UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL
ASSEMBLY
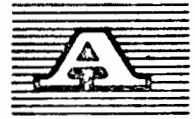
Thirty-fourth session

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND CO-ORDINATION
ON THE WORK OF ITS NINETEENTH SESSION

CHAPTERS I AND II

ORGANIZATION OF THE SESSION AND THE PROCESS OF
PROGRAMME PLANNING IN THE UNITED NATIONS

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    * This is a provisional mimeographed version of the first part of the report
of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination on its nineteenth session. The
complete report will be issued in printed form as Official Records of the General
Assembly, Thirty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/34/38), following the resumed
nineteenth session of the Committee, scheduled to be held from 4 to
7 September 1979.

79-15570

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1/ Agenda item 8, entitled "Proposed programme budget for the biennium
1980-1981", will be considered by the Committee at its resumed session from
4 to 7 September 1979.

2/ The provisional mimeographed versions of chapters of the report contain also
the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. The final report will
reproduce all the conclusions and recommendations in chapter VII.

CHAPTER I*

ORGANIZATION OF THE SESSION

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* This chapter will not be issued in a provisional mimeographed version, but will appear in the final printed report.

CHAPTER II

THE PROCESS OF PROGRAMME PLANNING IN THE UNITED NATIONS

A. Introduction

1.   The Committee considered agenda item 3, entitled "The process of programme planning in the United Nations", at its 568th to 579th, 586th and 587th meetings, on 7 to 11, 14 and 18 May 1979.

2.   At its eighteenth session, the Committee agreed that it would carry out an in-depth study of the planning process at its nineteenth session, on the basis of a report to be prepared by the Secretary-General in co-operation with the organizations of the United Nations system and a report by the Joint Inspection Unit. Further, the Committee recalled that the General Assembly in resolution 32/197 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, had called for the development of co-operative and, wherever possible, joint planning in the United Nations system. In that connexion the Committee emphasized that United Nations planning efforts should be tailored to the needs of system-wide joint planning. 1/

3.   At its eighteenth session, the Committee had before it information on the financial aspects of the proposed medium-term plan provided by the Secretary-General in response to paragraph 3 (a) of General Assembly resolution 31/93 of 14 December 1976, which it considered to be a reference document. Accordingly, the Committee recommended that chapter 3 should not be included in the medium-term plan for the period 1980-1983 and decided to consider, at its nineteenth session, the application of paragraph 3 (a) of General Assembly resolution 31/93 in the context of its review of the planning process in the United Nations. 2/

4.   The Economic and Social Council, in paragraph (d) of its decision 1978/84, approved the decision of the Committee to study in depth, at its nineteenth session, the process of planning and programming. The General Assembly, in paragraph 4 of its resolution 33/118 of 19 December 1978, also welcomed the Committee's intention to conduct such a study.

5.   In connexion with the consideration of the item, the Committee's attention was drawn to the guidelines proposed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on financial information to be included in future medium-term plans (A/33/345, paras. 7-11), which were endorsed by the General Assembly in paragraph 7 of its resolution 33/118.

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1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/33/38), paras. 2 and 3.

2/ Ibid., para. 55.

6.   In paragraph 10 of the same resolution, the General Assembly approved the recommendations of the Committee, at its eighteenth session, on further harmonization of programming in the United Nations system, including the request to the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) to submit detailed proposals for securing an overview of the objectives and plans of the organizations of the system. 3/

7.   The Committee's attention was also drawn to Economic and Social Council resolution 1979/4 of 9 May 1979 on the medium-term plan for the period 1980-1983, in paragraph 1 of which the Council invited the Committee, in its proposed in-depth study of the process of programme planning in the United Nations, to pay special attention to the question of how better to ensure that the proposed medium-term plan conforms to the strategies, policies and priorities laid down by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

8.   For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a)   In-depth study on the planning process in the United Nations: report of the Secretary-General (E/AC.51/97 and Add.1-2);

(b)   Medium-term planning process in the United Nations: report prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit (A/34/84); 4/

(c)   Chapters 2 and 3 of Part One of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1980-1983; 5/

(d)   Summary of the discussion in the Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (Programme) of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on the in-depth study on the planning process in the United Nations (E/AC.51/XIX/CRP.1);

(e)   The identification of output in the programme budget of the United Nations: note by the Secretary-General (A/C.5/34/2);

(f)   Establishment of internal work programmes and procedures for reporting on programme implementation: progress report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/34/3).

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3/ Ibid., paras. 46-49.

4/ Although the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/34/84) had been submitted to the Committee pursuant to its specific request made at its eighteenth session (see ibid., para. 3), the date of submission of the report did not provide the Secretary-General with sufficient time, as provided for under the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit (para. 4 of art. 11 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 31/192, of 22 December 1976), to make his comments available to the Committee. Accordingly, the comments made by members of the Secretariat during the course of the discussions were preliminary, representing the view of their respective offices. It was understood that the Secretary-General would in due course submit his official comments on the report.

5/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/33/6/Rev.1).

B. General discussion

9.   As a basis for the general discussion of agenda item 3, the Committee agreed, on the suggestion of the Chairman, that it would consider simultaneously the report of the Joint Inspection Unit and the report of the Secretary-General (E/AC.51/97 and Add.1 and 2) on the same subject.

10.   In introducing the report of the Secretary-General (E/AC.51/97 and Add.1-2), the Assistant Secretary-General for Programme Planning and Co-ordination pointed out that, while the concept of medium-term planning in the United Nations had been accepted in principle and the Organization had gone through four experimental cycles of preparation and implementation, a need for further improvement had become apparent in a number of aspects which were outlined in the report.   The planning system suffered from several inconsistencies, the usefulness of the plan as a tool showed certain weaknesses and the choice between possible remedies or alternative solutions was not an easy one, since a hard core of problem areas, encountered from the beginning, were still present.

11.   In introducing the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/34/84), Inspector Maurice Bertrand indicated that he considered that report to be complementary to the report of the Secretary-General.   He mentioned his broad agreement with the choices outlined by the Assistant Secretary-General, explained the rationale behind his recommendations and submitted argumentation in support of three of them, which covered aspects of the planning process not dealt with in detail in the report of the Secretary-General, namely:

   (a)   The orientation by objective of the programme structure;

   (b)   The role of the introduction to the medium-term plan;

   (c)   The need for an involvement of programme managers in the work on the methodology of medium-term planning.

12.   Representatives of the organs, organizations and bodies within the United Nations system participated actively in the consideration of this item.

13.   The general debate helped to identify the weaknesses of the planning process and to clarify several issues of principle.   The discussion focused on the following major themes:

   (a)   The links between the legislative mandates of the various policy-making organs and the medium-term plan and the nature and status of the plan;

   (b)   The time horizon of the plan and its "rolling" or fixed nature;

   (c)   The optimum level and frequency of planning cycles and the volume of documentation which would effectively serve the purposes of the General Assembly in evolving an operationally effective and efficient system of programme planning;

   (d)   The actual extent of choices between alternative strategies;

   (e)   Harmonization of planning periods with the agencies of the system for co-ordination purposes;

(f) The nature and depth of the involvement of various levels of intergovernmental bodies in the plan formulation process;

(g) The amenability of different activities to planning and programming;

(h) The nature and meaning of the relationship between the medium-term plan and the programme budget;

(i) The purpose and nature of the introduction to the medium-term plan;

(j) Evaluation as a part of the planning process;

(k) Setting of priorities.

14. The approach to planning in the United Nations system was discussed from various angles. By its very nature, the medium-term plan should be future-oriented rather than extending existing activities and should thus have a deductive approach (see E/AC.51/97, paras. 100 to 106). It was recognized, however, that some interpretation might be required when translating certain resolutions into programmes. In that context, it was suggested that different types of resolutions might require different treatment. Legislative mandates setting broad aims and principles, such as the new international economic order or the international development strategy, required a considerable amount of interpretation, while other more specific resolutions such as the world plans of action in the fields of population, integration of women in development and water, provided rather precise and detailed directives for action and required much less interpretation. The Committee agreed, however, that the medium-term plan should be a faithful translation of legislative mandates into programmes.

15. A further difficulty arose when sectoral or regional legislative mandates had to be made compatible between themselves and with central mandates in a coherent global medium-term plan. This was an aspect of programme formulation which encompassed programme co-ordination and required not only faithful and skilful translation by the secretariats concerned, but also the active support of Member States.

16. The Committee agreed that the status of the medium-term plan could be considered in relation to the chronological order of its formulation. The legislative mandates for the plan objectives exist a priori; the proposed medium-term plan would remain a proposal of the Secretary-General until adopted by the General Assembly in its final form, when it would become a principal policy directive. Subsequently, a review mechanism would allow the incorporation of the implications of further legislation and legislative changes in the plan.

17. The Committee noted that the present frequency of the planning exercise and the volume of the planning documents had overwhelmed everyone's ability to review thoroughly the proposed medium-term plan. If the plan were to serve its main purposes satisfactorily, it had to become a briefer and more concise document. A balance should be struck between the need of Member States for full information to judge the legitimacy, adequacy, relevance and relative priority of programmes and the need to limit the time and efforts required for the formulation, integration, review and adoption of the proposed medium-term plan. The resources invested in the planning process should be commensurate with the benefits to be derived from it. The Committee emphasized that programme planning

should be viewed as an essential feature of the responsibilities of the programme managers and not as a burdensome addition to their work.

18. The Committee was initially faced with a number of choices which, if taken at face value, seemed mutually exclusive: continuity versus flexibility; fixed-horizon versus "rolling" plan; central co-ordination versus sectoral and regional requirements; full involvement of sectoral and regional organs versus the need to limit the preparation period to an acceptable length etc. The discussion revealed that most of those choices were not between mutually exclusive alternatives, but were rather distributed along a spectrum, since in practice the solution selected could be neither all black nor all white, but a blend, the real question being that of the mix. Also, most delegations noted that the differences between both ends of the spectrum were not as great as might have appeared at the beginning. The "trade-offs" involved were often less of a technical nature than of a political one and should be judged on the basis of relevant criteria.

19. The Committee considered the question of the planning cycle in relation to the need for continuity, flexibility and co-ordination. While there was general agreement that the planning period should be lengthened to six years, different points of view were expressed on the "rolling" or fixed nature of the plan. Since ACC had recommended the adoption of a synchronized fixed-horizon six-year plan as a standard for the United Nations system and certain specialized agencies had undertaken steps to implement the recommendation, a number of delegations felt that it would be desirable for the United Nations to follow that recommendation. It was stressed by other delegations, however, that the political character and central role of the United Nations would justify a different planning cycle and that the United Nations medium-term plan could be harmonized with those of other agencies without total synchronization.

20. A full involvement of intergovernmental organs at the central, functional, regional and sectoral levels in the formulation of the medium-term plan was generally considered desirable. As pointed out, however, by the representative of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, there were difficulties in so far as the programme structure, the format and review procedures instituted by regional and sectoral intergovernmental organs were often different from those currently in use at the central level. There were valid reasons for these discrepancies and, as a consequence, the programme management tools used by the regional and sectoral secretariats were often their own work programmes and not the medium-term plan. The problem was further complicated by the fact that, when submitting their programme budget, the sectoral and regional secretariats had to conform to the central programme structure and transform their work programmes accordingly.

21. Involvement of these organs in the plan formulation, however, should not extend to having them formally approve their relevant portion of the medium-term plan, since only the General Assembly could approve the plan. Also, as desirable as it might be, that involvement could not justify disruption of the calendar of conferences or the holding of additional or special sessions, which might cause insuperable difficulties in the allocation of conference facilities and resources.

22. There was general agreement that some of the substantive obstacles to fuller involvement might be alleviated by lengthening the preparation cycle for the proposed medium-term plan and by greater co-ordination in the calendars of meetings

of various organs. Further, the sectoral and regional organs could consider adapting their programme structures to the central one; that should be possible, since their work programmes were already being made compatible with the programme budget structure.

23. Concerning the scope of the medium-term plan and the degree of amenability to programme planning of various types of activities, it was generally felt that most substantive activities were programmable. Several delegations felt that planning programmes within a six-year horizon, according to a standard analytical format, was mainly valid for economic and social activities. However, the point was also made that all objectives and activities of the United Nations, including the maintenance of peace and security, should be dealt with in the medium-term plan document, possibly in a differentiated and more appropriate type of narrative.

24. The distinction between continuing activities and those aimed at time-limited objectives cut across broad programme areas, such as political, legal and humanitarian on the one side and economic and social on the other. There was agreement that, again in an appropriate format, strictly defined continuing activities had to be described in the plan, especially as regards potential changes to be introduced in their substance or periodicity and for a periodic review of their continuing relevance and usefulness.

25. The Committee agreed that the medium-term plan should provide the framework for the programme budget. A number of delegations pointed out, however, that the exact nature of the link between the future medium-term plan and the programme budget needed further consideration. Furthermore, the Committee considered the financial and programme relationships between the plan and the budget.

26. A number of delegations reaffirmed their view that medium-term planning should not be conceived as a way to control the budget, but as a means to analyse the scope and spread of activities. Other delegations, however, felt that the plan should serve as the main criteria for formulating the budget. The plan should not, however, go into details, but should provide only broad indications of financial magnitude. Another delegation emphasized that, in the process of preparation of the medium-term plan, it was necessary to take into account the present level of the regular budget of the United Nations.

27. The question of the programme structure in the medium-term plan was also considered in relation to the programme budget. The Committee agreed that, while the programme structure should be kept under review, the existing format should continue for the present, as it facilitated a comparison between the medium-term plan and the budget. Also, the programme budget can be used as an instrument for ensuring the implementation of the time-limited objectives within and beyond the time horizon of the medium-term plan.

28. Towards the end of the general debate the substance of the statements indicated that on a number of issues, a broad agreement was forming along the following lines:

(a) The 1980-1983 medium-term plan, with reviews at an appropriate time, could remain valid until the plan beginning in 1984 was in force;

(b) Future medium-term plans should be less frequent and should attempt to be shorter and more concise than heretofore;

(c) The introduction to the medium-term plan envisaged by General Assembly resolution 33/118 should become an important feature of the planning document;

(d) Medium-term plans should have a longer horizon and the preparation should be conducted over a longer period of time for a fuller involvement of functional, sectoral and regional intergovernmental bodies;

(e) Medium-term plans should be comprehensive and not staggered;

(f) The present broad programme structure of the plan was acceptable; although some changes in programme structure, including the four programme levels agreed upon by ACC, might be needed, these should be carefully considered before they were implemented.

C. Consideration of specific issues

1. Fixed or "rolling" plan and the duration of the planning period

29. There was considerable discussion in the Committee as to whether the medium-term plan should be fixed-horizon or "rolling", together with the question of the duration of the plan. Several delegations supported a proposal for a six-year plan which would be reviewed after the first two years and rolled, that is, completely reformulated after four years, again for a six-year period. It was pointed out in favour of this proposal that no logical connexion had been established between the "rolling" nature of the present plan and the difficulties of the exercise. The existing argument that a rolling plan afforded the best opportunity to accommodate change was therefore still valid. This was all the more so because, by its very nature the United Nations should not only be in a position to reflect proposals of Governments arising out of changing situations as they arise, but should also be adequately equipped to undertake crucial initiatives - a role which is unique to the United Nations. It was further argued that the goal should be the harmonization and co-ordination of planning efforts, in order to eliminate costly duplication in the United Nations system rather than mechanical synchronization of planning periods. In that connexion, it was pointed out that planning in the United Nations system ought to be a vehicle for a systematic ordering of activities and a basis for a rational allocation of resources, in order to enhance the efficiency of the system and the effectiveness of its programmes. It was unfortunate to regard planning as a means of squeezing resources out of the system.

30. Other delegations, which argued for a fixed horizon plan, advanced the following arguments in its favour:

(a) General Assembly resolution 32/197 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system requested the organizations of the United Nations system to intensify their work on the harmonization of plan cycles. ACC had invited its members to comply with that resolution and had recommended the adoption of six-year fixed-horizon plans with synchronized cycles;

(b) Synchronization of the United Nations plan cycle with those of the specialized agencies would facilitate joint planning;

(c) Sufficient flexibility to ensure that the plan incorporated new decisions of intergovernmental organs would be provided by reviewing it biennially and by bringing it up to date, since United Nations objectives did not generally change substantially over a short period of time;

(d) A six-year fixed-horizon plan would involve less frequent major planning exercises.

31. The Committee did not reach a conclusion on whether the plan should roll or be of fixed horizon. It was agreed, however, that the time horizon of the plan should be extended from four to six years and that new plans should be prepared on a less frequent basis than every two years, as at present.

2. Involvement of intergovernmental organs

32. The discussions of the Committee addressed two aspects of the involvement of intergovernmental organs in the planning process: the technical aspect of the length of time required for preparation and review, and the substantive aspect of the nature of the review required.

33. It was generally agreed by the Committee that the period of preparation, including formulation and review should be extended from the present period of about one year to allow for greater involvement of intergovernmental organs and to allow the Secretariat more time to produce better analyses. However, the three-year preparatory period presented as one of the options in annex II of the report of the Secretary-General (E/AC.51/97/Add.1) was generally found to be too long, especially since it would result in the plan being initially prepared too far in advance to be an up-to-date document.

34. On the other hand, it was recognized that, if intergovernmental organs at all levels were to be involved in formulation of the plan, a two-year preparatory period would entail revisions in the present scheduling of meetings and conferences.

35. Several delegations were of the view that such rescheduling should not lead to additional meetings of the organs involved. At the same time, it was acknowledged that, initially at least, a preparatory period of somewhat more than two years might be required. There was an emerging point of view during the discussions that the preparation period for the subsequent plans should be extended to between 18 months to two years.

36. The Assistant Secretary-General for Programme Planning and Co-ordination pointed out that the involvement of intergovernmental organs, in fact, goes far beyond simply reviewing the draft plan. The process of involvement should cover the formulation, review, implementation and evaluation stages. There was general agreement with that degree of involvement.

37. The Committee concluded that it should suffice that all sectoral and regional intergovernmental bodies should review their portions of the proposed medium-term plan during their regular cycle of meetings prior to its consideration by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination.

38. The discussion on this issue also addressed the special consideration to be given in the preparatory process to the introduction to the medium-term plan, to be prepared by the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation (see paras. 55 to 69).

3. Possible alterations in the structure of the present medium-term plan

39. The Assistant Secretary-General for Programme Planning and Co-ordination explained that the present four-level classification into major programme, programme, subprogramme and programme elements had been arrived at in agreement with programme agencies of the United Nations system. He said that the structure by objective proposed by the Joint Inspection Unit was not so far apart from the agreed upon theoretical programme level classification, since, for instance, a subprogramme was therein defined as a cluster of programme elements aimed at one single objective. The United Nations organ responsible for co-ordination within the system should weigh the advantages and drawbacks of modifying unilaterally the agreed classification system. It was further suggested that the formulation of a few programmes on an experimental basis, which had been requested from the Secretariat for the twentieth session of the Committee, should provide an opportunity to test the need for and usefulness of changes in the programme structure. Rather than deciding on the number of programme levels in the abstract, he continued, it might be wiser to review the results of the experimentation, possibly including different approaches to the issue, and then make an informed decision.

40. Regarding the detail of information and the possibility for varying its density, he pointed out that this question concerned both the managerial and legislative levels. In this context three levels could be distinguished: (a) operational level, (b) sectoral or regional level and (c) central level. In line with the above classification, it might be possible to vary the density of information according to the kinds of decisions to which the various organs and managers had to address themselves. He also suggested that the density of information could vary in relation to the time horizon.

41. In answer to questions on what methods could be employed to identify new activities in the medium-term plan, Inspector Bertrand suggested that the proposed distinction between continuing and time-limited activities might help in the identification. If the distinction were accepted, new activities would appear when either the time-limit of the objective was reached or the term of the plan had come to an end, or when a continuing activity was terminated. It might be possible if it were considered useful to group new activities in separate chapters of the plan, thus identifying separately that part of the programme which was continuing, a procedure which could further facilitate the review of the plan.

42. Some delegations stressed the need for identifying completed and obsolete activities in the plan. It was noted, however, that the medium-term plan was of necessity forward looking and related to the future. It would therefore be more appropriate if the planning process itself facilitated the identification and elimination of completed and obsolete activities. One delegation suggested that the administrative units should describe the 10 per cent of subprogramme activity to which they attached the least priority.

4. Use of the medium-term plan as a tool for co-ordination within the United Nations system, including the use of joint planning operations

43. The Committee reaffirmed that the medium-term plan should be used as a tool for co-ordination and harmonization within the United Nations system. A number of delegations stated that a longer preparation cycle, and variations in plan narrative laying greater emphasis on objectives and strategies would facilitate co-ordination. One delegation suggested that the narrative under "co-ordination" should analyse the delimitation of areas of common concern between major programmes and the actual allocation of responsibilities between bodies.

44. In the initial formulation of a new plan, the enlarged schedule should provide ample room for interagency consultations. It was also pointed out that, when the joint planning technique was widely used in all areas of common concern within the system, the co-ordination procedure based on the medium-term formulation process could be made lighter and less time-consuming. Some delegations suggested that bringing up to date operations undertaken within a tighter calendar might hinder a co-ordination procedure.

5. Use of time-limited objectives including the question of programmability of activities

45. It was pointed out that, while all objectives should and could be clearly defined and as specifically as possible, irrespective of whether a plan covered a period of six or four years, each objective should lend itself to evaluation at the end of the period, whether it had been reached yet or not. However, unless one was very specific and detailed regarding objectives at the programme element level, it might be very difficult to determine the exact time frame within which systematic evaluation could be performed.

46. In this context, the point was made that the idea of time-limited objectives would only gain meaning if programme managers were really made responsible for the performance of their programmes, whether the medium-term plan was designed along programme and/or subprogramme levels. It was important, therefore, that in the framework of internal evaluation, specific time-limited objectives be defined to serve as a standard against which the progress achieved at the end of the relevant time period could be assessed.

47. The Committee agreed that its future deliberations on the subject would benefit from the experimental formulation of programmes to be carried out by the Secretariat in accordance with the above proposals so that it could study and assess fully all implications of basing the future plans on time-limited objectives.

48. Answering questions raised by a few delegations, Inspector Bertrand suggested that there should be a clear relationship between the administrative structure and the programme structure by objectives, a problem that up to now had not been solved. Furthermore, while the present plan as submitted included very few time-limited objectives, an experiment on three programmes had been carried out. Those experiments had shown that the application of time-limited objectives to the existing type of subprogrammes was nearly impossible, but that the problem could

easily be solved by adopting a subprogramme structure of the type proposed by the Joint Inspection Unit, as had been demonstrated in the case of the Population Division.

49. The Committee had doubts about the proposal to classify activities as programmable or non-programmable. Some delegations felt that the concept was a relative one and expressed reservations regarding its introduction in the methodology of planning.

6. Evaluation as a step in the planning and programming cycle, and the use of achievement indicators

50. The Committee generally agreed that the application of achievement indicators and the process of evaluation were very closely related, since any meaningful evaluation would have to be based on achievement indicators, which should be built into the programme design. Furthermore, evaluation was seen as an ongoing, continuous process in parallel with programme implementation, but this internal and self-correcting process had to be matched by an external check and control. A major concern expressed by a number of delegations related to the selection of the point within the planning cycle when evaluation exercises should be carried out. While many agreed that any evaluation exercise should at the same time aim at and facilitate the redrawing and redefining of the programme, the opinion that evaluation should not be exclusively connected with the redrafting of programmes was also expressed.

51. The view was expressed that evaluation should take place at the end of each plan period so as to provide a general overview and comparison between what had been programmed and what had actually been achieved. Therefore, in the case of a six-year plan, rolling after four years, evaluation should take place at the end of four years, which would coincide with the review of a new plan. Several delegations pointed out that, attractive as the idea might be, the volume of work entailed by a thorough evaluation of all programmes simultaneously every four years made it impossible; furthermore evaluation should be a continuing process.

52. A further point discussed related to the relationship of internal to external evaluation. It was recalled that the Committee had already made its choice on the methods of evaluation and basically relied on a combination of internal evaluation carried out on a number of programmes each year, complemented by external evaluation by the Joint Inspection Unit and the competent intergovernmental organs.

7. Relationship between the medium-term plan and the programme budget

53. The Committee reiterated that the medium-term plan should and can be an essential instrument for the preparation of the programme budget. It should be precise and concise in its presentation. In order to be fully effective as the basis or framework for the preparation of the proposed budget, it should contain time-limited, quantitatively measurable objectives, an indication of the strategy to be followed to achieve the objectives, estimates of completion time for different phases of work and achievement indicators.

54. The importance of having a similar or comparable programme structure in the two documents was pointed out. While in the medium-term plan it should be enough to indicate the kind of activity that would be carried out under each subprogramme, the budget document would describe all the activities of the subprogramme.

8. Setting of priorities and introduction to the medium-term plan

55. The Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation was invited by the Committee to present his views on the planning process with particular reference to the role and nature of the introduction to the medium-term plan. At the 586th meeting, the Director-General made a statement, 6/ in which he expressed the view that the role that might be played by the introduction can be identified in the perspective of the process of priority setting, policy guidance and decision making. This process should commence at the beginning of the planning preparation period, provide thereafter suitable mechanisms for policy interaction between Member States and the Secretariat, and conclude with an authoritative pronouncement by the General Assembly. The preparations might begin with a mechanism for pre-planning consultations, which would provide ways and means for Member States to indicate their views on the general policy guidelines which should determine the preparation of the plan and possibly give an indication of the broad priorities to be established in the light of intergovernmental legislation.

56. He indicated that such a mechanism for pre-planning consultations should ensure that (a) a fully representative number of Member States take part in the consultations; (b) the Secretariat should play an appropriate role in initiating and organizing these consultations; (c) the results of the consultations should be such as to provide the Secretary-General with fairly clear guidelines from Member States, especially if major shifts in priorities were envisaged; and (d) allowance be made for some flexibility in case the course of events required some revision of the general guidelines thus established.

57. A possible way of meeting these conditions would be through a debate in the Economic and Social Council and/or the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination conducted on the basis of a statement made on behalf of the Secretary-General. Another device would be the issue of a pre-planning document. He pointed out that, for a variety of reasons, the pre-planning phase should seek an optimal balance between formal pronouncement and retaining its preliminary character.

58. The second stage of the process would be the internal Secretariat procedure for the circulation of the instructions for the preparation of the plan. These instructions would not simply deal with the mechanical process of putting the plan together, but would also contain, on the basis of the views expressed by Member States through the pre-planning consultations, instructions on the strategies to be followed in preparing the plan.

59. The third stage of the process would be the formulation of the introduction to the proposed plan. In accordance with views of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, this introductory statement would give an overview of the main concerns of the entire Organization as expressed in the plan and explain what the

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6/ For the text of the statement, see E/AC.51/101.

Organization intended to do during the period covered by the plan. It should concentrate in particular on the question of medium-term strategies for the United Nations.

60. The fourth and final stage of the process would be the consideration by the central intergovernmental bodies of the proposed medium-term plan in the light of the strategies outlined in the introduction. At the end of the process, therefore, the proposed plan would become the agreed medium-term plan for the United Nations and would thus, in the language of General Assembly resolution 31/93, "constitute the principal policy directive of the United Nations".

61. As regards the components of the introduction, the Director-General expressed himself to be in broad agreement with the approach suggested by Inspector Bertrand in paragraph 105 of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/34/84). However, he felt that his approach to the examination and definition of the criteria to be applied by Member States in establishing trends and guidelines would need to be made with careful regard to the policy-making prerogatives of central intergovernmental bodies; similarly, some flexibility would be required in regard to the level of specificity and detail to be included in the indications regarding major programme areas. On the question of the organizational coverage of the introduction, he thought that it would be realistic at this stage to focus the introduction on the United Nations plan, rather than the establishment of priorities covering the system as a whole. The introduction must, however, place the United Nations plan within the context of the system as a whole and should deal with areas that might be amenable to co-operative or joint planning, so that the plan might serve also as a useful tool of co-ordination.

62. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the Director-General for appearing before the Committee to present his views, which constituted a valuable input to the discussion.

63. A number of delegations expressed their support for the idea of a pre-planning document. They indicated the political nature of this document and its usefulness in providing a tool for interaction between the Governments and the Secretariat. Some delegations further suggested that this document could be discussed in the General Assembly where the widest representation exists.

64. Other delegations, however, indicated that the more informal approach of an oral presentation was preferred. They expressed the view that anything overly formal would restrict the possibilities of adapting to changes that might occur over the rather long preparatory period envisaged for consultations.

65. Some delegations further pointed out that, if observers and agencies were present, the Economic and Social Council would be an appropriate forum for the oral presentation by the Director-General. Several delegations indicated their view that the mechanics of the presentation should be studied further as no decision needed to be made during the current session of the Committee.

66. On the question of the scope of the introduction, the Committee recalled that, in accordance with paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 33/118, the introduction to the medium-term plan "should constitute an analysis of the activities of the Organization and the strategy for their implementaion and be prepared by the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation under the authority of the Secretary-General". The Committee,

recalling General Assembly resolution 32/197, emphasized the need for the introduction to highlight objectives and policy orientations of the United Nations system and to indicate trends as deduced from the legislative mandates which reflect the priorities set by the intergovernmental organs. The Committee expressed its desire to see the United Nations move firmly in this direction.

67. A number of delegations indicated the great importance they attach to the role of the introduction to the medium-term plan in setting out the priorities established by legislative mandates. It was indicated, however, that in this respect the introduction should focus on general trends.

68. It was generally agreed that the priorities which should be reflected in the plan must be based on legislation adopted by intergovernmental organs. Throughout the process described by the Director-General, therefore, the task of the Secretariat should be to translate those decisions in such a manner as to arrive at a coherent interpretation of them for the consideration of the appropriate intergovernmental reviewing bodies. In this context, stress was laid on the need to take full account of priorities established at the regional level.

69. The Committee agreed that the issues involved should be explored further before a carefully considered decision was made given its importance in the planning process.

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70. Pursuant to a decision taken by the Committee, the Rapporteur submitted an informal working paper containing draft conclusions and recommendations, which were considered and adopted, as orally revised, during the discussion. The conclusions and recommendations appear in paragraphs 71 to 73 below.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

71. During the consideration by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination of agenda item 3, entitled "The process of programme planning in the United Nations", the principles on which programme planning in the United Nations should be based were discussed at length. Among these, the relationship of the medium-term plan to development received particular attention. Bearing in mind its terms of reference, as contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 2008 (LX) and the relevant sections of General Assembly resolution 32/197 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, the Committee agreed that the programme planning process should be based on the following principles:

(a) The planning process, which is a part of the over-all management process, should be forward looking and dynamic. The medium-term plan should not be formulated primarily on the basis of projection of the past and present into the future, as has been the practice so far, but it should be deductive and its strategy and orientation as well as its specific goals and activities at all levels should be derived from the objectives and policy orientations set by the intergovernmental organs.

(b) The medium-term plan should be a faithful translation of legislative mandates into programmes.

(c) The medium-term plan remains a proposal by the Secretary-General until adopted by the General Assembly, when it becomes a principal policy directive.

(d) The medium-term plan should be comprehensive and not staggered.

(e) A longer time-horizon than four years is needed and a balance must be achieved between flexibility and continuity in the planning process.

(f) While it may be desirable to lengthen the planning cycle to ensure continuity, it will be necessary to achieve flexibility through reviews by intergovernmental organs as detailed as required to incorporate the programme implications of the resolutions adopted by intergovernmental organs and international conferences since the adoption of the plan.

(g) There should be full involvement of intergovernmental organs in the formulation, consideration, review and evaluation of the plan during the regular cycle of their meetings. The effective participation of the central as well as sectoral, regional and functional bodies would require a longer preparation cycle for the plan and a greater co-ordination in their calendar of meetings than at present.

(h) The introduction to the medium-term plan should constitute a key integral element in the planning process. It should highlight objectives and policy orientations of the United Nations system and indicate trends as deduced from the legislative mandates which reflect the priorities set by the intergovernmental organs.

(i) In the medium-term plan, the emphasis should be on description of objectives and strategy; the presentation and format of the analysis should vary according to the type and nature of activities.

(j)   The programme budget should be formulated within the framework of the medium-term plan, keeping in view its objectives and strategy.

(k)   There is a need to vary information density in relation to the time horizon as well as according to the information needs of the reviewing bodies.

(l)   The planning process should take into account the need for joint planning, programme co-ordination and harmonization within the United Nations system.   The Committee, however, could not agree that total synchronization of planning periods is thereby necessarily required.   Co-ordination is not an end in itself; its aim should be to maximize the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the system.

(m)   Performance reporting and evaluation are key elements in the planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation cycle; the evaluation mechanism should be strengthened; the ongoing process of developing and improving planning methods includes the refinement of evaluation techniques.   The use of achievement indicators as a tool for evaluation should be developed.

72.   Regarding the manner in which the planning process should be scheduled, organized and conducted in the future, the Committee recommends to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly the following:

(a)   The medium-term plan should cover a period of six years.   The Committee did not reach agreement as to whether the plan should roll or have a fixed horizon.   The plan should, however, be brought up to date, as appropriate, no later than the end of the second year of its implementation.

(b)   The next proposed medium-term plan to be submitted should cover the period 1984-1989, and accordingly the submission of a 1982-1985 proposed medium-term plan currently scheduled for 1980 is no longer required.

(c)   The current medium-term plan should be reviewed at an appropriate time to take account of all decisions with programme implications during the first biennium.

(d)   The plan should clearly identify new activities, and the planning process should identify completed and obsolete activities.

(e)   The emphasis in the plan narrative should be on the objectives and strategy.   Objectives should be time-limited as far as possible and the plan structure should be objective-based in all programmes where it is feasible.

(f)   Financial indications should be shown in the plan along the lines recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/33/345, paras. 7-11).

73.   For its twentieth session, the Committee requests the Secretariat to provide model medium-term plan programmes on the basis of general principles and specific recommendations formulated by the Committee at its nineteenth session.   The preparation of the model medium-term plan programmes would help clarify, in particular, the questions of the programme structure of the medium-term plan and the various levels of detail of programme narratives required by various

reviewing bodies. The two programme areas for the preparation of models should be selected from the list of programmes identified by the Committee at its eighteenth session (A/33/345, para 10). The Secretariat should also submit to the Committee, at its twentieth session a draft calendar of preparation for the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989.