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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Reporting on the performance and results of United Nations
programmes: monitoring, evaluation and management review
components

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Reporting on the performance and results of United Nations programmes: monitoring, evaluation and management review components" (A/43/124).

* A/43/50.

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

I. GENERAL

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Reporting on the performance and results of United Nations programmes: monitoring, evaluation and management review components" encompasses in its historic coverage a considerable number of years and in substance has addressed a major part of the entire cycle of planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation in regard to the activities of the United Nations. It is therefore welcomed as a useful compendium of what has taken place in this most important area.

2. In regard to the first aspect, namely the historic coverage, it is to be noted that the General Assembly, when considering the JIU report at its forty-third session, will also have before it the report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1986-1987 (A/43/326 and Add.1) and the report of the Secretary-General on application of evaluation findings in programme design, programme delivery and policy directives (A/43/179), which had not been issued at the time the JIU report was prepared and finalized.

3. This latest programme performance report in respect of the biennium 1986-1987 has incorporated a number of improvements, as recommended by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) at its twenty-sixth session, and is considered a significant further development in the process of enhancing this type of reporting and increasing its usefulness to Member States in the context of the intergovernmental review of programme formulation and of implementation. It is needless to stress the importance that the Secretary-General attaches to this process as a management tool for similar purposes at all levels of the Secretariat in regard to programme formulation and the oversight procedures in the implementation process. It is the belief of the Secretary-General that a beginning has been made towards enhancing, firstly, the analytical content of programme performance reporting, based on the capacity created for this purpose through computerization, and, secondly, a more detailed explanation as regards departures from programmed commitments in A/43/326/Add.1. While there is still room for improvement in the content of in-depth coverage of individual programme budget sections as well as in the breadth of coverage by including activities that heretofore have not yet been part of programme performance reporting, it is however believed that the general thrust and direction of performance reporting accurately reflects, firstly, the procedures and guidelines outlined in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation for programme performance monitoring and the reporting thereon; secondly, the integration of monitoring programme performance in the entire programme planning, budgeting and monitoring cycle, as taking off from what has been programmed and providing feedback and support to evaluation as well as to future programme formulation; and thirdly, its usefulness as a management tool on the basis of which a first diagnosis can be made for further in-depth investigations, such as in-depth and self-evaluations or management reviews and analyses.

4. The JIU assessment of the extent of coverage of programme performance reporting has to be seen as a direct correlation of the extent and detail of the programmatic content of the different sections of the programme budget of the Organization. In this regard it is necessary to make a clear distinction between the programme of work of a given unit and the carrying out of operational activities by that same unit in the form of delivery of technical co-operation. As the latter is entirely financed from extrabudgetary sources, that is, financing of a voluntary or non-assessed nature, it is important that the reporting on the delivery should be in a format that also recognizes all aspects, including the constraints, related to this source of financing.

5. It is also relevant to consider the current reporting mechanisms at the level of intergovernmental programme reviewing bodies, which have evolved over time and have proven to be of considerable usefulness to those bodies in two aspects: as the oversight of programme implementation and also as a background against which the approval of further programmes of work will be seen. While these mechanisms are in place and functioning, the reporting thereon to CPC and the General Assembly may need to be considered, at least in synthesis, in the context of future programme performance reporting.

6. The JIU assessment of the evaluation capacity and evaluation activities of the United Nations is generally valid, particularly in terms of the need to strengthen the evaluation system for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of programmes. While recognizing that the process of integrating evaluation into the programme planning, budgeting and monitoring cycle has been somewhat slow, it should be pointed out that the machinery for such integration is in place.

7. A report on the application of evaluation findings in programme design, programme delivery and policy directives (A/43/179) is being submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-third session and is being considered by CPC at its twenty-eighth session. In that report, answers can be found to several of the issues raised by JIU. Among other things, the report points out that the self-evaluation system has indeed been established and is now an ongoing process; programme managers have been requested to conduct self-evaluation of as many subprogrammes as possible during the remainder of the current medium-term plan period so that evaluation findings can be applied for a more effective formulation and implementation of the next medium-term plan, which in turn should lead to more effective programme implementation. The Evaluation Manual has been issued in English, French and Spanish and has been widely distributed; several refinements in procedures for evaluation and the reporting of evaluation have been effected, including those related to technical co-operation activities, the evaluation of which generally follows the guidelines issued by the United Nations Development Programme in 1987.

8. One of the major concerns of the JIU report is the need for adequate information on programme performance to be made available to intergovernmental bodies in order to facilitate their decision-making, a question to which reference has been made in the context of programme performance reporting in paragraph 5 above. That need is further recognized in the context of evaluation. In addition to findings of the in-depth evaluations and triennial reviews, and the general

reporting to the General Assembly every two years through CPC, arrangements are under consideration for reporting to intergovernmental programme reviewing bodies on findings from the self-evaluation exercise, similar to the current practice of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, which reports on its findings to its governing body, the Trade and Development Board.

9. Ways and means are also being developed as part of follow-up activities in the conduct of self-evaluation (a) to ensure that self-evaluation activities are more regularly and more effectively implemented, (b) to improve methodology that would permit sound analysis and the drawing of valid conclusions, (c) to strengthen the linkages between programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation and (d) to ensure that evaluation findings are systematically applied to improve programme formulation and implementation.

10. Comments made by JIU about the self-evaluation system, including the provision by the Central Evaluation Unit of training, advisory support, quality control, analysis and feedback, the refinement of methodology, and the increased responsibilities of that Unit, are well taken and would require constant attention. The Unit has been strengthened by an additional Professional post and now comprises five, not three, Professional posts.

II. SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS

11. In recommendation 1 JIU proposes to replace the present programme performance report with a report that "analyses progress made and results achieved against the established objectives for each United Nations subprogramme". The sample form contained in annex II of the JIU report, which is proposed for addressing this stipulation, will be given consideration by the Secretary-General. At the outset, however, it would appear that such a form would be appropriate for the self-evaluation exercise, providing a useful summary for analytical purposes at the subprogramme level. However, to include this summary in a "revised" format to the General Assembly, through CPC, as mandated under the provisions of article VI of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, 1/ would not only be at variance with these stipulations, but - even more importantly - would face the Assembly and CPC alike with a rather voluminous report of some 500 pages (given the number of some 471 subprogrammes, as has been acknowledged in para. 33 of the JIU report). That would present a scheduling problem, apart from the problems of timing and production in the more physical sense. It would be the preference of the Secretary-General to have this format of reporting first tested in the context of the self-evaluation exercise, possibly serving as background material for the formulation of biennial programme proposals, to be submitted initially to the intergovernmental programme reviewing bodies and to be specifically referred to in those instances where programmatic adjustments appear in those proposals.

12. In recommendation 2 a series of issues have been addressed. The first two parts (a and b) concern questions of staffing of the two central units concerned with evaluation (the Central Evaluation Unit) and with monitoring (the Central Monitoring Unit), which have already been taken into account by the Secretary-General in the current deployment of staff of these Units. They now form

part of the restructured Office for Programme Planning, Budget and Finance, and there are five Professional posts assigned to the Central Evaluation Unit and four to the Central Monitoring Unit, in both instances including one post each at the D-1 level. The recommendations regarding evaluation activities, as reflected in recommendations 2 (c), (d) and (e), are noted and will be taken into account as part of efforts being made to strengthen the evaluation capacity of the United Nations.

13. In recommendation 3 it is suggested that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Fifth Committee, and the Committee on Conferences "might consider requesting an annual in-depth review report from the Secretariat on management improvement actions and results in a selected administrative support or conference services area". In this context the Secretary-General considers it relevant to recall that in recent reportings to the General Assembly, both at its forty-second session, as well as to its forthcoming forty-third session, the subject of a major undertaking, i.e. an integrated management information system for the entire Secretariat, has been dealt with. The Secretary-General believes that once this system is in place and operational, such reporting would be one of its outputs.

14. In recommendation 4 it is stated that "the Secretary-General should give high priority in current technological innovation efforts to establishing a computerized management information system which integrates both performance and financial information". This aspect has been a concern of the General Assembly, its Fifth Committee and CPC for some time, and was last addressed by CPC, when at its twenty-sixth session it "requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to develop a methodology for making the information contained in the report on programme performance and the report on budget performance comparable". 2/ This issue will be taken into account and the relevant consideration will be given to it in the context of the development on the integrated management information system referred to in the preceding paragraph.

Notes

1/ Owing to the approval by the General Assembly in its resolution 42/215, section I, paragraph 1, of the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination that a new article III be added to the Rules and Regulations Governing Programme Planning (see A/42/16, part two, para. 74), the article referred to above on the monitoring of programme implementation is article V of the printed text (ST/SGB/PPBME Rules/1 (1987)).

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/41/38 and Corr.2), para. 53.
