

JIU/REP/68/4



REPORT ON CO-ORDINATION AND CO-OPERATION AT COUNTRY LEVEL

by

S. ILIC

R.S. MANI

A.F. SOKIRKIN

Joint Inspection Unit

CO-ORDINATION AND CO-OPERATION AT COUNTRY LEVEL

1. From its very inception, the United Nations recognized the importance of multilateral assistance in the economic well-being and development of vast regions of the world. Co-ordination and co-operation among the various branches of the United Nations and their activities at country level was always of great importance. The problem is thus as old as the United Nations itself and has been dealt with from time to time by its various organs, like the General Assembly, ECOSOC, ACABQ, etc. Many measures were recommended and adopted, with varying degrees of success. In the early stages, when the number of United Nations bodies operating in various countries was limited, co-ordination did not present a very serious problem. But, with the present growth of activities in the field of technical assistance and the increased participation of the United Nations family in pre-investment and development programmes, the problem has become very complex. The creation of special branches of the United Nations (economic commissions, UNDP, UNIDO, UNCTAD, etc.) has added to the magnitude and complexity of the problem.
2. Considering that the problem has been examined and solutions proposed by numerous expert bodies, the inspectors approached it with some diffidence. They felt, however, in the light of the experience they gathered during their visit to some African countries that, in spite of the laudable efforts already made, there was need for a greater degree of co-ordination and co-operation than exists at present among the various branches of the United Nations and their activities at country level.
3. Such co-ordination and co-operation, besides leading to greater operational efficiency, is also likely to result in the more rational and economic use of the United Nations financial resources. Considering that, in spite of the great strides made by the United Nations in recent years, the quantum of multilateral United Nations aid is still very small compared to bilateral assistance - one estimate puts it at no more than 15 per cent of the total assistance - the rational and economic use of limited United Nations funds assumes special importance. Furthermore, this quantum of United Nations aid is financed and executed from a variety of sources as indicated below:

- (a) Technical assistance programme financed by the regular United Nations budget;
- (b) Technical assistance and Special Fund component of UNDP executed by the United Nations and its specialized agencies;
- (c) The regular programme of the various United Nations specialized agencies;
- (d) Programmes financed by trust funds operated by the United Nations and the specialized agencies;
- (e) Programmes financed by UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, etc.

Such increased presence of the United Nations family in each country might easily result in the duplication of administrative machinery and costs and in co-ordination being made more difficult.

4. The functions of the representatives of the various United Nations organs stationed in each country fall under the following broad heads:

- (a) expert advice and assistance to local governments;
- (b) assessing local conditions and needs and keeping Headquarters informed;
- (c) administrative work.

5. The first function, viz. giving expert advice and assistance to local governments, is an important one. The type of expert advice which local governments require is however becoming so specialized and sophisticated that, generally, high-level specialists may have to be sent for special assignments on an ad hoc basis. The permanent local representative will therefore be an "expert" at a somewhat lower level, an "all rounder" in his general field. This would apply to the second function, namely, assessing local conditions and keeping Headquarters informed.

6. There may be some exceptions to this general rule. For example, in some "least developed" countries the local "expert" representative of a United Nations specialized agency may actually be utilized for everyday administrative work also. The WHO country representatives work in, and function more or less as a part of, the local Ministry of Health.

7. It is true that it is sometimes difficult to draw a line between the administrative and technical functions of country representatives of United Nations bodies. They sometimes overlap. By and large, however, a considerable proportion of the work of local representatives of United Nations specialized agencies and

bodies is administrative. Whenever there is any serious technical problem, a top expert is sent on an ad hoc basis.

8. This view of the inspectors is reinforced by their personal experience in the countries they visited. In the case of UNESCO representation in countries, it is often true that their officers are accredited to, and have direct dealings with, the Foreign Affairs Ministries (which are not technical Ministries) instead of the Ministry of Education, Culture, etc.

9. It seems obvious that the administrative functions of the country representatives of various United Nations bodies should be co-ordinated and unified as much as possible as this is bound to lead to greater efficiency, not to mention economy. This has been recognized in the past and various principles have been enunciated by the ACC and other bodies under which the UNDP Resident Representatives were to play a co-ordinating role especially in regard to "house-keeping" services and administrative matters. The inspectors found, in the three or four countries they visited, that these principles and directives have not gone far enough and have not been fully implemented. For example, almost all the representatives of specialized agencies had their own separate premises. They had separate administrative services, separate reference libraries, telephone systems, transport, watchmen, cleaners, etc.

10. The inspectors were told by the representative of a specialized agency in Lusaka that the premises given to him by UNDP were not adequate as he needed more room to receive experts; the inspectors thought that the existing premises were sufficient and that attempts of each agency to function separately should be discouraged. The inspectors also found instances when even junior representatives were unnecessarily touchy and sensitive about their status.

11. The inspectors also gathered the impression that some agency representatives thought that the Resident Representative represented only the UNDP and that it was only in regard to security, diplomatic immunities, etc., that he had any authority to act on behalf of the whole family.

12. The problem of co-operation and co-ordination can be examined under two separate heads:

- (a) Administration;
- (b) Policy and operations.

13. On the first there can be no objection on grounds of principle. Everyone is in theory agreed that "house-keeping" operations should be co-ordinated and unified. As stated earlier, numerous directives in this regard have been issued by the ACC, ECOSOC and other bodies.

The inspectors were told by some specialized agencies that in this respect there had been considerable improvement in recent years. They found that, in fact, a large number of administrative services were already being performed by the UNDP Resident Representatives on behalf of specialized agencies. The inspectors feel that, in view of this, there should be scope for some reduction in the administrative staff of representatives of specialized agencies.

There is, of course, room for even greater improvement in the sphere of co-ordination of administrative services. Firstly, every endeavour should be made to house all members of the United Nations family in a single building. This requires the co-operation of Governments as well as United Nations specialized agencies. The matter has engaged the attention of ECOSOC and United Nations Headquarters for some time, but very little headway has been made. The inspectors propose to examine this matter further in order to ascertain the difficulties in implementing the recommendations, and how they can be overcome. Secondly, all the administrative and financial work for the entire United Nations family (in addition to common "house-keeping" services), should be undertaken centrally - this, for the time being, could be the UNDP Resident Representative's office. It might involve the adoption of unified administrative and financial rules, or the adaptation of existing rules. If this suggestion is carefully thought out and adopted, there are bound to be considerable savings as duplication of effort will be avoided. Side by side, there will be the psychological advantage of the various units of the United Nations thinking themselves as members of one family engaged in a joint effort. The inspectors feel bound to express the view that they found competition among United Nations bodies more prevalent than co-operation and co-ordination. They gathered that this view was shared by many government representatives in the countries they visited.

14. The second aspect of the problem, namely, co-ordination in respect of policy, is more delicate and complex. The non-administrative functions of United Nations country representatives, as stated earlier relate to:

/...

(a) tendering of expert advice to governments, especially in the matter of initiation of development and other "projects" (however financed), including help and assistance in the preparation of over-all development plans; and

(b) briefing of Headquarters on the factual situation in each country, and suggesting areas of assistance by Headquarters.

15. Approved projects have their own Project Manager and other experts assigned ad hoc to each project. The functions of the agency country representatives in regard to the projects are therefore in the main administrative and can be easily performed by a single representative on behalf of all the United Nations bodies.

16. The tendering of expert advice to governments is by far the most important function. This might be subdivided under the following heads:

- (1) over-all development planning;
- (2) individual problems; and
- (3) the selection and preparation of project requests.

The first of these, namely, advice and assistance on over-all development plans, can be given only jointly on behalf of the entire United Nations family. The over-all advice must obviously be tendered to the Government by one representative in consultation with, and on behalf of, the entire United Nations family. Competing or contradictory advice to the same government on behalf of different United Nations bodies will be of no assistance to governments. The inspectors came across a case when two members of the United Nations family gave mutually contradictory advice to a government about a particular project.

17. On the other hand, each United Nations body can advise governments concerned of actions in its own sphere of competence and leave it to the governments to co-ordinate them with an integrated national plan, with due regard to the priorities as determined by governments. In fact many reports of United Nations co-ordinating committees and bodies mean precisely this when they say that co-ordination should be the prime responsibility of governments rather than the United Nations, especially as bilateral offers of aid have also to be taken into account. We have heard it argued, by one specialized agency, that it is a good thing for different United Nations bodies to compete among themselves for niches in the national development plans for their own favourite projects; and governments would in fact benefit from such competition in making their own final plans and allotting their final priorities.

18. The inspectors concede that there is something to be said for this point of view. But they were impressed by the large body of practical objections voiced in the countries they visited. They were told that each United Nations body was "pressurizing" its opposite technical Ministry, which in turn, was pressurizing the Planning and Development Ministries. This caused difficulties and embarrassment to the Planning Ministries. There is a strong feeling that Governments should draw up independently an over-all development plan for the country and see where United Nations aid and assistance will fit in and can be utilized. Whereas, what in fact happens in some cases is that the plans have to be made to fit the separate offers from different United Nations sources. This is not very satisfactory, because, after all, the quantum of total United Nations aid to a country is a very small part (about 15 per cent) of the total external aid; and even a much smaller part of the total investment (from all sources) in development.

19. Moreover, the United Nations regional economic commissions have an important role to play in advising countries on development programmes. The present separate projection of each United Nations body into each country does not take into account this role of the economic commission. Many specialized agencies have begun to realize this and are taking steps to work in co-ordination with the commissions and make use of the general expertise available to the commissions. The FAO, for example, has gone so far as to propose that the Executive Secretary of most of the regional commissions should also function as its regional representative. The ILO as well as the UNESCO have of late felt the need of bringing the ECA more in the picture in the field of their activities.

20. The idea of each United Nations specialized agency or body playing its lone "expert" hand in each country, and leaving it to the national government to sort out the priorities and do the co-ordination work is, therefore somewhat receding. Some Governments, which have a sophisticated administrative system, may be able to do all the work of co-ordination. Others would like that the United Nations should project a single total image (in the field of technical assistance) and not several competing (and sometimes contradictory) images. Without exception all Ministers and policy-making officials whom the inspectors talked to in Africa said in clear terms that they would like to deal with one single United Nations representative to discuss and finalize the whole range of United Nations

aid to the country. As, however, it cannot be asserted that this view prevails in all quarters, the inspectors propose to make further inquiries on the matter.

21. The inspectors also came across other instances of lack of co-ordination which caused embarrassment to the local government. Very often representatives of different branches of the United Nations family approach the government at different times for the same information. For example, in Lusaka an ECA expert was unable to obtain from the Government the information he was seeking because the UNIDO representative had recently collected the same information. Obviously the information collected by UNIDO did not reach ECA or the office of the local UNDP Resident Representative. It would appear that, so far, the United Nations specialized agencies and the ECA have failed to establish adequate contact and liaison.

22. The existing position being thus unsatisfactory, the inspectors gave much thought to the idea of having a single unified representative of the United Nations family in each country. They were aware of an earlier opinion of the Advisory Committee of Administrative and Budgetary Questions that the Resident Representative could not be expected to serve several masters. It seems, however, that the problem will sooner or later have to be faced and solved by the United Nations. With the UNDP having conceived of targets for successive "Development decades", it appears inevitable that the United Nations family must make an integrated approach to the problem of economic and social development in each country. The existing laissez-faire practice of each expert United Nations body sponsoring its own projects without reference to over-all targets, and leaving it entirely to the Governments to sort out the priorities, must, in time, yield to a system under which the United Nations will portray a complete and integrated image of the needs of each country or area in the field of economic and social development.

23. The inspectors have had informal discussion with heads of specialized agencies on this particular subject. Most admitted the necessity of achieving better co-ordination and co-operation at the country level. Some conceded that the problem could be solved by having a single United Nations representative in each country in over-all charge of United Nations technical aid, with the representatives of the specialized agencies acting as his technical advisers

/...

(as in the case at present with a number of FAO country representatives acting as technical advisers to the UNDP Resident Representative). They thought, however, that consultation arrangements with the various agencies with regard to the selection of the single over-all representative should be better than those which now exist for the selection of Resident Representatives.

24. One specialized agency was opposed to this idea, as it considered its field to be too specialized and technical to be subordinated to any over-all co-ordinating control by a non-technical single United Nations representative. It was emphasized by another specialized agency that care should be taken to ensure that the direct line of communication between the Agency Representative and the technical Ministry concerned is preserved, in spite of any over-all co-ordinating control by a single representative. The need for preserving the constitutional position and independence of each agency (and its legislative bodies) in each country was also emphasized.

25. The inspectors consider that the idea of having a single unified representative requires further study and investigation in order to obtain a more general spectrum of views, and to see how the practical objections can be met. They propose to pursue this study as one of their priority tasks in 1969.

S. ILIC
R.S. MONI
A. SOKIRKIN

October 1968
