



JIU/REP/69/5/Rev.1

R e p o r t

on

Some Aspects of Technical Assistance Activities  
of the United Nations

by

S. Ilić

C.S. Jha

A.F. Sokirkin

Joint Inspection Unit

July 1969.

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SOME ASPECTS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

This note deals with certain organizational and administrative aspects of technical assistance which have come to the Inspectors' notice during their inspection visits to a number of countries in Africa and Asia in 1968 and this year. The inspections last year were undertaken by the late Inspector Mani and by Inspectors Ilić and Sokirkin. Those this year - by the latter two Inspectors and by Inspector Jha.

2. In the course of their travels, the Inspectors were able to meet and exchange views with the local representatives of the Specialized Agencies and of UNDP and with many experts working in the countries visited, and to visit some of the projects in the field. They also had the opportunity to exchange views regarding United Nations development assistance activities with senior officials as well as members of government in these countries.

3. The Inspectors found everywhere deep appreciation of the efforts of the UN family of organizations in assisting the governments in the field of technical assistance and pre-investment studies. All government officials whom they met spoke appreciatively of the good work done by the UNDP and agencies even if some made a few comments and suggestions. Agency representatives by and large are held in high regard in the countries in which they serve. The comments offered by the Inspectors below are not to be regarded in any way as detracting from their own appreciation of the UN system's valuable contribution to the developing countries.

4. These comments are addressed to some of the difficulties which came to the Inspectors' notice, and which they have reason to believe are prevalent in varying degrees also in other geographical areas of UN assistance activities, in the hope that it might be possible to apply corrective action where necessary.

I. Slowness in the processing of special fund project requests

5. Delays in the processing of government requests and in the commencement of the execution of projects have inevitably an adverse effect on the final definition of the purposes and scope of the projects and the orderly start of their execution. The delays often make it necessary for governments to review their initial requests and to make changes in, and additions to projects already approved, in the light of the countries' evolving development plans. In some cases the initial projects have even to undergo a complete revision.

6. Although this problem of delays has long been a matter of concern both to governments and to UNDP and the agencies, and action is in some cases underway to speed up procedures, the Inspectors found that there is still often too long a time interval between the various stages of the processing of a project request: (i) between the formulation of the initial request by a government and its acceptance by UNDP; (ii) following its acceptance and verification, between the submission of the government's formal request and its approval by the Governing Council; and (iii) between this approval and the commencement of execution. Moreover, it would appear from certain recent agency documents on the subject (FAO) that despite the corrective action referred to above, these delays, far from diminishing, show a tendency to increase.

7. Not wishing to overburden this note with an exhaustive list of cases, the Inspectors confine themselves to citing a few specific examples, each of which illustrates one or several of the three types of delays enumerated above:

(a) Sihanoukville Municipal Drinking Water Project (Cambodia)

An official request was received by UNDP headquarters on 17 December 1968 and the formal request on 3 February 1969. UNDP experts gave a favourable report on the project not long after the official request was made. We understand in recent discussions with UNDP headquarters that it has been decided to include a special fund project in the January 1970 programme with "preliminary work on the emergency phase, namely, to meet the most immediate water supply needs by providing assistance in the design and construction of a diversion dyke on the Tuk Sap river and the various facilities to bring the water supply to the city to begin immediately".

(b) Chapula Project (Zambia)

Executing Agency: FAO

The request by the Zambian Government for a small scale irrigation development and training project was submitted to UNDP in 1965 and the project was approved in January 1967. It was only in January 1969, however, that the plan of operations was finally completed and that the project could get under way - over three years after the original request was submitted.

(c) National Industrial Vocational Training Centre (Kenya)

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A first request was presented by the Kenyan government at the suggestion of its ILO adviser some time in 1964. The formal request was submitted to the Special Fund in July 1965. The Council was prepared to examine it in January 1967, but in the meanwhile the Kenyan government had revised its priorities, the original project being replaced by preliminary action and the project itself being approved only in June 1967. Although, presumably, all the required information was available at the time the Council was first prepared to examine the project, in January 1967, another year was to be spent drafting the plan of operations which was signed, finally, only in June 1968.

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The Government's request was approved by the Governing Council in January 1967. The plan of operations, however, was not signed until August 1968, i.e. eighteen months later, and even then, only after the main project (which had been the object of the Council's original study and approval) had been dropped (in favour of bilateral aid) and replaced by a minor one.

All the cases mentioned above have been brought to the notice of the competent executing agencies and UNDP.

8. The Inspectors presume that UNDP Headquarters have undertaken detailed case studies and analyses of the various built-in factors contributing to delays. If not, it is suggested that these might usefully be undertaken as a matter of priority.

9. For their part, and without wishing to go into a minute examination of the delaying factors affecting the projects they investigated, the Inspectors found that, while some of them might be due to unforeseen circumstances (such as personality conflicts, changes of government, replacement of officials, etc.), others were due, on the one hand, to the initial inadequacy or even absence of information about the merits and technical soundness of a project in the light of the country's needs, priorities and resources; and, on the other hand, to the slowness and complexity of administrative and financial procedures.

10. While recognizing that a certain time lag between a country request and the commencement of the project is inevitable,

they feel that every effort should be made to reduce it to the minimum. Both the urgency of the developing countries' needs and practical considerations, e.g. accuracy of cost estimates, economy in operation, to name only a few, make it necessary that the processes intervening between the time of submission of country requests and the commencement of operations be simplified, and some of these, if possible, telescoped. Normally, the Inspectors do not think that the total interval between the date of a project request and - assuming that the project is accepted - the commencement of its execution should exceed eighteen months. Adherence to such a ceiling, which should be possible with improved procedures and management, will have a beneficial effect all round, including country programming by the UNDP on a fairly long-term basis and the development of national plans by governments.

11. Among the measures requiring early attention, the following might be considered:

(a) Compilation of a standard manual for project requests

There appears to be no single manual for the preparation of governments' requests for technical assistance. As a result, governments' initial requests, even when compiled with the aid of experts on the staff of the prospective executing agencies, often do not contain all the particulars required for approval thereof and, later, for the preparation of the plan of operations, and, therefore, move back and forth between the government, executing agency/UNDP.

Many governments still find it difficult to determine to which agency and how to direct their requests for assistance, and what particulars are required to substantiate the requests, even when these are compiled with the help of UN experts. We

understand that a few agencies have prepared manuals. Others are in the process of preparing one, and we believe that this is the case with the UNDP also. We consider that it would be most useful to have a single manual for reference by the field staff; and, in the event of a uniform manual for all agencies not being practicable, the single manual need be no more than a collection in a single compilation of the manuals of the UNDP and the agencies which are largely involved in technical assistance projects. This would be extremely useful and will, to some extent, contribute to eliminate avoidable delays. We also understand that, under the auspices of the ECPC, a handbook of criteria and procedures, indicating which agency should be approached by Government, with what kind of requests, is in the final pre-publication stage. We hope this will be brought out soon.

It is suggested that UNDP and the agencies might wish to expedite the preparation and wide distribution of manuals or handbooks applicable to the main groups of project requests, which would provide all the basic information and guidelines needed for their formulation by governments and their subsequent appraisal and their assessment by the Governing Council (or other executive bodies).

(b) Handling of urgent project requests

Often, by the time UNDP have made up their mind about an urgent country request, which itself takes time, it is too late to submit the project for Governing Council approval at its coming session, and the submission has to be deferred until the next session, six months later. Thus, a period of one year or more may elapse between the submission of an urgent project



request and its examination by the Council. In cases of such urgency as the above mentioned Sihanoukville (Cambodia) Drinking Water Supply project, the consequences of delay could be very harmful. The Inspectors have cited one particular instance, but there may be others.

It is suggested that in such cases of real urgency recourse be readily taken to the special powers given to the Administrator to sanction preliminary operations from out of the revolving fund, the amount of which is fixed each year by the Governing Council and stands at a substantial figure; and that the criterion of exceptional urgency in the financial rules be mainly applied in relation to the needs and wishes of the people and the government of the country concerned. Any investigations and appraisal prior to the exercise of these could be on a highly urgent basis.

(c) Plan of operations

The delay between approval by the Governing Council and the commencement of execution is due largely to the preparation of a complex and exhaustive plan of operations. This process is to some extent counter-productive, since by the time operations commence, some important factors may have become out of date, while new factors will have arisen. Moreover, operations and work plans are not things that can remain static; they must needs be reviewed during execution in the light of changing conditions or acquired experience on a recommendation of the project manager (acting, of course, with the consent of the government concerned).

It might, therefore, be expedient to have the plan of operations in two parts: the first part being a statement of legally-binding basic agreement between the government, the UNDP and the executing agency or agencies, together with a statement of objectives and a description of the project and its framework; and the second

part constituting the detailed plan of execution. Signing of the first part should suffice to give the green light for the commencement of the project, without waiting for completion of the detailed plan of operations, whose preparation must, in any case, commence immediately after the approval of the project by the Governing Council.

The Inspectors are glad to note that UNDP has recently been thinking along these lines and is planning some necessary changes. They have also noted that WHO has been following this procedure in some of its projects. They hope that, with the necessary adjustments, such a division of the plan of operations into two parts could be feasible in the case of many more agency projects.

(d) Closer association of governments in project implementation

The Inspectors found that, according to existing practices, once the request has been made, recipient governments have little further say in its processing. For example, the important final phase before work actually starts - the elaboration of the plan of operations - is carried out independently by the executing agency which may, if it sees fit, consult the recipient government on the technical details of the plan, but does not necessarily do so. Moreover, the draft plan of operations compiled by the executing agency must be agreed between that agency and UNDP before the agency begins negotiations with the government concerning the signature of the plan. Any amendments proposed by the recipient government during the negotiations for signature must again be agreed upon with UNDP before the executing agency receives authorization to sign the plan of operations. All this naturally takes up a great deal of time. It is often, also, a frustrating experience.

It is suggested that (i) some of these procedures could be telescoped: and that (ii) closer and more continuous consultation with the requesting government at the initial and subsequent stages of preparation of the draft plan of operations might be conducive

both to an economy of time and to creating in the government concerned the sense of participation which is recognized as vital for the success of any project.

(e) Expert assistance in project formulation

It is sometimes alleged and the Inspectors, too, have heard this said on several occasions that one of the reasons why projects take so long to process and why governments are not able to be more closely involved in this processing is their shortage in trained administrative and technical personnel capable of participating in the formulation of projects and in the elaboration of plans of operations. In some cases the point may be valid, but the only answer to it need not necessarily be the assumption by the executing agency (or by UNDP) of exclusive responsibility for all stages of preparation of projects. Greater reliance than hitherto, in such cases, might be placed in suitable cases, for instance, on the man-power resources of the regional economic commissions, which have acquired a good deal of expertise and knowledge and have the capacity to help governments provide the economic facts and data required for the formulation of satisfactory requests. Moreover, this kind of local arrangement is likely to lead to the saving of both time and money.

It is suggested that UNDP consider the possibility of instructing its Resident Representatives to make greater use of the regional economic commissions for securing the short-term services of experts to help governments, whenever necessary and suitable, formulate their project requests and that the Resident Representatives be provided with the necessary funds for this purpose.

## II. The planning of technical assistance requirements

12. The Inspectors fully share the view, expressed both by government representatives and by spokesmen of the various organs of the United Nations, that although some improvements have been made in recent years, the process of integrating multilateral technical assistance projects within the real priorities of the various national development plans is not yet satisfactory and that the projects do not always reflect these priorities, or else are insufficiently co-ordinated with them.

13. It is argued that, while technical assistance financed out of Special Fund resources can to some extent be anticipated and allowed for in national development plans, it is virtually impossible to anticipate or plan in advance technical assistance obtainable under the other programmes, because it consists of a multiplicity of small projects of the most diverse character which, moreover, are financed from different sources and on different terms. At the same time, it is acknowledged that all technical assistance requirements not only can, but should be planned, such planning being based on long-term forecasts and being closely co-ordinated with the priorities of the national development plans.

14. The whole question of the harmonization of UN programmes with national, regional and global priorities (these to be determined as a part of the planning for the Second Development Decade) raises, of course, important issues of principle and procedure which require searching study by both the governments and the various international bodies. The Inspectors understand that one such study is already underway in the UNDP Governing Council's Capacity Study Group.

### III. Problems of counterpart

15. Nearly all those with whom the inspectors met, whether representatives of governments or of international organizations, recognize that the difficulties of the recipient countries in providing contributions in terms of funds, services or candidates for training are real, that they deserve sympathetic understanding and that unless the conditions for the acceptance of such contributions are made more liberal and more flexible, the countries most in need of assistance are also likely to benefit least from such assistance.

16. The Inspector's observations in the field confirm that counterpart requirements are sometimes beyond the actual capacity of the countries to make such contributions. They also gathered that the regulations in this regard are too rigid. Among the difficulties mentioned to us were budgetary and financial problems and the non-availability of man-power for provision of direct counterpart officers or technicians who would take over the functions of the UN experts after their departure. In some cases, even when they were available and became suitably trained, it was difficult to retain them.

The problems arising in connection with the above are not easy of solution, seeing that the problems and circumstances often differ from one country and one geographical area to the next. Flexibility of approach is therefore called for.

Possible lines of approach in the case of counterpart financial contribution may be to accept the contribution in forms which are easiest for the country and most in line with its specific possibilities; reduction or even making nominal the proportion of a country's contribution in a particular case; instalment payments

by governments of their contribution over a period of time, etc. As regards counterpart personnel contribution, which is often an intractable problem, it is obvious that a rigid adherence to the book will mean that the most deserving countries may be deprived of UN assistance altogether. A possible line of approach here may be in the provision, as an integral part of a project, of training in the basic fields related to the project. The Revolving Fund could be used in advance for training purposes, the cost of which could later be charged to the project. Such a training sub-project (as an integral part of the main project) could provide increasingly for the input of trained country personnel into the project. The requirements of counterpart personnel contribution might also be deemed to be met if personnel from another developing country, of the recipient country's choice, were made temporarily available, to be replaced as soon as trained national personnel were available. The expert so temporarily provided could himself also be used for training indigenous personnel.

In view of the varying circumstances of countries in which these problems arise, each case may have to be treated on its own merits. Further studies are necessary by all concerned to find solutions to these problems. Speaking generally, we feel that: a more liberal and more flexible approach in this matter is desirable: the in-project training should be made, wherever necessary, an integral part of every project where the difficulties mentioned in this paragraph are likely to be met; and the duration of such training should be set, having regard both to its nature and the availability of the staff in the country in question.

#### IV. Long-term versus short-term contracts

17. The existing practice of extending contracts from one short-term period to the next is upsetting both to governments and to the experts. Faced with the uncertainty of an expert's continuing stay in the country, a government may find it difficult to establish

a proper rapport with his counterpart colleagues (if any). Indeed, this uncertainty is apt to have adverse psychological effects generally, thus affecting also the efficiency of the project.

Whilst recognizing that certain highly qualified personnel may not be available for long periods; that not all countries and not all projects require long-term experts; and that the practice of short-term contracts provides a "safety valve" in case the choice of expert turns out to be an unfortunate one, the Inspectors consider that especially in projects which - it is known in advance - will require continuity (such as economic planning); or for which no counterpart can be provided in the foreseeable future, greater emphasis should be placed on long-term contracts.

#### V. Project managers and their problems

18. The Inspectors agree with the government representatives with whom they talked that by far the most important factor in the success of a project is the choice of a suitable project manager.

19. Their attention was drawn to a number of projects, whose successful execution has been due, indeed, largely to the timely appointment, outstanding ability, untiring energy and devotion to duty of the project managers. They noted other cases, however, where a belated or unsuitable appointment led to delays in the execution of projects or made it impossible to proceed with them at all. One such example has been brought to the attention of FAO.

20. Project managers must possess not only high professional qualifications but also organizing and administrative skill and the ability to establish good working relations with the government and counterpart personnel (if any) of the country in which they are employed. They must also realize, however, that they are not only in a country "to do the job" - however successfully! - but that one day they will be gone, that someone else will have to take over and that it is essential for them, in anticipation of that day, to train their successors. Moreover, some project managers from highly developed and affluent countries are apt to set their sights too high, making proposals which go far beyond the resources of a developing country.

21. The Inspectors realize that it is not easy to find a combination of all these indispensable qualities - professional skill, administrative and organizing ability, tact, modesty, realism, etc. - in one individual. On the other hand, past experience has shown that the absence of one or several of these qualities may seriously jeopardize a project even when in other respects the project manager gives satisfaction or is, perhaps, actually outstanding.

22. In some cases that came to the Inspectors' attention the project managers' difficulties were due to the fact that they had been appointed or had taken up their duties after the plans of operations had been completed. If they happened to have reservations about some aspects of these plans, only two courses were left open to them. (a) to go ahead, half-heartedly, with a plan of which they did not approve; or (b) to press for an alteration of the plan - a time- and effort-consuming process.



The Inspectors feel that it is imperative that project managers be recruited in good time and that they be associated with all stages of the preparation and finalization of the plan of operations. We understand that existing rules permit recruitment of project managers two months before approval of a project, if the Inter-Agency Consultative Board agrees. There is a case for more liberal use of this rule and for considering if two months are sufficient.

23. According to existing procedures governments have little say in the selection of project managers (or experts for that matter). The only option open to them is to reject the appointee - a difficult and sometimes embarrassing decision to take.

The Inspectors suggest that before formally nominating project managers (and experts) for governmental endorsement, executing agencies should in the course of their contacts with governments seek to ascertain the latter's thinking on the suitability of the candidates for a particular project.

24. A number of difficulties experienced by United Nations project managers and experts in establishing effective and rapid communications with the headquarters of the Specialized Agencies and the United Nations have come to the notice of the Inspectors. It often takes a long time, for instance, to receive replies to their enquiries. As a result, they must either defer a decision on purely technical or administrative questions for which they lack the authority to take independent action, or take such action at their own risk.

25. While the Inspectors realize that the difficulties in communication with headquarters may be partly due to the great distances between the latter and individual developing countries and also, in a number of cases, to the absence of any regular communications whatsoever, some delay may possibly be attributable to lacunae in procedures within the agencies.

On these specific grounds the Inspectors consider it advisable that project managers should have some flexibility of initiative and that the UNDP, in consultation with the executing agencies, should consider to what extent some authority in financial and administrative matters should be given to them, so as to facilitate their task and speed up the execution of projects.

26. It is conceivable that the extent of such delegation of initiative may have to differ from one geographical area to the other, depending on local factors.

#### VI. Other problems

27. The Inspectors came across certain other problems pertaining to UN development activities in the field, such as the lack of appropriate decentralization and devolution of authority - as distinguished from operations - from agency headquarters to the field, which often tend to hinder the efficiency and expeditious execution of projects. The historical growth of the UN has been such that a certain measure of inertia in this regard is understandable. It also goes without saying that ultimate control of operations must be retained at headquarters. It is necessary to recognize, however, that the vast extension of United Nations activities and programmes all over the world in recent years imposes the need for appropriate distribution of authority between headquarters and the field, with concomitant decentralization of personnel and of financial responsibility. A study of the debates in the various legislative and executive bodies of the United Nations family of organizations shows that this need is now generally recognized.

The Inspectors note with satisfaction that some of the agencies (such as ILO and FAO) have clearly recognized this need for a greater delegation and devolution of authority. On the other hand, the Inspectors realize that this is a major problem which deserves

urgent study not only by all the agencies but by the various inter-agency bodies and the AJC as well.

28. In this paper, the Inspectors have endeavoured to identify and bring together a number of problems in the field of UN Technical Assistance and Special Fund projects deserving urgent attention. They are fully aware that these are not new; they are continuing problems for which there are no easy and over-simplified solutions. The Inspectors do not presume to have found out anything which was not already known before, in one form or another; nor do they pretend to be able to find all answers to all the problems. Their main purpose was to identify problems and suggest solutions, where possible, leaving the problems identified to be taken up by the executive or legislative authorities, or by the Inspectors themselves in their subsequent studies.



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It is suggested that in such cases of real urgency recourse be readily taken to the special powers given to the Administrator to sanction preliminary operations from out of the revolving fund, the amount of which is fixed each year by the Governing Council and stands at a substantial figure; and that the criterion of exceptional urgency in the financial rules be mainly applied in relation to the needs and wishes of the people and the government of the country concerned. Any investigations and appraisal prior to the exercise of these could be on a highly urgent basis.

(c) Plan of operations

The delay between approval by the Governing Council and the commencement of execution is due largely to the preparation of a complex and exhaustive plan of operations. This process is to some extent counter-productive, since by the time operations commence, some important factors may have become out of date, while new factors will have arisen. Moreover, operations and work plans are not things that can remain static; they must needs be reviewed during execution in the light of changing conditions or acquired experience on a recommendation of the project manager (acting, of course, with the consent of the government concerned).

It might, therefore, be expedient to have the plan of operations in two parts: the first part being a statement of legally-binding basic agreement between the government, the UNDP and the executing agency or agencies, together with a statement of objectives and a description of the project and its framework; and the second

part constituting the detailed plan of execution. Signing of the first part should suffice to give the green light for the commencement of the project, without waiting for completion of the detailed plan of operations, whose preparation must, in any case, commence immediately after the approval of the project by the Governing Council.

The Inspectors are glad to note that UNDP has recently been thinking along these lines and is planning some necessary changes. They have also noted that WHO has been following this procedure in some of its projects. They hope that, with the necessary adjustments, such a division of the plan of operations into two parts could be feasible in the case of many more agency projects.

(d) Closer association of governments in project implementation

The Inspectors found that, according to existing practices, once the request has been made, recipient governments have little further say in its processing. For example, the important final phase before work actually starts - the elaboration of the plan of operations - is carried out independently by the executing agency which may, if it sees fit, consult the recipient government on the technical details of the plan, but does not necessarily do so. Moreover, the draft plan of operations compiled by the executing agency must be agreed between that agency and UNDP before the agency begins negotiations with the government concerning the signature of the plan. Any amendments proposed by the recipient government during the negotiations for signature must again be agreed upon with UNDP before the executing agency receives authorization to sign the plan of operations. All this naturally takes up a great deal of time. It is often, also, a frustrating experience.

It is suggested that (i) some of these procedures could be telescoped: and that (ii) closer and more continuous consultation with the requesting government at the initial and subsequent stages of preparation of the draft plan of operations might be conducive

both to an economy of time and to creating in the government concerned the sense of participation which is recognized as vital for the success of any project.

(a) Expert assistance in project formulation

It is sometimes alleged -- and the Inspectors, too, have heard this said on several occasions -- that one of the reasons why projects take so long to process and why governments are not able to be more closely involved in this processing is their shortage in trained administrative and technical personnel capable of participating in the formulation of projects and in the elaboration of plans of operations. In some cases the point may be valid, but the only answer to it need not necessarily be the assumption by the executing agency (or by UNDP) of exclusive responsibility for all stages of preparation of projects. Greater reliance than hitherto, in such cases, might be placed in suitable cases, for instance, on the man-power resources of the regional economic commissions, which have acquired a good deal of expertise and knowledge and have the capacity to help governments provide the economic facts and data required for the formulation of satisfactory requests. Moreover, this kind of local arrangement is likely to lead to the saving of both time and money.

It is suggested that UNDP consider the possibility of instructing its Resident Representatives to make greater use of the regional economic commissions for securing the short-term services of experts to help governments, whenever necessary and suitable, formulate their project requests and that the Resident Representatives be provided with the necessary funds for this purpose.

## II. The planning of technical assistance requirements

12. The Inspectors fully share the view, expressed both by government representatives and by spokesmen of the various organs of the United Nations, that although some improvements have been made in recent years, the process of integrating multilateral technical assistance projects within the real priorities of the various national development plans is not yet satisfactory and that the projects do not always reflect these priorities, or else are insufficiently co-ordinated with them.

13. It is argued that, while technical assistance financed out of Special Fund resources can to some extent be anticipated and allowed for in national development plans, it is virtually impossible to anticipate or plan in advance technical assistance obtainable under the other programmes, because it consists of a multiplicity of small projects of the most diverse character which, moreover, are financed from different sources and on different terms. At the same time, it is acknowledged that all technical assistance requirements not only can, but should be planned, such planning being based on long-term forecasts and being closely co-ordinated with the priorities of the national development plans.

14. The whole question of the harmonization of UN programmes with national, regional and global priorities (these to be determined as a part of the planning for the Second Development Decade) raises, of course, important issues of principle and procedure which require searching study by both the governments and the various international bodies. The Inspectors understand that one such study is already underway in the UNDP Governing Council's Capacity Study Group.



### III. Problems of counterpart

15. Nearly all those with whom the Inspectors met, whether representatives of governments or of international organizations, recognize that the difficulties of the recipient countries in providing contributions in terms of funds, services or candidates for training are real; that they deserve sympathetic understanding and that unless the conditions for the acceptance of such contributions are made more liberal and more flexible, the countries most in need of assistance are also likely to benefit least from such assistance.

16. The Inspector's observations in the field confirm that counterpart requirements are sometimes beyond the actual capacity of the countries to make such contributions. They also gathered that the regulations in this regard are too rigid. Among the difficulties mentioned to us were budgetary and financial problems and the non-availability of man-power for provision of direct counterpart officers or technicians who would take over the functions of the UN experts after their departure. In some cases, even when they were available and became suitably trained, it was difficult to retain them.

The problems arising in connection with the above are not easy of solution, seeing that the problems and circumstances often differ from one country and one geographical area to the next. Flexibility of approach is therefore called for.

Possible lines of approach in the case of counterpart financial contribution may be to accept the contribution in forms which are easiest for the country and most in line with its specific possibilities; reduction or even making nominal the proportion of a country's contribution in a particular case, instalment payments

by governments of their contribution over a period of time, etc. As regards counterpart personnel contribution, which is often an intractable problem, it is obvious that a rigid adherence to the book will mean that the most deserving countries may be deprived of UN assistance altogether. A possible line of approach here may be in the provision, as an integral part of a project, of training in the basic fields related to the project. The Revolving Fund could be used in advance for training purposes, the cost of which could later be charged to the project. Such a training sub-project (as an integral part of the main project) could provide increasingly for the input of trained country personnel into the project. The requirements of counterpart personnel contribution might also be deemed to be met if personnel from another developing country, of the recipient country's choice, were made temporarily available, to be replaced as soon as trained national personnel were available. The expert so temporarily provided could himself also be used for training indigenous personnel.

In view of the varying circumstances of countries in which these problems arise, each case may have to be treated on its own merits. Further studies are necessary by all concerned to find solutions to these problems. Speaking generally, we feel that: a more liberal and more flexible approach in this matter is desirable: the in-project training should be made, wherever necessary, an integral part of every project where the difficulties mentioned in this paragraph are likely to be met; and the duration of such training should be set, having regard both to its nature and the availability of the staff in the country in question.

#### IV. Long-term versus short-term contracts

17. The existing practice of extending contracts from one short-term period to the next is upsetting both to governments and to the experts. Faced with the uncertainty of an expert's continuing stay in the country, a government may find it difficult to establish

a proper rapport with his counterpart colleagues (if any). Indeed, this uncertainty is apt to have adverse psychological effects generally, thus affecting also the efficiency of the project.

Whilst recognizing that certain highly qualified personnel may not be available for long periods; that not all countries and not all projects require long-term experts; and that the practice of short-term contracts provides a "safety valve" in case the choice of expert turns out to be an unfortunate one, the Inspectors consider that especially in projects which - it is known in advance - will require continuity (such as economic planning); or for which no counterpart can be provided in the foreseeable future, greater emphasis should be placed on long-term contracts.

#### V. Project managers and their problems

18. The Inspectors agree with the government representatives with whom they talked that by far the most important factor in the success of a project is the choice of a suitable project manager.

19. Their attention was drawn to a number of projects, whose successful execution has been due, indeed, largely to the timely appointment, outstanding ability, untiring energy and devotion to duty of the project managers. They noted other cases, however, where a belated or unsuitable appointment led to delays in the execution of projects or made it impossible to proceed with them at all. One such example has been brought to the attention of FAO.

20. Project managers must possess not only high professional qualifications but also organizing and administrative skill and the ability to establish good working relations with the government and counterpart personnel (if any) of the country in which they are employed. They must also realize, however, that they are not only in a country "to do the job" - however successfully! - but that one day they will be gone, that someone else will have to take over and that it is essential for them, in anticipation of that day, to train their successors. Moreover, some project managers from highly developed and affluent countries are apt to set their sights too high, making proposals which go far beyond the resources of a developing country.

21. The Inspectors realize that it is not easy to find a combination of all these indispensable qualities - professional skill, administrative and organizing ability, tact, modesty, realism, etc. - in one individual. On the other hand, past experience has shown that the absence of one or several of these qualities may seriously jeopardize a project even when in other respects the project manager gives satisfaction or is, perhaps, actually outstanding.

22. In some cases that came to the Inspectors' attention the project managers' difficulties were due to the fact that they had been appointed or had taken up their duties after the plans of operations had been completed. If they happened to have reservations about some aspects of these plans, only two courses were left open to them: (a) to go ahead, half-heartedly, with a plan of which they did not approve; or (b) to press for an alteration of the plan - a time- and effort-consuming process.

The Inspectors feel that it is imperative that project managers be recruited in good time and that they be associated with all stages of the preparation and finalization of the plan of operations. We understand that existing rules permit recruitment of project managers two months before approval of a project, if the Inter-Agency Consultative Board agrees. There is a case for more liberal use of this rule and for considering if two months are sufficient.

23. According to existing procedures governments have little say in the selection of project managers (or experts for that matter). The only option open to them is to reject the appointee - a difficult and sometimes embarrassing decision to take.

The Inspectors suggest that before formally nominating project managers (and experts) for governmental endorsement, executing agencies should in the course of their contacts with governments seek to ascertain the latter's thinking on the suitability of the candidates for a particular project.

24. A number of difficulties experienced by United Nations project managers and experts in establishing effective and rapid communications with the headquarters of the Specialized Agencies and the United Nations have come to the notice of the Inspectors. It often takes a long time, for instance, to receive replies to their enquiries. As a result, they must either defer a decision on purely technical or administrative questions for which they lack the authority to take independent action, or take such action at their own risk.

25. While the Inspectors realize that the difficulties in communication with headquarters may be partly due to the great distances between the latter and individual developing countries and also, in a number of cases, to the absence of any regular communications whatsoever some delay may possibly be attributable to lacunae in procedures within the agencies.

On these specific grounds the Inspectors consider it advisable that project managers should have some flexibility of initiative and that the UNDP, in consultation with the executing agencies, should consider to what extent some authority in financial and administrative matters should be given to them, so as to facilitate their task and speed up the execution of projects.

26. It is conceivable that the extent of such delegation of initiative may have to differ from one geographical area to the other, depending on local factors.

#### VI. Other problems

27. The Inspectors came across certain other problems pertaining to UN development activities in the field, such as the lack of appropriate decentralization and devolution of authority - as distinguished from operations - from agency headquarters to the field, which often tend to hinder the efficiency and expeditious execution of projects. The historical growth of the UN has been such that a certain measure of inertia in this regard is understandable. It also goes without saying that ultimate control of operations must be retained at headquarters. It is necessary to recognize, however, that the vast extension of United Nations activities and programmes all over the world in recent years imposes the need for appropriate distribution of authority between headquarters and the field, with concomitant decentralization of personnel and of financial responsibility. A study of the debates in the various legislative and executive bodies of the United Nations family of organizations shows that this need is now generally recognized.

The Inspectors note with satisfaction that some of the agencies (such as ILO and FAO) have clearly recognized this need for a greater delegation and devolution of authority. On the other hand, the Inspectors realize that this is a major problem which deserves

urgent study not only by all the agencies, but by the various inter-agency bodies and the AJC as well.

28. In this paper, the Inspectors have endeavoured to identify and bring together a number of problems in the field of UN Technical Assistance and Special Fund projects deserving urgent attention. They are fully aware that these are not new; they are continuing problems for which there are no easy and over-simplified solutions. The Inspectors do not presume to have found out anything which was not already known before, in one form or another; nor do they pretend to be able to find all answers to all the problems. Their main purpose was to identify problems and suggest solutions, where possible, leaving the problems identified to be taken up by the executive or legislative authorities, or by the Inspectors themselves in their subsequent studies.





A N N E X 2

OBSERVATIONS BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE I.T.U.  
ON THE REPORT JIU/REP/69/5

The report prepared by Mr. Ilić, Mr. Jha and Mr. Sokirkin of the Joint Inspection Unit does not call for any special comment. The examples and observations, some of which are accompanied by proposals, appear pertinent and will doubtless enable the U.N.D.P. administration to consider the possibility of making more flexible or modernizing certain administrative and financial procedures which, through too rigid interpretation or application, may be the cause of the excessively long time taken to prepare and execute Special Fund projects.

I. It is particularly desirable that clear and precise instructions be drawn up to guide governments in the formulation of their requests for assistance, with the aid where necessary of the specialized agency. These instructions should be so framed as to ensure that, if they are followed, the preliminary study accompanying the request will contain all the basic information required for the subsequent preparation of the first part of the plan of operation as defined in the Inspectors' report.

A comprehensive, concise, preliminary study enables the agency and the U.N.D.P. specialized services to examine the request within a reasonable period of time, to correct errors, if any, and to speed up the preparation of the first part of the plan of operation. The agency must have the necessary funds to carry out the preliminary investigation as efficiently as possible.

There is no doubt that the economic and financial aspect of a Special Fund project must be studied in detail before the project is submitted for approval to the U.N.D.P. Governing Council. The preliminary study accompanying the request must therefore also be as precise as possible and in conformity with the rules specified by the U.N.D.P. services that have to consider it.

But there is a dilemma inherent in the whole process of which the I.T.U. is acutely aware. On the one hand, the recipient country wants the benefit of the assistance envisaged at the right moment, before the situation has had time to evolve to such an extent that the content of the request and the justification given are no longer relevant.

On the other hand, the executing agency and the services at U.N.D.P. headquarters are anxious to make a searching study of the project, to analyze the substance and its chances of "receivability" by the country, without undue difficulty, and then to establish a suitable plan of

work. All of these processes, however, tend to take some time. We consider that, if applied flexibly, the present procedures will provide an appropriate way out of the dilemma, but the U.N.D.P. and the agency must have such organizational and administrative arrangements that the interval between submission of a request and the day when work is begun in the field - on the basis of the plans adopted - is cut to a minimum. The capacity study might lead to recommendations to this end.

The I.T.U. also wholeheartedly shares the view that a Special Fund project has much greater chance of success if the plan of operation is developed in close cooperation among the authority directly concerned in the recipient country, the project manager and the executing agency. This demands the early recruitment of the project manager who will take part in this work and, for some projects, the recruitment of one or more members of the staff assigned to the project.

## II. Government contributions (counterpart)

Every project must be considered on its own merits - its nature, its importance, the region concerned, financial resources of the recipient country, etc. It is thus very difficult to apply very rigid rules and it is advisable that the existing regulations be made more flexible.

On the other hand, there is the danger that, if certain basic principles are not maintained in determining the amount of the counterpart contribution (taking GDP, for example, into account), some governments may be tempted to request that their contribution be either too small or non-existent.

## III. Project manager

The choice of project manager is a determining factor for the success of the project. It is therefore essential to take every possible precaution at the time of recruitment to ensure that the project manager is fully qualified and to have no reluctance about replacing him in mid-stream if he is not entirely satisfactory.

The project manager must be associated with all stages of the preparation and finalization of the plan of operation; in some cases he should even be responsible for it.

He should therefore be recruited as soon as the agreement in principle has been given by the U.N.D.P. without waiting for final approval of the request by the U.N.D.P. Governing Council.

It is desirable, moreover, that the project manager be allowed to exercise a certain amount of discretion in technical, administrative and financial matters within the framework of the broad directives given by the agency and the U.N.D.P. A high degree of centralization is often very harmful; it is always possible to make a check subsequently.

IV. Establishment of the technical assistance plan

The I.T.U. agrees with the Inspectors and others that the various forms of technical assistance furnished to the new or developing countries have now reached such proportions that they should be planned and coordinated at national and regional level rather than be dealt with by sector. Our feeling is that the U.N.D.P. resident representatives and the United Nations Regional Economic Commissions, working in consultation and cooperation with the regional experts of the executing agencies, have a part to play that cannot be overestimated. We are inclined to favour the idea that the offices of the resident representatives should in some way be equipped to give their support to and act in close liaison with the national planning authorities.

The points mentioned above relate primarily to projects in the Technical Assistance sector, but they also apply to a large extent to projects in the Special Fund sector.

V. Urgent projects

The I.T.U. would welcome maximum exploitation of the advantages to be derived from the decisions recently adopted on the size and management of reimbursable advance funds for financing urgent projects.

It should be pointed out here that the I.T.U., mainly from the resources in its own budget, has set up a group of engineers who are specialists in different branches of telecommunications. Among other tasks, these engineers assist countries in defining and solving the problems that fall within their specialities. They can also be called upon to help countries in formulating their basic requirements for assistance in telecommunications.

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