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Report on the Inter-Organization Board for Information Systems

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the Inter-Organization Board for Information Systems (JIU/REP/78/7).
2. As indicated by the Joint Inspection Unit, the report is also of concern to the Economic and Social Council, the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

* A/34/50.

REPORT ON THE
INTER-ORGANIZATION BOARD FOR
INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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SUMMARY

(with principal conclusions and recommendations)

(i) After considering the historical background and the present IOB work programme, as approved by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), the Inspectors conclude that a firm foundation has been laid for future work, and that the United Nations system must now take decisions for the future, in the light of the Restructuring Resolution 1/. They suggest that more attention should be given to preparing cost estimates for information systems (Chapters I and II).

(ii) The Inspectors consider that an inter-organizational mechanism continues to be needed in order to encourage the development of compatible information systems, and to foster moves towards better co-ordination and harmonization and to reduce costs. They propose that IOB's role should be strengthened so as to help the UN family in progressing towards co-ordination and harmonization of information systems, in response to the need of intergovernmental bodies and of the system as a whole. IOB will have to identify these needs clearly and fully (Chapter III).

(iii) The Inspectors recommend that IOB should be given more impetus and guidance through revised terms of reference. The purpose of IOB should be defined as identifying common information needs amongst members of the UN family and initiating measures to ensure as required the co-ordinated development of the information systems and services of the family. All organizations that are members of ACC should be members of IOB; organizations' representatives should be at the senior programme and policy-making level. Before developing or expanding any technical, scientific or administrative information system, each organization should conduct a feasibility study which (when the system in question might have inter-organizational implications) should be sent to the Board for comments, to be taken into account in the organization's final decision; this process should be applied flexibly. The IOB's work should include financial and administrative systems as well as technical and scientific ones. The Inspectors emphasize the need for closer governmental involvement with IOB's work through the appropriate intergovernmental bodies and recommend that IOB's reports and programmes should be submitted to the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) as appropriate, through ACC, thus giving those bodies regular opportunities to provide guidance and impetus. A revised budgetary procedure is suggested. These recommendations are incorporated in tentative revised terms of reference for IOB (Chapter IV and Annex II).

(iv) The Inspectors examine the 1978 work programme. They conclude that, though it has been modest, useful work has been done. Some essential documents including directories of systems and facilities, now form a solid foundation for future work, including the compilation of an up-to-date list of "Broad Terms". Intergovernmental bodies and ACC should now provide clear policy objectives and guidelines for future work programmes. IOB must focus on the needs of the system as a whole. Attention and action by ACC and also by CPC and ACABQ will be required on the basis of proposals

1/ General Assembly Resolution A/32/197 of 20 December 1977.

from IOB for policy objectives and guidelines. Some broad programme objectives, with some specific objectives for the period 1980-1985, are put forward. A main function which has been neglected until now is the determining of the real needs of intergovernmental bodies and organizations for consolidated inter-organization information (Chapter V).

(v) The CORE project, with its history of high expectations and little progress, is examined and a "pilot" continuation suggested for the attention of ACC and CPC. The Inspectors draw three general lessons from the CORE story (Chapter VI).

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

1. The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) requested the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in May 1977 "to assess the IOB work programme in 1978 and submit its findings to ACC for consideration at its spring session in 1979" 2/. The JIU also received from the Chairman of the Panel of External Auditors in December 1977 a suggestion that it might examine computer and management information systems within the United Nations agencies and consider whether adequate liaison arrangements existed. These requests preceded by a short period the adoption by the General Assembly on 20 December 1977 of the Resolution on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System, which stresses as never before the need for general co-ordination throughout the United Nations system and places upon all its component parts renewed requirements to coordinate their efforts. This study is therefore made at an important juncture. At the time of writing, decisions on IOB's place in the restructured ACC system are understood to be imminent.

2. At an early stage of the study, the Inspectors realized that if they were to assess the IOB's work programme to good effect they must broaden the study to include the IOB's terms of reference and its structure. They have expanded its scope in this way.

Method of Work on the Study

3. A questionnaire was distributed in March 1978 to participating and other organizations, touching on various aspects of the IOB and its work, such as: organizations' assessment of IOB's pre-1977 work programme, including its usefulness; participation in IOB's budget and at meetings; the 1978 work programme and suggestions for the future work programme; a rough estimate of the cost of organizations' existing and planned information systems; and suggestions for an improved IOB. Sixteen completed questionnaires were returned. The Inspectors also personally consulted between March and October 1978 many of those in the United Nations system who are involved in IOB's work and in information systems and who have given special thought to its future. To them and to the organizations which replied to the questionnaire the Inspectors express their thanks.

Information in the United Nations System

4. Information (not in the sense of publicity but in the sense of analyzed and structured data) is a major product of most of the activities of the United Nations organizations. This information is generated by the research and practical experience of the organizations; further information

2/ ACC document CO-ORDINATION/R.1219 of 10 May 1977.

is also received, flowing from the activities of the world community, both governmental and non-governmental. This collected information is used by inter-governmental bodies and by individual governments and academic institutions as well as by secretariats.

5. Apart from this "developmental" information, there is also a large amount of "management" information within the systems of the United Nations family, which should also be readily available to organizations including their governing bodies. This is a second and important aspect of the IOB's major task of working towards an efficient, flexible and economic operation of the network of information systems amongst the various United Nations organizations.

6. In the 1950s, United Nations family activities, and particularly technical assistance, were on a much smaller scale than at present and somewhat more sectoral. Each organization worked essentially in its own field, with less need for information generated by others. The total volume of information was smaller, and its complexity not as great. Now that there are more cross-sectoral activities and large programmes of international cooperation, the volume and complexity of information required are very great indeed and - even more important - major policy decisions (such as those on the Development Decades and on Restructuring) require the various United Nations organizations to work more and more closely together and to know much more about each other's activities, both at Headquarters and in the field. But in general the hundred-and-more operational and planned technical and scientific information systems still only meet each organization's individual sectoral requirements and -with some exceptions - envisage neither the horizontal transfer of information between organizations nor the presentation of consolidated information to such bodies as ACC, CPC (Committee for Programme and Coordination) and ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council). There is the same kind of situation with administrative and financial information. The great mass of information in the United Nations family continues to be used only in the situations it was first intended for.

7. It is therefore important that organizations should move decisively towards the adoption of information systems which will both enable each organization to store and retrieve its own information and give other organizations, intergovernmental bodies and the outside world access selectively, flexibly and economically, to scientific, administrative and management information stored anywhere in the United Nations family of organizations (organizations will need to develop suitable policies for ensuring that information supplied in confidence by governments or individuals is adequately protected). It must be recognized that this will call initially for resources for the development of the required systems; but once systems responding both to the needs of the United Nations family as a whole and to those of individual organizations are in operation, their cost should not be much greater than that of the more limited systems now in operation or planned. In many cases, a system that can be used by all or many organizations will be more economical to develop and use than those developed and operated for similar purposes by each organization.

8. This will not, however, apply in all cases. There are some cases, particularly in the smaller and more highly specialized organizations of the UN family, where systems exist solely in order to meet the individual specific needs of that organization alone; in such cases coordination with other systems may be neither possible nor desirable. There may be other cases where coordinated systems can be designed to cover the similar but individual needs of a small number of organizations; in such cases coordination would avoid duplication of effort and reduce costs to some extent. But the full benefits of coordination would flow from the introduction of systems designed to meet the needs of the UN family as a whole, or at least a significant number of organizations, particularly as regards the presentation of consolidated system-wide information. Even in the category of systems designed for the needs of one organization only, general factors (the presentation of consolidated information about technical cooperation, for example) may influence the form in which the relevant information is stored. To illustrate this point let us assume that ten organizations decide that it would be cost-effective to have a computer-assisted information system as an aid to translators. Under present practices the organizations would tend each to do its own systems analysis and programming and each would prepare its own inputs for the system. However, if there were a coordinated approach with the assistance of IOB, systems analysis and programming would be done only once instead of ten times and, more important from the point of view of economy, the majority of the inputs to the system would be common to all organizations (eg. translations of UN administrative and budgetary terminology, names of non-governmental organizations, etc.) and would have to be prepared and introduced into the system only once. The same point could be made for many other systems such as those concerned with personnel, budget, finance, documentation, etc.

9. The Inspectors attempted in their questionnaire to determine the cost to organizations of developing and operating their present information systems, but the task proved impossible. Some organizations were unable to give even approximate figures and others could give estimated costs for only part of their work. It seems therefore impossible to say more than that many millions of dollars must have been spent in the construction of the present unco-ordinated network of information systems, and that the millions which can be expected to be spent on future system development will continue to be used only for the piecemeal addition of new unco-ordinated systems unless the situation is taken firmly in hand.

10. It would be useful if a realistic estimate of the total cost of the existing information systems were available so that inter-governmental bodies could better appreciate the relationship between expenditures and benefits. The Inspectors recognize that problems might be encountered in any effort by IOB to obtain current, and especially past, costs other than for the equipment. It should be possible, however, for any new system or modification of an old system to be presented in such budgetary terms that the complete cost for the system (both development and operational costs) would be included in submissions to IOB (see paragraph 24 below).

11. Modern technology has made it possible to devise information systems capable of storing, treating and updating vast amounts of information,

of transferring and manipulating it and of presenting selectively the information required for specific purposes. The cost of information storage, treatment and retrieval is declining as machines become more efficient and work with fewer constraints. But machines have always represented only a part, and sometimes a small part, of the total cost of information systems. The major cost to organizations and governments is in the staff salaries or consultant contracts required to carry out feasibility studies, systems analysis, the design of software and - often most important - input preparation. It is therefore important to take advantage of the latest technological advances and develop the efficient and flexible system which the situation requires. It is also obvious that if each organization continues to develop its own systems to meet requirements which are similar, if not identical, in all organizations instead of co-operating on common systems, the cost will remain very high and the results will continue to be of limited value. The reasons for this are explained in paragraph 8 above and were confirmed by observations of the Inspectors. For example, the radically different systems used by organizations for personnel, budget, finance, documentation etc. are of widely unequal quality as pointed out by several external auditors. Yet they all deal with very similar if not identical questions.

Chapter II

HISTORY

12. This is not the first time that concern has been expressed about the need to co-ordinate the information systems of the various United Nations organizations ^{3/}. In the early 1960's the ACC saw this need and set up in 1965 the Computer Users' Committee (CUC) with terms of reference:

(a) to deal with questions concerning the use of computers in Geneva (later strengthened by the ECOSOC, which requested the CUC to "devote as much attention to questions concerning the use of computers throughout the United Nations system as to questions concerning their use in Geneva"); and

(b) to develop inter-organizational co-ordination and co-operation on matters of general concern regarding computers^{4/}.

This endeavour fell far short of expectations, and the problem was later referred to Sir Robert Jackson's team of experts for consideration in the context of their work on the Capacity Study^{5/}. The Study eventually recommended that three information sub-systems be designed for UNDP's developmental purposes, but did not go deeply into the question of the co-ordination and harmonization of existing information systems. This was the stage at which the idea of a large central computer, serving all United Nations organizations, emerged, and a further report on Electronic Data Processing in the United Nations System, the so-called Henderson Report of 1970 ^{6/}, crystallized this trend of thought.

13. One result of all these discussions was a general recognition that systems mattered as much as hardware, and in December 1970 the General Assembly authorized the Secretary-General to join UNDP and WHO in establishing in Geneva the International Computing Centre (ICC), which would be open to other United Nations organizations as well; and to go ahead with the proposed establishment of the IOB as a subordinate body of the ACC. At the same time the CUC was discontinued^{7/}. The IOB's initial terms of reference, as approved by ACC in April 1971, envisaged that it would "develop inter-organization management information systems in the United Nations family, particularly for the purpose of supporting social and economic development activities^{8/}".

^{3/} For further details on the historical background, see document E/AC.51/90.

^{4/} Document E/4486, para. 118

^{5/} Document DP/5, 1969.

^{6/} Document A/8072.

^{7/} General Assembly resolution 2741 (XIV) of 17 December 1970.

^{8/} Document E/5489 of 9 May 1974, Annex.

14. Between 1971 and 1976 the IOB therefore attempted to emphasize the development of new common systems and the testing of the software required to operate them. An ambitious management information system was considered, termed "COMPASS", aimed at monitoring programmes and projects. However because of the high costs involved and the complexities of inter-organization cooperation, the Board turned to more modest proposals for an inter-organizational project register (CORE) which it outlined in a special report, submitted through ACC to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1974. ECOSOC subsequently endorsed these proposals 9/.

15. However, little progress was made either in the development of CORE or in the coordination and harmonization of UN family information systems activity. To meet growing dissatisfaction at the proliferation of information systems, the ACC decided in 1976 to give a new orientation to IOB's work, with more emphasis on the co-ordination of existing and future systems. To this end it gave IOB new terms of reference at its spring 1976 session.10/. These terms of reference lay down that IOB should "coordinate the development of common or compatible information systems in the United Nations family". The difference between this text and that of 1971 is significant.

16. Since getting its revised terms of reference, IOB has made some definite, though limited progress. At the end of 1976, a new Director was appointed and from 1978 new staff have been engaged in the Secretariat and work has begun on the first essential foundations of the co-ordinative operation. IOB has moreover continued to provide a useful meeting place where information system questions can be discussed and the organizations of the United Nations family can exchange ideas and benefit from one another's experience. From 1978, modest but definite products of the Board's new work programme have begun to emerge. It is now possible to feel that the United Nations system is on the right road and that the time is ripe for taking firm decisions for the future.

9/ ECOSOC resolution 1889 (LVII) of 1974.

10/ See Annex I of this report.

Chapter III

IS IOB NECESSARY?

17. The Inspectors have reached the conclusion after extensive examination that an inter-organizational mechanism is needed in order to encourage the development of compatible information systems and to foster moves towards co-ordination and harmonization and to reduce costs. To be effective the mechanism needs to be devised in full recognition of the problem of coordinating the activities of the 30 or so large and small organizations of the UN family, and should also recognize that in some areas coordination is less essential than in others. The Inspectors considered the following possible methods of providing a structure for harmonizing information systems:

(a) Maintain IOB as it is, as essentially a technical, non-policy-making body. The Inspectors believe that although IOB has done good work in the last couple of years, its progress has been slow and that the United Nations organizations must move more quickly and decisively. They believe also that the inter-governmental bodies desire quicker progress. They therefore do not recommend this method;

(b) Abolish IOB and reestablish the Computer Users' Committee. This would provide opportunities for computer specialists from member organizations to exchange views: this is important and some people consider it to be the present IOB's most important function. But computers are only a small part of the problem of developing harmonized information systems and recent technological advances have further reduced this part of the problem. This solution represents a regression from even the present situation, with prospects of even slower progress. The Inspectors therefore also do not recommend this approach;

(c) Divide the present IOB into two parts. One would handle all aspects related to administrative systems and would be part of the CCAQ mechanism. The other would handle matters related to technical and scientific information systems and would be part of the new ACC structure, but independent of CCAQ. This method would have the advantage of placing IOB's two principal functions in distinct, well-contained bodies, but would divide the effort of harmonizing present systems and those being developed. Also there is frequently no clear division between administrative and substantive systems. The Inspectors therefore do not recommend this approach;

(d) Establish an IOB with considerable regulatory and control functions over the establishment of new information systems and

the organization and modification of existing ones. This method would have great attractions for those who wish to move very rapidly towards full compatibility and harmonization. The Inspectors felt bound to recognize, however, that it would be unlikely to command the measure of general willing acceptance that would be necessary for it to succeed, and that it might overstrain the capacity of the system to accelerate its rate of progress. They therefore abandoned this method;

(e) Strengthen IOB's role but not force the pace beyond the tolerances within the system. This is the basis of the Inspectors' recommendations in Chapter IV. The intention has been to give IOB realistic functions and acceptable powers, so that it may help the system, firmly but not forcibly, in progressing towards rational co-ordination and harmonization of information systems as necessary, in response to the requirements of inter-governmental bodies and the increasing general awareness of the needs of the system as a whole as well as those of its component parts.

18. The work of IOB, and the whole function of creating a responsive and efficient network of information systems, requires an awareness on the part of all concerned that the UN family is more than the sum of its parts. It is in the Inspectors' view entirely justifiable to set aside appropriate resources for this work, with the expectation that the money or man-months will be more than repaid in the form of a general improvement in the level of effectiveness throughout the family. The Inspectors are also aware that the requirements of the United Nations family of organizations and of member governments for information, and particularly consolidated system-wide information, have not been clearly and fully identified. Identifying these needs should be a priority task for IOB, for it is not reasonable to spend time and effort on coordinating or harmonizing systems when there is doubt about precisely what information should be produced.

Chapter IV

A MORE EFFECTIVE IOB - PROPOSED REVISION OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

19. The Inspectors believe that more vigorous action is necessary if the IOB is to achieve a meaningful harmonization of UN family information systems, in response to the general requirements of member governments as expressed in the Restructuring Resolution. They therefore recommend that the IOB should be given more impetus and guidance through revised terms of reference that spell out more clearly its purpose, organization and methods of work. The following paragraphs describe and explain the main features suggested for inclusion in such revised terms of reference, a tentative and illustrative draft of which is set out in Annex II. Annex I contains IOB's present terms of reference for ease of comparison.

20. So that IOB can properly carry out its essentially system-wide responsibilities, it is important that all organizations which are members of ACC should in future also be members of IOB.

21. IOB should be charged, under the direction of ACC, with identifying common needs for information amongst the members of the UN family and the intergovernmental bodies concerned, and initiating as required measures to ensure the coordinated development of the information systems and services of the UN family so as to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort, to permit the presentation of system-wide consolidated information, and to keep costs to the minimum. These words have been chosen with care. They reflect the Inspectors' belief that IOB should be in a position to take initiatives, based of course on its appreciation of the needs of the UN family as a whole. These needs have first to be identified and identifying them with precision will be one of IOB's most important tasks.

22. An essential requisite of this primary function of IOB would be a firm commitment by the member organizations of the UN family to bring together and harmonize, as required from the angle of interorganizational coordination, their plans to develop new information systems or to modify existing ones. This could be done by informing the IOB of such plans at the earliest possible stage, so that the Board may examine how such new or modified systems can be fitted with existing ones and if necessary made compatible with them, and so that it may offer comments and advice at that preliminary stage. The Inspectors consider that great importance should be attached to the strict fulfilment by member organizations of this commitment. The similar provision in the existing terms of reference does not seem to have been fully effective. A method for accomplishing this is described in paras. 23 and 24 below.

23. It would seem logical that when several organizations use or plan to use information systems to meet similar objectives or when information systems require inputs from more than one organization, the organizations concerned should call upon IOB to assist them in harmonizing their work, in order to avoid duplication of effort for systems analysis and to simplify and reduce the cost of data collection. Such harmonization would be

important for users, both inside and outside the UN family, who will want to know how to draw on the information in the systems evolved by the organizations in the UN family.

24. The Inspectors believe that it would be appropriate for each organization, before committing itself to a new technical, scientific or administrative information system or expanding significantly an existing one, to conduct a feasibility study which would pay particular attention to the real need for the information to be produced by the system and the cost-effectiveness of various methods for providing the information. When a system may have inter-organizational implications, the organization concerned should send the feasibility study to the Board for its comments. The Board should examine, among other things, any alternative and less costly method of providing the needed information in the light of similar work done by other organizations and should be free to comment on the findings and cost estimates in the feasibility study (these and similar questions might usefully be referred in the first instance to the technical Working Group described in paragraph 32 below). The Board would send its comments to the organization concerned to be taken into account by it in deciding on action resulting from the feasibility study. In addition, the Inspectors think that when systems reach the stage of having to be re-designed, similar feasibility studies should be undertaken and the results communicated to IOB for its comments. This procedure should not be too rigid or formal. If in any given case it appeared that IOB had little relevant experience, or that it would not be able to make its comments in time for them to be useful, the Chairman would doubtless so inform the organization concerned. In cases of urgency, the IOB Secretariat might prepare preliminary comments of an informative character, which the Chairman would transmit to the member organization concerned, reserving the position of the Board in relation to possible revision of those comments.

25. IOB should have a central rôle in stimulating, encouraging and facilitating the adoption, in all areas of organizations' activities, of common administrative and technical information systems when the Board or governing bodies feel that they are required. A good illustration of this would be in the case of personnel and financial management. Most organizations work under similar staff and financial rules and regulations; consequently, standardization of outputs would lower costs and be helpful to governments and external auditors, by permitting the easy preparation of consolidated system-wide reports for ACC, ICSC, CPC, ACABQ, etc. This would also contribute to the achievement of "optimum efficiency and the reduction of administrative costs with a consequent increase in the proportion of resources available to meet the assistance requirements of recipient countries" 11/ called for in the Restructuring Resolution. Similarly, systems which store, treat and retrieve technical and scientific information, although often dealing with different sectoral information needs in each organization, could nevertheless benefit from a common approach which could reduce costs of systems development and maintenance. A documentation system can store and retrieve information contained in technical documents regardless of their subject content, provided in some cases that there is

11/ A/32/197 Annex paragraph 28(d)

an adequate thesaurus. Thus, both types of systems - administrative and technical - could, if they were based upon common approaches and if they provided output in standard formats, be a powerful tool for exchange of information between organizations and could facilitate the production of consolidated information in support of the recommendations contained in the Restructuring Resolution.

26. The Inspectors believe that, in keeping with the emphasis given in the Restructuring Resolution on co-ordination of the UN system as a whole, intergovernmental and other bodies would wish to be more closely involved in the work of IOB than has been the case in the past. They have in mind the ECOSOC, CPC and ACABQ. They recommend that IOB's reports should be submitted through ACC to CPC and ACABQ, as appropriate. This would give such bodies a regular opportunity to provide much-needed guidance and impetus to IOB's work.

27. In addition to these major recommendations, the Inspectors propose a number of changes of a structural nature and in the way the IOB is to operate.

28. To enable IOB to play its part effectively, the Inspectors suggest that the Board's member organisations should be represented by senior officials at the programme or policy-making level preferably above the rank of Director. A number of organizations have internal committees to co-ordinate the development of their information systems. The Inspectors think that it might be beneficial both to the Board and to the organizations concerned if their representatives on the Board were drawn from such internal committees - the Chairman or Vice-Chairman for instance - since they would speak for their organizations with full authority and knowledge. Ideally, these representatives should be empowered to enter into commitments on behalf of their organizations, subject to any reservations pending consultations with their executive heads, on matters within the work programme approved by ACC, but they should in any case be in a position to give the views of their parent organization as a whole upon the various matters in the Board's field of activity. It should go without saying that the success of IOB will depend on the degree of commitment by the various organizations; this will be evidenced in part from the level of representatives on the Board. Thus the Board would be able by virtue of its composition to provide the necessary policy guidance, subject to decision of ACC and the intergovernmental bodies. Technical support of policies would be provided by the Task Forces (see paragraph 30) composed of specialists selected for their expertise on each subject.

29. The Board now has only a Chairman. The Inspectors believe that to ensure the proper functioning of IOB and in particular of the Secretariat, the Board should have also a Vice-Chairman. The ACC should appoint both the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman. A key criterion in the selection of these two officers should be their knowledge of the information requirements of the UN family at the programme and policy level.

30. In order to associate the participating organizations more closely with IOB's work, the Inspectors suggest that, as foreseen in paragraph 10 of the existing Terms of Reference, the Board should set up ad hoc Task

Forces to study particular problems or undertake specific tasks. Many items could greatly benefit from the constitution of a Task Force composed of two to five member organizations and serviced by the IOB Secretariat. Where information programmes have been established such as the UNISIST programme of UNESCO, or bodies with a coordinative function such as the CCAQ, joint programmes of work might be established with IOB and implemented through such Task Forces. The IOB might also usefully set up Task Forces to tackle such problems as the preparation of policy guidelines in various sectors of the technical and administrative fields. Of course, items of the work programme of a continuing and informational character may not require Task Forces.

31. With the Board meeting twice a year, as proposed below, and the constitution of Task Forces, the Inspectors believe that the continued existence of the present Standing Committee of five organizations (UN, UNDP, ILO, WHO and UNESCO) would no longer be necessary.

32. The Inspectors also believe that there should be a continuing Working Group comprising the heads of computer units of the member organizations including the Director of the International Computing Centre, which would consider questions concerning technological support to information systems in relation to specific items of the IOB work programme, and any questions referred to it by the main Board (see paragraph 24 above). This Working Group would be a useful forum for the exchange of experience on complex subjects and for establishing standards for the harmonization of facilities, the preparation of cost estimates for facilities and suggesting policies for providing support and services to information processing. The Working Group should also periodically review opportunities resulting from the rapidly changing technology and its effect on costs and concepts.

33. The IOB Secretariat should, as at present, consist of a Director, a small number of professional information system specialists, *ad hoc* consultants and supporting General Service staff. (The Secretariat of the Board now has a staff complement of a D-2 Director, two P-5 senior officers, a P-2 junior officer and two General Service Staff). One of the professional staff members, working under the supervision of the Director, should be assigned to each item of the work programme. A professional staff member should also act as the technical secretary of each Task Force. Because the IOB work programme will no doubt consist of a number of specialized items and because the specializations will change from time to time, the use of consultants would be preferable to providing a large staff. But a small nucleus of staff would nevertheless be needed to provide continuity, supervise and service consultants and follow up their work. Therefore, the Inspectors believe that the IOB Secretariat and its budget as now constituted will be sufficient to permit IOB to move more rapidly in helping the United Nations organizations to improve, adapt and harmonize their information systems, provided that the work of the IOB Secretariat is supplemented by the Task Force and "Lead Organization" techniques suggested in paragraphs 28 and 36 of this Chapter.

34. The Inspectors feel strongly that in order to ensure stronger direction of the work, the Board should meet twice a year.

35. At its first meeting of the year the Board would review the work accomplished during the preceding year and approve a report on it to ACC, and through ACC to CPC; and would consider tentative proposals for the work programme of the following year and any revision of the work for the current year. At its second meeting of the year the Board would review the work programme for the current year, adopt the work programme for the following year, consider programme and budget proposals for the next biennium (in even numbered years), and proposals for the IOB medium-term plan (in odd numbered years). The programme and budget proposals as well as the medium-term plan proposals would be submitted to ACC, and through ACC to CPC and ACABQ as appropriate, in order to ensure the involvement of these bodies in the development of the IOB programme. In addition to these items, the Board would, at either meeting, take decisions on any personnel, budgetary or administrative questions, as well as on matters raised in connection with the activities of the Task Forces and the computer Working Group. One of the responsibilities of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman would be to prepare the meetings of the Board with the assistance of the Secretariat.

36. The annual report which the Board should adopt at the first session of the year would discuss the activities of the previous year, the work programme of the current year and prospects for the future. It should also describe policy and administrative problems and suggest solutions or options. The Chairman should present it to ACC and ACC should forward it, with its decisions on outstanding problems, to CPC and ACABQ for information and for policy guidance. At the request of CPC or ACABQ through ACC, the IOB should be available to prepare special reports on topics within the terms of reference of IOB under consideration in these bodies.

37. The medium-term plan of IOB, its period of coverage and its format, should be established by the Board. The Board should transmit the draft medium-term plan to ACC for amendment and approval. The plan should come before CPC for overall programme and policy guidance and ACABQ for consideration of work related to administrative systems. The plan should be considered and approved in these bodies and then sent for information and observations to the legislative bodies of the member organizations. The actual implementation of the medium-term plan, as well as of the annual work programme, would in most cases require resources within member organizations as well as within the IOB Secretariat.

38. The Inspectors wish to commend the "Lead Organization" technique, already envisaged in the existing Terms of Reference (paragraph 10), for use in cases where an item of the work programme calls for the development and subsequent operation of a system. The Board should propose to ACC the organization which in its view might become responsible, in consultation with the IOB Secretariat, for systems development and, where systems are to be used by all or several organizations, for guiding their implementation, operation and maintenance. Where there is a Task Force for the item, the "Lead Organization" would preside over that Task Force. When an item on the IOB work programme as approved by ACC requires, in the Board's opinion, a "Lead Organization", but the Board is unable to propose any individual organization, the item should generally be postponed until ACC can designate an organization or directs that an alternative solution should be employed.

39. In the course of this study, the Inspectors have repeatedly come across the problem confronting the participating organizations of financing their share of specific items of IOB's work programme. The history of CORE is perhaps the most telling example of the "hand-to-mouth" approach which has hampered the implementation of certain work items. A way of ensuring that adequate resources were available to carry out IOB's approved work programme, might be to have two types of budgets - a general budget and special purpose budgets.

40. The General Budget would be made up of assessed contributions from member organizations, as at present. It would pay for the IOB Secretariat, consultants, travel, printing, etc. The proposals on the work programme of IOB (see Chapter V) assume that the Secretariat and its cost will remain fairly constant (except for mandatory increases) with a small increase for General Service staff. This assumption would hold if the Task Force and "Lead Organization" techniques proved to be successful. The General Budget would be financed by contributions from all member organizations in accordance with a formula determined by ACC.

41. Special Purpose Budgets could be created to pay the costs of Task Forces and "Lead Organizations" for specific IOB work items as approved by ACC, when these costs went beyond the normal contribution of an Organization to IOB. The funds in these budgets would not be used for the IOB Secretariat, but they could be administered by the Secretariat when appropriate. Contributions to Special Purpose Budgets would be made on a voluntary basis by organizations which would benefit from a specific item on the work programme; or alternatively contributions could be assessed. Special Purpose Budgets would defray such costs as travel, consultants hired by a Task Force or Lead Organization, ad hoc data collection for testing systems, etc. Each Task Force and "Lead Organization" would draw up a Special Purpose Budget required for its work and a meeting of the Board would determine how the budget should be financed. This approach presupposes that the participating organizations would make adequate provision in their own programme budgets for their participation in work programme items covered by Special Purpose Budgets. IOB's medium-term plans should, if well drawn up, provide sufficient guidance on the types of work items that would be carried out with the help of such budgets for their financing and execution to be assured in advance. The Board could accept on behalf of ACC voluntary contributions to Special Purpose Budgets from governments and from organizations outside the United Nations system.

42. The Inspectors believe that these proposed measures are in accord with the spirit of the Restructuring Resolution and would meet the requirements not only of the organizations but also of governments, as well as inter-governmental and other bodies charged with the co-ordination of activities within the UN system.

Chapter V

ASSESSMENT OF IOB WORK PROGRAMME FOR 1978 AND FUTURE

WORK PROGRAMME

43. The work programme of the Board falls into four programmes:

- Programme 1 Basic Co-ordination and Secretariat Services
 - 1 (a) Basic Co-ordination
 - 1 (b) Secretariat Services
- Programme 2 Documentation and Data Systems
- Programme 3 Management Information and Administrative Systems
- Programme 4 Computer Facilities and Operating Systems

44. Within each programme the Board has proposed and ACC has approved explicit work projects.

Programme 1 - Basic Co-ordination and Secretariat Services

45. This programme has been divided into 1(a) Basic Co-ordination and 1(b) Secretariat Services, as the former is principally substantive and the latter mainly deals with the overhead of servicing the Board meetings and maintaining the IOB as an independent organization.

46. Programme 1(a) Basic Co-ordination is designed to improve communications between the organizations of the United Nations system, avoid duplication of effort, promote exchange of information and further the basic co-ordination measures which the Board is instituting. The following individual work projects comprise the programme:

Work Project 1.1

Preparation of periodic reports on conference and committee activities. This work project is directed at the preparation of reports of meetings of the Standing Committee of the Board and full sessions of the Board and at furthering basic co-ordination measures by ensuring the presence of the Board's Secretariat at meetings. Special relationships and in some cases joint work projects have been established where there is a direct interface with the Board's work programme, in order to avoid duplication and competition. Such relationships exist between the IOB Secretariat and the Secretariat of UNESCO/UNISIST, the CCAQ Working Party on Programme Planning, Budgeting and Evaluation,

the ACC sub-Committee on Statistical Activities and the ACC Working Party on the Indexing of Documents. Assessment: This is a normal Secretariat function and needs to be maintained.

Work Project 1.2

Development of an information paper on Committees, Task Forces, etc., dealing with information systems. This work project began in March 1978. The Board considers that there has been a proliferation of committees, etc., dealing with information systems and that organizations have difficulty in maintaining adequate representation at the almost continuous calendar of meetings in North America and Europe. This work project is suspended pending the restructuring of the ACC subsidiary machinery as a consequence of the Restructuring Resolution. However, the ACC machinery only includes some of the committees involved. A first product of the work in 1978 will be a listing of committees and their functions, to be followed in 1979 by proposals for rationalization. Assessment: This is a useful information function. The critical step will be in 1979 when the Board will have an opportunity to express its views on the proliferation of various groups. If the Board takes a position, this could be helpful. ACC should encourage this.

Work Project 1.3.

Development of bi-monthly inter-organization newsletter. The Board considers that while there has been an increased circulation of information on system development in 1977 through the activities of the IOB, communications between organizations of the United Nations family still need to be improved. The newsletter will be restricted to staff members of the United Nations family. Following an experimental issue in April the first of the bi-monthly newsletters to be issued in 1978-79 went out in July 1978. IOB will assess the newsletters after a year's experience. Assessment: The Inspectors were impressed with the newsletter and its potential utility as an information document within the United Nations system.

Work Project 1.4

Development of information paper on the response to information support requirements of inter-agency bodies. One of the requirements of the Board's terms of reference is that it "should take into account and assist in meeting the information support requirements of other inter-Agency bodies". During 1977 the Board carried out an enquiry with the CCAQ and the International Civil Service Commission into the availability of data elements dealing with occupational classifications, language ability, educational qualifications and working experience of United Nations staff. Out of these discussions came the suggestion for an inter-organization system which could assist in the recruitment of field staff and in improving career planning for professional project staff. Discussions continue on this subject. Assessment: This project if successful, could provide useful information to governments who manage their own United Nations

assisted development projects. It would contribute to implementation of the recommendations of the Restructuring Resolution for common recruitment of field experts.

47. Programme 1(b) Secretariat Services provides for the general overhead tasks of servicing the Board, etc.:

Work Project 1.5 - for 1979

Work Project 1.6

Servicing Board and Standing Committee meetings. The Board at present holds one three-day session each year, and its Standing Committee, on which five organizations are represented (United Nations, UNDP, ILO, WHO, and UNESCO), meets as required (three times in 1977). Assessment: This is standard Secretariat support for a board's activities. It would change if the organization and structure is modified as the Inspectors propose.

Work Project 1.7

Correspondence and other general services. This project covers correspondence other than that involved in other work projects, general administration, recruitment, staff training and unscheduled requests for information and the preparation of papers not covered by other work projects. Examples in the current year have been papers for CPC and ACABQ. Assessment: Again, this is standard Secretariat support.

Programme 2 - Documentation and Data Systems

48. This programme covers questions of co-ordination and harmonization of what are usually known as technical and scientific information systems.

Work Project 2.1

Preparation of Directory of United Nations Information systems and services. This work project began in 1977 with the help of the ACC Inter-Agency Task Force on Information Exchange and the Transfer of Technology (IATFIS) with the objective of producing a user-oriented directory. The General Assembly welcomed the draft document circulated in November 1977, in resolution 32/178, as an effort "useful to all countries, in particular developing countries". The final version of the Directory in different languages (English, French and Spanish) has come out and contains particulars of over 100 information systems and over 2,500 addresses of input centres, offices of organizations in countries, depository libraries, etc. This is the first attempt to list the information systems and services of the United Nations family. Up-dating of the Directory is not envisaged before 1980, but there is provision for preparatory work in 1979. Assessment: The Inspectors believe that this has been a useful undertaking, not only for United Nations organizations, but also for governments and other organizations outside the UN system. Also this is an important building block for future United Nations family activities.

Work Project 2.2

Development of bibliography of nomenclatures, classifications and thesauri employed in the United Nations family. This is the follow-up to work project 2.1 and is the starting point for the work on the harmonization of technical and scientific information systems. That part of the work which involves co-ordination between bibliographic systems inside and outside the United Nations family will be undertaken in co-operation with UNISIST/UNESCO with whom the Secretariat has a special agreement. Assessment: This is another important building block which could lead eventually to the harmonization of systems. Both United Nations organizations and governments have an interest in this.

Work Project 2.3 - for 1979

Work Project 2.4

Collection and compilation of a list of "Broad Terms" representing the programmes and activities of organizations. At the request of the Preparatory Committee of ACC, the Board has agreed to implement in co-operation with ILO and UNESCO the recommendation of the ACC Working Party on the Indexing of Documents that a list of broad terms should be compiled representing the programmes and activities of organizations. The original purpose is the development of the first stage of a vocabulary through which member governments and organizations can locate United Nations family publications on a given subject. However, as the list covers the programmes of organizations, the final product should have wider application. To ensure that the administrative and programme aspects of the work are fully exploited, the IOB is co-ordinating this project with related activities of the CCAQ Working Party on Programme Planning, Budgeting and Evaluation which is engaged on the different but related task of revising the ACC Programme Classification. A draft list of "Broad Terms" was issued in September 1978. Assessment: This should prove useful to United Nations organizations and governments as it represents a first step towards an index of the programme and activities of organizations. However, the Inspectors feel that this activity indicates a trend to refer to IOB specialized tasks which might be more appropriate for other bodies - in this case the ACC Working Party on the Indexing of Documents and the CCAQ Working Party on Programme Planning, Budgeting and Evaluation. To keep the IOB Secretariat at approximately its level, which the Inspectors feel is reasonable, it is important not to overburden IOB with peripheral tasks which other more specialized bodies could do. IOB needs to concentrate on its main function - the coordinated development of information systems - without being diverted to admittedly related tasks but which belong more fairly to other more specialized groups. Therefore the Inspectors recommend that this activity be the responsibility of one of the bodies mentioned above (subject to the outcome of the restructuring of the ACC mechanism) and that the body chosen report to ACC through IOB. The same principle could apply to Work Project 2.2.

On the other hand, if the proposals of the Inspectors for using working groups and lead organizations are adopted, then Work Projects 2.2 and 2.4 could be pursued under this technique. This method would help in efforts to streamline the ACC mechanism.

Programme 3 - Management Information and Administrative Systems

49. This programme covers the exchange of information and questions of coordination and harmonization of what are usually known as administrative support and management systems.

Work Project 3.1

Development of inventory of United Nations family administrative support systems. This work project began in 1977, the work being initiated by a consultant service contract. The inventory covers the capabilities and characteristics of five major types of administrative support systems - accounting, budget, payroll, personnel and projects administration - in 14 organizations of the United Nations system - United Nations (New York), United Nations Office at Geneva, UNCTAD, UNIDO, UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, FAO/WFP, UNESCO, WHO, the World Bank Group, ITU, WMO and IAEA. The first product of the work project is a Directory of United Nations Administrative Support Systems for use by subject matter officers within organizations. The Directory came out in July 1978. Follow-up on the results of the inventory is planned for 1979. Assessment: This is another important building block which describes what is available within the United Nations system, a prerequisite to developing measures of harmonization and coordination. However, in its present form, the Directory is not entirely satisfactory. Some administrative support systems are not yet included. Although the budget preparation and budget reporting systems have been combined into one category, the same is not true of other equally related systems such as "payroll" and "personnel". The Inspectors note that the 1979 work programme (projects 3.1 and 3.2) will include an updating of the Directory and its expansion to include other organizations and other administrative and management systems not covered in the first issue of the Directory. An attempt should be made in this revision to include all administrative support systems, including those that are in the preparatory stage. The presentation of the inventory should be revised to place together systems which could use the same input documents and thus point the way to further integration of the administrative systems.

Work Project 3.2 - for 1979

Work Project 3.3

Further development of an inter-agency project register (CORE) and an examination of the estimated costs involved both for agencies and centrally. This is one of the most controversial aspects of the IOB work programme and is the subject of a special Chapter (VI) in this report, where proposals are also made.

Programme 4 - Computer Facilities and Operating Systems

50. This programme covers the exchange of information and questions of coordination and harmonization in the area of United Nations computer facilities. The proposed working group on computers should have primary responsibility for this programme with the assistance of the IOB Secretariat.

Work Projects 4.1 and 4.2:

Development of inventory of United Nations family computer facilities

Development of inventory of general purpose proprietary soft-ware owned or rented by members of the United Nations family. These

two inventories were undertaken as one work project in 1977. The product of the inventories was issued in February 1978 as a Directory of United Nations Computer Facilities. The Directory shows for the first time the computer facilities (hardware) and proprietary programmes and packages (software) owned or rented by 30 organizations of the United Nations family: it also lists eight other United Nations family organizations which make no direct use of computer facilities. The Directory is intended to enable organizations and those within organizations concerned with the development of computer systems and services to locate experience on the use of particular hardware and proprietary software and to obtain initial information on questions of compatibility of facilities. The inventories will be up-dated in 1978 to show changes in facilities, and extended to include regional office facilities. Assessment: Most of the UN organizations have indicated that the Directory and its annual up-date would be useful, as a step towards compatibility of facilities, the exchange of information and the development of inter-organizations' policies and strategies. With this the Inspectors agree.

Work Projects 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 - for 1979

Work Project 4.6

Development of section on word-processing to be included in the 1978 Directory of United Nations computer facilities. Several organizations are currently making or considering large investments in the relatively new technique of word- or text-processing. The Board believes that some organizations have acquired a good deal of experience and that it is important to share it. Further, the development of word- or text-processing is still in a sufficiently early stage for sensible measures for compatibility or harmonization of facilities to be undertaken. The output of this project will include a report on the state of the art (i.e. the technical advances commercially available), will assess possibilities and suggest criteria for UN applications and will identify and analyze developments to date within the organizations of the United Nations family. The results will be included in the 1978 Directory of United Nations Computer Facilities. Assessment: This is a new venture on the part of the

Board in undertaking a study of a technological area of importance within the United Nations family. The results could be useful to individual organizations and serve to identify areas where compatibility and harmonization of facilities could be introduced. This work should stress the anticipated cost-effectiveness of using word-processing equipment particularly its effect on the number and cost of required posts.

Work Project 4.7

Development of paper on policies and strategies on technological support in the area of information processing. This work project has as an objective the development of policies and strategies for all forms of technological support to information processing. Thus, although the IOB cannot itself establish and implement the policies and strategies, it can identify both the areas where policies are needed, and the general parameters required. This work project will be undertaken in two stages. The first part, due for completion during the second half of 1978, will provide an outline draft paper setting out the course that the work might take. Subject to discussion and approval by the Board, the project in 1979 will involve organizations in an expansion of the description of functional areas and the related technologies employed or in prospect. At this stage an additional section will be added, identifying policy considerations and implications for the UN family against the requirements foreseen in functional areas and the possibilities offered by related technologies. Guidelines for the policies and strategies will be recommended. Assessment: The need for policies and strategies arises because of the rapid and increasing pace of technological change. This change, coupled with intensive marketing of products that are becoming less expensive and more powerful (a reasonably powerful mini computer can now be purchased for about \$10,000), requires careful assessment so that organizations can benefit from lower costs and greater productivity. Properly controlled, the availability of inexpensive technological support can provide major advantages to UN organizations. This is an important part of the 1978-9 work programme.

51. The Organizations participating in IOB and which replied to the JIU questionnaire of March 1978, felt that the 1978 work programme would be useful or marginally useful to them. Most felt that the programme would be useful to the United Nations system. When also queried on individual items of the work programme, most organizations placed the utility of items higher for the system than for their own organization. CORE scored particularly low. This was also true of the directory of administrative and financial systems. However, the organizations had not seen all of the final products at the time of the JIU questionnaire. The Newsletter, the Directory of Information Systems and Services, and the Bibliography of thesauri, classification and nomenclatures were, however, named as being of particular use to several organizations.

Overall Assessment

52. The Inspectors believe that the IOB has produced several useful documents during the past year, e.g. the Directory of UN Computer Facilities (February 1978), the Directory of UN Information Systems and Services (English edition May 1978, French June, Spanish July), the Directory of United Nations Administrative Support Systems (July 1978) and the IOB Newsletter (first issue July 1978). These should be continued and brought up-to-date as needed.

53. The planned Bibliography of Nomenclatures, Classifications and Thesauri employed by the UN system will also be an essential element in the future co-ordination and harmonization of systems. The compilation of a list of "Broad Terms" representing the programmes and activities of organizations is the first stage of a vocabulary through which governments and organizations can locate UN family publications on a given subject. All of these are essential though modest elements for developing a better co-ordinated system in the future.

54. There were certain constraints in the implementation of the 1978 work programme. The principal one was the absence of a Chairman and the consequent inability to convene the Standing Committee mechanism. The Secretariat had administrative support problems in personnel, finance and translation which affected the rapidity of progress in certain aspects of the work programme. It must also be remembered that of the six staff on the Secretariat the two senior professionals came on duty only at the beginning of the year. Until 1978 the Secretariat consisted of the Director, a junior professional and two general service staff.

55. The Inspectors believe that the 1978 work programme, as approved by the ACC, has been carried out with care and precision. This work programme forms a solid base for more difficult and challenging activities in the future. The programme could be described as modest, but on the other hand it has been practicable. To have forced the pace further in 1978 could have exceeded the ability of the United Nations family to absorb co-ordination measures. For the first time the IOB has shown some results which will be of use to the organizations and to the system as a whole. Each successive programme will be more difficult but should at least be possible on the solid base of the 1978 work programme, provided the organizations are determined to move forward in developing better co-ordination and harmonization in the United Nations family, in keeping with the approach laid down in the Restructuring Resolution. In order to do this, clear policy objectives and guidelines need to be developed. The focus of IOB's attention should be on the needs of the system as a whole, on both the technical co-operation and management sides. This will require the attention and action of ACC, CPC and ACABQ.

Future Work Programme Objectives

56. The Inspectors will not attempt to suggest detailed future work programmes for IOB. Proposals are now being sought from organizations and formulated by the Secretariat for the Board's next meeting. However, the Inspectors do recommend that the Board draw up policy objectives and guidelines, to be approved by ACC and then submitted to CPC and ACABQ, as well as a programme of positive harmonization and co-ordination of information systems for putting these guidelines into effect. These should be drawn up in recognition of the many practical difficulties which exist, including the question of cost, but in recognition also of the importance of responding to the requirements of member governments, as set forth in the Restructuring Resolution.

57. The Inspectors note with some concern that only one of IOB's current activities is directed at determining the needs of intergovernmental bodies and organizations for consolidated system-wide information (Work Project 1.4 to some extent). Since this is a pre-requisite for developing, co-ordinating or harmonizing many information systems, the Inspectors propose that priority should be given to the identification of needs. The determination of the needs for system-wide information requires careful consideration. It will not always be enough to suggest that the various intergovernmental bodies and organizations should specify their needs. IOB has a special role to play in this regard and should assist these bodies by presenting an outline of needs, from which these bodies could make a selection or modification.

58. In broad terms, the Inspectors visualize the major programme objectives of IOB for the future as being:

- determination of the major requirements of the United Nations organizations and of member governments for consolidated system-wide information;
- initiation of measures to ensure the co-ordinated development of information systems;
- harmonization of present systems;
- promotion of co-operative effort among organizations;
- promotion of the exchange of information on systems and technology;
- measures for providing useful and efficient system-wide information to member governments and other organizations outside the UN family.

59. Specific objectives for the period 1980-85 should at least include the following, bearing in mind the need to avoid dispersal of effort on marginal activities and to concentrate on work which directly supports the broad objectives of IOB:

- determination of requirements for consolidated system-wide information in the light of the Restructuring Resolution and the reorganization of the ACC mechanism;

- improvement in communications between organizations of the UN system and dissemination of up-to-date knowledge of developments in information system techniques;
- development of a consolidated data base of documents produced by all organizations of the UN family;
- development of a capacity within the UN system to respond at the world level to requirements for sectoral and intersectoral information;
- ensuring that systems become compatible and easily accessible to all UN organizations;
- establishment of principles for the development of information systems for management, administrative and financial matters which support the work of the UN organizations;
- development of policies and strategies for technological support to information processing.

Chapter VI

A SPECIAL PROBLEM : CORE

60. The history of this project illustrates all too well the general situation in relation to the co-ordination of information systems throughout the UN family, resulting both from the false start made in the early 1970s and from the continuing obstacles in the way of inter-organization co-ordination. If the need for a coherent system-wide store of information covering the developmental activities of all UN organizations was already felt in the 1960s, the continued absence of such a conspectus in the late 1970s can only be described as deplorable. Yet this is only a particularly striking instance of the general lack of progress.

61. As has been said above, the need for a system-wide store of information on developmental activities began to be felt, particularly by intergovernmental bodies and in UNDP, in the 1960s at about the time that the Capacity Study was commissioned. The first attempt to satisfy this need took the form of a project called COMPASS (COmmon System for Management Information on Programme Activity in Economics and Social Development Services), started by IOB with the approval of ACC in the early 1970s. Its purpose was to create a computerized data bank which would provide selected information for management to support the planning, decision-making, monitoring and evaluation of the activities of the United Nations system. This proposal is perhaps related to the idea, prevalent at that date, that the UN system should be served by one large central computer (para. 12 above). After a few years it appeared that COMPASS was overly ambitious, if only for financial reasons and because of the manpower that would be required for putting the relevant information from participating organizations - even when that information was available - into a common format. COMPASS was therefore abandoned, and the more modest CORE (COmmon REgister for Development Activities) took its place, first on an experimental basis and then more substantially after ECOSOC, in resolution 1889 (LVII) of 31 July 1974, had urged organizations to develop and implement the register and to adopt common concepts for the purposes of information systems.

62. The purpose of CORE, as its name implies, is to provide an interorganizational project register covering the developmental activities of the system in such a way that these activities can be analysed and compared sectorally, financially, by country and in other ways. It may be that for many reasons the full implementation of even this relatively modest project may not receive sufficient support.

63. In 1977 CORE was divided into two sub-projects, known as CORE/1 and CORE/2. This subdivision corresponds to two different but related objectives: a financial analysis of the expenditures of the various UN organizations by sector, and by country (CORE/1); and a much more elaborate indexing of activities undertaken in projects throughout the system (CORE/2).

64. CORE/1 is going ahead and will pose problems enough for many organizations, together with significant financial demands. At the same time an estimate of the cost of developing CORE/2 is to be made. It seems that this is likely to be very high. Organizations do not always keep descriptions of their projects as a matter of routine. There are also great divergencies between the ways in which most of the relevant information is kept in the various organizations and, in many cases, difficulties of assembling the information needed. To this must be added the labour of assigning key words or descriptors which serve to indicate the activities associated with each project. It is also worth noting that no comprehensive commonly accepted bases of indexing presently exist for the UN family as a whole. The question therefore arises, whether the benefits to be expected of CORE/2 will justify the resource outlays required. The Inspectors cannot answer this question, before the financial estimate is available; but on the assumption that the organizations and the governing bodies decide that the benefits do not justify the outlays, they have looked at possible courses of action.

65. One would be just to drop CORE/2 or postpone it indefinitely. This would be simple, and it would correspond to the convictions of many knowledgeable people; and it is significant that the "level of approval" accorded to CORE in organizations' replies to the questionnaire on IOB was among the lowest. It is, on the other hand, a counsel of despair, and it would mean that the system must forego making further use of knowledge and techniques acquired during CORE/1. Another course would be to reduce the scope of CORE/2. It would contradict the whole of purpose of CORE to exclude any UN organization, or to exclude any sectors, but it would be possible, in the Inspectors' view, to confine CORE/2 to categories of developing countries. The least developed countries, as a small and compact group of special importance, might offer a category which might be considered for a "pilot stage"; this could probably be undertaken within the present resources of UN organizations and the IOB Secretariat. Such an assemblage of information could possibly be supplemented by elements of basic economic and social information about the countries concerned, usually referred to as "country profiles". If this course were adopted, it would be appropriate for ACC, CPC and ACABQ to review the utility of the document produced and decide whether the pilot stage should be followed by full implementation. The Inspectors believe that this course of action could be a desirable step for the UN family. It would help towards the development of precisely stated project descriptions with clearly defined objectives and proper indicators for each project. This would support project evaluation. The Inspectors hope the UN family will move in this direction. However, even this pilot stage should not be undertaken by the IOB Secretariat alone. A lead organization and working group or groups should be designated.

66. With the benefit of hindsight, one can say that the history of the CORE project demonstrates the unwisdom of trying to run before one can walk. The aim of CORE, the exhaustive store of system-wide information selectively available in many different ways, is really part of the original objective which IOB was set up to achieve in 1970. An attempt was made to reach the partial objective by a short cut, when no short cut existed. The attempt was therefore doomed to fail. Three general lessons can be learned from this.

67. The first lesson is that, as there is no short cut to the partial goal, the system must determine to take the long way to the general goal of a coordinated and mutually compatible network of information systems encompassing the whole UN family. This will make CORE's objective attainable, as part of a general evolution. There is, in the final analysis, no alternative to the hard and very detailed preparatory work on which the IOB Secretariat is now engaged and which is designed to lay the first stone of the foundation of a stable structure. CORE has been an attempt to build a superstructure without a substructure. But an essential prerequisite stressed elsewhere in this report needs to be repeated here. It is first necessary to determine as precisely as possible the real information requirements and then to devise a system to meet them.

68. The second lesson is that no more time must be lost. Ten years have gone by, and more than a million dollars have been spent by the Board since the Capacity Study first examined the problem of a system-wide information system, and there is little enough to show for all the resources that have been provided. Four years have passed since ECOSOC urged member organizations to adopt common concepts for the purposes of information systems, and none has been adopted. The work must be pushed forward by all concerned.

69. The third lesson is that there was too much optimism, for too long, about the progress and prospects of COMPASS and CORE. It was only in its annual report to ECOSOC in July 1977 (E/5973) that ACC indicated that the development of CORE had been far slower than had been hoped. It is important that both progress reports on work projects and discussions of those reports should be entirely frank and realistic.

ANNEX I

INTER-ORGANIZATION BOARD FOR INFORMATION SYSTEMS (IOB)

PRESENT TERMS OF REFERENCE

Functions

1. The Inter-Organization Board for Information Systems (The Board) shall, under the direction of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), co-ordinate the development of common or compatible information systems in the United Nations family, particularly for the purpose of supporting economic and social development, and shall advise ACC on all questions pertaining to the development of such systems.
2. The information systems of concern to the Board are systems used for the support of the activities of the organizations of the United Nations family, including planning, execution and evaluation. These systems include: (a) systems jointly developed on an interagency basis; (b) individually developed systems which can be used by other organizations for similar purposes; and (c) individually developed systems which are of interest to other organizations either in terms of system design or in terms of information produced, or both.
3. Where appropriate, the Board shall also undertake, promote or stimulate the joint development, under its auspices, of common information systems to meet the common needs of the participating organizations.
4. To ensure proper co-ordination in the development of information systems with a view to maximizing their benefits for the activities of the United Nations family and to avoid duplication of efforts, prior to the development of one of the systems referred to in paragraph 2(b) and (c), each participating organization shall inform the Board of its plans, and the Board may express its views as to how proposed systems should be related to existing systems and made compatible therewith. To this end, the Board may provide observations and advice for the development of the system concerned.
5. To the same ends, the Board shall be responsible for establishing, keeping up to date and circulating an inventory of primarily computerized information systems in use or under active development in the United Nations organizations, which shall register their system and provide for the purpose standard information in a manner to be prescribed from time to time by the Board.
6. The Board shall, in addition, provide a focal point for the collection and dissemination of information on the development and use of systems and electronic data-processing practice in the United Nations family.

7. To facilitate the exercise of its co-ordinating functions, the Board shall elucidate issues to be considered and may commission studies for the purpose.

8. The Board shall undertake, in addition, such other functions as ACC may from time to time determine.

Organization

9. In the discharge of the foregoing functions, the Board shall be assisted by a secretariat comprising a Director and such staff as may be necessary. The Director shall be selected by ACC on the recommendation of the Board and shall be responsible to the Board for the execution of the work programme approved by it. The expense of the secretariat shall be borne by the participating organizations and shall be apportioned among them according to a formula agreed by ACC.

10. The Board may establish task forces composed of staff provided by participating organizations to study particular problems or undertake specific tasks, or may entrust responsibility for such activities to one or more participating organizations.

11. The Board shall establish the necessary work programmes and approve for submission to ACC cost estimates for the discharge of its functions, including the provision of staff support for the secretariat or ad hoc task forces, and the utilization of resources made available by the United Nations family and, where appropriate, by outside sources.

12. The Board shall supervise progress in the implementation of the work programme and report thereon to ACC regularly.

Relations with other bodies

13. The Board shall take into account and assist in meeting the information support requirements of other interagency bodies, including in particular the other ACC subsidiary bodies, with which it shall co-operate directly or as directed by ACC.

14. The Board may address advice and requests to the Management Committee of the International Computing Centre (ICC) for its proper consideration. The Board receives reports on the operations of ICC in so far as they relate to the work of IOB, and the Board keeps the Management Committee of ICC informed on developments of IOB's work programme in so far as they affect the workload of ICC.

15. The Board may also co-operate, as appropriate, with organizations and institutions outside the United Nations system engaged in activities of relevance to its work programme.

ANNEX II

INTER-ORGANIZATION BOARD FOR INFORMATION SYSTEMS (IOB)

TENTATIVE REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE

A. Purpose and Functions

1. The Inter-Organization Board for Information Systems (IOB) is established as a subsidiary body of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). Under its direction IOB is charged with:

a) identifying the common requirements for information of all or some of the organizations of the United Nations family and the intergovernmental bodies; and

b) initiating as required measures to ensure the co-ordinated development of the information systems and services of the UN family of organizations, in order to meet those requirements, to avoid duplication of effort, to permit the presentation of system-wide consolidated information and to keep costs to the minimum. As appropriate, the Board also initiates, promotes or stimulates the joint development, under its auspices, of common information systems to meet the needs of the UN system.

2. To this end, each member organization informs the Board of its plans to develop information systems so that the Board may express its views as to whether and how such proposed systems should be related to existing ones of other organizations and made compatible with them. The Board may also provide observations and advice for the development of the system concerned.

3. The Board provides information services on the development, operation, cost and products of the information systems of the United Nations organizations and, as appropriate, on relevant work of other organizations.

B. Organization and Composition

4. IOB consists of a Board and a Secretariat.

5. All organizations which are members of ACC are also members of the Board. The organizations' representatives on the Board should be at the senior policy-making level, preferably above the rank of Director, and should represent authoritatively the views of their organizations as a whole on matters within the work programme approved by ACC.

6. ACC appoints for a two-year term, which may be renewed, from among representatives of member organizations a Chairman and Vice-Chairman,

chosen, inter alia, for their familiarity with the programmes of the UN system and the information required to support them. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman meet with the Director of the IOB Secretariat to discuss matters of current interest and to prepare for sessions of the Board. They may consult the other members of the Board on matters of urgency.

7. The Board may establish ad hoc Task Forces composed of two or more member organizations to carry out specific items of the IOB work programme with the assistance of the IOB Secretariat. The Board may also designate a member organization, with its agreement, as Lead Organization for carrying out a specific item of the work programme with the assistance of the IOB Secretariat. When both a Task Force and a Lead Organization are designated for an item of the work programme the Lead Organization assumes the function of Chairman of the Task Force. The Board also establishes a Computer Working Group composed of managers of the computer facilities of member organizations and the Director of the International Computing Centre. This Working Group, with the assistance of the IOB Secretariat, reviews questions concerning technological support to information systems in relation to specific items of the IOB work programme as decided by the Board, and reports on these questions to the Board.

8. The Board normally meets twice a year. It reports to ACC, and through ACC to CPC and ACABQ, on its past and future work programmes.

8.1 The first session of the year deals inter alia with:

- (a) review of the work accomplished during the previous year and approval of a report to ACC, and through ACC to CPC and ACABQ, on that work;
- (b) any revision of the work programme for the current year; and
- (c) consideration of a tentative proposal for the work programme of the following year.

8.2 The second session of the year deals inter alia with:

- (a) review of the work programme for the current year;
- (b) adoption of the work programme for the following year;
- (c) consideration (in even-numbered years) of programme proposals for the forthcoming biennium for submission to ACC, and through ACC to CPC and ACABQ, and within the budget cycle of the UN, of budget proposals to ACC for inclusion in the UN programme budget;
- (d) proposals relating to the IOB medium-term plan for submission to ACC, and through ACC to CPC and ACABQ.

8.3 As required, the Board considers at either session: (a) personnel, budgetary or administrative questions; (b) the constitution, or change of membership of Task Forces and/or designation of Lead Organization for specific items of the work programme; and (c) matters raised in the reports of the Task Forces, the Computer Working Group or the Lead Organizations.

C. Secretariat

9. The Secretariat consists of a Director, Professional and General Service staff. The Director and the Professional and General Service members of the Secretariat are staff members of the United Nations and the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules of the United Nations apply to them. They are selected in accordance with Article 101, paragraph 3 of the Charter of the United Nations.

10. The Director is appointed by ACC on the recommendation of the Board. The Director reports to the Chairman, and in his absence the Vice-Chairman, and is responsible to the Board for the implementation of the approved work programme. The Director is responsible for proposing the appointment of the authorized staff of the Secretariat in agreement with the Chairman, or in his absence, the Vice-Chairman, and in accordance with the relevant procedures of the UN. The Director may engage consultants as specified in the work programme and within the limits of the budget.

D. Budgets

11. There are two types of budgets for IOB - a General Budget and a Special Purposes Budget.

11.1 The General Budget pays for the cost of the IOB Secretariat. It is financed by contributions from all member organizations in accordance with the formula for the apportionment of the budget for the CCAQ Secretariat. Budget proposals are drawn up by the Director of the Secretariat in accordance with instructions of the Board, reviewed by the Board and transmitted to ACC for approval and inclusion in the regular budget proposals of the United Nations. The Chairman of the Board and/or the Director of the Secretariat represent IOB at discussions of the budget by ACC, ACABQ, and the General Assembly.

11.2 Special Purposes Budgets pay for the cost of Task Forces and Lead Organizations for specific work programme items when these costs cannot be met from the regular budgets of the organizations or from the General Budget. They are financed by voluntary contributions from United Nations organizations, or from governments or other organizations. The Board may accept voluntary contributions on behalf of ACC.

E. Relations with Other Bodies

12. The Governing and Inter-Governmental bodies of the member organizations may address requests for advice or assistance to IOB through ACC. In particular, IOB responds in priority to any requests for advice from CPC or ACABQ in view of their system-wide co-ordinating responsibilities.

13. The Board may also co-operate, as appropriate, with organizations and institutions outside the United Nations system engaged in activities of relevance to its work programme.
