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CO-ORDINATION QUESTIONS: SYSTEM-WIDE MEDIUM-TERM
ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Note by the Executive Director

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In his introductory report to the Governing Council at its sixth session, ^{1/} the Executive Director sought to survey major developments in the United Nations system relating to the trend towards the harmonization of medium-term planning and programme budgeting methodologies, and proposed the development of a System-wide Medium-term Environment Programme (SWMTEP).

2. By its decision 6/1 of 25 May 1978, the Governing Council endorsed this proposal. The Executive Director is pleased to report that the General Assembly, in its resolution 33/86 on the report of the Governing Council on its sixth session, having taken note with satisfaction of the report,

"Welcomes the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme and in particular the decisions of the Governing Council relating to the establishment of a system-wide medium-term environment programme based on thematic joint programming ...".

A similar decision had previously been adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session in 1978.

^{1/} See document UNEP/GC.6/2, paras. 4-15.

3. The present document reports on development with respect to programming and evaluation processes and the development of the System-wide Medium-term Environment Programme, in terms of both concepts and action, since the sixth session of the Governing Council, taking into account the views expressed during the intersessional informal consultations with Governments (Nairobi, 8-12 January 1979).

II. THE PROGRAMMING AND EVALUATION PROCESS

4. The UNEP secretariat is at present responsible for the preparation of two different documents dealing with the programme, but based on different methodologies. The first is the programme document for the Governing Council, and the second is the environment chapter of the United Nations medium-term plan. The two methodologies applicable are described below.

A. The UNEP programming process

5. The UNEP "programme" document submitted to the Governing Council each year is developed on the basis of the "programmatic" process (Levels One, Two and Three) adopted by the Governing Council at its second session, and now applied to the "in-depth" portions of the document. At Level One, there is a review of the current activities of the United Nations system in the subject area, leading to a perception of gaps and an identification of what needs to be done. At Level Two, a strategy for the future is formulated, a programme is developed to implement the strategy, the actions to be carried out by members of the United Nations system are set out, and the relevant activities planned by Governments are described. At Level Three, the resources of the Fund are apportioned to exert a catalytic effect and provide the leverage required to bring about the implementation of the activities identified at Level Two.

6. The application of the programmatic process still has several limitations. Since there is no specified time-frame for Level Two, the output of Level One tends to lead to a broad strategy covering the subject area, rather than giving rise to very precise objectives at Level Two for the achievement of which a strategy can be developed. Quite understandably, the various considerations that have to be taken into account and the high degree of flexibility required make it difficult to set out very precise objectives. This lack of precise objectives, and of a time-frame for their achievement, does not allow Level Two to provide for precise management by objectives. This leads in turn to the dispersal of resources and energy and continued lack of concentration in activity, which has been the subject of much complaint, by Governments and the secretariat alike. (A further reason for this situation is, of course, the need to meet the requirements of various Governments and groups of Governments whose concerns with respect to the environment vary considerably).

7. The lack of precise objectives also impairs efforts at co-ordination of environmental programmes in the United Nations system. The attempt to proceed on the basis of broad subject areas leads to multiple demands for

information, documentation, etc. to which the organizations of the system find it increasingly difficult to respond. The above considerations become even more relevant with the recent move into thematic joint programming in various fields of environmental concern. Exercises have so far been carried out in regard to arid and semi-arid lands ecosystems, including desertification, environmental aspects of water, follow-up to the Tbilisi Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education, and natural disasters, and there has been a first consultation in regard to appropriate technology and industry. Because of the above-mentioned limitations, and the fact that not all agencies concerned participated, it is rather difficult to point to any of these exercises as satisfactory. Of course, the concept is still being developed, and the members of the United Nations system are co-operating fully to improve the thematic joint programming exercises.

8. It should also be mentioned in this respect that the lack of clear definition of programmes, or programme objectives, has made programme evaluation rather difficult. It has proved much easier to evaluate individual projects, but the evaluation of their role in bringing about the implementation of the total activities in a subject area still presents some difficulties, although appreciable progress has been achieved in this respect.

9. It is still more difficult to develop effective ways of assessing what catalytic or leverage effect may have been achieved through the use of the overall resources of the Fund, and evaluating the impact of the whole environment programme on major environmental concerns at the global, regional and national levels. This is an issue to which the Executive Director is giving continued attention, and he wishes to recall his request for views and advice regarding it from the Governing Council.

B. The United Nations medium-term planning process

10. Every two years, the UNEP secretariat prepares the draft of the 'environment' chapter of the United Nations medium-term plan. The United Nations plan is a four-year plan, which rolls forward every two years. Thus, in 1978, the Committee on Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) considered and made recommendations to the General Assembly regarding the medium-term plan for 1980-1983. In 1980, CPC will consider the medium-term plan for 1982-1985, and in 1982 the medium-term plan for 1984-1987. A programme budget is prepared every two years for a period of two years. In alternate years, CPC considers the programme budget (in 1979 for 1980-1981, in 1981 for 1982-1983, in 1983 for 1984-1985, etc.).

11. The United Nations medium-term plan is structured into major programmes, programmes, sub-programmes and programme elements. The methodology has been developed as a response to General Assembly resolution 3199 (XXVIII) of 18 December 1973 on the adoption of programme budgeting, and seeks to embrace the entire programming-evaluation cycle. A report of the Joint Inspection

Unit (JIU) on programming and evaluation in the United Nations system ^{2/} described the United Nations methodology, and made six recommendations for remedying certain defects. These recommendations were considered by CPC at its eighteenth session, held in 1978. ^{3/}

12. The first recommendation related to the institution of time-limited objectives at the sub-programme level in the medium-term plan. The description of the sub-programme should include objectives, problem addressed, legislative authority, strategy and expected impact. The report recommended that there should be very explicit criteria for distinguishing between those portions of the programme which definitely represent continuous functions and those for which target dates must be fixed. Time-limited objectives should as far as possible be the rule, and continuous activities the exceptions. Under the sub-heading "objective", a distinction should be made between the objective to be achieved in the period of the medium-term plan and the objective to be attained upon completion of the sub-programme. Under the sub-heading "problem addressed" there should be a brief but precise description of the present status of the activity considered. The sub-heading "strategy" should include a description of the resources to be employed which should demonstrate how the projected kinds of output are related to the aim to be achieved, with particular emphasis on the requirements and nature of the clientèle it is proposed to reach. This sub-heading should show the relationship between the overall strategy for the full period of implementation of the sub-programme and the strategy for the period covered by the plan. The section headed "expected impact" should contain the list of achievement indicators to be employed.

13. Further recommendations in the JIU report related to the system of identifying "outputs" in programme budgets, the establishment of internal work programmes, the information process for ongoing programme implementation and output costing, the monitoring of programme budget performance and evaluation methods and use of built-in achievement indicators.

14. In reviewing the JIU report, CPC considered that the medium-term plan constituted the core of the system of planning, programming and budgeting in the United Nations, as it contained the objectives for the medium term at the sub-programme level and the strategies for achieving them. The Committee expressed support for an effective evaluation system in the United Nations, and summarized the directions in which progress should be further striven for. The Committee concluded that there was agreement on the intent behind the recommendation on time-limited objectives and recommended that the Secretary-General should proceed with selected programmes to try out the feasibility of the recommendation, and submit the results of the exercise to the Committee in the presentation of the draft.

^{2/} See document E/1978/41, copies available.

^{3/} See document A/33/38, copies available.

medium-term plan for 1982-1985 (to be considered by the Committee in 1980). Among the selected programmes are four related to the environment chapter (terrestrial ecosystems, oceans, energy and supporting measures).

15. The Committee also requested the Secretary-General to proceed with the other recommendations in the JIU report. During the Committee session it was pointed out that the UNEP secretariat would endeavour to apply all the recommendations on an experimental basis.

16. The Committee also, recalling General Assembly resolution 32/197 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, emphasized that United Nations planning efforts should be tailored to the needs of system-wide joint planning. It agreed that it would carry out an in-depth study of the planning process at its next (1979) session, on the basis of a report to be prepared by the Secretary-General in co-operation with the organizations of the United Nations system, and a report by JIU.

17. CPC also considered the environment chapter of the United Nations medium-term plan for 1980-1983. Its comments may be summarized as follows:

(a) The presentation should be accompanied by the Governing Council's comments, i.e. it should go through the Governing Council;

(b) The presentation should mention the complementary activities of the United Nations system in regard to the implementation of the programme, as was done in the programme document put before the Governing Council;

(c) The programming process undertaken under the aegis of the Governing Council and the process relating to the preparation of the environment chapter of the medium-term plan should converge;

(d) The UNEP Governing Council decision to move to a system-wide medium-term environment programme, based on thematic joint programming and in harmony with over-all system-wide co-ordination efforts, was a development to be welcomed. The Committee wished to be kept informed of progress towards that end, and would advise as necessary;

(e) The Committee was anxious to encourage the Governing Council's efforts in regard to project and programme evaluation.

18. A number of members of CPC expressed the view that the environment programme should in future be presented as a "major programme", rather than as a "programme".

III. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM-WIDE MEDIUM-TERM ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

19. The development of the System-wide Medium-term Environment Programme was considered by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) in October 1978. In its report to the Governing Council (UNEP/GC.7/5), ACC

"expressed its willingness to extend full co-operation in that endeavour and in the development of the requisite methodologies during the experimental phase. The work on the harmonization of programme budgets and medium-term plans now being carried out under the auspices of ACC is particularly relevant. The experience of previous thematic joint programming exercises has shown that the utility of thematic joint programming would be greatly increased by the use of an agreed framework, which should provide a basis for the move to the medium-term programme. Such a framework would be prepared taking account of CPC's views on programming and evaluation, used on an experimental basis and further developed on the basis of experience and in harmony with overall system-wide efforts. In the further development of the framework, account should be taken of the fact that what is of primary importance in the achievement of programme objectives is governmental action at the national level, and that thematic joint programming should be developed in such a way as to maximize the impact of the United Nations system in the context of these national efforts."

20. The proposals which follow (paras. 21-28) have been the subject of consultation with the designated officials for environmental matters of the members of the United Nations system. The results of these consultations were in general supportive of the proposals. However, the representative of FAO cautioned against giving the impression that the designated officials' meeting as such discussed and endorsed the text of the paragraphs.

21. The Executive Director considers that there should be two stages in the development of the System-wide Medium-term Environment Programme:

(a) The first stage should be linked to the preparation of the environment programme chapter in the United Nations medium-term plan for 1982-1985, which is to be considered by the Governing Council at its eighth session in 1980. This will be the conclusion of the first stage;

(b) The second stage should be linked to the preparation of the System-wide Programme itself, which would go into effect on 1 January 1984.

22. In the first stage, there should be a convergence between the programming processes of UNEP and of the United Nations itself (see para. 4 above). With regard to those matters which fall within the purview of the United Nations medium-term plan, it is suggested that the environment chapter of that plan should be the principal programme document for the Governing Council. Accordingly, the environment chapter would cover all the activities within the environment programme to be carried out in the medium-term plan period.

23. Since by far the greater proportion of those activities will be implemented by the United Nations system, the methods developed during the first stage for the presentation of the United Nations medium-term plan

should, in the second stage, be employed, with such further refinement as proves necessary, in the preparation of the System-wide Medium-term Environment Programme document to be submitted to the Governing Council at its tenth session, in 1982.

24. The Executive Director thus considers that the key to the development of the system-wide medium-term environment programme in both stages is the endorsement by the Governing Council of very precise objectives for the medium-term plan at the sub-programme level (see paras. 19 and 26), and the output of the Level One exercises should lead precisely to the recommendation of such objectives at Level Two. Proposals for consideration by the Governing Council in this respect should be presented after full consultation with members of ACC and their designated officials for environmental matters.

25. The Executive Director agrees with the view expressed by members of CPC that the environment programme should be presented at the level of a "major programme" in the United Nations medium-term plan. It is suggested that, after the present subject areas are adequately disaggregated, they be presented at the "programme" level, which is the next level in the planning process required for the United Nations medium-term plan (see para. 11). Thus the subject area of terrestrial ecosystems would be disaggregated into programmes on tropical woodlands and forest ecosystems, mountain ecosystems, wildlife and protected areas, etc. The subject area Oceans would similarly be disaggregated into programmes on the Mediterranean, the Kuwait Action Plan, etc. Such a revised programme document would maintain the concept of subject areas as constituting an agenda for national and international action, but only those constituent programmes intended for implementation by the United Nations system in the medium-term period would be included in the medium-term plan presentation, thus providing for a concentration of activity.

26. In regard to such programmes, specific time-limited objectives would be defined at the "sub-programme" level, it being understood that there will be some few sub-programme activities (e.g. negotiation and adoption of a convention by an intergovernmental conference) which cannot be time-limited in a precise manner. The objectives at sub-programme level would in each case be the subject of joint consideration with the organizations which would be concerned with their implementation.

27. Following their acceptance by the Governing Council, the achievement of such objectives would in principle then become the subject of thematic joint programming exercises. Such exercises should prepare the sub-programme presentation as part of the United Nations medium-term plan. In each such presentation the strategy to be followed should be set out, including the actions proposed, the role of each concerned organization in implementing the strategy, a description of the resources to be employed by each organization and an indication of the magnitude of the resources to be provided from the Fund of UNEP. Achievement Indicators should be agreed and shown in the section on "expected impact".

28. The process may have to be telescoped somewhat in the preparation of the 1982-1985 medium-term plan presentation, and in 1980 the Governing Council may need to consider the objectives and the sub-programmes designed to achieve them at the same time, as against the normal situation where the Governing Council would first approve the objectives, and the sub-programmes to achieve those objectives would then be prepared and included in the medium-term plan presentation, for subsequent consideration by the Governing Council. However, the UNEP secretariat will now commence the preparation of a skeleton medium-term plan structure and sample objectives at the sub-programme level, and commence also the necessary consultations with the designated officials for environmental matters. The Executive Director will report on any further progress in his introductory statement to the Governing Council at its seventh session. Moreover, the previous consideration by the Council of the goals for 1982 provides guidance which will assist the Executive Director in framing proposals in regard to objectives. It may not prove possible to apply the methodology suggested above to all subject areas of the programme in the time available, or to complete thematic joint programming in regard to each sub-programme. In that event, priority will need to be given to the areas selected by CPC (see para. 14).

29. The Executive Director has sought the assistance of Inspector Bertrand of the Joint Inspection Unit in the application of the methodology, and he has very kindly consented. As stated in paragraph 16, JIU is preparing a report which will assist CPC in its in-depth study of the planning process in 1979, and Inspector Bertrand has agreed to use the area of oceans as an example, showing how the methodology may be applied to that area. It is intended to make the example available to the Governing Council if it is ready by the time of the session.

IV. IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONVERGENCE OF UNEP PROGRAMMING WITH THE PROGRAMMING CONCEPTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIUM-TERM PLAN, AND OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM-WIDE MEDIUM-TERM ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

30. It is important to note that the present environment programme document does not include only those activities which the United Nations system is to carry out in the medium-term plan period, but is broader in scope, and has a longer time horizon. The present programme document should be developed to provide the perspective and philosophy on the basis of which the medium-term presentation is devised, and should be called a "programme perspective" document. The two documents, the programme perspective and medium-term programme, would thus be complementary and without overlap.

31. It should be pointed out at this stage that the term "medium-term plan" as used in the Fund procedures is a complete misnomer and does not convey the same meaning as the term as now used in General Assembly resolutions, decisions, etc. It should also be pointed out that the Fund procedures will need amendment to bring them into line with the medium-term plan concepts as used in the United Nations relevant General Assembly resolutions, as well as modification, in the light of the development of the System-wide Medium-term Environment Programme. The appropriate changes will be proposed to the Governing Council at its eighth session in 1980.

32. A further implication of the move towards the System-wide Medium-term Environment Programme is that the projections of resources and expenditures for the Fund will have to be for periods coinciding with the periodicity of the United Nations medium-term plan.

33. In order to bring about such coincidence, the Council at its eighth session will be expected to approve a Fund medium-term plan covering 1982 to 1985, the period of the United Nations medium-term plan. Since the United Nations medium-term plan and the System-wide Medium-term Environment Programme will roll forward every two years, and thus will require consideration by the Governing Council at its tenth, twelfth, fourteenth, etc. sessions, consideration will also have been given at those sessions to rolling forward the Fund plan.

34. Hence at the present session the Council should not be required to extend the present Fund medium-term plan beyond the years 1980-1981, which have already been approved (decision 98 A (V)). However, the Council will, as a transitional measure, need to approve a minimum forward commitment authority. The amount contemplated is \$16 million for 1982-1983. Such action would be consonant with the spirit of the existing guidelines applicable to the forward commitment authority.

V. SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

35. Since the Governing Council customarily adopts a programme policy and implementation decision at each session, the views of the Council in regard to the above proposals could most suitably be reflected in that decision as one of its sections.
