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SUPPORT

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

EVALUATION

Report of the Administrator

Summary

This is the fourth report of the Administrator on evaluation, responding to Governing Council decision 83/12 of 24 June 1983, which requested information on the arrangements for the evaluation of the Programme. The report deals with the status of the steps taken by the Administrator to improve evaluation policies and procedures. It also responds to the issues raised in Governing Council resolution 86/28. These issues are: (a) harmonization of monitoring, evaluation and reporting procedures throughout the system; (b) examination of criteria used in selecting projects for evaluation; (c) integration in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) of the evaluation results; and (d) strengthening Government evaluation capacities.

The results of the UNDP review of evaluations in the field of sustainability, training, and women in development, are included, along with a brief status report on thematic and ex-post evaluations.

As in the first report (DP/1984/18), the attention of Council members is drawn to reports of Programme achievements by the Regional Directors for their respective regions with regard to specific evaluation activities conducted by them.

INTRODUCTION

1. The report of the Administrator on evaluation has in previous years reflected the predominant concerns of installing, supporting and testing a revised monitoring, evaluation and reporting system applicable to all UNDP-financed projects and programmes. Attention has also been directed at reviewing output and performance at the various stages of the tripartite evaluation system. Reports were provided to the Governing Council on the status of thematic evaluations and on activities reviewing the role of UNDP in strengthening Government evaluation capacity. While many of these activities continued as planned through 1986, UNDP has also responded to other issues raised in Governing Council decision 86/28.

2. The key issues raised in the decision were:

(a) Integration of the results of evaluations into UNDP activities;

(b) Intensification of the attention to strengthening Government evaluation capacities;

(c) Continuation of efforts to contribute to the harmonization of monitoring, evaluation and reporting procedures throughout the system; and

(d) Examination of the criteria used in selecting projects for evaluation.

3. This report outlines the response of UNDP to these important concerns and provides additional status reports on other activities concerning evaluation in UNDP.

I. STRENGTHENING AND HARMONIZATION OF EVALUATION OF MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REPORTING PROCEDURES

4. The 18-month field-test of procedures on monitoring, evaluation and reporting, along with consideration of their suitability as a basis for harmonization, has concluded with an evaluation of its process, results and problems by an independent consultant. The report was shared with the agencies and the findings, recommendations and consequent follow-up was extensively discussed at the October 1986 Inter-Agency Working Group meeting on evaluation. The main findings of this report were:

(a) There is, notwithstanding some shortfall in compliance, a genuine perception in the field of a workable monitoring and evaluation system and its importance;

(b) The increasingly important role of national project officials must be addressed in further developments of the system;

(c) There is an understanding in the field of the importance of the design-evaluation linkage;

(d) There was, with few exceptions, a serious absence of feedback from agencies to the project level;

(e) There is a need to elaborate further on the requirements of the system, as applicable to regional and global projects;

(f) There have been some improvements in in-depth evaluation, although there continues to be room for further development; and

(g) Training will be the most important supporting action required for successful follow-up of the introduction of the revised system.

5. The consultant's report also stated that the system, as developed and applied to UNDP technical co-operation projects in the field, contains within it the basis for further harmonization of monitoring and evaluation activities among United Nations organizations. Continuing efforts will be needed by all parties to foster this development and to progress beyond the present level to encompass eventually the wide variety of other activities undertaken.

6. The UNDP/agency drafting group created by the Inter-Agency Group meeting completed the necessary revisions of reporting formats. The final version of the revised procedures was completed, as planned, before the end of 1986 and is to be issued in March 1987.

7. UNDP believes that most of the issues involved in facilitating the process to harmonize monitoring, evaluation and reporting procedures as applicable to system-wide field projects in technical co-operation have been examined. Many agencies perceive no difficulty in confirming the use of the jointly developed system for field projects in technical co-operation. However, some of the larger agencies have not yet confirmed that they will undertake harmonization of the major procedural elements.

8. UNDP aimed the initial efforts at training the officials responsible in UNDP field offices for programme management, project design and evaluation. It now seeks to extend training efforts to encompass other partners in the tripartite system, principally Government officials. UNDP has also facilitated interagency collaborative training efforts by disseminating information of use to agencies that provide training programmes and also to those that require them.

II. CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF PROJECTS FOR EVALUATION

9. Pursuant to Governing Council decision 86/28, UNDP has examined the criteria in force for the selection of ongoing projects to be evaluated.

10. Current policies and the procedural criteria governing ongoing project evaluations were carefully examined. Performance of the use of these criteria in determining actual evaluation practices was then analysed and reviewed. A summary of findings and proposals for future action based on the analysis was then elaborated.

11. In brief, the UNDP evaluation system as a whole seeks to serve three purposes:

- (a) Ensure the accountability of the Administrator to the Governing Council;
- (b) Support decision-making on current operations; and
- (c) Generate lessons for use in improving future activities.

12. The criteria used for selecting ongoing projects for evaluation come into play either where the projects cost over \$1 million; and/or (b) where other projects are evaluated because: (a) there are operational difficulties being experienced by projects; or (b) there is an anticipated cost or time over-run; or (c) the projects are innovative or complex.

13. These criteria were then assessed in terms of (a) potential coverage provided; (b) acceptance (i.e., usage); (c) manageability; (d) costs to the programme; and (e) utility.

14. The analysis indicates that the criteria appear to be useful and accepted, and provide both potential and actual coverage of the entire Programme. The conclusion is that the criteria themselves do not need to be changed; what apparently continues to need emphasis, and indeed re-emphasis, is that ongoing project evaluation in a decentralized system must be planned and managed. A two-stage process has been introduced to put this into operation. As a first step in evaluation and planning, field offices will list those projects which qualify under the criteria. The second stage calls for each project so qualifying to be assessed as to its specific need for evaluation in the prevailing circumstances, and therefore a decision to be taken as to whether to evaluate it or not. This mandatory verification needs to be carefully performed so that accountability is assured. There is also a requirement that explicit justification be provided via the Regional Bureaux whenever the list of projects selected for evaluation is not identical to the list of projects eligible for evaluation.

15. This approach avoids the automatic evaluation of projects triggered by the routine application of criteria, and replaces it with a selective process designed to make evaluation more cost effective. It also provides management with a clearer understanding of the decision-making process in evaluation planning.

16. The selection criteria, however, encourage a project-by-project approach to evaluation planning. Seen from a programme or strategic basis, the outcomes of such evaluations are disparate, and the results of individual evaluations are not easy to aggregate. An examination of a cross section of evaluations pertaining to any one country does not identify a group of major policy problems which programmes can then address.

17. Evaluation planning, guided by a desire to explore or understand issues, can assist in identifying both positive and negative development experiences and in isolating the factors for the success of effective technical co-operation efforts. In this way, the lessons learned from experience go beyond the mere avoidance of error.

18. To a certain extent, ex-post and thematic evaluations provide lessons from experience. Yet, since thematic evaluations are normally organized on a global and more sporadic basis, they are often unable to provide the situation-specific, direct feedback, which are particularly required by Governments and programme/project managers at the country level. Hence, issue-oriented evaluation of ongoing projects would be an important complement to the current decision-making orientation of evaluations.

19. Programme managers will be encouraged to use evaluations to respond to evolving policy or information needs in their countries on issues relevant to the programme: examples are the use of evaluations in clusters of projects dealing with policy-dialogue, institution-building, human resources development, environmental policy, etc. This approach, while retaining formal criteria, would enable them to be operationally justified in terms of programme needs. The analysis conducted so far indicates that emphasis should be put not on the criteria for evaluations, but on the purposes of evaluations, their conduct, rigour of performance and the uses to which the information produced is to be put.

III. INTEGRATION OF EVALUATION RESULTS INTO UNDP ACTIVITIES

20. The Administrator has previously reported on the generally satisfactory status of follow-up to decisions of tripartite reviews and to the findings of evaluation missions. However, in response to the need for greater emphasis on the valuable role of evaluation in programme and project planning, urged by the Working Group of the Committee of the Whole (February-March 1986), UNDP recognizes that existing feedback mechanisms need further detailing and procedural specification to achieve the fullest possible utilization of results.

21. The proposals to strengthen these mechanisms recognize that monitoring and evaluation in UNDP are distinct but closely interrelated processes. Feedback mechanisms, therefore, are intended to operate at three broad levels: ongoing and follow-up projects; the linkage of project evaluations to programmes; and at a sector or functional level, requiring storage and utilization of thematic-level lessons derived from either aggregating project evaluations or from thematic or ex-post evaluations. These mechanisms will utilize the various monitoring and evaluation instruments stipulated in the UNDP evaluation system.

22. The recent independent evaluation of the UNDP revised Policy and Procedures Manual, discussed at the October 1986 Inter-Agency Working Group meeting on evaluation, identified shortcomings in feedback to projects on issues raised in progress and internal evaluation reports. These shortcomings in the performance of the monitoring and evaluation system have been addressed in detail in the final revision of the relevant sections of the Policy and Procedures Manual, by providing instructions and a format to ensure agency/UNDP feedback.

23. At the level of ongoing projects, evaluation findings are fed directly into the follow-up project to which they relate. However, the larger problem to be tackled is how best to identify, synthesize and feed findings of more general relevance into planning and managing of other future and ongoing projects. This

has to be achieved in a cost-effective manner and also with due regard to the substantial volume of operational evaluation activity in UNDP.

24. The following steps, therefore, are envisaged in the proposals being developed to enhance the entire feedback process:

(a) Each monitoring and evaluation instrument will have specific feedback instructions;

(b) Project appraisers in UNDP, both at headquarters and in the field offices, and tripartite review meetings, will all have ready access to monitoring and evaluation findings;

(c) Existing programme advisory notes and technical advisory notes will be reviewed and made more easily accessible; and

(d) Plans will be developed for the synthesis of lessons learned from project evaluations, albeit with due considerations to staff and workload. In this fashion, feedback will be enhanced both directly to ongoing or successor projects and indirectly to new projects and programmes. The use of this feedback will also be periodically reviewed to ascertain how well the system is functioning.

IV. STRENGTHENING OF GOVERNMENT EVALUATION CAPACITY

25. This issue has been addressed at two levels: (a) enhancing and supporting the involvement of Governments in evaluating UNDP-assisted projects; and (b) strengthening Government capacities to monitor and evaluate their own development plans and programmes.

26. To facilitate greater Government involvement and in recognition of the role of national project management, UNDP field offices have provided training and orientation to Government officials in over 50 countries. In further support of this effort, UNDP intends to develop a handbook containing the core requirements and guidelines for courses of this type. The guidelines will be developed in conjunction with the UNDP Training Section by a training expert from a developing country with experience in training Government officials. Field offices will also be encouraged to provide more training and orientation. Agency training institutions will also be used in this regard. Another area that continues to require attention is the need for greater involvement of national expertise in the evaluation of UNDP-assisted projects. Indicative planning figure (IPF) resources and field office support can be provided to Governments wishing to evaluate the larger national projects, which encompass the UNDP-assisted effort. The findings of such independent national evaluations should be used in augmenting the findings of evaluations of UNDP-assisted projects.

27. In situations where national monitoring and evaluation institutions have yet to evolve, UNDP has assisted in identifying project needs through the mechanism of a national level workshop involving decision-makers who will manage the monitoring and evaluation process. The advance identification of potential operational

constraints by those involved in implementing such systems will enable project designers to anticipate such eventualities and enhance the sustainability of the effects of such projects.

28. UNDP and the executing agencies continue to support Government efforts to strengthen their capability to monitor and evaluate their own projects and programmes. At the third Inter-Agency Working Group meeting on evaluation in 1985, a working group was informally created to work out a programme in which organizations of the United Nations system could collaborate to address the issue of strengthening Government evaluation capacity. The emergence of an actual programme continues, however, to be elusive because most activities undertaken are sector specific, reflecting the mandate of each of the organizations.

29. UNDP currently finances 35 projects in the strengthening of Government central evaluation capability in the context of plan implementation development and aid co-ordination. These projects are periodically reviewed by the Central Evaluation Office in an effort to identify common problems which can be addressed collectively. New projects in this area are also assisted at the formulation and design stage. UNDP also actively participates in the system-wide panel on Monitoring and Evaluation of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination Task Force on Rural Development.

V. REVIEW OF PROJECT EVALUATIONS

30. As in previous years, UNDP has examined the methodologies and findings of evaluations carried out in current and prior years. These reviews involved desk studies and consultations with UNDP staff. The reviews covered evaluations dealing with the three major areas of concern: the sustainability of project results; training as an aspect of human resources development; and the issues affecting the role of women in development.

A. The sustainability of project results

31. The concern for sustainability addresses the question of whether or not the results generated by UNDP technical co-operation projects and programmes are utilized on a continuing and durable basis; it has been dealt with in various ways by UNDP. Sustainability in the technical co-operation context is taken to be the capacity of the target groups or institutions assisted by UNDP to use project results on a continued and effective basis.

32. Some independent country programme evaluations that have been undertaken have dealt with these issues in the context of the domestic environment which faces institution-building projects. These evaluations noted a variety of long-term institutions requesting continuing assistance. This assistance, taken for granted in the past, was being increasingly questioned. The issue has moved from one of whether or not to extend support to these institutions, to one of whether such institutions can be afforded at all, given the current demands of their environment. In some cases, the proliferation of institutions with similar or overlapping functions was clearly found to affect their sustainability.

33. UNDP has reviewed the extent to which evaluations of ongoing projects have sought to address sustainability. It is clear that there is a perceptible increase in the number of evaluations that addressed the continued viability of project results. Many evaluations, although hampered by the inadequacy of baseline data, drew attention repeatedly to the critical importance of careful project design to enduring technical, administrative and financial project success. Intercountry project evaluations sought to inquire into the viability of the institutions created by such projects, their future financing, their intrinsic continued contribution to the needs of the region, and above all, the continued financing for the bureaucracies needed to operate these institutions. Specific follow-up action based on the consequent recommendations have, in the main, been addressed.

34. Ongoing evaluations have identified the most important factor determining project success was the commitment of Governments to supporting the institutions assisted. This factor, in turn, doubtless affects the sustainability of results after projects are completed. Evaluations have also indicated the often optimistic nature of the diagnosis of constraints facing Governments undertaking the necessary commitments. This resulted in underestimating the complexity of the administrative, managerial and political issues involved. These factors affect implementation and project outcome as much as they do effective utilization of project results after project completion.

35. The analysis of sustainability has been an important part of the thematic evaluations. It was an important element in the examination of UNDP efforts in agricultural and industrial research and in vocational training capabilities. These thematic evaluations, which were concerned with improving future operations, sought to identify the most important pre-conditions to ensure continued project success.

36. Since actions which are to be taken after project completion and which affect the development of institutions are the responsibility of the recipient authorities, many of the recommendations about the factors affecting sustainability were addressed to Governments. The specific recommendation depended on the recipient institutions themselves, the technological environment of these institutions, the capability of Governments to ensure the payment of recurrent costs, and social and cultural factors.

37. The evaluations referred to in paragraph 35 found that, in fact, a substantial proportion of the institutions were ongoing and active after termination of UNDP assistance. Many were also found to have benefited the countries assisted. However, attention was drawn to the continuing problems that beset the further development and growth of these institutions. A commonly agreed theme in these evaluations was that the degree of autonomy of an institution, as judged by the status of its senior management and governing body within the Government hierarchy, often affected its further development. Institutions preoccupied with seeking to stimulate a demand for their activities were often stretched beyond their capabilities. This resulted in a restructuring of priorities, which often adversely affected the original purpose for which the institution was established.

38. The ability of these institutions to plan for their own incremental growth was judged to be a crucial factor in their achievement of a degree of self-reliance. Growth which was based either on an established strategy or in response to changes in external considerations, such as client demand, suffered if there was inadequate management and non-recognition of the evolution needed in the skill composition of those institutions. Also identified was the continuing need for Governments to allocate increasing budgetary resources if a key institution is to respond to new and growing demands and not stagnate. Attention was drawn to the other precondition, now equally well known, that attractive conditions of employment are needed to deter the high occupational mobility enjoyed by highly trained personnel.

39. More recent thematic evaluations have also stressed the importance of addressing issues of sustainability during the life of a project. In the field of aquaculture development, it was recognized that projects need to be monitored to ensure that assistance does not overemphasize bio-technology and training at the expense of considerations affecting production, marketing and social and cultural factors. Research results obtained during the course of such projects must be judged on the effectiveness of their usage in extension work at the pond level. Technical backstopping and supervision must seek to identify alternative approaches, whenever necessary, to reach beneficiary groups. Similarly, the need to acquaint those who make national agricultural policy, with the implications of this added productive potential, should not be neglected in any aquaculture project that is designed to have sustainable effects.

40. Two thematic evaluations in the external trade sector have also stressed that institutional capacity needs to be created if those who plan and carry out international trade are to be able to respond to changes in procedures and to information available about international trade. Therefore, project implementation has to be closely monitored to ensure that training, which has usually been the principal component of such projects, occurs in the context of a package of complementary efforts that seek to strengthen national capacities in both private and public sectors.

41. Procedural instructions for post-project monitoring of the actions undertaken by Governments to utilize project results effectively have existed for some time now. The instructions concern the role UNDP and/or the executing agencies can play in this regard. Information generated through these instructions has most significantly provided data on planned and actual investments following completed pre-feasibility studies.

42. The improved project formulation and design process should complement the concern for sustainability by assessing the specific types of support needed to ensure the continued use of project achievements after UNDP assistance is withdrawn. It is also anticipated that the improved country programming procedures will, in turn, identify such sectors where continuing attention needs to be paid to the issue of sustainable results.

43. UNDP recognizes that the sustainability of outcomes is a result influenced by a large number of variables which have to be addressed from its design, through its implementation and post-completion. UNDP will work towards improving its

understanding of the issues that ensure the continuation of the contribution that project results make to the related larger development effort. Improved formulation and design processes will, by clarifying the end-of-project status, contribute to the proper assessment of future roles of Governments and UNDP in the sustained use of project results. Ex-post evaluation activities will be increased and will complement efforts currently undertaken by thematic evaluations in this regard. Executing agencies have, in various interagency fora, welcomed this move. Ongoing evaluations of projects and programmes will further focus attention on whether project design has hindered or has assisted the eventual achievement of sustainability.

B. Training projects

44. Evaluations of projects concerned with training as an aspect of human resources development and with women as potential beneficiaries have also been reviewed. The findings of these pilot reviews must be tested against larger samples in order to ascertain whether more comprehensive studies are required.

45. The review of training projects across a wide variety of sectors indicated that the concentration was essentially on training per se, with less attention given to either manpower planning needs or to the subsequent utilization of trainees. The lesson to be learned here is that the sustainability of the results of sizeable training projects needs to be viewed at the level of the sector or of the economy itself, since the changes that can be brought about are determined to a significant extent by the infrastructure and the policy framework with which trained manpower operates. Many improvements in the design and implementation of these projects were, however, noted when the findings of these evaluations were in general compared to the findings of earlier thematic evaluations in the training field. The findings of this review have been taken into account in the critical analysis of the UNDP experience in Human Resources Development requested by Governing Council decision 86/14 of 27 June 1986.

C. Women in development

46. The principal finding of the review of projects with a potential to benefit women is that women's concerns are reflected in the evaluations of projects designed to achieve direct impact at the local level or on specific target groups and which operate in the more traditional domains of women's life, i.e., the social sectors and agriculture. Women's issues, however, still remain excluded from evaluations concerning developmental efforts at the macro-economic and sectoral levels, e.g., projects providing assistance to national development planning. While it was encouraging to note that women's issues seem to be raised as frequently as issues of beneficiaries in general, the discussions were not as systematic and analytic as other parts of the reports. Available empirical evidence does not permit a clear conclusion to be drawn about the importance of the composition of the evaluation team. Sometimes, the presence of a female evaluator mattered; at other times, it had no obvious bearing on the team's perspective of the project. The direct recommendations that arise from this and other preliminary

findings are commensurate with the emphasis UNDP places on the need to develop specific operational measures, guidelines and training to identify and record projects with planned or potential impact on the issue of women in development.

VI. OTHER EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

A. Thematic evaluations

47. The three thematic evaluations (Aquaculture, General System of Preferences, Trade Information System) scheduled to be completed in 1986 are all in the publication stage. The programme advisory notes relating to each of the studies are in draft and will be issued after review by user groups.

48. All three evaluations comment extensively on the adequacy, or otherwise, of their respective technical approaches; highlight the need for greater attention to end-user requirements, in both the public and private sectors; and call for more intensive monitoring of projects in their effort to achieve impact.

49. A fourth thematic evaluation on Rural Small Industrial Enterprises has concluded its first phase, and plans for the next phases are under review.

B. Ex-post evaluations

50. The first ex-post evaluation on the use and maintenance of sophisticated technology in meteorology has indicated that most of the equipment provided almost 10 years ago for national projects continues to be in reasonable use. There are, however, recurrent problems in obtaining spare parts because of many reasons, including shortages of foreign exchange. In the case of regional projects, however, more appropriate precautions should be taken to ascertain, in advance, the ability of countries to be fully supportive of complex technology used for regional meteorological data-gathering. The projects themselves were on the whole successful. It has to be recognized that all the projects reviewed were in operation prior to the comprehensive 1983 revised instructions on the identification, provision and use of equipment. The impact of these instructions will be reviewed in due course.

C. Country programme evaluations

51. Three independent evaluations of country programmes in three least developed countries (LDCs) have provided useful lessons for follow-up at the programme level and have provided experience in the conduct of these complex exercises. The lessons learned have been used to strengthen monitoring and evaluation in the country programme context. The sample to date is limited both in terms of programme size and complexity, and needs to be augmented by more evaluations.

