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SUPPORT

UNITED NATIONS FUND FOR POPULATION ACTIVITIES

DEVELOPMENT OF A SYSTEM FOR ATTRIBUTING INTERCOUNTRY ACTIVITIES
TO THE COUNTRIES THAT RECEIVE INTERCOUNTRY ASSISTANCE

Report of the Executive Director

SUMMARY

This report is being submitted to the Governing Council in response to decision 86/34 I, paragraph 6. This document examines several alternatives of a system which could be utilized for the attribution of intercountry activities to countries and proposes a system which has been applied for such attribution of intercountry activities supported by UNFPA in 1986. In addition, it provides background on the scope and evolution of UNFPA intercountry programming.

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INTRODUCTION

1. This report of the Executive Director is prepared in response to decision 86/34 I, paragraph 6, adopted by the Governing Council at its thirty-third session, which requested the Executive Director, inter alia "to develop a system for attributing intercountry activities, as far as possible, to the countries that receive intercountry assistance, identifying and assigning administrative activities presently charged to intercountry programmes to the administrative budget, and to present the system to the Governing Council at its thirty-fourth session (1987) for its consideration ...". During the past year, UNFPA carefully analysed its intercountry programme in order to devise a system of attribution that would be appropriate to the Fund's intercountry programme, administratively feasible to implement and would provide the Council with the information it requested. In researching possible systems that would meet the requirements of the Council, UNFPA conferred with other donors, seeking their advice and drawing upon their experiences in apportioning to countries those activities undertaken at a more general level of funding. The Fund also consulted with the various United Nations agencies, which execute the bulk of the UNFPA intercountry programme, to elicit their thoughts on the design and implementation of such a system.

2. With regard to that part of decision 86/34 I, paragraph 6, requesting that the Executive Director identify and assign administrative activities previously charged to intercountry programmes to the administrative budget, the Executive Director wishes to advise the Council that, as a result of the extensive revision of financial and personnel procedures that has taken place during the past two years and the directives of the Council concerning the use of project personnel, beginning 1 January 1987 all administrative activities are charged to the Fund's administrative and programme support services budget. Also, beginning 1 January 1987, no personnel costs at headquarters are charged to intercountry projects.

I. DEFINITION AND SCOPE

3. Intercountry activities are those undertakings which, because of their design, e.g., innovative or pilot projects, or substantive content, e.g., contraceptive research, and their potential benefit to a large number of countries are more appropriately funded on a broader basis than within the framework of a single country programme. The UNFPA intercountry programme consists of projects supported at two levels:

(a) Regional, that is projects focusing on the particular concerns of a specific geographic region, viz., Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and Mediterranean, and Europe;

(b) Interregional, that is projects having relevance, applicability and potential replicability in more than one region or in all regions and countries. In the past, UNFPA limited the designation "interregional" to those activities encompassing more than one but not all regions while the designation "global" was

reserved for projects which were world wide in scope. Over the years, the distinction has blurred for, in fact, most interregional activities have a world-wide focus. As a result, UNFPA is now designating intercountry projects either as regional or interregional and will no longer use the "global" designation.

4. The intercountry programme includes projects in all work plan categories, e.g., maternal and child health and family planning; information, education, and communication; basic data collection, etc.; and consists of four kinds of functional activities, namely, technical assistance and backstopping; training; research; and the exchange and dissemination of information. Frequently, a project may contain elements of several such functional activities. If an intercountry project includes elements of several work plan categories or of several functional categories, UNFPA's statistical reporting refers to the major work plan and functional categories.

5. Technical assistance and backstopping. Technical assistance and backstopping activities involve the provision of specialized advice to country programmes and projects, as necessary, to supplement and complement country level inputs. It is usually provided by advisers located in the region and, in some cases, by interregional advisers based at the United Nations headquarters or at the respective headquarters of the specialized agencies. Technical assistance and backstopping involves working with Governments and individuals who are concerned with the implementation of UNFPA-funded projects, assisting them in planning, organizing, monitoring and evaluating their technical co-operation needs, whether at the country level or at the regional level. Technical assistance and backstopping, on average, accounts for about 52 per cent of UNFPA's intercountry programme annually.

6. Training. In order to increase the supply of trained personnel in developing countries, UNFPA funds a wide range of training activities at the intercountry level. In 1986, it initiated, pending the approval of the thirty-fourth session of the Governing Council, a global training programme in population and development and it continues to provide assistance to the various regional and interregional demographic training and research centres as well as to a regional training centre in maternal and child health and family planning in the Africa region. While the goal of UNFPA is to assist countries in becoming self-reliant in training in all aspects of population matters, UNFPA recognizes that the support of intercountry training programmes is a practical interim measure to assist developing countries in building up a cadre of trained professionals in the population field. Training constitutes approximately 18 per cent of UNFPA's intercountry programme annually.

7. Research. Research supported by UNFPA under the intercountry programme is carried out mainly under the aegis of United Nations agencies and organizations and, to a lesser extent, by non-governmental organizations in conjunction with institutions in the developing world. Research pursued at the intercountry level is based upon UNFPA's assessments of aggregate needs identified at the country level as expressed in reports of expert groups and country needs assessment reports, as well as by observations of UNFPA and executing agency headquarters and field staff and by the countries themselves. Intercountry research is undertaken only when there is an indication that the results will be of use to a number of

countries within a region or in several regions. Such research is by its nature related to more than one country, e.g., to topics like contraceptive development or international migration, as well as to activities designed to test new methodological and conceptual approaches, e.g., the World Fertility Survey. Currently, the largest single research activity supported by UNFPA is the Fund's assistance, mandated by the Governing Council, to the World Health Organization Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction. The fact that intercountry research is carried out in selected countries has immediate benefit for these countries in terms of knowledge gained, institutional development and training of national personnel. On average, research accounts for 20 per cent of UNFPA's intercountry programme annually.

8. Information exchange. Information exchange and sharing of experience constitute an important activity in the population sector. Various documentation centres and clearinghouse activities supported by UNFPA have been developed to expedite this process. They serve an important role in backstopping national activities through circulation of population-oriented information and training materials. Also, from time to time, conferences are held on specific issues, e.g., the International Conference on Better Health for Women and Children through Family Planning to be held in Nairobi in October 1987. Information exchange activities comprise approximately 10 per cent of UNFPA's intercountry programme annually.

II. EVOLUTION OF THE INTERCOUNTRY PROGRAMME

9. When the Fund became operational in 1969, its first priority was to create awareness of the urgency of population issues and to build up an international capacity to deal with population matters. As a result, during the period from 1969 to 1973, intercountry activities annually averaged approximately 63 per cent of total programme expenditures. Gradually, the interest and capacity of countries to undertake population activities grew, a trend which was accelerated as a result of the global focus on population matters through the World Population Year of 1974 and the 1974 World Population Conference held at Bucharest. Since 1974, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of UNFPA funding to intercountry activities and a consequent increase in the proportion of UNFPA funding to country activities. At the same time, intercountry funding, which had initially been largely for awareness creation, shifted to such areas as technical assistance and backstopping and training.

10. Since 1975, UNFPA's intercountry programme has been a subject of special interest to the Governing Council. Document DP/1983/22, paragraphs 8 to 15, presents a comprehensive account of the reports of the Executive Director and the decisions of the Governing Council pertaining to intercountry programmes. The Council has recognized the necessity and validity of carrying out certain types of activities at the intercountry level and has acknowledged that intercountry funding is one of the essential inputs in order to meet countries' technical assistance and backstopping and training needs as well as to satisfy the requirement for certain types of research that can be pursued on a more cost effective basis at the intercountry level. The Council has also noted that intercountry funding provides

a suitable vehicle for pursuing innovative approaches in the population sector and for pilot and demonstration activities.

11. In reporting to the Governing Council on intercountry activities over the past 12 years, the Executive Director has, inter alia, presented strategy reports on the funding of intercountry programmes and on the criteria for selecting intercountry programmes that would receive UNFPA support. During the same period, the Governing Council, while urging the Executive Director to continue to reduce the proportion of programmable resources expended for intercountry activities, cautioned that such reductions should be effected "... bearing in mind the importance of global research projects of an innovative character and of other intercountry programmes of proven effectiveness" (decision 77/24 I A, para. 3 (e)). In decision 79/28 I, paragraph 4, the Council approved the recommendation made by the Executive Director in document DP/406 regarding "priority areas of future UNFPA support of intercountry activities within the level of approximately 25 per cent of total programme resources". In the period since that decision, the Executive Director has reported annually to the Governing Council on the level of funding of the intercountry programme, noting the obstacles encountered in trying to reach the 25 per cent level, and has also presented to the Governing Council two major reports, DP/1982/29/Add.1 and DP/1986/39. Difficulties in reducing expenditures for intercountry activities to the 25 per cent level have stemmed largely from the nature of the intercountry activities supported, e.g., technical assistance and backstopping of country projects. UNFPA funding for this activity, which is critical to the implementation of country programmes, has risen over the past few years as personnel costs have escalated. Expenditures for training have also risen, largely as a result of the increased numbers of candidates for international training being put forward by developing countries. While overall support for research and dissemination of information at the intercountry level was scaled back, it was recognized by both the Fund and the Governing Council that certain expenditures in these categories were necessary because of cost effectiveness considerations and because of the proven effectiveness of such projects, e.g., contraceptive research and development.

12. The report of the Executive Director to the Governing Council at its thirty-third session (DP/1986/39) defined the scope and components of UNFPA's intercountry programme and proposed a new target, namely, 20 per cent of programmable resources. The Executive Director also proposed that expenditures for technical advisory services be excluded from that ceiling. The Council did not approve this new target, but discussions at the thirty-third session indicated that Council members were increasingly convinced of the relevance of the intercountry programme to country activities and were less concerned with setting a fixed target. Council members also noted that UNFPA had removed from the intercountry programme category those projects which more properly belonged in other budget categories. As a result, the Council requested UNFPA to develop a system for attribution in order that the relationship between intercountry and country activities could be documented in a more detailed fashion.

III. POSSIBLE SYSTEMS OF ATTRIBUTION

13. The attribution of intercountry activities to countries can be conducted in principle through the following three methods:

(a) A system could be developed which shows, with a high degree of accuracy, the proportion of intercountry activities and, consequently, the amounts spent assisting individual developing countries directly through intercountry activities;

(b) The system, as described above, could be made more sophisticated so as to show which specific countries, which could be listed by name, are benefiting directly from intercountry activities;

(c) This more sophisticated system could be further elaborated in order to show not only which specific country benefited directly from intercountry activities, but also the amount spent for each individual country through intercountry activities. Within the model mentioned in this subparagraph, the mention of specific amounts attributable to each individual country could be replaced, where applicable, by the mentioning of experts/months of advisory services.

14. The three methods of attributing intercountry activities to countries could be used either in a prospective manner, i.e., showing what is intended or expected in the future, or in a retrospective manner, i.e., showing what the actual expenditures for intercountry activities had been in that past year, for which detailed figures would be provided.

15. For the reasons mentioned below, the Executive Director, however, cannot recommend to the Council the use of any other system than the one which is retrospective and which generally shows the amount of expenditures for intercountry activities attributable to specific developing countries, i.e., as briefly described in paragraph 13 (a) above.

16. Any prospective system of attribution would, by its nature, be highly imprecise. Technical advisory services are provided to developing countries if and when countries need them. This need frequently develops on fairly short notice and cannot be forecast for, at best, more than four to six months ahead of time. Similarly, the nationality of trainees would normally not be known even a full year ahead of time. With regard to research activities, it may be possible to list those countries in which such research will be conducted, if this is applicable, that is those countries who would definitely benefit directly from such research. However, it would be purely speculative to mention ahead of time any country in which results of intercountry research will be used, when available. Similarly, any prospective attribution of intercountry activities in information exchange would be only of speculative nature. The Executive Director therefore firmly believes that any prospective attribution of intercountry activities to specific countries, in whatever fashion, would provide misleading information, fully unsuitable for any decisions on the Council's part in the case that the Council would want to make decisions on UNFPA's intercountry programmes on the basis of such attribution.

17. Retrospective information on the attribution of intercountry activities can be provided, as briefly described in paragraph 13 above, as to the total which can be attributed, the specific countries to which attributions can be made and specific amounts which can be attributed to specific countries. However, the Executive Director feels obliged to point out that the latter two alternatives would require a fairly elaborate reporting system which would refer primarily to statistics and not to substance. This reporting system would be very labour-intensive for both UNFPA and the involved executing agencies, be they United Nations organizations or international non-governmental organizations. Thus the additional administrative work and administrative cost to all parties concerned, make such an elaborate system inadvisable. In any case, the Executive Director has made no provision in the administrative budget proposal for the biennium 1988/1989 (DP/1987/41) for the additional UNFPA staff which would be required. In addition, an elaborate retrospective reporting system would probably not lead to results which are available in a timely fashion. Experience has shown that UNFPA and its executing agencies, during the first four months of each year, already have a great number of reporting responsibilities to fulfil, which are barely met and repeatedly lead to delayed submissions of Council documents. An elaborate reporting system on the attribution of intercountry activities to specific countries would, thus, lead to reports to the Council which refer to periods not 6 months, but 18 months past. The Executive Director questions the utility of such reports, submitted to the Council in 1988, referring to intercountry activities conducted between January and December 1986. Finally, the Executive Director believes that an elaborate reporting system would produce information which would essentially be misleading. An elaborate report might show that one country received technical advisory services in a specific substantive area with four times the amount than another comparable country. Such information, even though factually correct, would be misleading, unless the report also mentioned that the second country had been provided with a full-time adviser, making regional technical advisory services unnecessary, while the first country had not been provided with a full-time adviser. Under these circumstances, the Executive Director cannot but recommend against an elaborate reporting system which would render information post-facto, late, potentially misleading and at comparatively high cost and fully unsuited for decision-making.

IV. A SYSTEM OF ATTRIBUTION FOR INTERCOUNTRY ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY UNFPA IN 1986

18. The Executive Director, realizing that the Council wishes some system of attribution, is submitting below a description of the type of retrospective attribution possible and is applying it to the allocations of UNFPA to intercountry activities in 1986. The system, briefly described in paragraph 13 (a) above, starts with a breakdown of intercountry activities by functional category which in turn are subdivided into regional and interregional activities or otherwise as appropriate.

19. Technical assistance and backstopping. All activities in this category are composed mainly of personnel costs. Most of the work done by regional advisers can be attributed to individual countries, since the regional adviser either travels to

the country or works at his regular duty station on projects referring to any one of the countries in the region. Based upon substantive reports which UNFPA regularly receives from the executing agencies, this work accounts for about 95 per cent of an adviser's time. Other activities of such advisers, notably participation in regional meetings and workshops, accounting for about 5 per cent of an adviser's time, could be attributed to all countries for which the adviser might work in the future, or to the specific countries for which he will work within the year. However, using strict criteria, they shall here be regarded as non-attributable. Interregional advisory services exist in two forms: advisers who work for individual countries, but in more than one region (examples exist in the United Nations Department of Technical Co-operation for Development) and advisers who work in headquarters of specialized agencies with the main task to backstop the regional advisers mentioned above. The work of the former can be attributed to specific countries, identical to the work of the regional adviser, while the work of the latter can be attributed to countries only in the more general fashion, as mentioned above for regional meetings. It should, however, be noted that the interregional advisers at agency headquarters do not necessarily carry such a title and that frequently they are additionally involved in work referring to the other three functional categories: training, research and information exchange, which to some extent cannot be attributed to specific countries. For the total of interregional and global technical assistance and backstopping, using strict criteria, at least 65 per cent would be directly attributable to specific countries. For the combined total of technical assistance and backstopping, UNFPA would estimate 85 per cent as directly attributable to specific countries.

20. Training. UNFPA finances training activities through intercountry activities at sub-regional, regional, interregional and global levels. Training activities are addressed at persons working or expected to work in a specific country's population programme or in institutions which in turn are involved in population-related development work (inter alia, executing agencies and UNFPA itself). UNFPA would regard only the training of the first group of persons as attributable to specific countries, which however amounts to 90 per cent of all training at the intercountry level. Such attribution could be undertaken by nationality of the fellow or by his future country of work; in practice the two largely coincide. General cost for such training, primarily the salaries of trainers, can correctly be apportioned to the individual trainee. In sum, 90 per cent of all training at the intercountry level is directly attributable to specific developing countries.

21. Research. In general, research activities, even at the intercountry level, include a direct country component. Thus, to that extent it can be attributed to the country in which the research is conducted. According to UNFPA's experience, the specific country component of intercountry research amounts to at least 30 per cent which is thus attributable. UNFPA does not attribute the remaining 70 per cent of research at the intercountry level to specific countries, even though most research results are ultimately applied to specific developing countries in one way or the other.

22. Information exchange. Information exchange is financed by UNFPA at the intercountry level mainly through general awareness creation on population matters, dissemination of research results and conferences. Although conferences can easily be attributed to specific countries by the nationality or place of work of its participants and although all other information exchange activities could be attributed to specific countries in accordance with nationality or place of work of the recipient of the information, UNFPA, using strict criteria, regards only 20 per cent of the intercountry activities in information exchange as directly attributable to specific countries.

23. The attribution of intercountry activities in 1986 to specific countries, based upon the principles developed above, leads to a result as shown in the table below:

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Allocations in 1986 (Millions of US dollars)	Percentage attributable to countries	Allocations attributable to countries (Millions of US dollars)
Technical assistance and backstopping	15.2	85	12.9
Training	6.8	90	6.1
Research	6.5	30	2.0
Information exchange	3.5	20	0.7
Total	32.0	67.8	21.7

The table shows in column 1 the actual allocations in 1986, totalling \$32 million, by functional category, in column 2 the assumed percentage for each functional category which can be attributed to specific countries, without identifying each specific country, and in column 3 the allocation amounts which can be attributed, totalling \$21.7 million. This is, as shown at the bottom of column 2, a weighted average of all intercountry activities in 1986 directly attributable to specific developing countries of 67.8 per cent. Given the fact that this calculation is based upon strict criteria for attribution, the real amount and percentage attributable to countries appears to be higher and can be estimated as no less than 70 per cent.

V. CONCLUSION

24. The Executive Director is presenting in this report a simple system which, applied for intercountry activities in 1986, shows that at minimum 67.8 per cent, but more likely no less than 70 per cent of the intercountry activities in 1986 were directly attributable to specific developing countries. As the Governing Council is aware, UNFPA programmes its intercountry activities on a quadrennial basis. The current cycle, 1983-1987, ends this year and the Executive Director intends to submit the new intercountry programme for the 1988-1991 period to the Governing Council at its thirty-fifth session for its approval. In addition, the Executive Director intends to present in the future a retrospective attribution of the intercountry activities for the past year, as part of his regular reporting on intercountry activities, in the same manner as has been done in this report in paragraphs 19-23.

