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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Co-operation between and management of libraries of the United Nations system

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC)

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Co-operation between and management of libraries of the United Nations system" (A/39/299).

* A/39/150.

ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC)

1. The large majority of organizational elements that commented on the contents of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Co-operation between and management of libraries of the United Nations system" (A/39/299) expressed their general agreement with the objectives and recommendations of the report of JIU.

Specific comments

Recommendation 1: Inter-library panel

2. It was generally felt, as expressed by the Administrative Management Service (AMS), that the JIU call for improved co-operative activities through the establishment of a new mechanism at the inter-agency level deserved careful examination and attention.

3. The Advisory Committee on Co-ordination of Information Systems (ACCIS) considers that there is no doubt that a panel of library directors would be useful, provided it had clearly defined terms of reference and specific objectives. It suggests that the first priority would be to get organizations to adopt, as the JIU report states, "careful statements of up-to-date objectives to guide the provision of effective library services".

4. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) appreciates the suggestion that an inter-library panel be established to co-ordinate the operation of libraries, and suggests that the panel be integrated into the inter-agency consultative machinery, probably under the organizational umbrella of ACCIS. UNDP also insists that the panel, if established, should develop realistic work plans to be approved by ACCIS or ACC.

5. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) supports the proposal of JIU for establishing a common integrated library system of the United Nations, based on internationally accepted standards developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and UNESCO. It supports the inspectors' recommendations, and especially the establishment of an inter-library panel of United Nations agencies to develop and maintain an effective network, not only among libraries but also of documentation centres and units.

6. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) notes that the main recommendation of the inspectors is to create an inter-agency panel of heads of libraries that would establish a practical, co-operative work programme concentrating on certain specific areas. It mentions, however, that the prerequisite for such a panel is a basic commitment from the organizations to strengthen library co-operation, and that the main question remains as to how to achieve that commitment. If the question is not addressed, ILO believes that there is little point in making even a relatively modest investment in meetings of an inter-agency panel. ILO insists on the fact that the priority continues to be indexing and bibliographic control, which would reduce the amount of duplicative indexing and cataloguing work done in

institutions all over the world and facilitate access to the information produced by organizations in the United Nations family.

7. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recognizes the need for co-operation among libraries, and pursues such a policy with regard to libraries and documentation centres in the agricultural and related fields. At the same time, and also in view of the large differences in levels of development, size and working practices in the various libraries, FAO believes that any possible advantages to be derived from a co-operative system-wide venture involving linkage with a world-wide network of libraries must be weighed against the additional staff time and costs involved. In particular, FAO questions the need for setting up formal machinery in the form of an inter-library panel that would establish its own work programme and meet periodically. Informal ad hoc consultations to deal with specific needs and problems as they arise would appear to FAO more cost effective and practical.

Recommendation 2: Management improvements

8. * UNDP believes that JIU's recommendations relating to staff training, which are directly applicable to UNDP's situation as it plans for future information activities, are helpful to the extent that they are brought to the attention of the administrations of all United Nations system organizations as well as their respective governing bodies.

9. UNESCO concurs with the inspectors' conclusion that the libraries of the United Nations system are working in isolation and do not employ optimal management methods. It supports the proposal of JIU for establishing a common integrated library system of the United Nations based on internationally accepted standards. It points out the efforts of the United Nations/Dag Hammarskjöld Library in creating a United Nations bibliographic information system. In order to reach the target of a common integrated library network, it would be necessary for the various libraries to agree on a minimum number of standards, for instance those concerning bibliographic descriptions and formats.

10. ILO supports the recommendations that all organizations develop a network of internal libraries and documentation centres, ensures that the relationships among the different parts of the network are clearly specified and establish proper planning and management techniques for even the smallest units in the network. ILO is moving towards meeting these recommendations through the internal co-ordination aspects of the International Labour Information System (ILIS).

11. The World Health Organization (WHO) and FAO are in general agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation 3: New technologies

12. Most of the agencies agree with the recognition of the fact that there is a serious need to support the introduction of new technologies in the libraries of the United Nations system, as well as a need to keep pace with the developments in information and library-related fields all over the world.

13. UNDP notes that the recommendations of the inspectors are particularly useful as far as they relate to new information technologies and staff training to apply them.
14. ILO is relatively well-placed in the application of new technologies except in so far as the rapidly increasing use of microcomputers is concerned. ILO regrets that this particular area was not given more emphasis in the report because microcomputers are rapidly being introduced in both national and international organizations. There is a need to know more about the capabilities of micro-hardware and software for co-operative activities.
15. FAO agrees that the library should, as appropriate and within available resources, continually consider the possible introduction of new technologies that can be beneficial to both productivity and the quality of services provided.
16. It is generally felt by the members of ACC that the establishment of the proposed inter-agency panel would be a first step towards implementing co-operation between the libraries of the United Nations system. The panel could consider what measures should be proposed to improve compatibility among computerized operations of libraries, and to encourage co-operative ventures in order to apply new techniques and promote information interchange among libraries. It has been accepted that co-operation between the libraries to set up new management standards and test the fast-growing technologies can only be beneficial to the whole system. It has been mentioned, however, that in a period of budgetary constraints, it would be more reasonable to set limited goals to be achieved in a short period than to try to embrace the whole range of problems at the same time.
