compared with Suriname. There was little appetite for the Delivery as One Reform. There was a misconception of what it meant. The UN staff, they thought they would lose their job, that it is something from headquarter which doesn’t mean nothing to them, and they are always looking at the fighting between the agencies. While in Suriname agencies knew that they needed each other because the government was demanding the UN to be working as One”. From this point of view, the push to work together among the agencies comes from the state, rather than the Resident Coordinator as a facilitator. According to this view, Respondent 6 noticed a different approach to working as One from the perspective of two different countries in Africa, Tanzania and Liberia where the former had one of the best implementation of the SOPs among the pilot countries and the latter receives little funds “In Liberia it took much more hard work and it was more difficult. We did the whole prioritization process, where agencies were very much stuck in their own competitive mind set, I would say.” Clearly, the type and level of agencies involvement to the programming process contributes heavily on the overall success of the Delivery as One implementation, which, turns to be very difficult if not well supported. Respondent 4 defines it a “game of incentives” which in the context of Bolivia is not funded: “as there is no money linked to complying with the UNDAF... You are rational and plan for what you have... why would you take time and effort to bankroll something that you think is
worst for that country?” Moreover, being the UNCT teams represented by the Head of Agencies, the decisions they make can be related to their personal views, their career and personality, which will detail in the Bounded Rationality sub-theme.

One more component influencing the governance of the Delivery as One reform and the prioritization of programmes is the **Role of Donors and Financing Institutions**. The amount of funds a country receives greatly impact the way in which way the activities are planned and carried out jointly by the organizations. From the point of view of **Respondent 6**, “The prioritization is completely different from a country where there is scarcity in financial resources, where there is donor fatigue, and there is a lack of interest to contribute. Liberia is a good example; you had much more of a clash and much more conflict between agencies.” In this sense, the lack of funds influences the degree of synergies among agencies which become less due to the competitive sphere it creates, hence impacting negatively on the criteria of prioritization of the programmes. In alignment with the previous view, **Respondent 4** argues that donors play a major role in the successful coordination of agencies at country level, depending on how they give funds; the UN coordination can increase the synergies between the agencies through incentives. Instead, donors earmark the money to what they like: “Everyone is saying that development should be about what countries need, but a lot of development is about what donors perceive the country needs” in this way, not being there money in the UN system as a whole, there is no rational incentives for agencies to coordinate and deliver together. On the contrary, from the perspective of countries in the Caribbean, **Respondent 5** argues that in presence of more funds, there was no “obvious need for agencies to look and ask what others were doing”. Now instead, when resources a more limited, the Delivery as One reform has allowed for richer analysis of the problems in the country, carried out together among agencies, national partners and NGOs.

Another way in which the donors influence the governance structure is the limited degree of flexibility that allows the system to adopt, since “cause if the donor comes back, they want to see the trail” as mentioned by **Respondent 2**, if you have an agile system, donors would not be able to track why decisions where taken or whether the decision was a right one. This aspect of the flexibility of the system in further explained in the section dealing with the sources of uncertainties.

### 5.3.2 Country Specifics

![Country Specifics](image)

*Figure 10 - Hierarchical (Top-Down) Netword Diagram - Country Specifics*

Within this category we decided to include specific aspects of the countries that we found to have a significant influence on the programming decisions and criteria. Among the various factors that could be considered, the main ones arising from the interviews were the following:

**Size of the country.** This aspect plays an important role in the involvement of the different agencies. In fact, small countries with limited agencies presence might create
opportunities to collaborate independently from the implementation of the SOPs, as for example the case in Georgia commented by Respondent 6, which although not a Delivery as One country, worked perfectly together and had joint programmes: “that comes back to the personality of the people, they wanted to. They liked to work together, maybe it was a small country office...And because also we were not that many people, we were sitting physically together, that is an important key aspect, we interact with each other. Maybe the delivery as one worked better in Georgia than in Mozambique”. The size of the country also significantly impacted the outcomes and perceptions of the Delivery as One in the Caribbean region, which Respondent 5 explained to be much more sensitive about the reforms coming from the headquarters, “because we are very small in Caribbean, everything that comes globally, hits us harder and faster than the rest, and you can feel that people are tired and exhausted, having the government staff complaining, the UN staff complaining... a lot of us being this small, when it has been implemented in these countries we feel it very quickly, because it’s only a few numbers of people that have to implement and give the structures”.

At the same time, in the current year, the Dutch and English-speaking Caribbean region implemented a regional framework that unites 18 countries under one strategic development plan, the UNDAF. The respondent further comments that “The regional framework has allowed us to work much closer together than before. I didn’t see that over the last 10 years”. Adding to that, Respondent 8 from the same region confirms that “this multi-country UNDAF provides for economies of scale in terms of the provision of the expertise within the region. And it allows for more coherence response to regional and national needs. Because one important factor to bear in mind is that in the Caribbean or the small islands states in the Caribbean region, there are several similarities in the development context”. On the other hand, larger countries like in Africa, have a quite different situation, where, given the size of the countries is reflected also on cultural dimensions and peculiarities, for example Tanzania and Mozambique. where the number of agencies is very high and therefore the coordination more complicated, “When you have between 15 and 25 agencies, everybody is just doing their own thing and they will report directly to their own regional office and headquarters. So, for the local governments it’s really complicated because sometimes they have two or three agencies working with real close mandates”.

However, in the case of the African countries, more than their size there are other main factors influencing the adoption of the Delivery as One, which follow below:

**Income and development of the country**. Clearly the actual level of development of the country impacts on the implementation of the reform, as different types of programmatic interventions will be needed. Among the interviewees, two mentioned that the country of their context is a medium-high income, and therefore the role of the UN varies considerably with respect to developing countries. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, Respondent 5 explained that being a high-middle income country, it does not receive a lot of funding, and the UN role is almost equal to the one of countries in Europe. “In this context, the cost-savings is the number one priority, but again it’s so difficult to attract funding here. You have to be very careful with your funding, what is going away, look at the synergies...see what others are doing”. In this way the adoption of the Delivery as One and of the Multi-Country Regional Framework has “prompt Trinidad to get closer to the SOPs and Delivery as One and working together, along with the flexibility and synergy, cooperation, sharing information, and being more efficient”. Once again thus,
the push to adopting the SOPs comes from the government engagement, which “comes from the state being able to engage at the political level in the headquarters in New York, so when you have an ambassador who is representing you in New York that is able to be part of international processes, you will find that there is much more strength and political buying to carry it out on the ground”.

On the contrary, a country like Mozambique, that is the 10th least developed in the world, has a complete different scenario. As reported in the government role section, it is not just about the involvement of the state, as well as the type of involvement, since the capacities are very low hence the enabling resources limited. Accordingly, Respondent 2 claimed that “In a context like Mozambique, I think that instead of finding and identifying all the problems, which are billions and are very hard to prioritise... I believe that in that particular context you should start with the capacities you have”. By saying this, the interviewee means that if there is an asset to make a change, like a good minister, “you work on that and support that instead of trying to push a particular issue you want to pursue and where there is no capacity and no interest of doing anything about it”.

Other factors specifically related to the countries arising from the interviews were for example specific political contexts such as in the context of human rights violations, dictatorships which changes the level of participatory involvement of the government hence the type of analysis and prioritization that is carried out. However, we didn’t have direct interviewees experiencing this to further detail this aspect.

5.3.3 Sources of Uncertainty

The UNDAF Guidelines (UNDG, 2017, p. 37) recommends an approach to identify and manage “any potential risks that could disrupt the planned process of the roadmap and list appropriate mitigation strategies.” It promotes a risk-informed approach to UNDAF design, implementation and monitoring. In particular, it acknowledges the importance of conflict analysis in the CCA in relevant contexts, (UNDG, 2017, p. 6). The risks in the context of prioritization can originate from the country context, where risk management into programming, and strengthening national capacities to address these issues are recommended in the UNDAF Guideline (UNDG, 2017, p. 11). The risk management approach at the UNDAF intervention is to “seek to reduce risks and build resilience through strengthening national capacities and policy support, and to mainstream sustainability and resilience across programmes”, also an outcome from the results-focused approach (UNDG, 2017, p. 13). The gap between what is planned and what is achieved is needed and that implies risk management.

Respondent 3, on monitoring the evaluations from countries with the Delivery as One, and through the analysis of the risk and assumption that were put in the project when it was designed, claims that there's still many challenges in terms of risk management when it comes to the UNDAF implementations: “...a sample of what happens with the
evaluations being carried out with UNDP countries in terms of the UNDAF, I think...we were a step back. Because ... UNDP has installed more capacity in terms of monitoring their projects, and you have more people dedicated full-time monitoring. But that is not the case for UNDAF” although it is predicted in the UNDAF Guidelines. One of the reasons might come from **Respondent 4**, which clarifies that the “…there is a huge gap to what you plan for, and what you would like to do. The whole context has changed” and continues: “You wouldn't know about the financial crises, about the draught... all these uncertainties that in reality will define the context for you to take the decisions”. This argument is supported by **Respondent 1** which add that “...working on a volatile situation it is very hard to predict what will be happening” reinforced by **Respondent 2** which add that “you can't predict the resources and capacities next year, you don't know who is going to be around”.

On the other hand, **Respondent 4** also calls the attention to the political dimension as a source of uncertainty: “…if you only plan for results then you will never achieve them, because it's the political context that will define the possibilities”. Risk management and the sources of uncertainty are always a combination between political, economic, environmental and social factors. What is not known will be affecting the ability to execute, “…and that would have been far more important factor in your ability to deliver than synergies between agencies, or that there is a flat. This means that you can’t execute the project at all”. This is pointed out by the respondend as one of the reasons why the system is problematic and why the connection between risk management and uncertainty in the UNDAF as a concept is complex: “What you already know is not a problem; the problem is what you don't know. And that's why the system is problematic, because you need more flexibility. You need flexibility to respond to the reality on the ground at the point in time it happens, without losing kind of a common focus. And the UNDAF doesn't do that, it's a document that is signed by government and you can't do anything”.

The fundamental characteristic of the countries UN is in it is the uncertainty, and this situation quite differs in other contexts. **Respondent 7** highlighted a level of flexibility of adjusting the UNDAF: “...also we have a closure in doing the UNDAF saying that if something really big happens, even if it's a signed document, we can in terms of relations do some adjustments if it will be necessary.” **Respondents 6 and 8** expands that “…there are provisions for, technical provisions, for how things will be prioritized, because reality on the ground may change. It could be anything, it doesn't have to be really drastic things happening, but it might be that the government comes up with a new set of economic policies that basically make them change course or direction big infrastructure projects” and “…there is space to revisit if the circumstances of the context change significantly... that's where the SOPs provide for that flexibility”. In this regard, **Respondent 4** clarifies on the possibility of adjusting the UNDAF to respond to the context: “…in theory you can but you don't want to go into the process of two years negotiations with the government to change something. It is not fit for purpose. I think the SOPs are fit on purpose, but the UNDAF itself it is not”.

But the effects that the uncertainties originating from humanitarian crisis not necessarily affect the course of the prioritization process. According to **Respondent 1** “…there are structures in place that definitely should be able to take humanitarian crisis through the use of the One UN approach”. And the role of the government in these situations is reinforced by the same respondent: “you still have to keep the new SOP element which is the steering committee. You will still have the function between the government and the
UN, to keep seeing that we are doing what we are saying if it's something needs to change. They have the power to do it.” At the same level, Respondent 2 associates the lack of response strategies from the UNCT to the bureaucratic institution that UN is: “...is one difficulty within bureaucracy that tends not to give that, empowerment to the staff” and continues: “…the risk management and the bureaucracy is that we are trying to secure all our decisions”. Respondent 5 on the other hand highlights that “…every partner is responsible for risk management”. This could imply the lack of rationality on applying the RBM (Results Base Management) in developing countries as detailed by Respondent 4 which explains that the rationale behind it is that “…because it's based on risk management, and you are not managing risks, you are accepting uncertainties”.

5.3.4 Bounded Rationality of Decision Makers

After the Common Country Analysis – CCA is done, one of the sources of rational data for prioritization, also observing that that is based on partnership with governments and other stakeholders, the baseline resulting from it is what informs the problem statement in that country. Respondent 2 details that:

“These are the challenges that country X is experiencing, and then based on that you sit down, and you do your internal comparative analysis: what is my agency capacity to address these problems? And then, rationally is translate into a body of agencies coming together, where they basically say that this is our mandate, this is our comparative advantage, and this is our current capacity to deliver. We should be doing X Y and Z, and the other agencies, and you sit down together, quite collectively and agree on should be doing what, and who is best equipped to deliver or assisting a government with resolving the problem statement” and concludes “I would say that ultimately the model is to put together to reflect rational choice theory.”

Respondent 4 on the other hand, as specified on the processes contained on the SOPs that are the guidelines for implementing initiatives in the countries, processes are never rational. When asked if it was possible to be rational considering all these political contexts and the complexity of the UN structure, the respondent emphasises “Yes of course, but it's based on bounded rationality.” Respondent 2 adds that “…to be agile in working on development, it's not rational to put all this thinking all together, we have to go with the flow, and this is something of course not only for the UN or the development context”.

Back to the notions and perspective from a pilot country in the Delivery as One approach, the situation was very different. Respondent 6 highlighted that: “…a great deal of success with the reform process is that people were on board” and continued “...but obviously... there is a lot of politicking involved in these processes and I've seen it in
every country I've worked which is based on culture, it's based on personalities. The Agency head level but also, probably I think the entire agency, it goes on mandates it goes on directives coming from their respective headquarters”.

Respondent 4 view supports the statement and adds that “...in the end, it's the agencies incentives... it's your career, it's the agencies reputation. Also, it's your passion, because if you are UNICEF, you think that what you do is so much important than everything else. So why would you take time and effort to bankroll something that you think is worst for that country? It's a pride thing as well. You are rational, you plan for what you have, your money, and then you get that as close as possible to UNDAF, there's no priorities” adding that “...when it is not financed, then your personal interest will define what you do” and “rationality doesn't guarantee anything” implying further that regardless of the level of rationality, most factors that will actually define the impact is beyond the control of the decision maker, and concludes that “...in the end it's all about people as well”.

Originally all staff should be international to diminish the bias on the decision-making process and to avoid issues of compliance in the country level. Respondent 2 says that: “...particularly procurement, is a big issue. If you are procuring in your own country where you have five suppliers, for sure you will have one of your siblings or some kind related to you”. This is also associated with having the right people and the right mind set of people on-board, tracing back to what motivates people within the UN. In this matter, the same respondent added that “(people) are not getting the incentives to put the organization first, but its more incentives of putting yourself first, and that works against, for example, implementing some of the great ideas”.

Respondent 1, attributes to the level of commitment of the UN Country Team, a great deal of success for the UN Reform “...if they hadn’t stayed on board this year, you will not be able to achieve anything. If you push the One UN agenda at the country level too hard, and then that may backfire”. Respondent 7 adds up that “...it's really much easier to do the negotiation, because if some people feel that you have been working alone. It's more difficult later on because they may be not so open to listen to you”. Supporting that a key for a consistent decision-making process is alignment among all the levels. But people do not always embrace the culture of change. Respondent 6 highlighted an experience of the implementation where “...people didn't really care. It takes a long time to change institutional mind set and conscience. Agencies were still very much geared toward their own mandate their own bosses in New York or Geneva, their own their own particular interest and ...again, coming to what they would prioritize”.

Another important actor on decision making which is mentioned by some of the respondents is the government. A successful relationship with the government also relies on the personalities involved, especially when it comes to the minister’s seats which changes constantly depending on the political context. In this regard, Respondent 7 shares that “...the new minister she's much more open to the U.N. than the previous... I feel this dense growth of personalities sometimes” and highlighting the influence the personalities have on the decision-making process. Argument that is supported by Respondent 1, “...it all comes back to the power struggles and personalities, and how important this process is”. Other countries that decided to adopt the UN Reform and the delivery as one approach, also shared the same experience. Respondent 5 complemented that it was the own government that pushed the UN Reform in the country, adding that “it wanted to be part of the international system and it wanted to be leader. A lot of this
came from the personality of then the Minister Planning” complementing that “...the country itself was enjoying being part of the political dynamics in New York, and of the regional office of the Caribbean, and this was all before the SOPs and the QCPR, this was when we were doing the TCPR. It was the only country in this region”.

5.3.5 Decision Characteristics

On the One Programme layer of countries that have adopted the Delivery as One Approach, it is on the preparation of the UNDAF and on the conduction of the Joint Results Groups (Annual or Bi-annual Work plans), that most of the decisions associated with the prioritization of projects and programmes take place. Respondent 6 on this matter, highlighted that “…if you narrowed it down to the UN reform countries, the highest decision-making body is the Delivery as One joint steering committee. They will be, and it usually constitutes the resident coordinator a handful of heads of agencies, usually on a rotational basis, and some key ministers from the line ministries also sometimes on a rotational basis. Bearing in mind that the government it's not a client, it is a partner.”

Ultimately that is the body that, with support from the technical spheres of the agencies specialist, the Resident Coordinators Office and the Government Ministries specialists, decides on what goes into the UNDAF document, into the prioritization of strategic areas itself. Respondent 9 reinforces that “The development of the UNDAF are done in way that brings to bear the national development priorities that would be evident through an analysis that is conducted by the Country Team in consultation & partnership with the government and multiple stakeholders.” Continued by Respondent 7 which stated that: “That big long process, it takes usually more than a year... start with the country analysis, where we identify all of the problems in the country ahead of its date and to the state to show where the biggest social problems...”.

The UN Country Team convenes representatives of all UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies who are present in a country, as well as maintaining relations with non-resident agencies that have programmes on the ground. On this matter, is important to reference to the secondary data analysed – the Standard Operation Procedures for Delivery as One Countries, (UNDG, 2014, p. 24), which defines that “On the basis of the appropriate decentralization of authority from headquarters, and empowered UN Country Team takes decisions on programmatic and financial matters relating to the programming activities as agreed with national authorities and as called for in the QCPR. Together with the UNDG at the global level, agency headquarters and Regional UNDG Teams, UN Country Teams fully implement the Management and Accountability System, with the following key responsibilities”.
Respondent 2 noted that depending on the issue, decision making process can be centralized or decentralized at the UN context: “…of course, it centralized when it comes to standards and norms and thinking approach. Then it's much more decentralized when it come to the operational issues and implementing, again to be agile.”

As observed from the respondents’ perspectives, decisions taken on focus areas and distribution of investments are often involving a lot of negotiation within the UN. It is traced back to the socio-economic implementation and political characteristics of the country the UN is on, the maturity level on the UN Reform, to which agency are present in there and what exactly can the agencies work on. Respondent 4 suggests that: “…the logic of the UNDAF processes that you decide in what areas you want to coordinate, and you don’t have a UNDAF, but you would have interrelated programmes between agencies” must be changed. Respondent 7 on this regard highlighted the complexities of the decision-making structure: “…the UNDAF it's very big level ...that's huge, so on the annual work plans are the ones that have the detailed actions, to say exactly what we're going to do. That's not in the UNDAF, and that's developed every year. The UNDAF is for five years and really big level, a lot of the things that we will work exactly what every agency will do every year. It depends on that annual work plan.”

When asked if decisions are done on the political level or on the technical level Respondent 7 stated that it happens on “…both, because a lot of times the mechanization is going up and down.” With all of this in perspective and again, keeping in mind the level of maturity of the country on the UN Reform process, the decision-making process of assigning priorities to projects and programs can be associated to these two macro-process of governance in other two different and interplaying spheres: The Technical and The Political Level. Both are detailed below.

5.3.5.1 Technical Level
According to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, nations combines its diverse and complimentary mandates, expertise and technical contributions so that the policy support it provides to national partners is comprehensible, comprehensive and coherent. These approaches enhance collaboration towards collective outcomes and the UNDAFs leverage both specialized sectoral technical assistance and cross sectoral work. As part of this process, the Common Country Analysis (CCA), defined is the UN System as “the UN system’s independent and mandate-based articulation of the country context” identifies opportunities and challenges, encompassing sustainable development and other UN commonalities (e.g. human rights, gender equality, peace and security). Responded 3 says that “…also, you are supposed to do the comparative advantages analysis. Which is an analysis which should help the agencies to decide if the UN should work in this specific area or not.”

Also, according to the SOP guidelines (UNDG, 2014, p. 22), the CCA provides technical expertise and good practices. The country context and the data are analysed, supporting decisions on the UNDAF elaboration. Also in here, a neutral space to discuss sensitive political issues is facilitated through convening a range of national and international partners, where various issues such as peace and conflict mediation, can be addressed and resolved. Respondent 7: “…we had a lot of sessions, like big workshops with hundreds of people helping us to prioritize areas for the common country analysis, and based on
all these topics that came up in the workshops we were asking what are the big problems in Bolivia today. And then we add a lot of data to that”. This suggests a linkage with the Political Level of the decisions. Respondent 9 “…the technical level has to get together and make sure that we didn't end up with more extra work, for that that instance: reporting, lines, indicators, results, effective results etc. were aligned.” The respondent adds that even in countries without a clear leadership from the One Leader, there needs to seek an alignment of the national strategic areas with the UNDAF.

The technical level of decision making is also defined by Respondent 9 as the “technical committees or working groups that would come together to ensure that the implementation or the actions that are outlined in the plan are being implemented in a consistent way, in line with the plan.” Based on all the analysis done on the Country Team, some areas that were have been mentioned as the big problematic areas are identified. Respondent 7 expands “that's not the level where the representatives are discussing, that's the technical experts that sitting down. So, then we have a representative from a technical expertise from the minister's house together with the expertise from the WHO (World Health Organization), for example, sitting together discussing their indicators.” Still, Respondent 7 argues that “…maybe 60 or 70 percent of the negotiation in one and a half years have been on technical level, but all the big decisions obviously have been on the political level.” When asked about the extent to which the decisions on this level are rational, Respondent 8 implies that “it’s all based on real data and analysis and evidence. We can say that the decision is rational and is taken depending on external factors…It is rational based on evidence.”

5.3.5.2 Political Level

The characteristic of multilateral organizations, in this case the UN, is that it is formed by the country states, by governments. In this matter, Respondent 3 clarifies that: “…that's at the highest level. That's part of the complexity. All the politics that you have among the governments, you also see that at some level internally in the UN.” and continues “the political influences it's quite important. Yes, I mean politically in the good sense you know, because you have an issue of internal politics and that is really that also to the mandate that each of the agency has. For example, the representative of UNICEF let's say, he has to respond to these corporate mandates in terms of what UNICEF does and request etc. So that's how he or she has to move. That has to be negotiated politically with the UNDAF representatives and the resident coordinators. Respondent 5 adds that “…if the country decides this is what to do, If I want to be called the green nation, if I want to be a nation with limited crime of peaceful nation, the politics comes to the country. Remember that the UN is operating in a political economy and you can't take one out of the other. You are so focused on the social and you are pursuing the right things. However, all this is happening in the context of the politics”

Prior to the SOPs and the Delivery as One model, the UNDAF were developed differently across different country teams. As the UNDAF auto-reflects the high-level priority and the outcomes, only some parts of it went down to outputs, but it was not consistent, or it was not clear. Respondent 8 highlighted that at the time that is was optional to have what was referred to UNDAF action plan: “…the UN developing group provides very specific guidance to country teams on the operational guides, so the guidance at the time provided it was considered optional if the CT wanted then to develop an action plan to operationalize the UNDAF”.

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After the definition of the focus areas, or strategic areas on the preparation for the UNDAF, the RCO in the person of the RC, then takes it to be debated in the retreat of the UNCT. Respondent 7 commented that “...we worked 2 days just the political level to define that because we have had a lot of input from the technical level, for recommendations, that in the end they sat down for two days and decided how to prioritize them. Then they negotiated with the government and after two days we have the four areas signed with the government.” Furthermore, Respondent 7 reinforces the importance of the discussions held on the technical level and increments that “…discussion with the political level (were held) informally, just to see where the wind was blowing, and then we sat down for two days and we really put it down to deciding how to prioritize and how to put together.”

When questioned on who would own the ultimate decision-making power, Respondent 5 explained that “…it's the state that does that type of leadership. Even with the most excellent resident coordinator fully committed to the QCPR and SOPs and getting the UN going, if you don't have the partnership of the government, it's not going to get the results that you desire.”

Respondent 2 on the other hand, highlights that “It will come too probably in the country context. If you are working in Afghanistan you have probably a decentralized decision making because they both have the resources and capacities, if you are working in a small country it will be much more dependent on headquarters and depending on the agencies. Respondent 2 reinforces that “It's not necessarily that the Resident Coordinator should be empowered...you would also go where the money is, and the trend.” Continued by Respondent 1 which stated that “…what the U.N. is deciding, that's much more complex, and it’s much more political”. At the end of the day, is the Government that takes the final decision, even with the most excellent RC, as stated on the role of the government section. Multilateral organization often possess the government as co-owners of actions taken in place in the ground, being them starters and requestors of the UN Reform in the country. It also justifies one of the reasons why the political sphere of the decisions is so important, Respondent 5 then reinforces “…so you have this sort of challenges at the government side as well. How much we have political buying and how much we have their attention how much are they engaging in that international system.”

Another important characteristic of the decisions highlighted by Respondent 8 was that “…there are not a lot of negotiations, so much because the programmes are developed based on consultations... so it is to a certain extend the reflection of what has been identified as priority needs or gaps that can be addressed, and best addressed by the UN. So, it is the formulation and then it goes through a process of not just consultations but also of validation, so it means having face to face meetings, providing the documents, doing the joint-analysis around the various thematic areas considering those programming principles that guide how the analysis is completed and how the programme is developed.” In line with the technical support provided by data and analysis from the discussion held on the technical level.

In contrast to responded 8, Respondent 7 argues that “…it’s like a negotiation we have... what can we hope the government to do and what they want us to do”. This claim would support the need to navigate between the two different levels. But when it comes to how the projects and programs are managed in the portfolio, Respondent 4 supports that “it’s based on the resources you have. So, if you know that in your plan you have a certain
amount of resources you want to get them in the UNDAF because that's what's supposed to be done. But when it comes to how projects are managed in the portfolio, this is strictly speaking where there are more resources, and I think it’s the agencies own prioritization that will define how the total projects will look”.

5.4 Prioritization Criteria

The contextual factors above explained all influence the way in which the prioritization of the programmes takes place in the development of the One Programme. According to the UNDAF guideline (UNDG, 2017, p. 24), the strategic prioritization is based on the CCA (Common Country Analysis) and the UN vision 2030. The areas prioritized should be the ones with the greater impact potential hence contribution to the achievement of the SDGs, in line with the national priorities. Therefore, this process is transparent and consultative with the national stakeholders, particularly looking at what other bilateral or multilateral organizations are doing to understand how to work with them. Where progress is slow and the UN has comparative advantage, it should establish with the government shared outcomes in line with the SDG targets.

The criteria used for the prioritization of the programmes at country level mentioned in the interviews were the following:

**Strategic alignment to national plans**, which is clearly in alignment with the guideline, and that is the most grounded code when related to prioritization, as **Respondent 7** says: “We didn't arrive with strategic priorities to the government and said: look this is our proposal, what do you think? But we have been working with them almost six months to have a common analysis of the country. And then based on that everybody had a dialogue. We already agreed on a lot of things.”

**Maximum impacts and results**: as mentioned many times, the overarching objective is to achieve results. As **Respondent 5** explains referring to the multi-country framework in the Caribbean: “It's all about producing results, because there's so much that has happen, but we were not able to show the result in the past, so now there is a much consistent effort that we must show that we are making a difference”.

**Capacities**, together with the mandates, are a critical factor in determining the comparative advantage hence the prioritization areas. As **Respondent 6**, “So that obviously sets the tone on when you sit down, and have the prioritization retreat. There was big fighting between agencies. Especially around mandates versus capacity.”

**Incentives**: From the point of view of the agencies, the incentives are a main point. Therefore, as is explained by **Respondent 4** “In coordination you always try to look at the incentives and where they are, because if you are able to find a joint programme that’s
within the incentives and interest of several agencies, then you can create synergies and better outcomes”.

5.5 Outcomes of the Prioritization Process

The overall system of the Delivery as One approach finally conveys in the following outcomes:

**Impact.** The overall objective of development hence of this reform ultimately is to generate the greatest possible impact. However, the measurement “you can’t put on paper, or quantify all the time. It's not that you have 50 computers or loads of fuel what we are looking at. That's the good delivery for the UN agencies. But change and the impact... if you are not there with personal interest and warmth and love, working close to the people... that’s difficult and tricky to achieve”. **Respondent 4** further discusses that if you look and read the SOPs they “look like a very good idea, and it make sense to work together to generate a greater impact, without competing about resources and so on...” However, to make this in practice is very difficult, because the SOPs don’t look at what motivates people, and the agencies “want to have their own governance influencing on it. So as long as you have 10-30 bodies run by their own governance and their own board, it's very hard for them to come together and try to find common denominators, and I agree. They will find common denominators, but they will be not the most revolutionary ideas they will move on. It's kind of the lowest denominator and so as long as you have a challenge and a governance structure it will be very hard to make any sense or really big impact to the Delivery as One.”. The notion that impact is quite a separate factor deriving from much more complex relationships is shared among the respondents. Another view on this is the one of **Respondent 5**: “Maybe you have saved money for the UN, maybe you have made it more efficient in the programming, but it doesn’t mean that you are having an impact on development. ...Two things are happening when you think of the SOPs and QCPR: one is the UN internal reform, the system to react to the national and global at the same time through the leadership of the resident coordinator. The other is the partnership between the UN and the sitting government. So, both internal and external together.”

**Coherence** is regarded as one of the main outcomes of the adoption of the Delivery as One. This is particularly related to the fact that it makes it clearer and easier to understand what the other agencies are doing in the same country or region. Therefore, the communication is improved as well as the accountability, as **Respondent 1** explained, “it makes certain issues more visible in terms of advocacy in communications, and they're doing it through all the other UN agencies”.

**Effectiveness**, following the coherence, is one more highly grounded theme on which the majority of the respondents agreed upon. As for example, **Respondent 4** considers “a lot
of the SOPs and RBM tools are very effective”, and Respondent 3 says “The UNDAF and all the instruments and mechanisms of delivering as one approach ... I think they are valuable efforts made by the organization, to improve its efficiency, efficacy, which is the end are part of what the U.N. reform was looking at”.

Efficiency and synergies, this theme arose a number of discrepancies among the respondents, while some were more positive and saw the efficiency and cost-reductions taking place through the Delivery as One approach, others had a completely opposite view. On the one hand, in the context of the Caribbean Respondent 5 claims that: “we are doing initiatives and actions that will all fit in the same results and where we can borrow from each other or help each other in logistics maybe or in other ways, sometimes even a consultant that you share the analysis that were done. In terms of cost savings there was a lot of planning going on in Suriname, and a lot of that did happen”. On the other hand, Respondent 2 that speaks from the perspective of African countries claims that: “…one way to save money is reducing staff, and no agency was prepared to reduce staff. If you are going to adopt the delivery as one you need to ask yourself those questions. Are you prepared to reduce? That how you get savings. That's the way you are going to get savings. You can't just build a big RC, which happened in many countries, because you actually increase the cost. You are actually absorbing functions from the agencies. If you are having your procurement unit, the procurement staff needs to be reduced, or at least it shouldn’t increase”. Adding to this view, Respondent 4 claims that “rather that promoting synergies, it creatives incentives against synergies, because the categories defined (by the UNDAF) won’t be relevant anymore at the time you are actually implementing them”.
6 Discussion

In this chapter, the findings are directly linked to the theoretical framework to show the reasoning behind the answer to the research question presented in the concluding chapter.

The findings of the empirical section consolidated on [see APPENDIX IV – A Comprehensive Network Diagram] involves most of the codes mapped on the data analysis and it represents their relationship. These findings confirmed the relevance of most of the contextual factors identified in the theoretical framework, and highlighted the peculiarities of the field of application. Hence in the following sub-section, each of the factors will be discussed and synthesize to answer the research question and define the contribution to the current literature.

![Diagram of Portfolio Management Framework]

**Figure 16 – Findings reflected on the Literature Framework – Source: Author’s Elaboration.**

6.1 Governance

Martinsuo (2013, p.798) identifies among the main issues that influence the success of portfolio management practices the governance type, organizational complexity, and parent-organizational context. These factors were clearly found as relevant in the case of the UN Delivery as One reform, from three interrelated points of view:

The degree and type of involvement of the government, that, in this specific case is the owner of the reform and the programmes, influences the type of commitment of the agencies, hence the extent to which the planning and prioritization of the programmes is done looking at best common results instead of to the lowest common denominator. Therefore, the governance structure is here directly linked to the involvement type of the project/ programme owner. This aspect is in fact increasingly recognized in the current literature of project management as well, but mainly at the single-project level. Davis (2014, p.193) claims that successful projects have higher rates of involvement of the owner, which establishes effective communication. In contrast with unsuccessful projects which often see little involvement of the owners. Thus, the findings suggest the role of the owner is critical not only for the success at the single-project level, but also for the successful outcome of portfolio management.
One more aspect of the governance structure of the UN Delivery as One is the role of the Resident Coordinator, which ensures the strategic alignment of the UN assistance to the national development strategies. Among his responsibilities, the RC leads the country team in the definition of the strategic focus and the allocation of funds, taking the final decision if consensus is not reached among the members (UNDG, 2014, p. 24). However, the role of the Resident Coordinator resulted to have less authority than what is claimed in the guidelines, while it is more about soft-power. This confirms the view of Martinsuo (2013, p. 799) which argues that the actions and decisions of portfolio managers involve negotiation and bargaining skills, given by the influence between people and the organization, which go beyond the assignment of resources and responsibilities accounted for in the rational frameworks of the standards. Particularly, this influencing process is characterized by issue selling, charismatic power and in-depth expertise (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 800).

One more relevant aspect of the governance which influence the decision and the prioritization of programmes of the Delivery as One approach are given by the agencies power and capacity. This in turns depends on the fact that among the criteria used for prioritizing, an important one is the creation of maximum impact and results, through the use the capacities available. This topic emerged from the empirical analysis and is little mentioned in the literature. However, it can be assumed that, being the prioritization of portfolio management based on criteria like performance (PMI 2006, p. 37), and creation of profits (Mikkola, 2001 p. 424), it is likely that managers in charge of profitable and better performing projects and programmes have a stronger influence on the prioritization and on decisions taken by the portfolio manager.

Lastly, although multilateral channels are claimed to give less influence to the interests of the donors compared with other types of aid-giving (Hawkins et al., 2006, p. 138), we found that donors do influence, although indirectly, the prioritization process. The amount and type (earmarked or not) of funds received by a certain country determines the degree of involvement of the agencies, hence the planning and prioritization for strongest possible results. These aspects are very different from the traditional project management fields of research, where the resources and funds are often allocated based on strategies inherent to the organizations. It is in fact a peculiarity of the development aid sector, which arose from the literature considering the stakeholders at the single-project level. Golini & Landoni (2014, p. 124) claim development projects receive funds that donors want to see used for value-adding activities for the beneficiaries and local community. Therefore, in presence of funds scarcity, major cuts are done in the administrative and non-core activities. This is what takes place in the Delivery as One reform, where the activities of the UN coordination are seen as supporting ones, hence has scarce availability of funds to perform well.

6.2 Bounded Rationality of Decision Makers

Many studies claim that the managerial context is affected by the behavioural influences rather than the maximization of the economic utility (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014, p. 343). In the case of the UN system, this was clearly confirmed, and often the prioritization of programmes is influenced by the bounded rationality of decision makers rather than the creation of the maximum impact. This is mainly attributable to two actors in the systems:

The head of agencies, by a matter of fact, think that their own programmes are more relevant that the ones of others, and being involved in the planning and definition of
strategic priorities themselves, it is straightforward that they do not collect all the information available and possible alternatives to take a position. Therefore, often this has been regarded as a problem and difficulty of the Delivery as One reform, which sees the agencies in conflict among each other, instead of looking at the bigger picture and the need to work together. This really depends on the personalities, which the system assumes to be much more rational and open that what often is the reality.

Additionally, the personality of the minister in charge of the country planning, determines how closely to engage with the UN, and based on the personal views for the country as well as the ability to engage with the UN Headquarters in New York, will this influence on how prioritization areas will look like.

6.3 Characteristics of the Decisions

Managers categorize decisions in different ways based on the matter, motive, importance, time pressure etc. Shepherd & Rudd (2014, p. 349) showed that the label of a decision, might have a significant influence on the decision making. The empirical analysis highlighted that interviewees often distinguished between different levels of the decision-making, mainly referring to technical ones, and high-level political ones.

On the one hand, the technical level influences the decision through analysis, evidence, indicators, and data. It involves negotiations and monitoring to ensure the alignment of the implementation with the national plans based on numbers and through the technical experts. On the other hand, the political level is where the big decisions are taken, and where the political actors get involved. The statistics and data inform the decision makers at this level, but much reflects the high-level priorities of the countries, which might not be in line with what evidence suggests. Priority areas might be assigned according to the personal view of the decision makers at this level, such as the minister or the strategy, planning or heads of agencies.

Project-based organizations are structured in such a way that the decision is distributed from the projects and operations, to programmes, portfolio and the top management (PMI, 2006, p. 7). Portfolio management is considered the bridge from the operational to the strategic level (PMI 2006, p. 6; Rajegopal, 2007, p.10). Therefore, although current literature does not consider how the different levels might interact with each other, the empirical findings in the development aid sector show they both contribute and play a dominant role in the prioritization process.

6.4 Geographical Location and Country Specifics

Literature suggests that the geographical context might influence the application of portfolio management tools and techniques (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 793; Müller et al, 2008, p. 39). Confirming this claim, the empirical findings show that the characteristics of the country in which the standards of the Delivery as One reform was applied, varied much its adoption. In particular, two main factors were significant:

The size of the country resulted to be connected with the number of people involved in the process of coordinating and prioritizing. In this sense, smaller countries with fewer staff were found to have higher motivation to work jointly with other agencies and share resources. Moreover, a limited amount people makes it feasible to sit physically together, another important point that facilitates the collaboration and involvement. On the other hand, larger countries often implied the participation of many agencies and people, which
increase the complexity of the decisions to make jointly, hence the prioritizations of programmes in a way that is a minimum common denominator between the agencies. In fact, although in this context many agencies have similar mandates, they struggle to create synergies between them, failing to reduce duplications of the activities. As a result, the adoption of the Delivery as One has surprisingly increased the overall costs, instead of reducing it.

One more fundamental aspect of the country context is the income and level of development. Obviously, being development the overarching objective of the whole reform, the role of the UN varies depending on the type of programmatic interventions needed. High-middle income countries don’t receive much funding, subsequently, they need to be more conscious about how the funds are being spent. In this case the prioritization looks more at cost-savings and the most efficient use of resources. On the other hand, countries with low income and low level of development face a number of issues beyond the lack of funds. One of these is the level of capacities available in the country. This aspect has a major impact on the outcomes of the Delivery as One reform and the prioritization process, which being carried out in partnership with the government, is affected by the limited contribution that the people involved can give. For this reason, the priorities might be assigned considering where there is the interest and the capacities to make an impact.

As it is clear, the specific attributes of the countries in which the standards are adopted, have a great impact on the way in which they are implemented, as well as on which criteria programmes are prioritized. This topic is mentioned in the literature of development sector at the single-project level, mainly referred to as: “different value structures and cultures” (Golini & Landoni, 2014, p. 124), “human behaviours dependent on cultural dimensions” (Hermano et al., 2013, p. 22) or “social factors” (Yourker, 1999, p.6). However, given the empirical results, there might be implications in other traditional-project oriented sectors, where the number of the population, income, active work force, and educational levels of a certain location imply certain cultural perception that influence the criteria of prioritizing a portfolio.

6.5 Different Sources of Uncertainty and Risk Exposure

Traditionally uncertainty is defined as “the difference between the available information and the required information to finish a task” (Hällgren et al., 2012, p. 700). Contextual uncertainty specifically refers to whatever exists beyond the boundaries of the organization. Nowadays environment is characterized by rapid and constant changes, resulting in an increased interest of the literature in understanding how uncertainties can be managed. Petit (2010, p. 539) suggested that portfolio management is highly affected by the dynamism of the environment, which leads to constant changes of the scope. In the context of the development aid sector, uncertainties are considered to be a significant factor impacting the management of single-projects outcomes. From the perspective of multiple programmes and agencies planning, the empirical findings showed that even at this level, uncertainties have an impact on the outcomes of the Delivery as One reform and on how the programmes are prioritized.

In fact, it was possible to distinguish among two types of uncertainty, as suggested by Hällgren et al. (2012, p. 700), operational uncertainty ad contextual uncertainty. The former, relates to information that is available inside of the organization or the project, while the latter includes everything around, and outside the boundaries of the organization.
The empirical findings show that the uncertainties at the operational level mainly involved high rate of staff turnover within the UN system. This makes it difficult to manage the motivation and the commitment of people to work together to a profound change of the organizational culture, which the Delivery as One is seeking. On the other hand, even more significantly, the contextual factors lead to a gap between what is planned and what would be required to be done in a certain point in time, considering for example draughts, financial crises, the political instability that has the potential to affect with more strength this type environments, hence changing significantly the type of interventions required.

Generally, both these types of uncertainties are present at the single-project level literature of development projects, which refers to “uncertain operating environment” and “uncertain natural factors” (Hällgren et al., 2012, p. 700). From the findings, these factors influence also the higher level of planning and prioritizing, which risks being outdated and not relevant to the context in which circumstances have changed. In addition to that, the process of changing strategic plans and priorities is regarded as very complex and time consuming, hence rarely undertaken. This is in line with the claims of Petit (2010, p. 539), which argues that portfolio planning in dynamic environments involve the continuous changes of the scope, assuming a tremendous efforts and resources consumption.

In general, the dilemma between the adaptations to the environment against the planning of rigid goals is an ongoing discussion in the literature. On one hand, having established rigid goals leads to less successful outcomes when the environment changes. On the other hand, two high degrees of adaptation to the environment doesn’t allow setting a goal and planning for the execution, making operations inefficient (Hällgren et al., 2012, p. 700). This was perfectly confirmed from the interviews conducted, which all highlighted that uncertainties dominate the environment in this sector. However, while some perceive that the tools and techniques of the Delivery as One approach provide the flexibility to respond to that, others highlight that the system is problematic in that sense. From one side, it requires to go through a very long and complex process which is not applicable on the day to day operation, from the other, it is claimed to reduce the ability to react to emerging opportunities or threats, by the limitation of the planned priorities.
7 Conclusion

The research conclusion hereby presented is a result of the literature, findings and discussions that supports answering to the research question. The theoretical and managerial contributions are synthetized and further delimitations and limitations of this study are presented. By the closing of the chapter, future research is encouraged, and focus areas are suggested.

7.1 Answer to Research Question

The overall effort of this research has aimed towards the understanding of how the context influences the organizational structures that support the decision making in multilateral organizations, and how it influences the prioritization of development programmes and/or projects. Accordingly, the question we seek to responded is:

“How does the context influence the decision-making structures supporting the prioritization of development projects and programmes in multilateral organizations?”

To answer this question, we first have consulted the existing literature on two macro-topics: the application of portfolio management, and the peculiarities of development projects. In this way, we have identified in which way the practises of portfolio management might be affected by the context of application, grasping six major categories. Secondly, the characteristics of the environment in which development project take place has been analysed, gaining an understanding of the main actors and the challenges involved in the sector. We then summarised the theoretical findings in a framework that defined the connection between these two macro-areas, which helped us define the focus for the empirical data collection. Hence the influences of 6 main categories of the context were mapped: the governance, the bounded rationality, and the characteristics of the decision, the geographical location, and the degree of innovation and the different sources of uncertainty.

The findings obtained from the case study of the UN coordination system showed that most of the categories of the context had a relevant influences on the way in which the country teams implemented the Delivery as One Standard Operating Procedures, a set of best practises that share similar principles with the portfolio management methodology.

In particular, the governance plays a significant role in the way in which decisions are taken and priorities are assigned to programmes. Within the governance structure 3 main relevant aspects were identified: a) The role of the owners and its degree and type of involvement are crucial to the overall commitment to the coordination efforts; b) The presence of a facilitator can positively impact on the commitment and involvement of stakeholders through charismatic and soft power and bargaining skills; c) The allocation of funds from the donors determine the type of incentives relevant for the engagement of stakeholders.

The second category of the literature was confirmed to be relevant, in fact the bounded rationality of decision makers influences the way in which strategic priorities are assigned. This phenomenon mainly occurs through the influence of personalities of the deciding heads, their personal interests and motivations, as well as the personalities of the most relevant stakeholders based on performance, capacity, hence political influence.
Specific characteristics of the decisions influence the way in which the decisions are sourced and taken. The prioritization of programmes is the combination of decisions taken from two different levels in the organization, the technical level – data driven, and evidence based hence rational, and the political level, data sourced but rationally bounded, hence non-rational.

Geographical location and the specific characteristics of the country significantly influence the criteria base in which the decisions are taken, and priorities assigned, such as the number and the skills of people involved in the decisions, and the relevance of the programmes in the given country.

Lastly, uncertainties negatively affect the decisions on priorities, making them less relevant in changing circumstances and at times, limiting the ability to respond to arising opportunities.

Overall, the empirical findings show the actuality of Weber (1947) claim about the “struggle” existing between organizations and the environment, mainly dependent on power structures, control over scarce resources, and on the emergence of different actors. In particular, we show that the context plays a determinant role influencing the way in which decisions are taken and programmes in multilateral organizations are prioritized through governance structures, the bounded rationality of decision makers, country specific characteristics, and different sources of uncertainty. Accordingly,

“Universal laws are for lackeys. Context... is for kings” (Star Trek, 2017)

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

From a theoretical point of view, the benefit of this research effort is the advancement of the portfolio management literature on a non-traditional field of application. Although project-oriented, the development aid sector had so far received the sole attention of the literature at the single-project level. This research has highlighted how the aspects of the unique environment of development projects play a significant role also in the portfolio management practices. Particularly, this research responds to the claims of the authors sustaining that portfolio management in reality includes a number of aspects not mentioned in the theory.

Another relevant theoretical contribution reflects upon the origins of portfolio management in the financial arena where investment analysts initially suggested collective performance based on identified securities that offered the most promising opportunities for gain with the least risk propension, in line with current literature that claims that decision making in portfolio management would be a defined and structured process, based on rational data and logics (Levine, 2005, p. 461; Rod & Levin, 2006, p. 13). With the identification of two new layers in the decision-making sphere in managing priorities in portfolio management, this study calls upon the evolution on the "Portfolio Selection" work developed by Markowitz (1952) and grounds the claim based on the complex social constructs forming the application of Portfolio Management to coordinate human interaction and specially its decisions being so deeply influenced by the politically and the bounded rationality of its decision makers, inherent to all of the sectors of our economy and in contrast to the view of Levine (2005, p. 4) which claimed that “The
project portfolio management process starts with the rational prioritization and selection of projects”.

In particular, this research responds to the call of Petit (2012, p. 552) for further research to help understand the different types of environments in which the portfolio must be managed, and what are the different sources of uncertainty. From this point of view, we investigated and presented the peculiarities of the environment that characterises the development aid sector and the different types of uncertainties perceived, from operational and contextual level.

Additionally, we highlighted how the specificities of development projects, are reflected at the portfolio level, responding to the claim of Martinsuo (2013, p. 794) saying that since any type of project can be part of portfolios, the peculiarities of projects types might be considered for future research arenas (Martinsuo, 2013, p. 794).

Lastly, the research has strengthened the claims of Müller et al. (2008, p. 39) regarding the context of application that says that the outcomes of portfolio management depend on the type of project, internal dynamics, governance types, and geographical location. In fact, we highlighted that all the factors highlighted by Müller et al. (2008) have a significant influence in the development aid sector.

7.3 Managerial Contributions

From the findings of this research, it is possible to draw a contribution to four major areas of knowledge in the studied organization:

First of all, the literature of the project portfolio management to this specific and non-traditional field of research was synthetized. The organization can benefit from this on further methodological advancements in the field of portfolio, programme and project management applied to the organization’s processes and procedures;

Secondly, nuances of the decision-making processes along with the different layers and particularities of them are thoroughly detailed. This can support the organization on the review of roles and responsibilities in the prioritization process along with the adaption of internal timelines considering the need to fulfil nuances of the decision-making process;

Thirdly, the findings described on the discussions and the standpoint of the respondents can help the organization to assess, to some extent, the adherence of the Standard Operating Procedures to different geographical locations, along with it the views of the practitioners on the aspects inherent of the environments they are inserted on;

Finally, the UN and multilateral organizations in general, can also find on this study a support for enhancing the quality of the decision-making process in their complex environment. Hopefully, by accessing the material, practitioners acquire tools to map the context in which decisions are made and build more comprehensive response plans to deal with this inherent characteristic of this type of organization.
7.4 Delimitations and Limitations of the Research

Furthering what has been described within the methodological chapter; the presented research is subjected to various sets of limitation that can be divided into theoretical and methodological. Both aspects are further discussed below.

7.4.1 Delimitations of the Research

The delimitations in this research are characterized as the choices made by the researchers on which parameters were considered for the investigation and which of them were mentioned, setting the boundaries for the study.

Multilateral organizations by definition are often involved with the public sector via governments and its representatives. Upon reviewing the literature in portfolio management in the public sector, the choice made was not to detail this context once the studies found majorly applied to the level of project and program management. Although it shares similarities with the International Development theory in project management, it is in contrast with the top-down view intended for the study, which seat on the higher level of the organization—navigating from the Governance aspects and Strategy definitions to Portfolio Management. Furthermore, the theory in Public Project Management did not contribute to respond to the research question proposed to this study. We have therefore mentioned the catalogued researches when in connection to the characteristics of International Development Projects.

Likewise, few literatures were found on the application of Portfolio Management theory to multilateral organization. Therefore, we have decided to make the connection with the current portfolio theory developed and mostly applied in the private sector. Furthermore, the population considered for the study was based on the initial assumption of possible practitioners of portfolio management methodology in such organization, notion that was further expanded on this research.

Another limitation to this study refers to the empirical data considered. The secondary data collected and analysed for this study comprehends those that supports the statements highlighted by the respondents during the interviews and to illustrate the case study. A comprehensive review of all governance related material and guidelines was not made and consequently one could argue that main aspects or nuances of the work method in the UN were not captured. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the study did not aim at verifying the level of attainment of the countries with the Delivery as One model to the SOP guidelines and their respective mandates.

7.4.2 Limitations

The limitations of this research are describing the circumstances affecting and restricting the adopted methods and the data analysis. As limitations are influences that the researchers could not control, an effort was put into adopting a broader view of the phenomenon, which in some circumstances meant approaching the data in a more generalist manner.

From a methodological standpoint, by using the single case study method, the findings and conclusion of the present research only apply for the researched organization that the study was conducted on. Generalization of the findings from this study is not encouraged. However, we believe our findings and conclusions contribute to the theory in various
aspects, from the role of the Resident Coordinator, associated to the Portfolio Manager, to the characteristics of decision making and contextual environment affecting them. Furthermore, the experience of the respondents described on the case and the reliability of their standpoints, mixing a combination of international components and years of experience, make these claims credible and reliable to other value based organizations.

7.5 Further Research

In line with the methodological limitations and the overall research delimitations, the perspective taken into account for this study considered the experiences of current and former employees in the Resident Coordination Office Team in different countries in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. Another interesting field of research would take into account the standpoint of other actors involved in the prioritization process, such as: The Agencies, the Government, the Donors’ and the Financing agencies. Owners of mandates and bodies of knowledge, such as the ones characterized as 'New York – a reference to the UN headquarters’ in the qualitative analysis collection, could be better explored along with its influence the governance structure and on the role of the above actors.

The discussion chapter has highlighted fruitful venues for research concerning the practise of portfolio management. Among these are: how the role of the owner influences the outcomes of portfolio management in different environments, in which way project/programme managers personalities impact on the decisions taken by portfolio managers, what other peculiarities play a role in defining portfolio priorities in other environments.

Another fruitful venue for further research would consider the various interrelations among the themes originating from this study and how they interplay with the overall context, or even how it influences of on the achievement of the Expected Outcomes – or maximum contribution as per definition in the analysis.

Interesting too would be to explore the project and programme management methodologies adopted by the various agencies, partners, and the Resident Coordination Office when narrowing the topic to the project and impact level.

Finally, the interviews conducted have identified that the various agencies from the UN Country team conduct a further prioritization process of its action items, liaising directly with the government. This fact might suggest that, taken into perspective the bases from the current studies in portfolio management, a prominent area of study comprehends the existence of a multi-portfolio structure in place, where the objectives of the portfolio are met collectively, but on a layer beyond the boundaries of current literature. This might happen due the role of the structure with different mandates, policies and directives to the various agencies – along with the existence of multiple strategy plans signed with the governments and the non-defined role of the portfolio management within the One Leader.

As researchers, having begun this thesis with an interest in Portfolio, Programme and Project Management practices in multilateral organizations, we would like to advise of the complexity and uniqueness of such value based institutions and from the large distance of the governance model itself to the tangible results.
References


APPENDIX I – Presentation for Exploratory Interview and Guideline

Managing a Portfolio of Developing Projects in Complex Environments - How the UN coordinates for Impact at the Country Level.

RESEARCH PURPOSE
Our research intends to shed light on how context influences the way in which a portfolio of developmental projects is managed within multilateral organizations.

RESEARCH QUESTION
We are interested in a) how context interplays with the organizational structures, rules and norms that set the boundaries for and supports decision-making and planning and b) how this influences priorities.

METHOD
We aim at understanding the decision-making patterns of the “One Leader” (Resident Coordinator and UN Country Team) within different country contexts. The focus is hence to understand the nuances of decisions taken to balance different agencies’ interests and to which extent these reflect the flexibility described in the SOPs “Delivering as One” guidelines. Therefore, the empirical section will use two sources of data collection:

• Conduct interviews with the representatives of the UNCT and the Resident Coordinator’s office, managing multi-agency interests at country level.

IMPLICATIONS
• Theoretical: Contribute to the PPM theory to understand patterns of decision-making process in the context of development projects.
• Practical: a) to contribute towards the advancement of the project portfolio management literature specifically on this non-traditional field of application, b) receive an insight of the UNCT and Resident Coordinator decision-making patterns from an external perspective, hence c) to have access to information that can influence the future decisions of the organization, and d) to enhance the quality of the decision-making process as a result of the knowledge acquired from the findings of this research.

Literature review structure

1. PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT
   a) PM in context: efficiency, effectiveness and risk management
   b) PM Decision Making: rational and structured process based on criteria

   Influence of: Governance/organizational structure, Decision-makers bounded rationality, characteristics of the decision, degree of innovation, geographical location, different sources of uncertainty.

2. Development aid sector:
   a) Development Projects
      Environment complexity given by: number, interrelation and ambiguity of stakeholders, technical conditions, resource constraints, cultural dimensions, natural conditions.
   b) Development decision making
      centralization/decentralization:
      Multilateral Institutions and private-public participation
Secondary data analysis (QCPR 2016, “SOP Delivering as One Approach”)

The SOPs (Standard Operations Procedures) respond to the request from the UN member states in the QCPR to strengthen the Delivering as One reform: “...improvement of coordination and coherence at the country level should be undertaken in a manner that recognizes the respective mandates and roles and enhance the effective utilization of resources and the unique expertise of all UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies”.

In this way, the SOP’s enable a more complete system wide alignment of the UN Contribution in countries with national development priorities and plans. The extent of the jointness/collaboration is based on core elements of the country context, that are:

- The One Program - One national development strategy plan (UNDAF)
- The common budgetary framework – planned and costed program activities;
- The One Leader – UN Country Team (UNCT) coordinating function lead by the Resident Coordinator;
- Operating as One – more cost-effective common operations;
- Communicating as one - facilitating coherent messages.

Secondary data analysis (UNDAF Guidance)

The One Programme: UNDAF

The UNDAF provides a system-wide overview of key UN activities and functions at country level, in support of national policies, priorities and plans of programme countries, while ensuring coordination, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency for maximum impact.

How to develop and manage an UNDAF

A) Roadmap for an UNDAF
B) Common country Analysis (CCA)
C) UN vision 2030
D) Developing the UNDAF
E) Financing the UNDAF
F) Coordination and management arrangements
G) Results monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

Primary Data - Interview guideline

The SOPs should be a balance between flexibility and standardization in order to be applicable and useful for any UN Agencies in different country contexts. How does this work in reality? Is it true? What in a country context challenges the standards? How are the decision more inclusive of local needs through the UNCT and resident coordinator?

The SOPs make the most effective use of combined ideas and skills, institutional experiences and capacities across the membership of the UNDG. Can we assume that the SOPs are mainly about effectiveness, hence ability to reach a desired result, rather than efficiency thus considering the resources spent in achieving it? …but are the real practical reasons why adopting the “Delivering as One” SOPs?

The strategic prioritization of the UNDAF should be primarily drawn on the CCA and the UN Vision 2030 in line with national priorities. Does this process follow defined (rational) steps? What are the challenges in prioritizing? How is the decision taken? How are the national stakeholders involved?

The quality criteria of the UNDAF should assure: a) relevance and strategic focus, b) being principled, c) efficiency, d) effectiveness, e) sustainability, based on given standards. Is the assessment structured in this way? What are the challenges of it? Are there other criteria relevant for the decision making at this point?
APPENDIX II – One Page Proposal

MSPME Master Thesis – Chiara Borneman & Mateus P Figueira
Managing a Portfolio of Developing Projects in Complex Environments – How the UN coordinates for Results at the Country Level.

Project Portfolio Management has reached a common definition shared by global standards and practices tool books: “a collection of projects and/or programs and other work that are grouped together to facilitate the effective management of that work to meet strategic business objectives. At an operational level, project portfolio management involves the selection, identification, prioritization, authorization, management and control of the component projects and programs and the associated risks, resources, and priorities”. Even though it is claimed to be an effective and beneficial operating model for organizations, its practices and studies are limited to certain areas.

Our proposed research intends to shed a light in the practice of project portfolio management in a non-traditional – although project oriented - service sector. We aim to study the decision-making process supporting the projects prioritization and evaluation in multilateral organizations. Particularly, we intend to explore the influence that the context interplays in complex environments, like the ones that characterize development projects in international development aid. In short, we intend to understand a) how context interplays with the organizational structures, rules, and norms that set the boundaries for and support the decision making and planning, and b) how this influences the prioritization.

UNSDG is the United Nations Development Systems coherence mechanism, bringing together the 32 UN funds, programmes, specialized agencies, departments, and offices that play a role in development. It is in charge of operationalizing the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCP), which is the member states decision on how the United Nation shall operate on the ground. This is done through the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). According to the SOPs guidelines these should allow to “…move forward in a more practical and harmonized way, making the most effective use of our combined ideas and skills, institutional experiences and capacities across the membership of the UNDG. With a flexible approach, and adapted to different country contexts, the SOPs are an indispensable tool in ensuring that our joined-up work is focused on the strongest possible results a UN team can deliver on the ground”. Considering this statement, we want to understand how the SOPs are actually put in practice and to then explore if, and in which ways the flexibility is achieved. As consequence of the observations, we will tackle how the Resident Coordinator along with UNCT responds to their assigned responsibility to adapt these standards to the local context.

Supported by the studies conducted in rational decision-making and context constraints, we want to understand what are the decision-making nuances of the “One Leader” (Resident Coordinator and UN Country Team) in developing the UNDAF (UN Development Assistance Framework) drawing particular attention to the strategic prioritization of agencies interests in relation to the UN country programme, and the review and validation of the framework based on quality criteria.

The benefits of joining this research effort are a) to contribute towards the advancement of the project portfolio management literature specifically on this non-traditional field of application, b) receive an insight of the UNCT and Resident Coordinator decision-making nuances from an external perspective, hence c) to have access to information that can influence the future decisions of the organization, and d) to enhance the quality of the decision-making process as a result of the knowledge acquired from the findings of this research.
APPENDIX III – Complete List of Codes

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APPENDIX IV – A Comprehensive Network Diagram

Codes without relationships are not displayed in this view.