Special session  
February 1987, New York  
Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

PROGRAMME PLANNING  

Country and intercountry programmes and projects  

FOURTH COUNTRY PROGRAMME FOR THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme period</th>
<th>Actual resources programmed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third cycle IPF balance</td>
<td>572,000</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other resources programmed</td>
<td>1,876,000</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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* Detailed listings of projects and other related data prepared as part of the country programming exercise are available on request. These listings include: (a) ongoing projects; (b) proposed projects; (c) distribution of resources by objective; (d) distribution of new country programmes by sector.
I. DEVELOPMENT TRENDS, STRATEGIES AND PRIORITIES

A. Current economic trends

1. The Syrian Arab Republic is a medium-sized economy. Its population of 9.9 million is growing rapidly at 3.4 per cent per annum. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was estimated at $1,680 (at the official rate of exchange) in 1983. The economy is supported by a diversified resource base with 5.6 million hectares of cultivable land, oil, gas and phosphate reserves and relatively developed manufacturing, construction and trade sectors. Other structural characteristics of the economy stem from the country’s centrally planned socialist system. The Government directly owns and manages the mining, large manufacturing, energy and banking sectors. It also controls prices, credit, international trade and all major investment.

2. The country has made impressive progress in the past decade in raising GDP, expanding its economic and social infrastructure, and providing basic services and employment opportunities to the bulk of the population. However, following the very rapid growth, which averaged 10 per cent annually in the period 1970-1981, GDP growth slowed down to 3.2 per cent in 1982 and 3.1 per cent in 1983. This was mainly because of reduced oil prices, stagnation of the petroleum and mining sectors, and an almost virtual absence of growth in agriculture.

3. Nevertheless, the outlook for the medium-term growth of the economy is favourable. The growth potential in the energy sector is considerable. Rapid implementation of the Government policy to develop gas resources would free domestically-consumed oil for export. The prospects of output growth in agriculture are substantial, particularly if the irrigated area is expanded and more attention is given to the effective use of water resources and to the provision of agricultural extension. In the manufacturing sector, substantial expansion of output for export can take place, particularly in the cement and textile industries.

B. National development strategies

4. At the time that the fourth cycle country programme was being formulated, the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan, covering the years 1986 to 1990, had not yet been finalized. However, the major objectives of the Plan are:

(a) Concentration of efforts on agricultural development and food processing industries with a view to ensuring food security;

(b) Consolidation of the industrial sector through, inter alia, optimum utilization of existing capacities with a view to increasing industrial output;

(c) Development of the oil and gas resources with a view to increasing their output in order to meet the internal demand of energy and ensure a surplus for exportation;

(d) Expansion of electrical generation capacities to bridge the gap between demand and supply.
C. Technical co-operation priorities

5. In conformity with the objectives and strategies of the Plan, the Government has decided to give high priority to technical co-operation in the fields of agriculture, industry, energy and mining. Several studies, surveys and sectoral assessments were conducted to identify the specific technical assistance needs of those sectors, in particular an industrial survey financed by the European Economic Community (EEC) and carried out in 1984-1985, and the study entitled "Issues and Options in the Energy Sector", conducted in 1985 by the UNDP/World Bank Energy Sector Assessment Programme.

6. These studies have been instrumental in the identification of areas in which technical co-operation is urgently required in furtherance of the major objectives of the Plan. As a result, the Government has described priority requirements for technical co-operation as:

   (a) Introducing new technologies in the various sectors of the economy;

   (b) Building up skilled labour, particularly at the intermediate/sub-professional level through education and training;

   (c) Attending to constraints and bottlenecks in various sectors through high-level expertise and short-term consultancies;

   (d) Strengthening the planning process in respect of programming, monitoring, evaluation and information systems.

7. In order to ensure the provision of the services needed to meet the extensive technical assistance requirements of the country, the Government has concluded a number of technical co-operation agreements with various countries and regional and multilateral organizations.

8. The process of identifying technical co-operation priorities for inclusion in the country programme was supportive of the overall effort in respect of technical assistance undertaken by the Government in connection with the launching of the Sixth Plan. The State Planning Commission took full cognizance of the contents of the Resident Representative's note on the country programme. Moreover, making use of available surveys and studies, of the findings of United Nations agency missions and of reports of regional and interregional advisers, the Commission held a series of discussions with various Government entities, during which their requirements were identified and listed in order of priorities.

9. Those priorities were later discussed with UNDP in a number of meetings which were at times attended by representatives of the entities concerned. In all those discussions, full acknowledgement was made of the special character of the contribution which the United Nations system could make in assisting the process of bringing science and technology to bear on economic and social development. The Government consequently decided to make the linkage between those two dimensions
the main thrust of its country programme proposal for the fourth cycle. This was not meant, however, to foreclose the development of projects in other areas of major concern to the Government where the capacity of the United Nations system may be particularly valuable. One such area was to be the participation of women in development within the framework of the objectives of the Plan on social conditions and equity.

D. Aid co-ordination

10. The programming and co-ordination of external assistance is exercised by the Government, acting through the State Planning Commission, in respect of both bilateral and multilateral co-operation.

11. UNDP maintains close individual contact on a permanent basis with the representatives and staff of the three agencies involved in technical co-operation with offices in Syria, i.e., the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This enhanced in particular the interface between the UNDP programme and the Technical Co-operation Programme of FAO in fields such as citrus production and agricultural service extension. All other agencies rely on the UNDP office as their channel of communication with the Government on technical co-operation matters - except the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which, in view of the highly specialized nature of the assistance it provides, is in direct contact with the relevant Government entity, but keeps the UNDP office fully informed of its activities.

12. Besides the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), in respect of which the Resident Representative has statutory responsibilities, the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) are also brought operationally into this network of co-operation, inasmuch as three major UNDP-financed ongoing projects have been specifically designed in support of loans provided by those agencies.

II. THE COUNTRY PROGRAMME

A. Assessment of previous country programme

13. The indicative planning figure (IPF) allocation for the current third country programming cycle is $8.25 million. In addition, an amount of $1.52 million was carried over from the second cycle, raising total actual resources taken into account for programming to $9.77 million. Of this amount, however, $2.95 million was allocated for the continuation of second cycle project activities, leaving only $6.82 million to be allocated to new third cycle projects.

14. The sectoral distribution of such new allocations was 59 per cent for agriculture and 37 per cent for education, whereas in the energy sector the balance was used almost entirely for new projects that were launched towards the end of the
cycle. More than this sectoral concentration, however, the main characteristic of the third cycle programme was that over 81 per cent of the resources available for new activities were allocated to three large projects in support of World Bank and IFAD loans in the agricultural and educational sectors.

15. While the allocation of technical co-operation resources in direct support of development financing loans is undoubtedly attractive in principle, the effect of such an approach, as generalized in the third country programming cycle for the Syrian Arab Republic, was to divest the programme from most of its flexibility and to entrap it in forms and modalities of technical co-operation that corresponded to the requirements of the loans which it was to support. The appropriateness and usefulness of such support is not in doubt. Because of the nature of the loans, however, it tended to perpetuate relatively conventional modes of large-scale technical assistance projects, entailing in particular the provision of resident experts for a long duration, fellowships and equipment. The programme was not entirely spared some of the difficulties that are invariably attached to this kind of technical co-operation. They most often revolve around the question of timing in the provision of project inputs, whether they be international personnel, national counterparts, equipment delivery or building construction.

16. A country programme review was conducted in October 1984. It took cognizance of some unavoidable difficulties in project execution, without this altering the generally shared judgement that the implementation of the country programme was, on the whole, progressing satisfactorily. The contents of the programme were also found to be relevant and valid in terms of the programming options that had been taken, and the achievements of the projects were considered as encouraging.

17. An overall assessment of the third country programming cycle cannot, however, rest with this positive picture of the programme at the micro-level. The scarcity of the resources available under the IPF commands that those resources be engaged in a manner that will ensure the best possible cost/benefit ratio from the technical assistance thus made available to the country. Taking into account the considerable progress already achieved in socio-economic development and the fact that local capabilities have largely outgrown traditional forms of technical assistance, an effort has been made to present for the fourth cycle a programme proposal that would do fuller justice to the capacity of the country to draw optimum benefit from its co-operation with the United Nations Development System.

B. New programme proposal

18. The fourth cycle country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic will cover the years 1987-1991. This will largely coincide with the Government Sixth Five-Year Development Plan, which encompasses the years 1986-1990.

19. In respect of the resource base, the allocation for the fourth programming cycle is $8.25 million, to be increased by a carry-over from the third cycle of $0.572 million. In addition, the Government has agreed to provide in local currency for programme cost-sharing the equivalent of $2.0625 million, which includes 13 per cent support costs, equivalent to $237,279. Moreover, the United
Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has agreed to contribute $0.05 million in support of a project concerning the participation of women in development. The total resources actually taken into account for programming thus amount to $10.698 million. Of this amount, $1.083 million will be earmarked for ongoing projects and $0.914 million will be kept as an unprogrammed reserve, leaving an amount of $8.701 million for new project proposals and programmed reserve.

20. While no other resources could be taken into account for programming purposes at the time of finalizing the country programme, it is hoped that in the process of project formulation, Government entities concerned may be able to provide additional resources from their own budgets in the form of project cost-sharing.

21. The broad areas of concentration that emerged from this process are as follows:

(a) Measures for the development, management and conservation of energy-related natural resources;

(b) Strengthening of agricultural production through new scientific and technological approaches;

(c) Improvement of industrial production;

(d) Acquisition and development of new technologies; and

(e) Participation of women in development.

22. While retained for practical purposes, the above categorization does only partial justice to the degree of concentration of the programme on activities related to science and technology. Indeed, several projects in the categories labelled as natural resources and industry are also closely related to scientific and technological processes.

23. The specific proposals of the Government for the fourth programming cycle are as follows.

Measures for the development, management and conservation of energy-related natural resources ($2,883,400)

24. In addition to their intrinsic role in the development of the country, natural resources are of particular importance because they are the major foreign exchange earner. It has already been indicated that the development of gas resources and the expansion of oil production are to be key elements in the improvement of the growth rate of the economy. Reflecting the same concern, there exists a great potential for energy conservation and the avoidance of energy losses and waste in the industrial sector and in the domestic use of energy. The Government has requested UNDP assistance for a number of activities related to its policy objectives in this field, some of which are a direct follow-up of the findings of the 1985 mission of the World Bank/UNDP Energy Sector Assessment Programme.
New projects

Petroleum and gas resources development

25. The Government decided to take a $50 million loan from the World Bank for a project dealing with Gas Appraisal and Petroleum Engineering. Its aim is to appraise promising gas structures in the Palmyra region; to improve the exploitation and recovery efficiency of existing oil field reserves; and to develop a gas utilization programme and derive an appropriate gas-pricing policy. The project, whose technical assistance requirements amount to approximately $10 million, will be Government-executed through a specially established project unit. The UNDP project will finance part of the technical assistance needed. It will also undertake to strengthen the executing unit and assist it in the project's overall execution.

Uranium exploration

26. High priority is given by the Government to the prospection of radioactive materials and ores, in view of their potential importance as a source for nuclear fuel material in the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The project aims at strengthening the operating capacity of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission (SAEC) for the prospection of radioactive materials and ores through consultancies, training and the provision of field and laboratory equipment, as well as through the introduction of a systematic exploration technique for the evaluation of the radioactive mineral potential of Syria.

Uranium extraction from phosphates

27. The occurrence has been confirmed of uranium in deposits of phosphate and phosphate-bearing rocks. Phosphate ore that is rich in uranium is now being exported prior to chemical treatment and the uranium content of the ore is thus lost to Syria. With a view to assisting the country in making fuller use of its natural resources, the project aims at setting up a small-scale pilot plant for the extraction of uranium by means of phosphoric acid. The Government attaches considerable priority to this endeavour which, if successful, will ultimately enable the country to recover for its own use considerable quantities of uranium.

Household energy strategy

28. Household energy demand has been identified as an important potential area for energy conservation and the rationalization of energy use. The project aims at defining a strategy for the most appropriate and economic way of meeting such demand. This will include: (a) an examination of economically justified interfuel substitution with emphasis on reducing oil, gas and electricity power consumption, and exploration of the possible use of solar energy for water and space heating; (b) energy efficiency enhancement concerning heating, cooling and cooking equipment; (c) improvement of building insulation; and (d) supportive policy and incentive measures.
Ongoing projects

Power system efficiency audit

29. Losses in electrical power supply because of technical reasons such as long cable transmission and station service and non-technical reasons such as statistical error, metering error, theft and diversion was estimated in 1984 at 28 per cent against a normal acceptable margin of 15 to 17 per cent. In an initial phase, the project will assist the Government in conducting a power system efficiency audit, focusing principally on reducing technical power transmission and distribution losses and improving the efficiency of power generation. On the basis of the findings of this audit, the project will assist in preparing a power system efficiency programme which should encompass an assessment of the cost/price relationship of electricity power supply.

Energy strategy and efficiency improvement in the cement industry

30. It has been estimated that in the industrial sector, over 50 per cent of the energy presently used by the cement, fertilizers and manufacturing industries could be saved as a result of energy audits and by the full utilization of existing capacities. As a first step, the project will concentrate on energy strategy and efficiency improvement in the cement industry. It will determine the scope for energy conservation and eventual interfuel substitution, notably the use of gas, and work out, in a preliminary way, the relevant cost/benefit analysis. The project will also assist in outlining the action needed to extend this type of analysis to other industrial sectors.

Linkages

31. As indicated above, the project on petroleum and gas resources development will be part of a larger endeavour undertaken by the World Bank.

32. The last three projects listed will be executed by the World Bank, in consonance with the major emphasis which that agency puts on the energy sector as an element of its lending policies.

Strengthening of agricultural production through new scientific and technological approaches ($2,937,000)

33. The paramount objective of the Government in the field of agriculture is to stimulate production with a view to ensuring food security and to developing export-oriented production that may earn foreign exchange. In support of this effort, the Government has requested UNDP assistance for the introduction of new scientific and technological approaches in respect of water development and management, cotton and citrus production as well as animal feed and livestock health.
New projects

Development and Management of Water Resources for Agricultural Use

34. In view of the climatic conditions, proper water use is one of the most important factors influencing agricultural production. This is fully recognized by the Government and reflected in its decision to invest approximately 6 billion Syrian pounds in this sector over a period of 10 years. The project will assist in establishing 5 research centres/pilot farms in regions with limited water resources. It will also assist these centres in developing and improving field irrigation techniques, in determining the economic and technical effectiveness of various irrigation techniques, and in training technicians and peasants to use them.

Utilization of agricultural residue for animal feed

35. Most animal feed now in production, particularly that which is used for sheep fattening, is made up of a high percentage of legumes, sorghum and barley, which make it very costly. In the main cereal production areas around Al-Hasakeh, an area to which sheep do not migrate in normal years, surplus straw is available. It was previously recuperated for use by a paper factory which, however, now uses wood pulp. The project will engage in research and testing aimed at reducing the cost of animal feed by utilizing treated straw, together with other agricultural residue, as a main ingredient for animal feed.

Veterinary laboratory diagnosis and vaccine production

36. Veterinary laboratories currently perform forty to fifty thousand tests a year on various animals, including tests for blood, stool, intestine, milk, and embryo. Huge quantities of vaccine are imported, particularly for poultry. The project aims at introducing new, precise and rapid methods for laboratory testing and diagnosis which will enable the quick issuance of effective prescriptions and thus reduce animal losses. The project will also assist in the production of all vaccines needed for poultry and in ensuring their availability at all times.

Improvement of cotton production

37. Cotton, which is the prime cash crop, ranks second after oil as an export commodity. The further development of its production has been given high priority by the Government with a view both to meeting local requirements for the fibre and increasing foreign exchange earnings; it is also a source of income for a large number of rural families. The project will aim at strengthening the research programme of the Syrian Cotton Bureau with a view to providing permanent support to cotton production. This will entail in particular the establishment of a capacity to produce pest-resistant, high yield and better quality cotton varieties; to develop efficient control of seed multiplication; and to develop research programmes on environmental stresses and on integrated pest management.

Improvement of citrus production and protection

38. Citrus production is far from sufficient to meet local requirements; it is estimated that the present production of 100,000 tons should be at least doubled to

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satisfy the internal demand. The Government, which operates a major programme to increase the surface planted with citrus, has requested UNDP assistance for a project aimed at ensuring the provision of healthy plant materials to farmers through the establishment of a budwood certification programme. The project will also engage in a research programme on stubborn disease with a view to allowing better disease identification and control, and will assist in the establishment of a long term research programme to improve citiculture in Syria.

**Strengthening the agricultural extension system**

39. This project aims at strengthening the organizational and operational aspects of the agricultural extension system, with the main emphasis on the establishment of national, provincial and local extension units capable of reaching small farmers, farm labourers, rural women and the rural poor generally, with effective assistance designed to increase production and improve living conditions. The project has a very important training component for extension personnel at all levels and in various types of courses.

**Linkages**

40. The need for the two new projects in this area has been identified with the assistance of the FAO/World Bank Co-operative Programme Investment Center in the context of a World Bank loan for livestock development.

41. It will be noted that the project of the third cycle regional programme for Arab States on the improvement of olive production (RAB/83/17), in which the Syrian Arab Republic actively participates, also aims, inter alia, at bringing applied research to bear on the improvement of production. In addition, this project may, if continued, contribute to the activities of the proposed project on the utilization of agricultural residue for animal feed.

**Improvement of industrial production ($1,100,000)**

42. An expansion of the industrial sector is seen as one of the key elements for the achievement of a higher rate of economic growth. Within this framework, the present strategy of the Government gives priority to a consolidation of the sector through, inter alia, the optimum utilization of existing capacities that should result in increased and improved industrial output. The Government has requested UNDP assistance in support of its efforts to improve the overall level of industrial production.

**New projects**

**Industrial consultancies and training**

43. The 1970s brought rapid industrial development with the establishment of a large number of enterprises, many of which represented new activities for the country. In this process, it has not always been easy to master all the elements involved in rational and economically viable industrial production. The project will aim at providing high level short-term consultancies and training, in
particular in relation to specific problems and bottlenecks that may arise in respect of management, maintenance, new technologies, production techniques and productivity. It will also offer expert advisory services for diagnostic studies.

Quality control

44. As part of its concern with the improvement of industrial output, the Government has decided to request UNDP assistance to strengthen and enhance the capacity of the Industrial Testing and Research Centre in the matter of quality control. The activities of the project will concentrate mainly on four areas, namely, food industries, engineering industries, chemical industries and the sugar industry. They will aim at strengthening laboratory services, techno-economic services and industrial information services.

Acquisition and development of new technologies ($1,800,000)

45. A paramount objective of Syrian development policy is to build up a capacity for the absorption of transferred technologies and the development of indigenous technologies with a view to reducing technological dependence. In pursuance of this policy, the Government has requested UNDP assistance in establishing the relevant infrastructure and instrumentalities in specific areas.

New projects

Assistance to the centre for technological development

46. The establishment of a Centre for Technological Development at the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre aims at the development of new industrial activities with a much higher content of indigenous technology, in terms of both processes and product. It is expected thereby to stimulate the application of advanced technology in the economy. The project will assist one such activity, i.e., establishing an optical laboratory capable of the small-scale production of lenses, glass cutting and polishing, thus affording an indigenous response to an industrial need. The project will also entail the training of personnel related to this endeavour.

Introduction of computer science in education

47. The Government intends to introduce courses in computer science, a subject which has been so far rather neglected in curricula. It also intends to use computer technology to obtain rapid, reliable and accurate information and statistical data for the purpose of better educational planning and administration. The Government has requested UNDP assistance on both counts and a project will be developed to support the efforts of the Ministry of Education in terms of computer science curriculum development on the one hand, and of the use of a computerized system as a management tool on the other.

Linkages

48. EEC has provided assistance to the Scientific Studies and Research Centre in the fields of remote sensing, lubricants, solar energy, computing and laser optics.
49. The strengthening of the technological capacity of the countries of the region has already received attention in the UNDP third cycle regional programme for Arab States. It is envisaged that advanced technology will be a cornerstone of the regional programme for the fourth cycle. The outline of this programme stresses two dimensions that are of central relevance to the proposed programme for Syria: (a) the acquisition and adaptation of technology emerging from applied research with a view to increasing the indigenous content of production in those sectors where it is economically and socially beneficial to do so; and (b) informatics, which it is recognized, will only filter down on a wide scale if the educational systems of the countries in the region can effectively tackle the demands for revisions of curricula at all levels. Regional activities that have already been launched, such as Introduction of Informatics in Education (RAB/86/012), or that will be developed in respect of those two dimensions will be of major interest for the fourth country programme.

Participation of women in development ($263,000)

50. The full integration of women into the development process is prominent in the development strategy of the Syrian Arab Republic. High illiteracy rates, especially in rural areas, have been acknowledged as a major obstacle to achieving this goal. The Government intends to tackle this problem through the establishment of centres that will provide for female literacy classes and vocational training, and it has requested UNDP assistance for the development of this approach.

New project

Two Pilot Centres for Literacy and Vocational Training for Rural Women

51. The Government objectives in developing literacy and vocational training centres for rural women are to enable them to become literate, to help them engage in income-generating activities, and to ensure them of eventual full and active participation in the political, cultural, economic and social life of the country. The project aims at establishing and equipping two pilot centres for running literacy and vocational training programmes. It provides for a programme of specific activities and, in particular, it sets targets for the number of teachers to be trained, the number of courses to be held and the number of women to attend the courses during the life of the project.

Linkages

52. In addition to the allocation from the IPF, UNIFEM is providing $50,000 in support of this activity. Moreover, the project will be submitted to the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Organizations (AGFUND) for co-financing and will benefit from a cash counterpart contribution from the general Women's Union.

53. If, as suggested, training for Arab women is retained as an area of concentration in the field of human resources development for the fourth cycle Arab States regional programme, ways and means will be explored to draw from the relevant regional project or projects in support of the activities of the two pilot centres.
Programmed reserve

54. The Government is proposing the inclusion in the new country programme of two projects that aim at keeping resources aside for use in any sector in which they may be needed at any time during the cycle, and are thus in the nature of a programmed reserve. These projects provide respectively for the carrying out of pre-investment feasibility studies and for the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN).

Umbrella project for feasibility studies

55. Multilateral development financing agencies such as the World Bank and IFAD, or of other sources of development finance, may call at any time during their prospective activities for a pre-investment feasibility study, a prerequisite for a loan approval. In order to preserve the flexibility needed to meet such requirements, the Government is requesting an umbrella project for feasibility studies, for which an allocation of $800,000 is to be made from the IPF.

TOKTEN project

56. The Government has expressed interest in the potential offered by the TOKTEN programme, through which short-term, high-level expertise of expatriate nationals is put at the disposal of their country of origin at nominal cost. The Government is prepared to use such expertise in any sector in which the opportunity arises and has earmarked $50,000 for this purpose.

C. Unprogrammed reserve

57. The Government has set aside $0.914 million as an unprogrammed reserve. Resources from this reserve will be used in the first instance to meet additional requirements of identified projects and possible increases in project costs. The balance will be allocated to new projects executed or started during the fourth cycle.
Annex

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

I. ACTUAL RESOURCES TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT FOR PROGRAMMING

A. UNDP-administered sources

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<td>Fourth Cycle IPF</td>
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B. Other sources

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<td>Funds from other United Nations agencies or organizations firmly committed</td>
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<td>Parallel financing from non-United Nations sources</td>
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<td>Subtotal, other sources</td>
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<td>TOTAL ACTUAL RESOURCES TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT FOR PROGRAMMING</td>
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II. USE OF RESOURCES

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<td>Ongoing projects</td>
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<td>New project proposals</td>
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<td>Unprogrammed reserve</td>
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<td>TOTAL USE OF RESOURCES</td>
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