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PROGRAMME PLANNING: THE THIRD PROGRAMMING CYCLE, 1982-1986 COUNTRY AND INTERCOUNTRY PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

Report on implementation of country programmes, 1982

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Report of the Administrator

Summary

This report is prepared in accordance with Governing Council decision 81/15 (E/1981/61/Rev.1) which endorsed the Administrator's proposal to submit to the Governing Council an annual progress report on the implementation of the various country programmes, highlighting significant developments in selected programmes.

An outline is provided on the status of country programme implementation and review in the 33 recipient countries and territories of the Asia and the Pacific region. During 1982, 22 countries or territories held some form of periodical reviews of their ongoing programmes. This paper highlights the results of: (a) a representative mid-term review (Indonesia); (b) a representative review in the first year of country programme implementation (Pakistan); (c) other special country reviews with ad hoc timing (Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Viet Nam); (d) the review of the intercountry programme; and finally (e) the results of the Bureau's Selected Project Implementation Review Exercise (SPIRE) which dealt, across the board, with monitoring of remedial action in respect of operational projects.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Governing Council, by decisions 80/7 and 81/15, invited the Administrator to report on a selective basis concerning reviews of country programme implementation. Within the Asia and Pacific region there are 33 recipient countries of UNDP technical assistance where the Governments and the Resident Representatives periodically review activities. The timing and form of these reviews is individually designed to suit the special circumstances of each situation, and the particular programme of UNDP assistance. In addition, the regional or intercountry programme of UNDP assistance is also systematically reviewed.

2. Of the 33 recipient countries and territories, 31 have prepared country programmes which have been approved by the Governing Council. The other countries or territories are being assisted with Governing Council endorsement but do not have country programmes due to the relatively small amount of assistance being provided or because of special circumstances which make multiyear programming difficult or inappropriate.

3. An integral part of the preparation of any country programme is a review of the ongoing programme. At the May 1982 meeting, ten Asian and Pacific country programmes were approved by the Governing Council; six were approved at the February 1983 meeting. In addition, six country programmes will be considered for approval at the thirtieth session. Of these, only two are first country programmes. Thus, in the other cases there had been a systematic review of the ongoing programme conducted jointly by the Government and the UNDP Resident Representative.

4. The periodical review of an ongoing programme has been foreseen by the Governing Council, in its decision 81/15, as an important instrument in ensuring continuous and flexible programming. During 1982, 22 Asian and Pacific countries held such reviews. In line with paragraph 25 of document DP/518, and Council decision 81/15, the following pages will highlight selected individual programme reviews which will be of interest to the Council as indicative of evolving processes and trends in the implementation and the review of country programmes in the region.

(a) Indonesia: mid-programme review

5. One of the more detailed in-depth reviews was carried out in Indonesia in October 1982. This was the second review of the ongoing country programme (1979-1983) and had the full participation of the Government authorities, including the technical ministries. The Resident Representative and his programme staff, representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization, International Labour Organisation, World Health Organization, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Children's Fund and the World Bank, and the managers or Chief Technical Advisers of the UNDP-funded projects participated in reviews. In addition, one bilateral donor, through its embassy, participated in one portion of the review concerning a sector of mutual involvement.

6. During the review of the Indonesia country programme, the following aspects were examined: (a) overall future directions of the programmes; (b) financial status; (c) relation to intercountry programme; (d) technical co-operation among developing countries; (e) Government management and execution of United Nations

projects; (f) use of international experts, national experts, consultants, and Government counterpart personnel; (g) training of Government officials; (h) project formulation and design and implementation modalities; and (i) joint programming of United Nations resources. Each topic was introduced by an appropriate Government or United Nations system official and, in many cases, a paper had been prepared on the topic. This set the basis for a meaningful discussion leading to decisions for action, as required, in each subject area.

7. Although the nature of the review precluded any immediate tangible results, several important recommendations were made concerning most of the topics covered by the review, particularly the country programme content. A specific recommendation was made for joint programming of United Nations system resources available to Indonesia.

8. Furthermore, as a result of the review, the Government of Indonesia decided that Government execution of projects as well as the use of national experts should be more actively pursued in the future. The direction of the third country programme was discussed extensively and a recommendation was made that the country programme formulation would have to strike a desirable balance between pre-investment types of projects on the one hand and human resources and manpower development on the other.

9. In addition to the subject area discussions, the review process also included Sectoral Working Committees which reviewed the overall relevance of the UNDP programme in the respective sectors and examined the ongoing projects as well as proposals for new projects or extensions.

10. These sector reviews resulted in the establishment of a priority pipeline both in respect of proposed project extensions and new proposals. As a result, a number of marginal project proposals were removed from the pipeline.

(b) Pakistan: first-year programme review

11. Pakistan presents an example of a slightly different approach designed for reviewing a recently approved UNDP country programme. This programme covers the period 1982-1986 and was approved in May 1982. A review was held in November 1982. Although this was only six months after approval, it was about one year after the actual preparation of the programme. The review was convened by the most senior level Government official concerned with UNDP. The entire ongoing programme at the project level was examined.

12. The Government itself set the criteria for examining the ongoing programme. It indicated that, in view of resource constraints, UNDP inputs must be used judiciously and in needy areas and that projects which were not producing planned outputs or were dragging on due to a lack of proper Government support were to be considered for termination. This criterion provided the basis for making a number of project-specific management decisions during the review. A separate review session was held with the same participants to examine the pipeline projects in the approved country programme. This was also conducted on a project-by-project basis. Decisions were reached concerning the priority ranking of pipeline projects. Project proposals which, due to changed circumstances, were no longer considered viable or needed were deleted from the pipeline.

13. It may be of interest to note that of the 62 operational projects reviewed in Pakistan, 27.4 per cent were evaluated as already having tangible impact, 45.1 per cent as progressing satisfactorily, 19.5 per cent as problematic and 3.2 per cent as failures. Three projects, or 4.8 per cent, defied classification. Although the overall rating of the performance of UNDP-funded projects is positive, both the Government of Pakistan and UNDP are now focussing on further improvement in the quality and design of new project concepts being prepared for UNDP funding.

(c) Country programmes: special reviews

14. Some country programmes, because of particular circumstances, are being reviewed in a systematic manner more frequently than once a year. This was the case in 1982 for Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Viet Nam. In the case of Afghanistan, the process was a continuation of earlier programme and project reviews, to ensure operational validity as well as any pragmatic modifications required in respect of ongoing and planned activities.

15. The Government of Bangladesh, in 1982, undertook to reduce the size of its Annual Development Programme to bring it in line with realistically projected resource availability, and in order to restore equilibrium to its public finances. In that context, and similar to exercises being undertaken in respect of other aid programmes, UNDP and the Ministry of Finance instituted quarterly reviews to screen and streamline the UNDP-assisted projects and project components in Bangladesh. It is considered that even more relevant future projects are emerging from this process.

16. In Viet Nam, since 1981, reviews have been conducted every six months. These have made a definite contribution to establishing effective management of a complex and varied programme of assistance and to strengthening the involvement of all levels of Government in its implementation. They have ensured that projects involving more than one Government Implementing Agency have reached their objectives in an integrated manner. They have also allowed UNDP to support a particular Government Implementing Agency in its efforts to get the necessary inputs, be they logistical or construction materials, from a national central procurement agency.

(d) Intercountry programme reviews

17. Pursuant to a request made by the Governments at the February 1981 Meeting of Development Assistance Co-ordinators in Asia and the Pacific, which was subsequently endorsed at the twenty-eighth session of the Governing Council, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific is engaged in a review of the ongoing Regional Programme in preparation for the mid-term review of the Programme by the Aid Co-ordinators of the Region, who will meet in the fall of 1983 in Bangkok.

18. This review is planned to cover 75 per cent of the value of the ongoing programme and is being conducted in full collaboration with Governments, United Nations system agencies and the UNDP Field Offices. The process of field consultations for this review was initiated with a meeting of selected Principal Project Representatives in Bangkok, in October 1982, where they were requested to consult with Governments to solicit comments concerning the programme. Apart from this

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continuing consultative process, the review will, at the formal level, draw heavily on the results of ongoing monitoring activity. In the year ending June 1983, 43 tripartite reviews of intercountry programme projects will have been conducted; 32 more are scheduled during the rest of 1983 and early 1984. In addition, 18 large-scale projects will have been the subject of major review missions or evaluations during that period. Included are some of the largest and most complex of the joint undertakings with the Governments of the region, for example, the Asian Pacific Development Centre, the Mekong Programme activities, a cluster of projects in the labour sector, and a major programme in the field of educational innovation.

19. In order to obtain a representative sample of projects and activities for review, projects possessing the following criteria have been selected for intensive review both at headquarters and in the field. The criteria are:

(a) Projects with a duration of seven years or more, taking into account earlier phases;

(b) Projects which have ceilings for the third cycle of \$1 million or more;

(c) Projects to which the total UNDP contribution through 1981 was \$2 million or more and

(d) Projects with networking arrangements for their implementation or with formal intergovernmental supervisory bodies.

20. This review will provide Aid Co-ordinators with specific issues for practical action intended to enhance the implementation and the impact of the projects which will be active in the years 1983-1986.

21. In addition to the formal review described above, intergovernmental consultative meetings have been held with the island countries of the Pacific and the Directors-General of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, comprising Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. Occasion was taken also at various gatherings of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) of Asia and the Pacific to review the specific programme earmarked by the Council to assist these countries in their development efforts. Where such facilities exist, the reviews are conducted with the actual participation of, or in consultation with, the intergovernmental project groups.

22. While most of the foregoing should be seen in the context of the request made by the Aid Co-ordinators to provide them with information to review satisfactorily the ongoing intercountry programme, a recent working-level review has also been conducted with agency partners to adjust the programme to the realities of the changing financial situation. This review was conducted not only on projects currently in operation but also on projects anticipated to be approved and implemented in 1984. The purpose of this specialized review was to obtain, firsthand, from the agencies, undertakings with regard to the implementation of specific projects so that the programme to be continued might avoid some of the undue delays that sometimes attend intercountry programmes.

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23. At the project level, the focus of the review exercise has been on examining the relevance and usefulness of specific project objectives, activities and outputs to the recipient Governments, with specific attention being given to any measurable project impact. Particular consideration has been given to the regional rationale for project undertakings, and to the advantages and disadvantages of an intercountry approach as a means of meeting project objectives. Finally, the reviews have also considered the problems in project implementation and the desirable linkages between regional and ongoing country-level activities. At a programme level, an attempt has been made to assess the experience to date in the application of the new modalities of implementation identified and endorsed at the New Delhi Meeting of Aid Co-ordinators, which was convened in February 1981. These include a shift from institutional to programme support on the establishment of networking relationships between national institutions and facilities.

24. In overall terms, therefore, this review, using the widest variety of monitoring and evaluation techniques and opportunities, should produce a substantial understanding of the complex process involved in developing an effective intercountry programme.

(e) Selected Project Implementation Review Exercise

25. Total programme reviews cannot be considered in isolation from project monitoring and evaluation, which are often the sources of the issues or problem areas brought to the consideration of programme reviews. During 1982, some 400 Tripartite Reviews were held throughout the region.

26. In addition to the programme and project reviews, the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific conducted a Selected Project Implementation Review Exercise (SPIRE), which examined 95 projects in 25 countries, the implementation of which involves 16 executing agencies. The exercise covered approximately 15 per cent of the ongoing projects, which account for about 15 per cent of programme resources. The exercise was designed to identify projects which were encountering operational difficulty and, thereafter, to trace the outcome of the remedial actions undertaken through the regular tripartite process.

27. The exercise was carried out by the Governments, the Resident Representatives and the executing agencies. The SPIRE review fulfilled several objectives: it served as a sensitivity test in the effectiveness of the regular monitoring procedures; it illustrated and illuminated the root causes of project difficulty, be they in the design process, in the nature of the inputs or otherwise; and it led to the resolution of many of the difficulties. As a result of the exercise, implementation problems were resolved for 60 large-scale and 10 small-scale projects.

28. Country projects covered by this special exercise were found to have both design and implementation problems. Of the total, 33 large-scale and three small-scale projects had design deficiencies which were negatively affecting project implementation and objectives. In the course of the SPIRE review, action was accelerated in all cases to redesign the projects.

29. The SPIRE review definitely contributed to identifying implementation problems, determining required corrective actions and assuring that these corrective actions received priority attention. While the primary impact of all of this has been, as it was designed to be, at the level of specific projects, the results of the exercise also present valuable information which can help recipient Governments, the executing agencies and UNDP to make across-the-board improvements in future project design and implementation.
