



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/38/180/Add.1
3 June 1983

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-eighth session
Items 81 (c) and 114 of the preliminary list*

SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE: IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE MEDIUM-TERM AND LONG-TERM RECOVERY AND REHABILITATION
PROGRAMME IN THE SUDANO-SAHELIAN REGION

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Activities of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office

Comments of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Activities of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office" (A/38/180).

* A/38/50/Rev.1.

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

I. GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Activities of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO)" (A/38/180) is the first assessment of UNSO undertaken by JIU. It was prepared, as indicated by JIU, in view of: (a) the great interest that the General Assembly and a majority of the other organs and bodies of the United Nations have shown in resolving the problems of the States members of the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), as well as in combating desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian region; (b) the urgency of dealing with these problems in the countries of the region, most of which are classified as least-developed countries; (c) the innovative character of some of the methods used by UNSO in project identification and resource mobilization; and (d) the fact that UNSO is a recently established institution, so that its initial experiences can be analysed in order to ensure the optimum use of its resources for more effective assistance to the Sudano-Sahelian countries.
2. The report of JIU is comprehensive, thorough and well-documented, and the Secretary-General welcomes the analytical and constructive manner in which the Inspector has reviewed the various activities of UNSO and prepared recommendations bearing on the future direction of the Office. The report, which was issued one decade after the establishment of UNSO by the Secretary-General, initially as a "Special Sahelian Office", is particularly timely. It comes at a time when a number of Sudano-Sahelian countries are again being subjected to the pressures of recurrent drought and when an assessment is being carried out of the progress made in the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. Initial findings of this assessment are that desertification continues to be a major problem of the region and is being accelerated by recurrent periods of drought. JIU's report, therefore, serves a useful purpose in drawing attention to the problems of drought and desertification and in examining the role of UNSO in assisting the countries of the region to deal with these problems.
3. The Secretary-General notes the systematic manner in which JIU prepared its report. This included preliminary discussions with UNSO as well as with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which have entered into a joint venture under the auspices of which UNSO assists the countries of the region in combating desertification. It also included the preparation of detailed questionnaires and their dispatch to the 19 countries assisted by UNSO, followed by field visits to nine of these countries. Finally, JIU visited and held consultations with the relevant organs of the United Nations, including the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and specialized agencies, as well as regional organizations. The latter included CILSS, with which UNSO has particularly close working relations, the African Development Bank (ADB), the Regional Centre for Training and Application in Operational Agro-meteorology and Hydrology (AGRHYMET), the Institute of the Sahel, the Authority for the Integrated Development of the Liptako-Gourma and the West African Economic Community (WAEC).

4. The Secretary-General takes note with satisfaction of the harmonious and close relationship that UNSO has maintained with the international organizations noted above. The nature of this relationship is reflected in most of the comments received from the agencies which support the findings and recommendations of the report. These comments also stress the importance of UNSO's resource mobilization and monitoring role, the need to make optimal use of existing institutions and expertise in the recipient countries, as well as to ensure a complementarity of all relevant activities undertaken in the Sudano-Sahelian region by the organizations of the United Nations system.

II. COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

5. The following specific comments of the Secretary-General on the recommendations of JIU should be read within the context of the above considerations, which have guided his responses to these recommendations.

A. Mandates and organization of UNSO

Recommendation 1

6. The Secretary-General agrees with the recommendation of JIU that UNSO should continue to pursue vigorously its specific activities in both the fields of drought and desertification. He agrees, in this connection, that the two are closely related and that, since one of the consequences of drought is to accelerate the process of desertification, continuing attention and appropriate measures should be taken to deal with the problems of drought. The Secretary-General wishes to draw to the attention of the General Assembly, however, the fact that UNSO's drought-related mandate is limited to the States members of CILSS, its activities in the other countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region being concerned exclusively with desertification.

Recommendation 2

7. The Secretary-General notes JIU's recommendation that, if the mandate of UNSO and the geographic area covered remain as they are now, the relatively modest number of staff should be kept at the present level. While the Secretary-General concurs with the thrust of this recommendation, he considers that the level of staffing in UNSO should also depend on the volume of activities UNSO handles within its present functional and geographic mandates.

B. Planning, programming, identification and formulation of projects

Recommendation 3

8. The Secretary-General is in agreement with the recommendation of JIU that the planning and programming of projects dealing with drought and desertification should be closely related to national economic and social planning to ensure their cohesion with Governments' criteria, priorities and resource allocations. He

/...

endorses the recommendation of JIU that UNSO should encourage the formulation of an overall joint strategy to deal with the problems of drought and desertification in Africa through the convening, in collaboration with UNEP, of an inter-agency task force, whose report will be reviewed by a subsequent regional seminar organized by UNSO. It is the Secretary-General's view that the proposals made by JIU, if implemented, could benefit the national planning efforts of the Sudano-Sahelian countries by providing them with broad guidelines for taking account of drought and desertification in their development and environmental protection plans.

C. The search for financing

Recommendation 4

9. The Secretary-General has noted, and is in general agreement with, the observations of JIU concerning the innovative nature of the resource mobilization activities of UNSO. He endorses the specific recommendations of JIU relating to the association of potential donors in the identification and development of projects as a way to facilitate their decision-making regarding the financing of specific projects, provided such projects are closely related to the economic and social plans of the countries concerned and are in accord with the countries' priorities and resource allocations. He agrees also that these donors should be requested to reserve a part of their contribution to projects for programme development activities, feasibility studies or contingency financing measures, in order to ensure interim funding between ongoing project phases. In the light of the appreciation expressed by both donors and recipients of the role of UNSO, the Secretary-General also suggests that donors, as a way of increasing non-tied contributions, should consider increasing their pledges to the United Nations Trust Fund for Sudano-Sahelian Activities through the annual United Nations Pledging Conference for Development Activities. The Secretary-General further believes that, as suggested by JIU, it would be very useful if donor Governments and assistance organizations, such as the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), were to invite UNSO to attend their meetings whenever they consider matters of interest to the countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region.

D. Project implementation, monitoring, evaluation and follow-up

Recommendation 5

10. The Secretary-General agrees that a greater proportion of projects should be executed by recipient Governments, either directly or with the assistance of the specialized agencies, with UNSO having primary responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation of project activities to ensure that project objectives are met. He also stresses the importance of JIU's recommendation that the populations affected should closely be associated with the development and implementation of projects. Such arrangements, coupled with the training of national staff in the management of development projects, are essential to their success.

E. Relations and co-ordination

Recommendation 6

11. The Secretary-General agrees with the recommendation of JIU that UNSO should intensify its collaboration with the intergovernmental organizations which are active in the region, such as CIILSS, ECA and WAEC. The Secretary-General also agrees that UNSO should accord high priority to assisting Governments in the establishment or reinforcement, at their request, of national committees responsible for co-ordinating their activities dealing with desertification and drought. In certain situations, however, the Secretary-General believes that Governments may consider it more effective to assign major responsibilities to a central authority rather than to resort to an interdepartmental committee.

F. Value of the methods used by UNSO in mobilizing funds

Recommendation 7

12. The Secretary-General notes the recommendation of JIU that he should ask the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) to examine the methods used by UNSO in mobilizing financial resources. The Secretary-General will draw this recommendation to the attention of ACC at its next meeting.