

PROVISIONAL

E/1995/SR.34

14 July 1995

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Substantive session of 1995

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 34th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Tuesday, 11 July 1995, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. GERVAIS (Côte d'Ivoire)  
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATION:

- (a) UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME/UNITED NATIONS POPULATION  
FUND;
- (b) UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND;
- (c) WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME;
- (d) ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES  
(continued)

---

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

GE.95-62777 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Kamal (Pakistan), Mr. Gervais (Côte D'Ivoire), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION:

- (a) UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME/UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND;
- (b) UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND;
- (c) WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME;
- (d) ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

(agenda item 4) (continued)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to continue its consideration of agenda item 4 by beginning a discussion with representatives at the field level of the United Nations development funds and programmes, in accordance with the provisions of its resolution 1994/33.

Mr. HAEMMERLI (Division for Policy Coordination and Economic and Social Council Affairs) said that, to facilitate the dialogue about to be taken up in accordance with Council resolution 1994/33, the Secretariat had held consultations with representatives of the various specialized agencies, funds and programmes about how to proceed. As a result, two models were being presented - an entire system-wide country team and a panel of representatives from various recipient countries - with a view to deciding empirically how to proceed in future. Financial constraints had thwarted the original intention to have a number of the specialized agencies' field personnel present also during the Council's deliberations. At the current meeting of the Council, the field panel present related to Viet Nam.

The PRESIDENT said he took it that the Council agreed to the procedure suggested, and invited the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Viet Nam to make an introductory statement.

Mr. MOREY (United Nations Development Programme), having briefly sketched his UNDP background at New York and in the field culminating in his appointment as Resident Coordinator for Viet Nam, referred to the text, which the Council had before it, of an informal paper giving an overview of the United Nations resident coordinator system in Viet Nam. The foremost role, of course, was that of the Government itself, which published the country

strategy note (CSN). Clearly, if a Government was not committed to the coordination of aid management within its country, there was little that the system's various representatives could do to improve matters.

Fortunately, the Government of Viet Nam was committed to that purpose, as could be seen, for example, by the establishment of a consolidated system of assistance which fully involved all programme personnel, relevant public officials and donors, and included aid from all bilateral, multilateral, private and non-governmental organization (NGO) sources. The formulation of the CSN had been a government-led exercise throughout; the Government had convened a meeting of the United Nations organs and agencies in 1994 and had outlined the basic CSN structure, which had subsequently been reviewed in the light of the findings of the government-chaired preparatory working groups.

Enhanced aid coordination within the United Nations system, while important, should also be viewed as part of a broader donor context involving the international financial institutions, bilateral donors and NGOs. The text of the overview reflected some of the initiatives taken in that regard, including monthly lunch meetings with donors. Also mentioned in the text were the major functional areas, including an outline of the analytical work that was so important at the country level, and examples of how the analytical approach was being enhanced.

One functional area was that of strategic planning and advice, including the preparation of the new CSN for adoption by the Government, and the system of information-sharing, which had been greatly improved as a result of the NETNAM computer network, to which the organs and agencies, NGOs and most bilateral donors subscribed. Other areas which the Council might wish to discuss were coordination within programme frameworks, capacity-building for aid management, and further possible improvements, such as the funding of the resident coordinator system, which should perhaps be effected by means of contributions from the various agencies on a regular basis instead of the ad hoc inputs hitherto received. Lastly, there was the subject of increasing collaboration in public information, an example of which was the United Nations News, copies of which were available to the members of the Council.

Mr. WOODHOUSE (United Nations Children's Fund), having briefly outlined his career in UNICEF, referred to the latter's role in Viet Nam. A plan of operations signed recently, with UNICEF support, would utilize

resources of some US\$ 135 million over the next five years for the protection and participation of children and women within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Government's own relevant programme of action. The plan, which had been developed in close cooperation with other United Nations organs, was fully consistent with the CSN. The success of the CSN process was due almost entirely to the Government's firm control of the process and clear policy statements, together with coordination by the donors.

There was close collaboration among the various organs and agencies and with the Government. Examples were the preparation, in March 1994, of an analysis of the situation of women and children, which formed an important basis for the development of the current country programme. Government policies and programmes made use of the UNICEF comparative advantage with regard to cooperation among donors inside and outside the United Nations system.

System-wide collaboration in the 1991-1994 country programme and in future projections was very good, making the most of each organ's comparative advantage in its respective field, and embracing activities such as a common training curriculum and membership of a steering committee to oversee implementation of a primary education programme, involving some \$80 million, with the support of the World Bank.

The Bank drew on UNICEF experience in the funding of various activities relating, inter alia, to primary health care and nutrition. He himself would be participating in one of three field workshops, coordinated by the Government and involving the World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF, on poverty alleviation in the Mekong delta.

The main factors for success in inter-agency collaboration were strong government policies, a flexible approach to agency participation and highly decentralized decision-taking by agency representatives; the development of the CSN process had been as significant as the outcome in that regard. Tangible progress had been made in implementing General Assembly resolution 47/199; the process could be made even more successful and the United Nations team in Viet Nam was firmly committed to that task.

Ms. DEMERS (United Nations Population Fund) said that she had been the UNFPA country director in Viet Nam since 1992, being seconded to UNFPA from the Canadian International Development Association. The UNFPA 1992-1995 programme in Viet Nam was the Fund's third largest country programme, and was

characterized by a high level of national execution and a sectoral approach leading to a programme approach. It made extensive use of the multidisciplinary support team based in Bangkok. The large number of projects were all integrated into the Government's programme.

In her view, the project approach provided an important management tool and did not conflict with the programme approach. UNFPA headquarters was developing new guidelines for the next programme; she had been personally involved in the revision, and noted that one major benefit of the improved planning, monitoring and evaluation methods was that they facilitated the programme approach. The most important requirement was, of course, a national programme; in Viet Nam, fortunately, there was one.

UNFPA was firmly committed to the coordination of assistance, and participated in all activities organized by the Resident Coordinator and the Government. It focused chiefly, of course, on sectoral issues relating to population, collaborating with the World Bank, bilateral donors and international NGOs, and acting as facilitator for the activities of all those concerned in that sector. It had been asked, by the Government and the donors, to take the lead in donor coordination relating to population activities, it having been agreed that the approach should be pragmatic rather than systematic. Such activities, and UNFPA's special relationship with UNDP, UNICEF, WHO and FAO in specific areas, showed that coordination was alive and efficient.

A major difficulty was the shortage of and high turnover in human resources and the resultant constant effort required to train project staff. It was not easy to reconcile the demands and problems in that regard with the directives of the Governing Council and the various budgetary and financial constraints.

Mr. GUPTA (World Food Programme), having informed the Council that he had joined WFP in 1986 and had been its country director in Viet Nam since that date, said that the mandate of WFP was twofold: to provide relief to the victims of natural and man-made disasters, and to provide food aid to the poorest and most disadvantaged sectors in the developing world. WFP had been active in Viet Nam for almost 20 years, having committed some \$400 million in resources. During that time, the centre of activity had gradually shifted from the provision of emergency assistance to the promotion of development,

and was currently focused on natural resources development, including the improvement of forest and water resources, and support for primary health care.

In recent years, project formulation and approval had acquired greater significance, to the benefit of collaboration efforts with other United Nations organs and agencies, which had produced excellent results in Viet Nam in recent years, having greatly enhanced the monitoring of activities, the mobilizing of bilateral support and the improvement of project quality. Funds provided by the Governments of Australia and the Netherlands had been particularly helpful in that regard.

General Assembly resolution 47/199 articulated some of the primary needs of WFP and the benefits that it stood to obtain by improving its impact and collaborating with other United Nations organs and agencies. From the outset, WFP had implemented its projects through government agencies but, while those agencies and institutions had been given the task of implementing projects, national execution had been merely a modality without much substance. More recently, WFP had been able to provide capacity-building through technical assistance, training, group discussions, study tours and participation in the project-formulation process. That kind of collaboration had really helped. WFP had found it a highly educational process which brought all its comparative advantages together and produced, under the Government's leadership, a programme in which all could participate.

As for the programme approach, WFP was constrained by its basic regulations which required it to proceed in the project mode. Those regulations were being amended and it was to be hoped that, by the beginning of 1996, WFP would move gradually towards the country strategy outline, within the framework of the CSN, and then towards the programme approach.

Mr. MACHIN (United Kingdom) said that there had been much discussion over the past few days about strategies and particularly mechanisms for improving coordination at the field level. A more radical solution was needed. He would like to know what the panel thought about the possibility of creating a single United Nations development agency.

Mr. WOODHOUSE (United Nations Children's Fund) said he thought that, if all the agencies were subsumed under a single one, much would be lost. It was better to promote good coordination among the agencies, maintaining the particular strength of each of them. That seemed to work very effectively.

Mr. MOREY (United Nations Development Programme) said he fully agreed with that statement. Each of the various United Nations organs and agencies had its own particular contribution to make at the country level. In the long run, there was an advantage in maintaining the separate agency identities as well as areas of focused concentration.

The difficulties that arose because of a lack of coordination could, in fact, be overcome. The question should really be viewed from the perspective of the Government which the international community was seeking to serve. If that Government was firmly committed to the notion of improved management coordination, it would understand what was meant. The same applied to the United Nations organs and agencies and the members of the donor community and improved collaboration as well as cooperation would result.

Ms. ALBRECHTSEN (Denmark) said she noted that all the speakers had stressed the value of the work they were doing in the area of coordination and cooperation. The Secretariat's interim report on the triennial policy review of operational activities for development within the United Nations system (E/1995/98), showed that what the resident coordinators considered to be the most significant area of cooperation in the field was ex-post sharing of information. That was most interesting, since it was not what had been regarded by the Member States as being the most important and valid area of cooperation. She would welcome comments from the members of the panel on the subject.

It might be suspected that the Viet Nam team had been selected to meet the Council because its collaboration was exceptionally good. Since the members of the panel had had field-level experience elsewhere, they might, perhaps, be able to indicate why collaboration was better in Viet Nam.

Mr. ANSARI (Pakistan) said that the informal paper mentioned by the Resident Coordinator for Viet Nam referred to a State Planning Committee that was responsible for the coordination of aid management and asked whether the United Nations system dealt directly with the State Planning Committee or with

the Ministry responsible for aid-management coordination. He would also like to know how much assistance was disbursed annually by the United Nations system to the Government of Viet Nam.

Noting that WFP, UNFPA and UNICEF all provided health care in Viet Nam, he wondered whether that situation did not lead to some duplication.

Mr. LEENSTRA (Netherlands) said he would welcome information on the situation in Viet Nam with regard to personal initiatives by field staff and directives from headquarters. He would also like to know whether any difficulties were encountered in setting priorities. Comments by the panel members on the role of the Council would also be welcome.

Mr. MOREY (United Nations Development Programme) said that what had often been regarded as a weakness of UNDP, namely, its multisectoral and multifaceted nature, was in some respects its major strength. It was a weakness to some extent in that it encouraged a tendency to develop very large portfolio projects and spread attention thinly over a large number of areas but, in the case of Viet Nam, the system had worked quite well. In the course of the past three years, the number of projects in the UNDP portfolio had been reduced from 169 to less than 80, so the system had been moving in the right direction in terms of the establishment of concentration.

On the other hand, as a multisectoral organization, a comparative advantage of UNDP was that it could act at the macro-policy level and also at the grass-roots level which, in effect, tested the validity of the national policies that had been adopted. In the case of Viet Nam, UNDP had, over the last five years, been acting as the lead agency and assisting the Government in its full reform programme with major activities in respect of economics, finances, public institutions and State-owned enterprises while, at the same time, providing assistance in determining whether or not the economic-reform policy adopted was having any appreciable effect on the population's quality of life, particularly that of people living in the poor provinces of central Viet Nam and of the ethnic minority groups.

Mr. WOODHOUSE (United Nations Children's Fund) said that UNICEF probably had six comparative advantages. The first was the rapid access to professional advice, based on experience elsewhere, that it could offer to Governments. The second was its ability to mobilize quickly. The third was its ability to deliver a flexible mix of inputs, combining the provision of direct support to test an approach and the use of the results, together with



the experience of neighbouring countries, to influence government policy. The fourth advantage was its ability to work not only with the central Government but also with the authorities at the provincial and communal levels. It was able to promote social mobilization and mass education and enrol various parts of civil society to achieve the objectives within its mandate. The fifth advantage was its cross-sectoral ability. Lastly, UNICEF was highly decentralized and, consequently, its representatives could call upon resources to meet the locally analysed particular needs of children anywhere in the country.

With regard to the questions asked as to why the situation in Viet Nam was better than elsewhere, he said that one reason was that there were strong and unambiguous government policies. Next was the fact that all the representatives of the United Nations system had arrived in Viet Nam at about the same time and with the same desire to learn from each other. Thirdly, Viet Nam was still a relatively small country in terms of the total number of donors.

Ms. DEMERS (United Nations Population Fund) said that UNFPA had two comparative advantages. It had a very clear mandate but one which also contained many cross-cutting issues covering the whole area of social development. On the operational side, it had country support teams throughout the world that provided enormous technical assistance to all its country programmes.

Mr. GUPTA (World Food Programme) said that the mandate of WFP was to provide relief during man-made and natural disasters. Its mandate also included caring for refugees, in which connection it collaborated with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In Viet Nam, the approach of WFP had been that any proposal sent to it by the Government must come through a coordinating mechanism such as the State Planning Committee. Since it needed technical support, it found cooperation with other agencies very advantageous. When it came to implementation, WFP interacted very closely with the relevant ministries and even with departments at the provincial level.

Mr. MOREY (United Nations Development Programme) said, in answer to the question concerning the assistance provided specifically for aid management, that the most important item was the \$1 million programme that

UNDP had been applying for the last two years in Viet Nam. That programme, which was specifically devoted to improving aid management and coordination, was being executed by the State Planning Committee. However, assistance under the programme was not limited to the State Planning Committee but was available to other key organs of the national Government.

Technical assistance had also been provided to the State Planning Committee in its preparations for the 1993 donor conference, the first conference held in Viet Nam, which had in many ways inaugurated the reappearance of that country in the international donor community.

As for the question concerning total United Nations assistance to Viet Nam, he said that a summary table had been distributed indicating that, in 1993, about \$85 million had been provided collectively by the organizations of the United Nations system. It should be noted that the United Nations was the largest source of assistance to Viet Nam.

His colleagues seemed to have given very satisfactory answers to the question why their operations and coordination had been so successful in Viet Nam.

As for another question, while General Assembly resolutions on aid coordination were in many ways admirable, they naturally focused on coordination within the United Nations system. That system had to be seen, however, as part of the larger donor community, and it would be an improvement if United Nations coordination was more often viewed in that wider perspective.

He suggested that there should be more emphasis on aid management than on aid coordination - a point that had been made by the Vice-Chairman of the State Planning Committee, which played the leading role in that area. Aid coordination was merely a part of aid management, the ultimate objective being to assist Governments in managing their own affairs. The Vice-Chairman had also pointed out that aid management should, in its turn, be viewed as one component of development and had argued that it was not really cost-effective to look at improved aid management as an end in itself. The purpose of the entire United Nations aid programme was to help countries manage their own affairs and in the case of Viet Nam, such help related essentially to the crucial area of public administration and the improvement of the performance of public institutions - the topic most intensely discussed by both the donor community and the Government.

In answer to the question concerning the role of the Council, he thought that, while its current focus was, quite rightly, on countries, the Council should not overlook the importance of the regional dimension of development. For example, the new Mekong River Agreement and the establishment of the Mekong River Commission constituted the most important contribution to the development of all South-East Asia in recent years. The Council should thus include the regional dimension in its deliberations. In respect of cross-border and transnational problems such as HIV/AIDS and drug trafficking and abuse, it was clearly essential.

One dilemma facing United Nations organs and agencies, including UNDP, was how to reconcile unity and diversity. United Nations bodies needed to be recognized as having global integrity: they had advocacy roles and a global point of view. That unity had, however, to be reconciled with the diversity of the workaday world of United Nations activities at the country level. In the Asia-Pacific region alone, the organizations of the United Nations system were faced with the extreme contrast of small island States and the immensity of China with 23 per cent of the world's population. There could be no final solution to that dilemma, but it had to be recognized as a persisting factor.

Ms. VOLKOFF (Canada) asked, with respect to the thematic teams, how decisions were taken on whether to set them up, whether the Government took the decision, whether agencies found that the teams to which they were assigned were led by another donor or whether they found that they were acting as part of a United Nations exercise rather than, as the Resident Coordinator had suggested, as part of a larger aid-management process.

Recognizing that the United Nations also had a non-financial role to play, that of coordination, she wondered if it made any difference whether it was the first United Nations agency to be established in a given country or another that took on that role. In China, for example, UNDP had been the first to establish an office and all those dealing with aid had turned primarily to it, whereas, at a later stage when the World Bank established an office, the emphasis had changed.

With regard to regional activities, she wondered whether they should be thought of as activities and programmes funded regionally or as country programmes cooperating regionally. At the administrative level, she asked whether differences between the rules, regulations and procedures of different agencies led to practical difficulties of coordination. She would also like

to know whether, when carrying out monitoring and evaluation, the agencies acted individually or worked with others. It would be interesting to learn what Governments would miss most if the agencies were to withdraw their programmes.

Mr. BRUN (Norway) said, with regard to the factors that made for successful coordination, that he would like more specific suggestions than had been forthcoming as to what could be changed for the future. On page 6 of the unofficial overview paper, a number of desiderata were set forth regarding the functioning of the resident coordinator system. All United Nations agencies should support Governments in improving aid management and coordination; resident coordinators were expected to have analytical capacity at the field level; and reference was also made to the need for adequate financial and human resources to carry out such activities. He would be grateful for information on how those requirements had been met in the specific circumstances of Viet Nam.

A further question was whether the CSN could serve as a foundation for joint programming and reporting and even, perhaps, as the representative of Canada had suggested, for joint evaluation. There had been repeated calls to strengthen the resident coordinator system, but it had proved difficult to find an appropriate mechanism to achieve that end. He asked what the reaction of the agencies would be to giving the resident coordinator more authority and whether that would be viewed as a threat or an opportunity.

Mr. DENHAM (Ireland), having congratulated the Vietnamese Government on the publication of its CSN, which he hoped would be successfully implemented, said he would like to know whether the United Nations News in Viet Nam was published in any language other than English and who the major bilateral donors in Viet Nam were. The UNICEF representative had mentioned the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a major international human rights instrument. It would be interesting to know whether and how the other United Nations agencies, either collectively or individually, promoted respect for human rights and whether there had been any dialogue on human rights during the preparation of the CSN.

Great stress had been laid on the importance of government commitment but he would like to have further details on the involvement of NGOs and local community groups. Information regarding the role of women and foreign direct investment (FDI) would also be welcome.

He noted that WFP appeared to have some very good projects on the ground in Viet Nam, and its efforts to help the poorest of the poor were very laudable, but he wondered whether it was, perhaps, becoming involved in activities that would be more properly carried out by other United Nations agencies, such as UNDP, WHO and UNICEF.

Mr. OLANIYAN (Observer for the Organization of African Unity (OAU)) congratulated the panellists on their presentation of the activities of their agencies in Viet Nam. Some good results seemed to have been achieved, but the debate should be carried further from the level of policy analysis to consideration of the operationalization of policies.

Some problem areas had been mentioned on which further light should be shed. The representative of UNFPA had mentioned human-resources problems, and he would like to know whether they involved local employees or UNFPA staff. The representative of WFP had referred to cooperation with bilateral donors and he wondered whether any difficulties had arisen in that area. It would be interesting to compare agency experience with that of a number of the developing countries in that regard. There was also the question of financial difficulties and how they could be overcome in the context of United Nations restructuring and revitalization. Lastly, he would like to know how global programmes adopted at the United Nations level were integrated into regional programmes and implemented at the regional level.

Mr. MOREY (United Nations Development Programme), replying to the question about thematic teams, said that the essential point was that they had to be wanted by the country concerned and had to be based on a national programme. The United Nations organs and agencies could, however, play a preparatory advocacy role, as they had done for two and a half years preceding the development of a national HIV/AIDS programme. As to the question which agencies had been the first to establish themselves in Viet Nam, it had not been possible for any international financing institutions to undertake programmes in that country during the period 1979-1993. However, in that case also, the agencies on the ground had been able to do some preparatory work by providing technical assistance for basic analytical work in major sectors, such as transport and energy. Consequently, when the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) had been able to resume their programmes in 1993, well over a year had been saved in bringing them up to full operation.

As for future activities, UNDP had been given two major responsibilities for Viet Nam at the 1993 donor conference. The first was to take the lead role in providing advice and assistance to improve aid management. In the Consultative Group mechanism, the meeting was chaired by the World Bank, as in other countries, the one difference being that, in Viet Nam, the meeting was organized in consultation with both the Government and UNDP. The second major lead role of UNDP was in providing technical assistance for capacity-building, particularly for aid and basic development management. In neither of those roles would UNDP have contemplated acting independently, either within the United Nations family or the larger donor community. In Viet Nam, UNDP and the other organizations of the United Nations system had a good working relationship with the Bank.

As for regional projects, his own conviction was that agencies other than UNDP should be more actively engaged in providing funding at the regional or subregional level, as ADB did to some extent. He personally favoured funding earmarked for regional or subregional purposes, but a mechanism needed to be developed with its starting point in the countries themselves, which had to be consulted.

With regard to administrative problems, one was the uneven nature of the delegation of authority to the field. Delegation was very good in the case of UNDP and UNICEF but was less so in other organizations, particularly the specialized agencies, which, at inter-agency meetings, were often obliged to refer back to their headquarters when quite small amounts of money were involved. As for the desiderata quoted by the representative of Norway from the unofficial overview paper, his own view was that the resident coordinator should not bear the sole burden of trying to improve coordination. That was a task that had to be seen as important by all United Nations organs and agencies. He judged his own performance by his success or failure in improving management coordination, and he thought the same criteria could be applied to the representatives of other agencies.

As for analytical capability, it would be a great mistake to concentrate funding for that purpose in agency headquarters. Good analytical capability was absolutely essential at the field level. It was difficult to calculate contributions that were of lasting value to the country served in purely monetary terms. A country's perception of the United Nations, and the

importance it attached to its own role in the organization and to having a United Nations presence at country level mattered even more. After 50 years, the United Nations and its organs and agencies were valued, and their advice sought.

The representative of Ireland had asked about external resources and bilateral donors. The largest single source of external resources required by Viet Nam into the next century would quite certainly be FDI - despite the tremendous growth in ODA to the country. It would be invidious for him to place donor countries in any order of merit, but a list would certainly include traditional donors, such as Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, and France. The United Nations News was currently published only in English, but there were plans to produce it in other languages as well, the first of which would, of course, be Vietnamese.

Ms. DEMERS (United Nations Population Fund), replying to the question by the observer for OAU, said that UNFPA experienced difficulties in mobilizing human resources. Of each national project team, comprising a director, an assistant and a secretary, the director was usually a high-level official of the country who was available for part-time work only. It was often difficult to recruit the other members of the team, an assistant and a secretary on a full-time basis. UNFPA had frequently drawn the attention of the Government of Viet Nam to that problem and, during the recent mid-term review, the Government had acknowledged the critical impact on projects of the lack of full-time staff. It had assured UNFPA that, in the next programming cycle set to begin in 1996, the staffing problem would be given due attention. At a lower level, the recruitment of properly qualified staff was also a challenge. UNFPA generally preferred to train staff at the start of a project and to provide continuing training throughout its implementation, but that greatly increased the workload of the qualified staff.

Concerning evaluation and monitoring, she said that national execution always meant that the Government was involved in such activities. UNFPA provided the Government of Viet Nam with support and with advice on what to look for in monitoring field activities and evaluating projects and programmes. For instance, the recent mid-term review had been led by the Government, with technical support from UNFPA.

In answer to the question whether donors were involved in UNFPA activities, she said they were invited to attend tripartite review meetings and to participate in field monitoring trips. A programme-review and strategy-development process was currently in progress, and UNFPA was working very closely with the donors in that context.

As to what would happen when UNFPA left Viet Nam, she mentioned that she had often heard members of the national staff of projects say that no other agency worked as closely with them as UNFPA did. Although the World Bank would soon be implementing a major, heavily funded project which would dwarf its activities, UNFPA nevertheless still had a strong capacity for working closely with the Government and nationals of the country and its work on the development of strategies and models might be of use to other agencies.

The CSN was not only an important background document for the programme-review and strategy-development exercise, but also constituted an important ongoing process and UNFPA looked forward to working on it further.

Lastly, the question had been asked whether the existence of separate rules and regulations for the various agencies posed a problem. It did, in fact, but both at the headquarters of the various agencies and in the field, efforts were being made to cope with them.

Mr. GUPTA (World Food Programme) said that the representative of Ireland had asked about the role of women. Women usually constituted at least half of the participants in WFP projects, but the question was whether their participation did anything more than reinforce their traditional roles of running the household, caring for children and working in the fields. WFP had commissioned a study on the subject, which had concluded that, while women were passive beneficiaries of WFP projects, their status had in fact been improved by them since, for the first time, they had been able to leave their households and become involved in remunerated activities. In the last analysis, however, their fundamental role had not changed.

It had been suggested, therefore, that women should be more actively involved in project identification, formulation and execution so as to ensure that they occupied certain managerial and supervisory positions and WFP was moving towards that goal. In a project approved in May 1995, it had been stipulated that women should constitute at least one third of all brigade leaders - the individuals responsible for 30 to 40 project participants. Women were also to be given basic training in labour mobilization, work



supervision and overseeing compliance with work specifications. It had also been stipulated that one or two women must be incorporated into project-management committees at every level from the local to the national. Such efforts to change the role of women from that of passive beneficiaries of to active participants in projects were, of course, tiny steps that could not transform overnight the nature of traditional societies or the traditional roles of women.

On the question of duplication of efforts and WFP involvement in the health sector, he mentioned that, in Viet Nam, about 58 per cent of the rural population lived below the poverty line. A visit to a primary health-care facility meant the loss of a day's wage for many women in rural areas so, even if such facilities were available, they tended not to make use of them.

Hence the need for incentives to ensure that, during pregnancy, women went to clinics for periodic check-ups, that deliveries took place under the supervision of trained health workers or midwives, and that the health and development of the child was monitored. The WFP food incentive had been extremely useful in that regard: in areas where it was applied, the coverage and frequency of visits to health-care facilities had increased from about 30 per cent to 87 per cent.

The observer for OAU seemed to have misunderstood his remarks about bilateral assistance. He had not meant to imply that it was a problem - it was, indeed, an asset, and had even been crucial in meeting the non-food requirements of certain projects. Bilateral funding had made it possible, for example, to hire consultants to organize operational and managerial studies of completed projects and to look into the institutional and financial arrangements necessary to ensure that the assets created through such projects were properly sustained and managed. As to whether the use of bilateral funding forced WFP into areas of activities preferred by the donors themselves, he said that was not so in his experience.

Mr. WOODHOUSE (United Nations Children's Fund), referring to the question by the representative of Canada about evaluation and monitoring, said that UNICEF was trying to strengthen government capacity for such activities: he had already cited the example of joint efforts by UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP to support the monitoring of social indicators. Indeed, one reason why the

Viet Nam country team was working well was joint monitoring, which had the additional benefit of promoting a common understanding of the development challenges facing the country.

A number of factors would be lost if UNICEF were to leave Viet Nam: advocacy for children and for Viet Nam within the larger donor community, unbiased professional advice, moral authority, money, an emphasis on the most impoverished sectors of society and a presence in the field.

In response to the comment by the representative of Norway about factors for success, he said that the CSN contributed to the ability of the various agencies to see how they fitted together in furtherance of a goal that went beyond their own individual mandates. It would be useful, however, to have clearer and more up-to-date mission statements to promote a better understanding of the objectives being pursued by the various agencies.

Replying to a question by the representative of Ireland, he said that UNICEF chaired an NGO forum which had moral authority in matters relating to children and could therefore stretch the boundaries of government policy to allow room for the NGOs to work more independently.

Lastly, the CSN was the basis for progress towards a more comprehensive review of the support provided by the entire United Nations system. It would be the primary context within which UNICEF's support to Viet Nam would be judged during the forthcoming review with the Vietnamese Government.

Mr. Hong Jae KIM (Republic of Korea) asked about the status of the common premises for the various agencies active in Viet Nam and endorsed the remarks in the last paragraph of the unofficial overview paper concerning the need for financial support of the resident coordinator system.

He would like to hear the views of the panellists on whether national execution was a prerequisite for field activities and whether the CSN could be developed into a single country programme, combining all the country programmes of the various agencies. Such an approach would seem to be a definite step forward. Lastly, he urged that stress should continue to be laid on the regional dimensions of cooperation.

Mr. KELLOWAY (Australia) said that the importance of coordination for effective management should not be underestimated. The agencies involved in country activities had different financial and reporting systems, rules and regulations, computer networks and methods of communication. In the context

of the triennial policy review, frustration had been expressed by a number of developing countries about the wide variety of procedures within the United Nations system.

He would therefore like further information on the level of coordination among the four organs active in Viet Nam, particularly the extent to which the cooperative arrangements delivered results in the field and how effective coordination with the specialized agencies was. Lastly, he inquired to what extent success or failure in achieving effective coordination depended on the Government's interest in the activity in question and how much depended on the efforts of the United Nations organs themselves.

Mr. MELEKH (Russian Federation) said he endorsed the questions asked by the representatives of Norway and Canada.

Mr. BRESLER (United States of America) asked how coordination with the international financial institutions was implemented in the field and said he would also like to know more about the workings of national execution and whether the process resulted in capacity-building.

Noting that three of the four panellists were from organizations sponsoring the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), he asked what they thought about the co-sponsored programme concept as a means of enhancing the coordination and delivery of assistance by the United Nations system in a particular field.

Mr. IRUMBA (Uganda) said he shared the misgivings of the panellists about the impact of the proposal made by the representative of the United Kingdom concerning a single development agency: it might well result in some programmes being marginalized.

One of the drawbacks mentioned by field representatives in connection with the CSN was its lack of a regional dimension. He would like to know how the CSN for Viet Nam dealt with the regional dimension and how the CSN was taken into account for future planning, particularly in the context of a continuing decline in resources for operational development activities. It would also be useful to know how the organs represented on the panel went about developing national-execution capability.

The Joint and Co-sponsored Programme on HIV/AIDS would be a test case for the coordination of activities within the United Nations system, and it would be useful to learn how the sponsors were preparing to implement that programme. Lastly, he would like to know how the agencies had worked together

to mobilize resources after the first donor conference convened under the auspices of the World Bank in 1993 and, in general, how they were cooperating with the Bretton Woods institutions.

Mr. MOREY (United Nations Development Programme), replying to the questions asked by the representative of the Republic of Korea, said that, in Viet Nam, UNDP and UNICEF shared common premises in a single compound and attempts were being made to expand the compound through the acquisition of Government-owned property. The fact that the premises were shared helped to improve coordination, but was only one of the many measures that did so.

The decision at a recent meeting of the UNDP Executive Board to allocate over \$18 million for the resident coordinator system was an outstanding move: it was to be hoped that other agencies would set aside funding specifically for that function. The establishment of UNAIDS was an excellent initiative that would be of critical importance for coordination within the United Nations system.

As to whether the CSN would evolve into a single country programme, he said that that was rather unlikely, at least in the case of Viet Nam. The Government had made it clear that it saw the CSN as a way of enabling it to determine how assistance from the various United Nations organs and agencies could be better managed. The fact that there was no reference to regional dimensions in the CSN was indeed a defect but that did not mean that, in actual fact, collaboration in regional activities could not be increased.

As for the comment by the representative of Australia that the role of coordination should not be underestimated, especially in view of the separate procedures and regulations applied by the various organs and agencies, he said he quite agreed, but that the ultimate goal should be to build the capacity of each of them to carry out activities on which there was general agreement: for example, joint training programmes.

The specialized agencies had traditionally played a slightly different role from that of the organs represented on the panel. In organs like UNICEF and UNDP, the level of delegation of authority to the field was quite good; in the specialized agencies, on the other hand, field representation was relatively weak and there was little authority to make decisions on the spot.

The United States representative had asked about coordination with the international financial institutions: representatives of those bodies participated in all the major coordinating mechanisms and were involved in

a number of project activities. For example, the project on reform of the financial system in Viet Nam was co-sponsored by UNDP and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the project on reform of State-owned enterprises was being executed by UNDP and the World Bank. Representatives of the World Bank and IMF participated in all inter-agency meetings, and the ADB was informed of the proceedings.

The representative of Uganda had asked about the impact of the financial problems experienced by the various United Nations organs and agencies. There was no doubt that the cut-back in UNDP funding would have a serious effect on his work as the UNDP Resident Representative in Viet Nam. He would be obliged to reduce his national staff by 15 per cent and his international staff by about 20 per cent. Clearly it would be impossible to do as much with those reduced resources as had been accomplished in the past, although increased reliance on information technology and improved direct communications among field offices made UNDP's work in the field a bit "smarter".

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.