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## INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS RELATING TO NUTRITION

### Supplementary statement by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

#### Introduction

1. At its sixty-first session the Economic and Social Council had before it a statement by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination entitled "Institutional arrangements relating to nutrition" (E/5805). The Council decided to defer to its sixty-third session detailed consideration of the proposals made in this document, in order to allow time for more thorough study and for consultation with the Protein-Calorie Advisory Group (PAG) and others about arrangements for the future. 1/ These consultations have been held. This supplementary statement elaborates some of the original recommendations, and modified them in three respects:

(a) It proposes a standing advisory group on nutrition composed of five or six members. The PAG would complete its work at the end of 1977;

(b) At the same time all agencies would draw widely on consultant advice without constituting formally a "nutrition advisory panel";

(c) The secretariat would be administered by one agency on behalf of the sponsors, rather than rotating among them.

2. The PAG met at Headquarters from 31 January to 4 February 1977 with an agenda that included an item on institutional arrangements. Representatives of the sponsoring agencies and of seven bilateral aid agencies working in nutrition took part in useful discussions, which provide the main basis for this supplementary statement. The PAG report "Institutional arrangements relating to nutrition", dated 4 February 1977, is attached as an annex.

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1/ Economic and Social Council decision 174 (LXI) of 5 August 1976.

### World food and nutrition situation

3. The improvement in world food supplies that began in 1975 has continued during the past year, and in many respects the situation has begun to recover to that which prevailed before 1972. With generally better weather, strong price incentives, and an improved supply of fertilizer and other inputs, many developing countries have enjoyed two successive years of good harvests. With the major exception of Africa, food production per head of the population in the developing regions has regained earlier peak levels, and in most countries food consumption and nutrition are likely to have recovered from the sharp deteriorations that occurred earlier in the decade. However, although they are difficult to measure, the long-term problems of poverty and hunger and malnutrition remain as before. One indication is that during the period 1970-1974 in 58 countries with a total population of 1,300 million people national average supplies of dietary energy were less than nutritional requirements. This may be an overestimation of the degree of hunger and malnutrition to the extent that some people in these countries are adequately nourished, but at the same time there are many malnourished people in countries where average supplies exceeded requirements. Higher consumer prices for food bear heavily on the poorest population groups. Moreover, few countries have services for the prevention and treatment of malnourishment that can reach the large number of children in these groups. Although, with the replenishment of cereal stocks made possible by the recent good harvests, there has been a marked improvement in world food security, little progress has been made towards the establishment of an internationally co-ordinated system for the holding and management of the enlarged stocks. Food aid, which can play a major role in improving the nutritional levels of the poorest countries and population groups, has not yet reached the minimum target of 10 million tons of cereals a year recommended by the World Food Conference. Hence the necessity to encourage all sources of expertise, financial support and policy advice.

### ACC Sub-Committee on Nutrition

4. The recommendation made by the ACC last year that the ACC Sub-Committee on Nutrition be established (E/5805, para. 32) has been elaborated. The concerned agencies should be represented on this committee by senior officers with responsibility for action on nutrition in their respective agencies. It would be expected to meet twice a year. The Sub-Committee, which would be serviced by a small interagency secretariat, would keep under review the over-all direction, scale, coherence and impact of the United Nations system response to the nutritional problems of the world. It would be a point of convergence in harmonizing the policies and activities in the United Nations system, particularly in accomplishing the objectives of resolution V of the World Food Conference. It would provide initiative in the development and harmonization of concepts, policies and strategies and programmes in the United Nations system in response to the nutritional needs of countries. It would appraise experience and progress towards achievement of objectives, and would lay down guidelines for mutually supporting action at interagency and country levels. It would bring to the ACC issues in need of resolution and would suggest ways to approach specific problems, such as the formation of special task forces or working groups.

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5. Formally, the terms of reference of the ACC Sub-Committee would be to fulfil on a continuing basis the objectives which ACC set out in document E/5805, para. 3, namely, to:

(a) Examine the existing and projected activities of the United Nations system with reference to the implementation of the resolutions of the World Food Conference related to nutritional improvement, taking account of the relevant decisions of the governing bodies of the agencies concerned;

(b) Determine whether the efforts of the system are fully mobilized and integrated, in co-operation with the Governments, at all levels in order to achieve maximum impact at the country level, taking into account programmes being undertaken on a bilateral basis;

(c) Consider whether the existing arrangements and resources can respond effectively to the major nutritional problems of the developing world.

#### Advisory group on nutrition

6. The ACC emphasized, in document E/5805, paragraphs 37-39, the need for a much broader-based arrangement than in the past for channelling outside expertise to the United Nations system. Panels or groups of experts are needed in a number of distinct fields of activity within a composite approach to the nutrition problem. The organization of such groups of experts is the primary responsibility of lead agencies in the particular fields concerned. In addition to these arrangements, ACC agrees with PAG that there would be advantage in establishing a supplementary mechanism for making outside expert advice available to the ACC Sub-Committee. Such advice would relate primarily to multidisciplinary problems, to the linkages between the various activities involved in an attack on the problem of nutrition, and to the over-all orientation of the efforts of the United Nations system. To this end ACC proposes the creation of an advisory group on nutrition. 2/

7. The advisory group would have a membership of five or six with a panel of alternates, representing the major disciplinary areas within a comprehensive approach to nutrition. It would function in a flexible manner, responding to requests for advice from the ACC Sub-Committee or from the sponsoring agencies. The programme of work of the advisory group would be formulated and approved by the sponsoring agencies in the light of proposals from members of the ACC Sub-Committee and of the group itself. Problems would be referred, according to their nature, to the group as a whole or to individual members of it. Where the necessary expertise was not available either in the group or in the sponsoring agencies, the programme of work could envisage the use of consultants or the establishment of working groups on specific subjects. Meetings as a group would be arranged by the ACC Sub-Committee; the advisory group would elect its own chairman and the Sub-Committee's secretariat would service the meetings. Members of the group would also meet informally with members of the ACC Sub-Committee.

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2/ The name "Advisory Group on Nutrition" is suggested instead of "Standing Nutrition Advisory Committee (SNAC)" in the PAG report.

and would be free to bring appropriate matters and concerns to their attention. The members of the group would be appointed by the ACC Sub-Committee on the recommendation of the sponsoring agencies. A membership rotation system would be introduced gradually so that after the first several years, each member would serve a three-year term, with the possibility of renewal or re-appointment later. The reports of the advisory group or of individual members of it would always be addressed to the ACC Sub-Committee.

Relations with interested bilateral aid agencies  
and other agencies working in nutrition

8. In resolution XXII, paragraph 11, the World Food Conference requested the Economic and Social Council to examine the need for new institutional arrangements on nutrition "giving appropriate attention to nutritional programmes being conducted on a bilateral basis". The agencies and PAG have been in contact with bilateral agencies interested in nutrition on an ad hoc basis. Elaborating the last sentence of paragraph 32 of E/5805, there should be informal tripartite meetings involving members of the ACC Sub-Committee, the advisory group on nutrition, bilateral agencies and representative institutions active in nutrition especially from developing countries.

"Nutrition advisory panel"

9. The different agencies of the United Nations system have long been drawing on valuable consultant advice, whether from individuals or panels or groups of experts. Most agencies have panels of names of consultants on whose services they draw. This practice will need to be continued and intensified, as mentioned in paragraph 6 above. However, with the creation of an advisory group on nutrition it does not seem that any useful purpose would be served by combining these panels of names into a "nutrition advisory panel of the United Nations system", as set out in paragraph 38 of E/5805. The ACC therefore does not propose to proceed with this.

Independent review of nutrition problems  
and work of the United Nations system

10. It is recommended in document E/5805, paragraph 39, that there be an independent review of the "state of the art" every two or three years to include a review of the evolution of the nutrition problem, of the understanding of its causes and cures and of the need for any reorientation in the work of the United Nations system, and that the results of this assessment be reported to the Economic and Social Council. From among the ways of doing this listed in the PAG report, ACC proposes to appoint a very small expert review group to do this. Co-operative arrangements with the World Food Council for this review will be explored.

Budget and secretariat

11. The services required to support a vigorous ACC Sub-Committee, the advisory group on nutrition, tripartite meetings, and the periodic review, constitute a heavy workload. Nevertheless, present budgetary constraints, especially for meetings and related secretariat services, lead ACC to recognize that the basic budget should initially be limited to the present level of the PAG budget financed by agency contributions, i.e., \$300,000 a year, while remaining open to contributions from new sponsors or to receive funds-in-trust as contributions towards the cost of activities within the approved programme of work of the advisory group. The budgetary limitation will mean that experts participating in the various institutional arrangements accept to do substantive preparatory work between sessions.

12. The budget would have to be provided by sponsoring agencies, which should comprise those agency members of the ACC Sub-Committee with a substantial concern with different aspects of nutrition. With the proposed broadening of the functions of the institutional arrangements, it would be appropriate for more agencies to share the costs than was the case for PAG. Those agencies which have been supporting PAG intend to continue to contribute to meeting the costs of the new arrangements.

13. After consideration of the observations made at the sixty-first session of the Economic and Social Council, ACC would arrange for this secretariat to have a permanent location, and to be administered by one sponsoring agency on behalf of the rest, instead of the system of rotation put forward in paragraph 34 of E/5805. Appointments to the secretariat would be subject to approval by all sponsoring agencies. FAO would administer the secretariat, which would therefore be located in Rome.

14. The processes of dealing with the world nutrition problem should be kept as open as possible, and reports of general interest coming out of the above institutional arrangements should be published whenever appropriate.

Annex

REPORT OF THE PROTEIN-CALORIE ADVISORY GROUP ON INSTITUTIONAL  
ARRANGEMENTS RELATING TO NUTRITION

Preamble

The Protein Advisory Group (PAG), at its twenty-fourth session held at United Nations Headquarters from 31 January to 4 February 1977, with the participation of PAG members, representatives of sponsoring agencies, as well as from other United Nations organizations and from bilateral agencies, had in its agenda the consideration of the item on "Institutional arrangements relating to nutrition", in connexion with the United Nations system's response to the pertinent resolutions of the World Food Conference.

As a basis for its deliberations on this topic, the PAG session had a report of a PAG drafting group that had been appointed by the PAG Chairman at the time of the PAG Steering Committee meeting held in New York on 28-29 September 1976, which had had participation of the five sponsoring agencies. That meeting had agreed that PAG should make its views on this matter known to the United Nations agencies, and to this end a PAG Drafting Group would propose amendments to the ACC statement on institutional arrangements relating to nutrition submitted to the sixty-first session of the Economic and Social Council (E/5805), and report to the twenty-fourth PAG session. It had also been agreed that proposals adopted by the full PAG session would be transmitted to the sponsoring agencies and ACC, so that the latter might consider those views in the re-elaboration of its proposals for the sixty-third session of the Economic and Social Council.

The PAG acknowledges with appreciation both the work done by the Drafting Group and the constructive suggestions received from the representatives of the United Nations and bilateral agencies during the deliberations on this topic. The PAG was particularly appreciative of the opportunity to discuss its proposals with such a wide range of organizations concerned with the nutrition problem and, on the basis of a very free discussion among all parties, to be able to prepare recommendations that would seem to meet many of the pressing concerns of the participants and that, at the same time, hold strong promise of effecting real improvement in the ability of the United Nations system, together with bilaterally supported programmes and individual government actions, to work towards the objectives established by World Food Conference resolution V.

Considerable progress was made in these discussions towards a consensus position on major points. However, the final recommendations are those of the PAG members.

In the sections that follow, PAG sets forth recommendations concerning specific actions that it feels should be undertaken together with brief explanation and further suggestions concerning the implementation of these actions. Brief comment is then offered on certain operational considerations. A number of the

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recommendations which follow are adopted from those in document E/5805. (See recommendations 1, 2, 3 in part, 9, 10 in part; a number of ACC proposals are also incorporated in the supporting text.)

### Recommendations

1. It is recommended that there be established an ACC sub-committee on nutrition with a major objective of serving as a point of convergence in harmonizing the policies and activities of the United Nations agencies, and hence the United Nations system in accomplishing the objectives of resolution V.

In the view of PAG this would create the point within the United Nations system at which interagency harmonization of policy and activities could be effected.

2. The participating agencies in the ACC sub-committee should include those with involvement in activities relevant to resolution V and should be represented by substantive officials with authority to act on behalf of their organizations.

3. The terms of reference of the ACC sub-committee on nutrition should include:

To provide initiative in the development and harmonization of concepts, policies, strategies and programmes in the United Nations system response to the nutritional needs of member countries;

To keep under review the over-all direction, scale, coherence and impact of the United Nations system response to the nutritional problems of the world.

Document E/5805 implies that the priority concerns might include:

(a) Practical approaches in assisting member States to identify their nutritional problems and goals, and to develop adequate nutrition policies as an integral component of their development strategies;

(b) Realistic methods of co-ordination of approaches and actions in carrying out feeding programmes and emergency aid;

(c) Approaches to the planning, implementation and assessment of nutrition programmes as well as nutrition-related activities, e.g., in education and training; environmental programmes; food legislation; and food control.

The PAG believes these may be reasonable priorities once the institutional arrangements now recommended have been implemented and would add only the co-ordination of applied nutrition research priorities and programmes. However, as recommended below, PAG believes very strongly that a mechanism involving the use of outside experts must be established to review the problems and priorities on a continuing basis and otherwise to assist the ACC sub-committee on nutrition in its work.

4. It is recommended that there be established a standing nutrition advisory committee (SNAC) with the primary purpose of assisting the ACC sub-committee in its important mission. In this context a related function of SNAC will be to review at appropriate intervals the changing world situation, the programmatic activities and scientific and professional opinion, and to bring to the attention of the ACC sub-committee such matters and concerns as the members of SNAC deem worthy of attention, as well as working closely with the ACC sub-committee on nutrition in harmonizing policies and activities and responding to specific requests for advice from the ACC sub-committee.

It is strongly felt that there must be a mechanism for introducing outside expert opinion and advice into this process and that to make this advice effective, the individuals must be involved on a continuing basis. There may be occasions when the ACC sub-committee will request that SNAC serve specific needs of individual agencies or bilateral organizations.

5. It is recommended that the members of SNAC be appointed for renewable three-year terms with appropriate arrangements for rotation; that initial appointments be made by the ACC sub-committee on nutrition but that subsequent appointments be made by the sub-committee after consultation with SNAC; and that SNAC elect one of its members to serve as convenor.

It has been suggested to PAG that SNAC be composed of five or six members. The final decision on numbers should accommodate the appropriate representation of major disciplinary areas as well as a degree of geographical balance not to mention possible physical or scheduling constraints that may affect attendance.

6. It is recommended that the terms of reference of SNAC include:

1. To assist the ACC sub-committee on nutrition in developing and harmonizing policies and activities in the United Nations system towards achievement of the objectives of resolutions I and V of the World Food Conference. Provision of such assistance shall require that the committee maintain a knowledge of the nature and extent of the global nutrition problem and its expected trends, and of the United Nations system capability and over-all pattern and scale of effort in responding to countries' needs and to the global nutrition problem;
2. To respond to requests by the ACC sub-committee on nutrition or to propose to it a review of specific topics related to the above; such reviews may require the appointment of special advisors or ad hoc advisory groups;
3. On the basis of the members' projection into the broader scientific and professional community, to provide advice on scientific, technical and policy matters, and to stimulate research for the guidance of action to reduce malnutrition.

The above terms of reference do not explicitly include, but should not be taken to exclude, a role of SNAC in serving certain related needs of the bilaterally



assisted programmes in developing countries establishing thereby an effective relationship with the United Nations system, as part of the wider international effort.

It would seem logical to seek the assistance of SNAC in the review and co-ordination of applied nutrition research.

7. It is recommended that the forum for discussions between the ACC sub-committee on nutrition and SNAC be an informal meeting. Agenda items will be identified jointly by the chairman of the ACC sub-committee on nutrition and the convenor of SNAC.

This procedure is suggested as being consistent with the policies and procedures of ACC and its sub-committees.

8. The SNAC will issue periodic review reports in connexion with its function in support of the ACC sub-committee on nutrition and as a contribution to the over-all review process required in the assessment of the evolution of United Nations system activities relevant to resolution V. These reports shall be in the public domain. It shall be normal practice to send copies of these reports to the appropriate heads of agencies (and ACC), to the Economic and Social Council, to the World Food Council for information and comment, and to other interested parties and bodies. Such reports should be of significant assistance to heads of agencies and to their governing bodies in formulating policy. As a general principle, reports of SNAC that do not involve privileged information should be made generally available.

The PAG deems it very important that the processes of developing and implementing programmatic approaches to world nutrition problems be kept as open as possible so as to encourage a spirit of co-operation in achieving common objectives both within the United Nations system and in the greater community. This was also suggested in the concluding passage of document E/5805. It is felt strongly that communication should be in both directions if the institutional arrangements now proposed are to prove effective. It is felt to be to the advantage of the United Nations system and to the support of its activities that there be a wide knowledge of both activities and needs.

9. It is recommended that there be established a secretariat to support the activities of the ACC sub-committee and SNAC. The professional staff of the secretariat should be selected by the ACC sub-committee after consultation with SNAC.

The PAG has considered the question of the size of the secretariat and experience relating to active ACC sub-committees. It is felt that a secretariat encompassing several professionals may be required to support the scope of work that will relate to the operation of the United Nations system in this field. However, PAG is also cognizant that current budget constraints may enforce a more modest beginning. At the same time PAG envisions that certain functions of the secretariat that could serve the needs of bilaterally supported programmes

might be underwritten by bilateral agencies. The PAG recommends that the secretariat needs be monitored and that there be a review in not more than three years.

The PAG has considered the location of the secretariat. It recognized several possible locations and felt, on balance, that there were strong reasons to suggest a New York base. The PAG urges that the base selected be considered permanent.

10. Recognizing the role played by bilateral agencies and by institutions and organizations in the developing countries in combating world nutrition problems, and the desirability of harmonizing activities of both international and national agencies, it is strongly recommended that:

(a) Such agencies, organizations and institutions be kept informed of activities undertaken by SNAC;

(b) These agencies, organizations and institutions be invited to offer comment on these activities;

(c) Periodically there be arranged meetings at which the ACC sub-committee, SNAC and representatives of such agencies, organizations and institutions meet to review and discuss current approaches and evolving needs.

As noted earlier, PAG feels that much would be gained by establishing a mechanism for informal exchange of experience, views and proposals for new approaches among these groups sharing a mutual concern for the achievement of the goals of resolution V.

The above recommendations might be seen as initial steps in an evolving process.

#### Comments on operational considerations

Informal meetings of the ACC sub-committee on nutrition and SNAC will probably need to be held at least twice per year at the outset. Experience will determine the necessary frequency of meetings in subsequent years. It is to be expected that SNAC will meet independently before or after the informal meeting, and perhaps also as needed at other times.

It seems clear that as the new institutional arrangement comes into action, specific topics warranting detailed consideration will be identified. It is suggested that for some such problems, the most effective approach will be commissioning a consultant or group of consultants to assist in the preparation of a report for consideration by SNAC alone or meeting jointly with the ACC sub-committee. As a general principle it seems desirable that most such reports be made available to the broader community.

The PAG notes that the World Food Council is charged to conduct periodic reviews of the operation of the United Nations system with reference to the implementation of resolution V. However, in the normal process of policy development, programme planning and harmonization it is necessary that SNAC and the ACC sub-committee on nutrition stand back and assess the operation of the programmes they are advising and the world situation in which those programmes are operating. This responsibility is reflected in the terms of reference of both groups. These periodic (perhaps biennial) assessments for the ACC sub-committee on nutrition might be undertaken by one or more processes including the following: a review by SNAC, with or without additional consultants recruited for this purpose; a specially appointed task force; or a co-operative arrangement with the World Food Council. Whatever mechanisms are adopted from time to time for this purpose, it will be important that the findings be made available to the World Food Council as a contribution to the continuum of review processes of the nutritional activities at different levels in the United Nations system and the world community at large mandated by the World Food Conference. It is also important that the results of such reviews be made available to the heads of the agencies for probable reporting to the governing bodies and to other interested agencies and organizations, particularly those concerned with the nutritional problems of developing countries throughout the world.

It would considerably assist the effectiveness of the new institutional arrangement, including the generation of public awareness, if a regular publication were planned.

Recognizing the very heavy demands that will be placed on the time and effort of the members of SNAC, it was suggested to PAG that ACC may feel inclined to consider whether appropriate remuneration should be considered. The PAG itself did not express a view.

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