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PROGRAMME PLANNING

CRITERIA FOR UNDP RESPONSE TO NATURAL DISASTERS

Report by the Administrator

Summary

In response to Governing Council decision 79/32 adopted at the twenty-sixth session, the Administrator, in this report, informs the Council of UNDP's co-operative arrangements with the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) and proposes criteria to govern UNDP's response to natural disasters.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Governing Council, at its twenty-sixth session, adopted decision 79/32, which authorized special assistance to Yugoslavia following an earthquake, and to Jamaica which had suffered from severe floods. The same decision recommended that the Administrator submit to the Governing Council at its twenty-seventh session a report on the possible criteria to govern UNDP's response to natural disasters. The purpose of this paper is to suggest such criteria. In order to facilitate consideration of the matter, the background of UNDP assistance relating to natural disasters is also presented.

II. BACKGROUND

2. The involvement of the United Nations in matters relating to assistance in cases of natural disasters was formalized by General Assembly resolution 2034 (XX) of 7 December 1965 which authorized the Secretary-General to draw on the Working Capital Fund in the amount of \$100,000 for emergency aid in any one year with a normal ceiling of \$20,000 per country in the case of any one disaster. These funds were to be used for emergency aid only and to enable the United Nations to provide on a priority basis essential supplies and services immediately following the disaster.

3. Since then, a number of resolutions have been adopted by the General Assembly which have led to increased yearly assistance in cases of natural disasters and finally to the creation of the United Nations Disaster Relief Office in December 1971 (General Assembly resolution 2816 (XXVI)).

4. Pursuant to this resolution, an agreement was concluded between UNDP and UNDRO by which Resident Representatives also represent the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator in the countries to which they are assigned. This agreement between UNDP and UNDRO is reflected in a number of UNDP administrative instructions in which, in particular, the Resident Representative is also instructed to submit to the Administrator requests from the Government for immediate emergency assistance to the stricken area. If approved, this assistance is allocated from the UNDP Programme Reserve and normally does not exceed \$20,000 in any one situation. It would be granted only in respect of such immediate needs as emergency food supplies, clothing, blankets, etc., that could promptly alleviate some of the population's sufferings. This assistance should be obligated within six months.

5. UNDP assistance in post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction was first approved in June 1964 with "Skopje Urban Planning", Yugoslavia, following the destruction of the city by an earthquake. It was after the Peruvian earthquake of 1970, however, that the Governing Council of UNDP requested the Administrator to take "steps to meet the requests of the Government of Peru related to the reconstruction works provided for and its initial emergency project", and decided that "in addition to the activities qualified for financing from the Revolving Fund, 1/ as expressed in

1/ At its second session, June 1966, the Council established a Revolving Fund "for the purpose of financing Technical Assistance contingency activities and Special Fund preparatory activities.....and for the additional purpose of financing urgent Special Fund preliminary operations prior to approval of the projects concerned by the Governing Council." (See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 11A (E/4219), paragraph 153(a)). With the institutions of the IPF system, the Revolving Fund became unnecessary.

decision of the Council at its eighth session, there should be included pre-project activities of an urgent nature arising from the emergency situation caused by earthquakes in Peru; and, that the size of the Revolving Fund should be increased from the present level of \$12 million to \$14 million". 2/

As from 1970, UNDP assistance in the case of natural disasters has taken several forms such as direct emergency relief assistance; temporary diversion, for emergency purposes, of resources not immediately required by on-going development projects; direct provision of equipment; technical surveys of damaged areas and/or installations; post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction projects; and medium to long-term disaster prevention projects. The amounts granted to individual countries for disaster relief and rehabilitation have varied between \$850,000 and \$3,000,000. Disaster-related technical assistance financed from the Programme Reserve and approved by the Governing Council since 1973 has amounted to a total of \$16,922,000.

III. CRITERIA FOR DISASTER-RELATED ASSISTANCE

The mandate of UNDP as a development organisation does not provide for assistance for disaster relief. On the other hand, the various decisions which the Governing Council has adopted over the years to provide special assistance to specific countries affected by disasters have built up a series of precedents; the number of such instances of special assistance has been increasing recently. With the exception of guidelines for immediate relief assistance limited to \$20,000, referred to in paragraph 4 above, no criteria have been developed for any other disaster-related assistance. It is, therefore, necessary to define the conditions under which UNDP can provide assistance in these instances.

Immediate relief assistance

UNDP's assistance, when requested, will be considered in cases of natural disasters such as earthquakes, tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, floods, cyclones, drought, etc. A natural disaster, however, may be caused by the failure of a man-made structure; for example, the rupture of a dam following torrential rains.

Longer-term disaster-related assistance

The only sources of funds available to UNDP for longer-term disaster-related assistance are the national IPFs and the Programme Reserve. Following a disaster, it is, of course, open to any UNDP recipient country to propose a reorientation of its country programme funded under the IPF in order to divert resources to technical assistance purposes which will alleviate the impact of the disaster on the afflicted population and on the country's development. Examples could be technical assistance to support planning the rehabilitation of transportation and communication systems, reconstruction of housing, restoration of irrigation works, re-establishing health services, and similar activities.

2/ See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 6A (E/4884/Rev. 1) paragraph 176.

10. Special disaster assistance over and above the IPF should only be available for technical assistance activities. As funds available from the Programme Reserve are extremely limited, assistance from this source should therefore be restricted to technical assistance activities directly related to the effects of the disaster, including those in which the disaster is jeopardising the achievement of the expected results from previous or on-going UNDP-financed technical co-operation activities. To cite just one example of the latter case, a severe flood may damage bridges along market roads serving an agricultural development scheme assisted by UNDP. Technical co-operation in planning and executing the restoration of these roads and bridges would qualify for special assistance. In any case, additional assistance would be acceptable provided that it is of direct benefit to the population of the stricken area.

Extent and location of disaster

11. It is not feasible to attempt to classify disasters into major and minor ones for the purpose of determining the consideration of assistance by UNDP. For the stricken populations, human misery cannot be measured or compared. By the same token, and in view of both the precedents which have been established and the humanitarian image of UNDP, it would appear inappropriate to restrict assistance to such specific developing countries as, for example, LDCs or disaster-prone countries. Therefore, all requests from UNDP recipient countries would be eligible for consideration for assistance following a natural disaster.

Amount of UNDP assistance

12. The limited availability of funds within the Programme Reserve makes it essential to establish a limit to the extent of UNDP technical assistance as defined in paragraph 10 above. Guidelines should define, inter alia, maximum amounts which may be made available for any one disaster, and for any one country per year. These amounts are bound to be somewhat arbitrary; but, taking into account past precedents and financial constraints, reasonable figures might be a maximum of \$1 million per disaster, with a maximum of \$2 million per year per country. The allocated funds should be committed within a maximum of two years after occurrence of the disaster.

13. Within the above-mentioned maxima, it will be the responsibility of the Administrator to determine the exact amount to be allocated, based on the extent of the disaster and the availability of funds. In practice, however, due to the inherent difficulty of comparing and assessing the extent of disaster, the criterion which is most likely to be used in assessing the amount of assistance will be the availability of funds.

14. It would not be advisable to earmark an over-all predetermined amount per year for assistance in cases of natural disasters. Funds should continue to be obtained from the Programme Reserve so as to allow sufficient flexibility in the handling of disaster-related requests.

Co-ordination of UNDP disaster assistance with assistance of other multi-national and bilateral sources

15. With the exception of the co-ordination of immediate relief operations, which is the mandate of UNDRO, and where the role of the UNDP Resident Representative is

defined in an understanding between UNDR0 and UNDP (see paragraph 4, above), there are presently no formal mechanisms to co-ordinate UNDP post-disaster assistance with the assistance of other multi-lateral and bilateral sources.

16. It is the prerogative of Governments to co-ordinate all assistance. Resident Representatives however have been instructed to propose to Governments, particularly in disaster-prone countries, that contingency plans be drawn up. Such plans would deal with all aspects of relief organization and would include, *inter alia*, provisions for the co-ordination of assistance received from multi-lateral and bilateral agencies, NGOs and other private sources. It is considered that such an arrangement would be more effective and would be capable of being brought into use immediately as compared to a situation when co-ordination would begin only after the occurrence of a disaster.

Disaster preparedness and prevention

17. The Governing Council discussed UNDP assistance in disaster preparedness and prevention at its twenty-sixth session. ^{3/} It was pointed out that UNDP and its predecessor organizations had been supporting many such projects since as early as 1959. Projects have covered a broad range of research aimed at the understanding of natural phenomena relating to climate and earth tremors, as well as activities in water control, pest control, preservation and restoration of natural vegetation, earthquake engineering, etc. Since many UNDP-supported projects include an element of prevention or preparedness (for example those in drought-prone areas), it is difficult to define and classify them exactly.

18. In addition to the types of projects referred to above, there are other disaster prevention and preparedness activities which countries can undertake (such as risk assessments and vulnerability maps) for which UNDR0 is willing to provide advice and assistance. Action in this area requiring funding can be proposed by Governments for charging against the country IPF.

19. UNDP recognizes that there must be a close working relationship with UNDR0. In order to strengthen this relationship, revised guidelines for the use of Resident Representatives have been agreed upon by the two organizations and were issued in January 1980. The guidelines deal both with immediate relief operations and with disaster prevention and preparedness.

Emergency disaster assistance

20. It is proposed that the existing arrangements for providing immediate relief assistance following a disaster be maintained. The maximum amount which may be allocated from the Programme Reserve for the purpose, at present \$20,000 in any one situation, would be raised to \$30,000. This amount should not be considered as a replacement for United Nations funds which might be approved by the Secretary-General and disbursed by the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and which have been increased to a maximum of \$30,000 per country in any one disaster. ^{4/} It is

^{3/} See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1979, Supplement No. 10 (E/1979/40) paragraphs 102-109 and decision 79/17.

^{4/} General Assembly resolution 34/55.

well understood that the Programme Reserve allocation is a token amount and that all other United Nations relief assistance must flow through the office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator.

21. Taking into account the foregoing, the Administrator recommends that:

The Governing Council,

(a) Agree with respect to longer-term disaster-related assistance, that such assistance over and above the country IPF be limited to technical assistance activities only and that it be restricted to activities directly related to the effects of the disaster and of direct benefit to the population of the stricken area;

(b) Further agree that with regard to the extent of longer-term assistance from the Programme Reserve the Administrator should be guided by the limit of \$1 million per disaster with a maximum of \$2 million per year and per country, subject to the over-all availability of funds in the Programme Reserve;

(c) Support the action of the Administrator to encourage Governments in disaster-prone countries to draw up contingency plans in advance which would include, inter alia, provisions for the co-ordination of assistance to be received following a disaster;

(d) Approve an increase to \$30,000 as the maximum amount to be allocated from the Programme Reserve to provide immediate relief assistance in any one situation following a disaster; and

(e) Request the Administrator to inform the Council periodically on the nature and extent of disaster-related assistance provided by UNDP.

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