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Operational activities of the United Nations
for international development cooperation segment

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 22nd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 6 July 1994, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. BUTLER (Australia)

CONTENTS

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued) (E/1994/34, Parts I, II and III), E/1994/35 (Parts I, II and II), E/1994/84)

Ms. VOLKOFF (Canada) suggested that the Council should focus on reforming organization and procedure rather than on the content of the reports of the Executive Board. The transitional period provided an opportunity to allocate issues to different segments of the Council session, and to decide which issues should be highlighted and how they should be presented.

The PRESIDENT agreed that the Canadian representative had drawn attention to an important concern. The Council must decide how, on the basis of the reports, it could fulfil its restructuring mandate and what its future role would be with respect to the funds and programmes.

Mrs. VASISHT (India) supported the Canadian statement. Referring to a question raised by the Pakistani delegation at an earlier meeting, she asked how certain policy decisions already taken in Executive Boards - for example, sustainable human development or the 20:20 compact - could be legitimized after the fact by the Council, which was the only organ empowered to take policy decisions.

Mr. ELMOAKAF (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) noted that the reports of the Executive Boards were not yet available in Arabic.

The PRESIDENT said that that was because the Executive Board meetings had taken place very recently. The reports would be available shortly in all official languages.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom) expressed his delegation's full agreement with the Canadian remarks. The reports of the Executive Boards, which addressed different issues in different formats, were not a particularly

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useful tool for the Council's task of providing overall policy guidance. Perhaps the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) or the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) could meet prior to the operational activities segment with a view to suggesting issues which they felt might require policy guidance. The Council might also select one topic on which to focus in depth during the operational activities segment. Documentation would have to be adapted accordingly.

Mr. KAARIA (Observer for Finland) agreed with previous speakers about the importance of redefining procedure for future operational activities segments. In a statement delivered during the high-level segment, his delegation had expressed its views on the kind of documentation which should be submitted to the Council. Documents which simply described activities carried out in the funds and programmes during the past year should not be considered annual reports unless they had been approved by the Executive Boards of those funds and programmes. The documents should be more policy-oriented and provide a more concise description of the main features of the activities of the funds and programmes. They might also report on a specific topic to be designated by the Economic and Social Council. The Council should not be examining individual reports but rather a summary document prepared by the Secretariat on the various annual reports and highlighting policy issues or issues on which action must be taken. During the transitional year, the Council might also examine certain issues in the context of JCGP or another coordinating mechanism in order to determine how it might play its role more effectively.

Miss JANJUA (Pakistan), referring to the remarks by the representatives of Finland and of the United Kingdom, recalled that, under General Assembly resolution 48/162, the Council was to provide policy guidance within the context of the triennial policy review of the General Assembly (resolution 47/199). However, it had no mandate to adopt new legislation. The Council should review the reports of the Executive Boards in order to

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determine common trends and provide guidance for coordinating activities, but it should not seek to redefine triennial policy in the very process of its implementation.

Mr. MARTYNENKO (Ukraine) urged the Council to take a more pragmatic approach with regard to countries which had suffered as a result of the imposition of sanctions. He referred, in particular, to paragraph 3 (b) of General Assembly resolution 48/210 on economic assistance to States affected by the implementation of the Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Mr. LUNDBORG (Observer for Sweden) stressed the importance of two-way communication between the Council and the Executive Boards. More systematic formatting of reports would enable the Secretariat to produce an overall analysis of the work of the programmes and funds based on which critical issues could be identified. The Council might formulate global strategies for the different funds and programmes based on the recommendations of, for example, the forthcoming International Conference on Population and Development or the World Summit for Social Development. In that connection, he wondered whether one overall strategy for the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development might have been more effective than the different strategies implemented in the various funds and programmes.

Mr. BRUN (Norway) agreed with the Finnish and Swedish representatives that the discussions should be based on more analytical annual reports and an analytical overview produced by the Secretariat. His delegation appreciated the Secretariat's efforts to highlight certain important issues during the current session. The annual reports submitted by the funds and programmes should contain standard sections on, inter alia, the implementation of the recommendations of the triennial policy review; follow-up and operationalization of the major international conferences, such as the United Nations Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for

Social Development and the World Conference on Women; and decisions by the Executive Boards of the funds and programmes.

The establishment of a rolling agenda might facilitate the in-depth treatment of selected topics each year. For example, the Council might focus on an international conference within the context of the triennial policy review or on a specific issue such as United Nations development assistance to sub-Saharan Africa, which was currently reviewed piecemeal by each Executive Board. Input for the selection of themes would be provided by the reports of the funds and programmes, suggestions from the Secretariat and its analytic review, and perhaps JCGP, as the representative of the United Kingdom had proposed. In addition, issues might arise during the year which the Executive Boards could draw to the Council's attention. Specific themes should be identified during or prior to the organizational session. Flexibility should be exercised. His delegation would welcome a reaction by both the JCGP partners and the Secretariat on the consequences of implementing the proposals put forward. During the organizational session, JCGP partners and the Secretariat might also provide input to the Council on improving the documentation submitted by the funds and programmes.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom), referring to the Pakistani remarks, reaffirmed that the Council must not exceed the framework laid down in the triennial policy review (resolution 47/199) and in resolution 48/162 on the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic and social fields. Within that framework, however, the Council could play a useful role in the provision of policy guidance, particularly where the more ambiguous sections of resolution 47/199 might require some interpretation. In such cases, the Council could help to ensure that the resolution was properly implemented.

His delegation was encouraged by the very practical nature of the discussion and thought that the Council might be prepared to adopt a decision on how to conduct its work more efficiently in future. The apparent consensus on the need for more analytical reports from the funds and programmes, on the

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usefulness of an analytical overview prepared by the Secretariat, on the proposal of themes by the funds and programmes to the Council's organizational session, and on the selection of a theme for in-depth consideration during the operational activities segment might form the basis for such a decision. He hoped that in the selection of themes the distinct roles of the operational activities segment and the coordination segment would not be blurred. The topic of assistance to Africa, for example, might be more appropriately discussed in the coordination segment, given the breadth of United Nations involvement in that area.

Mr. KELLOWAY (Australia) said that, while the reports of the Executive Boards might not help the Council to fulfil the six functions specified in paragraph 16 of resolution 48/162, they should continue to be submitted for reasons of transparency and accountability. The proposal that the organizational session of the Council should select key issues on which to focus during its substantive session was sound. He agreed with the representative of the United Kingdom that the Council should not appropriate the functions of the General Assembly. It could be very useful, however, in sharpening the focus of operational activities. He also agreed with the statement by the British delegation concerning the need to maintain the distinct character of the segments. The annual sessions of the Council provided an ample opportunity to develop a more systematic policy for the funds and programmes in preparation for the triennial policy review.

The relationship between the JCGP agencies and the specialized agencies must be clarified. Lack of coordination was all too possible where resident coordinators dealt with finance or planning ministries and specialized agencies dealt with line ministries. For example, the initiation of a programme funded by a specialized agency which also had a cost-sharing component might actually be detrimental to a Government attempting to contain local costs. That was an issue which had not really been addressed during the session.

Mr. KAARIA (Observer for Finland) agreed that the Council should not appropriate the policy-making role of the General Assembly. The Council, however, could provide very useful guidance with respect to both the triennial review mechanism that considered tools for the delivery of operational activities and the actual substance of those activities. He agreed with the United Kingdom representative concerning the differences between the coordination and operational activity segments. He saw no need to consider assistance to sub-Saharan Africa - a question to which the General Assembly devoted considerable attention - but perhaps the operational segment could review the activities of the funds and programmes.

In order to avoid delays, in the submission of reports, draft annual reports might be submitted to the regular sessions of Executive Boards for preliminary discussion prior to their annual sessions. Referring to the remarks by the United Kingdom representative, he wondered if a president's summary of the views of the Council might be preferable to the adoption of a decision.

Mr. RAO (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) (UNCHS)) said that the operational activities of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) were focused on assisting Governments in the formulation of policies and strategies to create a self-reliant human settlement development and management capacity. In direct response to increasing demand from developing country Governments, its technical cooperation activities had continued to expand during 1993. UNCHS operational activities were financed from voluntary contributions, UNDP indicative planning figure (IPF) resources and cost-sharing, while the non-operational part of the work programme was financed from the regular budget. Total expenditure for technical cooperation programmes and projects in 1993 was over \$32 million, a record high for its technical cooperation activities. It should be noted, however, that the funding sources for Habitat's operational activities underwent a major change in 1993, with the increase in third party cost-sharing and funds-in-trust only partially compensating for the large

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decrease in UNDP funding. The proportion of its budget financed by UNDP had dropped to its lowest level ever, less than 54 per cent of the total technical cooperation budget, and that trend had continued in 1994.

An analysis prepared by UNDP showed a 10 per cent increase in IPF resources executed by Habitat between the fourth and fifth programming cycles. The Office for Project Services (OPS), the in-house executing arm of UNDP, however, had increased its share of IPF resources in the field of human settlements alone by 460 per cent. Those figures reflected the move from agency execution to direct UNDP execution through its own implementing agency, OPS.

Habitat's record demonstrated its full commitment to supporting national execution, the use of national expertise and procurement from developing countries. However, one of the primary explanations for the decrease in funding available from UNDP was the general shift towards direct execution of projects and programmes, which was undermining the mobilization of Habitat's technical capacity in support of national execution.

That development was alarming, considering that projects were frequently being implemented without benefit of Habitat's specialized knowledge and experience in the field of human settlement. The situation was further compounded by UNDP's move to field office execution, raising the question of the continued viability of the tripartite system, which had been put into place to separate the funding and execution function, to allow for improved transparency and joint control.

Regarding the country strategy note, agencies without separate field representation had so far found it difficult to participate in the process. Habitat's lack of involvement in the preparation of country strategy notes in many countries had made it more difficult for Governments to use its technical expertise in housing and environmental infrastructure. Finally, Habitat had been designated the task manager for chapters 7 and 21 of Agenda 21. It was fully committed to working in partnership with UNDP to overcome the problems

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mentioned in order to provide technical cooperation support to Governments in the implementation of the goals and objectives of Agenda 21.

Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) said that, in accordance with paragraph 16 of 48/162, it was clear that policies should be formulated by the General Assembly and that there was consensus that the operational activity segment should be practical in orientation. Rather than focusing on substantive issues, it should consider the role of the specialized agencies, national execution and support costs. The comparative advantage of the Economic and Social Council was its system-wide scope.

In order to avoid a certain discrimination in analysis among countries and to get to the heart of their problems, a regional approach was essential. Finally, the format and outcome of the high-level and operational activity segments should be evaluated before the end of the session.

Mr. COSTA (Brazil) agreed in general that the operational activities segment should have a particular focus each year. He was concerned, however, that it was too late in the process to choose that theme at the organizational session. The Executive Boards would not have enough time to discuss it in depth. It might be useful, furthermore, to convey the thrust of the debate in a Presidential summary, although such a summary would not be considered a binding document. He preferred the suggestion of the United Kingdom that a short decision should be drafted.

Mrs. AL-AWADHI (Kuwait) said that some of the specialized agencies did not give serious consideration to the needs of specific countries and were slow in responding. The new concepts recently applied to operational activities, such as the programme approach, had helped somewhat, but her country, for one, could not do without the expertise that should be provided by the specialized agencies. A roster of technical experts should be provided by the agencies, and improvements were needed in coordination with UNDP offices. The reports of funds and programmes were extremely important and should be considered by the Council as early as possible.

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Mr. MARRERO (United States of America) said that it would be useful for the operational activities segment to have a central theme, but that alone would not make it effective. His delegation had been disappointed that the representatives of the international financial institutions had not focused specifically on the Agenda for Development during the high-level segment. Perhaps the central theme and issues could be more carefully framed, and the programmes and funds could put on the agenda those areas where they were requesting policy guidance.

Mr. KELLOWAY (Australia) said, in response to the statement by the representative of Habitat, that it had been helpful to hear his concerns about the decline in funding as a result of the reorganization of UNDP. It might have been even more helpful to have that input in advance of the discussion, as it was very much in the spirit of paragraph 16 (b) of resolution 48/162.

Mr. MOJOUKHOV (Belarus) agreed with the representatives of Australia and Germany that it would be extremely helpful if reports were received in advance of meetings to facilitate more in-depth and complete discussions. He endorsed the remarks of the representative of Colombia regarding the need for an analytical annual review of United Nations operational activities, specifically per region and category of country.

On the subject of the operational activities of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), he noted that UNICEF had been the first body to adopt new rules of procedures as a result of recent changes introduced by General Assembly resolution 48/162. One positive outcome was that countries which were not members of the Executive Board of UNICEF now had the possibility to attend meetings as observers, resulting in a more balanced participation. UNICEF should serve as a model for other United Nations bodies involved in operational activities. His delegation suggested the Council should approve without amendment, the decisions and recommendations adopted by consensus at the 1994 sessions of the Executive Board of UNICEF, which would help to accelerate the implementation of those decisions and to consolidate practical activities in the field.

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Highlighting the importance of decisions adopted by the Executive Board of UNICEF regarding its country programme strategy for the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States, he asked how UNICEF expected to achieve a balanced distribution of resources per region when that region had received only 1 per cent of the global resources devoted to operational activities with respect to country and regional programmes.

Noting that some countries did not meet the traditional criteria required to receive UNICEF assistance and the fact that the operational bodies of the United Nations system applied varying criteria depending on the region, he asked if UNICEF had begun to harmonize the criteria for the implementation of country programmes.

Mr. MARRERO (United States of America) addressing the issues raised by the representative of Belarus, said he believed that at the current session, the Economic and Social Council was attempting to shape its new role in relation to programmes and funds in order to establish a proper forum for those issues to be discussed. He questioned whether the issues raised by the representative of Belarus would not be more appropriately discussed by the Executive Board of UNICEF which dealt with such budgetary and programme questions.

The PRESIDENT pointed out that the Council's work during the working-level segment was at the heart of the General Assembly restructuring of the Economic and Social Council. The policy dialogue and high-level segments on the Agenda for Development had indeed been important, but in the light of resolution 48/162, the working-level meetings were at the core of making the Council effective and relevant. The Council was designing future mechanisms for policy direction. Paragraph 29 of that resolution referred to the effective and efficient interaction between the Assembly, the Council and the individual Executive Boards. It was clear that the General Assembly wished the Council to operate differently than in the past, and to provide true policy guidance. The task before the Council at the current session was

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to draw a distinction between goals and strategies and the operation of the individual parts of the system. For its purposes, it should also assume that the funds and programmes had their own internal efficiency, through their own Executive Boards, as distinct from effectiveness, which could be defined as the way in which they carried out the Council's goals. Furthermore, since many of the same representatives sat on both the Executive Boards and the Council, it should be assumed that they were efficient because their behaviour in both forums would be consistent.

The central question before the Council was how it would perform the tasks outlined in paragraphs 15 and 16 of the resolution, and how that output would be expressed. A mere President's summary did not seem sufficient, and a more substantial report would probably be necessary. At any rate, the Council must end the substantive session with a clear decision on how resolution 48/162 would be implemented.

He reminded the Council that, under the triennial policy review, four specific inputs would be received by the Council, which in turn would be expected to produce four specific outputs. The inputs were the reports of funds and programmes, the recommendations of the subsidiary bodies of the Council, the reports of special meetings such as the International Conference on Population and Development, and the annual report of the Secretary-General. The four corresponding outputs were guidance, direction to subsidiary bodies, recommendations to the coordination mechanisms, and preparation for the next triennial review.

Mr. MARTYNYENKO (Ukraine) said that, since the Council was evaluating ways in which to make programmes and funds more effective, it should consider the practical side of operational activities, specifically the growing trend within UNICEF activities to emphasize emergency assistance. That trend was cause for concern since it diverted funds previously allocated for development, and when discussing the goals and strategies of the United Nations system, it was vital to include that important aspect.

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Mrs. VOLKOFF (Canada) said the Council needed first to determine precisely what information it required in advance so that, in subsequent years, it obtained what it needed. In that regard, suggestions had been made as to how to improve the recommendations it received from JCGP and CCPOQ. Furthermore, there had been a willingness on the part of the Executive Boards of the programmes to be more frank which helped to identify specific problems. She agreed it would be useful to receive reports from the specialized agencies in advance, particularly if the Council informed them of what would be most worthwhile to it.

Secondly, the Council needed to determine what topics it would discuss. In that regard, she endorsed the suggestion of the representative of Colombia that problems and issues should be reviewed from a country category or regional point of view, rather than globally. Opportunities, as well as problems, should be analyzed from a systemic stance. She agreed with the representative of Norway that the Council should review the results of international conferences, especially in areas such as the division of labour. She also endorsed the view of the representative of India that certain subjects such as the 20:20 concept which were substantive in nature, nevertheless should be discussed in terms of their operationalization.

Thirdly, if the Council sought to give specific direction, it should state its conclusions in a resolution. However, certain elements of the debate would be best summarized in a document by the President which would be complementary to such resolution. The various United Nations agencies, funds and programmes needed a resolution. At the same time, the Economic and Social Council also had the task of building political consensus, and, to that end, it needed to address the Member States themselves, which would highly value a President's summary.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom) said that the President's description of four basic inputs and four main outputs went right to the heart of the matter. His delegation believed that the analysis and monitoring of reports by funds and programmes could be improved by establishing better reporting

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standards and soliciting contributions on relevant topics from the specialized agencies. There should also be a clearer format for the decisions made by subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council. On the problem of international conferences, representatives should ensure recommendations were in a form which could be applied by the Council and the Executive Boards. As for the Secretary-General's report on operational activities, the Council already had a tradition of offering guidance.

It would be useful, in providing guidance to funds and programmes, to select each year one major topic for discussion at the next session and to ask coordinating bodies to suggest other issues. Policy guidance should also be provided to coordinating bodies such as the Administrative Committee on Coordination and the Joint Consultative Group on Policies. Finally, the Council should play a larger role, without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the General Assembly, in the triennial policy review.

Mrs. VASISHT (India) believed the difficulties concerning inputs could be overcome. With regard to the immediate business of decision-making, she wondered whether - if the President's summary was not adequate in itself - a draft resolution submitted by the President might not serve as a starting-point to encapsulate the discussion.

Mr. FALLER (International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)) endorsed the view that proper inputs were required for action-oriented decisions. He drew attention to the special problems, in a situation of shrinking resources, faced by smaller technical agencies such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, which were taking steps to cope with new realities by modifying the delivery of technical assistance and adopting a more cross-sectoral approach. The unique talent, experience and raison d'être of the smaller agencies should not be undermined or duplicated by larger ones. The smaller agencies often provided scientific and technical assistance to integral parts of a country's infrastructure, universally recognized as being essential for development. Two specific problems for ICAO

lay in a shortage of field representation and the need for a more regional approach to reflect the nature of air transportation.

Mr. ROESCH (Germany) acknowledged the importance of General Assembly resolution 48/162 in terms of policy guidance and announced that the European Union was preparing a draft resolution concerning the triennial policy review.

Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) endorsed the President's comments and the subsequent constructive contributions by the representatives of Canada, India and the United Kingdom. With regard to decision-making, he drew a distinction between the useful role of a presidential summary in reflecting views expressed and the fact that any decision or decisions identifying further information required for the triennial policy review must be subject to negotiation.

Mr. LUNDBORG (Observer for Sweden) said the Council should send a clear message to the Secretariat concerning the need, in 1995, for an analytical report reflecting the critical points discussed by the various Executive Boards. He took note of the interesting proposals concerning major areas of discussion made by the representatives of Australia and Colombia. Output from the 1994 session, while perhaps including a few substantive decisions, would basically be of a procedural nature, ensuring proper preparations for the next session. With regard to the immediate decision-making process, his delegation did not rule out the idea of a summary by the President to reflect the various views expressed.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.