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REVIEW OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND EXPERT MACHINERY
DEALING WITH THE FORMULATION, REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF
PROGRAMMES AND BUDGETS

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report on medium-term planning in the United Nations system

Comments by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination 1/

1. The Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report on medium-term planning in the United Nations system (A/9646) is a comprehensive study of the state of planning and programming in the United Nations, UNDP, the ILO, FAO, UNESCO and WHO. The report contains a number of far-reaching and thought-provoking proposals intended to improve the work of these organizations - and, by implication, that of the United Nations system as a whole - in the economic and social field. The present document first summarizes the main points made in the Inspector's report; it then offers general comments, which are followed by specific comments on each of the eight major recommendations set forth at the end of the Inspector's report. No summary, however, can convey adequately all of the many implications of the report with its network of detailed interlocking proposals. A full appreciation of the report's scope and import, therefore, can be obtained only by reading it in toto.

I. BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE REPORT'S MAIN POINTS

2. The Inspector states that the recent adoption of programme planning throughout the system leads logically, in the present international political context, to a redefining of the role of the international organizations in

1/ The following comments were prepared by the five organizations covered in the report (United Nations, the ILO, FAO, UNESCO and WHO) and by UNDP and were reviewed and approved by ACC on 30 October 1974. It should be noted, of course, that this report is not directly relevant to those organizations that do not operate on a programme basis.

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economic and social matters. In this connexion, the change in financial and administrative management techniques is viewed as a sign that the search for a conceptual agreement on a new definition has already begun. In particular, he attaches special importance to the question of the links to be established or strengthened between the operational activities of the system (which are considered marginal in relation to the totality of the bilateral programmes) and the activity of defining a world policy for economic and social co-operation.

3. The report begins by examining the situation with respect to programme budgets. The Inspector finds that most of them generally fulfil expectations, although further improvement is possible and desirable. Where medium-term plans are concerned, he notes the diversity of the existing documents and feels that a satisfactory definition of the planning exercises has not yet been found. ^{2/} The major reason for this, in his view, is the difficulty of demonstrating - although it does exist - the logical link between the very limited and marginal activities of the organizations in question and the pursuit of the great objectives and ideals proclaimed in the constituent instruments and resolutions of the intergovernmental bodies.

4. The report then goes on to review successively the country-programming exercises and the present objectives and priorities of the organizations. In the light of these reviews he calls for profound changes in the very conception of the country-programming exercise and mentions the concern and scepticism which has always been aroused by the scope and, in particular, the multiplicity of the tasks listed in the plans and programmes of the international organizations.

5. After analysing the programming procedures employed by the organizations for their global activities and field activities respectively, the Inspector arrives at the following conclusions:

(a) There is not even a tenuous link between the two programming systems;

(b) The contribution of the United Nations system to the total technical co-operation effort in each country is viewed in exactly the same light as other contributions; the same approaches are used and, accordingly and because the system's contribution is on a relatively small scale, it is considered residual and marginal by the requesting countries;

(c) As a result, the very essence of the United Nations system, the individual character of the international organizations, the uniqueness of their role and the potentially original and catalytic nature of their means of action are very largely ignored or lost sight of when programmes are being formulated.

6. What should be sought, according to the Inspector, is an appropriate

^{2/} The Inspector, in making these comments, could not take into account the latest medium-term planning documents of the ILO, UNESCO, and WHO, which were issued after the completion of his report.

selectivity in the technical co-operation activities of the United Nations system based on the advantages of internationalism (political neutrality, independence) and on the careful selection of the means of action (consensus or agreement of national wills, "moral constraint", activities of a catalytic nature). These activities should reflect a logical and necessary link between study and research at headquarters and technical co-operation and pre-investment activities in the field. This process would lead to "specialization", with the United Nations system henceforth doing only what "the others" cannot do, or what it is better equipped to do than they are. Such a focusing of activities would hopefully pave the way for the redeployment of services sought by the governing bodies and would increase the efficiency of the system.

7. In undertaking an exercise or exercises of this kind, the United Nations would at the same time find the opportunity to redefine its role in economic and social matters, to change direction and to order its activities better. The report finds arguments in favour of this thesis in the description of the objectives and activities of the international organizations given in chapter VI. The following short-comings of the present programmes are noted by the Inspector: a tendency to ever-increasing diversification at variance with the paucity of means; a preponderance of research activities without any clear purpose; a lack of real dialogue between development economists and sectoral specialists; perpetuation of a structure of activities whose internal logic is not very apparent.

8. The Inspector suggests that these short-comings should be overcome by means of setting up an ambitious new information system that would be based on comprehensive cross-sectoral country studies covering the factual situation in each member State. The information in these studies might then be used for many purposes, but would, inter alia, serve the needs of programme planning both in the operational and non-operational realms and thus serve as a kind of link between them. Aggregated on a sectoral, regional and global basis, this information should be used by secretariats, Governments and the system's numerous programme-reviewing and policy-making organs to bring activities gradually into line with the new economic and social goals.

9. According to the Inspector, a medium-term plan should be an aggregate of medium-term intermediate stage objectives established by the various substantive divisions, each programme proposal being composed of:

(a) A description of the general situation in each economic and social sector leading to the identification of the problem or problems to be solved;

(b) Indications on the historical background, the existing methodology and the effectiveness threshold;

(c) An appraisal of the long-term strategy;

(d) Finally, taking into account these various data, a definition of the next intermediate stage objectives for the period of the plan.

10. He further suggests that such a plan should be founded on a thorough analysis

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of the global situation of the problem studied and that the analysis should be based on the studies by country and by economic and social sector. Special arrangements should be made (a) for distributing this preparatory work among the various echelons (local, regional and central) in each organization, and among the five organizations and UNDP; (b) for the study of this material by the various governing bodies concerned; and (c) for the organization of a complete information system.

11. The report also contains a number of other subsidiary or supplementary proposals. It urges that the presentation of the various programme budgets should be harmonized along certain suggested lines. It proposes that governing bodies consider the possibility of establishing the "order of magnitude of the appropriation limits within which programme proposals could be made for the period of implementation of the plans". It suggests that there should be studies seeking new concepts and ideas for technical co-operation. It also visualizes a re-orientation of research on the international framework of principles and methods for the international development strategy for the 1980s, with integrated world plans by main economic and social sector and 10-year regional indicative plans. Finally, it suggests that there might be informal working meetings between representatives of the various governing bodies to facilitate study of specific problems, including the possibility of reorganizing the intergovernmental machinery.

II. GENERAL COMMENTS

12. The foregoing very brief summary shows the far-reaching character of the Inspector's proposals. The fundamental issues raised by him, namely the possibility of a redefinition of the role of the international organizations in economic and social fields and the need for closer ties between the planning of operational and non-operational activities and over-all economic and social policy-making, are addressed to Governments and involve basic policy judgements. Acting on them would clearly require, in the first instance, a very significant effort by member States to elaborate the new concepts on which a redefinition of the system's activities would be based and would imply a readiness to redirect a number of activities which they had previously called for.

13. Before embarking on the extensive exercise proposed by the Inspector, Governments will surely wish to weigh very carefully the likelihood of its achieving the results being sought. The Inspector seems to appreciate this when, in his concluding remarks, he states:

"This is certainly not an easy task: it will probably sometimes be considered to be too ambitious, the outcome of an analysis more logical than practical, in short, something too remote from the international organizations' shifting and complex reality and from their capacity to perform" (A/9646, para. 197).

14. While sharing these misgivings, the secretariats of the organizations concerned

are nevertheless convinced that there is a continuing necessity for their activities to be adapted to the changing needs of the world community. Accordingly, the need for reviewing and, where necessary, redirecting many of their activities remains a continuing preoccupation of them all. In view of the inherent constraints in the system which need to be overcome, particularly those of a political or technical nature, the way in which the continuous review and redirection of activities might best be achieved naturally requires careful consideration. While the Inspector has suggested one possible approach towards this goal, it does not seem appropriate to anticipate the conclusions and recommendations likely to emanate in a few months' time from the special session of the General Assembly, which has as one of its specific tasks the initiation of "the necessary and appropriate structural changes to make the United Nations system a more effective instrument of world economic co-operation" (General Assembly resolution 3172 (XXVIII)).

15. It must be stated at the outset that some of the premises and hypotheses on which the report is based seem somewhat exaggerated or even of doubtful validity. For example, it is not really true that there is not even a tenuous link between the programming of headquarters activities and that of operational activities, since every regular programme contains activities which are, directly or indirectly, supportive of its field operations (see A/9646, para. 70). Also the implication that all such activities should be linked gives the impression that the international organizations should not provide a number of separate services which Governments find useful even if these services do not always conform to a single all-embracing pattern. The Inspector assumes that the United Nations organizations should specialize in certain activities. Even if this assumption be granted, it raises once again the question of priorities in its most recalcitrant form. As is well-known, the political difficulties of working out such priorities have proved to be very great indeed.

16. Much of the report is addressed to the provision of technical assistance and to the experience with country programming. The Inspector's analysis of this experience is valid in many respects and will no doubt be considered in the current UNDP review of the experience gained so far with the country-programming process. This is true with respect to his findings that while country programming accords well with the intention of its initiators, it has not yet produced entirely satisfactory results; that there is no reference in most of the country programmes to technical diagnosis by sector; that the linkage between the analytical part of the programmes and the list of projects is inadequate; that there is a need to link the country programmes more closely with the programmes supported by the regular budgets of agencies; and that there is a need to modernize the methods of technical co-operation by diversifying the kind of assistance that has until now been provided. On the other hand, his statements that there is a lack of internal coherence in every such exercise, that the countries concerned have themselves emphasized the theoretical and superficial nature of the exercise, and that most of the countries concerned have themselves drawn attention to the "deceptiveness" of these attempts, are too extreme and do not seem to be based on strictly factual evidence.

17. The Inspector's report is focused more on the need for the United Nations system to specialize in the assistance it provides than to the individual problems and needs of the countries concerned. In fact, technical assistance has tended to maintain its traditional forms largely because Governments' requests continue to follow a well-established pattern. In this connexion, the Inspector states rather categorically:

"Nor do I think that the real answer to the problem is provided by the solution now formally adopted by UNDP, which is that in theory each Government should define its own technical co-operation programme. While superficially irreproachable, this is basically fallacious and does nothing to advance the interests of the member States concerned" (A/9646, para. 130).

Even if this statement were interpreted as suggesting the need for closer co-operation between Governments and organizations in developing such technical assistance projects, it must be recognized that the final decision for projects to be submitted must continue to rest, as it always has, with the Government concerned.

18. It would, perhaps, have been more helpful if the report had endeavoured to analyse more closely the operation of country programming to determine if the recognized shortcomings of the system might not be overcome by changing its methods, while maintaining the essential principles on which it is based. For example, it is perhaps overstating the case to imply that country programming has not been successful and useful in any of the 100 countries in which it has been applied, and it is perhaps too early in the history of country programming to seek to replace it by a new system governed by different criteria and seeking more complex objectives. Can one be sure that the vastly complex package of interlocking country studies, common information systems, regional committees, all leading to the formulation of a general programme of technical co-operation of the United Nations system, as suggested by the Inspector, would, in fact, provide the way to overcome the problems that have been encountered with the country-programming system?

19. The report also appears to be over-optimistic as to the results to be expected from the centralization of major phases of programme planning in the global context. The experience in many organizations has shown the limitations of such planning and has led to a growing awareness of the importance of concentrating on planning at the country level. The Inspector rightly emphasizes the importance of intersectoral programming at the country level and makes specific recommendations to this end, and yet in other parts of his report, there is an appearance of over-emphasis on joint intersectoral planning at regional and central levels.

20. The report suggests, in this connexion, that global objectives and programmes for the United Nations system should be developed through the aggregation of a multitude of data on individual projects and programme elements. For instance, the "General programme of technical co-operation of the United Nations system" would be derived from a series of successive consolidations of sectoral and cross-sectoral country programmes, leading to sectoral and cross-sectoral regional programmes which ultimately would be summarized into a consolidated world programme.

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21. It may be doubted whether such an approach would indeed be effective. It would perhaps be preferable to see programming as a continuing process that responds to the current priority needs of member States. This requires decentralization of decision-making to the levels at which the most reliable knowledge of technical and local conditions exists. This decentralization of decisions, however, should take place within a framework of centrally co-ordinated policies and objectives formulated by the respective higher echelons in decreasing order of detail, reserving to policy-making organs the broad policy decisions. This would suggest that the co-ordination of system-wide policies should not be based on a central review of detailed projects and programme elements, but on statements of objectives and programmes that become more general as they move to higher levels in the United Nations system. Thus, while at the level of individual organizations objectives would be formulated in considerable detail (although in less detail than for the particular programmes of these organizations), objectives and programme outlines formulated for consideration and co-ordination at the top level of the system must be fairly general and cover the long rather than the short term.

22. It is for this reason that the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) has endeavoured to extend the procedures for prior consultation to the medium-term plans of the organizations and will continue to support measures to strengthen the programme-planning capability of the different organizations and, in particular, their capacity to formulate objectives and programmes.

23. Similarly, while broad policies must be applied uniformly throughout the system, their implementation need not necessarily follow uniform procedures. In the context of the United Nations system, this would suggest, *inter alia*, that the presentation of medium-term plans and programme budgets can be diverse so as to meet the particular conditions and needs of individual organizations, provided these documents contain comparable information.

24. Finally, the report focuses primarily on the role of the organizations as providers of technical assistance services to individual member States. In doing so, it tends to disregard the basic importance of the system's standard-setting, research and central servicing activities which include major programmes of world-wide intergovernmental co-operation that serve the needs of the international community as a whole. It would seem desirable, however, to maintain a proper balance (and interrelationship, where appropriate) between these two sets of functions without subordinating one to the other.

III. COMMENTS ON THE SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation I

Harmonization of programme budget presentation

25. In this recommendation, the Inspector suggests that work should be undertaken to improve programme budget presentation and that interagency negotiations should

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be conducted for the purpose of harmonizing the presentation of the programme budgets of the five organizations and of the UNDP administrative budget. He recommends that a joint progress report should be prepared by the secretariats of the five organizations and UNDP on a number of topics such as terminology, the presentation of tables and of expenditures from extrabudgetary funds, descriptions of programme components, country programmes, harmonization of annexes and of the period covered by the biennial cycles.

26. In connexion with this recommendation, the secretariats would be ready to prepare a joint report on harmonization of programme budget presentation. They would propose to begin this task at the next meeting of the Programme Planning Officers which is scheduled to take place in early 1975.

27. In this connexion, it should be pointed out that while a wholly standardized presentation of the programme budgets of the five organizations and of the UNDP administrative budget may not be feasible or perhaps even desirable, it is agreed that the various budget documents should be in forms that are readily comparable. It is suggested that the following general principles might guide the effort towards gradual harmonization of programme budgets:

(a) Every effort should be made to achieve the degree of uniform presentation required to meet the needs of interagency co-operation in the many programme sectors in which several or all organizations carry out common or closely-related activities;

(b) On the other hand, there should be no harmonization of programme budgets to achieve uniformity merely for its own sake;

(c) Finally, the distinct needs of the programme-reviewing organs and of the internal management of each organization must be fully met.

Recommendations II, III (1) and IV (2)

Country studies, consolidated country studies and timing questions

28. Recommendation II suggests that the five organizations and UNDP should systematically carry out country studies by economic and social sector, and consolidated country studies (for all sectors combined) for each developing and developed country (presumably some 130 countries); these studies should be kept up to date, their descriptive parts published and their results made available to the secretariats and the respective governing bodies.

29. Recommendation III (1) suggests that documents consolidating the sectoral country studies should be prepared for submission to the governing bodies of the organizations and their regional committees and councils and recommendation IV (2) proposes that a definite time-table should be drawn up jointly to enable the secretariats to prepare the necessary documents and the governing bodies to exchange recommendations or inform one another of their respective decisions.

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30. According to the Inspector, the country studies could serve the following main purposes (see A/9646, para. 182):

(a) Permit the publication of their descriptive parts in respect of individual countries;

(b) Help in the preparation, for countries whose Governments so request, of technical diagnoses by economic and social sector;

(c) Provide the raw material for further consolidated reports to permit the submission to the governing bodies (including the Governing Council of UNDP) of the information they need in the process of establishing medium-term plans and country programmes;

(d) Contribute to research which should lead to new concepts of technical co-operation and to a more precise definition of the international framework of principles and methods.

31. The Inspector indicated that the primary purpose of recommendation II is that given under paragraph 30 (c) above: this is confirmed by recommendation III, which deals with the use to be made of the raw material collected through country studies for purposes of medium-term planning. Paragraph 152 of the report states that "the main purpose of such studies is obviously to permit rational planning of the organizations' activities, particularly those connected with technical co-operation".

32. The network of country studies and related reports recommended by the Inspector is formidable in its scope, as is shown by the following summary listing of the methods and techniques of preparing country studies: 3/

(a) Information gathering through the setting up of a central system of data collection and distribution, and the organization of documentation centres;

(b) Setting up of an interagency country study committee or council to develop a strict method of preparing country studies, with a secretariat consisting of a group of economists specializing in development programmes;

(c) Preparation by each agency - and, within each agency, by each technical department - of (some 130) individual country studies with a "very high degree of precision" (see A/9646, para. 190 (3)) for each economic and social sector;

(d) Preparation of (some 130) consolidated country studies for all sectors combined could be entrusted, under the supervision of one or more interagency committees, either to the secretariats of the United Nations regional economic commissions and the UNDP resident representatives or to "a central body under conditions to be discussed and determined";

3/ For items listed under (a) to (d) see A/9646, para. 150; for items listed under (e) see A/9646, para. 153.

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(e) Preparation by the five organizations and by UNDP of "the consolidated documents indispensable to the intergovernmental (or tripartite) committees" as follows:

For the regional committees of each organization:

- (i) As preliminary information, a descriptive list of the technical co-operation activities of all kinds undertaken in the region, including activities undertaken by bodies outside the United Nations system;
- (ii) Consolidated reports by economic and social sector (e.g. health, industry, employment etc.) at the regional level;
- (iii) A global consolidated report (all sectors combined, by region);

For the governing body of each organization:

- (iv) A summary of the descriptive progress reports on technical co-operation activities in all the regions;
- (v) Recommendations from the regional committees concerning regional problems, priorities and objectives.

33. This, in summary, is the essential infrastructure upon which the formulation of intermediate medium-term objectives, country programmes, decennial regional indicative plans, world indicative plans by sector and a global technical co-operation programme for all sectors in the United Nations system would ultimately be based; and which would be intended to lead to simultaneous decisions for each and all sectors for a fixed-term period.

34. It will be clear from the foregoing that what the Inspector recommends would indeed be a daunting task not only for the secretariats of the six organizations, but also for their governing bodies and the different Government agencies in member States. Naturally, Governments would have to agree to such country studies and their full co-operation in carrying them out would have to be ensured in advance.

35. There is also the question of the resources required to carry out such an exercise. The experience of the various organizations with country studies in the sectors in which they work has shown that such studies are quite expensive in terms of cost and staff time. ^{4/} Conducting such studies as joint interagency enterprises would considerably raise the level of the resources that would be needed. Also if the studies were to embody the degree of detail, comprehensive scope and the frequent bringing up to date that seem to be envisaged for them, they would undoubtedly prove to be considerably more time-consuming and expensive than those that have been carried out by the organizations in the past.

^{4/} In the past, such country studies have been aimed primarily at assisting countries in their sectoral development planning rather than at providing information for interagency planning at regional and global levels.

36. While there might be some advantages for medium-term planning and country programming in having fuller and more systematic data on conditions and trends in individual countries, it is obvious that, on the scale contemplated, this work could neither be financed nor manned by a simple redeployment of available resources or staff without seriously interfering with the present activities of the organizations and hampering the delivery of technical co-operation projects. Moreover, it may prove difficult to assemble, at any one time, a sufficient number of persons with a suitable range of technical qualifications to carry out such a far-reaching programme.

37. It would prove equally difficult to build a compact and coherent picture from the wealth of material that would be collected in each country. It is also doubtful whether the aggregation of country studies would yield a sufficiently clear over-all view to facilitate planning at a global level on this basis.

38. In connexion with these proposals, ACC wishes to recall that it has already set in motion an experimental exercise for the preparation of an interagency country study and a parallel exercise in joint interagency planning (see E/5488, paras. 31-34). It would hope to carry out the experimental country study on as economical a basis as possible - i.e., without the large amount of work that seems inherent in the country studies suggested by the Inspector. The second exercise stems from the efforts of ACC to introduce concepts of joint planning in programme sectors where the various organizations have closely related activities and might benefit from such joint planning. This would involve introducing new procedures for the co-operative formulation of programmes of system-wide or multiorganizational concern. The second experimental exercise referred to above will involve the system-wide activities with respect to rural development and will use as a starting point the most recent medium-term plans of organizations. Where possible, both of these exercises will draw upon the Common Register of Development Activities (CORE), the further development of which is called for by Economic and Social Council resolution 1889 (LVII) of 31 July 1974. It seems to ACC that these two experimental projects would help to establish the usefulness of cross-sectoral data of this kind.

39. Finally, as regards the time-table called for in recommendation IV (2) for the preparation of the necessary documents and the decision-taking by the various governing bodies, it is necessary to try to visualize what the Inspector's proposals would involve in the scheduling of programme-planning documents and their review by programme reviewing bodies. Paragraphs 128 and 135 of the Inspector's report give the outline of these procedures, which would culminate in global reviews by the UNDP Governing Council and the Economic and Social Council. ACC would not propose at this stage to comment on this time-table, which would clearly need to be further elaborated if it were decided to proceed with the scheme as a whole.

Recommendation III (2)

Proposed medium-term intermediate stage objectives

40. In paragraphs 156 and 157 of the report, the Inspector has made certain suggestions which might assist in the development of such objectives. Using such information as may be currently available and subject to the views that may be expressed by their respective governing bodies, the secretariats would be ready to explore the contribution that these suggestions might make in their efforts to formulate clear and meaningful objectives, capable of evaluation by programme-reviewing organs.

Recommendation IV (1)

Introduction of a new system of decision-making in connexion with appropriation limits

41. In this recommendation, the Inspector suggests that financial ceilings for the medium-term plans might be determined in advance, prior to and independent of decisions on the programme of work to be included in these plans.

42. This recommendation is primarily addressed to the governing bodies of the several organizations which will have to decide on it. 5/

43. In paragraph 123 the Inspector expresses the views that "if medium-term plans are to act as instruments that can really help to define a policy, they must, together with the programme budgets, entail financial decisions" and that "it is necessary to keep decisions on appropriation limits apart from the programme definition processes". The main argument advanced by the Inspector in favour of such a separation of programming from financial decisions is that no profit or non-profit organization "has ever been able to establish its programme of activities and hence of expenditure simply in terms of its own wishes, since a budget must be drawn up in relation to income", and that "no one can systematically gear the estimates of his income to his plans for expenditure" (see A/9646, para. 125).

44. These views run counter to common current thinking as regards the integration of programme and financial decisions. There are alternative formulae that do not sacrifice the important integration of planning and budgeting and yet achieve a reconciliation between the cost of desirable programme levels with the prospects for likely income.

5/ There seems to be some ambiguity in para. 139 as to which body would be responsible for calculating the estimated total appropriation limits.

Recommendation V

Studies regarding a new conception of the technical co-operation of the international organizations

45. Under this heading, the Inspector has proposed detailed studies and advanced research designed to improve the present methods of technical co-operation in the United Nations system and to identify those development-related problems which lend themselves to broadly similar treatment in several countries. A two-pronged approach is suggested:

(a) Experimental comprehensive studies and diagnoses in certain volunteering countries, to provide reliable bases for extensive analysis of methodology;

(b) Consolidated studies of the typologies of the problems of development designed to lead to agreement on the most productive approaches to the identified classes.

46. ACC endorses the general intent of the recommendation. The studies being carried out by ACC which are described under recommendation II above would also aim at improving the United Nations methodology in technical co-operation. In addition, UNDP is currently engaged in a critical review of its country programming process, the main purpose of which is to improve, in this crucial aspect of development, planning in the United Nations system.

47. A question for decision now is whether or not to invest further time and money in additional studies as suggested by the Inspector. ACC welcomes the proposal that the World Bank be associated with the efforts at improvement and will take steps to enable its collaboration in the present efforts. ACC also believes that the results of the current studies should be available for consideration by the various decision-making authorities before further study and research actions along the lines suggested by the Inspector.

Recommendation VI

Comprehensive reorientation of studies on the international framework of principles and methods - review of the conception of the International Development Strategy for the 1980s

48. The essence of this recommendation is to include in a global Strategy for the third United Nations development decade "indicative plans by sector" and "ten-year regional indicative plans" in order to establish closer links between the organizations' programmes, to fit them more easily into the general context of world economic and social problems, and to give the Economic and Social Council an opportunity of determining whether these various global approaches by sector are concordant. Judging from the efforts involved in preparing somewhat similar exercises in the fields of agriculture and science and technology, such indicative plans would constitute rather ambitious undertakings.

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49. The forthcoming mid-term review of the activities connected with the Second United Nations Development Decade will no doubt involve the consideration of how the planning of a Strategy for the third United Nations development decade might be improved. Furthermore, it seems natural that any proposal of this kind should be reviewed first by the Committee for Review and Appraisal and the Committee for Development Planning, each of which would doubtless assess the benefits to be derived therefrom and the human and other resources likely to be required.

Recommendation VII

Organization of informal working meetings between representatives of the various governing bodies

50. It would be for each governing body to decide whether the problems of harmonizing the presentation of programme budgets of the several organizations (or other common problems) warranted such informal meetings. The need for this might be decided in the light of the report to be prepared under recommendation I.

Recommendation VIII

Selection of a common period for the medium-term plans of the five organizations and the adoption of a time-table for the preparatory work

51. The Inspector suggests that negotiations should be initiated among the five organizations to harmonize the dates and the duration of the period selected for their next medium-term plans and that the most convenient period might be 1978-1983. He also suggests the country programming period of UNDP might be made to conform with this period. With regard to harmonizing the plan period, ACC considers that there would seem to be merit in all agencies choosing the same six-year period. This would mean that UNESCO would arrange for its programme budget and medium-term plan to begin in even, rather than odd years and that the United Nations would have a plan of six, rather than four years.

52. The Inspector expresses the view that fixed-horizon plans, rather than plans that are periodically brought up to date and adjusted, are indispensable for purposes of the effective evaluation of performance. This proposal must be examined in conjunction with his recommendation to establish, separately and in advance, a financial ceiling for the entire period covered by the medium-term plans. It is believed that these proposals, if adopted, would introduce a degree of rigidity in the programmes of the international organizations that would prevent them from responding promptly and fully to rapidly-changing world conditions and the shifting needs of their member States.

53. ACC believes that the most important consideration is to have a plan for a reasonable period in advance (probably three biennia is as far in advance as is feasible). This would allow for adequate consultation among organizations and

would enable them to plan their work in the light of long-term needs. In any event, it would seem indispensable to provide an adequate opportunity to adjust plans from time to time in the light of the results being registered and of external developments affecting the organizations' activities.

IV. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

54. The Inspector has proposed a far-reaching programme of studies and suggested procedures which would have as their objective the rethinking and recasting of the activities of six United Nations organizations and the capitalizing on their special attributes. The Inspector's views and recommendations, and indeed the somewhat debatable hypotheses on which they are based, are addressed primarily to Governments and to the policy-making organs of the organizations concerned. The foregoing comments have been formulated with a view to assisting Governments in their study of these complex and interlocking proposals, and to do this in a co-ordinated way by utilizing for this purpose the machinery of ACC.

55. At the end of his report, the Inspector makes the following statement:

"The internal coherence which has been sought in the general plan here proposed in no way implies that these recommendations form an indivisible whole. On the contrary, I believe that the implementation, even partial, of any one of them should make for progress in the international organizations' performance and efficiency; that, in turn, would strengthen the member States' confidence in these organizations, thus initiating a cumulative beneficial process" (A/9646, para. 197).

56. This approach has been followed by ACC in its comments on individual recommendations, some of which could be supported in part or in whole while others require more preparatory work and consideration before a final judgement can be reached. This is particularly true of those that would involve the copious use of scarce resources.

57. As regards the technical aspect of programme planning and the documents on which it is based, it is clearly necessary to serve as well as possible the needs of programme-reviewing organs in their difficult task of defining the activities for which they are responsible. The very review of the Inspector's proposals has led to a long and fruitful exchange of views among the programme planners of the organizations concerned on many of the technical problems they face in common. ACC intends to convene these programme-planning officers rather frequently in future for such purposes as working out improved methods and criteria for assessing programme performance and evaluating results, for the formulation of more specific objectives and clearer programme statements, for the selection of priorities and, finally, for improving the link between medium-term plans and biennial programme budgets.

58. Finally, ACC is itself pursuing much the same goals as the Inspector. These include (a) making the decision-making process more rational; (b) tightening up the integration of regular programmes with the various field activities, perhaps through a stronger link between medium-term planning and country programming; (c) stressing activities that international organizations can do especially well; and (d) enhancing the thrust of the system-wide contribution in programme sectors of common concern.

59. While goals of this kind cannot be achieved overnight, a number of steps have and are being taken towards their attainment. Efforts to formulate clear objectives and programmes, if successful, would help to rationalize decision-making and the continuous exchange of experience at the meetings of programme planners will support such efforts. The organizations will also contribute as fully as they can to the UNDP review of country-programming procedures.

60. The organizations have long been involved in efforts to evaluate their own activities, but, as ACC indicated in the introduction to its last annual report to the Council (see E/5844), these efforts need to be redoubled. For it is by assessing results that one can distinguish and learn from failures as well as identify and fully exploit successes. If adequate methods of evaluation can be developed, the United Nations system could more easily build on its accomplishments and thereby come to play a special role in areas in which it has shown that it has distinctive capabilities.

61. Furthermore, ACC has been involved for several years in harmonizing and in imparting new impetus to a number of programme sectors of system-wide concern. These include statistics, population, the environment, natural resources, human settlements and, most recently, rural development. All of the new tools described above are being applied increasingly to endeavours in these areas of very broad interest.

62. ACC believes that steps such as these could make a significant contribution to the improvement of the programme-planning process and beyond that to the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of the organizations, individually and collectively.