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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

THE IDENTIFICATION OF OUTPUT IN THE PROGRAMME BUDGET OF THE
 UNITED NATIONS

Note by the Secretary-General

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* A/34/50.

I. RECOMMENDATION OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on programming and evaluation in the United Nations 1/ recommended that improvements should be made in the system used to identify the output listed in the United Nations programme budget. In this recommendation he suggested that the Secretary-General "prepare a report for consideration by CPC and ACABQ, and submission to the General Assembly, on the nomenclature and definition of output". 2/ This suggestion was accepted by the Secretary-General; 3/ the report will be submitted to the twentieth session of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) and to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) in May 1980. It was felt, however, that a note such as this, indicating the progress made to date and intended actions over the next year, would be useful.

2. The JIU report while describing the narratives in the 1978-1979 programme budgets as a "Praiseworthy effort", listed three problems: 4/

- (a) The lack of a uniform terminology for output;
- (b) The lack of systematic identification of the users of the output; and
- (c) The lack of a consistent distinction between intermediate and final output.

The report then presented two proposals for alleviating these problems:

(a) Glossary. A "conceptual exercise" should be undertaken resulting in an "official and exhaustive list of permissible terms of describing final output, with a definition of each term". A commentary attached to each definition should explain the difference between intermediate and final output for that type of output. The glossary should be translated in order to provide standard equivalents of each term in each official language.

(b) Identification system. A five-item identification system should be established giving:

- (i) A separate identification number for each output in the budget, incorporating its completion date;
- (ii) The title of the programme element to which the output corresponds;
- (iii) The nature of the output, using terms from the glossary;

1/ JIU/REP/78/1, reproduced as A/33/226.

2/ Ibid., chap. VII, recommendation No. 2 (b).

3/ A/33/226/Add.1, para. 30.

4/ A/33/226, Chapter III.

(iv) Particulars of the primary, and possibly secondary, recipients of the output; and

(v) One or more achievement indicators.

3. The Secretary-General agreed to these proposals, 5/ with the exception of the inclusion of achievement indicators in the standard identification text for each output.

II. ACTION BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

1. Action already taken

4. A classification of output into eight homogeneous groups was developed during the course of the evaluation of the social development and humanitarian affairs programme in late 1977. This classification was incorporated in the revised guidelines for internal evaluation and reproduced as an annex to the report on programme evaluation for the period 1974-1977, where it was stated that these eight groups "appear to cover virtually all activities of typical United Nations programmes and can be used as a standard classification". 6/ These groups of output were:

(a) Reports to policy-making bodies;

(b) Documents and background papers to intergovernmental meetings other than policy-making bodies;

(c) Information bulletins and bibliographies;

(d) Sales publications;

(e) Grants and fellowships;

(f) Networks of regional and national correspondents;

(g) Training seminars and courses; and

(h) Field projects and missions.

5. In its review of the evaluation reports submitted at its eighteenth session, CPC "welcomed" 7/ this classification of output.

5/ A/33/226/Add.1, paras. 28-29.

6/ E/AC.51/91, annex, para. 10.

7/ A/33/38, para. 25.

6. The instructions for the preparation of the 1980-1981 programme budget included guidelines for a new approach to budget preparation, monitoring and evaluation in the economic and social sectors involving the completion of detailed schedules at the programme element level. This development is described in general terms in a separate report 8/ in which the progress made and the difficulties encountered are spelled out. These schedules are the principal means by which the Secretary-General is implementing the JIU recommendation on the identification of output. They require each unit in the economic and social sectors to:

(a) Utilize the eight categories of output mentioned above whenever possible;

(b) Specify starting and expected completion dates for each output;

(c) Distinguish between products or services that are to be utilized solely within the programme in which they are produced from those that are to be used by other units in the Secretariat and entities outside the Secretariat. Only the latter are to be listed as output. This distinction will result in the listing of some outputs that are not final in the sense of being products or services that are intended solely for users external to the Secretariat. However, the number of such cases will be small and the practical advantage of keeping track of all external commitments of each programme was felt to outweigh the advantages of theoretical purity;

(d) Specify intended users, distinguishing between primary and secondary users;

(e) Specify indicators for appraising or determining the output achievements.

7. In terms of the JIU recommendation, these actions constitute a significant beginning in the use of standardized terminology and a complete compliance for all substantive items in the identification system. No separate identification number has been assigned to each output, however, since it was felt that the number assigned to the programme element in which the output was to be produced was sufficient identification for reference purposes.

8. Programme element schedules containing detailed output information are being used for budget preparation in the economic and social sectors, and will help in providing answers to questions in ACABQ and intergovernmental bodies. The narratives in the programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981 will contain, for all units in the economic and social sectors, information at the same level of precision and detail as in the narratives in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1978-1979. 9/

8/ A/C.5/34/3.

9/ A/32/6.

2. Intended action

9. There are two significant aspects of the JIU recommendation still at issue:

- (a) The scope of the coverage.
- (b) The glossary of standard terms.

10. Scope. The actions described above cover only the economic and social sectors. Sections of the budget dealing with political, legal, humanitarian and information programmes and those providing common services are not covered. A decision on whether or not to extend the scope of the output identification system need not be taken immediately and so will be made only after the experience in the economic and social sectors in the 1980-1981 programme budget has been reviewed.

11. Glossary. The eight categories of output listed in paragraph 4 above are the result of a detailed review of the social development and humanitarian affairs programme. However preliminary review of the programme element schedules for other programmes reveals that this list cannot be considered exhaustive and may not be as well formulated as it could be even for those categories of output that are covered. Consequently, the "conceptual exercise" suggested by JIU will be continued by an analysis of the applicable programme element sheets in order to arrive at an authoritative glossary of output terms. This glossary and the associated discussion of the concepts of intermediate and final output will be included in the report mentioned in paragraph 1.
