

Towards a more effective follow-up system for Joint Inspection Unit's recommendations

This article is part of an ongoing series to commemorate the Joint Inspection Unit's 50th anniversary and highlight the JIU's work and achievements over the last 50 years.

One of the most important elements of effective oversight is the systematic monitoring and thorough follow-up of the status of acceptance and implementation of recommendations issued by oversight bodies. Without a proper follow-up system, the impact of oversight recommendations cannot be determined accurately and the value of any review undertaken is greatly diminished, or lost. Over the years, the United Nations General Assembly has emphasized the need for the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) to follow-up on the acceptance and the implementation of its recommendations.

Legislative Framework

Article 11 of the JIU Statute sets out the procedure for handling reports by participating organizations (POs) and the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). It states that executive heads shall inform the JIU of decisions taken on the substance of the reports by the competent organs of their organization. At the same time, Article 12 requires that executive heads of organizations shall ensure that recommendations of the JIU approved by their respective competent organs are implemented as expeditiously as possible.

The Statute further states that such implementation may be subject to verification by the competent organs of the organizations, which may also request the JIU to issue follow-up reports. This institutionalized the principle of follow-up in the Statute itself and was further developed by the General Assembly resolution 50/233 (1996) which reiterated "that the impact of the JIU recommendations on the cost-effectiveness of activities within the UN system is a shared responsibility of the Member States, the JIU and the secretariats of the participating organizations." In the spirit of the resolution, the follow-up system is also

shared responsibility of Member States, the JIU and its POs.

In 1999 and 2000, the JIU produced a series of notes analysing the handling of its reports by 15 of its POs (WHO, FAO, ILO, WMO, WIPO, ITU, UPU, UNDP, UNICEF, ICAO, IMO, WFP, UNIDO, IAEA, UNESCO).

The notes addressed the following concrete issues: distribution practices of JIU reports to the Member States in the legislative/governing bodies, criteria for selecting JIU reports to be taken up by legislative bodies, agenda item under which JIU reports were considered, management responses prepared by the secretariats on JIU reports submitted to legislative bodies and decisions by legislative bodies, and follow-up actions by secretariats on the implementation of these recommendations. As a result of this exercise, it became clear that the establishment of a follow-up system was a key factor to increase the implementation rate of recommendations.

Subsequently, the JIU drafted a model framework for the handling of reports and recommendations by its POs which was endorsed by the General Assembly in 1999 (Resolution 54/16). On that basis, the JIU established specific individual follow-up agreements with some organizations which were ratified by their respective governing bodies between 2000 and 2005. As a result, a total of 14 follow-up agreements are in place with UN, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, FAO, ICAO, ILO, UNESCO, UNIDO UPU, WHO, WIPO and WMO.

While the implementation of follow-up agreements significantly clarified roles and responsibilities of Member States, the JIU and the secretariat of the organizations in addressing and following-up JIU recommendations, it should be noted that the expected improvements resulting from the establishment of those new instruments have developed over time.

Internal follow-up systems over time

The JIU began tracking actions taken by legislative bodies on recommendations in 1998. This tracking system evolved over the years (from a basic spreadsheet to a database) to respond to repeated requests by the General Assembly to strengthen the Unit's follow-up on the implementation of its recommendations. In 2012, the Web-Based Tracking System (WBTS) was introduced.

The first time the JIU reported on the status of acceptance and implementation of its recommendations was in its 2006 annual report. Until 2012, the follow-up of recommendations was done by requesting data on the status of implementation from each organization once a year and entering the responses received manually into a local database. The process for both the JIU and the POs was cumbersome and time-consuming. Organizations were expected to keep their own records and develop specific procedures for the follow-up of recommendations. The idea of introducing an on-line system to track the JIU recommendations first emerged in 2008. Driven by the request of the General Assembly resolution 62/246 to study the feasibility of using a web-based follow-up system to monitor the status of recommendations and receive updates from POs, the JIU embarked on the design of a more sophisticated system to track relevant information related to the implementation of its recommendations.

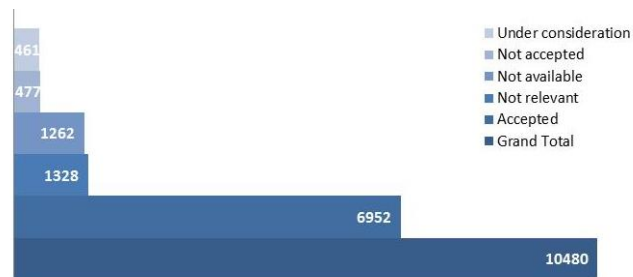
“The online system allows Member States to check and review online the status of acceptance and implementation by each PO of the recommendations”

The General Assembly resolution 65/270 authorized the United Nations Secretariat to commit financially for the development of the system, encouraging other POs to follow suit. The majority of them agreed to fund this project on a cost-sharing basis.

The WBTS

In October 2012, the online tracking system was successfully rolled out and brought significant improvement in the way JIU follows up on the acceptance and implementation of its recommendations. Feedback received from users in the JIU secretariat and in the POs indicated overall satisfaction with the system in place and its functionalities.

Number of JIU recommendations issued during the period 2004-2015 tracked by the WBTS and status of acceptance



Example of data extracted from the WBTS

The WBTS contains information pertaining to JIU reports and notes issued since 2004, not only providing online access to updated data but also allows statistical analysis and reporting, including a graphic capability (see example above). Upgraded versions of the WBTS were introduced in June 2014 and July 2016, which brought new enhancements to the system. The WBTS offers a central repository of real-time data to review the status of acceptance and implementation of recommendations. In a full spirit of cooperation, the system allows POs to consult and update relevant information online and avoid duplicate data entry and record keeping, while enhancing reporting facilities. The WBTS, with different user access controls, also allows Member States, to check and review online the status of acceptance and implementation by each PO of the recommendations contained in different JIU reports and notes. It makes follow-up more visible and transparent, and facilitates an in-depth analysis on how JIU recommendations are being addressed, enhancing accountability. Using the information available in the WBTS the JIU has started to produce a comprehensive series of management letters analysing the acceptance and implementation of its recommendations by each of its POs, highlighting good practices and suggesting improvements where needed. These notes are available on the Unit's website.

((Enhancing efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency across the United Nations system))