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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION
Restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the
United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1 - 2	2
II. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	3 - 4	2
III. EXPERIENCE WITH THE FUNCTIONING OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON CO-ORDINATION	5 - 27	3
IV. CONCLUSION	28 - 32	8

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 34/214 of 19 December 1979, the General Assembly decided to review at its thirty-seventh session for further implementation of section VII (Interagency co-ordination) of the annex to resolution 32/197 and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report in this regard taking fully into account the provisions of that resolution as well as of section II of resolution 33/202. The following report by the Secretary-General has been prepared after consultation with the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system.

2. In previous reports on the subject (E/1978/107 of 2 June 1978 and E/1978/144 of 20 November 1978), the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) welcomed the process of restructuring initiated by the General Assembly as an opportunity for the United Nations system to reappraise the direction and emphasis of its activities, strengthen institutional relationships and co-operative arrangements and, through greater coherence of action, increase the impact of its response to the policy objectives set for it by the international community. ACC observed that the multiplicity of problems hindering development could only be overcome by wide ranging measures, many of them multidisciplinary in nature, drawing on the assistance, contributions and experience of all concerned organizations. It was, therefore, essential to mobilize and integrate the inputs and activities of the organizations at the planning and programming stages and to pool the efforts and resources of the system in order to give effect to the directives, priorities and over-all policy guidelines established by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

3. In restructuring its subsidiary machinery, ACC was guided by three principal considerations. One was the recommendation by the General Assembly in the annex to its resolution 32/197 and reaffirmed in resolution 33/202 that the ACC subsidiary machinery should be streamlined and reduced to the absolute minimum necessary to meet specific intergovernmental requirements and to support the work of its continuing machinery. The second was the need to reflect in the new structures the emphasis placed on substantive support to be provided to the intergovernmental bodies concerned with the discharge of policy-making functions and as an integral part of intersecretariat arrangements for policy and programme execution. The third was the need for machinery capable of dealing effectively with the new responsibilities arising from resolution 32/197 as well as with ongoing tasks, and adjustable to respond promptly to the priority concerns of intergovernmental bodies.

4. The restructured subsidiary machinery consists of an Organizational Committee and of two main Consultative Committees concerned respectively with substantive questions (CCSQ) and with administrative questions (CCAQ). The Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions meets as two separate bodies - one dealing with programme issues (CCSQ (PROG)) and the other with operational issues (CCSQ (OPS)). The Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions also meets as two separate bodies - one dealing with personnel issues (CCAQ (PER)) and the other with financial and budgetary issues (CCAQ (FB)). Details on the functions of these

committees are contained in E/1978/144. In addition, there are a limited number of subsidiary bodies (statistics, nutrition, public information, science and technology, water resources, and rural development) which report to ACC through one of the main subsidiary committees. Finally, task forces or ad hoc arrangements are used to carry out specific, well defined tasks, most often in connexion with the preparation for or follow-up to international years and conferences.

III. EXPERIENCE WITH THE FUNCTIONING OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON CO-ORDINATION

5. The machinery for interagency co-ordination described above was designed to respond to the specific organizational recommendations contained in General Assembly resolution 32/197. The fundamental purpose of the revised organizational arrangements is to enhance the capacity of ACC in effectively assisting in the preparatory work for intergovernmental decisions, in the implementation of such decisions and their translation into mutually complementary or joint programme activities. In addition, in its resolution 33/202 the General Assembly requested ACC to give the highest priority in its work to substantive questions of central importance to the development of developing countries and to international economic co-operation, and to keep its functioning and reporting systems geared to the concerns, directives and programmes of work of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

6. The various reports of ACC and its subsidiary machinery provide a comprehensive record of the various activities undertaken during the period under review and thus a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the revised organizational arrangements. It may nevertheless be appropriate to highlight some specific activities.

A. Organizational arrangements

1. Regional commissions

7. Under the authority of the Secretary-General, the executive secretaries of the regional commissions are invited to participate in the work of ACC on matters of concern to their respective commissions. The regional commissions also have participated increasingly in the work of ACC and its subsidiary bodies. Further, in its work ACC and its subsidiary machinery make every effort to take fully into account the competences of the regional commissions. To this end, regional consultative arrangements have been established where necessary and appropriate.

2. Organization of work

8. In order better to co-ordinate the work of ACC with the priority concerns, specific requirements and programmes of work of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, ACC has begun to organize its work on a biennial basis. Full implementation of an ACC biennial programme of work is related to

progress in the restructuring of the Economic and Social Council as envisaged in section II of General Assembly resolution 32/197. At its first meeting held at the beginning of each calendar year, the Organizational Committee reviews the ACC programme of work in the light of decisions, work programmes and schedules of the central intergovernmental bodies and elaborates for approval by ACC the time-table and agenda for sessions of ACC and the programme of work of the subsidiary machinery. The Organizational Committee is also responsible for monitoring the follow-up to the work programme referred to above, introducing changes whenever required and ensuring appropriate interfacing.

9. ACC has introduced a series of procedures designed to rationalize practices for its functioning. The major focus of these efforts has been to improve the effective execution of the responsibilities of the main subsidiary bodies in supporting the work of the Committee itself. The new procedures relate to the agenda, the programme, participation, documentation, and format of the decisions of ACC.

3. Communications with intergovernmental bodies

10. ACC continues to attach high priority to the improvement of communication between ACC and intergovernmental bodies. In June 1980, the Organizational Committee of ACC prepared a discussion paper reflecting the views of the members of the Committee (ACC/1980/29) which provided a basis for informal consultations with members of the Economic and Social Council at the second regular session of 1980. As reflected in Council decision 1980/185 of 25 July 1980, adopted subsequently, particular importance is placed on improving the existing machinery for communications, namely, the joint meetings of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) and ACC. In this context, it should be noted that an effort has been made to select agenda items for the joint meetings which are substantive and are of interest both to all organizations of the system and to all members of CPC. It must be acknowledged, however, that the joint meetings have not achieved their full potential and further attention needs to be given to the organization, format and agenda of the meetings. At the same time, contacts should be multiplied on a continuing basis with a number of intergovernmental bodies and at various levels, and the process of informal consultations should be strengthened.

4. Reporting

11. Current arrangements provide full access to the results of ACC discussions. In accordance with its revised reporting procedures, instead of producing a single comprehensive annual report covering all of its activities, ACC now submits separate reports on specific issues of system-wide scope on the agenda of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. In addition, ACC submits a brief annual overview report designed to provide a general picture of the state of the United Nations system and an overview of the challenges facing the international community as they are perceived by the executive heads of the organizations of the system.

B. Programme activities

12. Development and international economic co-operation are a significant preoccupation of the United Nations system and occupy a major place in the deliberations of ACC. ACC itself has engaged in a series of high-level discussions on the principal problems confronting the international community and on the ways in which the organizations of the system might orient and redirect their efforts in order to respond effectively to the needs of member States. In addition to formal consideration as a continuing agenda item at its regular meetings, ACC has utilized new methods of work to facilitate informal exchanges of views on development issues and thus strengthen capacities to support intergovernmental bodies in their discussions of these issues. Such an informal meeting was held in April 1980 to discuss the general issue of development and international economic co-operation, and it is envisaged that a similar meeting might be held in the near future to discuss the challenges and constraints facing the organizations of the system in the area of operational activities in the 1980s.

13. A major effort was the assistance provided by ACC in the formulation of the International Development Strategy for the third United Nations Development Decade. In addition to the contributions of individual organizations, the ACC Task Force on Long-term Development Objectives provided inputs to the work of the Committee for Development Planning and the Preparatory Committee for the New International Development Strategy. The adoption of the International Development Strategy by the General Assembly at its 35th session established a basic framework for action by the United Nations system. The organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system fully accept their responsibility to assist Governments in the implementation of the Strategy and in the search for new avenues of international economic co-operation for development. To this end, ACC is currently examining the extent to which the objectives contained in the Strategy are being reflected at the policy and programme levels by the different organizations of the system. The CCSQ(PROG) is undertaking a series of programme reviews of the work of organizations of the United Nations system in relation to the different sectors of the Strategy to determine in specific programme terms how organizations have been able to respond to the Strategy's objectives. It is anticipated that ACC will report on the results of this review to the Economic and Social Council in connexion with the review and appraisal of the Strategy, scheduled for 1984.

14. Similarly, ACC has followed closely the discussions related to the launching of global negotiations and has affirmed its support for such negotiations. The members of ACC, both individually and collectively, have pledged to provide such support as may be necessary and appropriate for the successful conduct of the global negotiations.

15. International conferences and years offer an opportunity to focus on some of the most pressing economic and social problems confronting the international community, as identified by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The organizations of the United Nations system continue to participate fully in the substantive preparations required and in the implementation of final decisions. In doing so, ACC has utilized its main subsidiary bodies, as well as, when warranted, various informal ad hoc arrangements. Recent examples include

interagency consultations in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (1979), the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy (1981), the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981), the United Nations Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (1982), and the World Assembly on Aging (1982).

16. ACC has pursued its discussions on increased use of joint planning as a measure for joint action within the system. As a basic philosophy ACC believes that joint planning should not be undertaken for its own sake; rather, it should grow as programmes develop and acquire interagency dimensions. There already exist many non-formalized channels for joint activities which include the preparation of cross-organizational programme analyses, prior consultation arrangements, as well as certain joint activities that are undertaken on the basis of agreements or letters of understanding between two or more organizations in specific fields of action. In addition, further arrangements have recently been made to initiate joint planning in certain select areas - primary health care, research and training in the assessment, planning and utilization of energy, and harmonization of information systems for energy. In its approach to joint planning, ACC supports the expansion and strengthening of programme consultations at the regional level between the regional commissions and agencies having regional programmes, and the selection of a co-ordinating organization(s) whenever applicable.

17. System-wide analyses of programmes (Cross-Organizational Programme Analyses (COPA)) have become an increasingly common type of report intended to facilitate the co-ordination functions of intergovernmental organs by focussing on programme areas in which several organizations are active. It is also a valuable tool for ACC itself, since both the process of consultation and collaboration in the preparation of the analyses and the final product should contribute to improved co-ordination among the concerned agencies. The usefulness of such analyses could be improved by more concrete follow-up action. During the period under review, COPAs have been prepared in areas of rural development, energy, public administration and youth.

18. Other programme areas of interagency activity include environment, health, energy, science and technology for development, climate variability, water resources, transportation and communication, marine affairs, nutrition, rural development and the study of interrelationships between resources, environment, people and development.

C. Operational activities

19. The preparation by the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation of annual reports on operational activities and the triennial reports on policy issues regarding operational activities involves system-wide interagency consultations. Those consultations provide ACC the opportunity to analyse the system's operational activities for development and to ensure that these activities respond to the needs and requirements of developing countries as well as to consider measures to improve their effectiveness.

20. Closely related to the above is the concern shared by members of ACC about the deteriorating situation facing the organizations of the system with regard to the declining level of concessional resources in real terms available for international technical co-operation and other development activities. At its meeting in November 1981, ACC adopted a decision in which it called this problem to the attention of member States (see A/C.2/36/5). As a follow-up, CCSQ(OPS) is currently reviewing the challenges and constraints facing the organizations of the system in the area of operational activities in the 1980s in the light of this resource problem. The results of this exercise will be considered by ACC and should, in addition, provide valuable material for the 1983 review of policy issues pertaining to operational activities. It is hoped that the results of this exercise will increase the awareness of Governments and the public at large of the useful work of the United Nations system in the area of economic and social development and create a more favourable environment for the funding of an adequate level of United Nations operational activities in the 1980s.

21. Extensive interagency consultations have been undertaken to act upon the provisions of paragraph 34 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 relating to the designation of a single official with over-all responsibility for and co-ordination of operational activities for development at the country level. The new system of resident co-ordinators has now been in operation for some 18 months. Consultations are held to ensure that the official proposed for designation as resident co-ordinator commands the confidence of the system as a whole. In accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 34/213, consultations are being held with Governments through the Resident Co-ordinator with the participation of some agency representatives, and subsequently through ACC, in order to determine how resident co-ordinators might best be able to exercise their functions.

22. After reviewing the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to emergencies, ACC concluded that most of the emergencies that have occurred in past years were of such a nature that the organizations of the system directly concerned were easily identified and that those organizations generally had responded effectively in accordance with their mandates and in fruitful collaboration with one another. At the same time, it was felt that exceptional situations may arise which, because of their magnitude and complexity, require special, ad hoc arrangements for collaboration. Accordingly, ACC adopted a number of guiding principles concerning the role of the lead entity and participating organizations in complex disaster situations (see E/1982/4). It should be emphasized that throughout this exercise, ACC sought to respond fully to the various concerns expressed by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, including, for example, accepting the distinction between simple and complex emergency situations and the provision of additional information with regard to the latter.

23. Other issues of continuing concern to ACC in this area include the use of UNDP country programming process as a frame of reference, economic and technical co-operation among developing countries, and linkages between technical co-operation, pre-investment and investment.

D. Administrative and financial activities

24. The focus of section VII of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 and of resolution 33/202 is on the substantive functions to be performed by ACC. Accordingly, ACC accords highest priority to those activities. At the same time, management issues must remain a major concern in view of the responsibilities of members of ACC as executive heads of their respective organizations and the importance of these issues to the ability of ACC to carry out its substantive responsibilities.
25. The tasks of ACC in this area stem from support requirements of the General Assembly in connexion with its co-ordination functions in the administrative and financial fields and from the general functions of ACC relating to the efficient management of the common system of salaries and allowances and conditions of service. They also arise from the support requirements of the International Civil Service Commission.
26. As regards financial and budgetary questions, a major concern of ACC has been to provide, according to improved standards of quality wherever possible, the information needed by central intergovernmental bodies in carrying out their co-ordinating functions. ACC also proceeded with the continuing work which aims to harmonize financial and budgetary practices and procedures in the organization of the system and to promote common approaches as appropriate to problems arising in this field.
27. Other areas of continuing concern include conditions of field staff, levels of remuneration and security and independence of the international civil service.

IV. CONCLUSION

28. The ultimate purpose of intersecretariat co-ordination within the United Nations is to provide support to member States in their efforts to promote economic and social development. Formal organizational arrangements can contribute significantly to this end. Thus, as is indicated above, the restructuring of the subsidiary machinery of ACC was designed to improve its capacity to effectively fulfil the responsibilities outlined in section VII of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197. Similarly, the work programmes of ACC and its subsidiary machinery have been structured to reflect the substantive issues of central importance identified by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. Of equal importance to the formal organizational arrangements, however, ACC has demonstrated a capacity for pragmatic resolution which continues to yield positive results. Emphasis in the revised intersecretariat structure is on flexibility. The goal is to move away from rigid mechanisms and procedures and operate in ways more easily adjusted to specific needs and changing circumstances.
29. The restructured machinery of ACC has now been in operation for over three years. In general, ACC believes that it has made a positive contribution to interagency co-ordination at the intersecretariat level. At the same time, it is recognized that there is scope for further improvement.

30. Reference has been made earlier to certain improvements in the functioning of the ACC machinery (see para. 9 above). Other possible improvements currently under consideration include a clearer distinction in formulating the agendas for ACC between the discussion of managerial and substantive issues, increased use of informal arrangements for in-depth discussion of major substantive issues, and in the processes of ACC decision-making and improved secretariat support. Of particular concern to ACC in this regard are improvements designed to enhance the capacity of the Committee to identify and explore emerging issues, particularly in the development field, in order to give more dynamism and coherence to the machinery and fit it better to a forward-looking approach.

31. ACC recognizes the need to continue efforts further to enhance the quality of interagency co-ordination. Members of ACC bear a dual responsibility: first, to advise their respective governing bodies of the priorities expressed by the central intergovernmental bodies; and second, to represent fully in ACC the positions adopted by their governing bodies. It is one of the challenging roles of ACC to facilitate the achievement of that balance which will best serve the international community through greater coherence and impact. Member States also have a major responsibility in this regard to provide coherent and consistent policy guidance in the various intergovernmental forums. Such coherence and impact of the United Nations system must be enhanced within the framework of the functionally decentralized system established by the Charter of the United Nations, the constitutions of the specialized agencies and the relationship agreements and by associating organizations with the work of central intergovernmental bodies in the exercise of their co-ordination functions.

32. The process of restructuring the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system initiated by General Assembly resolution 32/197 is a continuous one, ACC will therefore keep under review the current arrangements and procedures to ensure coherent and co-ordinated support to the efforts of member States.
