



DOCUMENTS

CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF AFRICAN LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

REPORT OF THE SIXTH MEETING

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Yaounde, Republic of Cameroon
17-21 April 1986

Agenda item 6

REPORT OF THE
SIXTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF
AFRICAN LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. The sixth meeting of the Conference of Ministers of African Least Developed Countries was held at Yaounde, Cameroon, from 15 to 17 April 1986. Opening statements were made by the Minister of Cameroon for the Plan and Regional Development, H.E. Mr Sadou Hayatou, who formally opened the meeting, Mr. Djomatchoua Toko, representing the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity and the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Mr Adebayo Adedeji.
2. Representatives of the following African least developed countries attended the meeting: Benin, Botswana, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, the Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sao Tome and Principe, the Sudan, Togo, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.
3. The following ~~member~~ States of the United Nations not members of the Economic Commission for Africa were represented by observers: China, France, the German Democratic Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
4. Observers from the following States not ~~member~~ of the United Nations also attended the meeting: Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Switzerland.
5. The following United Nations bodies and agencies were represented at the ~~meeting~~: Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and World Food Programme (WFP).
6. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: African Development Bank (ADB), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Organization of African Unity (OAU).
7. In accordance with the Commission's rules of procedure, the African National Congress of South Africa was represented.
8. The Conference elected the following officers: Chairman, H.E. Mr. M. Yaovi Adodo, Minister of Plan and Industry of Togo; Vice-Chairman, H.E. Mr. M. Guy Darlan, Minister of Plan, Statistics and International Co-operation of Central African Republic; Rapporteur, Mr. G.W. Lutaya-Kanya, Chief, Government Development Economist, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development of Uganda.

B: AGENDA

9. The Conference adopted the following agenda:
1. Opening of the meeting:
 - (a) Statement by the Executive Secretary;
 - (b) Statement by the Secretary-General of OAU;
 - (c) Statement by the Secretary of State of Cameroon for the Plan and Regional Development
 2. Election of officers.
 3. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
 4. Consideration of the report of the fifth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of African Least Developed Countries:
 - (a) Review of economic and social conditions, major problems and policies in African least developed countries - 1984-1985;
 - (b) Progress towards the implementation of the Substantial New Programme of Action in African LDCs;
 - (c) Food strategies in the African least developed countries: An assessment;
 - (d) Review of ECA activities in 1984-1985 and work programme for 1986-1987 in favour of African least developed countries.
 5. Any other business.
 6. Adoption of the report and closure of the meeting.

C: FORMAL OPENING OF THE MEETING

10. His Excellency Mr. Sadou Hayatou, Cameroon Minister for the Plan and Regional Development, welcomed participants and drew attention to the hardships which the least developed countries had been facing. Most of them were land-locked and exposed to the rigours of drought and other catastrophes, while, on the other hand, they received little aid from the international community.

11. As was apparent from the review of economic and social conditions in the LDCs, the economic recession wreaking havoc in those countries had become a structural phenomenon as a result of both domestic and external obstacles.

12. Domestic economies in Africa had been based mainly on agriculture, and the countries concerned had no mechanisms to protect them from natural disasters, such as drought, floods and cyclones, that had seriously damaged the economy of entire regions of the continent. In addition, although the agricultural sector employed 70 percent of the economically active population, it had not been given priority and attention that it deserved. Agricultural production techniques

of about 3.7 per cent in the agricultural sector, and stagnation in the manufacturing sector, with an annual growth of 0.03 per cent, the GDP of LDCs had declined by 0.7 percent per year in the period from 1982 to 1984.

13. So far as providing transport facilities for expediting emergency aid to land-locked countries was concerned, Cameroon had, in a spirit of solidarity, opened the port of Douala to a large extent and had mobilized every possible means of transport.

14. With regard to the external economic scene, he drew attention to the fall in the prices of the main African exports on the international market and the consequent steady deterioration in Africa's terms of trade. He also referred to the African nations' dependence on the outside world for covering their food deficit and for the capital formation required for their development.

15. The Substantial New Programme of Action, adopted in 1981, had failed to fulfil the hopes it had raised. Even though the African LDCs had formulated their development programmes and plans in line with the global strategy laid down in that Programme and had adopted austerity measures so as to generate and mobilize greater internal savings, international support had fallen short of expectations. Indeed, whereas the external financing needs of African LDCs had been estimated at \$US 26 billion, actual ODA disbursements from Development Assistance Committee and OPEC countries had remained stagnant and had, in some cases, even been revised downwards. The set target for doubling the volume of ODA by 1985 or for increasing its value to 0.15 per cent of GNP was far from being attained. That situation had been aggravated by the difficulties of replenishing the resources of the multilateral financing agencies. African LDCs had seen their external debt rise to 18.2 per cent of Africa's total external debt, absorbing 25 to 30 per cent of their export earnings each year.

16. He addressed a solemn appeal to the African LDCs' major aid partners to show a greater spirit of solidarity, especially by increasing their official and private aid and by extending their compensatory financing to cover a wider range of products so as to stabilize the export earnings of African countries.

17. He concluded by expressing the hope that the work of the Conference would make a substantial contribution to the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the critical economic situation in Africa which would be considering Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery, 1986-1990, adopted by the twenty-first OAU summit.

18. On behalf of the Secretary-General of OAU, the Director of Economic Development and Co-operation welcomed participants and thanked His Excellency Mr Paul Biya, President of the Cameroon, the Government, the CPDM Party and the people of Cameroon for their hospitality.

19. The Lagos Plan of Action adopted in 1980 and the Substantial New Programme of Action (SNPA) for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) agreed upon in September 1981 at the Paris Conference had provided a mechanism for the member States to deal with the existing socio-economic problems and to sensitize the international community on the specific concerns of the African LDCs.

20. In response to the continued grave economic situation of the African continent in general and of the African LDCs in particular, the twenty-first ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of OAU had in July 1985 adopted the African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery, 1986-1990, which aimed at improving the food situation and rehabilitating agriculture, reducing Africa's external debt burden, evolving measures for a common platform for action of subregional, regional, continental and inter-continental levels, and continued struggle against the political destabilization by South Africa of the economies of Southern African countries. The Heads of State and Government had observed that the socio-economic situation in Africa had been aggravated by the global economic decline, the unjust international economic system and natural disasters such as cyclones, floods and drought.

21. The Mid-term Global Review of the progress achieved by SNPA held in Geneva from 30 September to 12 October 1985 had revealed that the socio-economic conditions of LDCs had declined substantially due to such causes as decline in export earnings, diminution of capital formation, unfavourable interest rates and heavy debt servicing, further aggravated by meteorological conditions which had had adverse effects on food production, thus causing more famine and misery.

22. He concluded by stating that the development of Africa must be the task of the Africans themselves, taking into account the complementarity of co-operation and economic integration at the subregional and regional levels.

23. In his opening statement, the Executive Secretary of ECA expressed his appreciation and thanks to the President, the Government and the people of Cameroon for agreeing to host the meeting, and for the exceptional hospitality and warm welcome extended to the meeting.

24. He drew attention to two very significant events that had taken place since the Ministers' fifth meeting in Addis Ababa in April 1985:

(a) The twenty-first ordinary session of the OAU Heads of State and Government, at which the Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery, 1986-1990 was adopted out of a very serious concern for the continued deterioration in the socio-economic conditions on the continent;

(b) The meeting of the UNCTAD Intergovernmental Group on the LDCs in Geneva from 30 September to 12 October 1985, which had undertaken a Mid-term Global Review of the Substantial New Plan of Action and made recommendations to be implemented over the same period as the Priority Programme.

25. In its resolution 40/40 of 2 December 1985, the General Assembly had decided to hold a special session at Ministerial level from 27 to 31 May 1986 to consider, in-depth, the critical economic situation in Africa. In the preparatory process for that session the OAU and ECA secretariats, as well as the extraordinary sessions of the OAU Council of Ministers and the ECA Conference of Ministers, had played a significant part.

26. The areas of concern and recommendations of the UNCTAD Mid-term Global Review included reaffirmation of the SNPA target of 0.15 per cent of donor GNP as official development assistance; reiteration of the appeal by the twenty-seventh meeting of the United Nations Development Committee in 1985 calling for an adequate eighth replenishment of IDA in 1986; recognition of the intensification of the debt service obligations of LDCs over the years; and recommendations to the international community to pursue actions aimed at facilitating trade access of LDCs to foreign markets.

27. It was important for the Ministers to tie in the immediate action of the Memorandum adopted at their fifth Conference with that of the Priority Programme, and to be prepared, collectively and individually, to take steps relating to rehabilitation and reconstruction of the key sectors of their economies.

28. Among the major items on the agenda were, first, the worsening socio-economic conditions in the African LDCs, primarily due to the 1982-1984 drought. Per capita GDP growth rates in 23 African LDCs in 1984 had either been negative, stagnated or fallen short of the SNPA threshold of 7.2 per cent, although, thanks to the recovery in agriculture in 1984, overall GDP growth was expected to register a modest increase of 2.3 per cent in 1985. Nor had the manufacturing sector fared any better, as evidenced by the 6.6 per cent decline in output in 1984 due to under-utilization of capacity brought about by shortage of foreign exchange resources for imported inputs. There was thus a continuing need for the implementation of the measures put forward by the secretariat to the fifth Conference of the LDC Ministers to enable countries to cope with the problems of excess capacity.

29. The slow progress in the implementation of SNPA was apparent from the fact that, to date, only approximately \$US 17 million or 13 per cent of African LDCs' external resource needs was available from net official development assistance from DAC countries, multilateral sources and OPEC countries. Concomitant with the adverse trends in concessionary assistance flows was the heavy external indebtedness of the African LDCs, reaching about \$US 30 billion in 1984, with an annual debt service of about 23 per cent.

30. Concerning food strategies, the temporary respite provided by the bumper harvest in many countries in 1985 should not lead to complacency about the need for medium- and long-term strategies in food production. The study prepared by the ECA secretariat on food strategies in the African LDCs was thus as relevant as ever.

31. In conclusion, he informed the Ministers that although the scale of the technical assistance and advisory services offered by the ECA secretariat was bound to be adversely affected by the current financial problems facing the United Nations, the secretariat would continue to respond to the needs of the African LDCs.

D. ACCOUNT OF PROCEEDINGS

Consideration of the report of the fifth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of African Least Developed Countries (agenda item 4)

32. The Chairman of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts, introducing the report of the Committee's fifth meeting (E/ECA/LDCs.6/Exp.5/6), said that the Committee's work had focused mainly on the following four items:

(a) Review of economic and social conditions in the African LDCs, 1984-1985;

(b) Progress towards the implementation of the Substantial New Programme of Action in African LDCs;

(c) Assessment of food strategies in the African LDCs; and

(d) Review of ECA activities in 1984-1985 and work programme for 1986-1987 in favour of African LDCs.

33. The report considered under item (a) had reviewed overall socio-economic performances in African least developed countries, in particular the development of key sectors such as food and agriculture, industrial development and transport and communications and emphasized the continuing low growth rate (2.3 per cent) achieved in 1984-1985. The report attributed the growth rate to the poor performance of the agricultural sector despite the recurrence of rain. Discussion of the report had focused on the updating of the second part of the document on country presentations in the light of recent statistics and information transmitted to the ECA and OAU secretariats.

34. The document considered under item (b) had reviewed the measures taken by the various least developed countries as part of the implementation of SNPA, support measures taken at the international level until 1984 with respect to aid and aid modalities as well as measures to lighten the debt burden. It had also presented the conclusions and recommendations emanating from the International Conference on the Global Mid-term Review of the Substantial New Programme of Action, held at Geneva from 30 September to 12 October 1985. The main comment made on the report was that it had not evaluated the outcome of the Mid-term Review on the basis of the memorandum adopted by the Ministers of African least developed countries.

35. The report, which was the study topic chosen by the secretariat for 1985 under item (c), had reviewed the food situation in terms of the degree of achievement of food self-sufficiency and dealt with the food strategies of African least developed countries in the light of the Regional Food Plan for Africa, the Lagos Plan of Action and the SNPA. It showed that food production had declined steadily since the 1970s and that food imports and food aid had continued to rise; accordingly, it proposed certain measures aimed at remedying the situation. In discussing the report, members of the Committee had acknowledged the importance of formulating and implementing appropriate food strategies and policies in the African least developed countries. They pointed out, however, that some of the measures advocated were not the only ones capable of remedying the situation.

36. Following the introduction of item (d), the members of the Committee had congratulated the secretariat on its work, underscored the crucial importance of the study on the structural adjustment programmes which the secretariat intends to carry out, and requested the secretariat to include, in its reference documents for the above-mentioned study, the UNICEF study on the social consequences of adjustment programmes.

37. In view of the various resolutions already adopted at the fifth Conference of Ministers of LDCs and the Geneva Conference on the implementation of the African LDCs, it was incorrect to state that aid modalities had become increasingly flexible. The question needed to be understood before one could make such a remark.

(a) Consideration of the Economic and Social Conditions in African Least Developed Countries, 1984-1985

38. The Conference noted the report of the Intergovernmental Committee without comment.

(b) Progress towards the implementation of the Substantial New Programme of Action in African LDCs

39. The Conference discussed the item together with document E/ECA/LDCs.6/EXP.5/3 on the subject. One representative drew attention to a reference in paragraph 34 of the report of the Committee stating that aid modalities had become increasingly flexible in terms of the grant element, maturity and grace periods. He said that in view of the prevailing grim situation in the aid modalities had become increasingly flexible. The question needed to be understood before one could make such a remark.

40. The same representative noted that the Committee had not taken a firm position regarding the cancellation of the debt as had been done previously and as the LDCs wished.

41. One delegation also drew attention to the fact that the bulk of aid was channelled through multilateral financing institutions such as the World Bank, whose terms were very stringent. If no appropriate steps were taken, the LDCs' debt problems would become considerably worse, because the cancellation of any non-multilateral debt would still leave the multilateral debt intact.

42. A representative stated that in view of the structural and non-structural problems and predicaments of the LDCs, their peculiar attributes and accepted nomenclature should have been amongst those employed for differentiation in the African submission to the May 1986 special session of the General Assembly, and wondered whether the Conference should not, even at the present stage, submit a position paper or special memorandum to the General Assembly to enable it to pay special attention to the LDCs. That, it was explained, would in no way detract from having a consolidated African position. He concluded by saying that while it was necessary to continue to implement the SNPA, it was no longer enough in the light of the renewed effort and additional approach of the international community to focus on Africa's serious economic problems, to stick merely to the 1981 Paris Programme.

43. Another representative wished to know whether the ECA Conference of Ministers could at the present stage influence the work already concluded by the March 1986 extraordinary session of Ministers to prepare for the special session of the General Assembly, followed by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and furthermore whether the African LDCs' position paper would be presented by the current Chairman of OAU.

44. Responding to issues raised by participants, the Executive Secretary explained that reference to increasing flexibility of aid modalities in paragraph 34 of the report overstated the prevailing situation in the African LDCs. It in fact contradicted the Memorandum adopted by the Conference in 1985, as well as what was stated in Africa's submission to the General Assembly. He advised that the sentence be deleted as it did not conform to facts. He further explained that paragraph 35 did not refer to public debt, but to private debt.

45. As a further elaboration on the debt issue, the Executive Secretary explained that Africa's submission to the special session of the General Assembly made a distinction between the financial resources needed for investment programmes and those required to service the debt, which absorbed between 40 and 50 and sometimes up to 100 per cent of countries' export earnings. It also proposed three series of measures, namely: the conversion of ODA debt into grants, a measure which would give a debt relief of about \$2 billion; the conversion of non-ODA debt into long-term loans payable over a period of 30 to 40 years, with a 10-year grace period; and the reduction of interest rates on commercial loans to acceptable levels. The aim of all these proposals was to ensure that resources intended for financing investment programmes were not absorbed by debt servicing. He reminded the meeting that the January 1986 meeting of the Permanent Steering Committee of OAU had taken an important decision with regard to the treatment of debt in the African submission to the special session. The debt issue was to be treated as a resource flow problem, with the resources needed to ameliorate the debt situation clearly delineated and separated from the resources needed to finance Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery 1986-1990. That was why in the final submission to the special session, resource needs of \$US14 billion - \$US 23 billion per annum were identified for debt service over and above the \$US 9 billion per annum external resource gap for the Priority Programme. The document of course contained measures to be taken to ameliorate the debt burden in such a way that the resources available would not be used for servicing debt but for investment in the Priority Programme.

46. As regards the proposal to submit a special paper on LDCs to the May meeting, the Executive Secretary explained that there were two issues: (i) the substantive one as to whether LDCs problems

were already adequately identified and focused upon in the African submission and (ii) the quasi-political issue as to whether there should be a separate submission for the LDCs. He pointed out that although the LDCs were not mentioned in the African submission as a group, their peculiar problems were reflected and highlighted in several parts of the document. In short, all the issues which could have been treated in a separate chapter or document on the LDCs were already substantively covered in the document containing the African submission. The African submission, he pointed out, more than covered the main concerns in the SNPA, including for instance the issue of conversion of ODA debts into grants, and it would be repetitive and counter-productive to have another submission on the LDCs. He concluded by saying that while the African submission, the basic document for the General Assembly's special session and therefore the document on the basis of which Africa should negotiate, adequately covered the interests of the LDCs, there was nothing wrong with the LDCs ensuring that their peculiar concerns and specific problems were taken into account both in the negotiating process and at the special session itself.

47. The Chairman concluded that the particular concerns and special problems of the African LDCs should be expressed by the Executive Secretary of ECA, the Secretary-General of OAU and the delegations in all possible forums relevant to the special session of the General Assembly.

(c) Food strategies in African Least Developed Countries: An assessment

48. One representative said that most African countries had been affected by drought and famine and were seeking to attain food self-sufficiency. While information was available on the role that intergovernmental organizations could play in assisting member States, such information was lacking in the case of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and he therefore requested the secretariat to take stock of those organizations in the region, in European and American countries and what technical, financial and material assistance they could provide.

49. He also emphasized that the high cost of technical expertise recruited from developed countries absorbed a very high proportion of total project financing. Judicious use of national or other African expertise would release substantial resources which could be used to strengthen the recipient countries' investment capacity. Accordingly, an effort should be made to ensure that donor countries and institutions made increased use of African experts in projects financed by them. In that respect, the secretariat should provide countries with as complete as possible a directory of African experts whose services could be drawn on for intra-regional technical co-operation.

50. The Executive Secretary explained that the issues raised were very important; they had in fact been discussed by the Technical Preparatory Committee of the 'Bale, and were reflected in its report to the Conference of Ministers. Member States themselves had to act in order to remedy the problem. First, they had to ensure that they did not recruit foreign experts where local expertise was available. Acknowledging that sometimes local experts would not have the requisite experience, he stressed that they were sufficiently qualified personnel who needed to acquire experience, and therefore needed to be given the necessary opportunity. In that connection he felt that member States had to give careful attention to effective and efficient use of their manpower. He informed the Conference that ECA published a directory of African experts every two years, and the information it contained was available to all member States. However, he would endeavour to ensure that the information was widely circulated. The ECA also maintained a computerized data base with information on African experts, and could respond quickly to requests from member States seeking such information. Thirdly, the ECA-sponsored institutions could also be called upon to provide technical assistance in their specific areas of concern. An example was the study on underground water for the Comoros undertaken by the Mapping and Survey Centre in Nairobi as part of a World Bank project. The Centre had implemented the project very well and cheaply. Finally, the Executive Secretary informed the meeting that ECA did not have full information on NGOs. However, the secretariat would undertake to compile a directory of NGOs, with information on their fields of operation and their contact addresses.

51. Another representative pointed out that member States often wished to use local experts, but technical assistance agreements required Governments to pay their own experts, and use of local expertise would thus be non-reimbursable. He then drew attention to the example of UNDP and the World Bank, which accepted the use of local experts, and appealed to other foreign financing agencies to follow that example.

52. The Conference took note of the information provided by the Executive Secretary and stressed that the problem of technical assistance had a number of aspects: while African experts might not be properly organized, there was always the erroneous impression that foreign experts were better than African experts. While recognizing that the financial requirements of technical assistance often made it necessary to use foreign experts, the Conference urged that measures should be taken to ensure use of domestic or other African experts within the framework of technical co-operation among African countries, as well as between those countries, on the one hand, and donor countries and financing institutions on the other.

(d) Review of ECA activities in 1984-1985 and work programme for 1986-1987 in favour of African least developed countries

53. Delegations expressed the view that ECA should continue gathering macro-economic information and making it available to member States to assist them in formulating responses to such problems as fluctuations in the exchange value of the United States dollar, escalating costs of imported raw materials and equipment, and the cost of food. They further remarked that ECA should analyse the situation of the debt burden and its components in order fully to assess the impact of exogenous factors on what African countries had been trying to achieve so far.

54. One delegation expressed concern at the objectives of the intended study of the implications of structural adjustments and stabilization programmes for long-term growth and development in African LDCs, asked what its content would be, and pointed out that the terminology used was similar to that of the World Bank and IMF. Other delegations pointed out that the annual World Development Report and the periodic special surveys on Africa published by the World Bank decisively influenced the policies of member States and adversely affected the policy options open to them. Consequently, studies such as that proposed by ECA should put forward the African perspective, as well as analysing the impact of measures advocated by the World Bank and IMF. Such ECA studies would be available to African member States in their dealings and negotiations with the World Bank group and IMF.

55. One delegation inquired as to the status of implementation of the 1981 decision of the Conference of Ministers to establish a unit within ECA to monitor the implementation of the SIFA to assist LDCs.

56. The representative of UNESCO summarized the activities recently undertaken by UNESCO under its strategy for combating drought and desertification: rehabilitating drought-affected areas where possible, and involving itself in resettlement programmes in respect of scientific and technological assessment of the areas concerned, analysis of education and training, and overall human development implications. To that end, multisectoral and sectoral field missions had been undertaken during 1984-1985 and 1986-1987, under the approved budget as well as from extrabudgetary sources, UNESCO would carry out more work in African LDCs, under the Special Programme for Science and Technology and Research Development, within the framework of the Lagos Plan of Action, Africa's Priority Programme, and the relevant resolutions of the twenty-first Assembly of Heads of State and Government of OAU.

57. The Executive Secretary said that the possibilities of expanding the unit for LDCs were constrained by lack of resources. However, wherever possible extrabudgetary resources emanating from the United Nations Trust Fund for African Development would be used to supplement the meagre resources under the regular budget. The concerns of African LDCs had continued to be addressed through an inter-divisional sectoral committee which followed up LDC-related activities in substantive divisions in the ECA work programme. He went on to stress the importance of the proposed study, and mentioned that the fifth Conference of Ministers of LDCs had requested an assessment of the impact of debt, devaluation and the effects of IMF structural adjustment conditions on the African LDCs which had implemented those conditions in the past.

58. The observer for France said that his Government's analysis of the African LDCs' situation made allowance for natural disasters, and also took into account the countries' external vulnerability and their domestic development problems. His delegation recognized that external vulnerability constituted a severe handicap to development, and that it had increased since the beginning of the 1980s with the violent fluctuations in primary commodity prices, such as those of cotton, and the general evolution of the terms of trade. That situation, which had important repercussions on the increase in the LDCs' debt, called for priority reflection on the part of the international community.

59. The difficulties of their public finance, balance of payments and food situation had moreover led the African LDCs to reflect on their domestic development policies. That had occurred with regard to the State's role in development, the objectives set for the education system (which no longer found the public service its main outlet), agriculture (urban-rural complementarity and import of food commodities, opposition between cash and food crops or integration of the two, attitude of the authorities to spontaneous dynamism on the part of farmers), etc. Such reflection might sometimes be painful, but also fruitful. In that connection the French Government fully supported the round table process developed by UNDP.

60. Finally, where aid to the African LDCs - which in overall terms was unquestionably inadequate - was concerned, six of the 12 main DAC donors to Africa had met the Paris Conference requirements and three were close to doing so. Aid to African LDCs comprised three main flows - bilateral aid from the DAC countries, which had increased in real terms between 1981 and 1984 (the 1985 figures were not yet available); multilateral aid, which was not showing a satisfactory trend because of the insufficient level of the most recent replenishments of IDA; and, finally, the aid of the OPEC countries, recent trends in which were generally known.

Any other business (agenda item 5)

61. One representative congratulated the ECA secretariat on all its efforts in favour of LDCs. He recalled the substantial contribution which it had made during the United Nations Conference on the LDCs held in Paris in September 1981 and had continued to contribute in the same manner since, particularly, through the institution of the Meeting of Experts and the Conference of Ministers. He expressed concern at the poor attendance at meetings of the Ministers of the LDCs and wondered whether the possibilities of holding the

meeting biennially instead of annually should not be explored. That, according to him, would afford the ECA secretariat more time for in-depth studies of the countries in question.

62. Another representative expressed a contrary view, wondering whether what was required was not more frequent meetings. The fact that the number of LDCs had increased in the last two years might, according to him, be an indication of the increase in the pervasiveness and intensity of underdevelopment on the continent, and there might be reasons other than apartheid to explain why Ministers are not present at meetings. He advised that Ministers and member States should in future be sensitized as to meetings of the LDCs, with the widest of publicity given to such meetings.

63. The Conference noted the problem of attendance, but agreed that it would not solve it under any other business. However, it was agreed that the issue should be made a substantive agenda item for consideration at the next meeting, when Governments would have reflected on it carefully.

64. Another representative stressed the need for interdependent discussions and consultations on ECA documents before their presentations at meetings, and expressed the hope that such documents pertaining to member countries would be made available in advance to the countries concerned so that they could be examined and studied before meetings.

Adoption of the report and closure of the meeting (agenda item 6)

65. The Conference adopted its report, subject to the incorporation of amendments proposed at the closing meeting.

66. The Chairman requested the Executive Secretary to convey to the Government and People of Cameroon the Conference's renewed expression of gratitude for the hospitality and excellent facilities extended to participants, and declared the meeting closed.