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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "United Nations system support for science and technology in Asia and the Pacific" (see A/50/721).

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ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "United Nations system support for science and technology in Asia and the Pacific"

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report of the Joint Inspection Unit is the second in a series of planned reports by the Unit devoted to the evaluation of the field-level results and impact of some operational activities of the United Nations system in support of science and technology in the developing countries. Like the first report on the United Nations system support for science and technology in Africa, which was considered by the General Assembly at its fiftieth session (A/50/125-E/1995/19 and Add.1), the present study uses as its frame of reference the Vienna Programme of Action on Science and Technology for Development, adopted in 1979, the continuing validity of which was reaffirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 44/14 A of 26 October 1989.

2. Having evaluated the operational performance and outputs of a sample of 10 institution-building projects in science and technology for development in Asia and the Pacific region supported by organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, the Inspectors have found that, with few exceptions, the projects were successful in achieving their development objectives. They also conclude that, by those projects, the United Nations system has made a valuable contribution to fostering endogenous self-reliance in science and technology for the socio-economic and industrial development of countries in the region under consideration.

3. The authors of the study advise that the Asian experience in the acquisition, development and utilization of science and technology to accelerate socio-economic and industrial development, and the role of trade and investment flows in strengthening regional cooperation and integration, offer some useful lessons for other developing regions. However, the Inspectors conclude that organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, and in particular the regional commissions, have by and large still to devise more effective interregional strategies and mechanisms for channelling that experience to countries in Western Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean along expanded South-South linkages. They suggest that for those purposes organizations and agencies should use global information systems more effectively in diffusing technological information to the socio-economic users in developing countries.

4. Based on their findings, the Inspectors have made several recommendations addressed to organizations and agencies of the United Nations system concerned with science and technology and, in particular, to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the executive secretaries of the regional commissions, which are aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations system support for science and technology in Asia and the Pacific. In that regard, they also stress that some of the recommendations

contained in the above-mentioned report dealing with the African continent can be equally applied to the present study.

II. GENERAL COMMENTS

5. The Administrative Committee on Coordination has found the topic of the study of great interest to the United Nations system, especially to the organizations and agencies involved in development assistance and transfer of technology to developing countries. It considers the report to be a valuable, thoughtful and informative study raising important and critical issues that deserve the attention of all the United Nations agencies active in the area of science and technology for development in general and in the Asian region in particular. The Committee notes the positive evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations system to institution-building, resulting in a palpable development impact. It shares the view of the authors that the advances in the development, utilization and diffusion of science and technology have resulted, to a great extent, from the clarity of national policies in the field of science and technology that has enabled organizations and agencies of the system to make substantive conceptual and operational contributions.

6. The Administrative Committee on Coordination notes a slightly different approach of the authors to the matter of the definition of science and technology for development. Unlike in the first report, they excluded in the present one the analysis and the in-depth review of the differing concepts and definitions of science and technology within the United Nations system. In this regard, the Committee can partially agree with the Inspectors that the lack of a common understanding among the organizations and agencies of the system on science and technology matters is of little consequence, as long as activities with an essential science and technology dimension are properly embedded in their respective sectors and follow basic principles underlying all technical assistance projects. This conclusion is supported by the Inspectors' findings that the lack of a common system-wide approach to science and technology or to endogenous capacity-building appeared to have more adverse effects on the projects implemented in Africa than on the Asian sample.

7. The Administrative Committee also notes the decision of the Inspectors, in the absence of a common United Nations system concept of science and technology, to distil from the Vienna Plan of Action and the guidelines of the Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development a working definition to guide their investigation and assessment of project outputs. In that context, it seems rational that, having accepted the broad working definition of science and technology capacity-building, which views technology as an integrated package of software and hardware, encompassing production, transformation and marketing skills, organization, management and so on, the Inspectors preferred to select for evaluation only institution-building projects, as far as such projects have a wide spectrum of action and are most suited for capacity-building in the integrated manner recommended by the Vienna Plan of Action.

8. The Administrative Committee supports in principle the broad conclusions and recommendations of the Inspectors, which, in its view, clearly and

unequivocally demonstrate how the United Nations agencies, with a sense of commitment, technical involvement and modest financial inputs, can enhance science and technology for development in developing countries and accelerate their self-reliance through sound training opportunities and transfer of technology. The Committee is in full agreement with the authors that much can and should be done to improve the activities of organizations and agencies of the United Nations system in this area. However, the value of the report has been diminished to some extent by occasional inconsistencies and some judgements that are not fully supported by the factual findings of the Inspectors.

9. Some members of the Committee pointed out that the report covered mainly conventional technologies, while it would be desirable that the key role of new technologies in the globalization of production and in the dynamism of the emerging economies in the Asian region should also have been mentioned by the authors of the research. In that connection, they refer to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, which is expected to deal with this issue through its inter-sessional expert panel on the substantive theme of information technologies and their implications for development. With regard to the gap in the technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC)-type exchange among developing regions, as concluded by the Inspectors, members of the Committee agree that a greater interregional exchange of information should be facilitated by the regional commissions.

10. As far as beneficiaries of science and technology components of the programmes are identified as the economic and industrial users, some members would like to see more information in the report concerning the socio-economic background of those beneficiaries. The main question in this regard is whether the formulation of programmes takes into account the needs and aspirations of a wide range of beneficiaries and, in particular, how the programmes have responded to the needs of small entrepreneurs and small farmers. In cases where the impact of technological change on their opportunities has not yet been assessed, the authors of the study should have identified if there is a monitoring system in place that would further help to shape science and technology policy in the direction of people’s aspirations.

11. In the view of some members of the Committee, the intention of the authors of the study to bring to light the very positive findings is understandable, in so far as the Asian experience reflecting the relatively higher level of scientific and technological self-reliance offers some valuable lessons for other developing regions. However, taking into account that technological progress is far from uniform for most countries of the region and that major disparities exist among and within subregional groups of countries, and in some cases even within individual countries, they feel that it would be advisable, for the purposes of the report, to draw attention to the necessity of strengthening the domestic technological capabilities and creating an overall policy framework that would encourage innovation and investment in infrastructure, and ensure intellectual property protection, human capital formation and a stable macroeconomic and regulatory environment. In that context, it would have been useful if an additional recommendation had been included inviting organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, in the process of executing and evaluating institution-building projects in developing countries and the States with economies in transition, to put

emphasis on the formulation and application of appropriate strategies, in particular with respect to legislation concerning intellectual property and transfer of technology.

12. One Committee member mentioned the omission of gender issues in the report, in particular, data on the number (and percentage of total) of women scientists and technologists participating in science and technology programmes, on the percentage of women among beneficiary users of the products of science and technology programmes as well as on the effect of technological change on gender dimensions of the division of labour, employment patterns, wage rates and so on.

13. Several members expressed their concern that their activities and positive experience directly relevant to the subject of the study had not been included by the Inspectors in the report. Thus, for instance, in the analysis of the 10 selected projects, little attention has been given to the importance of comprehensive science and technology policies at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels, which would be conducive to strengthening endogenous capacity-building in developing countries of the Asia-Pacific region. While explaining such a situation by the narrow approach of the authors to the selection of projects that address exclusively institution-building aspects, members of the Committee nevertheless insist that valuable information does exist on a large number of projects implemented, in particular, by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Department for Development Support and Management Services of the Secretariat and others, which are aimed at improving science and technology policies, strengthening linkages between the research and development sector and industry, and technological innovation and competitiveness. In that regard, they refer to the report considered by the Commission on Science and Technology for Development at its second session in 1995, entitled "Activities of the United Nations system in the field of science and technology for development, including cooperation in technology assessment" (E/CN.16/1995/7), which, together with a number of the above-mentioned projects, has been left outside the scope of the present report.

III. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

14. In the view of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, the report rightly underscores the importance of regional and interregional cooperation in science and technology, in particular of South-South cooperation in this field, and gives proper attention to this issue by describing a number of cooperation schemes in the region, as well as relevant activities of a number of the United Nations organizations. At the same time, it appears that the description of the subject and accordingly the formulation of recommendations is not quite connected with the analysis of the 10 selected projects at the core of the report. As far as the recommendations of the Inspectors are concerned, Committee members note that out of four recommendations, two are devoted to regional and interregional cooperation in the area of science and technology (recommendations 2 and 4), an issue that, as mentioned above, was not examined in the sample of projects; one recommendation addresses the relatively less

central issue concerning the publication of technical cooperation achievements (recommendation 1); and the last one relates to the use of science and technology information systems (recommendation 3), though it is not clear from the study whether all the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system have established such information systems. This recommendation, like some others, unfortunately does not emanate directly from the analysis of the selected projects. At the same time, the report lacks any specific recommendations addressed to the main economic actors in the countries of the region, as well as to the United Nations organizations, concerning the subject of the report, namely, institution-building in science and technology for development.

Recommendation 1. Technical cooperation achievements

(a) The United Nations Development Programme should take the lead in publishing the technical cooperation achievements of the United Nations development system, inter alia, by devoting a separate and prominent chapter on such achievements in the Human Development Report;

(b) All other organizations of the United Nations system should similarly endeavour to publish on a regular basis their most significant achievements in development cooperation, using in-house publications and the international media.

15. With regard to recommendation 1 (a), UNDP commented that it had noted the proposal with interest and would discuss it with the authors of the report. It also mentioned that the previous Human Development Reports, in particular the 1991 and 1992 Reports and others since, had explored emerging issues of development cooperation. Within the context of each year's theme, this analysis would be developed further in future reports.

16. All the other members of the Committee recognize the relevance of recommendation 1 (b), which highlights the importance of the regular publication of significant achievements in development cooperation by organizations and agencies of the United Nations system. Many of them stressed that the recommendation had been overtaken by events, as far as publication of achievements constituted an inseparable part of their activities in developing countries in general and in the countries of the Asian region in particular.

Recommendation 2. Regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific

The organizations of the United Nations system and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific secretariat, in particular, should take additional measures for strengthening regional cooperation in science and technology, especially for the benefit of the Pacific islands and least developed countries, as well as for countries in transition. Such measures could include, inter alia, training programmes tailored to the special needs of these countries and funded by the more advanced ESCAP member States.

17. Members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination actively involved in the area of science and technology for development have found this recommendation to be of direct concern to their respective agencies and expressed their readiness to continue to support the strengthening of regional cooperation in Asia in this field, paying particular attention to the Pacific islands, to the least developed countries and to the economies in transition. They believe that science and technology and the United Nations system's support of regional cooperation should be used primarily for the purpose of responding to the global challenge and national mandates to eradicate poverty. In this regard, they mention that it would have been useful for the report to elaborate further on the range of responses to such challenges as blending labour-intensive and technology-intensive modes of production, using technology for sustainable human development in eradicating poverty, expanding employment and protecting the environment. For that purpose, an assessment of lessons and analysis of best practices, in terms of conceptualization, modalities of cooperation and operational implications, would have been important.

18. With respect to training programmes, as proposed in this recommendation and in the text of the report (paras. 55-63), this had proven to be an area where most of the projects were judged to have attained satisfactory results. However, some Committee members consider it useful that besides the numbers trained and training modes used, a measure of successful training should have examined the extent to which trainees acquired the requisite skills and whether they could perform at the expected levels. They believe that it is a worthwhile task that should be accomplished by the project promoters and should have been taken into account by the Inspectors in the process of studying this area.

Recommendation 3. Science and technology information systems

(a) Organizations of the United Nations system concerned with science and technology should periodically evaluate and report to the Commission on Science and Technology the level of public awareness of their information services in the different regions, as well as actions taken to make their information systems more accessible to potential users in the developing regions;

(b) The Organizations' science and technology information systems should be linked up with:

(i) The global information referral system of the UNDP Special Unit for TCDC (UNDP-INRES) in order to expand their accessibility for TCDC purposes;

(ii) The data banks of the regional economic commissions in order to broaden North-South technological information flows.

19. With some reservations expressed in paragraph 14 above, members of the Committee agree with the Inspectors' proposals contained in this recommendation. A number of organizations and agencies operating their own information systems supporting science and technology exchanges are pursuing close cooperation with the UNDP global information referral system, as well as with the data banks of the regional commissions.

Recommendation 4. Significant strengthening of interregional collaboration in science and technology

(a) All organizations of the United Nations system concerned with science and technology should, within their respective sectors of competence, make more systematic use of the science and technology experience, institutions, projects and other appropriate facilities in the Asia and Pacific region as entry points for expanded cooperation with countries, organizations and enterprises in other developing regions, using various approaches such as networking, twinning or TCDC/ECDC;

(b) Each organization should include a specific provision for interregional cooperation in its technical cooperation budget in keeping with the above recommendation;

(c) The Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions should:

(i) Institute annual inter-secretariat meetings focused on interregional cooperation in science and technology in particular and social and economic development in general, and a special provision should be made for interregional cooperation in the work programmes and budgets of the commissions;

(ii) Establish an interregional trade and investment information system supported as a joint project by the regional commissions and other appropriate organizations like UNCTAD, UNIDO and WIPO and involving the participation of chambers of commerce and industry in the different regions;

(iii) Examine the possibility of strengthening cooperation, including the exchange of information and experiences in science and technology, among intergovernmental groupings or organizations in the different regions;

(iv) Establish linkages and regular consultations among the different regional science and technology institutions sponsored by the commissions in their respective regions in order to create an interregional network of these institutions in support of expanded South-South cooperation;

(v) Initiate a joint resource mobilization strategy targeting public and private sectors in support of the interregional network of science and technology institutions or specific projects developed by the network.

20. Members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination fully endorse the recommendations of the Inspectors calling upon the developing regions of the South to draw upon the science and technology experience of the Asia and Pacific region and stressing the need for a closer integration of technical assistance efforts among the regional commissions. According to the comments of the regional commissions, they have made a moderate beginning in sharing the successful experience in science and technology development with each other using for those purposes training seminars, workshops, study tours and other forms of exchange of experiences. They agree with the authors of the report that interregional TCDC/ECDC schemes in science and technology should be broadened to include private sector users of science and technology, such as chambers of commerce and industry, research and development and training institutions, professional associations, non-governmental organizations and so on.

21. With regard to the proposals contained in recommendations 4 (c) (ii), (iii) and (iv), the regional commissions consider them of great interest for the strengthening of interregional cooperation in the area of science and technology, but at the same time believe that these suggestions need further thorough study by their respective secretariats, as well as by regional intergovernmental organizations and groupings.
