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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION: ENVIRONMENT

Interrelationships between resources, environment, people and development

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In paragraph 5 of its resolution 35/74 of 5 December 1980, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to take the requisite steps for the implementation of the recommendations of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the work of the United Nations system on interrelationships between resources, environment, people and development, as well as those put forward by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1980/49 of 23 July 1980.
2. In the statement submitted by the Secretary-General concerning the administrative and financial implications of the resolution, (A/C.2/35/L.121) the Secretary-General indicated that it would be the intention of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, in response to the above-mentioned request, to proceed during 1981 with the elaboration of a programme of work taking into account the substantive guidelines provided by the high-level group of experts on interrelationships convened by the Executive Director of UNEP, 1/ and in the light of the further recommendations to be formulated by the group during 1981.
3. Subsequently, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1981/51 of 22 July 1981 welcomed the presentation made to it by the Director-General containing an outline of the elements of a system-wide programme of work as envisaged and requested him to finalize it for submission to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session.
4. The Secretary-General transmits herewith the report prepared by the Director-General in response to the above-mentioned resolutions.

1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 25 (A/35/25), annex II.

ANNEX

Report of the Director-General for Development and
International Economic Co-operation

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION: LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND	1 - 4	2
II. FRAMEWORK OF THE WORK PROGRAMME	5 - 12	3
III. WORK PROGRAMME ON INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT, PEOPLE AND DEVELOPMENT.	13 - 28	5
A. Programme objectives	13	5
B. Programme components	14 - 18	5
C. Programme areas	19 - 22	6
D. Programme activities for 1981-1982	26 - 25	8
E. Programme support	26 - 29	9

APPENDIX

Projects identified for inclusion in the system-wide work programme on interrelationships

I. INTRODUCTION: LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

1. In his statement to the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1981 (E/1981/SR.25, paras. 15-27), the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation outlined the legislative background to the request made by the General Assembly in paragraph 5 of its resolution 35/74 of 5 December 1980 concerning further work within the United Nations system on the interrelationships between resources, environment, people and development. In his statement, the Director-General also described the approaches which he proposed to follow and the considerations which he would take into account, subject to any guidelines the Council might wish to issue, in drawing up the programme of work envisaged by the resolution. Finally, he set forth for the Council's consideration an outline of the elements of the programme of work and indicated the steps taken for the establishment of a general trust fund which would eventually finance specific activities concerned with interrelationships.

2. In resolution 1981/51 of 22 July 1981, the Economic and Social Council welcomed the statement of the Director-General and requested him, bearing in mind the elements just mentioned, to finalize the proposals for the system-wide programme of work for consideration by the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session and to enable the Assembly to take the appropriate decisions for its implementation, also bearing in mind Council resolution 1981/73 of 24 July 1981. It also welcomed the establishment of the general trust fund for the purpose of facilitating the implementation of the system-wide programme of work to be undertaken pursuant to Assembly resolution 35/74.

3. In its resolution 1981/73 the Economic and Social Council endorsed, in principle, as recommended by the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), a/ the proposals made by the high-level group of experts with regard to the programme of work on the interrelationships between resources, environment, people and development, b/ and the important role that UNEP should assume in this regard consistent with its mandate. The Council also invited the Director-General to provide for the implementation of those proposals within the context of the programme of work to be established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 35/74, taking into account Council resolution 1981/51, and took note of the views expressed by the Governing Council on the report of the Secretary-General on interrelationships between resources, environment, population and development (E/1981/65).

4. The present report is submitted in response to the two Economic and Social Council resolutions referred to above and paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 35/74.

a/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 25 (A/30/25), annex I, decision 9/1, sect. II.

b/ Ibid., annex II.

II. FRAMEWORK OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

5. The approaches and considerations which together constitute the framework for the proposed programme on interrelationships were described in the Director-General's statement to the Council. In the present context, it may be recalled that the fundamental long-term objective of the activities to be undertaken under the proposed programme is to enlarge and improve the capacity of the international community to prepare for the future of humankind, both at the global level and in critical geographical areas, by building comprehensive knowledge and perspectives that can be used in current policy making. This concern emerges from the increasing scale of human activities and their observable repercussions on the productive and regenerative capacity of the bio-physical resource base and ecosystem within which human life exists. The urgency of this concern is underscored by the over-all assessment of work so far undertaken, as reflected in the report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council (E/1981/65). The report showed that actions to arrest harmful trends in the fields of population, resources and the environment cannot be postponed without foreclosing important options and that a number of options considered feasible only a decade ago were no longer feasible. These options include, for instance, the possibility of stabilizing world population by the end of the century and the prospect of an energy transition without the possibility of petroleum shortages.

6. The studies carried out thus far suggest that it is in the developing countries where the threats posed are most acute. Land degeneration is more serious in arable but undeveloped areas enjoying high rainfall than in irrigated agricultural areas. Post-harvest food losses are especially heavy among subsistence farmers. While concern on carrying capacity has generally been directed to the diminution of non-renewable resources, these studies suggest that, paradoxically, it is renewable resources in general that are most in danger. Thus, the problem of poverty and the regeneration of renewable resources are interrelated. The critical manifestations of interrelationships apply also to the developed countries, although in different forms. The energy crisis, for example, has among its root causes the dominant production and consumption patterns of the developed countries and the consequent world-wide impact on access to and the use of natural resources and the environment. Moreover, although in many instances the manifestations of a given acute problem are local, they are inextricably linked with the larger set of interactions within the world economy and with economic and political relations among countries.

7. The programme on interrelationships will need to deal with issues and problems which, while manifesting themselves in specific situations, nevertheless share a number of common characteristics: they emanate from indivisibly related and complex processes; they could give rise to inter-state conflict; they could threaten the physical survival of humankind; and they generally require action at the global level.

8. In the light of these considerations, the programme of work on interrelationships should comprise a series of elements to be pursued simultaneously in a mutually reinforcing manner. These elements should include:

(a) Surveying critical problems and problem areas around the world and monitoring them from a global vantage point;

(b) Identifying and promoting operational projects in the field in the form of case studies drawing directly on practical experience and empirical data from the field;

(c) Developing, diffusing, testing, applying and improving planning tools, policy options, methodologies and projections;

(d) Theoretical work and research to further clarify issues and problem areas, elaborating and improving the conceptual framework and keeping up with relevant research underway in various parts of the world.

9. The work programme on interrelationships will need to be implemented at different levels - local, national, regional and global. It will also have to be formulated from the standpoint of varying time perspectives - immediate and short-term, medium-term and long-term - and should take full account of the intrinsic importance and urgency of given issues.

10. The nature and scope of the programme, as well as its implementation, will be influenced, if not determined, by the financial resources made available to the United Nations, directly through the general trust fund which has been established for this purpose and indirectly through Governments, foundations and non-governmental institutions, within whose domain lie the critical levers of action. Their readiness to contribute and the extent of their involvement will be crucial.

11. Expectations from as well as the goals of the programme will have to be shaped realistically and over time, taking into account the above factors. Moreover, in view of the enormous scope of the subject, it will be necessary to be selective and to concentrate on the most critical and promising foci of initial action and points of leverage. It should be noted in this regard that a great deal of work relevant to interrelationships is already taking place throughout the United Nations system and elsewhere. The research effort perhaps most deserving of special mention is the Man and the Biosphere Programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which has established a wide interdisciplinary research network in more than 50 countries. The Programme has, however, been oriented more towards physical concerns than to socio-economic considerations.

12. The programme outlined below seeks to avoid repetition of work being done elsewhere and focuses on additional and innovative ways of tackling the complex problems of interrelationships and to fill some of the obvious existing gaps. It is aimed at building and strengthening the foundations for policy and concrete action in this vital area. This is a task to be undertaken with great care, relying on an iterative, pragmatic and experimental approach and drawing on experience.

III. WORK PROGRAMME ON INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RESOURCES,
ENVIRONMENT, PEOPLE AND DEVELOPMENT

A. Programme objectives

13. The over-all objectives of the system-wide work programme are the following:

(a) To advance national and international understanding of urgent and critical problems arising from the interrelationships between resources, environment, people and development;

(b) To promote innovative, multidisciplinary approaches to the study of such problems and the elaboration of relevant, integrative national policies and strategies;

(c) To stimulate international efforts for effective action.

B. Programme components

14. To achieve the over-all objectives, a co-ordinated multidisciplinary programme of activities is envisaged.

1. Comparative geographic, sectoral and societal studies

15. There is need to understand more fully how knowledge of interrelationships can facilitate national and regional planning so that policies and programmes may be more comprehensive and better integrated. As interrelationships may differ in form and intensity between sectors and countries, and even from area to area within countries, depending, inter alia, on differences in the level of development and on social and cultural considerations, a substantial degree of disaggregation is necessary for assessing interactions and defining operational measures. The interrelationships should, therefore, be mapped on a disaggregated level through a series of comparative case studies in different regions and countries that would identify common problems and evaluate the applicability of solutions on a wider basis. Taken together, the studies should yield significant relationships the manipulation of which can be operationally relevant in similar situations elsewhere.

2. Action-oriented research studies urgently needed for developing countries

16. In certain areas where processes under way have already given rise to critical problems that require priority attention but are too complex to be understood through uni-disciplinary research or to be resolved with existing models, it is necessary to involve researchers, decision-makers and other relevant actors who would jointly develop a methodological and operational basis for action. In such situations, action-oriented research studies would provide in situ programmes through integrated multidisciplinary and systems analysis approaches to assessment and management of interrelationships.

3. Methodological studies

17. Further elaboration of methodological issues is necessary, particularly with respect to the design, data-gathering and testing of innovative multidisciplinary approaches to research and policy analysis. In the past, considerable reliance was placed on aggregate modelling and projections for the study of interrelationships. While these tools have several important advantages and permit useful insights on longer-term perspectives, new techniques and approaches (such as systems analysis and social accounting matrices) also need to be explored.

4. Review and synthesis of new knowledge

18. If, as it becomes available, knowledge on interrelationships is to be adequately and directly used for policy formulation, implementation mechanisms such as assessment processes and structures will need to be developed within national, regional and international systems. An important mechanism at the international level is the review, synthesis and integration of pertinent findings of continuing research in multiple disciplines and fields of activity, both within and outside the United Nations system, and the channelling of the results of this exercise to intergovernmental bodies, on a continuing basis. Integration of results should emphasize the need to monitor and interrelate broad social, cultural, economic, demographic and physical trends and assess their implications in terms of principal development objectives and the anticipated changes implicit in the basic General Assembly documents relating to the new international economic order, including the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade (Assembly resolution 35/56, annex, of 5 December 1980). The review process, which would involve interagency consultations and the convening of technical panels or expert groups, should identify explicit research and policy priorities by problem area and/or geographical region and should consider emerging issues and proposals for effective international co-operation.

C. Programme areas

19. With regard to the substantive areas of action and/or study, attention will be given to intersectoral issues, as these highlight not only interrelationships and interactions but also interagency and interdisciplinary interests and activities. Particular attention will be given to areas that are not already the focus of existing programmes, such as the Man and Biosphere Programme of UNESCO and the on-going system-wide programmes on environment and development and on population and development.

20. The following three programme areas are intended to provide an initial orientation for building up a full-fledged programme of activities and are therefore to be seen as constituting an open agenda to which substantive areas will be added or modified on the basis of the findings of the review and synthesis studies to be undertaken.

1. Rational use of global resources

21. A major multidisciplinary effort is needed for analysis of the range of technical, economic, social, environmental and political problems posed by long-term global resource perspectives, and to frame these problems in a context of decision-making on development concerns and against an international background. Particular attention needs to be given to food and energy resources and to forests, fisheries, water, non-fuel minerals and the atmosphere. Promising concepts for orienting interdisciplinary studies include: (a) resource-use systems; (b) resource technologies, including dual use and recycling; (c) the concepts of rational use and rationality indicators for assessment of resource profiles and strategies; and (d) global accountability and international responsibility. The results of these studies should contribute towards greater understanding of the interactions between people and the environment in their development and utilization of resources and the identification of instruments to improve these interactions. They could also lead to updated reviews of resource situations, globally and country-wise, and to measures to develop and intensify developing countries' knowledge about their resources and to enhance their capacity to identify potential uses on a sustainable basis. They could provide a basis for (a) policies to improve access to and distribution of information on the uses of natural resources between countries and between generations; (b) modalities for managing "common heritages of mankind" - resources and "wastelands"; and (c) policies to help ensure that financial surpluses originating from the exploitation of natural resources and the environment are appropriately used to enhance the resource base and are equitably distributed within and between nations, and between generations.

2. Consumption patterns and life-styles

22. A second cluster of critical problems of interrelationships relates to the examination of the serious implications on the renewable and non-renewable resource base of contemporary production and consumption patterns and technologies. There is need for empirical multidisciplinary studies of development styles focusing on "distorted" or unsustainable tendencies in the character of processes of growth and change at the societal level in: (a) levels and structures of production; (b) participation of different classes and groups in economic, social and political activities; (c) distribution of incomes and wealth; (d) patterns of consumption and (e) systems of values, attitudes and motivations. The results of such studies could clarify the means by which alternative consumption patterns could orient the development process to accommodate people's aspirations and expectations within sustainable resource and environmental imperatives. They could also identify initiatives in the design of alternative technologies, especially in areas of energy, food, habitat, transportation, health and education, with consequential institutional changes.

3. Improving and expanding carrying capacity

23. Carrying capacity is a relative concept. In addition to the inherent resilience and dynamism of ecosystems, this capacity can be improved and expanded through a variety of means including a more careful exploitation of the indigenous natural resource base, diversification of the economy, and changes in consumption patterns. The third cluster of issues on interrelationships will include the identification and mapping of the critical areas or ecosystems around the world, particularly where significant population groups are directly dependent on the ecosystem in question. Periodic monitoring of the situation in those areas would need to be undertaken. Some of the well-known critical areas, such as the Himalayan foothills, the Sahel, certain zones of tropical forest, and some river basins, ^{c/} should be subjected to detailed study and analysis with a view to assisting the countries concerned in establishing a long-term strategy for sustainable development of those regions. Methods would also have to be developed for avoiding deterioration and for enhancing and assessing the production potentials of specific marine, forestry and agro-economic zones.

D. Programme activities for 1981-1982

24. The following activities are being undertaken:

(a) Consultations with United Nations organizations and regional commissions with a view to identifying examples of the types of study to be carried out in the context of the system-wide work programme and working out suitable arrangements for interagency co-ordination and co-operation;

(b) Discussions with Governments;

(c) Formulation of specific studies at the national, regional and international levels that may be initiated within the resources currently available to organizations or through the additional resources that may be made available through voluntary contributions to the general trust fund established for that purpose.

25. On the basis of activities undertaken to date, specific projects have been identified for inclusion in the system-wide work programme on interrelationships, as listed in the appendix below.

E. Programme support

26. Activities presently under way draw fully on available resources in the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation and in other United Nations entities concerned. Once the activities envisaged in the

^{c/} Ibid., appendix to annex II.

system-wide work programme on interrelationships enter the implementation phase, the Office of the Director-General will have to respond fully to increased requirements for co-ordination, substantive planning and appraisal, and management of the resources under the trust fund. In particular, it is envisaged that the following support to the programme on interrelationships will have to be provided by the Office of the Director-General:

(a) Co-ordination activities, including consultations with United Nations organizations; preparation of interagency meetings; identification of relevant national institutions, research centres and non-governmental organizations; and development of a network for informational exchange, review of activities and dissemination of results;

(b) Substantive activities, relating to programme planning and appraisal, development of project proposals, review of on-going work and preparation of periodic synthesis reports on findings, identification of gaps in system-wide work, anticipation of emerging issues and formulation of recommendations;

(c) Management of the general trust fund and related activities, including processing of requests for funding and preparation of periodic reports to donors.

27. The views expressed by interested delegations regarding the financing of support activities have been noted in the context of the procedures established to implement the provisions of the United Nations Financial Rules and Regulations relating to the coverage of that portion of normal programme support costs which would otherwise constitute an additional financial liability for the Organization. It is therefore expected that the resources necessary to finance these support activities will be provided through the application to the contributions to the trust fund of the standard deduction for reimbursement of support costs. Since the level of support required and the related reimbursement will largely depend on the amount of resources contributed to the trust fund, the Director-General intends to review these arrangements in the light of the experience gained during the first year of operation of the fund and to report to the General Assembly, if necessary, at its thirty-seventh session.

28. The Director-General further proposes that a small advisory body should be constituted, comprising four eminent experts appointed by the Secretary-General from outside the United Nations system to serve in their individual capacity, which would meet periodically to review the activities of the work programme on interrelationships, assess its over-all orientation and achievements and make recommendations for its further development, and to advise on the operation of the general trust fund. The costs of the meetings of this advisory body would be met from the resources of the trust fund.

29. It is proposed that the existing mechanisms for interagency co-ordination on the work on interrelationships in the framework of the Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (Programme) should be continued.

APPENDIX

Projects identified for inclusion in the system-wide
work programme on interrelationships

<u>Project a/</u>	<u>Relation to system-wide programme Programme area b/</u>	<u>Programme components c/</u>
Land resources for populations of the future (FAO/UNEP/United Nations/UNESCO/UNFPA/ILO/WHO/International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis)	Formulation of plans for attainment of food self-sufficiency in three critical tropical environments with high population densities (3)	Comparative studies for warm humid tropics (Indonesia), cool semi-arid sub-tropics (Tunisia), warm semi-arid tropics (Kenya) (1)
Deforestation of the Himalayan foothills (UNEP)	Improving and expanding carrying capacity (3)	Action research study (2)
Overgrazing in the Sudano-Sahelian region (UNEP/UNESCO/FAO)	Improving and expanding carrying capacity (3)	Action research study (2)
Peasant survival and environmental management in semi-arid high lands of high demographic density (ECLA/UNEP)	Examination of survival strategies of different peasant groups to study practical actions for resource management (1)	Comparative studies for Ecuador, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia (1)
Study of high consumption regions of resources (United Nations regional commissions)	Assessment of resource use profiles in terms of rationality indicators (1)	Comparative regional studies (1)
Resource use survey (United Nations regional commissions)	Evaluation by technical panel of global and regional priorities for research and policy in area of resources (1)	Review and synthesis of new knowledge (4)
Development and life styles: guidelines for integrated planning (United Nations)	Examination of findings of recent United Nations work on life-styles with view towards drawing conclusions for integrated planning (2)	Review and synthesis of new knowledge (4)

/...

Development of an extended Social Accounting Matrix framework for analysis of the inter-relationships (United Nations/UNFPA)

Design, data-gathering and testing of Social Accounting Matrix framework for mapping of production and consumption activities (2)

Methodological study (3)

a/ Whenever possible, the lead agency/institution for a project has been listed first.

b/ Programme areas: (1) rational use of global resources; (2) consumption patterns and life-styles; (3) improving and expanding carrying capacity.

c/ Programme components: (1) comparative geographic, sectoral and societal studies; (2) action research studies urgently needed for developing countries; (3) methodological studies; (4) review and synthesis of new knowledge.