



GOVERNING COUNCIL

Twenty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 686th MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 10 June 1980, at 11.30 a.m.

President: Mr. POPESCU (Romania)

Programme implementation (continued)

- (b) Evaluation
- (c) Investment follow-up
- (h) Standardization of development co-operation procedures

Programme planning and preparation for the third programming cycle (continued)

- (b) Programme planning
 - (i) Examination of the experience with country programming
 - (ii) Review of present practices and proposals for enhancing the collective involvement of the developing countries in the determination of priorities for intercountry programmes and in the identification and initiation of regional projects and activities
 - (iii) Criteria for UNDP's response to natural disasters
 - (iv) Assistance to Nicaragua

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The meeting was called to order at 11.40 a.m.

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (agenda item 4) (DP/500, 501) (continued)

- (b) EVALUATION (DP/437 and Corr.1, 448, 452, 453, 456)
- (c) INVESTMENT FOLLOW-UP (DP/442, 472, 479 and Corr.1)
- (h) STANDARDIZATION OF DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION PROCEDURES (DP/468)

PROGRAMME PLANNING AND PREPARATION FOR THE THIRD PROGRAMMING CYCLE (agenda item 5)
(continued)

- (b) PROGRAMME PLANNING
 - (i) EXAMINATION OF THE EXPERIENCE WITH COUNTRY PROGRAMMING (DP/454)
 - (ii) REVIEW OF PRESENT PRACTICES AND PROPOSALS FOR ENHANCING THE COLLECTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN THE DETERMINATION OF PRIORITIES FOR INTERCOUNTRY PROGRAMMES AND IN THE IDENTIFICATION AND INITIATION OF REGIONAL PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES (DP/435)
 - (iii) CRITERIA FOR UNDP'S RESPONSE TO NATURAL DISASTERS (DP/432)
 - (iv) ASSISTANCE TO NICARAGUA

1. Mr. LIPTAU (Federal Republic of Germany) said that the examination of the experience with country programming (DP/454) prepared by the Administrator was an excellent document establishing a number of important points which could help to streamline future planning procedures, improve the quality of the country programmes and, at the same time, strengthen the central role of resident representatives. He was happy to note that Governments seemed in general to endorse that approach. In some areas, however, there were still a number of unsolved problems, such as attitudinal barriers, the participation of the specialized agencies in preparations for country programming - both at headquarters and in the field, and the exchange of information on multilateral and bilateral technical corporation inputs.

2. His delegation had already stressed in the general debate the importance it attached to a programming exercise based on the voluntary nature of contributions. It fully endorsed the principle that Governments of recipient countries had sovereign responsibility to identify the inputs which UNDP might provide within their development objectives. At the same time, it was quite clear that the Administrator also had a certain responsibility for the implementation of priority objectives and programmes in the development process of the countries receiving UNDP aid. He had to justify programmes and expenditure in the Council. Continuous programming could help make the dialogue which already existed more systematic but would be effective only where UNDP had major technical assistance inputs. It would be especially valuable to those countries to which the bulk of the IPFs were allocated in the third cycle.

3. His delegation found it difficult to agree to the proposal, contained in document DP/454, paragraph 93 (b), that technical co-operation requirements to be met by the Programme should be identified primarily in terms of objectives and activities, that country programme documents should not contain detailed project information, and that they should not be required to specify projects other than those already under implementation or in a sufficiently advanced stage of preparation. As the representative of Belgium had rightly observed, that might adversely affect the Council's role; that point should be met in the draft decision contained in paragraph 103 of the document by adding to paragraph 1 a clause to the effect that the Council would endorse the Administrator's proposal, subject to the positions adopted during the discussion on that item. In addition, the Council should be informed of the possible financial implications of the proposals.

4. His delegation endorsed the suggestions contained in the report on criteria for UNDP response to natural disasters (DP/432). It was convinced that UNDP should intervene only in the event of natural disasters and considered that care should be taken not to draw too heavily on the Programme Reserve for assistance of that kind. In view of the specific character of such assistance, careful consideration should also be given to the problem of co-ordinating inputs from bilateral and multilateral sources and from non-governmental organizations. The procedure proposed by the Administrator for consultations with participating and executing agencies seemed to be practicable.

5. His delegation was very impressed by the dedication and efficiency with which the people and Government of Nicaragua had started to rebuild the national economy and improve the social situation. The Federal Republic of Germany had shown its solidarity with Nicaragua in the context of bilateral and multilateral arrangements by providing considerable aid, estimated at \$32.5 million in 1979 and \$24.3 million in 1980, and intended to continue such co-operation in 1981. It supported the proposals submitted by the Nicaraguan representative; there was no doubt that the country was still facing serious economic and social problems. It might perhaps be necessary to review the available data concerning, for example, per capita GNP, and to consider the proposals in the light of the decision to be taken on the allocation of IPFs for the period 1982-1986. For instance, it would make a substantial difference to Nicaragua whether calculation I or calculation VI, as indicated in document DP/496, was applied. In any case, there were many possibilities within UNDP review procedures to arrive at more exact basic data for the following cycle if the situation in Nicaragua did not show any dramatic improvement.

6. Mr. KAUFMAN (United States of America) said with reference to agenda item 4 (b), "Evaluation", that he supported the proposals made by the Administrator in the relevant report (DP/448); the thematic or programme evaluations should nevertheless be supplemented by selected field project performance evaluations, which should be carried out under UNDP leadership in close collaboration with host Governments and executing agencies and form an integral part of UNDP's evaluation approach. Such evaluations would provide the necessary data for tripartite decision-making, would be focused on the results, significance and impact of projects, and would demonstrate acceptable techniques of project design and evaluation. They should, inter alia, draw on professional evaluation staff from executing agencies and would offer participating Governments the opportunity to strengthen their own project design and evaluation capacities. Selection should be carried out, at least in part, in relation to earlier thematic evaluations, thus providing feedback for ongoing

projects. The evaluations would be largely funded from credits normally allocated for evaluation in project budgets. That new element should substantially improve the general level of project evaluation and would complement the proposals contained in document DP/448.

7. The three other reports relating to that agenda item (DP/452, 453 and 456) deserved careful consideration, for which the Council would not have time at its current session. His delegation would therefore make only brief comments on them and would transmit additional comments to the secretariat in writing. It fully endorsed the conclusion of the summary of the FAO/UNDP evaluation study on agricultural training (DP/452) that trainees should be carefully selected, positively motivated and offered a broader understanding of the socio-economic aspects of agricultural development. The summary of action-oriented assessment of rural women's participation in development (DP/453) usefully drew attention to both the constraints limiting the role of women in development and the opportunities which existed in that area. The recommendations contained in that report should, however, be considered with caution since their financial implications had not been examined. Lastly, the report on the evaluation of the global programme (DP/456) contained useful suggestions and highlighted the value of the global programme in promoting important development objectives which could not be envisaged on a national or regional basis. That point was particularly important at a time when decisions were to be taken on the allocation of funds for the third cycle. His delegation supported the recommendations contained on pages 1 and 2 of the report, but doubted whether UNDP's resources would permit it to undertake investigations of solar energy hardware, as proposed in paragraphs 80 and 81 of the report. It would transmit its other observations on the report to the secretariat in writing.

8. With regard to follow-up investments - agenda item 4 (c), his delegation supported the suggestion by the delegation of the Netherlands that a working group should be convened at an early stage to consider the matter further. Higher priority should be given to pre-investment in country programmes and co-ordination with external financial sources, both public and private, should be improved. His delegation was concerned about the vagueness with which the respective roles of recipient Governments and the Administrator were determined in the country programming and project approval processes. Serious consideration should also be given to maintaining the flexibility of IPFs so that they did not become firm financial commitments.

9. With regard to the standardization of development co-operation procedures - agenda item 4 (h), his delegation supported the suggestions contained in the Administrator's report on the question (DP/468) and hoped that UNDP would in future take into account the guidelines recently adopted by the OECD Development Assistance Committee in order to ensure the better use of assistance.

10. Turning to agenda item 5 (b) (i) concerning country programming, he said that long discussions on IPFs in the Council would be of little significance if planning efforts faltered at the national level. Report DP/454 showed that, although in general Governments supported the concepts of country programming, those concepts were not always observed in practice. A number of barriers were mentioned in that connexion: non-compliance with accepted policies and procedures (para. 9),

cumbersome administrative procedures within UNDP (para. 15), use of resources for low-priority projects (para. 21), lack of concentration of UNDP resources (para. 26), absence of linkage between country and intercountry programmes (para. 32), inadequate application of continuous programming concepts (paras. 42 and 44), and continuing gaps in the co-ordination of UNDP country programmes with those of other United Nations agencies (paras. 47 and 50) and with other organizations providing external assistance (para. 65).

11. His delegation was none the less aware of all the achievements mentioned in report DP/454 and endorsed the Administrator's recommendations for further improving country programming during the third cycle (para. 103), in particular through better application of the continuous programming concept and a strengthening of the linkages of UNDP projects and activities with other elements of the United Nations system.

12. With respect to the determination of priorities for intercountry programmes (DP/435) - agenda item 5 (b) (ii), his delegation agreed that there was a need to improve consultations with Governments in the planning of regional and interregional programmes. It supported the Administrator's recommendations concerning consultations on interregional programmes, but could not fully endorse his recommendations concerning consultations on regional programmes. In particular, the application of recommendation 9 (e) would place an unnecessary strain on the time and resources of all the parties concerned; rather than calling for meetings which were not essential, it would be better if Governments approved regional projects by mail or at already scheduled meetings.

13. With regard to criteria for UNDP response to natural disasters - agenda item 5 (b) (iii), his delegation endorsed the Administrator's recommendation contained in document DP/432.

14. Lastly, concerning assistance to Nicaragua - agenda item 5 (b) (iv), it associated itself with the other delegations which had called for increased UNDP assistance to that country. For the purpose of calculating Nicaragua's IPF for the third cycle, the Council might proceed in the same way as for those countries listed as "other" in the annex to document DP/496 (table 1, foot-note d/). In the immediate future, consideration might be given to converting a significant part of the loan to Nicaragua approved in February into a grant, which would leave its IPF largely unused for the third cycle.

15. Mr. EKBLÖM (Finland) said that although 10 years had elapsed since the adoption of the Consensus on country programming, in which he had personally participated, serious obstacles remained: those obstacles were analysed in document DP/454. Country programming could be defined as an agreed set of principles by means of which multilateral development inputs were made to respond in a coherent and well co-ordinated manner to priorities set by the developing countries themselves. It had been adopted in order to remedy the lack of co-ordination in the Programme in the 1960s. Of the obstacles which continued to hamper the application of country programming, the Administrator mentioned attitudinal barriers and excessive formalism. The Council could do little in that area; on the other hand, it had a duty to examine cases involving a flagrant lack of compliance with established policies and procedures.

16. With regard to respect for national priorities, he drew attention to the paradox mentioned in paragraph 21 of document DP/454, namely that Governments themselves sometimes preferred to use UNDP inputs in areas which were not of the highest priority. Nevertheless, while the appropriateness of such situations might be recognized in the light of experience, there should be no return to the sectoral competition of the 1960s: deviations from the basic principle must remain exceptions to the rule. Document DP/454 showed that even greater pragmatism was necessary in respect of regional and global priorities, and, in that connexion, the United Nations system must ensure that flexibility did not result in chaos. Paragraph 49, too, referred to disquieting competition between various sectoral ministries within Governments; that trend should not result in the reintroduction of agency influence on ultimate decisions as had been the case before the 1970 Consensus. Particular care should therefore be taken on that question when seeking ways to involve the executing agencies more closely in the programming process.

17. A crucial issue was the extent to which resident representatives enjoyed the confidence of the agencies and national authorities; paragraphs 61 and 62 of document DP/454 gave the impression that there were some difficulties in that respect. To ensure that resident representatives were recognized as "team leaders" in the multilateral development system, it was essential, firstly, that the executing agencies should "follow the rules of the game", even if their own representatives were in some instances more experienced, and secondly, that only the most qualified persons should be appointed resident representatives, without regard to any other consideration.

18. However, his delegation was aware of the achievements of country programming and supported the specific proposals made by the Administrator in paragraphs 96, 97 and 98 of his report (DP/454).

19. Lastly, with regard to agenda item 5 (b) (iv), his delegation hoped that Nicaragua's request for additional assistance would be given favourable consideration, in order to help that country's Government in its reconstruction effort.

20. Mr. KASTOFT (Denmark) said that, in general, his delegation agreed with the conclusions in the report of the Administrator (DP/454). In its opinion, country programming had been a success. However, some concern was expressed in paragraph 28 of the report, which he read out; his delegation shared the view expressed by the Administrator in paragraph 30, which he also read out, but his country's experience in the field of bilateral aid confirmed that in most cases national development plans reflected global and regional priorities of concern to the Government involved, as was pointed out in paragraph 29. His delegation hoped that a more coherent effort would be made by the entire United Nations development system and that, in particular, the UNDP country programming process would be used as a frame of reference for operational activities carried out and financed by the organizations in the United Nations system from their own resources.

21. With regard to the involvement of the executing agencies in the country programming dialogue, it was essential to achieve a balance between all relevant considerations and the legitimate, but in some cases regrettable, tendency of the agencies to promote their own special fields. In that context, the special problems of the smaller agencies must also be given full attention. That dilemma imposed a heavy responsibility on the resident co-ordinator, whose role should be strengthened. In any event, the United Nations system should continue fully to respect the prerogatives of the planning officials of recipient countries in order

22. Lastly, it must be remembered that aid channelled through the United Nations development system, excluding the World Bank, did not represent a very great proportion of total official development assistance, even though in qualitative terms it might be somewhat more significant. The agencies should therefore endeavour to minimize the administrative burden imposed on recipient countries by differing and cumbersome procedures. The streamlining of the United Nations development system with the full co-operation of the agencies was therefore a matter of urgency.

23. Mr. GAJENTAAN (Netherlands) paid tribute to the quality of the report of the Administrator on the examination of experience with country programming (DP/454), and said that, since technical co-operation was a prerequisite for economic development and must not only support that process, but generate it and serve as a link between the various development activities, it was entirely normal that the UNDP country programming system, which played such an important role in technical co-operation, should become in as many countries as possible a frame of reference for all the development activities of the United Nations system.

24. The proliferation of special-purpose funds and the resulting need for cohesion made the co-ordinating role of UNDP increasingly important. It would be appropriate, therefore, if in the future UNDP concentrated on those co-ordinating functions which it alone could fulfil.

25. The resident representative was a key element in the co-ordination of the various development activities in the field. His task was to maintain a continuing dialogue with the competent ministries and executing agencies, and it was important to select duly qualified persons to carry out that crucial role.

26. However, the resident representatives were not the only persons responsible for programming. They shared that responsibility with all the parties concerned, including the recipient countries. The responsibility of each party should be clearly identified when the country programme was drawn up. More attention should be given to the involvement of the United Nations agencies, particularly the smaller ones, in the programming process. Few agencies had so far been able to make an effective contribution to the preparation of country programmes; it was clear that sectoral support should be improved and that UNDP should play an increasingly intersectoral role. In that connexion, decentralization of authority from headquarters to the field offices should not reduce the accountability of the Administrator.

27. His delegation considered that the continuous programming approach was of major importance. By making it possible to follow changes in the objectives, needs and priorities of the recipient countries, and to identify, formulate and implement new projects as programme implementation moved forward, that approach should give country programmes a certain dynamism. In his opinion, the country programme reviews, mentioned in paragraph 82 of document DP/454, were essential.

28. Referring to the role of the resident co-ordinator, he considered that the proposals contained in document DP/454 should help to create the necessary conditions to ensure that the co-ordinator's action was effective and thus strengthen further the country programming process. In that regard, the resident representatives might co-ordinate, within the framework of the country programme, the preparation of national food strategies, whose adoption had for some time been advocated by the World Food Council.

49. With regard to the draft decision on the last page of document DP/454, he drew attention to a mistake in the second paragraph of the English text. The chapter and paragraph numbers mentioned in that paragraph were incorrect. The end of the paragraph, which read "chapter VII of the report, in particular, paragraphs 100 through 105," should therefore be replaced by "chapter VI of the report, in particular in paragraphs 93 to 98".

30. With regard to the criteria for UNDP response to disasters, his delegation entirely agreed with the views expressed by the representative of the Federal Republic of Germany: the draft decision contained in paragraph 21 of document DP/432 should relate exclusively to assistance to be provided in the event of natural disasters.

31. Mr. FREYRE (Argentina), referring to the question of country programming, said that, while it was true that resident representatives played a key role in the preparation of programmes (DP/454, para. 9), it was nevertheless for Governments to set priorities and to take the ultimate decision concerning the country programme. There was therefore a need for a continuing dialogue between resident representatives and Governments.

32. Moreover, as stated expressly in the Consensus of 1970, Governments had the sovereign responsibility to identify the role of Programme inputs in specified areas within the countries' development objectives. In that regard, it was useful to set up, at the government level, a central body to co-ordinate all sources of technical co-operation and assistance in order to make the best possible use of available resources. Argentina, which had had very positive experience in that area, would be prepared to help other countries to benefit from that experience.

33. His country fully supported the continuous programming approach, which introduced a degree of flexibility in the process of preparing country programmes and ensured a dynamic country programme which was synchronized with the national plan and was meant to evolve in response, over time, to the Government's articulation of its own development programme and activities.

34. With regard to the collective involvement of the developing countries in the determination of priorities for intercountry programmes, his delegation fully endorsed the Administrator's recommendation that draft regional and subregional programmes should be examined in detail within the context of the regional economic commissions (DP/435). The commissions, which had long been involved in identifying the needs of their region in the various sectors of the economy, could thus help Governments to benefit from their experience. His delegation reserved the right to comment in greater detail on the other recommendations made by the Administrator in document DP/435.

35. Referring to the question of assistance to Nicaragua, he said that the requests for assistance submitted by the Government of that country were entirely justified in view of its extremely difficult economic situation.