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P O L I C Y

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL AT PREVIOUS SESSIONS

Improvement of the methods and procedures for the recruitment of project professional staff and consultants

Report of the Administrator

Summary

This policy paper is submitted in accordance with Governing Council decision 81/20 which requested the Administrator to prepare a report, in consultation with the agencies of the United Nations system, as appropriate, that would provide detailed information on existing rules, procedures and practices in use for updating rosters of project professional staff and for circulating vacancy announcements, paying special attention to determining whether they were made available to all national recruitment services (NRS) in good time. The present report analyzes the information collected from agencies which is summarized in the support paper submitted as Addendum 1.

Furthermore, the Administrator, in paragraphs 35-46 of the report, offers suggestions and recommendations, to improve current methods and procedures for the recruitment of professional project personnel. Although the actual responsibility for the recruitment of experts and consultants rests with the executing agencies, these recommendations which have been formulated in consultation with agencies are submitted to the Governing Council as part of the Administrator's full accountability for all aspects of UNDP's activities.

INTRODUCTION

1. Governing Council decision 81/20 states that " there is a need for improvement of the methods and procedures for the recruitment of project professional staff and consultants, especially from developing countries". As a consequence, it invited developing countries which had not yet established a National Recruitment Service (NRS) to consider doing so and requested the Administrator to assist them, if requested, in either establishing such a service or strengthening an existing one. In order to comply with this part of the decision, the Administrator issued a Note Verbale to all developing countries by which they were informed of the support which can be offered by UNDP and the agencies. Initial responses by Governments to the Note Verbale, through UNDP's Resident Representatives, has been limited to a few countries by the time this report was prepared: none have requested support.

2. Operative paragraph 3 of the same decision requested the Administrator to prepare a report, in consultation with agencies of the United Nations system, as appropriate, which would provide detailed information on existing rules, procedures and practices for updating rosters of project professional staff and consultants. The decision also requested information about the procedures in use for circulating vacancy announcements of expert and consultant posts in UNDP-supported activities, paying special attention to determining whether they were made available in due time to all NRS. The decision further asked the Administrator to prepare appropriate suggestions and recommendations.

3. In accordance with decision 81/20, the study was directed towards an analysis of United Nations system policies and practices; it does not, therefore, cover National Recruitment Services (NRS) and other national recruitment sources.

4. Through the present report and its Addendum, which contains detailed information provided by agencies of the United Nations system on recruitment policies and procedures linked to the project cycle of UNDP-supported projects, the Administrator is responding to paragraph 3 of the decision. The report is divided into five sections as follows:

A. Planning of project personnel requirements as a means of accelerating the recruitment process, while involving national recruitment services;

B. Rosters as a tool for a rapid and broad response to project requirements;

C. Active recruitment phase;

D. Clearance, submission, selection and appointment of professional project personnel; and

E. Staff recruited from developing countries, including nationally recruited project staff.

5. The report contains suggestions and recommendations which have evolved from the analysis of data submitted by agencies in response to a questionnaire and as a result of direct consultations. They have been prepared by the
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Administrator in full awareness that actual responsibility for the recruitment of professional project personnel rests with the executing Agencies as part of their responsibilities for implementing UNDP-supported projects. The recommendations are submitted by the Administrator to the Governing Council as part of his responsibility to be fully accountable for all aspects of the Programme's activities. The recommendations have resulted from consultations held with agencies.

6. For over three decades the transfer of knowledge, skills and know-how through experts and consultants has constituted the central element in the technical co-operation programmes of the United Nations system. The quality of multilateral technical co-operation is closely linked to the quality and timeliness of the experts and consultants which are provided to developing countries. Given this continuing need for excellence, as well as the unique and universal responsibility of the United Nations development system, which demands world-wide recruitment of experts and consultants of the highest competence, it is appropriate to assess the system's recruitment procedures and practices. Underlying this assessment is the existing framework of responsibility of the development partners: (i) Governments, which determine their requirements and approve professional project personnel; (ii) Executing Agencies, which are responsible for the recruitment of professional project personnel; and (iii) UNDP, which approves projects and is accountable for the effective use of programme resources, including advisory services.

A. PLANNING OF PROJECT PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS AS A MEANS OF ACCELERATING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS WHILE INVOLVING NATIONAL RECRUITMENT SERVICES.

(i) Forecasting requirements and the use of NRS

7. An important factor influencing the recruitment process is the time available between the initial identification of project personnel needs and the actual appointment of consultants and experts. In order to gain time and to be able to respond rapidly and effectively in filling vacancies as they arise, adequate forecasting of requirements, as well as carefully updated rosters, is very important.

8. While agency practices in this respect differ, there appears to be agreement that the forecasting of expert requirements for technical co-operation posts is difficult and is not always effective. A main problem is the uncertainty, at the early stages of project preparation, as to whether the originally identified expert requirements will be approved or whether changing financial conditions and changing requirements in the project country will lead to modifications. As a result, most agencies are reluctant to use forecasting mechanisms.

9. An exception occurs in the United Nations (DTCD) which, twice each year, issues a forecast of personnel requirements. This consists of a list of envisaged posts (not yet firmly established) which could help NRS, as well as field offices of UNDP and other recruitment sources around the world, to identify possible applicants. The approach appears to be useful in building up the agency's roster.

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10. Although the expert and consultant requirements are usually determined in a general way during the formulation stage of a project, the specific requirements become known for most recruitment services only when a project is approved. Furthermore, as concerns consultants, the work-plan, which is prepared only after project approval, is used to establish firm timing of requirements, although consultant components are often specified in the project document. Especially for large-scale projects, the exact composition of the expert and consultant components are usually known by agencies some time before final approval.

11. The recruitment services of agencies are informed of actual project personnel requirements only when approval of a project is close at hand. In some organizations, the recruitment service learns of the actual requirements only when definite job descriptions have been established and have been cleared by the Government. At FAO, for example, the recruitment service is attached to the programme sectors which are responsible for projects. Thus, the recruitment service is directly involved in the formulation and implementation of projects and learns of the personnel requirements at an early stage. In another, smaller organization, no separate recruitment service exists; all project personnel are recruited directly by the staff who are responsible for projects.

12. Efforts are under way in some agencies to devise systems whereby actual recruitment requirements are known at an earlier stage than is currently the case. A successful solution to this problem would provide more lead time for roster searches, as well as for circulation of job descriptions to NRS.

(ii) Updating rosters including circulation of standard job descriptions

13. In order to explore other means by which rosters could be kept up-to-date, agencies were asked whether they issued typical job descriptions based on a forecast of potential requirements. Most agencies regard this approach as offering limited benefit; they claim that job descriptions should already reflect the specific and individualized priorities of projects. While some standard job descriptions are issued by agencies before project approval (in order to assist national recruitment sources to prospect for candidates at an early stage in the project cycle), as a rule job descriptions are issued and circulated only after a post has been firmly established in a project and actual recruitment is initiated. Only in new areas, or in highly specialized fields, are typical job descriptions widely utilized to seek applications to build up rosters. The United Nations system makes limited use of standard job descriptions in contacting NRS to help attract candidatures.

(iii) Involvement of recruitment services in project design

14. The involvement of recruitment services in project design could reduce recruitment lead-time. Practices on this aspect vary considerably between agencies. Some agencies encourage consultations between project officers and the recruitment services during the design stage in order to save time. At FAO, for example, the recruitment service is directly involved in the design

process through its decentralized operation support units by which personnel department staff are outposted. This appears to facilitate close co-operation between operational and specialized recruitment staff and provides more lead-time. The recruitment services of other agencies, however, are not involved at all during the planning stages of projects, although some measures to ensure greater involvement of recruitment services at that stage of the project cycle are being considered.

B. ROSTERS AS A TOOL FOR RAPID AND BROAD RESPONSE TO PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

(i) Issues in the composition of rosters with special reference to requirements of technical co-operation

15. Agencies maintain a common roster for consultants and experts, although, in most instances, the rosters contain information which allows for separate identification of applications for consultancies and for long-term assignments. (Please refer to the Addendum for a detailed description of quantitative dimensions, and criteria for inclusion of candidates therein).

16. Most agencies have computerized, or are in the process of computerizing, their roster systems. The larger organizations have on-line access to computer data and have an interactive mode for data entry and retrieval, as well as on-line visual display units. Almost all organizations have the capacity for batch-process printouts on a periodic basis or as required.

17. Each organization uses its own occupational classification system for its roster and there appears to be little co-ordination within the United Nations system in this respect. It should be noted that the "Common Classification of Occupational Groups" established by the International Civil Service Commission, is not being applied at present.

(ii) Means to maintain and update rosters based on various recruitment sources and ways to check on interest and availability

18. Some agencies conduct periodic or ad hoc recruitment missions for technical co-operation personnel, although such missions require the availability of specific job descriptions so that recruitment for current vacancies can be carried out effectively. Furthermore, some Agencies either have outposted recruitment staff in the regions concerned or utilize Agency personnel located at the country or regional level for the purpose of identifying potential candidates.

19. Another element required for understanding this phase of the recruitment process is an application of the reliance by agencies on a variety of sources other than NRS (only a few exist in developing countries) and other official recruitment sources, both to build up the roster and to utilize in the active recruitment phase. agencies rely on contacts made during international conferences, seminars and technical meetings and other activities related to the execution of their Regular Programmes. In addition, agencies often make use of an extensive mailing list of institutions throughout the world.

Recruitment missions and other forms of personal contact are also relevant in this regard. Some agencies use selective advertising of posts in journals and periodicals.

20. The United Nations (DTCD) supplies job descriptions to over 900 sources, including national commissions, NRS, universities, specialized institutions, NGOs, Resident Representatives of UNDP, agency representatives in the field and technical co-operation personnel. agency field personnel sometimes play a recruitment role in a number of countries - as do, in some cases, agency headquarters and regional office staff. Most agencies seem to prefer working in direct contact with technical ministries in their areas of competence, rather than through a centralized NRS. Since technical or professional qualifications are the fundamental criteria for the recruitment of project personnel, such an approach seems to be reasonable.

21. Most organizations have put in place a system to check and update the interest and availability of persons included in their rosters. This includes enquiries directly addressed to candidates. Such letters are sent to most of the candidates on organizations' rosters. Recruitment officers also ascertain availability in the context of roster searches and periodic updating. Applicants are requested to contact agencies at least once every two years in order to renew their candidature. In one case, selected printouts are sent to NRS in order to periodically ascertain the status and availability of candidates within their jurisdiction.

C. ACTIVE RECRUITMENT PHASE

(i) Role of rosters

22. Active recruitment of project personnel is initiated by agencies once the approval stage of a project is reached. While, as indicated above, some preliminary contacts are made before this stage in the project cycle in order to ascertain the availability and interest of candidates, active recruitment only begins once approval is imminent or has taken place. In general, lead-time available for recruiting professional project staff is inadequate for ensuring the widest possible involvement of all recruitment sources. Some agencies indicate that they sometimes require up to a year to fill certain positions; in many instances the available time is a few months at best. Several agencies indicate that time available for active recruitment is usually between three to four months. This limits the available time for circulating vacancy notices to NRS and increases reliance on the roster and other sources of active recruitment.

23. Job descriptions, which form the basis for active recruitment of professional project personnel, are usually prepared in a tripartite partnership of Government agency, and UNDP. Nevertheless, agencies play a determining role in the finalization of job descriptions, subject to approval by the Government.

24. Once job descriptions are available, a variety of procedures are in use by agencies for the active recruitment of personnel to fill approved expert and consultant posts. In some instances, the Government states a preference for certain institutions or individuals; the roster of the organization often includes these individuals and immediate action is possible. If no specific requests are forthcoming, first call may be made on the roster before going to outside sources of recruitment.

25. Generally, there are different procedures in use for long or short-term posts. Short-term personnel are often identified by the technical units of agencies having the substantive knowledge of available, qualified specialists. There appears to be a less systematic approach for recruiting this type of short-term personnel. As concerns long-term personnel, several agencies are mandated by their respective governing bodies to circulate, within established time-limits, vacancy notices to various national recruitment sources. This is done in two ways: periodically by issuing a vacancy list; and, on a current basis by circulating specific vacancies with job descriptions. A period of between 2-3 months is allowed for the submission of names. Nevertheless, whenever urgent recruitment is required, the time allotted for submissions is reduced. Instances have also occurred when delays in postal communications have affected this aspect of the recruitment process. The process can be time-consuming. Thus, a minimum of three months between the definite approval of a post including the certification of a job description, and the actual appointment date should be available in order to ensure that all relevant recruitment sources can submit candidates in time.

(ii) Various sources of recruitment to supplement rosters

26. Agencies have different institutional arrangements to facilitate the direct recruitment of professional project staff. The highly technical, smaller agencies maintain direct contacts with their technical counterpart institutions. The United Nations (DTCD) receives considerable support from the NRS, although their number is limited. In order to improve this function of NRS in developing regions, regional representatives in Kuala Lumpur, Nairobi and Lima of the Technical Assistance Recruitment Service (TARS) are assisting in establishing and strengthening NRS. Furthermore, UNDP, with the support of the Netherlands National Recruitment Service and TARS, within the framework of the Junior Professional Officers Programme, training for NRS representatives from developing countries. The lack of an adequate NRS not only impedes the finding of internationally recruited project staff in developing countries, but also limits the effective implementation of the policy (approved by the Governing Council in decision 79/48) of recruiting UNDP-financed nationally recruited project staff, including nationals residing abroad. (See paragraphs 33-34 below).

27. Governing Council decision 81/20 calls for special attention to whether job descriptions are made available in "due time" to all NRS for their review and submission of qualified candidates. As has been previously mentioned, reviewed in previous sections, agencies contact various national recruitment

sources for the establishment and maintenance of an updated roster which tends to be the primary source of active recruitment. Furthermore, agencies have traditionally relied upon technical ministries and other governmental units with which they have close working relationships in order to recruit personnel for technical co-operation posts.

28. Whenever primary use is made of the roster, NRS are obviously not involved in an immediate way in the active recruitment phase, although they would have had an opportunity to contribute candidates. Furthermore, agencies which have access to various national recruitment sources prefer not to rely on the NRS. Moreover, it is often not possible for agencies to contact NRS, and/or other national sources when specific project vacancies occur because of the limited time available for recruitment. In addition, some agencies prefer to use a selective approach when circulating vacancy announcements; they base recruitment on their knowledge of available talent, as well as on cultural and language requirements.

(iii) Screening and evaluation of applications

29. Once a candidate is being actively considered for a vacancy, an extensive screening and evaluation process is carried out. This procedure usually involves staff of both the personnel department and technical units of the organizations. In some cases special panels are charged with reviewing candidates. A number of agencies obtain an assessment of candidates from the persons listed as references on the Personal History Form. Interviews are often held with candidates.

30. Several agencies have issued clear guidelines and instructions to their staff with respect to criteria for the selection of candidates. In general, all applicants for a post must, meet strict standards of academic, technical/professional and personal qualifications. A number of agencies are concerned with selecting candidates from a wide spectrum of geographic regions. In one organization, geographic representation for technical co-operation personnel is as important as for regular programme staff.

31. When initial screening and evaluation is concluded, the selection of suitable candidates for submission to Governments takes place, usually by an advisory body composed of technical and personnel staff. A fairly elaborate process is normally employed before a "short" list of candidates is submitted for final determination to the Executive Head or his representative.

D. CLEARANCE, SUBMISSION, SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT

32. For nationals of some countries, special clearance procedures are required by national authorities. In other cases, some agencies inform national authorities routinely about applications of their nationals and request appropriate background information.

33. Practice varies as to the number of names being submitted to a project-country Government. Several agencies provide only one candidate, but are prepared to provide additional candidates if required. Many agencies submit three candidates for a post; the United Nations (DTCD) submits a panel of five candidates for each post.

34. A number of agencies, particularly the larger ones, follow the practice of transferring project personnel from one project to another. In no instance does this practice exceed 40 per cent of available vacancies. All project personnel have an opportunity to apply for vacancies. WHO makes no distinctions between professional staff working in projects or working as regular staff at headquarters and Regional Offices; transfers occur frequently between them. Other agencies permit transfers between secretariat posts and project posts.

E. STAFF FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES INCLUDING NATIONALLY RECRUITED PROJECT STAFF

35. While agencies are making efforts to emphasize the use of capabilities available in developing countries, the primary concern of the United Nations system is to ensure that the most effective, qualified individual is appointed. Thus, while there are in general no special measures applied by agencies for seeking out certain nationalities, there is, nevertheless, a concern for combining the highest professional qualifications with the widest possible geographic representation of project personnel, in keeping with the needs of the project country. The United Nations (DTCD) hopes to achieve this goal by making greater use of regional offices of TARS. Other organizations make special efforts in giving preference and priority to candidates and institutions from developing countries. In the case of the more specialized technical agencies, there is concern that the limited technical staff available in some developing countries may be drawn away from contributing to a country's development.

36. In decision 79/48, the Governing Council introduced a policy intended to help ensure the recruitment of nationals as experts in UNDP-supported projects. In practice, this approach presents a new challenge to agencies which must ensure that full consultations with Governments take place to determine whether a project post should be filled through national (including nationals residing abroad) or international recruitment. The necessary administrative arrangements have been established to permit such recruitment, either through a Service Agreement or on the basis of the reimbursement of costs to a Government or a national institution for the services rendered by nationally recruited individuals. Furthermore, non-resident nationals may return to their home countries to serve in a project. This new policy is likely to affect the manner in which future recruitment will be carried out. Since preference would be given to reviewing available qualified national professional staff, agencies and Governments must put in place measures to ensure the effective recruitment of such persons before resorting to international recruitment. In order to achieve progress in the recruitment of

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national project personnel, a model contractual agreement has been negotiated in CCAQ(PER) and is now in use. Furthermore, FAO has issued standing instructions to all operational units to ensure that, where such expertise is available and the recipient Government is agreeable, it is taken fully into account in the formulation of a project.

F. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

37. The paramount concern of all concerned is to ensure that qualified individuals are recruited for UNDP-supported projects in a timely fashion. The suggestions and recommendations presented below are intended to facilitate the achievement of this objective. The recommendations also respond to General Assembly resolution 35/81, para 8, concerning the introduction of measures to "reduce administrative and other support costs, to achieve maximum uniformity and harmonization of administrative, financial, budgetary, personnel and planning procedures ...".

38. Better use by the United Nations system should be made of national recruitment services in the recruitment of professional project personnel, particularly in the maintenance and updating of rosters, although it may not be desirable to rely solely on NRS whenever other technically qualified national recruitment sources are available to agencies.

39. A greater effort should be made to strengthen national recruitment services in order to obtain qualified candidates and to be able to undertake thorough screening of qualifications and suitability. These services should also be used to facilitate the clearance of candidates selected to serve in UNDP-supported projects.

40. More dynamic recruitment efforts should be carried out in regions of the world which are not properly represented in the rosters of organizations. This should include direct mailing of standard job descriptions to likely institutional sources and other national sources of recruitment, including field offices of the UNDP.

41. A much greater effort should be made by the United Nations system to advise Governments on ways to strengthen their "national skill data banks", both for internal and external recruitment purposes (see DP/443 para 118(e)), as well as other measures to strengthen national capacities for identifying qualified personnel for national or international recruitment.

42. Measures should be initiated to ensure that professional project personnel for UNDP-supported projects are recruited as close as possible to the date called for by the project. Such measures should include the effective involvement of NRS and other national recruitment sources in the identification and submission of suitable candidates. Among the measures to be considered are the following:

(a) Improved planning and forecasting of project personnel recruitment;

(b) The use of recruitment personnel as advisors in the early stages of project formulation and improved communication between them and staff of technical units throughout the project formulation process; and

(c) Wider use of an effective model, in use in some agencies, to decentralize recruitment and other personnel functions to operational units, possibly by outposting administrative staff or by entrusting greater recruitment responsibilities to operational staff.

43. Greater co-ordination is required between personnel units and these operational units responsible for experts concerning the maintenance and updating of rosters with a view to considerably reducing recruitment time and improving the quality of candidates.

44. Regional and country representatives of agencies should be more systematically involved in the recruitment process, as well as in the updating of rosters.

45. Each agency must adapt procedures and practices relevant to its specific requirements. Notwithstanding, efforts should be made to ensure that recruitment services are given greater lead-time either to initiate active recruitment at an earlier stage or to have the information required for updating rosters on the basis of forecasts.

46. The distinction between short and long-term assignments should be maintained. For long-term assignments, it might be desirable to institute systematic performance appraisal reviews. It may also be desirable to ensure a more systematic involvement of country representatives and other outposted agency personnel in the compilation of rosters as well as in the active recruitment process. As concerns short-term assignments, there seems to be inadequate co-ordination among United Nations agencies. Agencies may wish to review this issue particularly as it concerns terms of employment.

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