

Opening Remarks at the

23RD MEETING OF RCA NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Dhaka, Bangladesh

18 March 2001

Adnan Shihab-Eldin

Director

Division for Africa, and East Asia and the Pacific

Department of Technical Co-operation

International Atomic Energy Agency

The Honourable Mr. Fazlur Rahman, Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology.

The Honourable Engr. Habibuddin, Chairman, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission,

Prof. Naiyyum Choudhury, Member, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission and National RCA
Coordinator,

Distinguished RCA Representatives,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me to welcome you on behalf of the International Atomic Energy Agency and its Director General to the 23rd Meeting of RCA National Representatives. I take this opportunity to extend to all of you the greetings of Mr. Qian, the Deputy Director General and Head of the Department of Technical Co-operation and bring you his best wishes for a successful meeting.

It has been just over two years since I joined the Agency to assume the duties of Director of the Division for Africa, and East Asia and the Pacific in the Technical Co-operation Department of the IAEA. Working in the Agency, especially the TC Programme, is very demanding and challenging. Over the course of the past two years, I had the privilege of meeting and working with most of you either in Vienna or during my visits to Member States in the region. I have learned a lot about the TC Programme, the diversity of its scope, its challenging objectives, the elaborate and demanding process of planning, formulating and delivering a programme comprised of over 1000 projects in about 100 countries, on average at any given time. I have come to appreciate its complexity and the hard work it demands on the part of everyone involved - at the Secretariat and at counterpart institutions in Member States.

What I find most rewarding and satisfying about working with the TC Programme is the experience of interacting with such a high calibre of motivated and dedicated staff at national institutions and the Secretariat, and the unique satisfaction derived from observing the impact resulting directly from contributions made by the TC Programme.

Distinguished Representatives,

This is the fourth major RCA meeting I attended. I am particularly pleased that your meeting is being held in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. As you know, an RCA meeting of the National Representatives was planned to be held in Bangladesh in 1996, but the venue had to be changed due to unforeseen events. I am personally delighted to have this opportunity to visit Bangladesh for

the first time. In addition to my participation in the work of your meeting, I look forward to an opportunity, in the course of the next few days, to discuss with our Bangladesh colleagues, ways and means to further enhance the positive and fruitful co-operation within the framework of the TC Programme.

I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge on behalf of the Agency Bangladesh's important and active participation in the work of the Agency. This is manifested by the continued high implementation rate of the approved TC Programme in Bangladesh, which no doubt is the result of the excellent co-operation with and high importance accorded to the TC Programme by the Government at all levels.

Distinguished Representatives,

As you might expect, the Department of Technical Co-operation will soon request Member States to prepare and submit project proposals for consideration to be included in the TC Programme for 2003/2004. It is apt therefore, that a key agenda item of your meeting is the preparation of the RCA programme for 2003/2004.

In his addresses to RCA meetings over the past several years, Mr. QIAN Jihui, Deputy Director General of the Department of Technical Co-operation, has stressed repeatedly the importance of extensive upstream work as key for success in identifying and preparing a sound RCA programme, made up mostly of good Model Projects. According to the TC Strategy, endorsed by the Agency Board of Governors, Model Projects are those that provide solutions to real and important national development problems (and for RCA, common to Member States in the region), exploit existing national and regional capabilities, apply effectively substantive nuclear techniques and enjoy strong government support.

Over the past few years, the Agency has gained valuable practical experience of what constitutes a good model project. This has led us to refine and highlight one of the Model Project criteria - government commitment - as a central criterion that would greatly facilitate the work of all parties involved during the upstream work, design and appraisal stages, since it is simple, easy to apply and would result in selection of projects, meeting the Model Project quality standards. For projects outside mandatory areas or “core competence” of the Agency, such as safety and radiation protection, this means highest priority is given to projects in areas where there is concrete evidence that a given nuclear technique can:

?? have a significant impact on key development problems that the government(s) has an existing national programme in and provides evidence of its willingness to invest its own or borrowed resources; and

?? have a distinct advantage over other approaches.

It is useful here to underline what is meant by “government commitment”. It means commitment by the government to address or solve a particular priority national development need or problem through a national programme/project supported by sizeable and adequate national resources, including those mobilized from regional and international sources. Such commitment goes far beyond - and usually precedes - the limited commitment of an institute or a ministry to provide the required direct input resources and funds to a specific TC project. In fact, a TC project that meets the central criterion constitutes normally **only** a small though important - if not a critical - component of a much larger national development programme or project.

Distinguished Representatives,

Three factors have contributed to the added emphasis being placed in the forthcoming upstream and appraisal process on identifying and selecting projects that meet the central criterion of “government commitment”.

First, is the Agency-wide move into results-based programming and budgeting; this new approach has now been approved by the Board of Governors and is strongly endorsed by all Member States and is being observed fully in planning, reviewing and approving of the regular budget of the Agency for 2002/2003.

Second, in the past two years, the TC Department undertook a great deal of upstream work which resulted in a record level of design and approved programming, representing a total of about US\$ 260 million. Given that many of the approved projects are designed and budgeted for 2003/2004 and some others are likely to be extended, we estimate that resources for designing of new projects under the 2003/2004 TC Programme must be limited to less than 30% of the total new resources that will be available to TCF in the next cycle.

[In view of the above, and given that high percentage of expected TC Fund resources for 2003/2004 have already been committed for continuing/ongoing projects, it is doubly important that RCA lead countries exercise extra effort to identify those few projects that have the highest chance of competing for limited net new resources available for the next TC Programme cycle.]

Third, it is now evident that the TC Department has a high workload - both for programming and implementation. This has contributed to the existence of a serious problem commonly referred to as the “TC workload” problem. I refer here to the major imbalance that has developed over the years, and continues to increase at a rapid pace, between the size of the complex and diverse TC Programme to be planned and delivered - composed of more than 1000 projects, covering many diverse fields, all important and needed - and the human resources required to assist governments to

develop quality projects that meet the objectives outlined in the TC Strategy, manage their implementation and evaluate their effectiveness and impact. There is now a general agreement that the TC Department is indeed faced with a serious shortage of human resources to manage the planning and delivery of the TC Programme and that there is an urgent need to address this problem. As a result, the Board of Governors last December approved, as an exceptional measure, to make available up to US\$ 1 million for this purpose; but requested the DG to look into more sustainable medium and long-term measures, within the Agency Regular Budget that is constrained by zero, or near zero growth! A modest increase in resources that can be made available to manage the TC Programme may be incorporated in the Agency's Regular Budget for 2003/2004 if savings in other programmes are identified; but this will only reduce the imbalance, not eliminate it. The Board of Governors and Member States have consistently, therefore, asked the TC Department both to improve the quality of programming and reduce the number of projects in the TC Programme. This means, fewer - **much fewer**, but larger and better projects.

The TC Department has given this matter careful attention. Much effort has been spent to develop more elaborate guidelines for the upstream work that has started at all levels to identify and formulate the best proposals for those few projects to be selected and approved for the next cycle of the TC Programme. Let me recall here that design of projects that stand little chance of getting funding is not only a waste of Secretariat time, but more important, also national time. Thus, it is necessary and very beneficial to pay extra attention about priorities and central criterion before starting to design projects

During the course of this meeting, my colleagues from the Secretariat and I will endeavour to share with you our ideas on how to put these guidelines to work in the context of your efforts to develop your proposals for the next RCA programme. We would like to examine with you assistance that

may be provided by the Agency to enable the lead countries to undertake more effective upstream work over the balance of this year.

Distinguished Representatives,

As you continue your efforts to plan and manage a more effective RCA programme, you have other important challenges to consider. The Agenda of your meeting is rich and diversified, which means that your programme of work is going to be very compact and demanding. Let me comment on a few of the important items that you plan to consider in the course of your meeting:

First, is the issue of RCA ownership and management. Over the past few years, you have made significant strides in assuming a greater role in planning and formulating your programme. The concept of lead country has evolved through careful examination combined with learning experience; it has reached a practical implementation stage and is now well embedded as a key component of RCA management at the upstream stage. No doubt more refinement and enhancement is needed. The role of lead country in the execution and implementation stages of RCA projects - which is also the subject of discussion of your meeting - deserves your timely consideration.

There is now in fact a compelling reason to do so, and this is my second point. As you know, outsourcing has been identified as an important tool to manage the delivery of TC projects more efficiently, and, if carefully practiced, more effectively. The TC Department has increasingly made “outsourcing of the implementation of some TC activities” one of its priorities and has embarked on putting this to practice. This has not been easy, as it departs from the traditional way of doing business and, naturally, the current set of rules and regulations as well as procedures may need to be revised. In fact, in last year’s GC resolution (GC(44)RES/18) - on Strengthening of TC at the General Conference - Member States requested the Secretariat to “facilitate cost-sharing,

outsourcing and other forms of Partnership in Development by reviewing, amending or simplifying, as appropriate, relevant financial and legal procedures”.

Regrettably, the few trials made so far have identified some difficulties. We are addressing this problem at two levels. In the short term, we will continue to seek opportunities for outsourcing and we are developing models of best practices/approaches under the current financial and legal procedures. But for the long term, we are preparing a review that aims to propose revising those procedures to facilitate and maximize the utilization of outsourcing for the dual purpose of increasing participation and ownership of Member States in the management of the delivery of the TC Programme, while contributing at the same time to increasing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of delivery, and thus reducing the “workload” problem in TC.

At the regional level, such as the RCA programme, we look forward to proposals from you that can accelerate the incorporation of outsourcing during implementation, utilizing in this instance the already developed framework of lead-country and Regional Resource Units. Innovative proposals, made by RCA, for outsourcing TC activities in the region, and endorsed by Member States, are likely to be adopted and put into practice rapidly.

Third, is the fact that the scope of the RCA programme and its objectives, as reflected in its statute, go beyond the scope of the TC Programme, as it covers, for example, research and development of new nuclear applications. You have begun serious discussions on this issue during the last two RCA meetings, and have requested Japan to revise a paper on this topic for discussion during this meeting.

Another important agenda item for your consideration during this meeting is the proposal made by the Republic of Korea for the establishment of an RCA office in the region. No doubt, if you agree on modalities for establishing, staffing and funding such an office in the region, it would go a long way

in enabling RCA and its Member States to assume a more active role in the implementation of the RCA programme, in addition to planning and programming.

Distinguished Representatives,

As we go forth, the Agency needs to move beyond its success in helping Member States acquire the necessary basic nuclear infrastructure and apply it for solving selective development problems. We need to help countries to ensure that the basic infrastructure is sustainable. This means helping Member States to strengthen and sustain the management of nuclear technology for development, i.e. make the nuclear institutions more self reliant as they move into more development applications. The Agency is working through a new regional project with interested Member States in your region to explore how best to carry out this challenging and important task, and I look forward to your input and wisdom in extending our work in this important field.

Finally, I am pleased to note that immediately following your meeting, a consultative meeting with a number of important regional and international organizations is being organized at the same venue. A key element recognized in the TC Strategy is the important and often critical role of mobilizing regional and interregional resources to supplement and/or complement the national resources made available to address key development objectives. This calls for continued efforts to seek partnerships and co-ordination with regional and interregional development organizations. It is hoped that this consultative meeting would carefully examine the scope, objective and resources of the various participating organizations in the general areas of environment and natural resources and, as a result, may devise a process of co-ordination to enhance the effective use of limited resources and facilitate the achievement of common goals through expanded networking of institutions and individuals.

Before I conclude, I wish also to recognize the participation of FNCA [Mr. Machi] representative, who attends for the first time, in this RCA meeting.

In conclusion, let me now, on behalf of the Agency, express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Government of Bangladesh for hosting our meeting and to pay tribute to the Chief Guest, the Hon. Mr. Fazlur Rahman for delivering the key address. . I would also like to particularly thank Engr. Habibuddin, the Chairman of BAEC and Prof. Choudhury, the National RCA Co-ordinator for Bangladesh; Dr. Hussain, TC national liaison officers and all their colleagues for the excellent organization and for all the local arrangements that have been made to ensure the success of your meeting.

I wish you a successful meeting.

Thank you for your attention.

-oOo-