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PROGRAMME PLANNING

Country and intercountry programmes and projects

FOURTH COUNTRY PROGRAMME FOR THE GAMBIA

Note by the Administrator

I. PROCESS OF THE PROGRAMMING EXERCISE

1. The programming process for the Gambia, one of the least developed countries (LDCs), started formally with the Resident Representative's note in February 1986. Comprehensive consultations were held with the staff of the United Nations Development Programme office in Banjul, the Government of the Gambia, UNDP headquarters, specialized agencies of the United Nations system, and other donors. The country programme document emanates from these consultations.
2. Various studies and sectoral papers, including those prepared for the donor roundtable, organized with UNDP assistance, were taken into account. The economic recovery programme, prepared with assistance from the World Bank and adopted by the Government in June 1985, provided the required macro-economic framework and served as the basis for a policy dialogue between the Government and the donors. It also formed the core of the Government medium-term development strategy.
3. Government departments, under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Industrial Development, held a meeting to discuss the Resident Representative's note and various proposals for inclusion in the country programme. Several agencies fielded sectoral review missions at the same time as the country programming exercise began in June 1986. The UNDP office in Banjul benefited greatly from the exchange of ideas with staff from the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). These funds and agencies also held separate meeting with appropriate ministries. The draft document was approved by the Government on 8 August 1986.

II. THE FOURTH COUNTRY PROGRAMME

4. The Gambia has been going through a difficult period, brought about by a considerable decrease in the production and income from its only cash crop, groundnuts. There has been a serious balance-of-payment crisis and a mounting public debt. Since 1985, there have been several missions from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, attempting to address the worsening financial situation.

5. Without trying to meet the entire spectrum of needs, an attempt was made to concentrate the country programme resources to fully reflect the technical assistance priorities determined by the Government. By mobilizing additional resources from the United Nations system, as well as bilateral and multilateral donors, the country programme also aims to provide a catalytic mechanism to supplement and complement UNDP funds. It envisages close linkages with the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). As the Gambia is an LDC, several funds under the authority of the Administrator, such as the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) and the Special Measures Fund for the Least Developed Countries (SMF), have supported and will continue to support the Government programme.

6. The country programme focuses on three priority objectives:

(a) To improve the planning and management capacity of the Government (17.8 per cent of resources). This will be done by strengthening the ministry most directly concerned, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Industrial Development, as well as those ministries and institutions which have responsibility for providing basic social services. One of the main objectives of UNDP assistance in this area is to further develop mid-level management and administrative capacities in ministries and parastatal organizations. Notwithstanding important programmes of training abroad, financed by donors in the past, this mid-level expertise is still in short supply. Furthermore, without assistance in the strengthening of institutional capabilities, it will not be possible to bring about the needed improvements in aid co-ordination. An ambitious programme to train civil servants at all levels is therefore envisaged.

(b) To redress the position of agriculture and rural development (39.4 per cent of resources). The country has almost half a million hectares of good quality arable land and can grow more than 20 varieties of fruits which can be developed for export. This vast agricultural potential, if adequately tapped, can easily spur a rise in the economy. Since 70 per cent of the employed population works in their sector, the Government is diversifying agriculture and improving land utilization. Specific projects are envisaged to improve food production and to provide social services, such as easier access to clean water. In order to accelerate development efforts, it is imperative that UNDP assistance permeate the rural areas of the country. A project to help establish a rural credit institution and another on grassroots development will be formulated to support Government efforts for rural development.

(c) To develop training programmes and enhance employment opportunities in view of the seriously rising unemployment level (22.8 per cent of resources). It is envisaged to involve both the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in several projects. Recognizing the importance of the role of women in the country's development, such projects will include women's training in farm extension work; a specific component for women in small-scale industrial development; the creation of women's credit groups; and the organization of women's co-operatives to manage irrigation schemes.

III. MANAGEMENT OF THE COUNTRY PROGRAMME

7. During the implementation of the fourth country programme, both the Government and UNDP will develop and implement corrective measures to avoid problems encountered during the third cycle. The main problems, identified during evaluation exercises, tripartite reviews and the mid-term review of the country programme were: delays in the recruitment of experts; delays in the assignment of counterparts; lack of qualified counterparts; delays in procurement and delivery of equipment; difficulties encountered by the Government in meeting UNDP reporting requirements for Government-executed projects; problems with scheduling of fellowships; and poor maintenance of equipment.

8. The successful transfer of skills has not always been achieved. The large number of fellowships and scholarships abroad were often not adapted to the needs of the country and were therefore, not very successful. It has been agreed that on-the-job training will be a major aspect of any training programme during the fourth cycle. Moreover, local training will receive priority over training abroad. As a longer-term measure, another modality for the transfer of skills will be used during the fourth cycle: a first attempt will be made at twinning arrangements with an appropriate planning body of another developing country, to assist in the implementation of UNDP efforts in development planning.

9. Another important issue facing foreign aid programmes in the Gambia is related to recurrent costs of projects which have created problems, in some cases, in the efficient absorption of aid. Servicing the recurrent costs of various programmes calls on scarce foreign currency reserves. The Government fears that, because of the austerity measures adopted, its reduced ability to meet maintenance costs may lead to erosion of the economic infrastructure over the next few years. It has therefore decided that, as a matter of general policy, projects involving significant recurrent costs will be given lower priority. This policy will be applied by the Government and UNDP in the identification and selection of new projects or in considering proposals for the extension of ongoing projects.

10. Resident donors in the country hold regular meetings with the Resident Representative/Resident Co-ordinator for co-ordination purposes. For its part, the Government has established a National Project Monitoring Committee with the Minister of Economic Planning and Industrial Development as Chairman in an attempt to ensure a more adequate monitoring of development projects.

11. Overall monitoring and co-ordination by the Government of its development programme has, in the past, been hampered by the absence of a focal point for external assistance, which provides the bulk of development needs. This task is now shared by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Industrial Development, the Ministry of Finance and Trade and the Office of the President. The appointment of a macro-economist to serve as adviser to the Office of the President is intended to achieve a more systematic co-ordination of external assistance.

12. The fluid economic situation currently prevailing in the Gambia necessitates regular reviews of Government programmes. In this vein, the Government and UNDP have agreed to hold a mid-term review of the country programme in 1989. Consideration is also being given to organizing a national technical co-operation assessments and programmes (NATCAP) exercise. Discussions will be held with the Government and donors in order to schedule the exercise in 1988, before the mid-term review mentioned above. Thus, the NATCAP exercise will not only assist Government to better define its human resources and technical assistance needs but will also be used as a major input for its programme reviews, including that of the country programme.

IV. RECOMMENDATION OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

13. The Administrator recommends that the Governing Council approve the fourth country programme for the Gambia.
