Annual session
6-17 June 1994, Geneva

DRAFT REPORT ON THE ANNUAL SESSION

Addendum

VI. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND PROGRAMME-LEVEL ACTIVITIES

A. Annual report of the Executive Director

1. The Executive Director introduced the annual report of UNFPA for 1993 (document DP/1994/44). She noted selected financial and programme highlights provided on pages 2 to 4 of the report, including information on income levels for 1993, the projected resource situation for 1994, the percentage of allocations to priority countries, as well as pertinent aspects of the Fund's efforts to improve the quality of its programme activities and of its technical assistance. These included, among other things, the promotion of family planning within a broader context of reproductive health care services and the empowerment of women in terms of reproductive rights and reproductive freedom.
2. Following a brief introduction of the business before the Council, the Executive Director presented some thoughts on UNFPA's future role, reflecting in particular on the Programme of Action that would likely emerge from the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) being held in Cairo, Egypt, in September 1994. She said the draft document provided a number of important directions for UNFPA. The overarching goals of the Fund would remain the total and explicit integration of population considerations into all plans and strategies for sustainable development.

3. The single most important theme emerging from the ICPD process had been the importance of empowering women, both as an end in itself and as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Given the immensely important role that education played in empowering women, UNFPA would try to accelerate its advocacy to intensify efforts to educate girls. A significant outcome of the ICPD, with implications for UNFPA, would be a broader definition of sexual and reproductive health, the application of which the Fund would promote worldwide. She said that particular attention would be given to areas that had been neglected in the past, including reproductive-tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and infertility, among others.

4. Numerous delegations welcomed the new format of the Executive Director's annual report, in particular the more analytical approach, the use of lessons learned in support of the analysis, and the focus on vital thematic issues. A number of delegations appreciated the self-critical evaluation of important themes, noting that such objective analysis was a necessary first step to improving outcomes of projects and programmes. Several, however, recommended that future reports should have a more strategic focus and be output- or results-based. One delegation would have preferred a different style of report - one that provided more detail on the activities of the year, as well as a vision for the future and the personal views of the Executive Director. Another thought the report would have been more useful had it analysed UNFPA's progress and performance during the year in delivering its key outputs.

5. Delegations strongly supported UNFPA's efforts to broaden the scope of its programme to encompass a more comprehensive approach to family planning as part of reproductive health care. They also welcomed efforts to make the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, an integral component of reproductive health. Many, however, wished to know
more about how UNFPA was addressing the strategic and programmatic implications of this commitment. More specifically, several delegations inquired: (a) whether the Fund had developed indicators to assess the quality of reproductive health care; and (b) to what extent the Fund had been able to operationalize the concept of reproductive health care.

6. Numerous delegations focused on specific items covered in the report. Many welcomed the attention given to cost-recovery schemes and private-sector participation in family planning programmes. Several noted, however, that efforts in these areas appeared to be somewhat inconclusive. They therefore asked if UNFPA was committed to ensuring access to family planning services through private as well as public channels. Delegations endorsed UNFPA’s continuing support for micro-enterprise projects, which sought to link family planning activities with efforts to enhance women’s ability to earn income. One delegation noted, however, that the Fund should avoid entering areas where other organizations had a comparative advantage over UNFPA. Another asked how such projects would be integrated with information, education and communications activities.

7. Delegations generally valued UNFPA’s support of, and participation in, efforts to establish and further develop a United Nations joint and co-sponsored programme on HIV/AIDS. Several stressed the importance of allocating more resources to HIV/AIDS prevention activities and of exchanging knowledge and information with one another. One delegation considered such a joint programme an extremely valuable tool in empowering Governments to address the multi-sectoral impact of HIV/AIDS and in improving donor coordination in partnership with those national efforts. The delegation therefore recommended that the Executive Board encourage UNFPA to continue its excellent record of cooperation in this area within the context of Board decision 94/6, which had been adopted at the Board’s second regular session in May.

8. A number of delegations commented on the need for a strategic focus for UNFPA’s activities and on its future directions, noting the importance of the forthcoming Cairo Conference as a benchmark that would give new impetus to global efforts to integrate population concerns into the development process. Several noted that it might be necessary to further focus UNFPA assistance on a selected number of countries and on specific sectors in order to avoid the dilution of efforts and the resulting reduction in the quality and impact of
activities. Many stressed the importance of working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in particular with national NGOs.

9. One delegation observed that the current method of reporting on completed activities such as workshops and training was of limited use in assessing programme implementation. It therefore recommended identifying objectives at the beginning of the year and assessing them at the end of the year. Another delegation, while supporting the priority country system, wondered why the priority countries in the Arab States region had not received a larger share of resources. It suggested that UNFPA should develop methods to concentrate resources on those countries most in need. A third delegation said that criteria should be developed to facilitate the orderly phasing out of support when the objectives of country programmes had been achieved.

10. Delegations fully endorsed UNFPA’s efforts to empower women, stressing the need to pursue such activities in the context of national priorities and the cultural values and traditions of individual countries. Many remarked that it would be important for UNFPA to define its particular niche in this area. Several emphasized the importance of education as a key to the success of family planning programmes in developing countries, especially that of young girls and women.

11. Numerous delegations addressed the Fund’s financial situation as well as its management of resources. Many noted with concern the 7.8 per cent drop in UNFPA’s income from 1992 to 1993 and called upon the international donor community to increase its support for the Fund. A number of delegations also expressed concern over UNFPA’s underexpenditure of resources during the year as well as over the increase in the percentage of the Fund’s administrative and programme support services (APSS) budget in relation to income. Several delegates raised questions about how this ratio was calculated.

12. A number of delegations noted UNFPA’s efforts to implement General Assembly resolution 47/199, in particular as regards such aspects as the harmonization of programming cycles, the programme approach, decentralization and national execution, and national capacity building. With particular reference to decentralization and the efforts to extend total programme approval authority to 12 countries on a trial basis, one delegation expressed the hope that such a procedure would accelerate programme implementation. Two delegations, however, noting that the reporting on the
status of implementation of resolution 47/199 was headquarters-centred, recommended that, in future, such reporting be broadened to include the field perspective.

13. The Executive Director thanked delegations for their generally positive comments on the annual report and sought the Board's guidance on how to improve it. In response to delegates' concerns about cost-recovery schemes and private-sector participation in programmes, she acknowledged that initial efforts had not been fully encouraging. None the less, UNFPA had undertaken a joint cost-recovery exercise with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and had contacted some national business councils with a view to setting up programmes to provide services in the industrial sector in developing countries. She assured delegations that although the task ahead was a difficult one UNFPA was committed to doing more work in this area.

14. The Executive Director welcomed the Executive Board's strong support for the Fund's more comprehensive approach to reproductive health care. She explained that the new approach had emanated from the experience of past years and that, while criteria were being developed to help measure the quality and effectiveness of services, the approach was still in the developmental stage. The Executive Director said that UNFPA recognized the need to sharpen the focus of its activities, noting in this context that the concentration of the Fund's resources was part of the ongoing dialogue. She agreed that the Fund's financial assistance should be concentrated in those countries most in need, and she sought the Board's guidance in this area.

15. Concerning the question of setting Fund-wide objectives at the beginning of the year, the Executive Director indicated that the suggestion merited some consideration. She pointed out, however, that this would be a rather difficult task. There was also a need to discuss what types of criteria should be used. Commenting on the question of the allocation of resources to the Arab States region in the context of the priority-country system, the Executive Director pointed out that the system had been established as a way of concentrating UNFPA resources on a global rather than a regional basis. She expressed hope that in future discussions it would be possible to sharpen further the Fund's priority country system.

16. With regard to the need to phase out financial assistance when country programme objectives had been achieved, the Executive Director pointed out that a few countries had already reached this stage. She stressed in this
regard, however, that such countries would continue to receive technical assistance, should they request it. She further noted that most of these countries were currently involved in South-South cooperation activities. The Executive expressed total agreement with the need to work with NGOs and noted that UNFPA continued to work with a wide variety of NGOs, both at the national and international level.

17. The Executive Director identified three main reasons for the Fund's underexpenditure during the year: the uncertainty of UNFPA's funding situation, in particular in view of the fluid nature of voluntary contributions and information from some donors that they might be forced by economic uncertainties to reduce funding levels; the suspension of UNFPA activities in a number of countries owing to civil unrest; and the realization of an $8 million saving in the APSS budget. She stressed that the uncertainty over funding made it extremely difficult to ensure a steady utilization of resources throughout the year. As for the increase in the percentage of the APSS budget relative to income, the Executive Director noted that the administrative costs had been determined in the biennial budget and thus were essentially fixed costs that had been calculated relative to income assumptions for the period of the budget.

18. The Executive Board took note of the annual report (DP/1994/44) of the Executive Director as well as of the comments made at the session.