

CASE STUDY

ORS Brings Results-Based Budgeting to the U.N.

“The representatives of ORS were highly professional and extremely effective. They never criticized existing systems or the way trainees had been doing their work. They only focused on what could be done to help individual departments work towards achieving results and providing evidence of their success. Their technical knowledge and ability to translate theory into practice to accommodate the specific requirements of the United Nations was particularly commendable. They quickly became familiar with the United Nations policies and procedures and helped the staff to work within political constraints.”

~ Frances Zainoeddin, former Deputy Director, United Nations Program Planning and Budget Division

ORS Impact’s work with The United Nations has spanned more than 10 years and played a pivotal role in guiding the international organization as it designed and implemented a results-based approach to budgeting still in use today.

In the late 1990s, partly in response from mounting pressure from the U.S. government, the United Nations General Assembly adopted results-based budgeting – a process that ties budget allocations to specific achievements. Program objectives, expected results and benchmarks for measuring success had to be spelled out in the budget before it was brought to the General Assembly for approval.

Previously, budgets were allocated to pay for programs and activities without an organized system for measuring what programs actually achieved.

“People were busy doing -- delivering this project or that activity, but money was never given for sitting back and finding out whether that conference was successful or whether the publications produced were effective,” says former United Nations Program Planning and Budget Division deputy director Frances Zainoeddin. “When the government said we must look at results right from the start -- at the budget level -- we had to get someone to help us.”

Frances heard about ORS from the wife of a UN colleague, who knew ORS principal Jane Reisman through her work with United Way of America. United Way had named Jane a preferred consultant – one of only six nationwide -- and hired her to train its regional affiliates throughout the Northwest in results-based evaluation. A pioneer in the field, Jane co-authored “Outcomes for Success!” which laid the groundwork for United Way’s own publication, “The Handbook of Practical Measurement” still in use today. Frances read the manual and invited Jane to New York.

Jane began by working to develop indicators of performance and ORS's longtime work with the UN expanded from there.

"She was phenomenal to help us think through how to measure expected results," Frances says. "She came back time and time again to help us. I don't think that we would gotten as far as we did without her and the rest of the ORS team."

The ORS team helped trained UN budget officers and produced a step-by-step training manual so they in turn could instruct UN staff at all major duty stations throughout the world – more than 60 trainings.

"The biennial budget for 2002-2003 was the first program budget to reflect results-based budgeting principles that was approved by the United Nations General Assembly," Frances, says. "Since that time, results-based budgeting principles have been applied to peacekeeping budgets and budgets of the international criminal tribunals. ORS training materials have been used as the basis for training in those areas, too."