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Programme questions: evaluation

In-depth evaluation of the programme on public administration, finance and development

Note by the Secretary-General

In conformity with General Assembly resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994 and 54/244 of 23 December 1999, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of the programme on public administration, finance and development. The report has been reviewed by the relevant departments and offices. The Secretary-General takes note of its findings and concurs with its recommendations.

* E/AC.51/2004/1.

Annex

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of the programme of public administration, finance and development

Summary

The present report reviews the achievements and shortcomings of the United Nations public administration, finance and development programme, which is implemented by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The report covers the following activities: (a) support to intergovernmental processes; (b) exchange of information on practices of public administration; (c) technical assistance; and (d) collaboration with other entities of the United Nations system.

Since its creation in 1948, the public administration programme has evolved into a comprehensive set of normative, analytical and operational activities. In 2003, the Division for Public Administration and Development Management received additional capacity and can now address a broad range of public governance issues, including substantive support to national institutions in the social and economic governance areas.

The support provided by the Division to the intergovernmental debate on public governance and its coordinating role in promoting the global exchange of experience on national public administration practices are valuable to its major partners and to professionals in the field. The quality and relevance of its flagship publication, the *World Public Sector Report*, has been recognized. Through its substantive and material support to the Global Forums on Reinventing Government, the Division has acquired greater visibility. One of its major achievements is the establishment of a global electronic network, the United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN), for exchanging experience on practices in public administration.

Recommendations are made to strengthen the programme and improve its performance in areas where the evaluation identified weaknesses, as follows: (a) rationalizing the scope and focus of the programme by identifying a few critical areas where it can have an impact; (b) ensuring that the work on international cooperation in tax matters, which was transferred from the Division to the Finance for Development Office, is given appropriate support and that adequate resources be allocated by the Division to its work on public finance management; (c) improving the repertoire of best practices on public administration by developing standard methodologies for identifying and compiling best practices in public administration; (d) developing an information strategy to publicize more effectively the Division's initiatives; (e) enhancing UNPAN by establishing working-level contacts with relevant organizations and reviewing the content of the network; (f) enhancing linkages and synergies between the programme's functions and themes by formulating products that would draw from the Division various functions and which would be implemented by multi-skilled teams; and (g) using existing annual inter-agency meetings on public administration to promote greater collaboration among entities of the United Nations system.

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I. Mandate and methodology

1. The Committee for Programme and Coordination, at its forty-second session, recommended that the programme on public administration, finance and development be the subject of in-depth evaluation and that a report on the evaluation be submitted to the Committee at its forty-fourth session, in June 2004.¹

2. The in-depth evaluation reviewed all the activities of the programme, focusing on the most recent medium-term plans for the periods 1998-2001 and 2002-2005 and their objectives. The programme is implemented by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The present report contains the evaluation findings on the programme intergovernmental framework and secretariat arrangements (sect. II), secretariat services (sect. III), exchange of information (sect. IV), technical assistance provided by the Division to Member States to strengthen their government systems and institutions (sect. V) and collaboration between the Division and other United Nations entities (sect. VI).

3. In the conduct of the in-depth evaluation, the following categories of information were utilized by the Office of Internal Oversight Services: (a) United Nations documents; (b) information from internal sources (internal assessments and internal working documents of the Division); (c) information from previous assessments done by the Office of Internal Oversight Services; (d) structured interviews with the staff of the Division and Secretariat departments; (e) a survey of the views of the members of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration; (f) a survey of the views of a sample of the recipients of technical assistance; (g) a survey of the views of major partners of the Division, including regional commissions, other organizations of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations; (h) direct observation of the Division's support to a major global forum on governance, United Nations expert group meetings and coordination meetings; and (i) searches of the relevant databases and various web sites.

II. United Nations programme on public administration

A. Intergovernmental framework

4. The United Nations programme on public administration was created in 1948 by the General Assembly, which saw the need for international facilities that would provide training on the principles, procedures and methods of modern administration to candidates recruited on a wide geographic basis (resolution 246 (III) of 4 December 1948). Since then, the programme has grown into a comprehensive set of activities reflecting the evolving agenda of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

5. The importance of the role of the public sector in the development process was recognized by Member States when they decided to hold a special session of the General Assembly in 1996 to consider this issue. In the resulting resolution (50/225 of 19 April 1996), the Assembly gave the programme a broad range of issues to address, namely: strengthening government capacity for policy development; administrative restructuring; civil service reform, human resources development,

public-private sector interaction, public administration training and improving performance in the public sector. The Assembly, in its resolution 56/213 of 21 December 2001, recommended that the programme focus its activities on assisting Member States in their process of reform through fostering information-sharing in public administration, building essential institutional capacity and coordinating development assistance in that field. It further requested that the programme keep under review the role of public administration in the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

6. In 2000, the Group of Experts on Public Administration, established in 1967 to review the programme from time to time, recommended that its relations and interactions with the Economic and Social Council be strengthened. To that end, the Council, by its resolution 2001/45, restructured the Group into a Committee of Experts on Public Administration. Consisting of 24 experts appointed in their personal capacity, the Committee is responsible for reviewing critical issues of public administration and governance and for providing advice to the Council regarding new trends and strategies in this area. The Committee is to provide policy guidance and operational recommendations to Member States on how to address key issues related to the functioning of the State and providing guidance to the United Nations system in the area of public administration.

7. With the establishment of the Committee of Experts and its strengthened links with the Economic and Social Council, the programme's intergovernmental processes have become more formalized.

B. Secretariat arrangements

8. According to the medium-term plan for 2002-2005, the programme's major objectives regarding issues of public administration, public finance and public economics are: (a) to provide assistance to intergovernmental deliberations; (b) to assist Governments at their request to strengthen their policy-making and managerial capacities.² To reach these objectives, in addition to secretariat services to international bodies, the programme is preparing analytical studies and publications, disseminating information, providing advisory services and technical cooperation activities and collaborating with organizations of the United Nations system.

9. The programme's expected accomplishments in the results-based budgeting framework for the biennium 2002-2003 include: (a) a broader and deeper understanding by Member States of major issues of public administration, public finance and public economics; (b) improved access by Governments and international bodies to analytical tools, methodologies, information and best practices in the area of public administration and finance; and (c) improved coordination. The impact that the Division's activities reviewed in the present report had on the realization of these expected accomplishments is summarized in the conclusion of the report (see sect. VII).

1. Programme restructuring

10. The programme was affected by several restructuring steps taken during the period from 1995 to 2002, which aimed at better integrating its normative, analytical and operational activities. As a result of the latest reorganization of the Department

of Economic and Social Affairs, in early 2003, two major changes occurred in the Division's scope of work. On the one hand, the programme was broadened to include socio-economic governance by transferring to it resources that were previously available under the Division for Social Policy and Development. The objective of this reorganization was to achieve greater coherence in capacity-building by integrating into one unit support to procedural issues of public administration and substantive support to enhance the capacity of countries to realize the Millennium Development Goals.

11. On the other hand, the reorganization of the Department in early 2003, support to the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters provided by the Division of Public Administration and Development Management was transferred to the newly established Financing for Development Office. The new office serves as a focal point in the Secretariat for overall follow-up to the implementation of the outcome of the International Conference on Financing for Development, including support to efforts by Governments to establish and promote rational management of tax systems and financial administration. As part of this transfer of function, two Professional posts were reassigned from the Division to the Office. In addition, departmental staff capacity on finance matters was consolidated through reassignments to the Office from other divisions within the Department. At the same time, it was decided that issues related to public finance management would remain under the responsibility of the Division. This distribution of responsibilities was subsequently confirmed in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005.

12. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes that, within the broader framework of financing for development for which the Financing for Development Office is programmatically responsible, issues of international cooperation in tax matters should be given distinct focus and appropriately supported. In the Division, work on public finance management should be reviewed to ensure that analytical and operational activities in this area are effectively supported. The Office of Internal Oversight Services also observed that there is still lack of clarity as to which organizational unit within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is responsible for responding to requests for technical assistance and participation in relevant meetings in the area of taxation.

2. Core themes

13. As a result of the increased interest of Member States in public administration issues and the latest restructuring of the Division, the scope of the programme has broadened. At a formal presentation to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration in April 2003, the Division stated that the programme included 22 core themes subsumed under the following new and realigned functions: governance systems and institutions (7 themes), socio-economic governance (10 themes) and knowledge management and e-government for development (5 themes). The Division's three branches: Governance and Public Administration, Socio-Economic Governance Management, and Knowledge Management reflects the functional breakdown. The Office of Internal Oversight Services noted that there had been no attempt at prioritization among the themes.

14. An analysis of the core themes and their distribution across the three branches revealed some overlapping among the themes. For example, e-Government (under

the Knowledge Management Branch) could be considered a subtheme of Government systems (in the Governance and Public Administration Branch). Social governance and strengthening social capital (in the Socio-Economic Governance Management Branch) implies human resources links with development and training (in the Governance and Public Administration Branch). Private sector development (in the Socio-Economic Governance Management Branch) belongs to the same discussion as the changing role of the State (in the Governance and Public Administration Branch). In and by itself, overlapping and cross-cutting among themes would not pose a problem, if joint projects and teamwork across branches were an established practice in the Division. However, with the exception of two major projects which have involved broad cooperation from the staff (namely, the preparation of the *World Public Sector Report* and the Global Forum for Reinventing Government), joint projects and collaboration between branches is not the norm.

15. With only 25 Professional posts, the Division's resources are being spread thinly to cover the above-mentioned 22 themes. In November 2003, in a presentation at the departmental Directors' meeting, the Department's senior management took note of the Division's broad scope of work and recommended that it be streamlined. Some of the major partners of the Division have also noted that it is trying to cover too much ground and, as a result, faces the risk that its programme's impact and effectiveness would be diluted, a view also supported by the results of studies of the Department's technical assistance programme (see para. 39 below).

16. In conclusion, the restructuring of the Department in 2003 has had both positive and negative results for the Division. Bringing expertise and resources into the Division that were available under social development has increased the capacity of the programme to provide substantive support to national institutions responsible for realizing the Millennium Development Goals. At the same time, the restructuring had the effect of increasing the number of core themes underlying the work programme, and even with the addition of capacity from the social development area, the managers are spreading their resources thinly among the various themes. As mentioned above (para. 14), there is some thematic overlapping among the branches and the situation is not addressed through effective teamwork. Furthermore, the policy rationale for separating responsibility for domestic and international tax matters into two separate divisions was not clearly articulated and there is still some overlapping in the area of management of tax systems between the Financing for Development Office and the Division for Public Administrative and Development Management.

III. Support to intergovernmental processes

A. Support to intergovernmental bodies

17. The Division provides support to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council through the preparation of reports in response to specific requests. The reports prepared for the Assembly in 2002³ and 2003⁴ covered the role of public administration in the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. In support of the work of the Second Committee of the General Assembly, the Division has also organized panel discussions, for example, on challenges and

changes in public administration and on globalization and the State in 2001. As mentioned in paragraph 11 above, until 2002, the Division for Public Administration and Development Management also provided support to the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters.

18. The Division supports the work of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration by preparing reports and conference room papers on themes selected by the Committee. This documentation presents the results of the Division's analysis. It also contains policy tools and ideas developed in the context of international conferences, expert group meetings, panels and workshops organized by the Division. For the period under review, the majority of these gatherings have focused on public administration and civil service reform, knowledge systems and e-government, governance systems and institutions. Gender has been mainstreamed in the expert group meetings and publications of the Division, particularly in the context of its work on managing diversity in the civil service.

19. In-session support provided by the Division includes oral presentations on the themes selected and provision of advice at the request of the bureau members. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration, at its second meeting in 2003, commended the presentation made by the Secretariat and expressed deep appreciation for the work and progress that had been achieved in the past year and for the coherence of the proposed future activities and for its support of the work of the Committee.⁵

B. Publications

20. The publication programme was adjusted to reflect the different reorganizations of the Division that were carried out in recent years. At the same time, this programme was slightly streamlined (from 29 titles in the biennium 2000-2001 to 24 in 2002-2003). The publication of the *World Public Sector Report*, the biennial flagship report on special themes in public administration aimed at policy makers, scholars and civil society, was launched at the initiative of the Division in 2001. The report contains basic data, country profiles, information on emerging issues and highlights of best practices. The 2001 edition was entitled "Globalization and the State". The second edition, in 2003, was entitled "E-Government at the crossroads", a theme endorsed by the Committee of Experts and prepared in collaboration with academic institutions. The report is for free distribution, with a quarter of the print run reserved for sales (total print 2,070). The Committee recognized the importance and value of the *World Public Sector Report* as a tool for policy makers and practitioners, complimented the Secretariat for the quality and relevance of the first issue and recommended that the report continue to focus on emerging topics highlighted by the Committee.⁶

21. In collaboration with the International Foundation for Election Systems and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the Division has developed the electronic publication, entitled "Administration and cost of elections project". The project's web site states that it provides user-friendly, operationally oriented information on options, procedures and alternative solutions including the administrative and cost implications associated with the cost of elections. The web site (www.aceproject.org) has become a valued and well-known source of election-related information, as evidenced by the high number of monthly hits (700,000). The

usefulness of the site has been recognized in the reports of electoral institutes and centres and its content has been translated into French and Spanish with the financial support of partners.

22. Despite the success of the web site and United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) (see paras. 31-38 below), the Division and the staff of partner institutions commented to the Office of Internal Oversight Services that the Division's analytical products lack visibility and are not always reviewed by policy makers. The Committee of Experts also commented, in 2003 that, while significant, the initiatives of the Division in the field of public administration and governance were not sufficiently publicized throughout the world and should be the focus of a more effective public information campaign. The Office of Internal Oversight Services shares the view that the Division must improve the dissemination of information in order for it to reach its primary target audience (i.e. national policy makers).

C. Repertoire of best practices

23. The Group of Experts and its successor, the Committee of Experts, have encouraged the Division to produce repertoires and compendiums of best practices through the exchange of experiences in public administration. The Division's sources of best practices assessments include research conducted by the Division, material of experts and other organizations and reports prepared by Governments. In 2003, with a view to promoting the Division's work on best practices, the Committee suggested the creation of an inventory of administrative reform experiences that had taken place in different countries at the national and local levels in order to assess their respective effectiveness. The Division is in the process of formulating a plan to address the Committee's request.

24. The Office of Internal Oversight Services is of the view that Division efforts to prepare a repertoire of best practices in public administration is constrained by the following factors: case studies and country profiles prepared by the Division lack a standard methodology; country coverage is limited; and there is practically no synthesis of lessons learned about the core themes of the programme. It is the view of the Office of Internal Oversight Services that a repertoire of best practices should be more than a compilation of pertinent case studies, in that it also requires analytical work, critical assessment of the information obtained and synthesis, paralleling the process guiding the preparation of the *World Public Sector Report* (see para. 20 above).

D. Users and partners' feedback on the analytical activities of the Division for Public Administration and Development Management

25. The Office of Internal Oversight Services noted that the Division lacks a strategy for evaluating the usefulness of its services, including its analytical activities. Only recently did the Division prepare evaluation forms with which to assess its various activities. These were posted on the Division web site, but remained unused. The only documented evaluations were in connection with two training workshops at which participants' feedback was collected. In addition,

UNPAN gives users the option to participate in an online survey, the results of which are shared twice a year with all its members. The findings of a survey on the fifth Global Forum on Reinventing Government, conducted by the Government of Mexico in 2003, are discussed in paragraph 30 below.

26. The Office of Internal Oversight Services surveyed major partners of the Division, seeking their views on the relative impact of the services provided by the Division. The responses indicate that research and publications are perceived to have had a positive influence on strengthening policy making systems of government institutions, which is a major goal of the Division. Some of the respondents' comments suggest that they consider the analytical activities, such as documents, recommendations and expert group meetings, to be helpful in raising awareness and in creating better understanding of emerging issues. With respect to the most useful services to be provided in the future, there is an indication that organizing United Nations conferences and expert group meetings would be the most valuable service and that information provided electronically would be more valuable than printed material.

IV. Exchange of information

27. The General Assembly has placed a high priority on exchange on information on public administration. Exchange of information is pursued by the Division through (a) global forums with the participation of high-level government officials and representatives of international organizations and non-governmental organizations, as requested by the General Assembly in 2001, in resolution 56/213; and (b) a global information network.

A. High-level sharing of experiences

28. In response to the request of the General Assembly in resolution 56/213, the Division provided substantive support to the fourth Global Forum on Reinventing Government organized by the Government of Morocco in 2002 and the fifth Global Forum organized in 2003 by the Government of Mexico. The Global Forum is a periodic international conference that provides a platform for senior policy makers, experts, civil society and the private sector to exchange views and experience in areas related to governance and public sector reform.

29. The theme of the 2003 Global Forum, a four-day event attended by 8,500 participants, with delegations from 60 countries, was "quality of public service and innovation in Governments". The Division was responsible for organizing two of the seven capacity-building workshops (information and communications technology and e-government and the development of human capital in the public sector). The Forum's final declaration, intended to be followed by action by world leaders and international organizations, stressed the importance of decentralizing all aspects of governance, fiscal transparency, sound fiscal management and anti-corruption measures.

30. Based on a survey of the participants carried out by the Government of Mexico, one can conclude that it was a very successful event. Some 89 per cent of the participants expressed a strong interest in that kind of event and gave the highest

ratings to the workshops organized by the Division. The Office of Internal Oversight Services concludes that, by supporting the event, the Division is facilitating the exchange of information on emerging issues in public governance while, at the same time, contributing the United Nations perspective to those exchanges. In contrast to its publications and technical assistance projects, which tend to lack visibility, the Division's support to the Global Forum is widely known and is appreciated by public administration practitioners and policy makers.

B. Global information network on public administration

1. United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance

31. The United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) was launched by the Division in 2001 at the request of the General Assembly. By 2003, the Network, which in 2001 included 10 online regional centres and online international centres had grown to include 18 online centres (14 regional and 4 international). The online centres are responsible for collecting, analysing and communicating information available within their own regions on issues of public administration, public economics and finance. The most active centres are the Regional Cooperation Office for City Informatization in the Asia and Pacific region and the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe. African online regional centres have also made significant progress in participating in UNPAN activities, but the poor quality of online connection is a significant obstacle in increasing the number of documents contributed by them, particularly in one of the African centres.

32. The Division has provided technical assistance to the online regional centres, particularly those in developing countries, through provision of equipment, training workshops and coaching sessions, recruitment of local consultants and help-desk services. To achieve better coordination of the Network, the Division holds yearly interregional consultative meetings of UNPAN, where progress made and future strategies are discussed with online regional centres and other interested stakeholders. The last meeting took place in 2003 back to back with the Global Forum held in Mexico. The online regional and international centres also communicate directly among each other to coordinate their activities, avoid duplication and increase the efficiency of their work. Based on a performance monitoring system, established in 2001, the Division provides monthly feedback to all UNPAN members for improving their e-knowledge management.

33. The Division has made attempts to involve the United Nations regional commissions and agencies of the United Nations system in the work of UNPAN from the very beginning, by inviting them to participate in UNPAN events and contribute documents to the Network. However, attempts at broadening the scope of collaboration among United Nations entities are facing a number of challenges, one of them being the establishment of effective working-level contacts through designation of focal points by the respective regional commissions.

2. Dissemination of material of the Division through the United Nations Online Network

34. Besides its role as manager and coordinator of the Network, the Division is a major contributor to its content by making available such material as abstracts of its

publications, conference papers, a monthly Governance World Watch newsletter, worldwide online directories of public administration and training resources, such as the manual for professional ethics in the public sector. In addition, the Division responds, directly or by referral to an online regional centre, to online requests for information and advice (approximately 2,500 requests per year). The Office of Internal Oversight Services observed that the UNPAN information management system has contributed to increase the efficiency of the Division's work. For example, UNPAN is used to manage the Division's contacts, advisory services and conference and training databases.

35. Each branch of the Division is responsible for inputting its own data in the various databases. The Office of Internal Oversight Services observed that there was varying degree of compliance among the branches to that requirement. The Division has established an Information Management Task Force to improve its representation on the Network. The Task Force provides training and support to Division staff and monitors posting and enhancing the quality of information about the Division's activities on UNPAN. Given the absence of standards and criteria for inputting in the Network assessments of best practices, it is the view of the Office of Internal Oversight Services that the Information Management Task Force should play a key role in developing these guidelines to support the work of Division staff and the online regional centres in that area (see also para. 24 above on a similar issue).

3. Assessment of the United Nations Online Network

36. The number of UNPAN document and page views exceeded 1 million in August 2003. Approximately one fourth of the users are probably government officers, of which about 10 per cent are national policy makers. The Network was selected by the World Bank to become a member of the Bank's Administrative and Civil Service Reform Virtual Network. However, the latest online survey conducted by the Division (see para. 25 above) indicates that, while 80 per cent of the users found UNPAN information useful, the majority (57 per cent) said that they had found only some, or none, of the information they needed.

37. Pursuant to the General Assembly recommendation that UNPAN be expanded, the Division's budget for the biennium 2004-2005 includes resources to strengthen such capacity by improving the management of information at the subregional level.

38. The Office of Internal Oversight Services concluded that, since its launching three years ago, UNPAN has become a valuable tool for exchanging information among its members and partners. It could become an even more effective tool if the Division were to: (a) broaden the Network through increased collaboration among its partners; and (b) further develop UNPAN demand-driven content and a more user-friendly navigation system, particularly in relation to best practices.

V. Technical assistance

39. The Division's technical assistance projects, in large part, cover the following themes: strategies for poverty eradication; social economics; social governance; governance and electoral administration; local government; and civil participation. A large proportion of projects are multisectoral. A review of a sample of project files indicates that the Division is rarely involved in the complete project cycle.

Usually, it is requested by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide specific input into complex projects with multiple collaborators, such as advice on an aspect of policy, introduction of new tools and techniques or delivery of training courses. By the end of 2003, the Division had 362 active technical assistance projects. Of these, 58 per cent were managed by the Socio-Economic Governance Management Branch, 37 per cent by the Governance and Public Administration Branch and 4 per cent by the Knowledge Management Branch. The Office of Internal Oversight Services identified three recent technical assistance projects which were focused on gender equality and integrating gender into development policy.

A. Scope and focus of the technical assistance programme

40. In 2001 and 2002, with the support of external evaluators the Department of Economic and Social Affairs reviewed the performance of its technical assistance. The review, which included a number of Division projects, concluded that, in the context of declining resources and in order to compete effectively in a crowded arena of technical assistance providers, the Department would have to raise its profile by offering, for example, services of exceptional technical quality, or by concentrating its expertise in “niches” where few others are operating. In 2003, in their comments to the Office of Internal Oversight Services, representatives of other United Nations programmes and international organizations confirmed the relevance of this message for the Division. Other recommendations contained in the Department’s assessments were that there should be a closer alignment between operational activities and the issues of concerns to the intergovernmental bodies.

41. In the 2003 report of the Secretary-General on review of technical cooperation in the United Nations⁷ it was noted, in regard to public sector management, that a partial rationalization had already taken place between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme, whereby the latter focused primarily on the legislature-related elements and the former focused on the public administration elements, and left open the possibility of further rationalization. In a recent internal note on this division of labour, the Division restated that its technical assistance activities would remain focused on civil service reform, decentralization, innovation, audit systems, delivery of services and information and communication technology applications. Senior management in UNDP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs are planning to discuss ways and means to achieve a more effective division of labour and rationalization of work in 2004. The outcome of this review should be reflected in the proposals for the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007.

B. Value of the programme

42. With respect to the value of the Division’s technical assistance, the above-mentioned reviews of technical assistance (see para. 40), assessed by the Office of Internal Oversight Services as professionally competent, led to the conclusion that the Division had contributed to capacity-building in specific countries and that the high quality of its technical advisers and consultants was its best asset. In providing advice in the information and communication technology area, the Division’s value added was judged to be its objectivity and its linkage to

global information networks. On the negative side, the studies found that administrative problems affected the delivery of services by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and that UNDP, which had been developing its own capacity in the governance area was found by country offices to be more responsive. A 2002 Office of Internal Oversight Services audit found that the Division's implementation rate for technical cooperation projects was below the overall average rate of the Department. In 2003, several responses from one recipient country included in the Office of Internal Oversight Services survey of recipients of the Division's technical assistance, also referred to problems faced by the Division in delivering assistance (e.g. delays in processing authorization, poor project design and lack of monitoring and follow-up).

43. With regard to the question of which organization providing assistance in public administration and development was the most useful, the respondents to the Office of Internal Oversight Services survey of recipients of technical assistance did not indicate a clear preference for the Division. Other organizations surveyed by the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the work of the Division, ranked its technical assistance fourth for usefulness, after exchange of information, support to international conference and publications. Regarding future usefulness of the Division's activities, recipients of its technical assistance commented that activities in the future that would contribute to strengthening the capacity of institutions and that supporting the development of concepts and tools would be the most useful.

44. The Division is aware of the need to reorient its technical assistance programme and has tried to do so by focusing more on support to policy development and capacity-building. It is too early to assess the results of this reorientation.

C. Patterns of expenditure

45. The technical assistance programme of the Division relies on two sources of funds: the United Nations regular programme of technical assistance, section 21 of the programme budget, and extrabudgetary funds. Section 21 expenditures cover the salaries of the Division's interregional advisers. Extrabudgetary resources, which fund the implementation of activities, have declined by 40 per cent since 1994, from \$21 million at the end of 1994, to \$12.8 million in October 2003. The reduction in extrabudgetary funds would have been even larger, had there not been a substantial increase (over 70 per cent) in trust funds from 1994 to 2002. Despite this overall decrease, the Division is the largest of the technical assistance programmes of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with 38 per cent of the Department's extrabudgetary resources in 2001. However, for the Division's technical assistance to remain sustainable, it must diversify its extrabudgetary funding base.

46. Evidence that the programme has begun this diversification is illustrated by the increase in trust fund resources. In 2003, the Socio-Economic Governance Management Branch of the Division developed a plan to diversify its sources of funding by developing networks and contacts with the World Bank, regional development banks and foundations and through bilateral cooperation.

D. Synergy between the normative, analytical and operational functions of the Division

47. The underlying concept of the 1997 restructuring of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was that integrating normative and analytical functions and technical cooperation activities would rationalize economic and social activities throughout the Secretariat and create synergies. An Office of Internal Oversight Services inspection of the Department in 2001 had found that the integration of normative, analytical and operational functions was well under way.⁸

48. In the case of the Division for Public Administration and Development Management, the following example illustrates how the normative, analytical and operational dimensions have interacted, sometimes in unanticipated ways. In the context of its mandate to support developing countries and countries with economies in transition in strengthening civil service reform, the Division provided support to the Second Pan-African Conference of Ministers of the Civil Service, held in Rabat in 1998, and to the drafting committee of the Conference. In its declaration, the Conference recommended the creation of a Charter for the Public Service function in Africa. In parallel, the Division had conducted an analytical study funded by UNDP, on public service and ethics in Africa, which revealed a gap between standards at the policy level and practical implementation of those standards. The results of the study were shared with the drafting committee, which used them in its work. The Charter for the Public Service in Africa was adopted by 38 African countries at the Third Biennial Pan-African Conference, held in Windhoek in 2001.⁹ Subsequently, the Division's study served as the basis for workshops and training modules for promoting professionalism and ethics in Africa, in which linkages were made with the civil service charter. These interactions should be pursued more systematically in the future.

49. The establishment of such linkages and synergies will be further facilitated as country technical assistance projects become more focused on providing assistance in the development and formulation of policies and strategies referred to as upstream assistance. Such assistance could be provided to Governments in support of an integrated reform of the public sector, government decentralization, or to develop analytical tools for monitoring the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. The Office of Internal Oversight Services noted that the Division intends to consider linkages among the three types of functions (normative, analytical and technical assistance) as a key criterion for the selection of technical assistance projects.

50. Division staff stated to the Office of Internal Oversight Services that synergies between functions and across the different themes that the Division handles could be increased if management took the following steps: (a) make cross-linkages among functions and themes a programming priority; (b) formulate products and outputs which draw from its different functions; and (c) organize teams with the proper mix of skills to support these cross-dimensional products.

VI. Collaboration

51. At its fifty-sixth session, as a follow-up to the five-year assessment of the implementation of its resolution 50/225 on public administration and development,

the General Assembly, in resolution 56/213, requested the Secretary-General to improve the coordination of technical assistance in the field of public administration and development. In 2003, the core functions of the restructured Division for Public Administration and Development Management included ensuring effective cooperation with the relevant organizations and institutions inside and outside the United Nations system.

A. Collaboration among entities of the United Nations system

52. The Division is the focal point for reporting to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly on the public administration activities of all United Nations system entities. In late 1999, a partnership agreement between UNDP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was concluded in the area of governance and public sector management (see para. 41 above). Staff of the Division and UNDP stated to the Office of Internal Oversight Services that, in general, positive working relationships existed between the two entities. However, it appears that coordination with UNDP at the regional and country level could be improved. One of the issues mentioned by staff interviewed was that UNDP resident representatives were not always informed about the capacity of the Division to provide services and alternative sources of funding available to it.

53. Since 2002, the Division has organized inter-agency meetings with the representatives of United Nations entities that participate in meetings of the Committee of Experts. In 2003, the coordinating meeting was attended by 24 representatives from, inter alia, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), UNDP, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the International Labour Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization. The participants discussed potential collaboration between the Division, UNDP, the World Bank, regional development banks and the regional commissions. A joint report exploring future collaboration was issued by the Division, UNDP and ECA. While this joint planning exercise is a step in the right direction, it did not specify which activities would be jointly undertaken. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes that inter-agency meetings could be made a more effective mechanism of collaboration among United Nations entities involved in the area of public administration, by encouraging greater information-sharing and exploring additional areas of cooperation, based on the individual entities' mandates and expertise.

54. Collaboration between the Division and United Nations entities and other organizations takes place in the course of project implementation. While the Division's input into each project is limited (see para. 39 above), this arrangement multiplies the opportunities for collaboration. The following are recent examples of collaboration among organizations: (a) developing capacity-building workshops for conflict management, with UNDP, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Department for Disarmament Affairs; (b) providing support to a workshop on cross-border cooperation among local authorities for poverty reduction, with the co-organizers (UNDP, ECA) of the fifth Africa Governance Forum. A partner of the Division

expressed the view that there should be greater collaboration between the Division and other United Nations entities for increased attention to the role of local governments in public administration.

B. Coordination of development assistance

55. With respect to aid coordination, the Office of Internal Oversight Services noted two cases where the Division has exercised a leading role: (a) it is the implementer of the Africa Governance Inventory project, a database which describes governance initiatives implemented in sub-Saharan Africa. The database was designed to improve coordination of development assistance; (b) as a side event to the fifth Global Forum on Reinventing Government, held in November 2003, the Division organized an ad hoc expert group meeting on innovations in the sourcing and effective delivery of aid, as well as in aid coordination, management and accountability. Some of the participants stated to the Office of Internal Oversight Services that the scope of the meeting was too broad and that, with respect to follow-up of the discussions, the respective roles of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNDP were not entirely clear to them.

56. In conclusion, while the Division has taken steps to define its areas of activities so as to reduce overlap with other United Nations entities, the Office of Internal Oversight Services believes that there is still room for further rationalization of the division of labour between the Division for Public Administration and Development Management, the regional commissions, UNDP and other entities of the United Nations system. This rationalization should help the Division to prioritize its activities and focus on a few critical areas where it can have greater impact.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

57. Since its inception in 1948, the programme on public administration, finance and development has grown into a comprehensive set of activities which reflect the evolving agenda of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. In recent years the programme's link to the Assembly and the Council has become more formalized and strengthened through the establishment of a standing Committee of Experts on Public Administration. The programme's main value lies in its support to the intergovernmental debate on matters of public governance as a means to achieve development goals and in its coordinating role in promoting the global exchange of experience on national public administration practices. In 2003, the programme received additional capacity and can now address a broader range of issues related to public governance, including substantive support to national institutions in the socio and economic governance areas. The Office of Internal Oversight Services found evidence of synergies between the operational, analytical and normative activities of the programme.

58. Based on the findings presented in the present report, the Office of Internal Oversight Services is of the view that the Division obtained the following results with respect to its results-based budgeting framework expected accomplishments for the biennium 2002-2003 (see para. 9):

(a) *Broader and deeper understanding of major issues of public administration.* The Committee of Experts has expressed satisfaction at the substantive support provided to it by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management. In this context, the analytical activities of the programme have been helpful in raising the awareness of Governments and creating a better understanding of emerging issues. The quality and relevance of the programme's flagship publication, the *World Public Sector Report*, has been recognized by the Committee of Experts. Through its substantive and material support to the 2002 and 2003 Global Forums on Reinventing Government, the programme has reached out to a larger public of policy makers and practitioners;

(b) *Improved access to data and information.* One of the programme's major achievements is the establishment of a global electronic network, the United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) for exchanging experience on practices in public administration, which is viewed as a valuable tool by UNPAN members and users. Access to quality information and advice was also provided through technical assistance and the programme has contributed to capacity-building in recipient countries;

(c) *Improved coordination.* The Division organized annual inter-agency meetings and took steps to rationalize the division of labour between itself and its major partners; the agreement concluded with UNDP in the late 1990s to set up the terms of reference for a strategic partnership was further discussed; in addition, the Division identified areas of collaboration with one of the regional commissions, namely, the Economic Commission for Africa.

59. Despite the main accomplishments mentioned in paragraph 58 above, to improve its effectiveness, the programme needs to address the following issues. It should be noted that the present evaluation reviewed all aspects of the programme, not all of which could be tracked through the results-based budgeting framework for the biennium 2002-2003:

(a) The programme has to address 20 core themes covering the areas of public administration, socio-economic governance and knowledge management. One of the consequences of this broad scope is that the programme is spread thinly among too many themes. The Office of Internal Oversight Services also noted that there was some overlapping among core themes assigned to different Division branches. By itself, this situation would not present a problem if there were greater use of joint projects and teamwork by managers around the critical issues addressed by the programme;

(b) With the exception of its support of the Global Forum, the programme's outputs and products lack visibility and recognition. The Division's outreach strategy has relied primarily on UNPAN, which has limited outreach to national policy makers;

(c) The 2003 restructuring of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs led, inter alia, to the separation of functions related to taxation, assigned to its Financing for Development Office and public finance management assigned to the Division for Public Administration and Development Management. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes that, under this distribution of responsibilities, within the broader concept of

financing for development, issues of international cooperation in tax matters should be given appropriate focus and provided with sufficient capacity, while the work on public finance management in the Division is provided with adequate support;

(d) The Division has taken steps to develop a repertoire of best practices in public administration, considered a priority by the Committee of Experts, by collecting case studies and country profiles from a variety of sources, and posting them on the Network. However, the process for assessing best practices lacks a standard methodology, country coverage is very limited and the ability to search for “best practices” and related subthemes through UNPAN is difficult;

(e) UNPAN faces the following difficulties: (i) it reaches only a small proportion of its intended primary users, i.e. national policy makers; (ii) the lack of working-level contacts with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and some related United Nations entities does not promote collaboration; (iii) a substantial proportion of users feel that more information could be provided. The above-mentioned issues need to be addressed in order for the Network to grow and maximize its usefulness as a tool for developing and exchanging knowledge and information;

(f) The Division has contributed specific but modest inputs to a large number of complex technical assistance projects involving multiple partners. As was noted in paragraph 58 (b) above regarding the outputs of the programme in general, the Division’s contribution to these projects appear to lack recognition and visibility among its partners and users. The effort at rationalization mentioned in paragraph 58 (c) above should lead to a sharper definition of the programme and enable it to have an impact.

60. Based on these findings, the Office of Internal Oversight Services makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

Rationalizing the scope and focus of the Division

61. Given its existing capacity, within the broad theme of strengthening governance systems and institutions for social development and poverty reduction, the Division for Public Administration and Development Management should identify a few critical areas where it can have an impact. This process should be based on the following criteria: (a) the Division’s comparative advantage vis-à-vis other United Nations entities taking into account their respective mandates and substantive expertise; (b) an analysis of Member States’ specific clients groups that would benefit from the advisory and technical assistance services provided by the Division; and (c) a review of the relative usefulness of products and services based on existing assessments. This process should be concluded by the end of 2004 in order for these areas of focus to be reflected in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 (see paras. 15, 16, 22, 25, 40, 42 and 44 above).

Recommendation 2

Support to international cooperation in tax matters in the Financing for Development Office

62. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs should ensure that the work on international cooperation in tax matters and support to Governments in this area are given appropriate focus and support within the Financing for Development Office (see paras. 11 and 12 above).

Recommendation 3

Support to public finance management work in the Division

63. The Division should allocate adequate resources to work in public finance management to allow for a more effective delivery of analytical and operational outputs in that area (see paras. 11 and 12 above).

Recommendation 4

Enhancing the repertoire of best practices

64. Given the importance attached by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration to best practices, the Division should develop standard methodologies for identifying and compiling best practices in public administration (see paras. 23, 24 and 35 above).

Recommendation 5

Developing an information strategy

65. The Division should develop an information strategy to publicize more effectively its initiatives on public administration. The primary target of this strategy should be national policy makers. Part of the strategy should be to develop a worldwide database of national policy makers who would be interested in the Division's outputs. The strategy should also identify potential users in such groups as international organizations (see paras. 22, 36 and 43 above).

Recommendation 6

Enhancing the United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance

66. (a) The Division and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific should take effective steps in establishing working-level contacts to serve as a focal point to input information related to public administration in UNPAN system;

(b) UNPAN demand-driven content should be further developed, particularly in relation to best practices;

(c) Information management, including inputting data in the UNPAN database and regularly using the resources offered by UNPAN, should be better integrated in the work of all branches of the Division, at all levels (see paras. 31-38 above).

Recommendation 7**Enhancing linkages and synergies between functions and across themes**

67. To increase synergies between the functions and across the various themes handled by the Division, management should take the following steps: (a) make cross-linkages between functions and themes a programming priority; (b) formulate products and outputs which would draw from the Division different functions; and (c) organize teams with the proper mix of skills to support these cross-dimensional products (see paras. 47-50 above).

Recommendation 8**Strengthening collaboration among United Nations entities**

68. The annual inter-agency meetings on public administration, finance and development should be made a more effective mechanism of collaboration among United Nations entities involved in the area of public administration, by inter alia, encouraging greater information-sharing and exploring additional areas of cooperation, based on the individual entities' mandates and expertise.

(Signed) Dileep Nair

Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

Notes

¹ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/57/16), para. 259.

² Ibid., *Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/55/6/Rev.1), para. 7.36.

³ A/57/262-E/2002/82.

⁴ A/58/152.

⁵ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 44* (E/2003/44-E/C.16/2003/6), para. 32.

⁶ Ibid., para. 36, recommendation 3.

⁷ See A/58/382, appendix G.

⁸ See A/55/750, para. 55.

⁹ See A/56/63-E/2001/21, annex II.