COUNTRY PROGRAMME AND RELATED MATTERS
THE DECENTRALIZATION INITIATIVE
EXECUTIVE BOARD CONFERENCE ROOM PAPER: THE DECENTRALIZATION INITIATIVE

Background

1 Based on analytical and policy work carried out over the course of the past few years and in line with the spirit and intent of GA 47/199 (paras 24 to 27), the UBDP Strategy and Management Committee in its 17 December 1993 session adopted a strategy for programme management which emphasizes a decentralized approach. The strategy features ten specific components designed to balance increased operating freedom for Resident Representatives with strengthened accountability mechanisms. The ten components are to be introduced as a comprehensive package across all Bureaux and units, and are to be finalized over 1994 working with a group of interested country offices and headquarters units.

2 Fifteen country offices are involved in this finalization process, as well as the corresponding Regional Bureaux divisions at Headquarters and selected units of BPPS, BFA, DOP and the Office of the Administrator. There are 39 units in all. Each of the ten components is being finalized using a team approach, where all participating units are included in all the teams. Seven teams have Res Reps as Team Leaders, and three teams are led by Headquarters units. Five of the field-led teams are working under the advice of a Headquarters "Lead Unit", which is the unit having responsibility for the function which the particular component is improving.

3 Guidance for the exercise is being provided by an inter-Bureaux "Decentralization Contact Group" under the Director of BPPS. At the end of the exercise the BPPS Director is responsible for presenting the finalized arrangements for SMC approval.

4 The ten components, with the team leaders and Headquarters lead units, are:

1. Delegation of approval authority - which is revising UNDP's procedures for programme and project appraisal, and making recommendations regarding the approval criteria to be delegated to Resident Representatives. PERU and SYRIA offices are joint team leaders. The end result would be a new project appraisal and approval system which might include, for example, strengthening the local PAC and eliminating the financial level for delegation of programme and project approval.

2. Review and Reporting - which is revising UNDP's procedures for country office review and reporting to accommodate the management information requirements for the organization. TURKEY and GUYANA offices are joint team leaders. The end result would be a new review and reporting system which might include, for example, capturing and presenting in a standardized Country Office Annual Report format all the information needed at Headquarters for monitoring and providing feedback.

3. Joint Work Planning - which is devising UNDP's planning procedures, addressing strategic planning, establishment of multi-year management objectives and budgets, and annual unit work plans and budgets. ETIOPIA office is the team leader, working with the Office of Evaluation and Strategic Planning (OESP) at Headquarters. The end result would be a UNDP planning and budgeting system which might, for example, justify budget allocations on the basis of agreed work plans.

4. Role of the Action Committee - which is finalizing the terms of
reference and procedures for the Programme Review Committee in line with the strategy of decentralization. PRC Secretariat (recently transferred to the BPPS Division for Operational Policies and Procedures - DOPP) is the lead unit. The end result would be a definition of how the PRC fits into the new review and reporting system and into the new project appraisal and approval system.

5. Programme Performance Audit - which is introducing measurement criteria and processes necessary for determining programme performance and impact. VIET NAM office is the team leader, working with the evaluation section of Office of Evaluation and Strategic Planning (formerly CEO) at Headquarters. The end result would be a new programme impact performance assessment system which might, for example, define criteria for setting programme achievement targets and for monitoring performance levels.

6. Evaluation Feedback - which is determining the measures necessary for establishing a feedback system. CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC office is the team leader, working with the evaluation section of OESP at Headquarters. The end result would be an evaluation feedback system which might, for example, include access to the evaluation data base of all projects of the DAC members.

7. Programme Support Document - which is providing feedback to DOPP on issues relating to the implementation of the Guidelines for the Programme Support Documentation and the Programme Support Implementation Arrangements. DOPP is the lead unit. The end result would be a collection of items based on user experience for consideration in the review and refinement of the PSD/PSIA instruments, which would also be an input into the project appraisal and approval system covered under component 1 above.

8. Consultant Roster - which is testing the UNDP corporate consultant roster from the point of view of country office utilization, and recommending the roster management features which would be most appropriate to support the UNDP decentralization initiative. MOROCCO office is the team leader, working with DOP/HRIS at Headquarters. The end result, when combined with component 10 below, would be a country office consultant management and service procurement system which might allow, for example, country offices to directly identify and recruit suitable international specialists without assistance from Headquarters.

9. Information Management - which is defining the automation requirements for the management systems produced under the other components of the decentralized programme management initiative. COSTA RICA office is the team leader, working with all levels of the management of the Integrated Programme Management project (see below.) The end result would be that the automated elements of these management systems are incorporated into the specific automation projects and phases of the IPM.

10. Direct Support to National Execution - which is providing DOPP with feedback on the procedures for Direct Country Office Support to National Execution (programme circular PROG/93/5 of 17 December 1993). DOPP is the lead unit. The end result would be a collection of items based on user experience for consideration in the review and refinement of this instruction, working towards the development of the country office consultant management and service procurement system mentioned above.

The result of these initiatives is a series of new management systems for
the UNDP - where "system" is defined as the "production line" of related tasks and task instructions (procedures) to perform the functions of the organization. In terms of decentralization, these management systems are designed to help bring about a shift in the way in which the organization operates; namely, to introduce decentralized programme management supported by the necessary accountability instruments. The specific goals of this effort, stated in the documentation endorsed by the SMC, are (a) to sharpen Headquarters' focus toward policy and programme support and guidance, and the Country Offices' focus toward programme and project operations, and (b) to improve the quality and effectiveness of programme operations.

6 To achieve a sharpened focus on the roles of Headquarters and the field, Headquarters would place increased emphasis on programme-level impact, delegating attention to project operations to the field. The elements of the package addressing this aspect of the strategy are the delegation of approval authority, adjusting the role of the Action Committee, putting in place a review and reporting system which focuses on programme performance and impact, and building a Programme Management Information System which reinforces and institutionalizes the changed information requirements.

7 To achieve improved programme quality and effectiveness, attention would be placed on introducing measures which help Country Offices produce higher quality programmes and projects, and measures which reward quality performance and discourage mediocrity. The elements of the package which help promote Country Office quality efforts are the introduction of the Programme Support Document, the evaluation feedback system, and the consultant roster. The elements of the package which help promote performance are the joint work planning system, which establishes agreed performance targets for UNDP concerns, and the programme performance audit system which ensures accountability towards meeting these targets.

8 Each of the ten components represents an ongoing user-led effort to define the management processes envisaged. In most of the cases suggested contents of the new procedures, formats and management information foreseen have been identified by in-house teams. Discussion drafts (in the case of processes) and system prototypes (in the case of automation systems) have been developed and disseminated. The work necessary to finalize these components consists of broadening the teams to bring in a wider representation of country offices and units, and to associate business systems analysts to assist the users in defining their needs in a clear and structured manner. This latter requirement has been foreseen through the linking of the decentralization initiative with the work being implemented through the "Integrated Programme Management" project (IPM) to automate UNDP's business processes.

Progress to date

9 A meeting of the Decentralization Contact Group was held on 23 August to review the progress of the work, where the following report summaries were presented:

Group 1: Appraisal/Approval (Syria and Peru)

Work will begin with the arrival of new Res Reps (end-August and mid-September)

Group 2: Review/Reporting (Turkey and Guyana)

TOR circulated. First stage of discussion (on "Review and Reporting Steps") proposed to take place up to 9 September.
Group 3: Work Planning (Ethiopia)

TOR circulated; request for responses to specific proposals are being developed.

Group 4: Programme Review Committee (PRC secretariat)

TOR not yet circulated; waiting for a decision on whether the PRC secretariat will be transferred from the DRPC/BER to Policy Division/BPPS.

Group 5: Programme Performance Assessment (Viet Nam)

TOR has not yet been circulated. OESP circulated a progress report - proposes to change the name to Programme Impact Performance Assessment (PIPA) and to work directly with the Viet Nam office initially (beginning September/October) before broadening the scope to the rest of the units. A two-year pilot is foreseen. Viet Nam office has faxed a response concerning the timing of the initial work with OESP.

Group 6: Feedback (CAR)

TOR not yet circulated. OECD/DAC evaluation database has been circulated to the 15 country offices. A new Team Leader may be necessary for this component, and OESP would identify one.

Group 7: Programme Support Documentation (Policy Division - now DOPP) and Group 10: Direct Support to NEX

TOR circulated (not fully until recently - Higgins problem) and feedback invited. Some responses received for PSD, but not through decen-l list.

Group 8: Consultant Roster (Morocco)

TOR not yet circulated, but progress report received. Discussions are ongoing with Team Leader and HRIS/DOP on start-up of work, and delivery of software is awaited. Meanwhile introduction and training on the roster software was being carried out at Headquarters.

Group 9: Information Management (Costa Rica)

Progress report received; discussions on TOR are ongoing. Component is being taken up in the context of the Integrated Programme Management effort - PAC is to discuss proposal.

Issues

To date, the main concern which may delay the successful completion of the work appears to be a combination of unfamiliarity of the participating units with the e-mail workgroup approach to the finalization tasks, and the inherent unwieldiness and difficulties with internet communications. Coaching has been provided, but few of the groups have actually begun addressing the issues through this format. Efforts will continue, relying on facilitation from BPPS. In any event, in the near future it is planned for representatives from all the participating units to meet in a face-to-face setting to wrap up the discussion phase so that testing can proceed in 1995.