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Draft report

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Addendum

Programme questions: evaluation (item 4 (e))

Strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives

1. At its 2nd and 4th meetings, on 1 and 2 June 1998, the Committee considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives transmitted under cover of a note by the Secretary-General (A/53/90). The report reviewed in-depth and self-evaluation activities during the period 1996-1997.

Discussion

2. The report was discussed in the context of its function of reviewing the effectiveness of the United Nations evaluation practices and the contributions of such evaluation findings to improving programme design and delivery and the issuance of policy directives. While its brevity and clarity were appreciated, regret was expressed about the rather descriptive nature of the report, which did not reveal all the potential of evaluation. Observations were made on the uneven progress in the establishment of evaluation systems in the different offices and departments. It did not appear that the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget and the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation were being adequately implemented in all parts of the Organization, in particular with regard to support services. In this connection, it was observed that only a few departments had sought the views of stakeholders and clients, and that common services had not yet been subject to evaluation. Disappointment was expressed that the overall situation had not changed significantly in the last two years.

3. The view was expressed that the issue of an effective evaluation system was of special importance in the context of ongoing reform and, in particular, the Secretary-General's proposals on results-based budgeting. The evaluation practice of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) approach, which emphasized feedback from and participation of Governments in evaluation processes, were cited as examples of good practices. These practices were contrasted with the use of efficiency reviews designed to achieve savings, notably in support services and in the political programmes. It was acknowledged that the diversity of the methods and approaches to evaluation reflects differences in the nature of the programmes; however it was also stressed that evaluation should be based on standards that enable Member States, the Committee and other reviewing intergovernmental bodies to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme. In this connection, it was suggested that, in accordance with rule 107.1 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget and Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, evaluation standards and analysis should utilize performance indicators that would make it possible to conduct an in-depth analysis of whether Secretariat implementation of programmes is efficient and having the desired effects.

4. The view was expressed that the Office of Internal Oversight Services guidelines on programme monitoring and evaluation issued jointly with the Department of Management did not conform with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning. The view was expressed that the guidelines should have been submitted to the Committee for its consideration and approval before their issuance to programme managers. In this connection, it was requested that the guidelines be provided to the Committee to enable it to take appropriate action. The view was expressed that the Committee should have been consulted before these guidelines were issued. It was further noted that the guidelines were of a quality which was far inferior to articles VI and VII and the glossary contained in the annex to the existing Regulations and Rules. The Office of Internal Oversight Services was commended for its initiative in assisting programme managers to discharge their responsibilities with regard to programme monitoring and self-evaluation and was encouraged to report on the status of implementation of the guidelines in due course. The Secretariat stated that the guidelines were consistent with the existing General Assembly Regulations Governing Programme Planning and that the report was submitted in accordance with regulation 7.4.

5. Views were expressed that the issue of the guidelines, as mentioned in section 3 of the report (para. 33), should be considered at the thirty-ninth session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

6. It was observed that the General Assembly and its Committees had not yet considered the implications of the Secretary-General's proposals on results-based budgeting, and it was further observed that the guidelines should not prejudice the outcome of this process.

7. Concern was expressed about the evaluation of the reports on economic issues by consultants. They should have been examined by the United Nations staff who were familiar with the issues and aware of the views of Member States.

8. Specific measures for improving the evaluation process were proposed. The need for inclusion of information on the utilization of evaluation results was suggested and the need for evaluation findings to be given to functional intergovernmental bodies reviewing the programmes was reaffirmed. The establishment of monitoring and evaluation units within offices and departments was called for, as was the systematization of evaluation processes and the dissemination of good practices as a means of improving efficiency and effectiveness.

9. It was noted that the guidelines were an attempt to establish some minimal standards for the new style of public sector management, and it was observed in this regard that the intergovernmental character of the United Nations should be borne in mind. The view was expressed that comprehensive programme monitoring and evaluation were essential for effective management within the Secretariat and for effective review by intergovernmental bodies. It was further expressed that effective functioning of the Committee and the Secretariat required that the mandated programme monitoring and evaluation take place. This was necessary for them to fulfil their respective roles in prioritizing activities, determining the validity of programmes, assessing old mandates, providing guidance on programme design, identifying duplication and overlap and appraising levels of coordination.

10. The view was also expressed that the existing Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget and the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation are most comprehensive, clear and specific. If followed, they would provide a sound basis for effective monitoring and evaluation; regrettably, these Regulations and Rules had not been fully implemented. It was further expressed that self-evaluation by programme managers was a valuable function, as there were too many programmes and limited time for evaluations to be conducted only by intergovernmental bodies. In this regard, regulation 7.3 and rule 107.3 provided for self-evaluations to be conducted according to the guidelines established by the Central Evaluation Unit. Such guidelines, recently issued, were a hopeful indication that self-evaluations would be effectively conducted.

Conclusions and recommendations

11. The Committee viewed effective programme monitoring and evaluation as important elements in internal management and intergovernmental reviews. The Committee stressed the importance and necessity of further improving and integrating evaluation into the cycle of programme planning, budgeting and monitoring with a view to improving and strengthening programme formulation and implementation.

12. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly approve the addition of the following two programmes to the schedule of in-depth evaluations; reports on those evaluations were to be submitted to the Committee at its forty-first session: policy coordination and sustainable development and population.
