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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY TEAMS

Statement by Under-Secretary-Generalfor Economic and Social AffairstoCommittee for Programme and Co-ordination11 February 1970

The meeting of the Executive Secretaries of the regional economic commissions has been most fruitful, inasmuch as it was almost exclusively concerned with organizing multinational interdisciplinary teams. I have already outlined the plans for these teams in my report to the Second Committee of the General Assembly and the Assembly has subsequently approved this idea, although only in very general terms. There are a number of reasons for this new scheme. Firstly, most developing countries are attaching increasing importance to their programming and planning work and are becoming more aware of the limitations and problems of this work. There is a widespread tendency to abandon detailed and fairly rigid five-year or medium-term plans in favour of the much more flexible device of working out an indicative perspective for similar periods and then preparing annual programmes. This tendency has become apparent not only in the more advanced countries, but also in the developing countries, since both have found that, if their plans and programmes are drawn up by the old method they often become inoperative after the second year. The new system is infinitely more practical and more realistic, but it demands that the United Nations should make certain adjustments in its technical co-operation with Governments. It is no longer sufficient to send Governments planning or programming missions which leave the country after a few months. There will have to be greater continuity in the relations between experts assigned to Governments by the United Nations to help with their planning, which will in future be a continuous activity, and the Governments themselves, and also the governmental planning bodies. The trend is therefore to rely less on groups of experts and more on consultative services. Naturally,

the concepts of programming and planning have to be construed in that context, in an extremely general way. Governments need help with the major tasks of economic and social management, which means that they should have assistance not only in the techniques of economic and social programming and planning, but also in other sectors, such as public administration, trade policy, industrial programming, agricultural programming and employment policy. Such assistance has to be conceived as broadly and as flexibly as possible, so that the needs of Government can be met at any stage in the preparation and execution of their plans.

There is a further argument in favour of the establishment of multinational interdisciplinary teams - one which has a direct bearing on the forthcoming Decade and the formulation of a global strategy. The United Nations has become aware that any attempt to determine from outside the growth targets of a developing country, whether for over-all growth or for the growth of a given sector, is purely artificial and that targets have to be determined locally, by the countries themselves. The developing countries themselves have to set their growth targets, while the developed countries, in turn, have to determine the level of the commitments they can undertake. The United Nations, for its part, has to equip itself to assist the developing countries in determining these targets within the framework of the global development strategy; it would thus be able to correct the hypotheses it has derived from studies made on the basis of more central conceptions.

Moreover, the Organization, like Governments, has long hoped to see the regional economic commissions assume an operational role. However, in the operational programmes of the United Nations (consisting mainly of UNDP programmes) certain very important functions, such as personnel recruitment and the signing of contracts, are still centralized. The Executive Secretaries are the first to acknowledge that it will not be advisable to delegate them to the regional economic commissions.

The multinational interdisciplinary teams will enable the Organization to achieve an aim for which it has striven unsuccessfully as long as it has had to pursue it at

the continental, rather than at the multinational level. There is no doubt that the Economic Commission for Africa, in particular, finds it difficult to serve the forty-one countries of the region from Addis Ababa. It has had to establish sub-regional offices, which have been given no operational functions and are, in effect, merely offices for liaison between certain Governments and the Addis Ababa headquarters. It seems clear that the easiest method of organizing the multidisciplinary teams - which covers the major areas of economic and social policy - is to organize them around the sub-regional offices. Teams of that kind may familiarize themselves with problems common to seven or eight countries, carry out some essential research on them and give the countries concerned effective assistance in formulating policy and developing methods for its application. They may also become acquainted with the administrative staff responsible for actually implementing policies. In most countries, such staff will form a relatively permanent group, so that it will be possible to establish between the members of the teams and the governmental agencies concerned a much more fruitful type of relationship than that developed between expert missions which remain in the country for only a few months and the Governments they are sent to help.

The idea of establishing multinational interdisciplinary teams has been very warmly welcomed by the regional economic commissions, which feel that the teams can provide them with the opportunity to undertake operational responsibilities in those important fields in which they have achieved genuine competence.

There is already a model which might be followed in setting up the teams: the Beirut Office. The structure of that Office is, in fact, very similar in pattern to my definition of multinational interdisciplinary teams. In fact, ever since the establishment of the Beirut Office, I have thought that an attempt should be made to apply a similar formula to other continents, particularly Africa, using the procedures which seem to have yielded good results in Beirut. The proposal is therefore not a Utopian one: it is within the Organization's capabilities.

The scheme does not appear to be applicable, at least for the moment, to very big countries or to the more advanced of the developing countries. It can probably be applied, however, to the smaller countries.

The general opinion at the meeting of the Executive Secretaries has been that the work should be carried out initially in Africa, for two reasons. One reason is that ECA has, in a recent resolution, stressed the need to assign operational activities to the regional commissions. Moreover, this continent already possesses the first part of the structure, inasmuch as there are sub-regional offices. Nevertheless, existing "jurisdictions" will probably have to be reviewed, since some of them are much too extensive to suit the purposes for which the multinational teams are to be created, and further sub-regions might have to be established, with the consent of the Governments concerned, in order to ensure that the teams operate as effectively as possible. At a more general level, it seems essential that, in accordance with the views expressed at the second session of UNCTAD, special attention should be given to the least developed of the developing countries. There is ample evidence that sustained efforts will be made in that direction during the coming Decade. If it proves impossible to set up teams simultaneously wherever they are needed, at least certain priorities might be established on the basis of the criterion of the least developed of the developing countries.

In forming the teams care must be taken to avoid a too rigid approach and to endeavour to adapt them to the characteristics and varying needs of each group of countries. Some Governments, for instance, attach particular importance to the idea of multinational integration and it will be necessary to conform to their wishes. Others feel less need for co-operation with their neighbours and prefer to receive services on a strictly national basis.

The multinational teams will be mainly responsible to the Executive Secretary of the regional economic commission concerned. Headquarters will, of course, do its best

to help the Executive Secretary recruit the teams and supply them with the necessary technical support. On that subject, I fully agree with the Executive Secretaries. Essentially, the teams will be organized within the framework of the United Nations, that is, with the participation of UNCTAD and UNIDO. However, the United Nations will also have to enlist the support of certain specialized agencies. I have already contacted FAO, the ILO and UNESCO on the matter and have received very encouraging replies from them. Indeed, the proposed system meets a need currently felt not only by the United Nations but also by the specialized agencies. It is difficult at present to specify the form co-operation with these agencies should take, but the initiative has been very well received.

As to UNDP, the Capacity Study has particularly recommended improved implementation of country programmes and a shift from project planning to programme planning. That means that in future UNDP programmes should aim at being more directly related to a given socio-economic situation and that such situations would have to be more attentively examined than in the past. It would seem, therefore, that the teams, when they have proven their worth, can be of help to Governments and to UNDP Resident Representatives in applying procedures relating to the United Nations development co-operation cycle recommended in the Capacity Study. The UNDP Inter-Agency Consultative Board considers that the development co-operation cycle will represent a real improvement on the existing project juxtaposition and project formulation process and that progress is being made towards more consistent formulation based on a broader socio-economic approach. If that planning formula were adopted, some resources could be made available to Governments and UNDP Resident Representatives for the purpose, on the understanding that, in that event, the multinational teams would work under the auspices of the Resident Representatives, whose authority and usefulness is beyond question. If the UNDP Administrator so wishes, the United Nations will ask the teams to place themselves at the disposal of the Resident

Representative and give him assistance; the task can even be accorded a certain degree of priority. Dynamic pursuit of that exercise in programming will mean mobilizing all available resources.

In conclusion, I stress the need to establish a new and more intimate type of relationship between the international bureaucracy and Governments. That is the spirit underlying the new formula of advisory services which constitutes a new phase as it is, in the Organization's assistance activities in the sense that the idea of assistance proper is giving way to the idea of co-operation or partnership. From this point of view, the establishment of the multinational teams, although in itself a somewhat commonplace and modest undertaking, assumes a certain dimension since it forms part of international policy in general.