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BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1960

Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Organizational
changes and review of internal procedures relating to the
technical assistance programme

Thirty-second report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions to the General Assembly at its fourteenth session

Introduction

1. At the thirteenth session of the General Assembly, the Fifth Committee, in taking note of the Secretary-General's proposals concerning the amalgamation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Technical Assistance Administration, decided to request the Secretary-General:^{1/}

(a) To share with the Advisory Committee the results of his review of internal procedures to be undertaken after amalgamation, in order that he may have the advice and guidance of that Committee before completing the detailed administrative and procedural changes required;

(b) To submit, prior to the opening of the fourteenth session of the General Assembly, a progress report on the amalgamation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Technical Assistance Administration for the consideration of the Advisory Committee and the Fifth Committee.

2. In accordance with the first part of the decision of the Fifth Committee, the Secretary-General submitted an interim report to the Advisory Committee

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirteenth Session, Annexes, agenda items 43 and 44, document A/4070, paras, 46-47.

on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in July 1959. That report, which was recognized to be of a very preliminary character, was taken into account by the Advisory Committee in its report on the budget estimates for 1960.^{2/} The present report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/801) may be regarded both as a further step under the first part of the Fifth Committee's decision and as the progress report mentioned in the second part of that decision. While the Advisory Committee recognizes that the Fifth Committee had asked for the submission of the progress report prior to the opening of the fourteenth session of the General Assembly, the delay has at least enabled the Secretary-General to take into account certain related comments which the Advisory Committee has presented in its over-all report on technical assistance operations in the specialized agencies (A/4172).

3. The Advisory Committee notes also that, while the new organizational structure within the Secretariat for the management of the technical assistance programme has been worked out, the review of internal procedures connected with that programme will be continued. Thus, the first part of the Fifth Committee's decision of 1958 might be fulfilled in greater measure by a further report to the Advisory Committee during 1960 on the results of the review of procedures.

4. The comments that follow are related to specific points arising from the Secretary-General's report and should be read in conjunction with that report. They are, further, arranged under the major sectional headings used in the Secretary-General's report.

Progress to date

5. The steps that have already been taken in furtherance of the amalgamation are narrated in paragraphs 5 to 12 of the Secretary-General's report. This information was included, in a preliminary form, in the report of the Advisory Committee on the budget estimates for 1960.^{3/} The Committee notes that the

^{2/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Fourteenth Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/4170), paras. 61-70.

^{3/} Ibid.

Secretary-General, in developing his plans for the reorganization of United Nations technical assistance machinery, has endeavoured to apply, as closely as would be possible in the particular circumstances, the principles which the Advisory Committee has enunciated in its over-all report on technical assistance (A/4172, para. 33). Under those general principles, subject to flexibility and adaptation to the circumstances of each organization, the arrangements in regard to technical assistance activities should provide:

(a) That all substantive programme functions and responsibilities related to assistance projects and their technical support at headquarters should be vested in the relevant substantive divisions;

(b) That normal personnel, budgetary, financial and accounting functions in respect of the programme should be handled by the regular administrative and financial services of the Organization;

(c) That there should only be a relatively small unit to take care of the strictly operational and liaison responsibilities including those relating to communication with Governments and Resident Representatives, participation in the Technical Assistance Board and other central organs of the programme, and central reporting functions.

Accordingly, the Advisory Committee's examination of the measures proposed by the Secretary-General has also been undertaken in the light of the principles cited above.

Objectives governing further action

6. The objectives governing further action, outlined in paragraphs 13 to 26 of the Secretary-General's report, would appear to be in consonance with the basic purpose of the amalgamation, that is to combine in one department and under comprehensive leadership the substantive and operational responsibilities of the Secretariat in regard to the technical assistance programme, with a view to making that programme more effective and economical. The Advisory Committee was informed of, and would particularly underline, the fact that the role of the Commissioner for Technical Assistance has been developed in such a way that he is not merely a supervisor of the operational segment of the Department but is also

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in a position to mobilize the entire resources of the Department to meet both the substantive and operational needs of technical assistance. It should also be noted that there is in progress a reorientation of the substantive units of the Department towards the requirements of the operational programme.

7. When the question of the amalgamation of the Department and the Technical Assistance Administration was under discussion in the Fifth Committee in 1958, some misgivings were expressed about the possible impact of such an amalgamation both on the efficient conduct of the technical assistance programme and on the relations between recipient Governments and the new unified Department. The Advisory Committee is informed that, in the event, the Secretariat has been able, under the new system, to respond to the needs of recipient Governments more effectively and expeditiously. At the same time, the revised arrangements have in no way diluted the primary control by recipient Governments over the type of projects to be requested in their country programmes. Furthermore, the reorganization is being implemented, as indeed it has to be, without any interruption in the conduct of the programme.

Reorganization in process

8. The organizational changes which have been accomplished, or are in process, are illustrated by the two charts that are given in the Secretary-General's report, following paragraph 27. The first chart, which indicates the general supervisory and co-ordinating structure as well as the functional relationships on a broad basis, reflects the reorientation of the entire Department towards the substantive and operational needs of technical assistance. The proposed internal structure of the operational segment of the Department, namely the Bureau of Technical Assistance Operations (BTAO), is shown in the second chart.

9. The basic approach to the reorganization, reflected in the Secretary-General's report, would seem to be reasonable, although the proposed level of staffing of the Bureau might, at any rate over a period of time, permit of some further reduction beyond the target envisaged at present. The Advisory Committee deals with this point later in the present report (para. 18). The Committee would here comment only on four specific matters.

10. In the first place, the Committee has received confirmation that the functions of the Fiscal Control Section in BTAO - which will be under the supervision of an outposted officer of the Office of the Controller - will be confined to matters of budgetary control of the technical assistance programme and that the present responsibilities of the central office of the Controller in respect of the broader financial and budgetary policies affecting that programme would remain unchanged. The Committee believes, in accordance with the principles which it has suggested (para. 5 above), that the Fiscal Control Section might be organizationally regarded somewhat similar to the Technical Assistance Recruitment Service (TARS) which is an outposted group of staff members from the Office of Personnel, responsible for the recruitment of technical assistance experts.

11. The second point to which attention might be invited relates to the omission from the Secretary-General's report of any reference to TARS. Although this Service is an integral part of the Office of Personnel and, accordingly, is not directly affected by the reorganization, it represents an important element in the operation of the programme. Any attempt to streamline the programme and its operation must, of necessity, take into account, the procedures for recruitment of experts and must ensure that those procedures preclude avoidable delays. Furthermore, in practice, TARS is so deeply involved in the conduct of the programme that its relationships with the substantive divisions of the Department, on the one hand, and BTAO, on the other hand, constitute a significant aspect of the total operation. The Advisory Committee infers from paragraph 48 of the Secretary-General's report that this matter will be taken into account in the review of internal procedures that is currently in progress.

12. Thirdly, a further point which might appropriately have been considered in relation to the amalgamation concerns the participation of the regional economic commission secretariats in the conduct of the technical assistance programme. The Advisory Committee trusts that, in the review of operational procedures, attention would be given to this matter as well.

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13. Fourthly, the Advisory Committee has noted the establishment of a new post of Director for Special Fund Activities, attached to the Office of the Under-Secretary of the Department. The Committee is informed that, apart from this post, it is not contemplated that a special organizational unit be created in respect of the responsibilities of the United Nations in this regard, both as an executive agency for Special Fund projects or in broader terms.

Review of administrative procedures

14. The Advisory Committee will await a further report in 1960 on the progress and results of the review of internal procedures that is now in progress.

General staffing requirements

15. The authorized manning table for the Technical Assistance Administration (TAA), immediately prior to the reorganization, comprised a total of 133 posts, if account is taken of the fourteen posts for the Public Administration Division. This latter Division though previously attached to TAA, has always been considered more similar to a substantive division than to the operating units of TAA or BTAO. On 1 February 1959, this Division was redesignated as the Office of Public Administration, a unit reporting directly to the Secretary-General. More recently, effective 4 November 1959, the Office of Public Administration was again reorganized as a substantive division in the Department, but outside BTAO. Thus, if the Division of Public Administration is not taken into account, the old Technical Assistance Administration had 119 posts.

16. It is envisaged that the reorganized BTAO will start with 118 posts, that is the 119 posts mentioned above less one post of Under-Secretary which had been provided for the Director-General of TAA. On the other hand, an additional post at the Under-Secretary level has been established, in the Office of the Under-Secretary of the Department, for the Commissioner for Technical Assistance.

17. As regards the group of 118 posts in BTAO, the Secretary-General has suggested that he would endeavour to work towards a reduction in that establishment of the order of 10 per cent. It is anticipated that such a reduction would be achieved as soon as possible after completion of the initial trial period of the reorganization in 1960.

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18. The Advisory Committee believes that, over a period of time, some further reduction in the BTAO establishment should prove possible, although the necessary staffing adjustments may have to be effected gradually so as not to interfere with the smooth operation of the programme. It would further depend on the pace at which the substantive divisions of the Department assume an increasing role in various substantive and semi-substantive aspects of the programme.

The Committee notes in this regard that the representatives of the Secretary-General are aware of the further objectives to be sought; they have informed the Committee of their intention to explore the possibilities of achieving an even closer approach to the model structure which the Advisory Committee has suggested on a general basis (para. 5 above).

19. The Advisory Committee will keep this matter under review, particularly in connexion with the budget estimates for 1961. As stated in paragraph 3 above, the Committee expects at that time to have the benefit of a further report of the Secretary-General on the results of the current review of internal procedures.
