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PRELIMINARY INTERNAL EVALUATION OF ECA'S MULTIDISCIPLINARY REGIONAL ADVISORY GROUP (ECA-MRAG)

END-OF-YEAR REVIEW OF PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

DECEMBER 1992

Table of Contents

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Ι.	INTRODUCTION	1
11.	PROGRESS OF WORK	3
	(a) Staffing	3
	(b) Programme Development	3
	(c)Delivery of the Programme	7
111.	INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	8
	(a) Potential and Capacity	9
	(b) Integration by ECA	12
	(c) Impact at the Country Level	13
IV.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	14
	A. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT	14
	RECOMMENDATIONS	15
	B. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	17
	RECOMMENDATIONS	19
ANN	IEX	

Page

I. INTRODUCTION

1. ECA's Multidisciplinary Regional Advisory Group (ECA-MRAG), established in December 1990, has completed two years of existence. During that period of time the activities of the group have evolved around the objectives and terms of reference provided by the Executive Secretary Circular 004/91 of 29 March 1991. Accordingly, the programme of work was intended to foster ECA's operational capacities to meet the challenges of Africa's regional policies and strategies with particular regard to:

- the establishment of the African Economic Community;

the transformation of African economies and;

the priority sectors of the Lagos Plan of Action.

2. Since its inception, the work of ECA-MRAG has been held under continued review and appraisal carried out at various levels. This basically comprised the following exercises:

(a) Critical self-analyses undertaken by the ECA-MRAG group, inter alia in the form of joint reviews with ECA's substantive Divisions and multinational operational programming centres (MULPOCs). These reviews resulted in a policy document entitled "ECA-MRAG: Operational Framework", highlighting, among other things, a) the operational framework of the group; b) the need for a multidisciplinary approach in meeting the challenges of Africa's development in the 1990s; c) the management and organization of the group, its composition, terms of reference, modus operandi and relation with the ECA substantive Divisions, ECA-Mulpocs, member states and their intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). In addition regular assessments of the work of ECA-MRAG were

tijatika S Sisarsa also provided by the team leader in the form of briefing notes to the Executive Secretary of ECA and;

(b) independent assessment and evaluation undertaken by PPCO in the form of performance reporting at ECA's programme implementation review for 1991 and an internal evaluation of selected ECA-MRAG missions reports carried out in July 1992.

3. PPCO's present assessment takes into account the findings, conclusions and recommendations of these prior exercises and provides an overall review and appraisal of the evolution of ECA-MRAG and more particularly of developments during the period December 1991 - December 1992.

II. PROGRESS OF WORK

(a) <u>Staffing</u>

4. ECA-MRAG's capacity was still limited at the beginning of 1992. The appointment of the full team to comprise 10 regional advisors had experienced serious delays in the course of 1991. Throughout 1991 the team was limited to five sectoral advisors only. These were the advisors on energy, agriculture, environment, statistics, public administration and economic co-operation and integration. The take off in 1992 was ,therefore, necessarily affected by the late establishment of the full team and the sectoral predominance of activities carried out in the course of 1991.

5. The comprehensive composition of the group was eventually more or less achieved in March 1992 following the recruitment of the advisors in human resources development, macro economics, and economic co-operation and integration. The recruitment of the regional advisor in debt management however has not been finalized until now. In the meantime the post has been encumbered by a staff of the Pan-African Development Information System (PADIS) on a provisional basis. The absence of this advisor in the group is however a serious handicap for ECA-MRAG's programme of work.

(b) Programme Development

6. The programme of ECA-MRAG activities for 1992 basically followed the approaches and methods of work adopted in the course of 1991. The underlying concept of this approach is to closely associate ECA's legislative bodies i.e. ECA's Conference of Ministers, ECA's multinational programming and operational centres (Mulpocs) as well as African Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) and governments as appropriate in the formulation of requests for technical advisory services falling within ECA-MRAG's terms of reference.

7. The Group undertook in the course of 1991 extensive consultations with the intergovernmental experts of the five ECA-Mulpocs and their professional staff. This resulted in a draft work-programme for 1991/92 which was further refined and expanded by continued contacts of ECA-MRAG with IGOs and governments of the countries of the region who increasingly manifested interest in the work of ECA-MRAG and consequently requested its services.

8. The overall work programme of ECA-MRAG but more particularly that of 1992 was therefore based on a great variety of requests, including:

(a) reviewing of treaties of various subregional integration schemes;

(b) preparation of policy documents on development issues;

(c) establishment of research and extension networks;

(d) improvement of agriculture and rural development projects;

(e) preparation of management training needs and training programmes of IGOs and some ECA-sponsored institutions;

(f) proposals on multidisciplinary approach to the establishment of public service training schools;

(g) application of national accounts to development;

(h) strategies for combating desertification as well as strategies for integrating environmental dimension in economic planning; etc...

9. In the course of its programme development the group developed an increasingly sharpened focus on the critical issues of African development strategies in particular in relation to the implementation of the Abuja Treaty that established the African Economic Community.

10. With regard to the implementation of the Abuja Treaty, the work programme of ECA-MRAG placed great emphasis on catalytical activities aimed at fostering more active support from member states to the implementation of schemes of economic co-operation

and integration. In response to requests from member States ECA-MRAG mounted multidisciplinary teams to provide technical assistance in (a) establishing Departments of Regional and International Co-operation at the national level; (b) providing these departments with core-competency skills for (i) implementing decisions/resolutions of subregional and regional economic communities at the national level; that is, translation of regionally agreed policies into practical strategies and programmes; (ii) aid management and coordination; (iii) developing project analysis and evaluation procedures for regional projects and programmes with a view to integrating euch projects and programmes into the national planning process; (iv) monitoring participation in regional and international cooperation agreements and making periodic surveys/assessments of the benefits and costs thereof; and (v) strategic planning within a regional and international focus.

11. One of the main purposes of ECA-MRAG's advisory services in the field of economic co-operation and integration was to assist African States in creating departments of Regional Cooperation that would seek to establish their credibility as a source of sound thinking to development issues and to demonstrate their ability to help formulate a common approach for their respective subregions.

12. Multidisciplinary teams were despatched to the PTA and ECOWAS secretariats to (a) assist in reviewing their treaties so as to correspond with the main provisions of the Abuja Treaty and (b) provide training needs for explancing the capacity of the secretariats of the two communities to enable them service the member States adequately in their implementation of the provisions of both the African Economic Community and the subregional economic groupings.

13. Similarly, ECA-MRAG embarked on formulating strategies on North-South issues and the management of global inter-dependence. In this regard ECA-MRAG has been requested by the Council for Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) to make a critical multidisciplinary evaluation of the Report of the South

Commission on "The Challenge to the South" for implementation of the sections on (i) Regional Cooperation, (ii) Development of Human Resources and (iii) Development and Environment and strategies for implementing Agenda 21 and the Peace Agenda.

14. Eventually, ECA-MRAG was the initiator of ECA for establishing contacts with the Republic of South Africa aimed at a framework of cooperation between the former and ECA during the transitional and past apartheid periods. These activities resulted in the proposed establishment of a South African Desk and Task Force by ECA-MRAG.

15. Over and above its substantive activities ECA-MRAG undertook a wide range of intermediate activities in the form of a) participation in regional and international training/workshops and b) substantive services to the ECA secretariat and its substantive Divisions.

16. Intermediate activities resulted in a wide series of technical papers and studies concerned with policy issues relevant to the programme priorities of the Commission such as Development Administration in Africa, Public Sector Development, Democratization in Africa, Human Development Planning etc..

17. As to the preparation of its missions ECA-MRAG basically followed the methods of work introduced in 1991 which were further consolidated in the course of 1992. Accordingly requests were circulated amongst all ECA-MRAG staff for information. Objectives and terms of reference for the missions were established by the regional advisor(s) whose expertise appeared as directly relevant to the subject matters involved. This approach therefore continued to mainly rely on the individual sectoral competency of ECA-MRAG staff through which a fully comprehensive appraisal of the requirements for interdisciplinary activities is difficult to achieve. This difficulty is further compounded by the limitation of ECA-MRAG staff resources, the lack of interaction between ECA-MRAG and ECA's substantive Divisions as well as the absence of a clearly established overall responsibility.

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(c) <u>Delivery of the Programme</u>

18. As compared to 1991 when ECA-MRAG received 24 mission requests of which 16 were implemented there was a significant increase of requests in 1992. Taking into account 8 requests carried over from 1991 there were 58 mission requests in 1992. The total number of country missions carried out in 1992 was 16, of which 9 were multidisciplinary and 7 sectoral. Most of the sectoral country missions were in support of the priority sectors of the Lagos Plan of Action. The total number of missions to IGOs implemented in 1992 was 21 of which 12 were sectoral and 9 multi-disciplinary. Thus out of 58 requests for 1992, 39 were implemented and 19 reprogrammed for 1993.

As to geographical coverage of the region individual country missions were concentrated mostly in the east and south African subregion. Missions to IGOs however covered 11 major organisations located in all five subregions.

19. In addition the group organized 12 training workshops/seminars focusing on the following areas:

- (a) agriculture policy and development
- (b) energy policy and development
- (c) science and technology policy and development
- (d) environment policy and development
- (e) human resources policy and development
- (f) public administration and institutional reform policy

20. The active participation of ECA-MRAG in training/workshops requested by international, regional, subregional or national institutions has become a permanent feature of the work programme. To the extent that these activities are directly relevant to the priority areas of ECA-MRAG and actually result in policy advice to governments and/or IGOs and subsequent substantive programme activities they may well be

considered as part and parcel of the overall work programme of ECA-MRAG. Moreover, this kind of activities constitutes at the present state of development of ECA-MRAG an important means to project its potential and capacity to decision makers at various levels. Nonetheless, there seems to be a need to strike a more judicious balance between the substantive functions of the group and those concerned with intermediate activities in the form of training/workshops.

21. In terms of distribution of outputs in 1992 by recipients about 33 per cent were directed towards individual countries, about 43 per cent towards the regional/subregional IGOs and about 25 per cent to international discussion <u>fora</u>. As in 1991 about 50 per cent of the overall programme delivery was in the category of multidisciplinary activities; the other 50 per cent was of a sectoral nature.

22. The implementation rate was 67 per cent in 1992 and thus only by 1 per cent higher than in 1991 when it amounted to 66 per cent. However in terms of programme development and of delivery performance more than doubled in 1992.

III. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

23. ECA-MRAG was conceived as an innovative response by ECA to the increasingly obvious requirements for an integrated multidisciplinary framework for ECA's operational activities. The complexities involved in harmonizing and integrating individual country objectives with regional and subregional strategies has become more apparent with the inception of African strategies aimed at the socio-economic integration of the continent. At the same time structural and operational shortcomings of the regional commissions to respond adequately and appropriately to regional development requirements have also become more acute.

24. The expanding role of the Commission in providing technical assistance to its member States has emphasized the need to enhance the links between research and

analysis that the Commission does on the one hand, and the operational activities it undertakes on the other. This expanding role of the Commission has further highlighted the urgency involved in formulating comprehensive multidisciplinary action programmes based on coherent analysis and policies in devising more incentive tools for technical assistance to member States.

25. In view of the above objectives which have prompted the establishment of ECA-MRAG the following questions have therefore, to be addressed:

(a) Has the group been able to fulfil its mandate, proven its capacity to act as a cohesive and self-reinforcing unit, hence as a catalyst for promoting the desirable multidisciplinary dimension in ECA's development activities?

(b) To what extent has ECA supported and integrated the new dimension of ECA-MRAG into its organizational and administrative framework?

(c) Has ECA-MRAG achieved the intended impact at the country level?

(a) Potential and Capacity

26. Regarding the capacity of the group to fulfil its mandate it has to be noted that ECA-MRAG's programme of work has steadily grown over the past two years in terms of quantity and quality. Moreover, there has been an obvious attempt to sharpen and focus ECA-MRAG's activities more closely on the objectives of regionally agreed policies and strategies. The continued pursuit of this goal has been aptly reflected and highlighted in the brochure on ECA-MRAG "Meeting the Challenges of the 1990" updated in the course of 1992 which provides its terms of reference as follows:

(a) Assist countries to translate regionally agreed policies into practical strategies and programmes;

(b) Provide multisectoral analyses of African needs in the priority areas, and formulate time bound strategies for achieving the objectives contained in those priorities;

(c) Develop, with member States and subregional economic communities annual programmes of multidisciplinary technical assistance; and

(d) Provide multidisciplinary technical assistance teams to African countries based on those programmes.

27. These terms of reference made it explicitly clear that assistance at the national level should be subordinated to and based on established linkages with strategic subregional and regional development activities. The concept of ECA's regional advisory services has therefore the merit to exclude ambiguities surrounding ECA's operational activities which indiscriminately pursue national, subregional and regional objectives without necessarily establishing the desirable linkages between them.

28. The growing emphasis being placed on the implementation of regional policies and strategies is quite obvious from ECA-MRAG's programme of activities concentrating on assistance to regional and subregional IGOs which constitute the major part of it. That many of these services continued to be sectoral in this context is to be considered a minor shortening as actually this assistance was integrated into the subregional and regional multidimensional framework and process of socio-economic integration, hence into the forefront of ECA's priorities.

29. However, quite an important part of ECA-MRAG's programme continues to be concerned with sectoral advise at the country level. These missions have little ,if no direct relevance to ECA-MRAG's multidisciplinary objectives.

30. There would therefore appear a need to become more selective and proceed with the phasing out of such sectoral advisory services unless requests from individual governments are reformulated with them in order to introduce the desirable linkages with

interdisciplinary and/or multinational objectives as may be required. In some cases ECA-MRAG has undertaken quite successfully the reformulation of requests and introduced a more comprehensive approach.

31. On the whole the overall activities of ECA-MRAG may be considered as a breaking ground for ECA's desirable streamlining of its activities with the regional dimension of development on one hand and the effective provision of multidisciplinary advise on the other.

32. The appointment of a coordinator of ECA-MRAG which became effective in early 1992 must be seen as essential in the establishment of the group as a cohesive working unit.

33. However, the present role of the coordinator who acts as <u>primus inter pares</u> as useful as it has proven to be in providing general guidance to the group would appear as insufficient to assert ECA-MRAG's catalytical role in ECA's overall activities. The limitations inherent to his functions of coordination have necessarily deprived ECA-MRAG from authoritative leadership which would be required to produce decisive impact by way of policy direction and related decision making and implementation.

34. It has has to be noted that originally provisions were made in the terms of reference of ECA-MRAG by which the group was to be directly responsible to the Executive Secretary who was to personally provide policy guidance. In addition it was foreseen to oversee ECA-MRAG's activities by <u>an ad-hoc</u> steering committee to consist of the group leader acting as a spokesman for the group and the Division Chiefs of ECA, with the Deputy Executive Secretary as chairman.

35. None of these provisions were implemented and ECA-MRAG had actually to entirely rely on its own individual and collective capacities for its development.

36. The functioning of the group since June 1992 as a separate substantive unit with its coordinator participating in the divisional meetings with the Executive Secretary may be seen as an important step forward in the organizational development of the group. However, the present arrangement would appear too weak to sustain the future desirable integration of ECA-MRAG into the overall operational framework of ECA.

(b) Integration by ECA

37. The substantive development of ECA-MRAG has not led to any significant measures of support required to integrate the group into ECA's organizational and administrative framework. ECA-MRAG continues to be practically ignored and at the best tolerated by ECA's substantive Divisions and Administration. In spite of alarming observations on the lack of support from Administration made at an early stage by PPCO the group has been denied throughout its existence the most essential support services. Members of ECA-MRAG are spread over several floors of ECA with the Coordinator and his secretary located on the 9th floor; the Administrative Assistant and two secretaries on the second floor; and the other Regional Advisers on several floors from 3rd to 7th floor.

38. Thus far, only 3 secretaries have been allocated to serve 8 Regional Advisers, who have to produce considerable frequent mission and other reports. As a consequence it has become the most serious problem for MRAG members to produce their reports on time.

39. ECA-MRAG does not possess a single photo-copying machine. MRAG-members do not have PC's to work with.

40. On the whole ECA-MRAG's working environment has remained intolerable and as such must be viewed as an eloquent expression of ECA's difficulties to actually adopt and support the new programmatic dimension by ECA-MRAG which should however be considered as an essential asset for the organization's further development.

(c) Impact at the Country Level

41. Within the limits of the present evaluation and given the present state of development of ECA-MRAG it is practically impossible to assess the impact or lack of it of ECA-MRAG's activities at the country level. Thus far the group has not been able to systematically follow up on the outcome of its advisory missions. Reactions from governments are mainly obtained through personal and informal contacts undertaken by those who were directly involved in the missions to the countries concerned.

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42. Informal gathering of such reactions sporadically supported by written evidence from member states indicates that ECA-MRAG's advisory services are well appreciated. This general impression is however made tangible by the increasingly heavy demand for ECA-MRAG's services.

43. There is a definite need for the establishment of ways and means for a purpose oriented follow-up of ECA-MRAG's activities about which the group is fully aware. A methodology for monitoring progress and follow-up of impact has been a longstanding item under consideration at the regular meetings of the group. However, no progress has been made so far.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

44. ECA-MRAG's programme of work has steadily developed towards increased relevance to the substantive priority areas established by its terms of reference. Within this framework the focus on the African economic community has emerged as an overriding area of concentration. This is evidenced by the weight and diversity of requests formulated in close cooperation with ECA's legislative organs at the subregional level as well as directly with subregional Economic Communities and other intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) all over the continent.

45. While sectoral advisory services at the country level continue to play an important role efforts have been made to promote the multidisciplinary approach at that level through more focused objectives expected to comprehensively link expected results with region wide efforts to sustain the integration of the African economies.

46. The development of the programme has also been sustained by a growing volume of requests which underscore an existing and tangible need of ECA-MRAG advisory services to member States.

47. Furthermore the group has moved into highly complex fields of activities including politically sensitive areas which have constituted new challenges not only for ECA-MRAG but for ECA as a whole.

48. The development of the programme has greatly benefited from interaction amongst the members of the group facilitated by the effective coordination of the team-leader. It has moreover developed within an environment in which professional performance has

been stimulated and sustained by the challenge of multidisciplinary activities in which high professional standards, relevant professional experience and commitment to the development of Africa are called for to make a meaningful contribution.

49. As to the capacity to deliver its products ECA-MRAG has made remarkable progress in the implementation of its programme. However, the number of missions carried out in 1992 would appear to be the maximum of activities the group is able to absorb under its present resources availability. While the group as a whole has accomplished major achievements individual performance reflects a striking imbalance in some cases. This may be due to either the lack of competence of the regional advisors concerned or irrelevance of competence of the former to the programme, or both.

RECOMMENDATIONS

50. To be coherent with its goals and objectives and thereby sustain the relevance of its operational approach ECA-MRAG needs to further strengthen and develop its methods of work. The growing volume and increasing variety of requests from member states should be streamlined more closely with ECA-MRAG's priority objectives by focusing on catalytical and specific activities which truly fall into its area of competence.

51. In order to achieve this goal ECA-MRAG should undertake the following:

1. Establish a general framework of reference and/or criteria for ECA-MRAG's advisory services to be derived from development objectives of member states which actually fall within the priorities of ECA-MRAG's terms of reference. This framework of reference should be established at three

distinct but interlinked levels, namely at the country, the sub-regional and regional level.

Such a framework should be based on continued analysis of relevant documentation and data including information of development activities at the aforementioned levels. This implies that ECA-MRAG should develop a specific capacity for collecting information and undertaking research and analysis on development activities in all countries of the region in order to identify those areas in which ECA-MRAG's assistance would be of particularly critical importance.

- Hold under continued review and appraisal existing and/or required linkages between substantive and operational activities within ECA's overall work programme and identify complementary activities to be undertaken by ECA-MRAG including joint programming and implementation of missions.
- 3. Sustain a continued dialogue with member states including Resident Coordinators/UNDP Resident Representatives of the countries concerned on requests for ECA-MRAG missions in order to programme, implement and follow up ECA-MRAG missions in such a way that they are fully integrated into the framework of development programmes at the national, sub-regional and regional level as may be required. This implies that requests from member states be critically assessed. It also implies that government authorities and Resident Coordinators/UNDP Resident Representatives be duly consulted in order to establish appropriate objectives and terms of reference for ECA-MRAG missions. It also implies that adequate resources be identified and an appropriate time schedule for implementation be established.

4. Prepare in the form of a document an annual work programme to be submitted to ECA's Conference of Ministers for review and approval and ensure monitoring of implementation including preparation of revisions as may be required.

17

 Establish a systematic monitoring of follow-up of missions including assessment and analysis of ECA-MRAG's mission reports and preparation of recommendations for follow-up actions

B. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

52. ECA-MRAG has introduced a new dimension into ECA's operational activities for development. The new dimension is aimed at establishing a comprehensive multidisciplinary operational framework based on coherent analysis of Africa's development problems and ways and means to address them in the context of regionally agreed policies and strategies.

53. This approach is to be viewed as highly relevant to global objectives of the UN development activities in general and to African challenges in particular. Indeed the multidisciplinary programme approach has been stressed as the underlying principle for operational activities for development by UNGA resolution 44/211 which has triggered a continued process of institutional reorientation and restructure within the UN development system. In this context the role and functions of the Regional Commissions should be adapted to a fast changing environment in order to better assert their capacities and competitiveness. ECA-MRAG should therefore be viewed as a modest but very significant contribution to the process of the Institutional development the United Nations as a whole and of the Regional Commission for Africa in particular.

54. The growing complexities involved in adequately addressing member states requests have continuously challenged the potential and capacity of ECA-MRAG and proven the viability of its multidisciplinary approach. In the same time the limitations and constraints of ECA-MRAG to effectively contribute to ECA's institutional development and spearhead a new dimension in its overall programme of work have become apparent.

55. The constraints jeopardizing ECA-MRAG's future development stem from the combined impact of a variety of factors amongst which the following are the most significant ones:

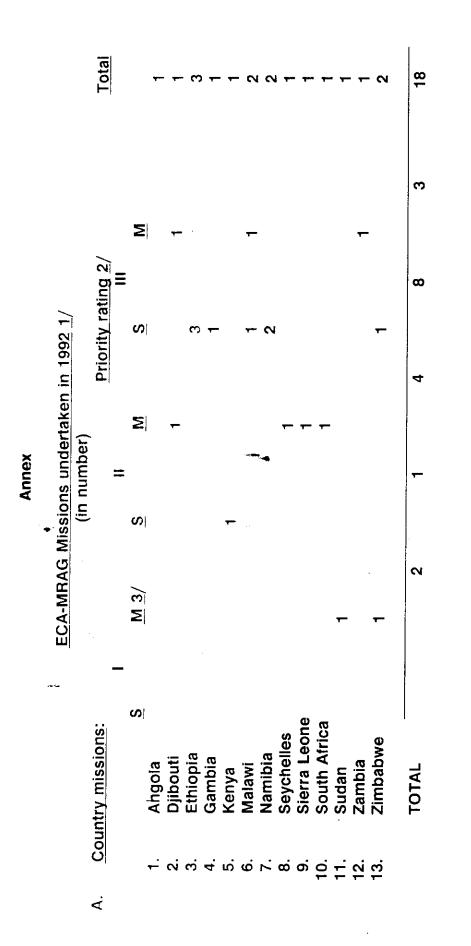
- (i) weakness of ECA's mechanisms and methods of work in the field of multidisciplinary approaches to substantive and operational activities. This weakness appears quite obvious from ECA-MRAG's general isolation from major programming/review exercises of ECA such as the revision of the medium term plan 1992-1997; the formulation of the UNDP funded programme under the 5th cycle etc.. as well as from activities of special task forces established by the Executive Secretary on policy/strategy issues;
- lack of well established leadership of ECA-MRAG able to provide overall policy orientation and direction leading to decision making and implementation as well as exercising of authority over the group as a whole; and
- (iii) lack of human and financial resources of ECA-MRAG required for expanding its programme of activities and meeting increasingly complex requests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

56. In order to integrate the desirable multidisciplinary approach and thereby ECA-MRAG's potential and capacity into ECA's overall work programme or in other words enhance through ECA-MRAG's contribution the institutional development of ECA the following measures should be taken:

- 1. Establish an enhanced capacity at the level of the Cabinet Office of the Executive Secretary for providing leadership in the conceptualization of multidisciplinary operational activities and related methods of work. Such a new capacity should essentially provide with a central oversight of all operational activities of ECA; develop a framework of coordination and sustain direction of those activities in relation to established and evolving development goals and priorities including analysis of opportunities for ECA in the context of regional, subregional and national development activities.
- 2. Review the terms of reference of the coordinator of ECA-MRAG with a view to upgrading his functions. This should aim <u>inter alia</u> that he be enabled to exercise leadership and authority over the group. It would also imply that he be fully responsible and accountable for ECA-MRAG's programme formulation and implementation as a whole as well as for individual performance by regional advisor. The coordinator should also have ultimate responsibility for establishing terms of reference for each ECA-MRAG mission, including the identification of advisory services required and appropriate planning for implementation.
- 3. Ensure the provision of additional human resources and adequate administrative support to ECA-MRAG.

In this regard, the present restructure of the social and economic sectors of the United Nations undertaken by the UN Secretary General who indicated <u>inter alia</u> his determination to decentralize technical advisory services to the Regional Commissions has opened new avenues to be explored for establishing ECA-MRAG on a solid footing. A proposal for a new structure of ECA-MRAG including the provision of adequate human resources and administrative support should therefore be jointly established by PPCO and ECA-MRAG for consideration by the Executive Secretary for follow up with the UN Secretary General.



Excludes 12 training workshops/seminars undertaken in 1992. 1

Priority ratings: 2/

I: Support to the establishment of the African Economic Community. II: Support to the transformation of African economies. III: Support to the priority sectors of the Lagos Plan of Action.

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ECA-MRAG Mission undertaken in 1992 (in number)

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