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PROGRAMME PLANNING

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

United Nations System Co-operation in Developing Evaluation by Governments

Comments by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "United Nations System Co-operation in Developing Evaluation by Governments" (A/38/333).

ANNEX

Comments by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "United Nations System Co-operation in Developing Evaluation by Governments" (JIU/REP/82/12), prepared by Inspectors Alfred N. Forde and Earl D. Sohm, is a constructive and useful contribution by JIU. In focusing attention on the evaluation needs and capabilities of Governments, the report is a welcome complement to the JIU's initial report in 1977 on evaluation in the United Nations system (A/33/225). It will be recalled that the general assessment of JIU then was that, while little real evaluation was being carried out, interest in evaluation, which had varied in intensity since the 1950s, appeared to be at a "take-off" point. Since the JIU's first report on evaluation, it has issued a number of subsequent reports concerning the internal evaluation systems of the United Nations. This report takes the process one step further by stressing the importance of developing Government's evaluation capability as part of the process of building self-reliance through technical co-operation. The report also indicates the relationship between this effort and recent developments in the evaluation systems within the United Nations. A final emphasis of the report is the important linkage between a Government's evaluation capability and its ability to undertake effective execution of its own development projects.
2. The report nicely integrates past policy decisions of the United Nations system, which indicate a strong trend away from a "United Nations system projects" input approach towards country-centred and results orientation, with the recognized need of helping Governments strengthen their evaluation capabilities.
3. The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) strongly supports the thesis articulated in the report that, both within the United Nations system and in Governments, evaluation should be seen as essential and integral to the processes of policy formulation, programme planning, budgeting and implementation management rather than being perceived merely as a desirable adjunct to these processes. ACC believes that the report offers an excellent basis for further review of the direction which organizations within the system are taking individually and collectively in supporting government evaluation activities relevant to specific needs. Recognizing the diversity of governmental and organizational arrangements which exist in the area of evaluation, the JIU report should prove valuable as a guide to the organizations of the United Nations system in further improving their collective efforts and in progressing towards harmonizing their evaluation systems over the coming years.

II. COMMENTS

General comments

. ACC feels that the report is an excellent and comprehensive coverage of a very important subject. Though some agencies do not see much scope in their operations that would be of direct assistance to evaluation by Governments, all agencies recognize the importance of evaluation by Governments in the development process. There is virtually no qualification within ACC to full support for the four recommendations of the Inspectors. ACC welcomes in particular the statement that "evaluation cannot succeed without firm and continuing political commitment and support". Some agencies believe that the recommendations are too general, especially in view of the detail given to the factors that influence evaluation (sect. VIII). ACC, however, recognizes that owing to the complexities of the United Nations system, as well as those of governmental structures, it may be difficult to give more detailed recommendations.

. Recommendation 1 is the only recommendation addressed directly to the agencies. It calls for a set of actions to address various aspects of evaluation on a continuing and co-ordinated basis. This recommendation enjoys the full support of ACC, as acknowledged in the report, and many agencies are already active in supporting evaluation activities by Governments. Those agencies already experienced in this area tend to feel that the constraint for further effort is not lack of sensitivity to the need for evaluation, but rather a resource constraint in terms of funding, staff, training material, etc. One agency felt that the Inspectors could have attempted to examine mechanisms to harmonize evaluation issues among bilateral and multilateral aid agencies to minimize the cost to Member States.

. All of the main recommendations are addressed to the United Nations system. Paragraph 139 does contain general and broad recommendations to other organizations and Governments. Considering that the subject of the report is evaluation by Government some of the agencies expressed the view that there should have been some recommendations addressed specifically to Governments, which might, for example, have considered such issues as ways and means of encouraging evaluation by Governments. One agency commented that it was regrettable that the report contained no reference to its activities to promote monitoring and evaluation by Governments.

. ACC would like to express its intention to do all possible to implement the recommendations of the Inspectors and to ensure co-ordination of the activities of its members with those of Governments in this effort. Improvements under way to internal evaluation systems form an indispensable element in any effort to assist Governments in strengthening their evaluation capabilities. ACC also notes the importance attached by the Inspectors to the strong potential leadership role which the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) could play in encouraging and supporting evaluation activities by Governments themselves, a view consistent with the JIU report on the evaluation system of UNDP.

Comments on specific recommendations

8. Recommendation 1 calls for a set of actions to address various aspects of evaluation on a continuing and co-ordinated basis. As mentioned previously this recommendation enjoys the full support of ACC and many agencies are already active in supporting evaluation activities by Governments.
9. Some agencies referred to their co-operation, through the ACC Task Force for Rural Development, in developing common definitions, concepts and approaches to the monitoring and evaluation of rural development projects executed by organizations of the system according to their respective mandates and fields of competence.
10. Recommendation 2 suggests that ACC should consider specific ways and means to better encourage joint activities to help strengthen evaluation by Governments. ACC will maintain on the agenda of its appropriate subsidiary bodies the subject of evaluation and will take the necessary steps to ensure that information is exchanged among agencies of the system on a regular basis. As the JIU report under reference and other JIU reports on evaluation have stated, steps are under way to strengthen evaluation within individual organizations of the system. The organizations stand ready to help Governments, upon request, strengthen their own evaluation systems. In addition, ACC would note that, at its first regular session of 1983, it decided to take measures, inter alia, to improve the monitoring and evaluation of operational activities at the country level, through emphasis on the importance of fully involving Governments of recipient countries in the monitoring and evaluation of projects sponsored by the system.
11. Recommendation 3 suggests that governing bodies of organizations might consider issuing a statement of policy which, in the context of their operational activities for development, would stress the value of support to the efforts of Governments to strengthen evaluation. Governing bodies will have the opportunity to consider this recommendation in the course of their review of the Inspector's report. One agency suggested that governing bodies should be cognizant of the fact that funds for evaluation activities are likely to be repaid several times over.
12. Recommendation 4 is addressed to the United Nations, and concerns action the Organization might take to support evaluation by Governments. With respect to the role of Governments in the internal evaluation system now being designed for the economic and social sectors of the United Nations, and as a follow-up to the instructions for the preparation of the Medium-term Plan for the period 1984-1989 issued by the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, guidelines for management-oriented evaluation are being developed under which programme managers will be requested, inter alia, to specify in their individual evaluation plans, as appropriate, the type and extent of participation by Member States. It is intended that this will become a regular feature of medium-term planning and the information gained from this source should prove of interest to other organizations.
13. It should be emphasized, however, that in order for assistance to Governments to be purposeful and effective certain pre-conditions must be fulfilled, namely:

(a) Adequate institutional capability within the United Nations itself should first be built up. At present, those organizational entities with established and functional evaluation units account for only a third of the total;

(b) A broad consensus of views within the United Nations concerning the basic evaluation concepts and methodologies appropriate to the needs of Governments of developing countries should be secured in order to avoid inconsistent, wasteful and counter-productive assistance whether in the areas of advice, institution-building or training. In this connection, there is a need to first achieve co-ordinated and harmonized planning and implementation of evaluation activities within the United Nations;

(c) A more adequate level of technical capability is required, based on a defined minimal level of knowledge and expertise and a more developed information system.

14. As regards the proposal to include assistance for evaluation by Governments as a specific part of the United Nations programme activities, the rationale for limiting the scope to development issues and policies and public administration and finance is not clear. There are possibilities for such support, also in other programmes, e.g., population, ocean economics and technology, energy, science and technology, and social development and humanitarian affairs. In addition, while development issues and policies addresses social and economic issues, it does so in a global context. Since assistance for evaluation relates essentially to individual developing countries, relevance and responsiveness to diverse conditions and specific needs in these countries should be emphasized in determining areas where the assistance in question can be built into United Nations evaluation activities.

15. In light of this, the thrust of United Nations support to Governments should be from regional commissions, regional institutes and other entities mentioned in recommendation 4 (c), with the United Nations Secretariat performing an appropriate and co-ordinating role.
