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Conduct of the Business of the Executive Board : Proposals by Mr. J.A.MacDonald, Representative of Canada, made to the Executive Board on 5 May 1972

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1972 session

Conduct of the business of the Executive Board:
Proposals by Mr. J.A. MacDonald, Representative of Canada
made to the Board on 5 May 1972

The delegation of Canada would like to address itself to the note by the Executive Director on the conduct of the Executive Board's business contained in document E/ICEF/L.1280. My delegation has studied with care this document and has given serious thoughts to a reorganization of the agenda for Board meetings.

To this effect, my delegation has considered various points which I would now like to explain. First I would like to deal with the problem of time-span for meetings, secondly with the plenary sessions of the Board, thirdly with the meetings of the Programme Committee, fourthly with the resumption of the plenary session and finally with the meeting of the Committee on Administrative Budget.

As regards the first point, in 1971 the average daily sitting of the Board was four hours and twenty minutes during the general debate on progress report. This figure is a total of two sessions held daily. The time available to the Board could therefore be increased almost 40 per cent simply by adhering to the present schedule of two sessions per day of three hours each. Our proposals might help to meet complaints of some delegations that Board meetings take too many working days.

Turning to the second point, plenary sessions, I would like to give an idea how my delegation would conceive the first five days of plenary. On the first day the Board would proceed to (1) the adoption of the agenda; (2) hear the Executive Director's introductory statement on the general progress report. On the second day, usually, a general debate on the report begins that will last four to four and a half days. The time might be better spent following a structured agenda of items to be considered in a broad policy context by the Board. For example, the second day could be spent examining country programmes from three regions, each centred around the programme for one country. They could be reviewed and discussed primarily in policy context by considering three aspects: (1) the programmes as reflection of UNICEF objectives and policies; (2) their relationship to UNDP country programmes; (3) their relationship to national development objectives and programmes. The Executive Director could prepare and circulate reports on selected programmes before the meetings. Within each region individual countries would be looked at closely on a rotating basis.

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On the third day the Board might wish to spend two sessions considering global reports on perhaps two types of assistance projects. The selection should vary each year and examples should be considered by the Board from a policy point of view. Suggestions for new types of projects could also be considered under such an item, perhaps necessitating further time allotment.

On the fourth day, two sessions might be concerned with emergency programmes and procedures, one being a review of major emergency situations which would have inevitably arisen during the past year, the other being a discussion of plans and procedures which might be used to meet similar emergency situations in the future.

The fifth day might be spent considering special projects or studies, such as UNICEF policy on education review, or the report of the Protein Advisory Group could well occupy the remainder of the Board's first week of business. A sixth day of meeting in the first week was not scheduled in 1971, but it was in 1972. This day could provide flexibility in agenda for more extensive consideration of any item mentioned above.

I come now to the meetings of the Programme Committee. A reorganization of the work in the Committee could be considered along the following lines: a first day concerned with a general review of the past year's programme by region, three to be selected on rotating basis. Emphasis should be on project and programme experiences. The next day the Committee might study in detail three regions, different from those considered in the policy context, each represented by one country programme, to be discussed primarily in the context of projects by considering three aspects: (1) individual project effectiveness; (2) effectiveness of the total country programmes; (3) problems of country programmes related to national preferences in a functional sense.

On the third and fourth day it might be appropriate to consider project proposals for the coming year. The Executive Director's response to complaints about the number of projects to be considered was to suggest that some projects be treated in detail, others in one or two paragraphs. If the policy guidance function of the Board is enhanced, the Board should be able to treat project proposals, which would be circulated previously, in a one-day session. The projects marked for detailed consideration could be scheduled for another day. The newly instituted system of reporting by regions on a rotating basis might well prove adaptable to the foregoing.

The next step, and my fourth point, would be the resumed plenary sessions. On the final day of its meetings, the Board could consider (1) the report of the Committee on Administrative Budget; (2) other business and (3) elections.

The question of the Programme Committee remaining as a separate entity or becoming part of the plenary would appear to make little difference. It will be noted that if Committee's functions were to be assumed by the Board, the Executive Director recommends the continuation of closed meetings for discussions of individual project proposals. If the Programme Committee were to remain as presently constituted, its report would also be considered on the final day.

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Finally, I would like to turn to financial matters and give some consideration to the Committee on Administrative Budget. This Committee generally meets on two days prior to the Executive Board sessions. If the suggestion to consider financial control in terms of relation of total UNICEF commitments to expected resources is added to the agenda, a further day of meetings might be necessary. As the purpose of the suggestion is to afford a detailed review of financial plans, it would mean that an important area of UNICEF's concern now dealt with by the Secretariat could be examined by the Committee.

In concluding these remarks, Mr. Chairman, I would like to point out that my delegation made these suggestions in a spirit of co-operation and because Canada is concerned that the efficiency of the Executive Board meetings be increased and also because it supports the enhanced policy-making function of the Board.



4-18-79