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REPORT ON TREATMENT OF WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT
IN THE UNITED NATIONS FAMILY OF ORGANIZATIONS

(JIU/REP/72/3)

Addendum

COMMENTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UNIDO
AND THE ADMINISTRATOR, UNDP

Comments of the Secretary-General

1. Inspector Jha has prepared a valuable report in the complex field of water resources development in the United Nations family of organizations. His report coincides with related events, in particular the establishment of the Economic and Social Council Committee on Natural Resources and Council resolution 1673 (LII). The latter calls for "a concise report covering the outlines of the work programme and the sphere of competence of the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system in the field of mineral, water and energy resources development, together with the views of those organizations and agencies on the most rational division of responsibilities between them in these fields" and for "proposals as to the most advisable measures to co-ordinate the formulation and implementation of the programme" in these fields. 1/ The report and proposals are to be considered by the Committee on Natural Resources at its third session, scheduled to convene at New Delhi in February 1973, and afterwards by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Council. Inspector Jha's report should therefore be made available to the Committee on Natural Resources as a valuable complement to the other documentation when the Committee meets in February 1973.

1/ In addition, at its fifty-third session, the Council, in its resolution 1728 (LIII), decided that this report should serve as the in-depth sectoral study called for in Economic and Social Council resolution 1643 (LI).

Need for a total and integrated approach

2. The Secretary-General endorses the main theme of Inspector Jha's report, which is that a total and integrated approach to water resources development is needed. This should take into account all aspects of water resources development, including the balanced and most efficient utilization of water for various purposes on a rational and scientific basis. Inspector Jha believes that this should be done both at the national and international level. It is only in recent years that recognition is being given to water from the resource point of view, and practical progress has been made in a number of countries, particularly developing countries, in pursuing this approach. In many countries, however, it is the fragmentary, partisan or user approach which persists for historical and administrative reasons. Such shortcomings in applying a total and integrated water approach also exist at the international level, where various organizations operate under various constitutions, resolutions, work programmes and budgets. Many of the points of deficiency mentioned by Inspector Jha (paragraphs 19-29, 35, 42-44, 87-88, 100, 102, 108), arise from the fact that, as he points out in paragraph 19, "each has its own concept of its competence and responsibilities and of priorities based on the most extensive interpretation and application of its mandates".

3. The fact that the interests of the organizations of the United Nations system in the water fields are not identical and that activities sometimes overlap is brought out in the report. Compounding the problem is the fact that terms tend to be given different meanings in different contexts, as is evidenced in the report itself where terms such as "water field", "water resources", "water problems", "bearing on water", "relation to water" and "field of water" (e.g. in paragraphs 2, 17, 19, 39, 43, 55, 60, 64, 67, 70, 84, 111, 119.1(e), 120.12, 120.20, 120.23 and 120.27) are used loosely and imprecisely. The report would have been richer, too, if it had taken into account (for example in paragraph 5) new concepts made possible by technological progress such as large water grids. A clear distinction should also have been made between operational (or field) activities and non-operational activities (substantive servicing of governing bodies, research, publication, seminars, conferences). The former are subject to requests of individual Governments or groups of Governments, while the latter are subject to programming and approval of intergovernmental bodies. This distinction has considerable importance when considering programming and co-ordination and the role of UNDP (paragraphs 78-91 and related paragraphs in conclusions and recommendations). This fact as well as apparent misunderstandings about UNDP practices (in paragraphs 91, 114, 117, 120), for instance with regard to allocating funds and according priority to proposals of requesting Governments, raise doubts as to the soundness of some of the recommendations in the report.

Role of regional economic commissions

4. Inspector Jha makes a number of perceptive comments about the role of the regional economic commissions. It must be pointed out, however, that if fuller use is to be made of their experience and expertise (paragraphs 50-58, 85, 105, 119.1), and if they are to play the strengthened role visualized for them in the report, the present obstacles imposed by limited resources would have to be overcome. It is up to the Governments themselves to decide whether this should be done.

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Establishment of new regional centres

5. It is proposed in the report that four regional centres for water resources be established to act as "expert forums" composed not only of representatives of the regional economic commissions and the specialized agencies but also of experts appointed in their individual capacities. These centres would be independent of the regional economic commissions although they would be serviced by their secretariats. The Secretary-General questions whether the establishment of regional centres on the lines proposed would be an effective way of seeking a greater degree of co-operation and co-ordination in regional water programmes. These centres would basically be without institutional moorings, since they would be expressing views and giving advice but would not be responsible to any particular intergovernmental bodies. Responsibility to intergovernmental legislative bodies does seem to be essential if an integrated programme of water resources development at the regional level is to be developed. Recommendations from regional centres composed of individual experts cannot be expected to have the same weight as, for example, collective decisions reached by representatives of Governments participating in the work of the regional economic commissions. It is also proposed that the regional centres would not be substantive operational groups. However, if the idea of water resources centres independent of the regional economic commissions is extended to other areas, it must be considered whether this would not result in the future in the creation of a number of circles, as it were, compartmentalized by subjects, but without an over-all intersectoral or legislative view by the commissions themselves. What might be more appropriate, if this idea is to be pursued in some form, would be for officers to be seconded to the commissions -- for example, from UNDP for the programming of pre-investment studies and investigations, from the IBRD group and the regional banks to study financial questions and assist in the preparation of studies leading to project investments, and from the specialized agencies as links with their organizations and drawing on their respective specializations - who would contribute to the integrated approach at the regional level.

6. There already exists at the regional level institutional machinery for dealing with water resources development. The Economic Commission for Europe has a Committee on Water Resources Problems and the governmental representatives who participate are, in their own countries, responsible for the formulation and application of water policies and thus have a direct authority over the co-ordination of governmental and intergovernmental action. The Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East's periodic water resources conferences have been the main instrument through which much development (which in this region has been varied and of large dimension) has taken place. These conferences already have interagency participation which could, of course, be strengthened. In addition, the conferences already possess the desired legislative links since they report to the Commission and the agencies report to their respective intergovernmental bodies on the elements for which they are responsible. Similarly, the proposal (paragraph 98) to dissolve the Joint Water Resources Group of the Economic Commission for Latin America seems to be in conflict with the idea of strengthening the role of the regional economic commissions. It should also be mentioned in connexion with paragraph 98 that the two panels in Buenos Aires and Delft, which are criticized for not having produced "appreciable results", involved

little United Nations expense and were largely financed by the host Governments who derived considerable benefits from them. The resulting documents, which will be issued shortly, are expected to be highly useful to water planners and water policy-makers.

World water centre

7. One of the principal recommendations of the report is the establishment of a world water centre (paragraphs 66-70, 97-99, 109, 118). In the absence of a fuller and more in-depth analysis of functions, organization, administrative relations and financial implications than that now contained in the report, it is difficult to comment on this proposal in any detail. In general, however, the Secretary-General considers that the proposed centre is likely to prove as ineffective as its predecessor, the United Nations Water Resources Development Centre, and believes that its establishment in the form recommended would weaken existing intergovernmental efforts to deal with water problems and would negatively affect the exercise by the United Nations of its Charter responsibilities for co-ordination.

8. The recommended structure and functions of the centre do not seem to differ basically from those of the United Nations Water Resources Development Centre, which was not delegated any decision-making authority by UNDP or the agencies. Since, however, the report merely mentions that centre (paragraphs 33 and 34), it is not possible to know on what basis Inspector Jha came to the apparent conclusion that the experiment, if repeated, would have a different outcome.

9. The proposed composition of the centre - a group of "eminent men" selected on the basis of their present qualifications and acting in their individual capacities, "assisted" by representatives of the United Nations and the agencies - and its independent character, while they might possibly ensure a co-ordinating role for the centre, would deprive the United Nations of the right of exercising, in this important field, the co-ordination responsibilities assigned to it by the Charter. The establishment of the centre would also weaken the very basis on which the United Nations carries out such responsibilities, i.e., the actions taken in this area by its intergovernmental organs. When the report assigns to the centre the functions of "'watchdog' on behalf of Member States", it does, in fact, imply that a body composed of a few selected experts would be empowered to act as the "watchdog" of organs composed of the representatives of the Governments of those States. While it is stated that the views of the centre would only have to be "seriously taken into account", the stipulation that the United Nations and its agencies must "consult" the centre before acting would remove the co-ordination centre from the organizations and their organs to individual experts.

10. In this sense, this proposal contradicts another main recommendation in the report (paragraph 118.1) that co-ordination at the intergovernmental level should, to the extent possible, be strengthened. In particular, the report seems to underrate or prejudice the outcome of the current efforts of the Committee on Natural Resources to clarify functions and division of responsibilities within the system in areas within its terms of reference, including water, and to provide the Economic and Social Council with the expert advice it needs to exercise effectively its co-ordinating responsibilities.

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11. Thus, instead of making suggestions to use existing machinery more effectively, and to improve relationships and communications between existing co-ordinating bodies, the report calls for the creation of yet another mechanism to co-ordinate water programmes and the addition of another layer of co-ordination on top of existing arrangements, now functioning under the aegis of ACC (Sub-Committee on Water Resources, prior consultation arrangements etc.) and the Economic and Social Council (Committee on Natural Resources and CPC).

12. As mentioned in the introduction to this submission, the Committee on Natural Resources has met for only two sessions and will, at its third session in New Delhi, begin a comprehensive review of activities of the system and co-ordination arrangements in the field of natural resources including water. Any drastic change in the present institutional set-up before the Committee has concluded this review and any judgement as to the ability of the Committee "to perform detailed and effective programme co-ordination in the field of water resources" (paragraph 41) would at this stage appear inappropriate.

Comments of the Executive Director of UNIDO

13. The Executive Director of UNIDO has commented upon this report to the effect that the interest of UNIDO with regard to industrial uses of water is more than peripheral. Its activities in industrial branches, such as chemicals, iron and steel, non-ferrous metals, pulp and paper etc., involve the consideration of water as an important input with regard to planning of these industries and their efficient operation. While UNIDO has prepared the necessary documentation on the industrial use of water, it has also participated actively in the various bodies of the United Nations concerned with water resources, namely the ACC Sub-Committee on Water Resources Development, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, etc., and it is also involved in a preliminary way with the preparations for the International Water Conference which is being planned to be held in 1975 or shortly thereafter.

Comments of the Administrator, UNDP

General

14. The report illustrates the need for an integrated approach to water resources development at the country and regional levels as well as at the level of the United Nations family or organizations active in this field. This problem, however, is not peculiar to the developing countries and to the international organizations active in providing technical and financial assistance, as may be noted from the various special commissions and studies which have been undertaken in the major industrial countries of the world, particularly during the post-Second World War period, aimed at rationalizing water resources institutions and at introducing greater co-ordination in the planning, development, management and use of such resources. An awareness of these problems and the solutions proposed for them is useful and could facilitate placing the issues faced by the developing countries in the proper perspective.

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15. Water resources cut across geographical boundaries, political subdivisions, functional ministries and agencies, and in most instances (particularly in arid and semi-arid environments) are a basic factor of economic planning. Therefore, institutional arrangements for integrated planning, management and use of water resources are closely linked with the particular philosophies and approaches to administrative organization and economic planning prevailing in each country. Additionally, the technological developments of the last two decades with respect to identifying and quantifying water resources, their planning and management, call for increasing sophistication and availability of adequate technological infrastructure to facilitate the adaptation of technology and its application under specific local conditions.

16. Consequently, the efforts of the international community could most effectively be focused on the formulation of appropriate technological mixes for water resources planning and management at the country, subregional and regional levels and on mobilizing the required expertise (qualitatively and quantitatively) for this purpose which would also facilitate the mobilization of financial resources essential for rational planning and development of water resources.

17. In connexion with the above, it may be noted that the regional banks (African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, and Inter-American Development Bank) and IBRD have over the years provided, in association with their loan activities, considerable technical assistance in the field of water resources and this has been growing at an accelerated rate in recent years. It is, therefore, essential to ensure that any international effort aimed at improving water resources planning and management should be harmonized with the activities of the regional banks and IBRD. This point could perhaps receive greater emphasis in the report.

18. The JIU report is under study by UNDP, particularly in the light of the above as well as in view of the experience with country programming and the need to ensure that the bulk of financial resources will be used directly for assistance to countries rather than to supporting costly regional and world institutions.

Specific comments

19. The UNDP shares fully the report's views that it should be actively involved in rationalizing the technical assistance efforts in the field of water resources. With the introduction of country programming, the UNDP role has been intensified since water resources sectoral programming has been an integral part of most country programmes to date, which has had the effect not only of rationalizing technical assistance in this sector but also of articulating the intersectoral and intrasectoral linkages and relationships. The organizations of the United Nations system, particularly the economic commissions, have been and are fully involved in the country programming exercise and in its sectoral components, including water resources. The role of UNDP in this area is implemented through the regional bureaux as well as through the appropriate technical advisers in the Bureau for Programme Policy and Co-ordination. Even a cursory review of the country programmes approved or being submitted for approval to the January 1973 Governing Council (for example, Burma, Chile, Kenya, the Philippines, Hungary and

Yugoslavia) will reveal that an integrated approach to water resources management is being increasingly reflected and provided for in these documents.

20. Increasingly in recent years UNDP has actively encouraged the agencies (within the framework of the ACC Sub-Committee on Water Resources Development and the country programming exercises) to operationally integrate water resources development activities within the framework of consistent and agreed strategies suitable for specific countries. For example, UNDP has taken the initiative in urging the formulation of uniform guidelines for water resources surveys and feasibility studies with a view to ensuring that rational development and management of water resources would follow as soon as possible upon completion of such studies. Similarly, UNDP has been urging the utilization of empirical data derived from UNDP-financed projects in the preparation of scientific papers for seminars and panels of experts in order to ensure that the results and experience are utilized in the formulation of over-all policy and in the preparation of conceptual papers. Additionally, it has been recommended that an in-depth analysis be undertaken of the experience with water resources and hydrological institutes with a view to ensuring that this type of institutional assistance becomes more closely related to the needs of countries, and that a world roster of experts in the field of water resources be established to facilitate more effective utilization of human resources by the concerned agencies.

21. At the request of Governments and with our encouragement, UNDP assistance is increasingly being provided not only to strengthen national machinery for co-ordination of water resources at the national level but more importantly to improve the capabilities of Governments to effectively plan and implement multipurpose water resources projects and regional and national over-all water resources policies (the Mexico National Water Study, the Kenya National Water Master Plan, the Planning and Development of the Vistula River System in Poland, and the Establishment of a National Water Authority in Ethiopia are only a few illustrations of this).

22. The management of interdisciplinary projects executed by one major agency in association with one or more agencies has been receiving considerable attention with a view to increasing its effectiveness. Accordingly, steps have been taken to define in some detail in the project document the specific scope and nature of the responsibilities and of the activities to be undertaken by the associated agency(ies) under the over-all technical and management responsibility of the major agency. The report's recommendations along these lines are therefore most welcome.

23. We note with considerable interest the need to further rationalize the areas of competence of the different agencies with a view to at least minimizing

destructive overlapping and competition among them and to ensure that agencies in fact have internally acknowledged expertise and competence in the field for which they claim rights to serve as executing agencies. Consideration may be given to reducing the number of agencies now claiming competence in this field with a view to consolidating and improving the over-all quality and efficiency of technical assistance in water resources.

24. In conclusion, it is felt that considerable additional technical, administrative and financial analysis would be required to facilitate scientific consideration of the desirability of establishing world and regional water resources centres as proposed in the JIU report. It is particularly essential to examine carefully whether the aim of strengthening co-ordination in the field of water resources development may not be furthered more effectively and at considerably less cost through the processes and arrangements already in existence and through the process of intensification and evolution rather than by establishing a costly set of new structures.
