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P O L I C Y

OTHER FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES

UNITED NATIONS FUND FOR POPULATION ACTIVITIES

Report of the Executive Director

on support to contraceptive research and development

Summary

This report is being submitted to the Governing Council in response to paragraph 9 of its decision 81/7, Part I, in which the Governing Council requested the Executive Director to "(a) undertake a comprehensive review of needs and opportunities in the field of contraceptive research and development which would address, inter alia, (i) the question of identifying those activities as a category separate from other intercountry activities, (ii) the question of what set percentage of the Fund's intercountry activities, if any, should be earmarked for research programmes designed to develop and improve various kinds of contraceptives, including natural family planning methods, and (iii) the question of continued Fund support - including the annual level of such support - for the World Health Organization Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction and other research programmes within the proposal presented, as requested by the Governing Council at its twenty-sixth session; and (b) explore with the World Bank and other interested agencies - World Health Organization, International Planned Parenthood Federation, and private foundations - how the World Bank proposal for the establishment of a joint board for health research could affect the contraceptive research field."

This report presents to the Council a number of policy options relating to the issues brought forth in the paragraph cited above, particularly those addressed in sub-paragraphs (i)-(iii), upon which the Council may wish to act.

Background information on the needs in the field of contraceptive research and development, the current status of contraceptive technology, present funding of contraceptive research and development and the opportunities for future UNPFA support to this field is contained in document DP/1982/36/Add. 1.

I. Introduction

1. This policy paper is being submitted in response to decision 81/7 of the Governing Council at its twenty-eighth session, and is based upon a review by UNFPA of the needs and opportunities in the field of contraceptive research and development, which was undertaken with the assistance of a consultant on current and future contraceptive technology and the advice of an Advisory Group on Contraceptive Development Research. This paper sets forth for the consideration of the Governing Council the objectives that UNFPA should attempt to meet in funding contraceptive research and development. It summarizes the present opportunities for research. It suggests criteria that might be used in making funding decisions among these opportunities. It discusses the question as to whether a fixed percentage of total programmable resources should be earmarked for this research and if so, what that percentage should be. It describes proposals for UNFPA contributions to the WHO Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (WHO/HRP). It suggests that other organizations also should receive UNFPA funds for research and development and the criteria applicable for appraising their requests for funds. Finally it presents several policy alternatives to the Governing Council for its determination.

2. This paper should be reviewed in conjunction with other UNFPA documents presented to the Governing Council at its twenty-ninth session: "Review and reassessment of the UNFPA programme for the period 1982-1985" (DP/1982/28) and "Report of the Executive Director on intercountry activities" (DP/1982/29 and DP/1982/29/Add. 1).

II. UNFPA objectives in the field

3. In following the direction of the Governing Council in decision 81/7 to give highest priority to supporting family planning programmes "including research into existing and new contraceptive methods and development of improved methods of contraception, including natural family planning methods," UNFPA could be directed, if the Council so decides, to undertake specific actions to enable it to play a major catalytic and leadership role in the field, over a sustained period of time, in collaboration with United Nations agencies and other organizations. UNFPA could, if the Council so decides, stimulate and co-ordinate research and development efforts by providing funding to appropriate organizations which seek to assist developing countries in making safe, effective and acceptable contraceptive technology available to meet the needs of their people.

4. The field of contraceptive research and development is very broad, ranging from basic research in human reproduction to follow-up studies after a new technology has been developed, tested, accepted and widely distributed. Within this range, UNFPA could be directed to concentrate upon development, introduction and adaptation of only those methods of fertility regulation that are sufficiently advanced to permit widespread clinical evaluation, and among these, only those particularly suited to the needs of developing countries. UNFPA objectives in the field of research, development of technology and introduction of new or improved technology might be limited to the short-term, i.e., three to five years, and the medium-term, i.e., five to ten years, as the preferred time spans for completion of any specific project for which funds are provided. These limits would have to be applied with discretion since sustained availability of funding is vital to any organization's general programme of development in which a

specific project may be pursued, and widespread introduction of a new or improved technology in a large number of countries could take more than ten years.

5. Two important areas of activity that are now beyond UNFPA's capacity should be noted. First, UNFPA is not funding fundamental research on human reproductive processes, even though the availability of new technology twenty or thirty years from today depends to a large extent upon this research. It is hoped that governments, especially those in developed countries, can continue and increase their support for this basic research. Second, UNFPA should not directly provide core support for long-term strengthening of research institutions. UNFPA should encourage governments of developing countries to mobilize additional scientists and institutions to address the many questions concerning contraceptive technology and should respond to requests for country programme funds to meet government needs in clinical testing and evaluation, acceptability studies or operational research in their own family planning programmes.

III. Opportunities for contraceptive research and development

6. UNFPA's review of the opportunities for new or improved contraceptives has concluded that several major scientific leads are promising in terms of wide application in developing countries over the next ten to fifteen years. In reaching this conclusion UNFPA considered certain criteria, including delivery at acceptable cost, acceptability to clients and health care providers, the requirement of minimal health care and service for use and low frequency of repeated use.

7. Several technologies now under development meet these criteria. They include improved oral products; injectables and implants; improved IUDs; male and female sterilization; post-coital agents; natural family planning methods; vaginal rings and barrier methods. Male methods, LHRH analogues and vaccines, while potentially important will require much more time to develop to the point of field application. It is not possible to assign precise priority ranking to these areas, given the intrinsic uncertainties of research and development programmes but the review by UNFPA found that these methods mentioned above correspond closely to those currently receiving priority attention from organizations active in the field.

IV. Funding for contraceptive research and development

8. Despite a growing demand worldwide for better contraceptive technology, the funding for this research is decreasing. Private sector investment from the pharmaceutical industry has declined, funding by governments of research aimed at meeting the needs of developing countries has not kept pace with the demand, and estimated total voluntary contributions from governments to the WHO/HRP declined by 10 per cent between 1980 and 1981, despite a one-time contribution of \$3 million by one donor in 1981.

9. UNFPA funding of contraceptive research and development will amount to approximately \$ 2.4 million in 1982, and of this the \$ 2 million to be provided to WHO/HRP is available for all the HRP's activities and is not limited to contraceptive research and development. This funding is categorized as an intercountry activity and falls

within the limitation of 25 per cent of total programmable resources fixed by the Governing Council. Continuity of funding is a necessity to research organizations to enable them to plan their activities which almost invariably require multi-year funding. A determination by the Governing Council that UNFPA should earmark a percentage of programmable resources each year for contraceptive research and development would be a stimulus to all the organizations in the field, and would serve to simplify UNFPA's programme planning and concentrate its efforts to determine the most effective uses of the earmarked funds. Applying a percentage for 1983 would be difficult because of other ongoing programmes, but a fixed percentage of 5 per cent of programmable resources could be set as a target for 1984 and future years.

Funding of the WHO/HRP

10. If the Council so decides, UNFPA might commit itself to providing long-term financial support to the WHO/HRP at an increased level, e.g., at least 3 per cent of programmable resources. Assuming programmable resources for 1982 of \$ 111 million, this would have been an increase from the \$ 2 million now allocated for 1982 to \$ 3.3 million, an increase of 65 per cent in the UNFPA contribution.

11. The Advisory Group recommended to the Executive Director that UNFPA's long-term funding support of the WHO/HRP should be contingent upon adjustments in the organizational arrangements of WHO/HRP to provide more active participation by its donors and recipients in determining the policies of the WHO/HRP and the Advisory Group suggested that an organizational structure similar to that of the World Bank/UNDP/WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) could help achieve the co-ordination and collaboration necessary for the entire field of contraceptive research and development.

12. In considering whether funding of the WHO/HRP by UNFPA should be contingent upon adjustments in the organizational structure of the WHO/HRP, the Governing Council should note that the suggested increase in UNFPA funding, while about 65 per cent compared to UNFPA's 1982 contribution, is an increment of only \$ 1.3 million. The total UNFPA contribution would still be less than the 1981 contribution to WHO/HRP of at least one of the donor governments. Thirteen governments contributed to WHO/HRP in 1981. From 1978 to 1981, fifteen governments contributed to the WHO/HRP and of these, ten are members of the Governing Council in 1982. The Council may wish to consider whether adjustments to the organizational structure of the WHO/HRP would be likely to influence donor governments in renewing or substantially increasing their long-term support of the WHO/HRP.

Funding for other organizations

13. If UNFPA is to play a wider role in the funding and co-ordination of contraceptive research and development, it may, if the Council so decides, also provide assistance to organizations in addition to WHO/HRP at a level of perhaps 2 per cent of programmable resources. Several organizations have programmes in which specific funding requests might meet certain criteria concerning likelihood of success of the research, time of completion of application phase of the contraceptive, relationship to needs of developing countries, etc., as more fully described in the support paper to this document (DP/1982/36/Add. 1). Support to other organizations would increase the number and availability of internationally sponsored testing facilities.

Funding for country programmes

14. In addition to these intercountry activities, UNFPA, as directed by the Governing Council, gives priority to funding contraceptive research and development at the country level as part of governments' family planning programmes. Funds for clinical testing and evaluation, adaptation and acceptability studies, operational research or for improvement or establishment of regulatory standards of safety and efficacy of contraceptives can be allocated within the amounts available from UNFPA for a country programme. UNFPA basic needs assessments and programming exercises will give greater emphasis to identifying needs for contraceptive research and development within country programmes. Co-ordination and collaboration with WHO will be increased to ensure that country level research activities in the WHO/HRP complement the country programme funded by UNFPA. When UNFPA is so requested by governments, WHO/HRP will serve as executing agency for UNFPA-funded country projects, as has occurred in several country programmes in the past.

V. Summary and policy issues

Summary

15. The UNFPA review of needs and opportunities in the field of contraceptive research and development has demonstrated that there is an important need for increased research and development efforts and that there are obvious opportunities for this research. If UNFPA's funding of these activities were identified as a separate category within the Fund's intercountry programme, their importance would be stressed and the Governing Council might wish to direct the Fund to report upon this specific activity from time to time. Setting an annual percentage of programmable resources for research in developing and improving various kinds of contraceptives including natural family planning methods would provide the continuity in research important to its success. A decision of the Governing Council that UNFPA should provide 5 per cent of its total programmable resources to this research would mean a significant increase in the amount available from UNFPA, though the increment to the field as a whole would be modest. Earmarking 5 per cent of programmable resources for this purpose for 1984 and thereafter would have minor effect on UNFPA support to country programmes but might require increasing the 25 per cent limitation on allocations to intercountry activities by 2 or 3 per cent.

16. If the Governing Council were to fix the annual level of UNFPA funding to the WHO/HRP at 3 per cent of total programmable resources, this would mean an approximate 65 per cent increase in the previous level of funding from UNFPA and would give the WHO/HRP a helpful multi-year commitment.

17. As to subsection (b) of section 9 of decision 81/7, UNFPA understands that the World Bank has never prepared a proposal for a joint board for health research nor has it received any such proposal from any other organization. If the Governing Council decides that a co-sponsorship arrangement similar to that of the World Bank/UNDP/WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases is necessary and appropriate in connexion with an increased UNFPA contribution to the WHO/HRP, the Executive Director will then consult with WHO and other interested agencies on possible arrangements for co-sponsorship.

18. The field of contraceptive research and development is complex and the Governing Council should consider this report as only a first step in addressing the questions of UNFPA's role in the field, the direction that research and the funding of research should take, and whether adjustments to the organization of the WHO/HRP are necessary if UNFPA is to make a long-term commitment to contributing to WHO/HRP. UNFPA has had only the most preliminary discussions with WHO on whether adjustments to the organization of the WHO/HRP are needed or would be beneficial and the World Health Organization and its governing bodies will undoubtedly review carefully whatever decisions the Governing Council may make that affect UNFPA's future contributions to the WHO/HRP.

Policy issues

19. The Governing Council may wish to consider the following issues:

- . The Governing Council may wish to approve or amend the statement of UNFPA objectives (Section II) or the criteria for determining opportunities for research (Section III) or the list of technologies meeting these criteria (Section III).

- . The Governing Council may wish to direct UNFPA to earmark a percentage of programmable resources for allocation to intercountry activities in contraceptive research and development each year.

- . If it decides that a percentage should be so earmarked for contraceptive research and development, the Governing Council may wish to fix that percentage at 5 per cent or a higher or lower percentage.

- . The Governing Council may wish to direct UNFPA to contribute a fixed percentage of UNFPA's programmable resources to the WHO/HRP in future years and if so the Council may wish to fix that amount at 3 per cent or a higher or lower percentage.

- . The Governing Council may wish to direct UNFPA to allocate up to 2 per cent of its programmable resources to other organizations in the field.

- . The Governing Council may wish to direct UNFPA to make no further contribution to the WHO/HRP, leaving to governments the question of their future funding of WHO/HRP.

- . The Governing Council may wish to direct the Executive Director to consult with the World Health Organization and other organizations on arrangements for co-sponsoring of the WHO/HRP if the Governing Council believes that such a co-sponsorship would have long-term benefits to the WHO/HRP by increasing financial support of the WHO/HRP from its government donors.

20. UNFPA believes that having considered these issues the Governing Council may wish to direct UNFPA to earmark 5 per cent of its programmable resources from 1984 onward for intercountry activities in contraceptive research and development; within this amount to earmark up to 2 per cent of programmable resources for allocations to contraceptive research and development by organizations other than WHO/HRP in 1984 and future years; to continue UNFPA support to the WHO/HRP and to contribute \$ 2 million to the WHO/HRP in 1983 and 3 per cent of programmable resources in 1984 and thereafter. The Governing Council may wish to consider at its thirtieth session the issue of linking the annual UNFPA contribution to WHO/HRP to changes in the WHO/HRP structure when it may have before it the views of donors to the WHO/HRP and of WHO and other organizations on the necessity and appropriateness of a co-sponsorship of the WHO/HRP and the prospect of increased contributions from governments to the WHO/HRP if a co-sponsorship is arranged.