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INTRODUCTORY REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Work on the interrelationships between resources,
environment, population and development

The present document, which is intended to be read in conjunction with the relevant sections of the Executive Director's introductory report (UNEP/GC.8/2) and his report on General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions of relevance to UNEP (UNEP/GC.8/2/Add.2), elaborates the views of the Executive Director on the subject, and sets out his recommendations in regard to UNEP's role, based on the advice of a high-level group of experts convened by him in January 1980.

I. BACKGROUND

1. Developments subsequent to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 3345 (XXIX) of 17 December 1974, including the holding at Stockholm in August 1979 of the United Nations Symposium on Interrelationships among Resources, Environment, Population and Development, are outlined in documents UNEP/GC.8/2, paragraphs 8-12, and UNEP/GC.8/2/Add.2, section B.8.
2. The Executive Director considers that the study of interrelationships and the generation of proposals for action, such as would produce beneficial results in the over-all systematic context at the national, regional and global levels, is emerging as a major issue not only in the work of UNEP but indeed also in the United Nations system, capable ultimately of influencing the over-all priorities of the system in the economic and social fields. Under the terms of General Assembly resolution 3345 (XXIX) and Economic and Social Council resolution 1979/49, the next report to the Economic and Social Council on the work on interrelationships should be accompanied by the views of the Governing Council; hence it will be a document for consideration by the Governing Council at its ninth session. In view of the importance of the subject, the Executive Director convened a high-level group of experts, which met in January 1980, to advise him on the role UNEP should assume in its own activities and in contributing to system-wide efforts.
3. The group of experts defined four main tasks in its work:
 - (a) Contribution to the development of a flexible conceptual framework for the study;
 - (b) Identification of issues which should be subjects for analysis;
 - (c) Definition of elements in a suitable process for efficient system-wide efforts on the interrelationships;
 - (d) Presentation of proposals for action by UNEP on the interrelationships.

II. STUDIES ON INTERRELATIONSHIPS

4. The group of experts shared the conviction expressed in the report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council ^{1/} that it is increasingly evident that development efforts tend to produce basic systemic effects resulting from strong interactions between population, resources, environment and development.

^{1/} E/1979/75.

5. The group fully supported the conclusion in the report that a conceptual framework has to be developed in stages. Flexibility is a sine qua non. The framework has to be open to change; it has to be enlarged or refined as the study proceeds. The group recognized the importance of the considerations to be taken into account in the study which were listed in the report. Thus it felt that the conceptual framework should be amenable to specific, quantitative and empirical analysis, be applicable at disaggregate - specifically regional and national - levels, be sensitive to the implications of risk and uncertainty, and take account of the long-term consequences of changes. The empirical investigations should also be made at the level of households, local communities and geographic regions, such as a river basin or island. The framework should aim at identifying critical interrelationships between population, resources and environment in regard to principal development issues, with the goal of presenting recommendations and guidelines for action by Governments and by the United Nations system. The group stressed that attempts at global modelling should be avoided. Instead of formulating a single aggregate mathematical model, different models should be used for different tasks such as selecting variables and analysing interrelationships. The conceptual framework should be based on a "systems approach" elucidating interrelationships between variables in the socio-economic and natural systems. The group emphasized the need for inclusion of parameters concerning management and technology.

6. The group concluded that the efforts which have been initiated to develop a conceptual framework should be intensified, and a suitable study commenced. The study should highlight techniques for optimizing the whole interactive system, as against particular sectors, and defining points of leverage where co-ordinated inter-sectoral action could induce positive accumulative development process. It should be submitted for consideration by the group of experts, suitably expanded by the inclusion of experts in relevant fields such as ecology and technology. A conceptual framework should then be prepared by the group, using the dynamic interaction method. Such a framework would also assist in identifying principal development issues for study, issues in regard to which critical interdependencies and important points of leverage could be expected to be found.

7. The group was of the firm opinion that studies of interrelationships geared to principal development issues should start concurrently, and not await the development of a conceptual framework. Facts should be gathered from various global, regional and national sources, an enlarged data base being of great importance. Earthwatch should contribute suitable data, and its assessment function would benefit from an enlarged data base. Critical interdependences and points of leverage could be identified through dynamic interaction on a high level between decision-makers and natural and social scientists. The group considered three issues - food systems, soil management and energy systems - as being of the highest importance in the field of development. They were interlinked, and the studies should in a more advanced stage focus on interrelationships between them. Other principal development issues where study of the interrelationships should be fruitful are: forestry, water management, health, industrialization, management of marine resources and communications systems.

III. UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM-WIDE WORK ON THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS

8. The group of experts recalled that General Assembly and Economic and Social Council decisions envisaged work on Interrelationships as a system-wide effort. The Secretary-General was requested by General Assembly resolution 3345 (XXIX) to take measures to provide facilities for co-ordinated research on the interrelationships. The group strongly supported the conclusion reached during the interagency consultations on the Interrelationships between population, resources, environment and development (Geneva, November 1979) that steps should be taken by the Secretary-General, inter alia through the establishment of a voluntary fund which should be drawn upon when necessary for the commissioning of specific activities to be undertaken by United Nations bodies or at regional and national levels, particularly in developing countries.

9. The work on the interrelationships should, in the view of the group, not be directly entrusted to any sectoral unit dealing with one of the areas involved. The only acceptable exception would have been UNEP, as environment is not a sector, and UNEP moreover is entrusted with the responsibility for system-wide co-ordination in the field of environment. The work should, however, according to the group, be performed under the direction of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, given his over-all mandate in the economic and social field, and should be closely linked to system-wide interagency programming and to the planning of integrated development. The capacity to perform the work should thus be provided in the office of the Director-General. Pending its provision there, UNEP should assist by providing the relevant capacity.

10. Ad hoc interagency consultations on the interrelationships have been held on a number of occasions. The group considered that an arrangement for co-ordination should be established in support of the interagency co-operation required by the work on the interrelationships.

11. General Assembly resolution 3345 (XXIX) also foresaw co-ordinated multidisciplinary research at the regional level, the reason being a strongly perceived need to disaggregate the global models. This argument is still valid. The group considered the ongoing trend towards a certain regionalization in the field of development to be a further reason for assigning responsibility for co-ordinating the regional studies to the regional commissions, a step which would also promote an integrated approach to development in the regions.

12. One of the subjects dealt with at the Stockholm Symposium was "Development of human resources". It was stressed at the Symposium that while the demographic variable is an important dimension, the issue of making people increasingly effective participants in, and beneficiaries of, the development process is central to effective policies resulting from studies of the interrelationships. The studies thus need to be wider in scope, stressing people both as human resources and as the

ultimate purpose of development. The group considered that this perspective rendered it necessary to change the name of this process in the work of the United Nations to read "Study on the Interrelationships between people, resources, environment and development".

13. The group stressed that perspectives and policies emerging from work on interrelationships should be taken into account in the process of the implementation of the new international development strategy, and also in the context of its review and appraisal.

IV. PROPOSALS FOR ACTION BY UNEP ON THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS

14. Taking account of the conclusions of the group of experts set out above, with which he is in agreement, the Executive Director recommends that:

(a) UNEP should continue its active participation in the efforts to be made to advance and synthesize knowledge on the interrelationships between people, resources, environment and development. In this connexion UNEP should be prepared to play a catalytic role in channelling these efforts into a well-functioning process, with the active participation of the organizations of the United Nations system, as well as of regional and national multidisciplinary and other institutions;

(b) UNEP should continue to contribute concretely to studies on the interrelationships. During the present phase, priority should be given to the development, in stages, of a conceptual framework for the studies, and to initiating studies of principal development issues. The Executive Director intends, in this connexion, to convene a second meeting of the group of experts, expanded to include high level experts in technology and ecology; at the end of 1980;

(c) Advanced knowledge on interrelationships should be disseminated to Governments and organizations of the United Nations system in the near future through the programme perspective document, and the relevant conclusions should assist in framing the objectives for the System-wide Medium-term Environment Programme. The perspective document should become a powerful vehicle for presenting the conceptual implications of advanced knowledge on the interrelationships, as well as the results of assessments through Earthwatch, thereby providing both a conceptual and a factual basis for management actions by Governments to protect and improve the environment;

(d) UNEP should aim at making use of new knowledge on the interrelationships to adapt and dynamize the tools and approaches developed for integrating the environmental dimension into development planning and implementation.

V. SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

15. The Governing Council is invited to note the information provided on the continuing work on interrelationships, and approve the Executive Director's recommendations in this respect. The Executive Director would intend to support work on interrelationships with adequate financial resources from the Fund in 1980 and 1981, within already approved budget lines.