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PROGRAMME PLANNING

Application of evaluation findings in programme design,
delivery and policy directives

Report of the Secretary-General

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* A/43/50.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is the first of its kind to be prepared on a biennial basis in accordance with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (hereinafter referred to as the PPBME Rules). Regulations 7.3 and 7.4 require the conduct of in-depth and self-evaluation studies and the submission of a brief report to the General Assembly summarizing the conclusions of the Secretary-General on the application of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives at the same time as the Assembly considers the text of the medium-term plan (General Assembly resolutions 37/234 of 21 December 1982, 38/227 A and B of 20 December 1983 and 42/215 of 21 December 1987). Pursuant to the decision of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination taken at its twenty-seventh session, 1/ the present report on the application of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives is being submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-third session through the Committee at its twenty-eighth session.

2. The application of evaluation findings will be discussed in the context of seven triennial reviews undertaken by the Central Evaluation Unit (see para. 38) and of the self-evaluation exercises currently being conducted at the United Nations and the establishment of the self-evaluation system will also be outlined.

3. Many of the issues raised here have been discussed routinely over the years by Member States and by the Secretary-General. 2/ The present report draws attention to the problems encountered in the evaluation system as a whole and stresses the need for a better understanding of the whole programme planning process on the part of all concerned and the importance of applying evaluation findings in order to strengthen that process. The attention of Member States is drawn to the conclusions and recommendations made in section IV, which they may wish to consider and endorse.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF AN EVALUATION SYSTEM

4. Evaluation practice, to be effective and meaningful, must be guided by criteria that meet certain standards of accuracy, objectivity and practicality. A knowledge of fundamentals is as necessary for the conduct of evaluation as it is for conducting research and analysis, collecting data, undertaking surveys, providing advisory services and so on. An evaluation system, therefore, requires not merely its introduction, but also its conduct, its continued operation, including improvements and refinement, and the trained personnel necessary for its effective implementation.

5. The Joint Inspection Unit has submitted three reports to the General Assembly on evaluation activities in the United Nations and has drawn attention to the importance of strengthening its evaluation capacity, including the establishment of a self-evaluation system and the conduct of training for programme managers to integrate evaluation fully into the whole programme planning process; it has also

drawn attention to the need for reporting to intergovernmental bodies on programme performance as essential to enhancing the decision-making process; the Secretary-General has presented his comments on those reports and has submitted information to the General Assembly over the years on the evaluation capacity of the United Nations. 3/

6. The establishment in March 1985 of the Central Evaluation Unit signalled the beginning of a new stage in the evaluation activities of the United Nations. The creation of a centralized mechanism to help develop and implement a United Nations evaluation system, formulate overall evaluation policies and procedures for all programme sectors, conduct in-depth evaluation studies, establish guidelines for self-evaluation, including training, and assist the Programme Planning and Budgeting Board to analyse evaluation findings, is intended to make it possible to approach evaluation in a more consistent manner and from a more co-ordinated perspective, in accordance with standardized procedures spelled out in the Evaluation Manual of the United Nations.

7. Previously, evaluation activities were handled by an Evaluation Unit in the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, covering economic and social sectors, and a Programme Analysis and Evaluation Unit in the Department of Administration and Management, covering activities in the political, legal, humanitarian, public information and common services sectors. The establishment of a single Central Evaluation Unit, within the Office for Programme Planning and Co-ordination of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, therefore set the stage for a more focused approach to evaluation in general. The subsequent consolidation in 1987 of the programme planning functions of that Office with the functions of the Office of Financial Services, renamed the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Finance, in the Department of Administration and Management following the recommendations of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, 4/ has further enhanced efforts being made to strengthen the integration of evaluation into the programme planning, budgeting and monitoring process.

8. It should be noted at this juncture that, in addition to the Central Evaluation Unit, the United Nations units and entities having an evaluation capacity under regular budget staff resources for the period 1986-1987 are, as stated in the Secretary-General's report on strengthening the capacity of the United Nations evaluation units and systems (A/41/670): the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (DTCO), on an ad hoc basis (sect. 7 of the programme budget), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (sect. 11), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (sect. 12), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (sect. 13), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (sect. 14), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (sect. 15), the International Trade Centre (ITC) (sect. 16), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) (sect. 19) and the Department of Public Information (sect. 27). Evaluation of operational activities under section 1 of the programme budget (World Food Programme (WFP)), section 18 (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)) and section 21 (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees (UNHCR)) relates mainly to projects and are funded solely from extrabudgetary sources. Similarly, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (sect. 2A) has also recently established its own evaluation system. Most of those entities have issued formal guidelines or informal instructions for the conduct of evaluation exercises, and although the initiatives taken have been somewhat hampered by limited resources, some progress has been made to institutionalize evaluation. The formal establishment of the self-evaluation system within the United Nations as a whole may provide a further impetus for enhancing the efforts of those entities.

A. In-depth evaluations and triennial reviews

9. Unlike self-evaluation, which focuses on the subprogramme level (as defined in the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989), in-depth evaluations undertaken are usually conducted at the major programme level by a unit specifically responsible for evaluation and as such external to the substantive unit whose programme is being examined. In-depth evaluations undertaken by the Central Evaluation Unit at the request of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination cover programmes at Headquarters, the regional commissions and sectoral bodies. Such in-depth evaluations differ from evaluations undertaken by other entities such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which carry out evaluations of a cluster of projects within their own field of competence.

10. The Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, at its twenty-sixth session in 1986, noted that the breadth of some programmes was such that an in-depth evaluation of an entire programme was not always feasible. In such cases, the Committee might decide to have an evaluation focus on a limited number of subprogrammes; the evaluation would, nevertheless, contain an overall assessment of programme effectiveness. 5/ Pursuant to this, progress reports are prepared by the Central Evaluation Unit two years before review of the in-depth evaluations by the Committee in order to propose a study design and to obtain substantive feedback from the Committee at an early stage. At its twenty-seventh session, the Committee recommended that such progress reports, in addition to eliciting guidance from the Committee on the objectives, scope, focus and methodology, should also provide such preliminary findings as could be derived from information already available. 6/

11. In accordance with a decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at its twenty-second session, the Central Evaluation Unit also undertakes triennial reviews of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee on the basis of in-depth evaluations conducted three years earlier. 7/

12. The developments outlined above have evolved over a 10-year period to meet the concerns of the Committee in terms of having relevant and timely information for its consideration of programme design and delivery; to provide evaluators with a time-frame for the planning and conduct of an evaluation, including arrangements for the participation of programme managers in the exercise; and to provide programme managers with time to implement the Committee's recommendations on the evaluation.

13. The schedule of progress reports, in-depth evaluations and triennial reviews, as recommended by the Committee, for which the Central Evaluation Unit is currently responsible is as follows:

<u>Programme</u>	<u>Progress report</u>	<u>In-depth evaluation</u>	<u>Triennial review/ follow-up</u>
Department of Public Information		1983	1986/1988
Drug control		1985	1988
Population		1986	1989
Electronic data-processing and information systems		1987	1990
Development issues and policies	1987	1988	1991
Human rights	1987	1989	1992
Human settlements	1988	1990	1993
Political and Security Council affairs	1989	1991	1994
Science and technology	1990	1992	1995
To be decided (by 1989)	1991	1993	1996
Social development	1992	1994	1997

B. Self-evaluation

14. While self-evaluation activities of one kind or another have been undertaken over the years, generally on an ad hoc basis, the formal establishment in October 1986 of the self-evaluation system put into place a mechanism that requires all programme managers themselves to ensure the systematic integration of evaluation throughout the programme planning process.

15. The self-evaluation system makes provision for building the evaluation function at every major stage of an activity. At the stage of preparation of the medium-term plan, an evaluation plan is required; at the stage of preparing the biennial programme budgets, evaluation requirements, including the identification of end-users and of the means of reaching them, expected outputs and their uses and indicators, are to be incorporated into the programme budget documentation. During implementation, continuing evaluation is required for the purpose of mid-course corrective adjustments. Finally, after completion of the activity, terminal and ex post facto evaluations are required. The system also makes provision for the

application of evaluation findings as part of routine management and in the preparation of the programme budget and the medium-term plan and revisions thereto (A/41/409, annex, para. 9).

16. It should be noted here that, even before the formal establishment of the self-evaluation system, instructions issued in 1982 for the preparation of the current medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989 and instructions issued in 1982, 1984 and 1986 for the preparation of programme budgets for the bienniums 1984-1985, 1986-1987 and 1988-1989 respectively have included references to and forms for completion by programme managers on aspects of evaluation. However, without assistance, guidance or training on evaluation techniques and procedures, it was difficult for programme managers to address the question of self-evaluation adequately or to integrate evaluation into the programme planning process with any success.

17. The findings of the self-evaluation may also serve as "building blocks" for in-depth evaluations. For instance, if programme managers periodically conduct surveys of major publications and activities, a pattern can be seen in terms of assessment by end-users of their quality, usefulness and utilization, thereby providing more reliable data than those gathered from a discrete survey undertaken during the conduct of an in-depth evaluation, for which there is often a low response rate.

18. With the publication of the Evaluation Manual of the United Nations in October 1986, 8/ the Secretary-General announced the formal establishment of the self-evaluation system throughout the United Nations, requiring programme managers themselves (defined here as those responsible for directing and/or implementing the programmed activities) to make a critical analysis of their work by measuring accomplishments against stated objectives and to analyse whether and why the results were successful or not. Self-evaluation, focusing on the subprogramme level, would be undertaken by programme managers primarily for their own use (that is, to improve implementation), but relevant findings, particularly those related to programme design, delivery and policy directives, would be synthesized and transmitted to the General Assembly through the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination every two years to assist Member States in their deliberations on the programme budgets, the medium-term plan and revisions thereto, and other relevant reports dealing with United Nations activities.

19. The Secretary-General also decided that for the remaining three years of the current medium-term plan, that is for 1987 to 1989 inclusive, 9/ the self-evaluation exercise would be carried out on a selective basis to enable programme managers, evaluators and planners to begin the establishment of self-evaluation as a component of the programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation cycle. At the same time an assessment would also be made of the effectiveness of the self-evaluation system in order to improve its functioning (see paras. 24-37).

20. It was agreed that out of a total of 464 subprogrammes within the 31 major programmes as defined in the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989, 113 subprogrammes would be evaluated by programme managers over a three-year period. The Unit has been informed that self-evaluation of 34 subprogrammes implemented at the regional level will be undertaken during 1988 and 1989. As at 31 January 1988, a total of 54 self-evaluation reports had been received by the Central Evaluation Unit. Of these, ESCAP submitted reports on 15 subprogrammes (see para. 25), ECLAC submitted reports on 2 subprogrammes and ESCWA also submitted reports on 2 subprogrammes. It should be mentioned here that while UNCTAD was requested to submit reports on 7 subprogrammes, it had undertaken self-evaluation of 15 subprogrammes. 10/

21. In an effort to assist staff in the establishment of the self-evaluation system and the actual conduct of the self-evaluation exercise, the Central Evaluation Unit held over 30 briefing sessions. Follow-up briefings for further clarification were conducted for those offices which requested additional assistance. Wherever possible, representatives from field offices visiting Headquarters were also briefed. In all, approximately 150 staff members were briefed on the self-evaluation exercise over a seven-month period.

22. The Central Evaluation Unit also organized two training seminars on self-evaluation in September and October 1987 at Headquarters, which discussed, inter alia, the general concepts of evaluation, evaluation as an integral part of the programme planning, budgeting and monitoring cycle, procedures to be followed in conducting the self-evaluation exercise, the application of self-evaluation findings at the level of implementation, the formulation of programme budgets and of the medium-term plan. When resources permit, similar seminars will be conducted away from Headquarters.

23. In order to disseminate information on evaluation in general and on the self-evaluation exercise in particular, and in view of the limited resources available for briefing and training away from Headquarters, it was decided to launch a United Nations Evaluation Newsletter. The first issue of the Newsletter was published and distributed in November 1987. It is envisaged that further issues will discuss general problems encountered in the self-evaluation exercise and ways to solve them; clarification of terminology; formulation of objectives; establishment of indicators; exchange of experience and other matters.

General assessment of the self-evaluation system

24. The establishment of the self-evaluation system has highlighted the importance of accountability and the need for programme managers to measure their accomplishments systematically against objectives. It has also provided programme managers, of both substantive and support services, with the means not only to be critical of the effectiveness of their own work, but also to be critical of the mechanisms, procedures and guidelines that are available to them for implementing their activities and of the self-evaluation system itself. Appropriate assessments and criticisms deriving from this process should contribute to improving the overall programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation process.

25. The self-evaluation exercise was generally better conducted, as expected, in areas where there was an institutionalized mechanism for evaluation that was able to provide guidance and feedback (see para. 8) and where there was an active interest and involvement of programme managers at the senior level. ESCAP's Operations Evaluation Unit, for example, not only provided guidance to programme managers, but also summarized the main findings and gave a brief assessment of each self-evaluation report. The secretariat of UNCTAD not only makes summary findings available to staff, but such findings are also submitted to the Trade and Development Board for its review, since the establishment of its own management-oriented evaluation was intended to "run parallel to and complement any policy-oriented evaluation undertaken by the competent UNCTAD intergovernmental bodies". 11/

26. In some cases, programme managers responsible for technical co-operation, data collection, research and analysis activities were able to understand evaluation procedures (though not necessarily apply them) more easily than those from, for instance, the support services, possibly because they had gained some experience from assessing certain aspects of their work programme at the request of their governing bodies. Moreover, for technical co-operation projects, programme managers have been following guidelines provided by UNDP. It should be noted here that support services have not been required to conduct self-evaluation activities other than at Headquarters.

27. The focus of the self-evaluation exercise carried out by the programme managers was mainly on process evaluation, which deals with the conduct of a programme, including formulation, implementation and follow-up; impact evaluation, which evaluates the outcome of a programme, did not receive adequate attention. This was to be expected, bearing in mind the difficulties in assessing impact in any conclusive manner without adequate information on external factors that normally lie beyond the control of the programme manager and sometimes even of end-users. Although the Manual states that self-evaluation at the subprogramme level can usefully assess impact in terms of the extent to which the outputs of the subprogramme are actually used by their intended users, the general question of impact evaluation, for theoretical and practical reasons, has been found to be extremely complex and will require further study and review.

28. It was very clear from the outset that most programme managers viewed the self-evaluation exercise, as they did the initiation of the monitoring exercise some years ago, as an additional layer of administrative work that they could well do without. They felt that the conduct of evaluation activities used up valuable time and resources that could, in their view, be better utilized for the "real" work for which they were responsible. Moreover, many programme managers considered the monitoring exercise an adequate mechanism for overseeing the implementation of their activities and evaluation something of a duplication. The confusion between monitoring and evaluation functions was thus apparent, as was unfamiliarity with the PPBME Rules.

29. Although the Manual was regarded as a useful tool for understanding basic concepts and theory, and for reference, it was felt that practical application of the procedures was difficult unless some training was provided. In this connection, training for the conduct of the self-evaluation exercise was not

adequate. The two training seminars of three half days each, while providing some preliminary basic instruction and guidance, were insufficient. In response to a questionnaire sent by the Central Evaluation Unit, participants indicated that they benefited in general terms, but nearly all of them also indicated that more training was essential, particularly in the application of evaluation tools and techniques, and that it should be more sector-oriented.

30. In many cases, record-keeping and adequate systems for data collection, storage and retrieval for evaluation purposes were either non-existent or not well-established. The collection of information from a user's perspective for evaluation purposes was generally regarded as too time-consuming. The formulation of questionnaires or readership surveys to solicit views on the quality of outputs, for instance, was considered difficult and, in terms of the expected number of replies, it was felt that the response rate was not commensurate with the time and energy devoted to formulating useful questionnaires.

31. Some programme managers were of the view that the effectiveness of their work could not always be determined by quantitative measurements (such as those that indicated, for example, the number of publications sold, contracts issued, legal opinions given, the number of personnel trained, etc.). It was felt that such measurements reflected superficial dimensions of their work and did not accurately reveal the relevance or effectiveness of a programme, and that the establishment of suitable indicators (or "success criteria") for the quantification of qualitative change should be given greater importance than is at present accorded in the current evaluation exercise. At the same time, it was noted that if objectives were well formulated, indicators would be more easily recognizable.

32. It was not surprising, given the inexperience in following evaluation procedures and the fact that this was the first time the exercise was being attempted by most programme managers, that the self-evaluation reports varied greatly in approach, content and structure. The Manual gives instructions on the preparation of reports and although programme managers were requested also to present their findings in terms of implications for action to be taken at the levels of implementation, of the programme budget and of the medium-term plan, many of the reports did not adhere to such guidelines.

33. Some reports were very detailed, giving full descriptions of the activities falling within the purview of programme managers. Some reports discussed the role of Governments extensively with little focus on the question of evaluating the role of the secretariat in implementing the activities; some reports read more like progress reports with little reference to evaluation considerations; some reports were rather self-congratulatory; some used the opportunity to stress their lack of resources. Some addressed particular problems and were able to propose ways to alleviate them; some were able to link their findings to the preparation of future programme budgets and to the formulation of the next medium-term plan.

34. Given the varied nature and quality of the reports, it is apparent that the assessment of self-evaluation findings becomes an issue in itself. One of the most interesting findings of the self-evaluation exercise was that many programme managers concluded that the current medium-term plan did not always accurately

reflect the true nature of their activities, that stronger efforts needed to be made, when preparing the next medium-term plan, to ensure that problems were more clearly identified and linked not only to the strategies envisaged for solving them, but also to the objectives, which should also be formulated with greater clarity and precision. In this connection, programme managers also recognized that the accurate translation of substantive issues and policy directives into viable programmes required a better understanding of the basic principles and procedures of programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation.

35. On the question of setting priorities, most programme managers indicated that this was not their responsibility, at least at the subprogramme level, but the responsibility of intergovernmental bodies. However, even at the implementation level, few addressed the question of setting priorities in the future conduct of their activities.

36. There was a willingness on the part of programme managers to share experiences and lessons learned, but currently there is no systematized mechanism for the exchange of experience in the conduct of self-evaluation, except in a few cases, such as ESCAP, which will be circulating the self-evaluation reports among programme managers responsible for different areas of work, and UNCTAD, whose findings are submitted to the Trade and Development Board (see para. 25); a synthesis of project evaluation findings is presented annually to senior staff of ITC for their review; in UNEP, project findings are disseminated in a bimonthly "Report to Governments" and follow-up of previous evaluations is also considered on a regular basis.

37. The establishment of a system does not, of course, automatically mean that it is being or could be effectively implemented. Unless policy directives are clear and well understood, staff well trained and able to apply evaluation methodology, available tools continuously refined and updated, follow-up activities carried out and findings applied, the system would merely exist in name and not in practice.

III. APPLICATION OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

38. As regards the in-depth evaluations, the application of findings can be readily observed, particularly since 1985, when the first triennial review of in-depth evaluations was prepared in response to a decision by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination to review the implementation of its recommendations. Specific details on the application of findings can be found in the triennial reviews of the following programmes:

- (a) Transnational corporations (E/AC.51/1985/5);
- (b) Mineral resources (E/AC.51/1985/9 and Add.1);
- (c) Manufactures (E/AC.51/1985/10);
- (d) Department of Public Information (E/AC.51/1986/10);

(e) UNDP-financed technical co-operation activities of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) in the field of manufactures (E/AC.51/1987/3);

(f) Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (E/AC.51/1987/7);

(g) Drug control (E/AC.51/1988/5).

39. For the purposes of this report, however, the application of findings will only refer to those findings that have been or should be applied in general to programme design, programme delivery and policy directives. It should also be borne in mind that in terms of programme design, a series of external factors, including new regulations on programme planning and new or reoriented medium-term plan objectives of the Secretariat have also influenced the application of those evaluation findings.

A. Programme design

1. In-depth evaluations and triennial reviews

40. Programme design for regular budget activities and extrabudgetary substantive activities is expressed broadly in terms of the medium-term plan, which is the principal policy directive of the United Nations, currently covering a six-year period, 1984-1989, and extended by the General Assembly at its forty-second session to include 1990 and 1991 (resolution 42/215). The medium-term plan in turn provides the framework for the formulation of the biennial programme budgets.

41. It was clear that efforts had been made to apply the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination emanating from in-depth evaluation studies, but the degree of implementation has varied. Where recommendations of the Committee were seen as reinforcing what were already perceived as viable means for improving the work programmes, efforts were intensified (see E/AC.51/1985/5, para. 67; and E/AC.51/1985/9 and Add.1, para. 90). The in-depth evaluations of the programmes on drug control, mineral resources and transnational corporations, for example, had provided the impetus for correcting a number of shortcomings in the programme design.

42. Where recommendations referred to problems concerning mandates and terms of reference, the available information suggests that difficulties were encountered in addressing them. Questions concerning the respective responsibilities of Headquarters and the regional commissions (see E/AC.51/1985/5, paras. 65-66) and the terms of reference for the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (E/AC.51/1987/7, paras. 29-32) were examples of such difficulties.

43. As the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination has noted, there was a tendency for programme managers to accord a different priority to implementing mandates, decisions and recommendations of the substantive (technical) intergovernmental bodies than to improving programming and planning techniques or co-ordination mechanisms, as recommended by the programming body, the Committee for

Programme and Co-ordination, resulting in the perpetuation of difficulties encountered in programme design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation. In this connection, the Committee may recall that, in its consideration of the triennial review of the programme on transnational corporations, it had reiterated its position expressed during its consideration of the triennial review on the manufactures programme, that there should be no hierarchy of mandates and that its recommendations, as approved by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, should be given equal weight with those of other intergovernmental bodies. 12/

44. Governing bodies do not, however, routinely consider as part of their agenda reports on in-depth evaluations, triennial reviews or recommendations thereof of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, nor are the latter's recommendations and decisions, as endorsed by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, cited as part of the legislative authority given in the medium-term plan and programme budgets as a clear reminder of the need to respond to its concerns throughout the given period of activity. A citation of such Council and Assembly resolutions would also provide additional guidelines when assessments of the implementation or the quality and usefulness of an activity are being prepared.

45. Following the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolution 37/234 on programme planning (the PPBME Rules), governing bodies do now receive, as a matter of course, draft proposals for programme budgets and the medium-term plan for review prior to approval by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and adoption by the General Assembly. However, the time and emphasis given to the formulation of programmes have not been commensurate with the importance assigned by the Committee or by the General Assembly. In addition, because of the scheduling of meetings and the timing of submission by the Secretariat of programme proposals, it has been difficult to synchronize meetings of intergovernmental bodies to review programme proposals before final adoption. Many entities, however, do now report on progress of work to their governing bodies according to the format of the medium-term plan and programme budget so that the status of implementation can be assessed more easily by those bodies.

46. Findings from the in-depth evaluations of the above-mentioned programmes have also been applied to the conduct of evaluation itself. For instance, it was found that evaluation reports should be structured around specific themes, such as substantive issues, methodological considerations, regional and sectoral concerns and co-ordination, so as to facilitate the Committee's discussions. However, poor design of the programmes, absence of baseline data, of clearly identified targets and of time-frames have often hampered the conduct of evaluation and triennial reviews.

47. While evaluation is not the primary reason or justification for good programme design, it is useful, at the design stage, to set the foundation for facilitating the process of finding out how successful the programme is at achieving its objectives and whether it remains relevant. This approach further reinforces the need to strengthen the whole programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation process.

2. Self-evaluation

48. As mentioned above, an interesting finding from the self-evaluation exercise was the realization of many programme managers that programme design would need greater attention in the future formulation of the medium-term plan. Because the self-evaluation exercises were undertaken at the subprogramme level in order to assess how well the subprogrammes were meeting their objectives, the statement of objectives naturally came under immediate scrutiny and the frequent imprecision and inconsistency in the formulation of objectives were readily apparent. For example, objectives (ends) were frequently stated in terms of activities (means). Programme managers observed that often the secretariat objective statement for the subprogramme did not define the population served, nor the time-frame against which progress and accomplishment could be measured and verified; nor did it provide the basis for establishing indicators (success criteria) to measure accomplishments; activities were often confused with outputs; linkages between problems, strategies and objectives were weak.

49. The self-evaluation exercise also required programme managers to look more closely at their programme budgets and to determine how best their resources could be distributed in terms of setting priorities, re-clustering activities and strengthening certain areas of work. As mentioned above, while activities are clustered at the programme element level, the programme element itself does not have an objective, although it is understood that the programme elements within a subprogramme, if completed successfully and on time, should collectively meet the subprogramme objective. Here again, the linkages were weak.

50. Although some of the findings came too late to be taken into account for the preparation of the programme budget for the biennium 1988-1989, closer attention should be given to the following when the next biennial programme budget, that is, for 1990-1991, and the next medium-term plan are to be prepared:

- (a) More precise definition of problems addressed;
- (b) Improved formulation of objectives;
- (c) Reassessment of strategies required to address problems;
- (d) Improved linkages between objectives, problems and strategies;
- (e) Better linkage between the various components of the whole programme;
- (f) Re-clustering of activities to improve efficiency and linkage;
- (g) Clearer definition of outputs;
- (h) Better response to undertaking activities not originally anticipated.

51. These concerns, as expressed in the self-evaluation reports, are not altogether new in terms of what should be taken into account when preparing work programmes. They do, however, imply that programme managers are demonstrating a greater awareness of evaluation fundamentals and more familiarity with programme design concepts, terminology and planning principles to which the self-evaluation exercise had drawn their attention. In order to incorporate such knowledge into the programme documents, further refinement of instructions for the preparation of programme documentation and the provision of training will be necessary.

B. Programme delivery

1. In-depth evaluations and triennial reviews

52. According to the assessments made in the above-mentioned triennial reviews of implementation of the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, evaluation findings have generally been applied to programme delivery, especially where such findings were perceived as reinforcing efforts already being made to improve implementation (e.g. rationalization of data collection systems; reorganization of units to respond better to implementation of activities; strengthening advisory services; strengthening technical co-operation activities; improving co-ordination between units of entities concerned, etc.). The areas where the application of findings has been less than satisfactory are discussed below.

53. A recurrent finding of the triennial reviews has been the inadequate identification of end-users, particularly in relation to the receipt of reports and publications (see E/AC.51/1985/9 and Add.1, paras. 72-85; E/AC.51/1986/10, paras. 7-29; and the in-depth evaluation of the population programme, E/AC.51/1986/9 of which the triennial review is due in 1989). In addition to the official distribution of documents and publications, departments have established mailing lists for free distribution in order to reach their target audiences, but such lists tend to be incomplete, inaccurate and out of date, and potential users are not systematically sought. Moreover, definitions of end-users vary and are inconsistently applied when reference is made to those who use the Secretariat's outputs (E/AC.51/1986/10). It was found that the sales channel provided an effective means of reaching interested users in developed regions but distribution to readers in developing countries relied mainly on departmental lists, making it all the more necessary for them to be up to date and complete.

54. Another recurrent finding has been the lack of feedback on activities. There appeared to be a consistent lack of concern about soliciting views and assessments on the Organization's work, whether in the form of studies, reports, advisory services, support services or dissemination of information, for the purpose of monitoring and responding to changing needs, or for improving programme quality and delivery. Once an activity has been implemented, an output delivered or a service rendered, follow-up activities were rarely planned or undertaken to assess effectiveness.

55. The triennial reviews also revealed that co-ordination mechanisms, at both the organizational and intergovernmental levels, have not been consistently effective and have tended to emphasize avoidance of duplication rather than ways to collaborate (see E/AC.51/1985/9 and Add.1, E/AC.51/1985/10 and E/AC.51/1987/7). 13/

56. One in-depth evaluation study that will have significant implications for the programme delivery and decision-making process is that on the electronic data-processing and information systems services (E/AC.51/1987/11), which was considered by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at its twenty-seventh session, in 1987. That evaluation was the first of its kind carried out in the area of support services and addressed the absence of an integrated management information system, which has long been a matter of concern in the Organization. Following that evaluation, and pursuant to General Assembly resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986, the Secretary-General has taken steps to modernize the administrative procedures and processes of the United Nations, at Headquarters and in the field, with a view to developing such an integrated management information system. Reduction of existing bureaucratic overlay of functions and administrative costs and updating information systems would permit easier access to and exchange of information, bringing about the realization of a centralized but consultative management policy-making process with decentralized implementation of and accountability for approved programmes.

2. Self-evaluation

57. With regard to the application of self-evaluation findings, there were many indications that at the level of implementation, or programme delivery, programme managers could see very easily where their difficulties lay. While programme managers could have, and have indeed, arrived at recommendations for improving programme delivery without formally undertaking a self-evaluation exercise (or perceiving it as such), the self-evaluation nevertheless gave them an opportunity to be more systematic about collecting data for evaluation purposes, to put on record their findings and to produce concrete, objective evidence to support their proposals for changes required or to defend their present efforts as being relevant, efficient and effective.

58. The question of adequate resources was raised frequently and was addressed not only in relation to staff requirements (mostly in terms of restoration of staff level rather than in terms of increase in personnel), but often in relation to availability of modern equipment to facilitate work. It was also clear that technological innovations had facilitated implementation in many areas, but sometimes they had not been matched by adequate training of staff.

59. Suggestions made by programme managers with a view to improving programme delivery are listed below. (It should be noted at this stage that the list is to be viewed as indicative rather than definitive, since not all programme managers were concerned with the same issues, nor did they have the same problems or attach the same degree of importance to what action was most needed to address those problems.)

(a) Training is required for staff to perform their functions more effectively and efficiently, not only in specialized fields and advanced technology but also in United Nations policies, practices and procedures;

(b) Increase in availability of office automation equipment would facilitate the performance of tasks;

(c) Development of an integrated management information system would help modernize administrative procedures and processes;

(d) Research studies need to be more action-oriented, dealing with practical issues;

(e) Data collection and research should be strengthened and better linked to technical co-operation activities;

(f) Cut-off dates for collection of information for studies should be strictly adhered to in order to avoid delays in publication;

(g) Governments should not be overburdened with too many questionnaires that may overlap or even duplicate each other;

(h) Timeliness of documentation and publications (completion of manuscript, editing, translation, printing and distribution) should be ensured;

(i) Target audience and end-users should be clearly identified;

(j) Distribution lists for reports and publications should be reviewed and updated to ensure that end-users are being reached;

(k) Feedback mechanisms and follow-up activities should be improved;

(l) Different kinds of format for disseminating information should be considered (video films, slides, etc.);

(m) Ways should be found to publicize United Nations publications better;

(n) Difficulties associated with ad hoc assignments and unplanned activities in response to government requests that had not been anticipated need to be resolved;

(o) Better planning of inputs is required for implementing activities;

(p) Administrative procedures should be further streamlined to facilitate implementation of the work programme.

60. It should again be noted that many of the concerns that need to be addressed are not necessarily new. However, the self-evaluation exercise has provided programme managers with specific examples and data to support their proposals for applying their findings, or to highlight problem areas beyond their direct

responsibility but which, if not addressed, could affect the programme design, implementation and results.

C. Policy directives

61. Policy directives for substantive activities and programme support services emanate from the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies. In order to implement these directives, the Secretary-General issues policy guidelines and instructions to be followed by the Secretariat and other United Nations bodies and entities.

62. The major policy directive for the United Nations work programme is the medium-term plan, which is formulated to reflect the concerns of Member States and provides the framework for the biennial programme budgets, which, in turn, identify the resources and activities required to achieve the objectives as stipulated in the plan.

63. In the context of the next medium-term plan, the Committee, at its twenty-eighth session, will have before it the Secretary-General's draft introduction. As discussed above, the formulation of the plan requires not only an understanding of the issues, the problems and ways to overcome them, and the setting of priorities, but also an understanding of how to translate those issues into viable and innovative programmes that the United Nations can and should implement. As mentioned above, a good design at the planning stage would facilitate not only programme implementation, but also monitoring and evaluation. The next medium-term plan, signifying the beginning of a new programme cycle, will test the extent to which planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation procedures have been applied from experience gained.

64. Although the complete text of the PPBME Rules was issued and distributed throughout the Organization (ST/SGB/PPBME Rules/1 (1987), dated March 1987), it was clear that most staff members were not familiar with the Rules, or, in some cases, even aware of them. Their updating to reflect the revisions indicated in General Assembly resolution 42/215 would need to be highly publicized to alert staff members to the need to apply them.

65. Guidelines and methodological standards for the preparation and conduct of in-depth and self-evaluations appear in the Evaluation Manual of the United Nations. Bulletins, administrative instructions and information circulars concerning various administration and management matters are also issued by the Secretary-General on a regular basis to keep staff informed. As indicated in paragraph 16, instructions are also issued for the preparation of medium-term plans, biennial programme budgets and biennial programme performance reports.

66. While written instructions and guidelines are useful, indeed essential, their application, as discussed above, presents another problem. In general, staff are unfamiliar with basic terminology, concepts, principles, procedures and methodology used for the whole programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation process. Instructions and directives that are clearly understood, accurately

interpreted and easily followed, as well as the provision of systematic training and follow-up, are therefore crucial for designing and implementing programmes that meet the concerns of Governments.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

67. Findings from the in-depth evaluations and triennial reviews have contributed to a better understanding and recognition of what is needed for improving programme planning and delivery. The findings have also reaffirmed the importance of the linkages between programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, with each component feeding into, supportive of and enhancing the other. In response to General Assembly resolution 41/213, such importance has been reflected in the decision of the Secretary-General to consolidate the functions of programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation within one office (the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Finance) in the Department of Administration and Management (see para. 7), with the objective of providing a supportive and effective mechanism for enhancing and increasing programme quality and delivery and for ensuring administrative efficiency, productivity and cost-effectiveness.

68. The machinery for evaluation is in place and the integration of evaluation into the whole programme planning, budgeting and monitoring cycle is proceeding gradually. The process of introducing it has been slow but steady and will require further attention if it is to function effectively in a continuous and systematic manner. As discussed above, constant efforts need to be made, especially at the introductory stages of the self-evaluation system, to ensure that self-evaluation is perceived as a helpful tool for assisting programme managers in decision-making and management, and for appraising the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and impact of their programmes by systematically measuring accomplishments against objectives on the basis of accurate data and analysis. It should not be perceived as just an administrative process for detecting failures, identifying problems and reducing funding, but rather as a tool for better planning and more effective implementation to meet the challenges of the future.

69. Sound decision-making and effective management must be based on reliable data, accurate analysis and options for action, and not merely on opinions and views that are not substantiated. Data-based evaluations are essential for decision- and policy-makers to ensure that United Nations programmes are innovative and vital.

70. Programme managers require a knowledge and practice of evaluation fundamentals in order to obtain objective and concrete evidence to support their programme proposals. Basic terminology, concepts and procedures need to be clearly understood and applied. It is fully recognized that there is still a need to refine evaluation methodologies, particularly the establishment of indicators and the improvement of measuring instruments such as questionnaires and interviews so as to ensure the collection of reliable data from which to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations, as recommended by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at its twenty-seventh session.

71. In the light of the above, the Committee may wish to reaffirm, in relation to evaluation (see sect. II), that:

(a) The Secretary-General should continue his efforts to strengthen the evaluation capacity of the United Nations, particularly the self-evaluation system, which is in its introductory stages, so as not to lose the momentum gained so far;

(b) Evaluation should be fully integrated into the programme planning, budgeting and monitoring process;

(c) Findings from the self-evaluation exercise should be drawn on and utilized for in-depth evaluations;

(d) Evaluation methodologies and procedures should be further refined; to this end, the Evaluation Manual should be modified and updated as necessary, with particular attention to be given to improving measuring instruments and the establishment of indicators.

72. With regard to programme design, programme delivery and policy directives (sect. III), the Committee may wish to recommend that the Secretary-General should strengthen the programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation components for integrated management and policy-making.

73. In order to reflect the importance accorded by the General Assembly to the evaluation function as an integral part of planning and programming, the Committee may wish to recommend that the Assembly request intergovernmental bodies to take into account evaluation findings, programme planning and performance reports, and relevant recommendations of the Committee when they are reviewing and giving policy directives on programmes that fall within their purview, so as to arrive at decisions that would assist the Secretariat in improving programme design, implementation and results.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/42/16, Part II), para. 110.

2/ Ibid., Thirty-second Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/32/38), paras. 6 and 7; Ibid., Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/33/38), paras. 6-25; Ibid., Thirty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/34/38), paras. 84-91, 304 and 305; Ibid., Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/35/38), paras. 60-66 and 346; Ibid., Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/37/38), paras. 300 and 360-377; Ibid., Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/39/38), paras. 181-184 and 363-365; Ibid., Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/40/38 and Add.1 and Corr.1), paras. 468-540; Ibid., Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/41/38), paras. 25-54; and reports of the Secretary-General on the evaluation capacity of the United Nations (A/38/133 and Corr.1, A/C.5/38/6, A/C.5/39/45 and A/41/670).

3/ Reports of the Joint Inspection Unit and comments thereon (A/33/225 and Add.1; A/36/181, A/36/182 and A/36/479; A/41/201, A/41/202, A/41/304 and A/41/409). See also the Inspectors' most recent report on the performance and

Notes (continued)

results of United Nations programmes: monitoring, evaluation and management review components (A/43/124), on which the Secretary-General will present his comments to the General Assembly at its forty-third session.

4/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49).

5/ Ibid., Supplement No. 38 (A/41/38 and Corr.2), para. 49.

6/ Ibid., Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/42/16, Part I, and Add.1), para. 236.

7/ Ibid., Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/37/38), para. 362.

8/ The Evaluation Manual of the United Nations was distributed widely throughout the Secretariat and within the United Nations system; the French version was released in February 1988 and the Spanish version is expected to be released in June 1988.

9/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/37/6 and Corr.1 and Add.1-3), and revisions thereto (A/39/6 and Corr.1 and A/41/6 and Add.1). See also General Assembly resolution 42/215, which extended the plan to include 1990 and 1991.

10/ Reports of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD on programme evaluation in UNCTAD (TD/B/1110 and TD/B/1145).

11/ TD/B/1110, para. 2.

12/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/40/38), paras. 743 and 754.

13/ See also the report of the Secretary-General on co-ordination in the United Nations and the United Nations system (A/42/232-E/1987/68).
