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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Assistance by the United Nations system to regional intercountry
technical co-operation institutions

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination



The Secretary-General is transmitting herewith the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Assistance by the United Nations system to regional intercountry technical co-operation institutions" (A/36/101 and Corr.1).

* A/36/50.

ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit provides Governments and the United Nations system of organizations with a most helpful assessment of the functioning of regional intercountry technical co-operation institutions, and of their methods of co-operation, notably in regard to their potential as instruments for technical co-operation among developing countries. On the basis of this assessment, the report contains a number of very valuable suggestions and recommendations on ways and means by which the effectiveness of such institutions may be enhanced, through, inter alia, the improved utilization of resources supplied by the United Nations system.
2. The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination notes that the report of the Joint Inspection Unit is concerned mainly with "institutions established at the initiative of a group of governments as a collective intercountry undertaking, with part of their resources being contributed temporarily by at least one organization of the United Nations system" (A/36/101 and Corr.1, para. 15).
3. Regional and global institutions which "belong to and are the entire responsibility of an organization of the United Nations system, and which are therefore integral parts of the United Nations system even if their funding is provided by extra-budgetary sources" (*ibid.*) have generally not been covered by the report. The present comments, therefore, also relate primarily to the type of institution referred to in paragraph 2 above.
4. The Inspector's report notes that in its "full and proper sense, regional technical co-operation must involve the strengthening of communication, interaction and collaboration among the participating countries, so as to help build up their self-reliant capability for dealing with common development problems" (*ibid.*, para. 10). The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination shares the view of the Inspector that the regional resources of the United Nations system are most effectively utilized when they are applied for these purposes, which include the provision of support to regional intercountry institutions, based on the interest and determination of participating countries to actively engage in intercountry co-operation. The Committee agrees, accordingly, with the thesis of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit that the modalities and orientation of the assistance provided by the United Nations system to regional intercountry technical co-operation institutions should be such as to support and reinforce the mutual efforts of the participating countries, and deliberately avoid supplanting the central role which only Governments can appropriately play. Such assistance should promote genuine self-reliance, and encourage and enhance the effective exercise by the participating countries of their fundamental responsibilities for the direction and management of the institutions concerned, in accordance with policies and objectives established by them.

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5. The approaches suggested by the Inspector are wholly consistent with the basic principles underlying the technical co-operation policies of the United Nations system, whereby such co-operation should be aimed at helping Governments to build up institutions and strengthen their own management capabilities, and should be geared to giving full effect to the authority and responsibility of the Governments concerned at all stages of project planning and implementation.

6. The Committee also supports the view expressed by the Inspector concerning the need to respect fully and to preserve the autonomous status of the relevant intercountry institutions (see, for example, para. 173 of the report). At the same time, the Committee attaches importance to the establishment of effective interactions and "two-way" flows of experience and information between these institutions and the various components of the United Nations system on all matters of common concern (see, in this connexion, paras. 142-147 of the report). It expects such interactions to become progressively more important in the future, in view of the current evolution of the system's own policies and activities, particularly those of its regional structures and the intercountry institutions integrated with it. This evolution responds to the growing demands placed on the system not only to support but also through its own programmes, to contribute to the realization of the collective self-reliance of developing countries at the subregional, regional and interregional levels. The regional commissions and other components of the United Nations system, at both the Headquarters and the regional level, can, in the view of the Committee, also do much to assist Government in working out operational modalities for achieving the necessary coherence of action among regional institutions and the translation of global and regional objectives into action at the country level - a goal which the Inspector's report emphasizes and to which the Committee attaches the utmost importance.

7. It follows from the above observations that the organizations members of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination generally agree with the thrust of the analysis and conclusions contained in the report, including, in particular, the recommendations concerning the programming of assistance, the implementation of assistance and supervision and follow-up. They intend, subject to the views of the governing bodies concerned, to take these recommendations fully into account in the provision of assistance to the relevant institutions and in their future co-operation with them.

8. The observations and conclusions in the report are also relevant to a number of other issues currently under active consideration within the system, and will be taken into consideration in the preparation of relevant studies and reports. Thus, for example, the observations in the report concerning the need to strengthen the decision-making capacity of Governments on regional priorities will be taken into account in the further work being carried out on the implications for the regional structures of the United Nations system of General Assembly resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system; and the specific recommendations of the Inspector concerning the role of the Resident Co-ordinator in enhancing the support to be provided by the United Nations system to the development of regional intercountry institutions will be drawn upon in the further elaboration of the functions of the Resident Co-ordinator pursuant to General Assembly resolution 34/213 of 19 December 1979.

9. Since, as noted above, the thrust of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit is acceptable to the Committee, the following comments concentrate on those specific recommendations on which some observations are called for, under the following headings:

- (a) Scope of regional technical co-operation institutions;
- (b) Legal framework;
- (c) Source of financing;
- (d) Management and staff; and
- (e) Regional networks.

II. SCOPE OF REGIONAL TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION INSTITUTIONS

10. The Inspector recommends that regional institutions should "function as centres of excellence capable of mobilizing a powerful intellectual thrust to generate developmental changes desired by the participating countries" (A/36/101 and Corr.1, para. 190). As far as training programmes are concerned, the Inspector notes that these institutions should "be mainly concerned with what may be termed indirect training, i.e., the training of trainers, the development of training methods, materials and curricula, as well as the research that has to go into the preparation and achievement of this function" (*ibid.*, para. 194). With regard to research, the Inspector recommends that the work programmes of these institutions should include, whenever necessary, a practical research component, in order to provide backstopping for their training and consultative functions and to lend substance to their leadership role. The Inspector further observes that there is a tendency in many regional institutions towards "polyvalence", in other words, "diversification into related research activities, advisory services, dissemination of information, etc." (*ibid.*, para. 197). The report fully supports such a trend and underlines the need for these institutions to build up a "critical mass" by offering a broad range of services, which would make the most effective use of their resources. He notes that this is "being hampered by a certain amount of duplication among regional institutions, ... [which] has the effect of creating unnecessary competition for scarce financial and professional resources" (*ibid.*, para. 157).

11. Generally the Committee agrees with those recommendations, with respect, specifically, to the Inspector's observations concerning the advantages of a "judicious concentration of resources". It would note that a determination of the optimal size of each of the institutions should result from the striking of an appropriate balance between the need to ensure that the institution is sufficiently endowed to exert real influence in its designated field of concern and the need to be responsive to special subregional or substantive requirements and the relative priority to be attached in each instance to, on the one hand, training activities (which, as the Inspector notes, are often most effectively organized in a decentralized manner), and, on the other hand, research programmes (which tend to benefit from a more centralized approach). The need will also continue to exist for relatively small institutions operating in highly specialized or narrowly defined fields.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

12. The Inspector notes that regional intercountry technical co-operation institutions "whatever their size or type ... should be legally constituted. This principle has not been followed in all cases, though it has been increasingly recognized that there is a high correlation between the institution's effectiveness and the degree of tangible commitment shown by the Governments concerned. Governments should be encouraged to enter ex post facto into the necessary legal agreements where such do not yet exist" (ibid., para. 251).

13. In the view of some members of the Committee, this principle, though very sound, needs to be applied flexibly, with due regard to the dynamics and special characteristics of intergovernmental relations in each region or subregion. Also, care should be taken, particularly in the early stages of the establishment of an institution, that the legal and managerial framework governing its operations should not be more elaborate and costly than the scale of actual activities would require.

IV. SOURCES OF FINANCING

14. The Inspector stresses the requirement that, as a general rule, regional institutions must be established and basically sustained by their participating Governments to qualify for support from the United Nations system.

15. The Committee generally supports this and related recommendations aimed at enhancing the financial independence and thus the viability of regional institutions, through the provision of government contributions on an assured and continuous basis, and a consequent concentration of support from the United Nations system on specific programmes rather than institutional costs. The Committee believes, however, that some flexibility will continue to be necessary in the implementation of this recommendation, taking into account the capacity, in each instance, of participating countries to share in the provision of basic financial support. The exercise of such flexibility is particularly important, as the Inspector notes, in order to promote the development of regional institutions with predominant least developed country membership and ensure their viability. Also, appropriate measures should be taken to ensure the full and equitable involvement of all participating Governments in decision-making regarding programming and management, irrespective of the relative shares of participating countries in the financing of the institution.

16. The suggestion of the Inspector that agency inputs should be merged with the Governments' contributions to regional institutions (ibid., paras. 94-109 and 266) also calls for comment. While the suggestion is worthy of serious consideration, since it would serve to enhance the budgetary and management autonomy of the concerned institutions, the Committee would note that its implementation would require a change in established practices concerning accountability to funding agencies for the use of the technical co-operation resources provided by them. Finally, reservations have been voiced by members of the Committee concerning the

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Inspector's suggestion to divide regional indicative planning figures (IPFs) on a proportional basis among the countries in a region. In their view, such an approach could make the regional IPFs simply an addition to the country IPFs, would, moreover, be likely to prove costly and administratively cumbersome and would not be consonant with the basic objectives underlying the establishment of regional IPFs.

V. MANAGEMENT AND STAFF OF THE INSTITUTIONS

17. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit, *inter alia*, recommends that the use of international personnel supplied through the assistance of the United Nations system should be treated as a strictly temporary resource, either to assist in carrying time-limited programme activities or in temporarily strengthening the capabilities of the institution's permanent staff. "Only in exceptional circumstances should the director of a regional intercountry institution be appointed and paid by a United Nations organization. In such instances the director should be provided as OPAS-type personnel and on a time-limited basis." (*ibid.*, para. 274.)

18. While generally concurring with the thrust of the Inspector's recommendations concerning management and staffing, the Committee would observe that the appointment by United Nations agencies of directors of regional institutions does not necessarily imply, as the Inspector seems to believe, inadequate intergovernmental participation. Reference could, for example, be made to the Inter-American Vocational Training Research and Documentation Centre (CINTERFOR), which is commended in the report for its region-wide support and effective linkages with national training institutions, and which is headed by a director appointed and paid by a United Nations agency. It should be added that such appointments are normally preceded by informal consultations with the Governments concerned. In the view of the Committee, the overriding consideration in this respect should be the establishment and full use by participating Governments of appropriate machinery for the effective guidance, supervision and control of all operational and administrative aspects of the regional institutions, irrespective of arrangements for the appointment to, and funding of, specific posts within the institution concerned.

VI. REGIONAL NETWORKS

19. The Inspector observes that intercountry technical co-operation institutions can do much to strengthen their catalytic role by devoting a substantial part of their resources to the establishment of strengthening of network and twinning arrangements with other institutions in the same field.

20. The Committee generally concurs with the above conclusion of the Inspector, and with the supporting observations in the report concerning the advantages of network arrangements, in terms of their contribution to technical co-operation among developing countries and the promotion of collective self-reliance, as well as

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their cost-effectiveness, and the relative merits of centralized structures versus network arrangements. The Committee would, however, observe that circumstances may vary, and could affect the decisions to be taken in each case by participating Governments regarding the most suitable and desirable arrangements. Such circumstances would include the degree of development of the region or subregion concerned and the number of institutions already in existence; the substantive requirements to be met by the institutions concerned; and, as mentioned in paragraph 11 above, the relative priority attached to research on the one hand and training on the other in the work programme of the concerned institutions. The Committee also concurs with the Inspector's observation that the utilization of regional IPFs for the strengthening of national institutions participating in network arrangements might be appropriate under certain circumstances, provided however that this is the result of decisions reached through collective consultations among participating Governments.