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REPORT ON THE

MEETING OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE
ORGANIZATION'S INTER-COUNTRY COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMME,
SEARO, NEW DELHI, 7-8 FEBRUARY 1980

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Sub-Committee on Programme Budget which was appointed by the Regional Committee at its thirty-second session, after reviewing the 1980-1981 inter-country projects, felt that the current mechanisms for involving Member States in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the inter-country projects were not adequate enough, and it suggested the establishment of a sub-committee to review the ongoing inter-country projects with a view to developing an effective mechanism for the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of the inter-country projects and, at the same time, reviewing the criteria for the establishment of the inter-regional programmes in the South-East Asia Region. This was endorsed by the Regional Committee through its resolution SEA/RC32/R10.

Such a Sub-committee was set up, composed of Mr A.R. Khan from Bangladesh, Dr R. Hapsara from Indonesia and Mr N.N. Vohra from India. It met in SEARO on 7 and 8 February 1980, Mr Vohra serving as the moderator.

2 REVIEW OF THE ON-GOING INTER-COUNTRY PROJECTS

2.1 General Observations

On the basis of a working paper (document SEA/ICP/Sub-committee/2) and supplementary information supplied by the Secretariat, the Sub-Committee had frank and useful discussions with the concerned staff members in SEARO.

The Sub-Committee reviewed the genesis, development and growth of inter-country projects since their inception. It felt, however, that it was not possible to make an exhaustive study of each and every aspect of inter-country projects within the span of a two-day meeting. Such an effort would necessarily involve an in-depth study of selected inter-country projects and visits to field institutions to gain a first-hand impression of the successes achieved and the reasons for default or failure. Within the limitations of time, the Sub-Committee could only address itself to the material presented before it and come to some broad-based conclusions which could be tested by an in-depth study and visits before arriving at final conclusions.

While reviewing the on-going inter-country projects, it was felt that: (i) whereas the objectives, broad activities and progress had been adequately documented, there was lack of information on difficulties faced during the course of implementation of the projects; (ii) the information would have been more meaningful if it had contained a critical review of the nature of problems encountered and the specific results achieved since the launching of each project.

Inter-country projects were originally formulated with strict and sensitive reference and relevance to national and regional priorities, but it appears that some projects which have since been developed do not conform strictly to these requirements. Possibly, this may have been due to an inherent difficulty of the current consent mechanism with Member States.

Consultation with governments had invariably preceded the formulation and implementation of the projects, but over the years, mainly owing to lack of a more effective consultation mechanism with the Member States, and sometimes to the absence of timely and concrete responses, the initial onus of formulating ideas about new projects and stimulating the interest of

governments had gradually devolved on SEARO. It is to be noticed that, while a project may have been formulated on the basis of acceptance by one or more countries, no Member State would readily reject or pose any problem in the interest of good relations both with WHO and with the sponsoring Member States, even if it felt that the proposal was not in accordance with the priorities of the Region. Consequently, it is felt that, while many of the ongoing activities were not necessarily redundant, some of the projects did not conform strictly to the priorities of the Member States, although they may have served a useful purpose for promoting new ideas and activities in emerging problem areas.

The Sub-Committee recalled that its task was not so much to indulge in a critical review of all that had happened, but to review the present and future plans and programmes to ensure the maximum utilization of available resources to meet the enormous challenge of health for all by the year 2000. This was considered essential and urgent as the financial implications of HFA/2000 were so large that the Organization and the Member States could no longer afford to channel the resources to any area which did not reflect the priorities of the Region. From this standpoint, it is felt that, although many of the projects were in tune with HFA/2000, some of the ongoing projects are not directly addressed to primary health care, which is the key approach to attaining the goal of HFA/2000. It is realized, however, that there may be a need for some activities related to emerging health problems which will become priority problems for the Region within the next two decades.

2.2 Review of Resources Allocation

It was noticed that inter-country projects, over a seven-year period covering 1973 to 1979, had been absorbing a varying percentage of the total regular budget ranging from 8.8 per cent (in 1977) to 18.5 per cent (in 1979); this was exclusive of the expenditure incurred on the Regional Advisers. The main reason for the sudden increase in 1978-1979 was due to the increased activities carried out under the Regional Director's Development Programme in the mainstream of inter-country projects, including the increased allocation of resources for biomedical research activities.

Within the allocations made available to inter-country projects, it may be necessary to probe as to how funding was organized for various programme areas and whether the bases thereto conformed to the priorities of the Region or the funding merely represented the momentum and pattern of activities in the period before 1973, with marginal variations from year to year in one or the other programme areas. Whatever the considerations, it was imperative that, beginning 1982-1983, the resources should be channelled to conform progressively to the priorities thrown up by the objective of HFA/2000.

2.3 Review of the Allocation by Component

As regards the distribution of resources among different components and their utilization, it was found that during the period 1973-1981, the expenditure on long-term staff had decreased from 53 per cent (1973) to 31 per cent (1980-81) and, for short-term consultants, from 24 to 12 per cent. However, the expenditure on subsidies and grants, and group educational activities had gone up from 17 to 47 per cent. The share of the

group educational activities per se in 1980-1981 is nearly 17 per cent of the total allocation for inter-country projects. The Sub-Committee felt that, whereas progressively increasing expenditures on group educational activities were understandable on account of the nature of activities in the Region, in terms of both the range and the frequency of consultative meetings, they should be examined whether they are directly relevant to national and regional priorities. The Sub-Committee is of the view that the allocations to different components will also assume a more meaningful pattern once definite decisions are taken regarding the very basis of future inter-country collaborative programmes. If future programmes are evolved to deal with priority problems of the Region, the distribution of the expenditure among different components will naturally have a pattern of its own depending upon the specific nature of activities envisaged.

2.4 Review of Criteria

The criteria for the selection of projects for WHO's involvement were noted. The Sub-Committee felt that, in view of the overall social target of the Member States and the Organization, viz., HFA/2000, there was a need for further sharpening of these criteria so that the resources in future could be geared to this end. The Sub-Committee deferred the finalization of the criteria for the selection of projects for the inter-country programme until it had an opportunity of carrying out a detailed study of the ongoing projects. In such an in-depth analysis, care will have to be taken to ensure that future inter-country projects will increasingly be in accordance with achieving the objectives of HFA/2000, with primary health care as the key approach. Within the overall ambit of HFA/2000, groups of countries within the Region will have varying problems which will require urgent solution. To that extent, there will be a reasonable range of project reflecting individual and mutual problems relating to some aspect of primary health care. In short, the Sub-Committee was of the view that the criteria should be such that the majority, if not all, of future inter-country projects would be related to one or the other aspects of primary health care as a key approach to HFA/2000.

2.5 Review of Mechanisms

The Sub-Committee felt that the current procedures for enabling Member States to involve themselves in the planning, operation and evaluation of inter-country projects, though valid in the past, were no longer adequate. Under the existing mechanism, given the quiescent attitude of the governments, silence was taken for consent, and this may have resulted in the utilization of some resources for poorly identified or non-priority activities. Viewed in the larger context of the restructuring of the Organization, in the light of its functions, it had become increasingly necessary to involve Member States more actively and meaningfully in fundamental decision-making of the kind that relates to inter-country projects. It was further observed that, on a broad analysis of the ongoing inter-country projects, some of them generate activities or ventures which have no direct relevance to the priority country health programmes of the concerned Member States.

While reviewing the proposal for an extension of the ongoing activities or for new proposals, the Member States who were involved in one or more projects should be asked to carry out a critical review of their participation since the launching of the inter-country projects and to state speci-

fically their interest in these activities, as well as to indicate their own suggestions for improvement, deletion or expansion of such activities. This would make future activities more attuned to strengthening what was already going on in the countries. The WHO programme coordinators should be associated in this process. In short, no inter-country project should be routinely continued from year to year merely because it was originally planned to have a tenure of a given number of years.

The current mechanism was inadequate to carry out an evaluation of project activities to determine how they have progressed over the years and succeeded in fulfilling the countries' needs and overcome any difficulties they encountered.

3 REVIEW OF INTER-REGIONAL PROJECTS

The Sub-Committee reviewed the inter-regional projects also. It noted that their number had been on the decrease. Viewed in the context of the restructuring of the Organization in the light of its functions, this is a happy augury. The Sub-Committee suggested that the Regional Office should be supplied with information regarding the financial implications, etc., of the ongoing inter-regional projects. The Sub-Committee, on the basis of available information, envisaged the continuance of some of these projects. However, as in the case of inter-country projects, fresh proposals for inter-regional projects would have to be in accordance with the priorities in the regions involved. On the basis of the data available to the Sub-Committee, it was not possible to pass a judgement on the criteria that might have been used for establishing the projects that are currently operational in the Region.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sub-Committee made the following recommendations:

(1) Establishment of a Sub-Committee by the Regional Committee. The functions of this Sub-Committee will be:

- (a) to formulate a regional variant of the general criteria for WHO's involvement in inter-country programmes, especially in the light of HFA/2000;
- (b) to carry out an in-depth analysis of the on-going inter-country projects and suggest a time-frame for a meaningful closure of some of the ongoing projects so that the available resources can be deployed for new tasks and objectives;
- (c) to participate in the initial exercise for the formulation of inter-country projects, and review ongoing and new programmes or proposals (the suitable time may be November/December every alternate year) and submit its report and recommendations to the Regional Committee. Wherever there is a need, the Sub-Committee may make field visits to study local problems and gain first-hand information, and
- (d) to review on-going and new inter-regional projects operating within the Region.

- (2) The Regional Office should carry out periodic evaluations of the inter-country projects utilizing the broad guidelines evolved by WHO for Health Programme Evaluation (HPC/DPE/78.1).
- (3) The 1982-1983 programme budget for inter-country projects should be formulated by the Regional Office on the basis of a suitable planning exercise applying country health programme principles.
- (4) The Regional Office should ensure that the vital link between country health programmes and inter-country programmes is established progressively so that Member States will be encouraged to formulate and operate inter-country projects in such areas where they have plans or provisions in the national health plans.