Fifty-seventh session

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTEERS PROGRAMME

Report of the Secretary-General and the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

In its resolution 3125 (XXVIII) the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General and the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme to report to it at its twenty-ninth session, through the Economic and Social Council and the Governing Council of the Programme, on the progress made in implementing the provisions of that resolution. The following report will also be considered by the Governing Council at its eighteenth session.

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UNIVERSAL NATIONS VOLUNTEERS

1. **Assessment of progress and performance**

1. The year 1973 witnessed further consolidation in the activities of the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV). It also marked the third year of the programme's operational activity since its establishment under General Assembly resolution 2659 (XXV) of 7 December 1970.

2. In implementing the UNV programme, the Administrator continued to follow closely the basic guidelines laid down by the General Assembly in the above-mentioned resolution. Prior to initiating activities in any country, it is the practice to obtain an official request for UNV assistance by the recipient Government. Furthermore, the programming of the UNV input within projects executed by the agencies of the United Nations system is based on a clearly defined need for manpower requirements at the intermediate level. Accordingly, recruitment is aimed at responding to project needs and well-formulated requests. Every effort is also made to encourage the broadest geographical participation, with special reference to promoting recruitment of candidates from developing countries.

3. The experience gained so far in introducing this relatively new form of assistance on a formal basis in the United Nations system, indicates that United Nations Volunteers have a valid role to play in the development process. In accordance with the fundamental principles of UNV, only those candidates with the necessary technical qualifications are submitted for consideration for any individual post. The procedures have provided for appraisal and technical clearance of each individual candidate by United Nations agencies concerned, and final acceptance by the recipient Government itself. As a result, a relatively high level of professional qualifications and technical skills have characterized United Nations Volunteer assignments. This has been verified by favourable comments received from UNDP resident representatives and agency field personnel in the context of an evaluation system introduced recently to provide necessary feedback on the contribution and relevance of United Nations volunteer assignments.

According to the resident representatives, the utilization of volunteers complements the services of more experienced experts. In particular, it is noted that the experts' effectiveness is enhanced in two ways. On the one hand, they can be relieved of time-consuming responsibilities, thus enabling them to concentrate on tasks demanding the full extent of their expertise. On the other hand, experts' instructions can often be implemented with special effectiveness by volunteers. For example, experience indicates that volunteers are especially successful in carrying out extension activities at the grass-roots level, and otherwise working in close association with people at the local level.

4. The trend towards the placement of volunteers in a wide variety of disciplines continued during 1973. The broad range of volunteers requested and fielded during 1973 under the programme has included economists, statisticians, agriculturists, foresters, engineers, mechanics, veterinarians, teacher-training specialists, biologists, irrigation specialists, architects, surveyors and sociologists. These assignments have taken place within the context of UNDP-financed projects and, to a very modest extent, under programmes financed by the regular budgets of United Nations agencies.
5. The following breakdown reflects the distribution of United Nations volunteers on an agency-wide basis:

31 per cent serving in FAO-executed projects
30 per cent serving in ILO-executed projects
9 per cent serving in United Nations-executed projects
9 per cent serving in UNESCO-executed projects

6. The remainder were distributed, in limited numbers, among UNICEF, UNIDO, WFP, WHO, ITU and UNPPA and UNDP-executed projects.

7. As of 31 December 1973, a total of approximately 170 United Nations volunteers, representing 32 different nationalities, were carrying out their duties in 29 developing countries. Several other volunteers who were the first to be recruited during 1971 completed their initial two-year assignments. Of the 70 volunteers in the field, roughly 36 per cent came from 14 different developing countries. At the same time, recruitment was in progress for a further 226 posts.

2. Limitations and constraints

8. The above figures, indicative of a relatively modest growth when compared with the larger bilateral programmes, reflect complexities inherent in introducing a new element within the existing framework of United Nations development activities. The programming and recruitment modalities, as well as the financial arrangements envisaged for the programme's operations at inception, have also had a direct bearing on its evolution and growth. The question of financial constraints and the need to provide proper administrative, logistic and substantive support for the United Nations Volunteers at the field level have inevitably restricted UNV operations to existing United Nations technical assistance projects, thus limiting the growth of the programme. It is also apparent that a proper selection and identification of suitable volunteer posts in the context of these projects is especially important, calling for an orientation to and awareness of the special stature of voluntary service among those entrusted with the programming and implementation of UNV at the field level. The early programming for the UNV component at the field level did not always result in posts suitable from a recruitment viewpoint or, when filled, able to sustain the motivation and energies of volunteers. An additional difficulty related to the established recruitment and clearance procedures. Since United Nations volunteers were required to receive preliminary technical endorsement by the United Nations agencies, followed by government acceptance, the consequent delays and time lags have tended to cause a high rate of withdrawal of potential candidates.

9. Moreover, recruitment performance under the existing contract between UNV and International Secretariat for Volunteer Service (ISVS) did not display the progress anticipated. Of the total vacant posts as of 1 January 1973, ISVS were able to fill only 33 per cent by the end of the year. It will be recalled that, at the establishment of UNV, the main responsibility for recruitment on the programme's behalf was entrusted to ISVS and the Co-ordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCTVS). While CCTVS, at its own request, ceased
to collaborate as a recruitment agency during 1973, the agreement with ISVS was renewed until June 1974. This extension was based on the understanding that UNV should assume the principal responsibilities for its own recruitment at the termination of the contract, working directly with volunteer-sponsoring agencies and organizations (governmental and non-governmental) interested in participating in the programme. It was recognized that such an arrangement would result in improved efficiency, administrative simplicity and economy.

3. Administrative support for the programme

10. In preparation for this change-over, the Administrator continued to establish and strengthen direct channels of recruitment during the course of 1973. Following wide distribution of the report on vacant posts issued on a bi-monthly basis, sponsoring organizations have begun to submit candidates directly to UNV. In the same context, the support of resident representatives' offices was enlisted as an important channel for recruitment in developing countries. With UNDP field offices playing a larger role in the identification, interviewing, language testing, and pre-departure administrative processing of UNV candidates, a general improvement of recruitment operations in developing countries has occurred. It is apparent, however, that, in the absence of formal national volunteer and service-oriented organizations to nominate candidates, the task of effectively drawing upon the manpower resources of developing countries remains difficult — requiring a concerted effort on the part of UNV and the UNDP field offices.

11. The programme's further development will be based on the broad plan of action approved by the Governing Council at its sixteenth session in June 1973 (E/5255/Rev.1, para. 119 (b)) — and subsequently endorsed in General Assembly resolution 3125 (XXVIII). The objective of assigning teams of volunteers in a selected number of countries has to some extent already been realized. In Iran, Jamaica and Yemen relatively large United Nations Volunteers teams were established. In several other countries — notably the Central African Republic, the Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Malawi, Niger and Togo — modest-sized teams were placed. Furthermore, in keeping with the recommendations of the Governing Council, primary concentration was focused on the least developed countries, where 70 per cent of the total UNV assignments are envisaged. As noted, efforts have also continued to increase the over-all number of volunteers from developing countries.

12. The Administrator also recognized the importance of UNV co-operation with domestic volunteer services. UNDP/UNV has explored the possibility of assisting such services which would promote the enlistment of local volunteers in self-help projects inspired, directed and carried out by the local people themselves. In this context, UNV has already participated in an ILO-executed project of the Youth Development Agency in Jamaica, in which United Nations volunteers are closely associated with Jamaican volunteers in the newly-created Jamaica National Youth Service. UNV was also involved in a UNDP-executed project providing consultative services to the Indonesian Board of Volunteers (BMTSI), which co-ordinates a large, well-developed, university-based volunteer scheme in Indonesia. Negotiations have been initiated with certain other interested countries to provide assistance to pilot projects aimed at encouraging the participation of domestic volunteers in local projects at the grass-root level.

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13. Finally, the question of reinforcing selected resident representatives' offices so that they can assume increased responsibilities for in-country volunteer support, recruitment at the field level, and evaluation has received careful consideration. The proposals of the Administrator in this connexion were considered by the Governing Council at its seventeenth session.

h. Financial considerations

14. As of 31 December 1973, Governments, international organizations and individuals had pledged a total of $563,595 to the Special Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Volunteers, called for by the General Assembly in its resolution establishing the programme. During 1973 the Fund's resources were used primarily for the external expense of volunteers from developing countries and, in a few instances, to cover their local costs and contingencies.
Fifty-seventh session
Item 15 (i) of the provisional agenda

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Corrigendum

Page 3, paragraph 9:

Replace the first two sentences by the following:

Moreover, for the above reasons, recruitment performance did not display the progress anticipated. Of the total posts requested to 1 January 1974, only 48 per cent had been filled.

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