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REVIEW OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND EXPERT MACHINERY DEALING WITH
THE FORMULATION, REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF PROGRAMMES AND BUDGETS

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Ahmed ABOUL GHEIT (Egypt)

1. At the 2324th plenary meeting, on 18 December 1974, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Fifth Committee, to establish a Working Group on United Nations Programme and Budget Machinery, 1/ which was to:

(a) Review the existing United Nations intergovernmental and expert machinery for the formulation, review, approval and evaluation of programmes and budgets, including the medium-term plan;

(b) Recommend means of improving the existing system, taking into account:

(i) The views expressed in the Fifth Committee during the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth sessions of the General Assembly;

(ii) The deliberations on this subject in the informal group set up by the Economic and Social Council at its fifty-seventh session to examine the machinery for programming and co-ordination, and the forthcoming intersessional meeting of the Policy and Programme Co-ordination Committee of the Council.

The General Assembly also decided:

(a) To request the Working Group to report to the Assembly at its thirtieth session and to submit its report for circulation among Member States in advance of the seventh special session, to be held in September 1975;

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 31 (A/9631), p. 137, item 74.

(b) To request the Secretary-General to provide assistance to the Working Group as required to facilitate its work, inter alia, by providing relevant documentation;

(c) To consider at its thirtieth session the report of the Working Group, together with the conclusions of the Economic and Social Council on the subject-matter mentioned above.

2. The Fifth Committee considered agenda item 97, entitled "Review of the intergovernmental and expert machinery dealing with the formulation, review and approval of programmes and budgets: report of the Working Group on United Nations Programme and Budget Machinery", at its 1713th to 1715th and 1719th meetings, from 14 to 16 and 22 October 1975.

3. At its 1713th meeting, on 14 October, the Fifth Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) The report of the Working Group on United Nations Programme and Budgetary Machinery (A/10117 and Corr.1);

(b) The report of the Joint Inspection Unit on medium-term planning in the United Nations system (A/9646);

(c) The comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (A/9646/Add.1) and the observations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/10081) on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit.

4. At that meeting, the Committee had before it a draft decision (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.1) submitted by the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Germany (Federal Republic of), Iran, Italy, Japan and Turkey, which read as follows:

"Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly that it:

I

"1. Takes note with appreciation of the medium-term plan for the period 1976 to 1979 (A/10006/Add.1) and the comments thereon by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at its fifteenth session (E/5632), and by the Economic and Social Council at its fifty-eighth session (A/10003);

"2. Decides to consider the medium-term plan and the biennial programme budget in alternate years, beginning in 1976 with a medium-term plan for the period 1978 to 1981;

"3. Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session, through the Economic and Social Council, a medium-term plan for the period 1978 to 1981, taking into account resolution 1945 (LVIII) of the Economic and Social Council, as well as the comments made during the consideration of the medium-term plan for the period 1976 to 1979 by the General Assembly at its thirtieth session;

II

"4. Notes with appreciation the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on medium-term planning in the United Nations system (A/9646), and the relevant comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (A/9646/Add.1);

"5. Endorses the observations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/10081) thereon, urges the Secretary-General and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination to take appropriate action, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session on the action taken;

III

"6. Takes note with appreciation of the report of the Working Group on United Nations Programme and Budget Machinery (A/10117);

"7. Refers to the Economic and Social Council the recommendations of the Working Group and recommends it to take the necessary measures to implement on an experimental basis in 1976 those recommendations to strengthen the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and improve its work, and report to the thirty-first session of the General Assembly on the rest of the recommendations to be considered along with the report of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations;

"8. Encourages Member States to be represented at an adequate level in order to raise the expertise of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination;

IV

"9. Refers the documents mentioned in paragraphs 1, 4, 5 and 6 above to the Ad Hoc Committee to be taken into account in its deliberations, together with the relevant comments made thereon in the General Assembly at its thirtieth session;

"10. Decides to include the item Review of the intergovernmental and expert machinery dealing with the formulation, review and approval of programmes and budgets in the provisional agenda of its thirty-first session."

5. Delegations wishing to comment on this agenda item did so in the general debate on item 96, entitled "Proposed programme budget for the biennium 1976-1977 and medium-term plan for the period 1976-1979", at the 1700th to 1712th meetings of the Committee. Most of the remarks made in the course of the general debate on this subject were directed to the report of the Working Group on United Nations Programme and Budget Machinery. In general terms, the comments and observations of delegations indicated an expression of appreciation for the work done by the Working Group as reflected in its report, which had dealt objectively with a number of

problems involved in the planning and programming processes. Many delegations expressed their support for its main recommendations (A/10117 and Corr.1, para. 77).

6. It was pointed out by a number of delegations that the issues dealt with by the Working Group in its report concerned the structure of the United Nations system, a subject which was being considered by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System, established by the General Assembly at its seventh special session. ^{2/} It was generally agreed that it would be premature for the Fifth Committee to adopt decisions relating to the structure of the United Nations system, and that the report of the Working Group should, in the first instance, be referred to the Ad Hoc Committee for its consideration within the framework of the proposed restructuring of the system. On the other hand, it was also agreed that the Fifth Committee should consider for immediate adoption any procedural and uncontroversial measures recommended by the Working Group. In this latter regard, there was general agreement in the Fifth Committee that the first recommendation of the Working Group, which called for the medium-term plan and the biennial programme budget to be considered by intergovernmental organs in alternate years, be recommended to the General Assembly for immediate adoption.

7. Wide support was also given to the recommendations of the Working Group dealing with the strengthening of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) in order for it adequately to perform its function as the main subsidiary organ of both the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly responsible for planning, programming and co-ordination. The view was expressed that, in addition to modifying its terms of reference and extending the length of its meetings, every effort should be made to raise the level of its expertise, so that its role in relation to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly would be the same as that of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the Assembly. In this latter respect, the view was expressed that, only as a special case, the United Nations might bear the travel and per diem costs of the intergovernmental experts as it does in the case of the members of the Advisory Committee.

8. Some delegations fully endorsed the idea that a closer working relationship between CPC and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the functions of which were complementary, should be established. The view was also expressed that, although the Advisory Committee should continue to remain an effective expert body, its size might have to be increased, the equitable geographical distribution of its membership ensured and the principle of rotation applied thereto.

9. Appreciation was also expressed for the in-depth analysis given to the subject of medium-term planning in the United Nations system by the Joint Inspection Unit in its report (A/9646), and for the comments thereon by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/10081) and ACC (A/9646/Add.1). It was suggested by one delegation that ACC might report on the implementation of the

^{2/} General Assembly resolution 3362 (S-VII), sect. VII.

recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session. Another delegation reiterated its long-standing position on the need to strengthen ACC in its important central role in the United Nations system of agencies, and endorsed the proposal of the Group of Experts on the Structure of the United Nations System ^{3/} on the creation of an Advisory Committee on Economic Co-operation and Development as a high-level consultative group to, or subcommittee of, ACC. The view was also expressed that the role of the regional commissions should be strengthened in order to increase co-ordination in the field and thus help to improve the entire system of planning, programming and budgeting.

10. All other comments and observations made by delegations on this agenda item in the course of the general debate on agenda item 96 are reflected in the summary records of the 1700th to 1712th meetings of the Committee (A/C.5/SR.1700-1712).

11. At the 1713th meeting, the Chairman of the Working Group on United Nations Programme and Budget Machinery introduced the report of the Working Group. In so doing, he stated, *inter alia*, that the Working Group, in general, had tried to define more clearly the responsibilities of the various intergovernmental organs involved and of the Secretariat, so as to ensure that the necessary decisions at the various levels were taken at the proper time and in the right order; it had called for a review of the effectiveness of programmes with a view to determining priorities; and it had recommended the preservation of whatever worked well in the existing system. The Working Group had concluded that there were too many, rather than too few, organs involved in the formulation, review and approval of programmes and budgets, and that the problem resided not so much in the inadequacy of their terms of reference as in the irrationality of schedules and a certain failure to relate means to tasks. The Chairman outlined the recommendations on which members of the Working Group were able to agree, and noted that the Group was not able to reach a consensus on the question of the payment of travel costs and subsistence allowances for members of CPC or on the role and future of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

12. The representative of the Federal Republic of Germany then introduced, on behalf of the sponsors, draft decision A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.1 (see para. 4 above) and announced that the delegation of Brazil had decided to become a co-sponsor. He informed the Committee also that it had subsequently been decided to change the format of the draft decision to that of a draft resolution. Referring to section II of the draft resolution, he explained that the sponsors had considered it advisable to endorse, for the moment, only the observations of the Advisory Committee, due account having been taken of the reservations expressed by some delegations on the methodology aspect of the medium-term plan. It was regretted that the methodology aspects of the plan and the report of the Advisory Committee could not be discussed in greater detail. With reference to paragraph 7 of the draft resolution, he explained that the object was to set in motion the machinery for strengthening CPC in time for it to start examining the new medium-term plan in 1976; the larger,

^{3/} United Nations publication, Sales No. E.75.II. A.7, annex III, sect. II, para. 3.8.

structural changes would have to await the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System.

13. At the 1714th meeting, on 15 October, the representative of Belgium suggested that, in order to make the provisions of the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.1) more explicit, it might be appropriate to include in paragraph 6 a reference to the recommendations of the Working Group, particularly recommendations 1, 2 and 3, and to replace the words "Takes note" by "Welcomes". In his opinion, it would also be advisable to clarify the intent in paragraph 7 by adding that the General Assembly wished the Economic and Social Council to implement those recommendations during its organizational session in January 1976.

14. At the same meeting, the representative of Algeria proposed an amendment (A/C.5/L.1228) to the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.1) whereby the following would be incorporated as new paragraph 8:

"8. Requests the Ad Hoc Committee to examine the role of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions within the context of possible modifications in the structure and functioning of the United Nations, including inter alia the mandate and composition of the Advisory Committee".

Paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 in document A/C.5/L.1227/Rev. 1 would be renumbered accordingly.

15. At the same meeting, it was suggested by the Controller that the sponsors might wish to reconsider paragraph 3 of the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.1) and to replace 1978-1981 by 1977-1981 as the period for the medium-term plan, in order to allow the Secretariat to reflect in the plan the decisions taken at the seventh special session and the current session of the General Assembly.

16. The representative of the Federal Republic of Germany, at the 1715th meeting, on 16 October, addressing himself to the amendments suggested by Belgium with reference to paragraph 7 of the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.1), stated that the sponsors had agreed to replace the words "it to" in the second line by the words "that at its next organizational meeting it should". The sponsors could not accept the suggestion of Belgium concerning paragraph 6, because they believed that the singling out of three recommendations would not be acceptable to all delegations. For the same reason, the sponsors could not accept the proposal of Algeria (A/C.5/L.1228), which was somewhat controversial. With reference to the suggestion of the Controller regarding paragraph 3 of the draft resolution, although the reasons advanced by him were sound, the sponsors preferred to retain the idea of a four-year plan; they had decided instead to insert after the words "for the period 1978 to 1981" the words "including a revision for 1977," as a transitional measure.

17. At the same meeting, the representative of Belgium orally proposed the following amendment to replace paragraph 6 of the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.1):

"Welcomes the report and recommendations of the Working Group on United Nations Programme and Budget Machinery (A/10117)."

/...

18. At the 1719th meeting, on 22 October, the representative of the Federal Republic of Germany introduced a further revision of the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.2), which was sponsored by Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Germany (Federal Republic of), Iran, Italy, Japan and Turkey. Aside from a few editorial changes, the revised version differed from the original text (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.1) in the following respects:

(a) In the third line of paragraph 3, the words "including a revision for 1977" were inserted after "1978 to 1981";

(b) In the second line of paragraph 7, the words "it to" were deleted and the words "that at its next organizational meeting it" were substituted;

(c) A new paragraph 9 was inserted as follows:

"Requests the Ad Hoc Committee to examine the role of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions within the context of possible modifications in the structure and functions of the United Nations, inter alia, the mandate and composition of the Advisory Committee;"

(d) Paragraphs 9 and 10 were renumbered 10 and 11.

19. The representative of the Federal Republic of Germany, speaking on behalf of the sponsors of the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.2) stated that, after consultations with a number of interested delegations, they had decided to accept the Algerian amendment (A/C.5/L.1228). The sponsors believed that the new draft (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.2) embodied a "middle-of-the-road" approach, which attempted to reflect the interests of all who had participated in the consultations.

20. The representative of France explained that his delegation was unable to co-sponsor the draft resolution in its revised form. It was the opinion of his delegation that the incorporation of the Algerian amendment, as a new paragraph 9, presented the short-coming of singling out the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions as deserving special treatment, and did not reflect faithfully the comments in paragraphs 61-64 of the report of the Working Group (A/10117 and Corr.1) or those in paragraph 130 (b) of the report of the Group of Experts on the Structure of the United Nations System. ^{4/} His delegation, however, would vote for the draft resolution on the understanding that it was interpreting paragraph 9 as intended to permit, in a general way, a review of the role and functioning of the Advisory Committee. Both of the above-mentioned reports had reflected a favourable opinion concerning the existing terms of reference and membership of the Advisory Committee. His delegation saw no reason for a change and was confident the Advisory Committee would retain its present effectiveness and balance.

^{4/} United Nations publication, Sales No. E.75.II A.7.

21. The draft resolution, as revised (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.2), was adopted by the Fifth Committee, without objection, at the 1719th meeting (see para. 29 below).

22. In the course of explaining their votes, the representatives of Brazil, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Iran, Poland, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America stated that they endorsed the views reflected in paragraph 63 of the report of the Working Group (A/10117 and Corr.1) and that they had supported the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.2) adopted by the Committee on the understanding that paragraph 9 of that resolution did not imply criticism of the present role and function of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, and did not imply that its mandate was inadequate or that any changes were advisable.

23. The representative of Greece stated that, although his delegation was broadly in agreement with the revised draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1127/Rev.2) it could not agree with the fact that paragraph 7 left it to the Economic and Social Council to interpret the artificial and vague distinction which it introduced between logically interrelated recommendations of the Working Group. His delegation would also have preferred to put more emphasis upon the need for co-ordination between the Economic and Social Council and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System in that paragraph, which also seemed to ignore that it would take more than a year to implement all the recommendations of the Working Group for strengthening CPC. The need to examine the possibility of granting to members of CPC travel expenses and per diem might also have been covered. He reiterated the suggestion his delegation made during the discussion of the draft resolution that the report of the Working Group (A/10017 and Corr.1) should also have been mentioned in paragraph 1.

24. The representative of the Federal Republic of Germany stated that his delegation did not consider that the phrase "including a revision for 1977 ..." in paragraph 3 of the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.2) implied an extension of the present practice of having a four-year plan. There was no need for a new medium-term plan to serve as the basis for possible revised budgetary estimates. Moreover, his delegation did not interpret paragraph 9 as a criticism of the Advisory Committee, but could not disregard the desire of some delegations to examine its present structure, function and machinery.

25. The representative of Pakistan stated that, although he had gone along with the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.2), he seriously doubted whether the measures recommended in paragraphs 7 and 8 would be sufficient to strengthen and revitalize CPC.

26. The representative of Belgium stated that his delegation would have appreciated a warmer welcome for the recommendations of the Working Group (A/10017 and Corr.1), and that it interpreted paragraph 3 of the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.2) to mean that CPC would, in 1976, undertake to revise the medium-term plan for 1977-1981.

27. The representative of Kenya agreed with Belgium regarding the response of the Committee to the report of the Working Group, and emphasized the importance of paragraph 7 of the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.1227/Rev.2).

28. The representative of the Netherlands hoped that the Committee would take a broader approach to the item under discussion in the following year.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE

29. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Review of the intergovernmental and expert machinery dealing with
the formulation, review and approval of programmes and budgets

The General Assembly

I

1. Takes note with appreciation of the medium-term plan for the period 1976 to 1979 5/ and the comments thereon by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at its fifteenth session 6/ and by the Economic and Social Council at its fifty-eighth session; 7/

2. Decides to consider the medium-term plan and the biennial programme budget in alternate years, beginning in 1976 with a medium-term plan for the period 1978 to 1981;

3. Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session, through the Economic and Social Council, a medium-term plan for the period 1978 to 1981, including a revision for 1977, taking into account Economic and Social Council resolution 1945 (LVIII) of 7 May 1975 as well as the comments made during the consideration of the medium-term plan for the period 1976 to 1979 by the Assembly at its thirtieth session;

II

1. Notes with appreciation the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on medium-term planning in the United Nations system, 8/ and the relevant comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination; 9/

5/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirtieth Session, Supplement No. 6 A (A/10006/Add.1).

6/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 7 (E/5632).

7/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirtieth Session, Supplement No. 3 (A/10003).

8/ A/9646.

9/ A/9646/Add.1.

2. Endorses the observations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions thereon, 10/ urges the Secretary-General and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination to take appropriate action and requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session on the action taken;

III

1. Takes note with appreciation of the report of the Working Group on United Nations Programme and Budget Machinery; 11/

2. Refers to the Economic and Social Council the recommendations of the Working Group and recommends that, at its next organizational meeting the Council should take the necessary measures to implement on an experimental basis in 1976 the recommendations for strengthening the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and improving its work, and report to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session on the rest of the recommendations to be considered along with the report of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System;

3. Encourages Member States to be represented in the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at an adequate level in order to raise the expertise of that Committee;

4. Requests the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System to examine the role of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions within the context of possible modifications in the structure and functioning of the United Nations, including inter alia the mandate and composition of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions;

IV

1. Refers the documents mentioned in section I, paragraph 1, section II, paragraphs 1 and 2, and section III, paragraph I, above to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System to be taken into account in its deliberations, together with the relevant comments made thereon in the General Assembly at its thirtieth session;

2. Decides to include in the provisional agenda of its thirty-first session the item entitled "Review of the intergovernmental and expert machinery dealing with the formulation, review and approval of programmes and budgets".

10/ A/10081.

11/ A/10117 and Corr.1.