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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Technical co-operation between UNDP and the regional economic commissions

Addendum

Comments of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Technical co-operation between UNDP and the regional economic commissions" (A/42/110).

* A/42/50.

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

I. GENERAL

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Technical co-operation between UNDP and the regional economic commissions: Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)" raises several issues with regard to the necessary co-operation between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the regional commissions.
2. The report analyses the role of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in the formulation of technical co-operation projects by concerned African Governments and in the subsequent implementation of such projects. According to General Assembly resolutions 32/197 of 20 December 1977 and 33/202 of 29 January 1979, the responsibilities of regional commissions in project formulation and implementation are limited to regional and interregional projects. The eventual role of ECA at the national level is a broader issue which in the opinion of the Secretary-General cannot be addressed within the limited scope of the present report, since it implies an examination of relationships not only with UNDP and specialized agencies of the United Nations system but also with other funding organizations for technical co-operation activities, including regional development banks. It should also be noted that UNDP is under the obligation to follow the rules set out by its own Governing Council for the designation of executing agencies for implementation of UNDP-supported projects.
3. The basic premise to which the United Nations system adheres is that a sovereign Government makes its own decision concerning the assistance it wishes to receive from organizations of the system, be these organizations the regional commission or UNDP. That said, it is important, in the view of the Secretary-General, to ensure that regional commissions are in a position to provide technical advice to Governments, at their request, on development matters, including, where appropriate, technical co-operation projects. As pointed out by the Inspector, this role of adviser to the Government on specific as well as on general matters within their areas of competence is indeed an important function of the regional commissions. Of particular importance in that respect is the capacity of ECA to offer its views on the relationship of projects to the overall priorities for development of the continent, as expressed, for example, in the Lagos Plan of Action and the African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery.
4. It is to be regretted that the report gives more attention to the desirable relationship between ECA and national Governments than to the existing relationship between UNDP, ECA and these Governments. It would have been appropriate to analyse this latter relationship in greater detail in order to make proposals on how ECA could participate more effectively in technical co-operation matters. Attention is drawn to the fact that UNDP signed an agreement with ECA on 1 March 1977 under which the Commission was designated as executing agency for UNDP regional projects. In this connection, it is appropriate to recall that UNDP, also, has a specific role to play vis-à-vis African Governments.

5. Although there were some consultations with organizations of the United Nations system before the report was made public, the Secretary-General believes that these consultations were inadequate. Organizations of the system should be given a fair opportunity to comment on matters directly concerning them before a report is published.

II. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

6. Comments made by the Inspector in paragraph 11 of the report are not adequately substantiated and give the impression that UNDP and ECA are experiencing serious difficulties in their co-operation. This opinion is not shared by ECA and UNDP. As concerns, for example, consultations with Governments in the region on the UNDP regional programme, UNDP, in accordance with procedures laid down by Governing Council decision 80/9, carried out such consultations in full collaboration with ECA through existing regional mechanisms.

7. In paragraphs 8 and 10 the report refers to responsibilities of ECA in co-ordination of technical assistance and design and co-ordination of country programmes. The Secretary-General believes that this view of the role of ECA is not in line with existing legislation, as country projects do not appear to be included in the mandate of the regional commissions as per General Assembly resolution 32/197. Assembly resolution 41/171 of 5 December 1986, on the contrary, reaffirms the responsibility of UNDP for country programmes.

8. There is an apparent contradiction between paragraphs 13 and 14 of the report: it is presumed that the Inspector is not inferring that the same Ministers have taken two opposing views on the same regional programme.

9. The Secretary-General wishes to point out that comments made by the Inspector in section 1 of part II D (second part of paragraph 18) are not substantiated by factual information. The Secretary-General therefore wishes to dissociate himself from the judgement on the motivation of specialized agencies of the United Nations system in the UNDP programming process.

10. UNDP wishes to state that the cuts in indicative planning figures (IPFs) during the programming exercise of the UNDP third cycle referred to in paragraph 23 were not linked to the efficient management of UNDP available funds. Rather, they were due to the fact that contributions expected from Member States that the UNDP Governing Council had forecast to be made did not materialize, and IFP figures had to be adjusted accordingly.

11. Paragraphs 24 to 31 of the Inspector's report are referring to measures to achieve greater regional self-reliance through regional institutions. A study was undertaken at the initiative of ECA jointly with the member States of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to assess the performance of inter-State regional or subregional institutions created under the auspices of ECA and receiving financing support from UNDP. The study identified useful recommendations. The Secretary-General would support action to be undertaken to implement recommendations that have been fully agreed upon by concerned Governments.

12. As concerns the section of the Inspector's report dealing with the UNDP Bureau for Arab States (paras. 32-39), factual comments of UNDP to JIU have not been taken fully into account in the final version of the report. Concerning paragraph 33, Mauritania is a member of the Arab League but is covered by the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa. Thus it is not correct to state that the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa covers only non-Arab African countries. As concerns paragraphs 34 and 35, the reference to difficulties and misunderstandings as a result of the existence of the Regional Bureau for Arab States and the Regional Bureau for Africa should have been substantiated in the report.

13. Several comments in paragraphs 32 to 39 of the report refer to the allocation of resources between the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa and the Regional Bureau for Arab States. As is well known, the mechanism for allocation of resources either for national or regional programmes and projects has been established by the Governing Council of UNDP. The existence of two separate bureaux does not lead to a reduction of available resources for the region. IPFs are established on a country-by-country basis in accordance with Governing Council decision 85/16. Regional IPFs are also established on a basis of ratios relating to individual countries IPFs.

14. There appears to be no objective criteria for the Inspector's comments on the quality of the relationship between ECA and the Regional Bureau for Arab States. However, as improvements are always possible when relationships between administrative units are concerned, ECA and UNDP have both agreed to examine in detail whether there is any need to improve existing relations between ECA and the Regional Bureau for Arab States.

15. Co-operation between the Regional Bureau for Africa and ECA is characterized by the recognition that ECA acts, inter alia, as a centre for studies and research on African economic and social development as well as an executing agency for UNDP-supported regional projects. For both functions, ECA must have the required resources to recruit and retain qualified staff. As pointed out by the Inspector in section IV of his report, as well as in other sections, the capacity of ECA in this area must be strengthened, inter alia, by providing additional resources and delegated authority. As concerns UNDP, the capacity of ECA is of course a key consideration in assigning projects for execution.

16. ECA has played a key role in the preparation of the fourth regional programme for Africa. If there has been a lack of involvement of ECA in the past, this has now been corrected, and, by and large, the Inspector's recommendation has therefore been already implemented.

17. It is to be regretted that the Inspector has not analysed examples of effective co-operation between ECA and UNDP. For example, there is close co-operation between the two organizations for the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990; this co-operation has also fully manifested itself in the case of the United Nations Decade for Transport and Communications in Africa.

18. In paragraphs 55 to 59 of his report the Inspector argued that the UNDP Liaison Office at Addis Ababa should become more operational. This can only be achieved by expanding its staff and could result in duplication of functions being presently carried out in New York. This proposal from the Inspector does not appear to UNDP as appropriate.

III. COMMENTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE INSPECTOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

19. The Secretary-General points out that this recommendation is not in line with the existing mandate of the regional commissions concerning project execution, as defined in particular in General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202. The Secretary-General is aware of the need to examine whether ECA should be more involved in development activities at the national level. He does not believe, however, that greater involvement is necessarily or solely achieved through the formulation or execution of UNDP-funded projects at the national level. He would therefore suggest that the desirable role of ECA at the national level be assessed in a wider context than that of its relationship with UNDP and taking into account the need for an efficient allocation of resources in the United Nations. He wishes to recall, in that respect, that Assembly resolution 2688 (XXV) of 11 December 1970 on the capacity of the United Nations development system mentioned the role of the regional commissions in providing assistance to Governments in the formulation of national development plans.

Recommendation 2

20. The Secretary-General fully agrees that there is a need for strengthening the capacity of the ECA Technical Assistance Co-ordinating Office, without which it would be extremely difficult for ECA to carry out its executing agency functions for regional projects. However, in view of the fact that such action centres around the number and quality of the staff of that Office, this is clearly a matter that has to be examined within the context of available resources.

21. While support costs earned from executing regional projects cannot by themselves remedy deficiencies in technical capacity, the suggestion implied in this recommendation to use overheads to improve administrative and technical back-stopping of technical co-operation for regional projects is acceptable.

Recommendation 3

22. Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) are seen as the operational arm of ECA. An agreement in principle has been reached between ECA and UNDP for the latter to assist in strengthening the capacity of the MULPOCs during the fourth cycle to carry out specific projects. There is, however, in the view of UNDP, a need to undertake an in-depth evaluation of MULPOCs. The Secretary-General fully supports this recommendation, which aims at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the sub-machinery of ECA.

Recommendation 4

23. This recommendation is acceptable. It reflects the priorities of ECA. It is also in full accord with UNDP policy as well as with the priorities of its regional programme for Africa.

Recommendation 5

24. There is a desirable link between regional and country programmes, but this link must be established by fully respecting the national sovereignty of Member States. The Secretary-General supports the view that close contacts between ECA, UNDP and the Governments concerned are necessary to ensure the desirable consistency of programmes at the regional and national levels. He wishes further to point out that there is an agreement between UNDP and ECA for UNDP resident representatives to assume the role of ECA representatives. To this end, UNDP resident representatives undertake regular visits to ECA as part of their agency brief. Furthermore, it was recently decided by ECA and UNDP that a circular will be sent to all the resident representatives concerned reminding them of this agreement.

Recommendation 6

25. UNDP policy follows the consultations laid down by UNDP Governing Council decision 80/9. It is difficult to visualize how a policy and procedures manual can contain references to the strengthening of the role of an organization of the United Nations system.

Recommendation 7

26. By virtue of existing mechanisms at UNDP headquarters, including the Action Committee and the Programme Review Committee, there is considerable interaction on programmes and projects between various units. But country programmes, by definition, reflect each individual Government's final decision.

Recommendation 8

27. The question of respective responsibilities appears to be adequately covered by existing provisions in the project document for regional activities. A section in that document provides for this purpose and it constitutes a binding agreement.

Recommendation 9

28. The rationale for these regional bureaux goes beyond the simple question of the relationship that ECA should establish with each of them. This recommendation raises essentially a political question. From a managerial point of view, no arguments are advanced in the Inspector's report which would justify in the view of UNDP a change in structure.

Recommendation 10

29. See comments for recommendation 5 (para. 24).

Recommendation 11

30. As is established in the "Consensus", the Administrator's designation of an executing agent is based on his appraisal of technical capacity. This responsibility cannot be delegated to ECA. Moreover, existing legislation clearly states that regional commissions act as executing agents in areas "which do not fall within the purview of the sectoral responsibilities of specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies" (General Assembly resolution 32/197, annex, para. 23). There is no objection, however, to a closer co-operation between UNDP and ECA for the implementation of multisectoral projects of a regional character.
