

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.
GENERAL

E/5430/Add.1
5 October 1973

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

REPORTS OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report on the capacity of the regional economic commissions
for a unified approach to development

(JIU/REP/73/1)

Addendum

Comments of the Secretary-General and the Administrator of UNDP

Comments of the Secretary-General

1. The concept of a unified approach to development is an important one, which has attracted considerable attention through such documents as the International Development Strategy, and in different fora, such as the Committee for Development Planning. The Secretary-General is very aware of the need to implement this approach to the fullest extent possible. In this connexion, it should be noted that in order to strengthen the unified approach to development analysis, planning and policies the relevant units of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs were combined to facilitate this approach.
2. The report attempts to determine the degree to which the unified approach exists in the regional commissions by basing their conclusions largely on the amount of expenditure and manpower earmarked for the organizational units normally associated with social issues. This is a rather narrow approach, which can lead to erroneous conclusions. First, as exemplified by the measures taken in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs cited above, the aim in many cases is in fact to combine economic and social activities within the same units so as to facilitate the interaction which is one of the foundations of the unified approach. In those cases, the manpower functions cannot easily be distinguished. Secondly, the units normally associated with economic matters are in fact also very much concerned with "social" issues such as unemployment and mass poverty. Therefore, in the Secretary-General's opinion, the quantitative approach followed by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in this report can be misleading and can be used only as a very partial tool at best.
3. In addition, it should be kept in mind that the terms of reference of the United Nations and the regional economic commissions do not include every social subject. Therefore, in attempting to determine the degree to which social issues are or are not receiving proper attention, it is imperative to consider this matter from the vantage point of the United Nations system as a whole. Many social issues

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are at the heart of the terms of reference of the specialized agencies, which, of course, are also active at the regional level.

4. Notwithstanding the above reservations, the Secretary-General can endorse the principles contained in recommendations 1, 2 and 5 of the Inspectors' report. Furthermore, the Secretary-General has requested the Administrative Management Service to keep recommendations 3 and 4 in mind in any future reviews or studies of the regional commissions. Finally, the Secretary-General will draw the attention of the Committee for Development Planning to recommendation 6.

Comments of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

5. In general, we welcome the recommendations to the regional economic commissions to give more attention to a unified approach to development. In particular, we hope that such a shift in emphasis in the commissions' work programme may also influence the choice of Governments in the use of UNDP resources for country and intercountry programmes. However, we feel that the report is too general and superficial to offer sufficient concrete guidance on how to bring the desired changes about.

6. Concerning the machinery for change, it would, for example, seem useful to emphasize that the lack of interest in a unified approach to development by the regional economic commissions in session (recommendation No. 2) may reflect inconsistencies in Governments' handling of the same problem in different United Nations bodies. Thus, the report urges the very same Governments who voted for the resolutions on unified development in the General Assembly and in the Economic and Social Council to pay heed to them as regional economic commission members. (Differences could arise on the basis of an uneven regional grouping of those Governments for and against a unified development approach, but the bias could hardly work in the same direction in all the regional economic commissions.) It would have been interesting to have an explanation of this situation. If this could not be obtained, an identification of the issue would still have been useful.

7. It may be added that, though it certainly behooves the executive secretaries of the regional economic commissions and the directors of the regional institutes of economic and social planning to take the initiative in proposing the requisite changes in structure and staffing of their organizations, these will also ultimately have to be subjected to the approval of the members of the regional economic commissions and governing boards, respectively. The recommendations of the Inspectors' report are therefore again directed at the originators of the resolutions that inspired the preparation of the report in the first place.

8. Another observation concerns the strong emphasis of the report on the quantitative aspects of the staffing patterns of the regional economic commissions. Surely, it does reflect the problem that is being investigated. Nevertheless, a changed staffing pattern is not per se a guarantee of a unified approach. As noted in the final recommendation, there is also a problem of competence and methodology. While highly appreciative of the contribution to an improved understanding of the development process of the Committee for Development Planning,

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we rather doubt that it can develop by itself a methodology for unified development. This must, inter alia, be based on substantial amounts of research. In this respect, a good beginning has been made by the World Employment Programme (WEP) on at least two fronts. The reports and policy recommendations of the Comprehensive Employment Missions organized under WEP to Colombia, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Iran are examples of a unified approach to development and are widely acclaimed for the innovative contributions they have made. Secondly, the WEP research programme endeavours to integrate development research and operational activities through an imaginative scheme of collaboration between multilateral, bilateral, national and private organizations, where strong emphasis is put on case studies at the country level. Though initiated by the ILO, WEP enjoys active participation by all States Members of the United Nations. We would like to suggest that greater care should be taken to ensure that a new slogan like "unified approach to development" is in fact something new before it is advanced as a solution to complex and difficult problems that are already being dealt with under different headings. This comment can of course be directed at a much wider audience than the Joint Inspection Unit, but it is nevertheless a valid point.

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.
GENERAL

E/5430/Add.2
24 June 1974

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-seventh session
Item 25 of the provisional agenda

REPORTS OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report on the capacity of the regional economic commissions
for a unified approach to development

(JIU/REP/73/1, April 1973)

Observations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has studied the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the above-mentioned subject and also a written statement containing the comments made by the Secretary-General and the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme on that report (E/5430 and E/5430/Add.1).
2. As explained in its opening paragraphs, the JIU report has been "prompted by the concern voiced by Member States at the United Nations General Assembly and in its Economic and Social Council on the need and importance of a unified approach to economic and social aspects of development" (E/5430, para. 1).
3. A similar concern was expressed in a report of the meetings of the executive secretaries which reviewed major policy areas to which regional co-operation through the economic commissions could usefully be extended or in which it could be developed (E/5370).
4. According to the Inspectors, the programmes of activities and the budgets of the commissions reflect a narrow concept of economic development in which the social aspects go unattended and the problems that pertain to the institutional framework for development are often neglected.
5. The Inspectors attribute this failing in the first place to the internal structure and organization of the commissions, which, in their view, allow the economic policy-related functions to prevail, to the detriment and exclusion of all other activities, in the allocation of budgetary and staff resources.

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6. This point of view is questioned by the Secretary-General and the Administrator of UNDP, who also express some doubts regarding the importance that the Inspectors attach to renaming the regional commissions in order to give prominence to the "social" content of their development functions. The Secretary-General and the Administrator point out that titles do not invariably provide an accurate indication of an organization's objectives, scope and functions. Several of the divisions in the economic commissions, with ostensibly "economic" functional titles have traditionally included, or are now in the process of developing, a strong "social" component (for example, migration, employment); moreover the Inspectors may have overstretched the scope of "economics" to include administration, cartography and other subjects (E/5430, para. 14).

7. It may be true, as the Inspectors argue (E/5430, para. 15) that the "vertical" structure of the regional economic commissions makes it difficult to adopt an intersectoral approach and that a different, more flexible structure - with more extensive use of interdisciplinary task forces, for instance - might better secure the desired result. But the Secretary-General and the Administrator suggest that there are other reasons for the prevalence of the situation which the Joint Inspection Unit criticizes. As they indicate "the terms of reference of the United Nations and the regional economic commissions do not include every social subject ... Many social issues are at the heart of the terms of reference of the specialized agencies, which, of course, are also active at the regional level" (E/5430/Add.1, para. 3). It may be too, that what the Joint Inspection Unit has criticized as a "one-sided" or "narrow" approach to development is a reflection of the paucity, to date, of adequate methodological instruments in several areas of social policy. It may also reflect the comparative weight accorded to "economics" in the Member Governments' own order of priorities.

8. Nevertheless the Secretary-General and the Administrator of UNDP do not dispute the need for an integrated approach to development, to which this Committee subscribes, and the Secretary-General has agreed with recommendations 1, 2 and 5 of the Joint Inspection Unit. He has further requested the Administrative Management Service of the United Nations Secretariat "to keep recommendations 3 and 4 in mind in any future review or studies of the regional commissions" (E/5430/Add.1, para. 4).

9. The problem of regional structures has already been the subject of several resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. More recently, the Economic and Social Council in resolution 1756 (LIV) requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Council at its fifty-eighth session a further report on the regional structures of the United Nations system "aimed at their gradual simplification and adjustment to the realities, needs and aspirations of each region, on the basis of an in-depth analysis of the regional structures of the United Nations system as well as the terms of reference of the respective regional offices". The resolution further requested the Joint Inspection Unit to include in its work programme an in-depth study of the same matter. The Unit has responded to that request (A/C.5/L.1169, para. 7).

10. In the circumstances the Advisory Committee is of the opinion that the Council will probably wish to consider the report contained in document E/5430 at its fifty-eighth session within the context of the study of regional structures.