



United Nations
Environment
Programme



Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/GC/87
10 March 1977

Original: ENGLISH

GOVERNING COUNCIL
Fifth session
Nairobi, 9-25 May 1977
Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda

INTRODUCTORY REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The purpose of this report is to assist members in preparing for the fifth session of the Governing Council by:

(a) Giving a brief account of major developments within or affecting UNEP since the fourth session of the Governing Council, and of difficulties encountered;

(b) Highlighting some of the principal policy issues before the Governing Council at its fifth session.

1. MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS AND DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

1. The secretariat has given the major part of its attention to the implementation of Governing Council decisions. Documents before the Council will illustrate the progress made; in some cases only limited progress is recorded, in part because of the manpower constraints of the small secretariat. More than 100 international meetings of various levels and types will have been convened or jointly sponsored by UNEP between the fourth and fifth sessions of the Council in connexion with the implementation of the programme, among them meetings concerned with programme development and implementation, on such subjects as:

- Environment and development
- Natural resources shared by two or more States

Na.77-645

- Liability and responsibility for pollution and other environmental damage
- Ozone
- Industrial seminars on automobile and agro-industries
- Regional seas (the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf)
- Regional preparatory meetings for the Desertification Conference
- Meetings related to UNEP's co-ordination functions, including joint programming meetings with United Nations agencies and programmes, a session of the Environment Co-ordination Board and meetings of its focal points, task forces and working groups.

In addition to meetings convened by UNEP, the UNEP secretariat actively participates in other co-ordinating forums in the United Nations system, such as:

- The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) and its sub-committees
- The Inter-Agency Consultative Board (IACB) and its committees
- Joint meetings of ACC and the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC)
- The Economic and Social Council
- General Conferences and governing bodies of various specialized agencies.

2. The Executive Director and the UNEP secretariat have also participated in a series of major international conferences convened by the United Nations itself, or by one of the specialized agencies, including Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements; the World Employment Conference; the fourth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and, of course, the thirty-first session of the General Assembly.

3. The Executive Director brought to the attention of UNCTAD at the fourth Conference the contents of Council decision 79 (IV) relating to environment and development. He was gratified by the general response received, and in particular by the UNCTAD resolution reflecting the importance of the environmental aspects of activities aimed at the transfer of technologies.

4. It is also gratifying to report the importance attached by the World Employment Conference and by the ILO governing body to activities aimed at satisfying basic human needs, and to note the prominence given

to the environmental aspects of ILO's work. Concern with the working environment will clearly be a major feature of ILO's work programme.

5. A report on the outcome of Habitat and its implications for UNEP will be found in document UNEP/GC/92.

6. The General Assembly debate on the environment, and more particularly on the report of the Governing Council on the work of its fourth session, involved an unusually large number of speakers, nearly all of whom were supportive in their remarks. This was taken by the Executive Director as a most encouraging expression of confidence in UNEP, and as a re-affirmation of the commitment of the world community to the cause of the environment. Agenda item 15 includes a report on the resolution adopted at the thirty-first session of the General Assembly and the sixtieth and sixty-first sessions of the Economic and Social Council. Particular attention is paid to selected resolutions under other appropriate items of the agenda of the Governing Council. However, it should be mentioned here that the Assembly noted with satisfaction 1/ the report of the Governing Council on the work of its fourth session, endorsed 2/ the views of the Council that the institutional arrangements of UNEP, as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII), appeared adequate and sound and that in any restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, the elements relating to environmental considerations should be strengthened and given institutional visibility, and elected the Executive Director for a four-year term beginning 1 January 1977. The Assembly also decided 3/ to defer to its thirty-second session definitive decisions concerning institutional arrangements for human settlements. Actions taken by the Assembly regarding programme and programme support costs and co-ordination questions are reflected in the documentation for the relevant items of the agenda for the Governing Council's fifth session.

7. The idea of a UNEP secretariat as a small focal point serving to co-ordinate the activities of the entire United Nations system in the field of the environment has been put into effect; the report of the Environment Co-ordination Board (UNEP/GC/89) reflects in some detail the significant progress which has been made in this respect. The concept of an Environment Fund which would support the co-ordinating and catalysing functions of the small secretariat, and promote coherent system-wide responses to environmental issues, has also become a reality.

1/ Resolution 31/111, para. 1.

2/ Resolution 31/112, paras. 1 and 2.

3/ Resolution 31/116, sect. 1, para. 2.

8. Physically, UNEP is well pleased with its temporary headquarters on the permanent site at Gigiri, generously provided by the Government of Kenya. Progress toward the development of a permanent UNEP headquarters is reported in document UNEP/GC/100, but it should be stressed here that the Executive Director is satisfied with the style and atmosphere already achieved at Gigiri, which in his view are entirely consonant with the character and aims of UNEP, and should not be altered. While the results of the architectural and engineering survey for the permanent site, authorized by the General Assembly at its thirtieth session, will not be available in time for consideration by the Council at its fifth session, the Executive Director is confident that the current temporary buildings will be retained, after suitable upgrading, as an integral part of the permanent complex, and that the established principles of modesty and efficiency in an environmentally sound and appropriate setting will be maintained.
9. However, while UNEP has, in the opinion of the Executive Director, achieved a mature understanding of its own purpose and role, it has not succeeded in sharing that understanding fully with Governments and the United Nations family of organizations. Admittedly, the concepts are complex, and the organization is young. Renewed efforts by the secretariat and by Government representatives on the Governing Council are however required if UNEP is to achieve its goals within the established constraints. While Governments are rightly concerned when evidence of non-coordination, overlapping and duplication is found within the United Nations system, they should be equally alert to the amount of secretariat effort that must be devoted to reporting to intergovernmental bodies on UNEP's work. The basis for the Executive Director's concern in this respect may be illustrated by the following documents available to Council: the report of ACABQ on co-ordination questions arising in the activities of UNEP (A/31/227), the medium-term plan (A/31/6/Add.1 and Corrs.1-5), the report of CPC on the work of its sixteenth session (A/31/38), the report of the Secretary-General on evaluation of selected programmes, including the environment, to CPC and the report of ACC to CPC on co-ordination aspects of the above programmes. These documents may also give some grounds for hope that fundamental understandings will eventually be achieved.
10. Reports about UNEP to intergovernmental bodies, including the Governing Council, represent only one dimension of a multi-faceted communications responsibility carried by UNEP. Creating increased public awareness of environmental issues and imperatives is a key supporting function which until the fourth session of the Council received inadequate attention by the secretariat. In the past year there has been a better record of achievement; it is hoped that the first annual report and the first issue of the quarterly journal Masingira will be available to the Council, and that efforts to achieve a satisfactory measure of public distribution of the overviews of priority subject areas, and of certain technical reports, will then be evident. The Report to Governments is being improved and used as a vehicle to convey specialized information on various aspects of UNEP's work. UNITERRA has been acknowledged as an improved version of the earlier UNEP NEWS, and efforts to bring it to a high standard of communication excellence are continuing.

11. The quality, scope and volume of documentation for the Governing Council is another dimension of the communications function which continues to require improvement. It is hoped that the documentation for the fifth session will show that the secretariat has attempted to respond to the concerns expressed at the fourth session. The Council may wish to reconvene the informal working group on documentation during its fifth session to advise the Executive Director on possible further improvements. The format of the programme document and the use of the UNEP/GC/INFORMATION series are subjects on which the views of members would be particularly appreciated.

12. As suggested earlier in this report, a principal difficulty encountered in implementing decisions of the Council has been the constraint imposed on the secretariat by manpower limitations. The Executive Director is convinced that the secretariat of UNEP should remain relatively small, and that the level of the Fund should stabilize, in real terms, if the co-ordinating and catalytic nature of UNEP is to be preserved. Nevertheless, the conflict between the need to remain small and the enormous scope of environmental concerns can only be resolved if four conditions are met:

(a) The UNEP secretariat, the Fund, the Environment Co-ordination Board and the Governing Council must concentrate their work in future much more effectively than has been done in the past. Neither the secretariat nor the Council has been sufficiently diligent in applying this principle. The Executive Director proposes that such concentration should be applied not only to Levels One, Two and Three of the programme, but also to the preparations for and debate during the Governing Council itself. To be specific, the Executive Director proposes to report in detail to the Governing Council at its sixth session on the following areas of concentration: pollution and human health; arid lands - soil and water (in view of the possible implications of the United Nations Water Conference and the United Nations Conference on Desertification for UNEP's activities in these areas); regional seas; the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals; Environmental Education (in view of the possible impact of the intergovernmental conference on environmental education on UNEP's activities in this field); and communication (being an area which requires continuous review by the Governing Council). In his introductory report to the Governing Council at each session, the Executive Director intends to make similar proposals for the following session. It is expected that this procedure will give the Council the opportunity to study specific subjects in depth and to give concrete directives to the Executive Director, and in the meantime will ease the load on members of the Council with respect to the volume of documentation and on the secretariat with respect to reporting on the various elements of the programme;

(b) The professional staff of UNEP must be of the highest calibre, within an appropriate geographical balance. The assistance of Governments in identifying qualified candidates will be vital if this condition is to be achieved;

(c) The Executive Director must have the co-operation of Governments in establishing a network of friends of the environment round the world. Such an international fraternity could facilitate the work of UNEP immensely, and would serve the requirement laid on the Governing Council by General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII), section 1, paragraphs 2 (d) and (e):

"To keep under review the world environmental situation in order to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance receive appropriate and adequate consideration by Governments;

"To promote the contribution of the relevant international scientific and other professional communities to the acquisition, assessment and exchange of environmental knowledge and information and, as appropriate, to the technical aspects of the formulation and implementation of environmental programmes within the United Nations system;"

(d) The currencies of the Fund must be fully usable. Governments are aware of the stipulation in Financial Rule 203.4 of the Fund that "voluntary contributions shall be accepted in currencies that are readily usable by the Fund", and are urged to take all appropriate steps to facilitate the use of non-convertible currencies in ways which are consonant with the requirements of the approved programme. Furthermore, the number of contributions to the Fund must be increased.

13. The principle of concentration described above is not intended to derogate in any way from UNEP's responsibility to monitor and report on the state of the environment; information should be gathered on any major issues that emerge. However, is it proposed that concentration, in this context should mean concentration of effort over stated periods of time by high-quality manpower to give the principal focus of the programme to a limited number of precisely defined areas. In the same way, concentration in the context of the Fund programme activities should mean concentrated efforts, with maximum flexibility in the use of currency resources. Reports to the Council, and presumably the debates of the Council, would focus on the predetermined concentration areas.

II. HIGHLIGHTS OF SOME POLICY ISSUES

A. Habitat and human settlements

14. The Executive Director has attempted to accelerate the momentum of the programmes of UNEP and the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation in human settlements, a task which has proved difficult in the face of the long-standing and continuing uncertainties concerning the structure and form of the United Nations system's approach to this vital subject, and of the inadequate response of Governments to his appeal for contributions to the Foundation. Reports before the Council (UNEP/GC/92, UNEP/GC/93 and UNEP/GC/94 and Add.1) show how the more important agreements reached at Vancouver have been applied in UNEP.

They also describe how the Executive Director has attempted to move the secretariat and the Foundation into full operation in this important field in accordance with the recommendations of Habitat. Administrative, budget and programme plans and the necessary supporting infrastructures are ready, inter-organizational links are being forged, and modest programmes are under way.

15. The General Assembly resolved at its thirty-first session 4/ to request the Economic and Social Council to submit for consideration at its thirty-second session "concrete recommendations on definitive institutional arrangements for human settlements within the United Nations". At the same time, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General 5/ to ensure, through the appropriate machinery of ACC, the co-ordination of the work of all the United Nations bodies concerned with respect to their activities in the human settlements field and to report to the Economic and Social Council at its sixty-third session on the progress made, and to take appropriate measures to ensure effective preparations for the discussions on human settlements questions at the sixty-third session of the Council, bearing in mind the contributions made by the relevant components of the United Nations system as represented in ACC.

16. Clearly, the General Assembly did not expect the Governing Council of UNEP to attempt to take formal action relating to institutional arrangements for human settlements. The Executive Director nevertheless invites members to express their views in the course of the fifth session, so that he can communicate the views of UNEP to the Secretary-General.

B. Water and desertification

17. UNEP has termed water a "vital resource for life". The extreme scarcity of this vital resource is one of the major factors in the process of desertification. The intimate relationship between water and desertification is clear, and the United Nations system in general, and UNEP in particular, have taken full account of this link in making preparations for the two global conferences on these subjects. The Governing Council, as the preparatory committee for the United Nations Conference on Desertification, is well aware of what led to the decision to hold such a conference. The Council will receive a current progress report, budget estimate, an overview of the process of desertification and a draft plan of action for consideration at its fifth session (UNEP/GC/95 and Add.1-4). UNEP has carried out the Council's instructions with regard to assistance for the United Nations Water Conference, and its contributions towards travel of participants to regional preparatory meetings and to the conference itself have been

4/ Resolution 31/116, sect. II, para. 5.

5/ Ibid., sect. III, paras. 1 and 2.

acknowledged, as has its assistance in the preparation of the ACC Environment Co-ordination Board report on the present and future activities of the United Nations system in water, and of elements of the information programme. The Council will be informed of the outcome of the Conference during its fifth session, and may wish to give special attention to the implications for UNEP of the plan of action adopted by the Water Conference, the draft plan of action for the Desertification Conference, and the relationships between them.

C. Environment and development

18. The report of the intergovernmental expert group (UNEP/GC/102) and the comments of the Executive Director on it show clearly that there is now considerable international recognition of the intimate relationship between environment and development. They also confirm the difficulty of establishing agreed definitions of terms relating to the determination of irrational and wasteful uses of resources. Universally applicable criteria for environmentally appropriate development patterns are difficult to determine, but a beginning has been made with the establishment of some proposed broad guidelines in this field.

D. Shared natural resources

19. Three sessions of the intergovernmental working group of experts established by the Governing Council at the request of the General Assembly have been held, two since the fourth session of the Council. Little progress was recorded at the last session, and the Council is invited to consider the alternative courses of future actions mentioned in document UNEP/GC/101 and to advise the Executive Director on the nature of the report to be made to the General Assembly.

E. The Environment Fund

20. The Fund was established with a target level of \$100 million for the five-year period ending 31 December 1977. The Executive Director is pleased to report that the financial uncertainties which troubled the Council at its fourth session have now largely disappeared; it is clear that the \$100 million target will have been approached if not exceeded by 31 December this year. The Council has already agreed, and the General Assembly has confirmed, following its review of UNEP's institutional arrangements, that the Fund should be continued. It is therefore now necessary for the Council to decide on the future level of the Fund; the proposals of the Executive Director in this regard are contained in document UNEP/GC/98. The Council is invited to consider, taking into account the effects of inflation, the optimum level of the Fund required to permit it to play fully its catalytic role, while at the same time UNEP continues to fulfil its co-ordinating function. The Council may also wish to consider the currency composition of the Fund, and the extent of progress to date in using non-convertible currencies. This issue relates to a number of questions which will be before the Council, including programme and project evaluation, the past implementation of Fund programme activities and the future level of the programme and programme support budget.

F. Evaluation

21. Finally, the informal consultations in Geneva in January 1977 clearly reflected the importance attached to evaluation by Governments. Discussions of the subject in the Governing Council itself have up to now concerned themselves with project evaluation, and, as indicated in paragraph 9 above, UNEP has been required to prepare a first attempt at programme evaluation for inclusion in the Secretary-General's report to CPC at its May/June 1977 session. That report will indicate that the preparation of documentation by the secretariat and the review thereof by the Governing Council, constitute in themselves a kind of continual evaluation of the United Nations Environment Programme. However, the Executive Director will have to inform the Governing Council and CPC that no specific programme evaluation methodology has yet been worked out, and that the answer to the broad question "what is happening to the environment and with what effect is UNEP doing anything about it?" entails evaluation:

(a) Of the role of the Fund as a catalyst in the implementation of the strategies and attainment of objectives of Level Two;

(b) Of the impact of the implementation of the programme on the protection and improvement of the environment at large.

The Council may wish to consider this general subject in some detail at its fifth and subsequent sessions, with a view to systematizing its approach to the evaluation of UNEP and to the delineation of its own role. Governments have made it clear that the continuation of their support for UNEP and for the Environment Fund may well depend on their assurance that UNEP activities are subject to continuing evaluative scrutiny.

- - - - -