Decentralization of Capacities and Authority

A. Objectives

(a) To further develop a country-focused response, thereby ensuring a substantial degree of cultural, social and economic country specificity in the dialogue and practical work of the United Nations system with developing countries, and to bring the power of decision-making as close to possible to those who are to benefit from the services offered;

(b) To better ensure Government ownership of development programmes by facilitating endogenous programming and design of interventions;

(c) To assist, the host Government as required, in its primary responsibility for the coordination of external assistance;

(d) To facilitate the provision of integrated, multi-disciplinary and substantive technical advice and support to national authorities, in order to meet country-specific needs;

(e) To maximize the use of national capacities and the modality of national execution;

(f) To facilitate United Nations system coordination and collaboration at the country level;

(g) To improve the speed, quality and efficiency of implementation.

B. Guiding principles

2. Decentralization consists primarily of the establishment of appropriate mechanisms and procedures for responding to the development needs of Member States. It can be effected to the regional, subregional and/or country level.

3. Decentralization should be designed

(a) to fit within the context of a regional, subregional or country strategy, and not to respond to non-recurrent needs or contingent pressures;

(b) to streamline decision-making processes, particularly with regard to programme/project formulation, approval and implementation;

(c) to adapt to the particular features and priorities of the region or country and thus to behave as a flexible process; and

(d) to enhance appraisal capacity and implementation effectiveness.

4. It must be seen as a strategy and mechanism for enhancing the efficiency and quality of external support to the development efforts of the countries in question. As a working tool it can incorporate various mechanisms, including (i) field representation; (ii) deployment of administrative and technical personnel; (iii) distribution of financial resources; and (iv) delegation of authority.

5. The degree of decentralization will depend on the specific mandates and the different tasks to be carried out by organizations at the field level (of which operational activities constitute only a part); on the authority that headquarters themselves have in regard to programmes and funds, by projections of resource availability for operational activities; on the level of field presence required to support Governments as they become increasingly able to assume a wider range of managerial and implementation responsibilities; and on the optimal levels of utilization of headquarters and field staff in the light of the increasing budgetary constraints faced by many organizations. The different mandates and tasks include the constitutional requirements of organizations and the roles relating to representational functions; normative activities; research activities; relations with non-governmental organizations; the provision of substantive policy and technical advice; and the provision of administrative and logistical support. The requirements of decentralization will also depend on a country's development status; its planning, coordinating and absorptive capacities; the volume and content of programmes; the volume and content of potential needs; and on requests by those countries for such offices.

6. Subject to the foregoing, a more even degree of authority delegated to regional and country offices on the one hand, and to field representatives of the system on the other, as well as a closer relationship between
the profiles and grades of representatives, could significantly enhance the effectiveness of their collaboration with each other at the country level.

7. Within the framework of an approved multi-year country programme, authority should be delegated to the maximum extent possible consistent with ensuring accountability.

8. Effective decentralization calls for a "decentralization ethos" that can generate an attitude favourable to the process.

9. Fullest use should be made of recent advances in telecommunications facilities, in order to bring the headquarters of organizations as close as possible to field operations and provide the necessary support to the latter.

Notes

Governments provide guidance on the degree of decentralization of capacities and authority. Policy decisions on the establishment and closure of offices, and on the choice of their locations, are also taken by Governments individually and collectively.