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REPORTS OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report on the decentralization of United Nations economic, social
and related activities and the strengthening of the regional
economic commissions

(JIU/REP/74/5, July 1974)

Addendum

Comments by the Secretary-General

1. This JIU report is concerned with the question of the need to decentralize United Nations economic, social and related activities from Headquarters to the field and to strengthen the regional commissions, in order to make the Organization as a whole and the commissions in particular, more effective in their response to the different development problems and requirements of the various regions and subregions of the world. It is a topical, perceptive and thought-provoking document based, obviously, on careful research and investigation. The Inspectors have made a valuable contribution towards the effort to improve United Nations performance in these areas.

2. The subject of the report is, of course, not a new one in the United Nations. Since the beginning of the 1960s, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly have, in several resolutions, proclaimed and affirmed decentralization of the United Nations activities in the economic, social and related fields to the commissions to be United Nations policy, and have laid down a number of guidelines and measures required to carry out this policy. In a sense, this report is an assessment of the extent to which this policy has been implemented to date. In order to obtain the full impact and appreciation of the report, it would be necessary to read it in toto. A summary of the main findings and conclusions of the Inspectors is, however, contained in section XI of the report.

3. By way of an initial comment, the Secretary-General agrees with the basic thrust of the JIU report concerning the need to decentralize to the commissions those substantive and administrative responsibilities that will enable the commissions to function in accordance with the wishes of the General Assembly and the Council. The range and complexity of economic and social problems currently facing the world call for a more co-ordinated and concerted response which can only

be achieved if both the commissions and Headquarters begin to play more effectively their respective roles in accordance with established policy and guidelines. The Secretary-General is, therefore, prepared to initiate that process of internal consultations between Headquarters and the commissions towards that end.

Comments on the specific recommendations

Recommendation I: Co-ordination of work programmes

4. This recommendation urges the development of mutually agreed on and effective measures to ensure that the work programmes of the United Nations Headquarters offices, including UNCTAD and UNIDO, and the regional commissions are better co-ordinated; and that consultations to this end should be held at all stages of the evolution of the programmes or projects. It is the feeling of the Inspectors that global or interregional activities should, as far as possible, be preceded by subregional and regional (or intercountry) activities on the same topic; and that interregional or global components of subregional or regional (intercountry) activities should normally be the responsibility of Headquarters' offices. Similarly, subregional and regional (intercountry) activities should, wherever possible, be planned to serve as inputs to interregional and global activities on the same topic; and subregional or regional (intercountry) components of interregional or global activities should normally be the responsibility of the commissions.

5. The Secretary-General concurs with the recommendation of the Inspectors with the view to ensuring a more effective co-ordination of work programmes between Headquarters and the commissions. He believes that the regional commissions not only need be fully informed but should also actively participate in what should in effect be a joint effort to accomplish agreed objectives. Through direct contacts between heads of corresponding substantive units at Headquarters and in the regional commissions, some measure of joint programming is already being achieved in, for example, the statistics programme. With the introduction of a new system of programme budgeting and medium-term planning in the United Nations as a result of General Assembly resolution 3043 (XXVII) it is necessary that full consultations should take place between Headquarters, including UNCTAD and UNIDO, and the regional commissions on the main thrust of the activities to be carried out within a plan period in order to develop an integrated medium-term plan which should preferably indicate an order of priorities within the projected level of resources. Following the approval by the General Assembly, at its twenty-seventh session, of a proposal made by the Secretary-General, a small planning programming and evaluation unit was established within the Budget Division. It has been given primary responsibility for the preparation of the second United Nations medium-term plan, currently in progress. This has provided an opportunity for substantive units at Headquarters to analyse in parallel with theirs the work programmes of the regional commissions, thus, it is hoped, leading to better co-ordination of programming. While it is anticipated that the preparation of the third medium-term plan may encompass a more complex system of reciprocal consultations between

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Headquarters and regional units, much of the effectiveness of the process will depend upon the conclusions reached by the Working Group on United Nations programme and budget machinery established by the General Assembly at the twentieth session, which will review the intergovernmental and expert machinery dealing with programmes and budgets, and the decisions reached thereon by the General Assembly at the thirtieth session.

6. On the basis of recommendations made by the Administrative Management Service (AMS), programme planning or programme co-ordination units have been or are being established at Headquarters (including UNCTAD and UNIDO) and in the regional commissions. The Resources and Programme Planning Office, established in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in February 1973, has as one of its specific responsibilities the preparation of the Department's medium-term plans and their co-ordination with those of the regional commissions.

7. The clear directive given by the Economic and Social Council in its resolutions 1896 (LVII) and 1911 (LVII) regarding adjustment, reorientation and adaptation of the programmes of work of the regional commissions and all organizations, institutions, subsidiary bodies and conferences of the United Nations system towards the implementation of the Declaration and the Programme of Action on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 3202.(S-VI) provides a basis for concerted action in the attainment of well-defined objectives and priorities.

8. The goal of attaining improved programme co-ordination has been given an added impetus as a result of experience acquired during the last few years in the preparations for, and follow-up to, a number of United Nations conferences on subjects of urgent concern to the world community. These include conferences on the environment and population. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has established offices of regional co-ordinators at the headquarters of regional commissions to ensure follow-up of the recommendations of the Human Environment Conference and the decisions taken at the Governing Council of UNEP. Regional meetings are being organized with the assistance of UNFPA to delineate the responsibilities of the regional commissions in fulfilment of the objectives included in the World Population Plan of Action. Similarly, conferences like the World Conference of the International Women's Year, 1975, the Conference on Human Settlements in 1976 and the Conferences on Water and Desertification in 1977 call for close consultations and co-operation between Headquarters and the regional commissions during the preparatory process. A meeting was convened in December 1974 of officials responsible for work in the area of water resources, both at Headquarters and in the regional commissions, to agree on an appropriate regional contribution to preparatory work to be undertaken for the United Nations Water Conference.

9. Improved programme co-ordination has also been facilitated by taking advantage of the presence of representatives of regional commissions at sessions of the policy-making bodies concerned with the various programme areas, such as the Committee on Natural Resources, the Commission for Social Development,

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the Statistical Commission and the Population Commission. Furthermore, in the preparation of the medium-term plan, 1976-1979, and the programme budget, 1976-1977, for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, particular stress has been laid on co-ordination with the regional commissions in the implementation of specific programme activities.

10. While agreeing with the recommendation of the Inspectors, the Secretary-General wishes to draw attention to a number of considerations which will have an effect on giving it a practical shape. While it is logical to use regional activities as inputs to global activities, it is not always appropriate that global or interregional projects flow out of regional projects. It is necessary to look at specific instances and to prescribe specific approaches. For example, the world-wide comparability of statistics and the development of common methodologies and standards frequently require initiation and co-ordination from the centre, though in consultation with the regions and with adaptation to specific needs in the regions. It could not be accomplished simply through an additive process of regional activities. Equally, sometimes it may be easier and more economical to develop certain studies and methods at the centre and adapt them to the regions, than to develop them in a region and then adapt them to other regions and the centre. There are special difficulties in carrying out and reporting on research into current conditions: it is sometimes impossible to use earlier work as a straight feed-in to later work. Moreover, the timing of various legislative meetings at which such topics are discussed - usually determined by other considerations - sometimes rule out any simple sequential treatment of the work. The stress on "consultations" should properly be coupled with prerequisites and means, such as prolonging the programming period to allow for all the consultations to take place (with the possible danger of programme proposals becoming out of date or overtaken by events), and for the provision of adequate travel funds and staff time.

Recommendation II: Advisory services

11. This recommendation calls for a review of the institution of interregional advisers as well as for a redefinition of the respective functions of interregional and regional advisers and a more sophisticated evaluation of their work. It emphasizes the need for a clear delineation of the respective criteria for the recruitment of interregional or regional advisers and a careful scrutiny of the qualifications of all candidates to such posts. The recommendation also calls for a strengthening of the regional advisory services through an increase of regional advisers and a reduction of the numbers of interregional advisers, who should be used only for assignments of a clearly "global" nature. It is also recommended that Headquarters and the commissions should be jointly involved in the recruitment of members of the multinational interdisciplinary development advisory teams (UNDAT) and that, once a team has been set up and established, it should be placed under the direct supervision of the regional commission concerned. Any guidance in respect of the operations or management of the team should be exercised by Headquarters, in the light of agreed standards and criteria, through the commission.

12. The main thrust of this recommendation is acceptable to the Secretary-General. The need for closer co-ordination between interregional and regional advisory services is generally agreed upon. The functions of the interregional advisers should be complementary to and not competitive with those of regional advisers. In taking decisions on establishing posts of interregional advisers, this consideration should invariably be borne in mind. While the main task of both regional and interregional advisers is to respond to country requests for assistance, interregional advisers provide greater flexibility in areas of a highly technical nature where requests may be expected from all regions and when to provide such advisory services at the regional level may be both uneconomical and a duplication of effort.

13. While agreeing with the Inspectors that the reports of the interregional advisers be sent to the regional commissions concerned, the Secretary-General would like to point out that in certain areas this is already being done. There is no doubt that an improvement in the flow of information and consultation between Headquarters and the regional commissions at the substantive level will keep to a minimum the possibilities of overlapping and duplication with regional advisers. It may also be of advantage that whenever possible and as a part of the travel arrangements within the region, provision should be made for interregional advisers to visit and brief the staff in the regional commissions and, where appropriate, other organizations in the United Nations system on the results of their work. In those cases where regional commissions have regional advisers available but with relatively little experience, they should participate in the missions of the interregional advisers and undertake some of the preliminary and follow-up work for such missions.

14. The Secretary-General fully endorses the view of the Inspectors regarding the need to make the work of the regional advisers more effective. The suggestion that regional advisers of one commission could be loaned out on a quid pro quo basis to another is to be welcomed, as such an arrangement could facilitate a mutual exchange of experience among regions. However, a constraint in the implementation of this suggestion is the language factor. The effectiveness of regional advisers may be enhanced if they were to assist only a limited number of countries, especially the least developed which lack sufficient qualified specialists.

15. Both regional and interregional advisers can provide effective assistance only if they are supported by research and development work done within the units to which they are attached. They serve as channels for transferring the experience and expertise available at Headquarters and in the commissions' secretariats to the countries in need of assistance and, in turn, for bringing the feedback from those countries to enrich the research work to be undertaken by staff members. One commission has noted in this context that it is almost impossible to avoid a working relationship between a regional adviser and staff in the substantive division he is attached to, who in turn are responsible for providing orientation, guidance and substantive support to the work of the adviser. This working relationship sometimes leads to the adviser being involved in the work of the division relating to its normal activities, such as action-oriented research which

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assists in the rendering of advice to Governments. The question of whether or not the interregional or regional advisers are employed on any assignments other than those for which they are specifically recruited or are under-utilized could be examined from time to time with the assistance of AMS. In this connexion, it might be mentioned that it is planned to introduce shortly a regular periodic reporting system for all project personnel, including advisers, which would lead to a better assessment of the quality of their performance.

16. The Secretary-General concurs with the Inspectors' recommendation that the criterion of "field presence" should be enforced more strictly than has been the case to date as regards regional and interregional advisers. It should, however, be borne in mind that the "field presence" requirement of an adviser's performance may at times prove costly and misleading if, for example, field visits are unnecessarily extended or unwarranted field assignments undertaken simply for the purpose of enhancing ratings.

17. Recruitment of interregional advisers is initiated by the Technical Assistance Recruitment Service (TARS) only at the specific request of the Office of Technical Co-operation in consultation with the substantive office concerned and in accordance with the procedure especially established for the purpose. The job descriptions which accompany the requests define clearly the proposed functions and responsibilities of the interregional advisers. Appointments are made by TARS in close consultation with and the full consent of the substantive office on the basis of the evaluation made by the latter on the candidate's suitability from the standpoint of professional competence and on the assessment made during interviews with the candidates conducted normally by the European or North American regional office of TARS and/or by the UNDP resident representatives.

18. Similarly, regional advisers from outside the respective regions are recruited by TARS at the specific request of the regional commissions. The candidates are evaluated by the regional commissions, and it is only those whom the commissions consider suitable for the particular assignments and whom the interviewers recommend who are ultimately appointed.

19. Scrutinizing the qualifications of candidates and interviewing them to ensure that their qualifications conform to the requirements specified in the relevant job descriptions are important steps in the recruitment operation.

20. The Secretary-General is in basic agreement with the recommendations of the Inspectors regarding the substantive, operational and administrative decentralization of UNDAT to the regional commissions once they are set up and established. As for recruitment, TARS has been in correspondence with one of the regional commissions concerning the delegation of authority for recruitment, from within the region, of experts required for one UNDAT with the intention of extending later such authority with respect to other UNDAT in that region. For this purpose, TARS has suggested the introduction of procedures similar to those followed under the existing decentralized arrangements applicable to regional adviser posts whereby it would be possible to recruit, without reference to Headquarters, from within the region personnel required for UNDAT for the initial

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period of 12 months and to extend appointments up to a total of 12 months at levels 1-5. It is intended to apply, as appropriate, the same procedures with respect to UNDAT in other regions. Recruitment of team leaders would continue to remain the responsibility of TARS after the candidate has been agreed upon by Headquarters and the regional commission concerned. As regards substantive guidance to be provided by Headquarters in respect to decentralized UNDAT, agreed standards and criteria would be worked out as suggested by the Inspectors.

Recommendation III: Training projects

21. This recommendation is addressed to the need for more co-operative and mutual consultation with the commissions in the management of training programmes, including workshops, seminars, study tours, fellowships and other regional seminars. It is suggested that, to the extent possible and in accordance with the agreed standards and criteria, the commissions should take full charge of all regional and subregional fellowship projects; and that, in co-ordination with Headquarters, the commissions should organize and service all regional and subregional training projects that are programmed by Headquarters. This recommendation is acceptable to the Secretary-General.

Recommendation IV: Operational programmes and projects funded by extra-budgetary resources

22. The Inspectors believe that the commissions should play a more active role in identifying, initiating and formulating regional and subregional programmes and projects. They also propose that, subject to certain qualifications, all regional and subregional operational projects of which the United Nations proper is at present or may in the future become executing or participating agency should, as a matter of principle, be fully decentralized to the commissions, which should be designated directly. The Secretary-General agrees with these proposals, which he is already starting to implement in accordance with part II of Economic and Social Council resolution 1896 (LVII).

23. With regard to country projects for which the United Nations is or will be the executing or participating agency, the Inspectors call for an active involvement by the commissions in all stages of the implementation of those country projects of a multidisciplinary nature or that have a direct bearing on regional or subregional activities in the same field. The Inspectors have also proposed criteria which may be used for consideration to be given on a selective basis to the decentralization of country projects. The Secretary-General also agrees with these recommendations.

24. Equally acceptable to him is the Inspectors' observation that the commissions should have such a share of UNDP overhead funds as is commensurate with their actual contribution to the projects decentralized to them.

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Recommendation V: Relationship between the regional commissions and other United Nations bodies

The regional commissions and UNDP

25. In order to strengthen the relationship between the commissions and UNDP, the Inspectors have made a number of specific suggestions. They include an institutionalized arrangement whereby the executive secretaries are consulted on matters of over-all UNDP policy and programming; regular consultative meetings at least once a year between the executive secretaries and the directors of the regional bureaux; an appropriate liaison arrangement at the regional level aimed at improving rapport and communication between UNDP and the commission; and the provision to the commissions of the good offices and services of the resident representative in those countries where the commissions do not have subregional offices. The Secretary-General believes that these suggestions would undoubtedly be of benefit to the work of the commissions.

26. This recommendation is the subject of separate comments by the Administrator of UNDP.

The regional commissions, UNCTAD and UNIDO

27. Within the framework of the general principles proposed by the Inspectors regarding the co-ordination of work programmes, they recommend that the various co-ordination practices already established by UNCTAD and the regional commissions and by the latter and UNIDO should be perfected and institutionalized as appropriate. The Secretary-General concurs with this recommendation.

28. UNCTAD attaches the greatest importance to the achievement of its objectives at the regional level, and to that end, co-operation with the regional commissions is being strengthened so as to ensure a mutual reinforcement of activities and an effective cross-fertilization of ideas. It should, however, be noted that, while the commissions approach questions from the point of view of their own regions, UNCTAD's tasks are of a more global nature.

29. It should also be pointed out that both UNCTAD and the regional commissions have responsibilities in the trade field which go far beyond the mandate given to the International Trade Centre in Geneva. Therefore, the placing of emphasis by the Inspectors on trade promotion should not be taken to imply that decentralization between UNCTAD and the commissions would be limited to this field. UNCTAD intends to implement as effectively as possible the relevant provisions of the International Development Strategy and of the Declaration of Action on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order in co-operation with the regional commissions.

30. As for relations with UNIDO, it should be noted that industry divisions have also been established in ESCAP and ECWA.

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Regional commissions and other United Nations bodies

31. The Secretary-General is satisfied with the current trend and state of co-operation between the regional commissions and other United Nations bodies. For example, UNICEF has expressed its willingness to explore ways of extending co-operative arrangements with the commissions in order to ensure a full co-ordination of programmes entrusted to the commissions and those financed by UNICEF. In the past, co-operation between UNICEF and the commissions included the exchange of information and participation in the meetings sponsored by the commissions that were of interest to UNICEF. Currently, this organization is undertaking a management survey intended, among other things, to re-examine the feasibility of further decentralizing its operations along the lines discussed in this JIU report.

32. As regards co-operation between regional commissions and UNEP, it should be recalled that the General Assembly in its resolution 2997 (XXVII) on institutional and financial arrangements for international environment co-operation, recognized specifically the role of the regional commissions in the implementation of environmental programmes in view of the particular need for the rapid development of the regional co-operation in this field. While the basic module of the UNEP programme is the ecological region which does not coincide with the geographical coverage of the regional commissions and in some cases cuts across two or three of them, there are a large number of common economic and social factors within each regional commission's area affecting man's interaction with his environment. Since its inception, UNEP has taken steps to establish close co-operative relations with the regional commissions including through the appointment of regional representatives and the approval of several projects under the Environment Fund for implementation by the regional commissions as co-operative agencies.

33. Another example is the collaboration between the commissions and the Office of Public Information. The latter has embarked on decentralizing to regional levels its production work and increasing the regional component of its programmes. In this connexion, emphasis is being placed on strengthening the information services of the commissions and on maintaining a close liaison with them.

Recommendation VI: Administration and management

34. The Inspectors recommend that, subject to a regional commission's acceptance of the decentralization of an activity (or component thereof) and to the observance of agreed criteria, standards, rules and guidelines, such decentralization should include all responsibilities related to its substantive and administrative backstopping. Only the recruitment of internationally recruited staff should continue to be the responsibility of Headquarters, acting in close consultation with the commissions. The procurement of office supplies and equipment should likewise be delegated to the commissions; and subject to the usual contracting procedures, that of project supplies and equipment should be delegated to the commissions as far as practicable. The residual authority of Headquarters in all other respects should be confined to broad co-ordination,

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control over the observance of said agreed criteria, standards, rules and guidelines and to the Secretary-General's statutory responsibilities for over-all financial and administrative control over all United Nations activities, generally. Accordingly, the decentralization of any activity (or component thereof) to a commission should be accompanied by the allotment to it of resources, including overhead funds, commensurate with its responsibilities.

35. The Secretary-General is in broad agreement with this recommendation. As regards purchasing and contracting, he believes that as much authority should be delegated as can be exercised with efficiency and economy of operation by the commissions. Financial rule 110.16 (b) (iii) delegates to the executive secretaries of the economic commissions for Asia and the Pacific, for Latin America and for Africa full procurement and contracting authority for individual requisitions, or a series of requisitions, up to the amount of \$10,000. Only individual purchases or contracts in excess of this amount need be referred to Headquarters. Consideration is being given to the amendment of this rule to increase authority to act locally. The existing delegation of authority and the proposed increase in the limit is based on the recognition that local procurement often results in a more rapid availability of the items desired as it permits immediate delivery of items in the available market, and, for those to be procured from abroad, it eliminates the time required to send requisitions to Headquarters and to ship the goods to the region. It reduces the administrative work both in the field and at Headquarters and the volume of stocks of supplies Headquarters needs to carry. Even within the present limit, the commissions frequently request Headquarters to do the purchasing for them. The reason for this can be attributed to the possibility of obtaining a lower price, unavailability of the item locally or inability of the procurement staff of the commission to handle a particular case.

36. There is an implied criticism in the report on the absence of a special unit in the Purchase and Transport Service in the Office of General Services to meet the requirements of the regional commissions. It should be clarified that the Headquarters procurement function is organized on the basis of specialized commodity or equipment fields rather than geographically. It has been proven that the most efficient way to handle procurement is to have specialists in various fields, such as vehicles, paper and office equipment. Furthermore, contrary to what might appear to be the Inspectors' impression, the volume of purchase orders handled at Headquarters for the regional commissions is not sufficiently large to warrant creation of a separate unit.

37. As regards training of staff to handle procurement in the regional commissions, five have already been trained at Headquarters. The Office of General Services has made a standing offer to the commissions that it will train staff at any time they can be assigned by the commission to New York for a period of six months to a year.

38. The Inspectors further recommend that the Secretary-General should take the necessary steps to relocate, through secondment or rotation, the professional and support service staff that may be required in a regional office. The Secretary-General agrees with this recommendation. There is no doubt that an exchange of staff between Headquarters and the field is necessary, inter alia, to widen the

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experience of the staff concerned and to foster a better understanding of the regional situations at Headquarters and of Headquarters' policy by the field. This question was discussed at the meeting of the executive secretaries in January 1974 where general agreement was reached on the principle of rotation of staff as among the regional commissions and between the regional commissions and Headquarters. Modalities to give effect to this agreement are at present being worked out. However, any such scheme can only be implemented if there is no insistence on total regionalization of the staff.

39. The Inspectors also recommended that, in the event that a vacancy in a commission cannot be filled by a fully qualified person otherwise than by temporarily setting aside certain recruitment criteria, the executive secretary should be authorized to recommend the recruitment of such a person nevertheless, on a short-term contract not exceeding two years. This dispensation should apply only to professional posts requiring technical expertise.

40. The current system for recruitment of professional staff accomplishes the same purposes as are envisaged by the Inspectors' recommendation. When neither the commission nor the Office of Personnel Services can locate candidates with the required qualifications, the commission may modify the qualification requirements, in order that candidates can be found. As pointed out in the report, notification to the Office of Personnel Services of a pending vacancy well in advance is an absolute necessity if professional vacancies are to be kept to a minimum.

41. The report also refers to delays in recruitment in technical assistance experts and the factors contributing to such delays. Although there has been some discernible improvement in this respect, much remains to be done. As part of its continuing effort, the Office of Personnel Services plans to resort to advertisement more frequently in the future. At the same time, the Office of Personnel Services is also proposing a major organizational change in the Technical Assistance Recruitment Service (TARS) to facilitate, on a systematic basis, the prospecting for and interviewing of candidates from those geographic regions in which it does not as yet have regional offices.

Recommendation VII: Organizational

42. This recommendation covers three points:

(a) The commissions are advised to begin considering in good time the reorganization of their internal structures, placing emphasis on strengthening those units of their secretariats concerned with programming and management of technical co-operation activities and the general improvement of co-ordination of their various offices;

(b) The redefinition of the functions of the Regional Commissions Section in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at Headquarters;

(c) The question of upgrading the posts of the executive secretaries.

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43. The Secretary-General's comments on the first point are covered under paragraph 6 above. As for the second point, at the time of its review of manpower utilization in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 1973, the Administrative Management Service considered the role and resource requirement of the Regional Commissions Section in the Department. The AMS concluded that with the Resources and Programme Planning Office and the Departmental Administration and Finance Office assuming responsibilities for programme planning, development and co-ordination with the economic and social areas, and for administrative and financial control matters respectively, the functions of the Regional Commissions Section were not as extensive as formerly. It recognized, however, that the Section should be retained with the existing level of staff and continue to serve as a focal point and expeditor for regional commission matters. With regard to the last point, the Secretary-General is prepared to review the level of the posts held by the executive secretaries.

Recommendation VIII: General

44. In accordance with recommendation VIII, the Secretary-General is prepared to initiate a process of internal consultation and discussion between Headquarters and the commissions on the ways and means of giving effect to those recommendations that will ultimately be accepted and to report thereon to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

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Addendum

Comments of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

Introduction

1. The report of the Inspectors contains the most comprehensive and thorough evaluation undertaken in recent years of the progress achieved in the decentralization of the United Nations economic, social and related activities to the regional commissions. The Inspectors have also made a detailed analysis of the evolution of the substantive content of the activities of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields with a view to bringing out the respective roles of the United Nations at Headquarters and the regional commissions. This has been supplemented by an analysis of the evolution of the funding and of the manpower available at Headquarters and the regional commissions for carrying out their respective programmes of work. On the basis of these analyses and studies, the Inspectors have drawn a number of highly significant conclusions on the general question of progress in decentralization and have made a series of recommendations designed to improve co-ordination between activities at the Headquarters level and those undertaken by the commissions, to strengthen the role of the commissions and generally to impart a greater momentum to the process of the decentralization of the United Nations activities to the regional commissions.

2. The major portion of the report deals with the relationship between United Nations Headquarters and the commissions, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is not directly concerned with it. Therefore, the comments in the following paragraphs relate mainly to those recommendations which are specifically addressed to UNDP. In addition, comments have been offered on those recommendations addressed to United Nations Headquarters and the regional commissions which have implications for UNDP's own activities or which relate to activities of United Nations Headquarters and the commissions financed by UNDP.

A. Relationship between regional commissions and UNDP

3. The Inspectors have expressed the view that "despite years of discussions, the establishment of a rational and mutually beneficial relationship between the commissions and UNDP is one of the still not wholly resolved organizational issues before the United Nations" (para. 306). They have made the following recommendations for the strengthening of the relationship between the commissions and UNDP (para. 15 of "Main recommendations").

(a) The executive secretaries should be enabled through appropriate institutional arrangements to be consulted on matters of over-all UNDP policy and programming;

(b) The executive secretaries should meet at least once a year with the directors of the regional bureaux for the purpose of comprehensive consultations;

(c) Appropriate liaison arrangements at the regional level should be worked out between UNDP and the commissions with a view to improving the rapport and communication between them. Such arrangements could be similar to those agreed between UNDP and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), or could involve:

(i) The posting of a senior UNDP official as liaison officer in each commission; or

(ii) The designation of the UNDP resident representative in the countries where commission headquarters are located as UNDP liaison officers to the commissions concerned;

(d) As agreed between UNDP and ECA, the other commissions should be able to have recourse to the good offices and services of UNDP resident representatives in those countries where no subregional offices of the commissions in question are located.

Comments

4. UNDP shares the view of the Inspectors that there is considerable scope for improving further the relationship between UNDP and the regional commissions. UNDP is glad to note that the Inspectors have expressed satisfaction with the arrangement made for liaison between UNDP and ECA. As regards their suggestion for the extension of this arrangement to other regions, it may be pointed out that recently a special UNDP Liaison Office with the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) has been created, and for the other commissions, the UNDP resident representatives in the countries where the commission headquarters are located also function as the UNDP liaison officers to the commissions concerned. These offices of the resident representatives have been strengthened recently by the posting of deputies to deal with liaison matters with the regional commissions concerned. The difference in the existing arrangements arises out of the differing situations prevailing in the respective regions. These arrangements are constantly

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under review and, to the maximum extent possible, being brought into line with each other. In pursuance of the decision taken at the eighteenth session of the Governing Council and of General Assembly resolution 3252 (XXIX) of 4 December 1974 entitled "Decentralization of the activities of the United Nations Development Programme", the Administrator is in the process of reviewing the present arrangements for liaison between regional commissions and UNDP and other aspects of relations between UNDP and the commissions. A report containing the outcome of this review and suggestion, if any, for improving the present relations will be made to the twentieth session of the Governing Council.

5. As regards points (a) and (b) above, there are many opportunities for the executive secretaries of the regional commissions and the senior officials of UNDP to meet with one another and exchange views on over-all policy and programming matters. The directors of UNDP regional bureaux and other senior officials of UNDP meet with the executive secretaries at the time of the biannual meetings of the executive secretaries as well as during the course of their visits to the headquarters of the regional commissions. Advantage is taken of the presence of the executive secretaries at the time of the biannual meetings to hold consultations between them and the respective regional bureaux on specific programme matters. Representatives of regional commissions participate in the regional meetings of resident representatives. Such participation is facilitated by the fact that these meetings are frequently held at the headquarters of the regional commissions. Similarly, the directors of UNDP regional bureaux or other UNDP representatives participate in the sessions of the regional commissions and in meetings of intergovernmental bodies of the commissions. Even otherwise, regional bureaux staff members frequently visit the headquarters of the commissions.

6. However, UNDP sees merit in the suggestion of the Inspectors that consultations with executive secretaries on over-all UNDP policy and programming matters should not be left to chance arrangements or to arrangements which have much broader purposes than merely exchanging views on over-all UNDP policy and programming matters. There is also advantage in preparing for such meetings in advance. UNDP is already discussing with some commissions the possibility of institutionalizing such arrangements.

7. As regards relations at the country level, there has always been an understanding that the regional commissions can use the good offices and services of UNDP resident representatives. UNDP has also made arrangements for the briefing of resident representatives at headquarters of the commissions either on initial appointment to the region or otherwise from time to time.

B. Decentralization of operational activities to regional commissions and the designation of the commissions as UNDP's executing or participating agencies

8. The Inspectors have welcomed the recent developments relating to the designation of the commissions as the executing or participating agencies of UNDP. They have however expressed misgivings regarding the suggestion made in this

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connexion that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs could decide not only what projects could be handled by the commissions, but also the degree of their responsibility for such projects. The Inspectors have therefore suggested that "once UNDP judges that a commission is able to act as executing or participating agency for a given project and the commission itself is willing to do so, there should be a clear-cut delegation of authority, functions and resources to that commission" (para. 356).

9. The Inspectors have recommended that all regional and subregional operational projects, of which the United Nations is at present or may in the future become executing or participating agency, should as a matter of principle be fully decentralized to the commissions, the latter being designated directly as executing or participating agencies (para. 326 and para. 13 of "Main recommendations"). The application of this recommendation should be subject to the following qualifications:

(a) The wishes of the commissions should be taken into account;

(b) In order to allow for a period of adjustment, initially the commissions should be designated executing or participating agencies only for projects that are both regional or subregional and of a multidisciplinary nature;

(c) At the end of four years, i.e., by 1979, the commissions should be executing or participating agencies for all regional or subregional programmes and projects in the respective regions, whatever their nature;

(d) Such decentralization should be without prejudice to the Secretary-General's statutory responsibility for the implementation of technical co-operation activities and consequently to his receiving periodic reports from the commissions, commenting on them and exercising generally the functions of normal financial and administrative control that apply to all activities of the United Nations.

10. The Inspectors have also recommended that "out of the usual 18 per cent of UNDP resources set aside for regional development, an appropriate share should be earmarked and made available to the commissions, directly or through the Office of Technical Co-operation (OTC), for specific activities to be undertaken by them" (para. 320)..

Comments

11. The developments at the eighteenth session of the Governing Council and the fifty-seventh session of the Economic and Social Council represent an important advance towards designating the regional commissions as executing agencies of UNDP and giving them the necessary authority and resources to discharge effectively their functions as executing agencies. In accordance with paragraph 5 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1896 (LVII) of 1 August 1974, the Administrator is discussing with the Secretary-General the necessary arrangements to be made for delegating the appropriate functions of executing agencies to the regional commissions for regional, subregional and interregional projects financed by UNDP.

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12. The implementation of the recommendation on the decentralization of regional, subregional and interregional projects to the regional commissions will depend largely on the arrangements to be made regarding the designation of the regional commissions as executing agencies of UNDP and, as the Inspectors have themselves pointed out (para. 242), on changes in the internal organizational structures of the commissions. UNDP, however, would like to point out that the question of designating regional commissions as executing agencies will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis in order to ensure that the commissions do have the capacity to implement the projects in question. The claim of other organizations to be entrusted with the execution of the project will also have to be taken into account.

13. It is not, therefore, possible for UNDP to accept the recommendation of the Inspectors regarding the earmarking of a proportion of the UNDP intercountry resources for the regional commissions. This will be contrary to two of the most basic ideas in the Consensus, namely the programming approach based on the needs of countries and regions and the Administrator's accountability for the effective delivery of the Programme, and for this purpose, among other things, the selection of executing agencies on a project-by-project basis and with the agreement of the Governments concerned. Besides, earmarking a proportion of such resources irrespective of the capacities of the agencies to undertake the implementation of the projects concerned, may result in a non-utilization of UNDP regional programme resources. That is why paragraph 5 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1896 (LVII) states that the functions of executing agencies for regional, subregional and interregional projects should be delegated to the regional economic commissions only "in cases where such delegation is requested by the country concerned and recommended by the Administrator of the Programme".

14. It may also be pointed out that the 18 per cent of the UNDP programme resources is not meant for only regional or subregional projects, as suggested by the Inspectors, but also includes the financing of interregional and global projects.

15. The suggestions made by the Inspectors in points (a), (b) and (d) above appear to be quite pertinent and will be taken into account in the consultations provided for under Economic and Social Council resolution 1896 (LVII).

C. Decentralization of country projects and the role of the commissions in country programming

16. The Inspectors have recommended that the commissions should play a greater role than at present in relation to some country activities. For this purpose they have recommended (para. 14 of "Main recommendations"):

(a) In regard to country projects for which the United Nations is at present or may in future become executing agency, the commissions should be invited by UNDP to participate actively in all stages of country programming in respect of projects of a multidisciplinary nature or which have a clear or direct relationship

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to regional or subregional activities in the same field, travel expenses that might be incurred by the regional staff in this connexion being at UNDP cost.

(b) The decentralization of such projects may be considered on a selective basis, and subject to the following:

(i) The Government concerned should agree to such decentralization;

(ii) The project should fulfil at least two of the following three criteria:

- a. The project is of a multidisciplinary nature and relates to an area in which a particular commission has already acknowledged experience and expertise;
- b. The commission has actively helped the country in question to formulate the project request;
- c. The commission has already had experience of executing a regional or subregional programme or project of the same type or in the same field; or the programme or project has a clear and direct relationship to such other activities.

Comments

17. As regards (a) above, it is assumed that reference by the Inspectors to participation by the commissions "in all stages of country programming in respect of projects" means assistance in project design. In principle, UNDP will be glad to see the substantive inputs of the commissions being utilized for the formulation of the kind of projects mentioned by the Inspectors.

18. As regards the general question of the decentralization to the regional commissions of country projects executed by the United Nations, UNDP is of the view that the basic criterion should be the capacity of the regional commissions to undertake the execution of such projects, and not necessarily the nature of the projects, as suggested in the Inspectors' recommendations. The fact that a project is of a multidisciplinary nature or has a clear and direct relationship to subregional or regional projects executed by a commission does not necessarily imply that the commission has the capacity to implement the project. Similarly, the association of the commission in the formulation of the project does not by itself carry an assurance that the commission would also be able to execute the project; for the factors determining the capacity to design a project are in many respects different from those required to implement it.

D. The role of the regional commissions in the preparation of regional and interregional programmes and in their implementation

(a) Procedures for regional programming and approval of regional projects

19. The Inspectors have pointed out that "UNDP procedures for the approval of intercountry projects apparently pose problems" (para. 257). They have further stated that the present procedures for eliciting the views of the commissions on the formulation of regional programmes do not give due weight to the opinions of the commissions.

Comments

20. There appears to be some misunderstanding in the Inspectors' report of the UNDP procedure for the approval of intercountry projects. The Consensus provides that assistance under intercountry projects will be provided at the request of at least two Governments. This does not imply, as indicated in paragraph 257 of the report, that intercountry projects must invariably be formulated by Governments. The involvement of Governments in the formulation of such projects generally takes the form of resolutions, recommendations etc. adopted at intergovernmental meetings. Subsequently, these wishes are translated into the form of project proposals by the agencies and the commissions. Therefore it is not correct to say that the UNDP requires the projects to be formulated by a group of Governments.

(b) Regional and interregional advisers

21. The report cites facts and figures to demonstrate that there is a trend towards the strengthening of the interregional advisory services at Headquarters at the expense of the regional advisory services. The Inspectors also question the validity of the interregional advisory services on a number of grounds. It is stated that the interregional advisers, in many cases, are advising not so much the Governments as the substantive officers at Headquarters and quite often they are simply carrying out administrative functions. Secondly, the very idea of lightning visits, often at high cost, from a Headquarters office to different parts of the world to render advice is regarded by the Inspectors as "often unconvincing" (para. 92). Thirdly, the interregional advisers most often do not fulfil the criterion of "field presence". Fourthly, the qualifications of the interregional advisers do not come up to the standards laid down for the purpose of their rendering exceptionally specialized and high quality advice. Finally, there is no proper co-ordination between the activities of interregional and regional advisers.

22. The Inspectors have, therefore, recommended (paras. 3-5 of "Main recommendations"):

(a) Interregional advisers should only be utilized for assignments of a clearly global nature;

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(b) The criterion of field presence should be enforced more strictly than has been the case to date;

(c) Advisory services in the region should be strengthened through an increase in the number of regional advisers and a reduction in that of interregional advisers.

23. They have also made recommendations for clearly defining the criteria for the recruitment of interregional and regional advisers and for co-ordination between their respective activities (paras. 2, 6 and 7 of "Main recommendations").

Comments

24. UNDP welcomes the recommendations designed to improve the regional and interregional advisory services and to use them in a mutually reinforcing manner. However, both the regional and interregional advisory services, as carried out at present, are deficient in several respects. The Inspectors themselves have pointed out that the regional advisory services suffer from many of the deficiencies characteristic of the interregional advisory services. The experience of UNDP is that there has been, on the whole, even less demand on the part of Governments for regional advisers than for interregional advisers and that the regional advisers in general have lagged behind the interregional advisers in fulfilling the criterion of "field presence". UNDP therefore does not find entirely convincing the conclusion of the Inspectors that "the regional advisers are an essential form of advisory services at the regional level" (para. 99) and the recommendation that the regional advisory services should be strengthened at the cost of the interregional advisory services.

25. What appears important is to undertake a thorough review of both the interregional and regional advisory services in order to assess their contribution to operational activities and to consider whether alternative arrangements can be made to serve the same purpose more effectively. Perhaps a more appropriate arrangement would be to provide regional and interregional advisory services, not in the form of tenure posts which may or may not be utilized, but as part of clearly formulated programmes with specifically defined objectives and activities and of finite durations.

E. Co-ordination between global and interregional activities on the one hand and regional activities on the other

26. The Inspectors have stated that, so far, the results achieved in co-ordinating the activities of United Nations Headquarters with those of regional commissions have been unsatisfactory. They have made a number of recommendations to achieve better co-ordination. Among these, their recommendations for improving co-ordination between global and interregional activities on the one hand and regional and subregional activities on the other, are of particular interest to UNDP. These recommendations are (para. 216):

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(a) Global or interregional activities should as far as possible be preceded by subregional and regional activities on the same topic;

(b) Headquarters' work programmes should, as appropriate, relate each project to the subregional or regional activities in a given field being done at present or planned;

(c) Wherever possible, subregional and regional activities should be planned to serve as inputs to global or interregional activities;

(d) Subregional and regional components of global or interregional activities should normally be the responsibility of the regional economic commissions.

Comments

27. Most of the above recommendations by themselves are unexceptionable. However, the main point is whether the sequence of activities and/or a more streamlined distribution of responsibilities between Headquarters and the regional commissions by itself can ensure better co-ordination between these two kinds of activities. In the ultimate analysis, the task of co-ordination must be seen at a more substantive level, as involving making judgements as to the types of activities to be undertaken at the global, interregional and regional levels, deciding how these kinds of activities can be better planned so they can reinforce each other, and ensuring a regular exchange of experience and information between these levels of activities.

F. Training programmes

28. The Inspectors have referred to UNDP's scepticism about training projects and have stated that there has been a decrease in training activities of all types. They have further stated that the fellowship component of training "appears to have declined in recent years" (para. 120). They have also observed that UNDP blanketly condemns seminar activities and that this attitude is not justified (para. 117). They have recommended that all regional seminars, irrespective of their source of funding, should be completely decentralized to the regional commissions. A number of detailed suggestions have also been made for improving fellowship programmes, including a suggestion that in fellowship placements the need to make the maximum possible use of facilities available in or at least near the regions should be taken into account (para. 121).

Comments

29. UNDP welcomes the detailed suggestions made by the Inspectors for improving fellowship programmes. UNDP particularly welcomes the recommendation that in fellowship placements the need to make the maximum possible use of facilities available in or at least near the regions should be taken into account. UNDP already has a mandate to do so under the Consensus and is seeking every possible

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opportunity to implement it. The effort of the UNDP in this regard, and for that matter of the entire United Nations development system, has been given further impetus by the approval in general by the Governing Council of UNDP and the General Assembly of the recommendations of the Working Group on Technical Co-operation Among Developing Countries, which emphasize that the United Nations system should make a systematic and conscious effort to utilize for its programmes the resources of the developing countries.

30. In referring to UNDP's scepticism about training projects, the Inspectors have taken all seminars to be training seminars. But, in fact, this is not correct. UNDP's policy is to discourage repetitive seminars on the same subject, seminars which are not well prepared, those which are not in response to the felt needs of the countries and those which have very little to do with the operational activities of UNDP. In its selective approach to financing seminars, UNDP gives particular importance to supporting training seminars.

31. The Inspectors have not given any facts or data to justify their conclusion that there has been a decline in training activities of all types. As a matter of fact, it is extremely difficult to substantiate such a conclusion, mainly because of the innumerable forms in which UNDP programmes provide for training activities. There has also been a shift of emphasis from person-to-person training or training as a component of a larger project to the building of entire institutions whose activities include provision of training on a continuing basis. Therefore any assessment of the training component of the UNDP programmes has to take fully into account these and similar other newly emerging trends in UNDP activities.

G. Regional and subregional institutions

32. Under this heading, the Inspectors have observed that "a perennial problem of many of these institutions has been the uncertainty and short-term nature of UNDP funding and consequently of their programmes and staffing" (para. 124).

Comments

33. The so-called short-term nature of UNDP funding of regional and subregional institutions should be seen in the context of the evolution of these institutions and the understanding reached at the time of their establishment on their financing by UNDP. When these institutions were created, there was an understanding in most cases that they would become self-financing or the Governments concerned would take up their financing after an initial period of support by UNDP. As these institutions developed, many of them did not become self-sufficient financially and continued to rely on UNDP funding. There was also a stagnation in the activities of a number of these institutions in that the nature and structures of their programmes were not adapted to the changing circumstances and the needs of the region and thus became increasingly less relevant. The notion that UNDP could be relied upon to finance them on a continuing basis in spite of their apparent lack of viability, both substantively and financially, led to the further

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deterioration of the substantive content of their programmes and of their financial and administrative management. This led UNDP to adopt a more cautious attitude towards providing continuing support to these institutions and to make future support conditional upon the upgrading of their staff and the overhauling of their research and training programmes. The same considerations have also led UNDP to favour programmes designed to achieve specific purposes during a specified period of time to be carried out by existing organizations rather than continuing to provide general support to already established institutions or for the establishment of new institutions.

H. Direct execution of projects by UNDP

34. The Inspectors have warned that direct execution of projects by UNDP "should be kept strictly within bounds". They have further stated that "while in exceptional cases it may be useful and even necessary for UNDP to become the executing agency for certain types of global projects, this increasing incursion of UNDP into the practical execution of projects will inevitably change the character of the Programme and furthermore lead to the under or non-utilization of the executing machinery of the United Nations system, including the regional machinery of the commissions, and to direct competition between UNDP and its executing agencies" (para. 319).

Comments

35. The direct execution of projects by UNDP is in fact "kept strictly within bounds", as suggested by the Inspectors. In undertaking direct execution, the Administrator goes strictly by the provision in paragraphs 39 to 42 of the Consensus. The projects are taken up for direct execution by UNDP or entrusted for execution to agencies outside the United Nations system, only after ensuring that the expertise or services required for executing the project "are not available in adequate kind, quantity and quality within the United Nations system" (para. 42 of the Consensus). Therefore there is no question, as suggested by the Inspectors, of "under or non-utilization of the executing agency of the United Nations system, including the regional machinery of the commissions, and direct competition between UNDP and its executing agencies".

36. The Inspectors have not made it clear as to how "increasing incursion of UNDP into the practical execution of projects will inevitably change the character of the Programme".

I. Other comments

37. (a) Throughout the report, it is wrongly stated that the UNDP uses the term "intercountry programme" for only regional and subregional programmes (see paras. 256, 318, 321, etc.). The UNDP intercountry programmes include interregional and global programmes also; the relevant provision of the Consensus leaves no doubt on this score.

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(b) It is stated that the advice of interregional advisers is "by and large of a non-project nature" (para. 87). According to UNDP's experience and knowledge, this does not seem to be correct. A major part of the time of the interregional advisers financed by UNDP is devoted to project support and to the formulation and evaluation of programmes and projects.