

FIELD VISITS

**Undertaken by the group that visited
SYRIA (31 August - 6 September 1992)**

and

YEMEN (7 - 13 September 1992)

List of Participants

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Introduction

An eight-man team comprising members of the UNDP Governing Council's Committee for Programme Matters from Austria, Cuba, Ghana, Germany, Nigeria, Poland, Romania and Saint Lucia undertook field visits to the Republic of Syria from 31 August - 6 September, and the Republic of Yemen from 7 September - 13 September, 1992.

The members of the team were of the view that some of the fundamental principles and elements enunciated in the General Assembly resolution 44/211 should constitute the statement of guidance for the field visits. In this connection, among others the following are some of the issues which would be discussed in this report: country programme, programme/project approach, national execution, comparative advantage of the UNDP, coordination.

The team believes that the field visit provided a unique opportunity to have a first-hand practical experience of the extent to which the various decisions taken by the Governing Council had been effectively implemented at the field level. It must however be underscored right at the outset that, due to very short duration of the field visit, any conclusions arrived at in this report could not be perceived as a standard of measure for assessing the UN system's operation at the field level.

Country programme

The Republic of Syria has entered the fifth country programme for UNDP and the fourth for the UNFPA. This cycle spans the period from 1992 to 1996. The Seventh Development Plan for the Government, which coincides with this period, was not published.

The fifth country programme, which amounts to USD 13.458.000 takes into account lessons learned from the previous programme cycles. It was concluded in the review that the fourth programme cycle had been project driven. This project orientation, neglecting the concept of programme approach, has produced mixed results.

The mission was told that the fifth programme cycle had been drawn to move from the project to the programme approach. Three themes have been identified by the Government as high priority areas for cooperation with the UNDP:

1. support for economic policy development and management;
2. environment and natural resources management;
3. development of rural areas through sustainable agricultural production and human development.

Other priority areas identified under the programme are to be integrated into these three key areas. The areas of concentration dovetail into the UNDP's field of comparative advantage.

The present Republic of Yemen, which emerged from the recent unification of the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, presently pursues the integration of two different political, economic and social systems. After the unification a 30 months transitional period, which ended in Dec. 1992 was declared.

The first country programme for the Republic of Yemen, amounting to USD 39.630.000 covers the period 1992 - 1996. This programme was drawn from a careful review of the 4th cycle for both former countries. The mission team was informed, that in the previous cycle projects had been inadequately designed, under-costed, small-sized and often unrelated to the overall national strategy. It was pointed out, that in the past agencies individually designed and implemented their projects without taking into consideration the concept of programme approach.

The present first country programme foresees a departure from this practice. The field office intimated that, in order to achieve the new approach, the relevant preparatory process involved a vigorous and continuous dialogue between the Government and the UNDP as well as donor countries. These efforts, in the view of one high-level government official, was seen as a good case in point with regard to coordination in the identification and selection of priorities.

The four areas of concentration under the programme are

1. strategic planning;
2. management development;
3. human development;
4. natural resource management.

Programme/project approach

In Yemen as well as in Syria the concept of programme approach has been accepted as an important benchmark for UNDP's cooperation with developing countries.

The mid term review in 1990 has analyzed the fourth country programme for Syria and assessed it as too project-driven. Projects were identified on a case by case basis.

In the meantime the Syrian government began to shift its policy from a centrally planned to a more market oriented approach. However, an overall national development plan for a current period was not published. This development to some extent presented difficulties for UNDP in its effort to fully utilize the concept of programme approach.

Information received suggested that, after thorough consultations and coordination with the heads of agencies present in Syria, the Resident Representative discussed the concept and advantages of the programme approach with government officials, in particular in the State Planning Commission. As a result of those discussions the Syrian government decided to use a major part (47%) of the resources allocated for the fifth country programme to the support of economic policy development and management.

In accordance with the conclusion of the review of the fourth country programme for both former Yemenite republics, the team observed that the concept of programme approach had not been fully sensitized. Projects were small-sized, under-costed and inadequately designed. As a result of lack of cooperation and coordination among the agencies present in the country, projects lacked complementarity and were unrelated to the overall national strategy. In the course of a briefing in which all the agencies present in Yemen participated, one of the agency-heads observed, that, in his view, the sheer lack of effective cooperation and coordination, coupled with the tendency of some agencies to preserve their autonomy had led to a certain degree of "empire building". In the past each agency had a tendency to design its programmes separately, contrary to the current approach.

The recent unification of Yemen inevitably led to a shift to national priorities towards harmonization of political, social and economic structures. The government prepared a one-year National Investment Programme for 1992. A three-year development plan for 1993-1995 and a five-year development plan for 1996-2000 are envisaged. Hence, in the absence of a long-term national strategy, the present UNDP country programme could not take the concept of programme approach into full consideration.

In the current cycle UNDP has limited the number of projects and has concentrated on areas directly related to Yemen's own development priorities. UNDP has offered to help design and articulate future national programmes with the aim to move towards a more programme oriented approach.

The mission observed that, in both countries visited, further efforts by Headquarters are required to enhance the understanding of the implementation modalities as well as the acceptance of the programme approach as a viable concept.

National Execution

The concept of national execution was discussed in all its aspects with the UNDP field office and the other agencies in Syria as well as in Yemen. Whereas national execution generates great interest by all parties involved, conceptual difficulties relating to the clear definition of execution, implementation and management were evident.

The availability of adequately trained manpower among others, constitutes a key element for every country to engage in national execution. Where there already exists capacity and

the needed manpower, project implementation could be greatly facilitated. As was observed by the team in Syria, UNFPA programmes are mostly nationally executed. Here the manpower required for such execution already existed or had been trained. In the case of the UNDP quite a small number of projects were nationally executed.

In Syria only 3 out of 25 UNDP projects (=21% of the total volume of funds) are nationally executed, whereas as regard to UNFPA 11 out of 17 UNFPA projects are nationally executed. The mission got the impression that only state implementing agencies dealing with family planning, educational and health related issues seemed to be sufficiently prepared for national execution of projects. In other sectors state implementing need further training and strengthening.

At the same time, 18 out of 25 UNDP projects are supervised by national directors applying UNDP regulations. To move from this project management by national experts to national execution, current weaknesses in accounting will have to be resolved. This applies to UNDP as well as to UNFPA projects. The UNDP field office will have to assist national agencies to gain the required know-how necessary to carry out the accounting of their nationally executed projects. Furthermore, the rules of procedure of the agencies involved will have to be harmonized.

Existing structures in Yemen were considered not suitable for the national execution of UNDP projects. The mission was informed that presently there were no proper state implementing agencies nor suitable NGOs for project execution. In addition it was learned that government accounting procedures differed from UNDP rules. At present only two small-scale projects are nationally executed and one bi-lateral project in cooperation with France.

It was pointed out by the field offices that the implementation of the concept of national execution would necessitate an increase in UNDP's staff so as to ensure the adequate preparation, supervision of project implementation and accounting. Additional responsibilities were to be bestowed on the Resident Representative, who ultimately takes decisions regarding national execution.

It was suggested to the mission that regarding nationally executed projects that it should not only be possible for UNDP to evaluate its own input but also to assess the project implementation as a whole.

Comparative advantages

Government representatives in both countries recognized the UNDP's comparative advantage specially its neutrality, its capacity to offer an impartial and objective advice with no economic interests as well as its world-wide experience.

In Syria UNDP acts also as a catalyst in mobilizing resources (projects co-financed by various donors with initial but low shares of the UNDP).

The Syrian authorities are very much aware of the UNDP's role in national capacity building and training of nationals. The concept of national execution seems to be widely appreciated.

The UNDP's role as a neutral broker in the development dialogue had been recognized by the government of Yemen. On this account, the government of Yemen requested UNDP's assistance in areas like the elaboration of legal structures in foreign investments, income taxes, fuel sector and statistical data

Private Sector Development

While in Yemen the private sector plays a predominant role, in Syria the public sector still constitutes a major element in the national economy.

Discussions with government officials of both countries visited stressed the importance of private sector development within the ongoing efforts of economic restructuring. Syrian authorities, in particular, underlined the possible role of UNDP in this process, especially in the areas of policy guidance and the preparation of draft laws and regulations.

Co-ordination

In Syria, co-ordination is given considerable attention by the UNDP/UNFPA Resident Representative in Damascus. Inter-agency co-ordination between UNDP and the other resident UN agencies (FAO, UNICEF, WHO, UNRWA), from what the mission heard, works sufficiently well. Co-ordination encompasses project design within the programme approach, as well as administrative matters.

Occasional informal contacts between UNDP and the major bilateral donors do not prevent duplications in the respective projects. A mechanism of jointly financed projects under the auspices of UNDP has been established with the EEC.

The State Planning Commission of Syria provides the framework for co-ordination between UNDP and the government. The Actions and Appraisal Committee, comprised of senior officials from the SPC, the technical ministries and different UN bodies, seeks to co-ordinate UN system assistance with national planning. Due to the absence of a national plan of development co-ordination is limited to those sectors for which national planning exists.

The UNDP Resident Representative in Syria is highly respected as an initiator/catalyst for co-ordination by the national authorities.

In Yemen, practical co-ordination problems were evident. This was made all the more evident in one of the projects visited by the Mission (Sheep and Goat Development Project). In this project four UN agencies (two funding agencies UNDP and UNCDF and two executing agencies FAO and OPS) with different rules and regulations, were involved. In this complexity of rules and regulations the question as to whose rules should prevail still remain unresolved at the field level. Specific co-ordination problems with OPS were pointed out.

With respect to co-ordination with the government, UNDP faces institutional weaknesses, managerial incapacities and a lack of inter-ministry co-ordination of a government still in transition. Co-ordination seems to be acceptable on some specific sectors but hampered in others.

The mission was informed that delays often occurred in communicating Governing Council decisions to the field. It was suggested that headquarters focus more on guidance for the field offices.

Office for Project Services (OPS)

Regarding discussion on OPS, the mission experienced different reactions in both countries.

In Syria, the activities of OPS were viewed with favour and had increased. The government has requested OPS, with budget funds of its own, to make certain procurements of materials. Management services were furthermore rendered by OPS within the framework of trust fund projects.

The situation with regard the operations of OPS in Yemen were rather different. The mission heard critical observations concerning project execution by OPS. Delays of between one and three years had occurred in the implementation of OPS-executed projects. These delays had resulted in undue cost increases in equipment purchases. Practical concerns were specifically pointed out to the mission during its visit to a life-stock project in Aden.

Support costs arrangement

The new support costs arrangement which was adopted in May 1992 was viewed as a positive contribution by the UNDP resident representatives in both countries visited. They considered the new support costs arrangement very helpful in the way that it might create competition among implementing agencies. At the same time it was observed that the implementation of the new arrangement seems rather complicated and that additional efforts in training were required.

At the time of the field visit the arrangement which entered into force on 1 July 1992 (only about two months before the mission) had not been operationalized in either Syria or Yemen. Integrated training activities, as called for in the decision of the Governing Council, had not yet been carried out.

The first TSS1 missions were expected to undertake the programming of projects. The mission observed that it was not entirely clear to the the field offices as to how much funds would be available for project preparation over the next 5 years, nor how much could be expected for the current budget year under this credit line. Consequently the

Observations/conclusions

The UNDP's active role in a wide range of development issues in both countries visited became evident to the mission through briefing sessions, visits to project sites and numerous discussions with government officials and other agencies involved. Its role as an important partner in development was acknowledged by the authorities in both countries. With the full cooperation of the other UN-agencies involved in the development process, an enhanced leadership role of the UNDP will facilitate the translation of decisions and concepts of the Governing Council into action at the field level. This process could encompass the collection of various inputs from all agencies and their integration into a unified UN response to national development priorities.

In both countries visited this concept of programme approach has gained wider acceptability. Nevertheless the team observed that there were still difficulties regarding its application on the field level.

On the part of governments the availability of a national development plan and its preparedness to discuss with UNDP national programmes is of fundamental importance for the full realization of the programme approach concept.

National execution requires the availability of adequate national structures, institutions and expertise. Where such prerequisites are absent UNDP could assist in the development of these capacities.

Coordination between UNDP and agencies, UNDP and government institutions, as well as between headquarters and field offices could be greatly enhanced. Programming cycles as well as the rules and procedures of all UN agencies should be harmonized.

In view of the scarcity of resources for development assistance a better coordination with bilateral donors might prove helpful despite the differences in approaches and in criteria for the assistance provision.

While the new support cost successor arrangement is generally perceived positively, there is a clear need for further guidance and provision of training for field office staff.

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