



General Assembly

Distr.: General
20 August 2002

Original: English

Fifty-seventh session

Item 121 of the provisional agenda*

Joint Inspection Unit

Joint Inspection Unit

Note by the Secretary-General**

In accordance with paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 56/245 of 24 December 2001, the Secretary-General transmits herewith to the General Assembly the preliminary listing of potential reports for the programme of work of the Joint Inspection Unit for 2003 and beyond (see annex).

* A/57/150.

** Owing to the need for preliminary consultations, it was not possible to meet the 2 July 2002 deadline for submission.

Annex

Preliminary listing of potential reports for the programme of work of the Joint Inspection Unit for 2003 and beyond

Introduction

1. The following listing of potential reports for the programme of work of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) for 2003 and beyond has been drawn up in response to paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 56/245 of 24 December 2001, by which, in particular, the Assembly invited the Unit to improve the presentation of the listing of potential reports for the following year and beyond by providing information on the source, including legislative basis, objectives, problems to be addressed, duration and expected date of completion, and to present such information before the final quarter of each year. The listing is subject to change: new reports may be added; planned reports may be modified, postponed or cancelled when circumstances so warrant; and titles may be changed to reflect the new thrust of reports.

2. The Unit has included in the preliminary listing proposals for 10 new reports on subjects for inspection, evaluation and/or investigation in the areas of administration and management, operational programme activities and humanitarian assistance. The duration of the preparation of each potential report may vary from 6 to 12 months, depending on its scope and complexity, on the basis of current internal yardsticks. The time frame may also be influenced by external dependencies, inter alia, the timeliness of required input from the secretariats of participating organizations. If included in the work programme for 2003, reports would, in principle, be initiated during the course of 2003 and be presented, in most cases, to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth or fifty-ninth sessions.

3. The Unit would highly appreciate receiving, by end-November 2002, any comments on the preliminary listing from Member States, the legislative organs and/or the executive heads of the participating organizations, as well as the bodies of the United Nations system concerned with budgetary control, investigation, coordination and evaluation.

A. Effective arrangements and mechanisms to ensure interdisciplinary approaches to the formulation and implementation of programmes and activities

4. Most organizations and programmes in the United Nations system have organizational structures based on disciplinary lines. With the gradual adoption of strategic planning and results-based budgeting principles, there is an increasing emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach, where required, in addressing recognized challenges and in the design of substantive programmes and activities. However, this poses a formidable array of practical and administrative problems. The Unit has therefore included, following a suggestion by the secretariat of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, a comparative review of the various experiments that have been attempted in the past or are currently being considered by various organizations with a view to identifying lessons and best practice in this area.

B. Role of the United Nations system in disaster reduction and response

5. The role of the United Nations system in disaster reduction and response has been included in the preliminary listing, based on a suggestion by the secretariat of the World Health Organization (WHO) for a report on the role of WHO in disaster reduction and response, following external evaluations and management reviews of recent emergency operations (e.g. Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor) involving WHO. Given that disaster reduction and response require an interdisciplinary approach backed by improved coordination among participating organizations, JIU decided to expand the scope of the report to cover all relevant organizations of the United Nations system. Such a study would allow for the comparative review of administrative procedures in entities within the system with a view to contributing to the progressive standardization of management approaches in

humanitarian-related activities. The legislative basis for this study lies in General Assembly resolution 56/195 of 21 December 2001, on the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

C. Cooperation of the United Nations system with multilateral financial institutions

6. In 1992, JIU explored various areas and mechanisms for cooperation and coordination between organizations of the United Nations system and the multilateral financial institutions, notably the Bretton Woods institutions (see E/1993/18 and Add.1). The report noted in particular that cooperation and coordination between the two groups of organizations could be further enhanced in areas perceived to offer mutual advantages, for example, combining the strengths of the United Nations agencies in development cooperation with the financial resource capabilities of the financial institutions.

7. In recent years, there has been growing emphasis on the need to enhance cooperation and coordination within the international development community in support of the outcome of the major global conferences. The United Nations Millennium Declaration laid down broad goals, the attainment of which requires concerted efforts by the organizations of the United Nations system, the financial institutions and the bilateral donors. With this in mind, the Unit found it timely to revisit its previous report on the subject and, accordingly, at the suggestion of the World Bank, the Unit decided to include this topic in its preliminary listing for 2003 and beyond.

D. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development: review of institutional and programme issues

8. In a previous report (see A/51/152), JIU assessed the results of the internal reforms undertaken by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in the 1980s and early 1990s in order to strengthen its global mandate and relevance in the area of trade and development issues, especially following the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

9. The report found that the mandates of UNCTAD and WTO were complementary in that UNCTAD approached trade issues from a holistic and development perspective, combining policy analysis, consensus-building and technical cooperation, whereas the WTO mandate was more legal and rules-based.

10. This topic has been included in the preliminary listing at the suggestion of the World Bank. It would seem useful to look once again at the central issues dealt with by the Unit, as a follow-up to the above-mentioned report.

E. Harmonization of administrative practices and entitlements for staff of the United Nations system serving at field duty stations

11. A review of administrative practices and entitlements for staff serving at field duty stations has been included in the preliminary listing upon a suggestion made by the United Nations Secretariat (specifically, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). The Unit would review possible discrepancies in the terms and conditions of service, entitlements and compensation packages of United Nations staff serving in the field and those of other United Nations operational agencies. Currently, it appears that administrative differences exist among the common system organizations, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as the United Nations Secretariat. These potential discrepancies relate to such aspects as assigned duty station, rest and recuperation entitlements for staff serving in hardship duty stations and compensation packages. Such a review would take into account the terms and conditions of United Nations staff, as established by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the International Civil Service Commission.

F. Information technology assets, their utility and effectiveness in the United Nations Secretariat

12. The proliferation of information technology systems is a general phenomenon in the United Nations system. At the United Nations Secretariat, investment

decisions for information technology systems were decentralized to departments and offices, pursuant to a budget instruction dated 23 October 1998. In February 2001, the General Assembly decided on a plan of action for information technology in the Secretariat and an information technology strategy for the Secretariat was finalized and set out in the report of the Secretary-General (A/55/780). This study, which has been suggested by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, would include a review of whether an accurate inventory of information technology assets (including their financial value) exists centrally in the Secretariat and whether this information is being used for further investment decisions. It could also review the impact of the Information and Communications Technology Board after one year of operation.

G. Human resources management in the United Nations system (a series of reports)

13. An earlier suggestion by the secretariat of WHO that the Unit include in its work programme a review of human resources management in the organizations of the United Nations system is the origin of this planned series of reports. Building on the Framework for Human Resources Management¹ which the International Civil Service Commission had presented to the General Assembly in 2000, WHO proposed a comparative analysis of human resources management to identify those areas in which further reform was necessary and assess whether there existed significant discrepancies that could affect the common system.

14. Since such an undertaking would be too broad in scope, the Unit decided to take a step-by-step approach and, in the first instance, to review the question of post structures and the types of appointments used by the various organizations of the system. Subsequent reports will address the issues of delegation of authority in human resources management, performance appraisal systems and accountability and oversight in human resources management.

15. In preparing these reports, the Unit will first take stock of the current situation and of current initiatives being taken by various organizations to improve their practices, and will make recommendations aimed at harmonizing criteria and achieving greater coordination

among organizations, taking into account their specific mission objectives, mandates and features.

H. Voluntary contributions from Member States

16. In the context of the regular interaction between the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and JIU, the issue related to a practice of donors attaching at times conditions to voluntary contributions and its impact on the programmes and activities of United Nations organizations, in particular the core programmes, was raised in 1998. Subsequently, at the end of 2001, the United Nations Environment Programme suggested that an assessment of the tendency towards earmarked contributions as part of voluntary contributions to United Nations organizations and programmes be included in the work programme of the Unit. This suggestion was supported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in its comments on the potential listing of reports for 2002. The International Civil Aviation Organization recently submitted in addition a suggestion that JIU study voluntary contributions from States for regular programme activities. In view of these suggestions, JIU has included this topic in its preliminary listing.

17. The objective of the study will be to assess the manner, methods and procedures followed in raising voluntary contributions, their level, including earmarked contributions, in relation to regular funding in various United Nations organizations, and their impact on the programmes and activities of these organizations. Issues to be reviewed in this context include: the funding structure in United Nations organizations; resource mobilization strategies and policies pursued by the organizations; predictability of resources received through voluntary contributions; and the extent to which earmarked contributions support or distort core programme activities.

I. Planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation in the United Nations system: status of implementation of results-based management

18. A number of organizations of the United Nations system have initiated results-oriented reform processes with a view to improving their planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation systems in order to cope more adequately with requirements for efficiency and accountability.

19. The planned review of such systems, which should be based on systematic consideration of the cycle as a whole, will focus on the results-oriented approach, identifying the impact of its application to the whole cycle. The report will suggest ways to improve, within the framework, the current methodologies for planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of the organizations of the United Nations system with a view to assisting Member States and the organizations themselves in designing and reviewing results-based management systems as an effective managerial tool. The impact of the zero growth policies (real and nominal) and other resource constraints on the implementation of results-based management will also be covered in this review.

20. This item was originally included in the programme of work of JIU for 2000, at the suggestion of the secretariats of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the International Maritime Organization, the Universal Postal Union, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, but was postponed pending the Secretary-General's pertinent report on results-based budgeting.

J. Procurement practices in the United Nations

21. The item on procurement practices in the United Nations has been included in the preliminary listing, based on the suggestions made by the secretariat of the World Food Programme to review procurement

practices in the United Nations system, and by the secretariat of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations that a system-wide review of electronic-procurement (e-procurement) be undertaken.

22. The review is designed to act as a catalyst to encourage greater coordination among the organizations of the United Nations system in the liaison and sharing of procurement information, with the aim of achieving the greatest possible efficiency and cost-effectiveness in procurement transactions. The review will cover policies and procedures adopted by the various organizations in the procurement of goods and services, and the coordination mechanisms that exist for the sharing of procurement information, including rosters of suppliers and blacklisted suppliers.

23. The review will also emphasize the status of e-procurement in the system, examining the potential benefits to be derived from a wider use of this facility and the merits of adopting a uniform approach. Areas related to procurement activities that could benefit from a wider and faster sharing of electronic-supported practices will be identified, and proposals will be put forward for innovative, information and communication technology-driven procurement procedures.

Notes

¹ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 30 (A/55/30), annex II.*