

65579



**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

Distr.: Internal

COES/NADAF/MR/00/5

May 2000

Original: ENGLISH

MISSION REPORT

Purpose of Mission:

Participation in the 15th meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts for the Sub-regional Development Centre for North Africa (NA-SRDC).

Place and duration of Mission:

Tangiers, from 27 to 31 March 2000

Reporting Staff:

Halidou Ouedraogo, Chief
SRDC Coordination Unit

REPORT

On
Mission to Tangier (Morocco)
To Participate in the 15th meeting of the Inter-governmental Committee of Experts of
the North Africa SRDC

(From 28 to 31 March 2000)

I. Purpose of Mission

1. The primary purpose of the mission was to participate in the meeting of the ICE for NA-SRDC, in response to an official invitation extended by the Director of the Centre. The opportunity was also taken to pursue the interaction with the Director and senior staff of the Centre on important programmatic issues, including the preparation of the planned Investment Forum (a core activity of the NA-SRDC in 2000) as well as strategies for re-launching the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), a major stakeholder of the SRDC. The mission took also the advantage of the presence in Tangier during the same period of Mr. P. Chiumya, Director, Conferences and General Services Division, to take part in on-going discussion regarding the host country agreement and some of the implications of the SRDC moving from Tangier to Rabat.

II. Mission Preparation

2. Although the agenda for the meeting was made available prior to the mission, all background papers were reviewed one day before the meeting. As such, no special preparatory work is worth mentioning.

III. Summary Outcome of Mission

Participation in the 15th ICE view of the Progress Report on the Implementation of UNSIA

3. High-rank official attended the meeting from all member countries of the SRDC as well as a large number of sister organizations, inter-governmental organizations and diplomatic missions. Also worth noting was the attendance and active participation of the UN Resident Coordinator in Morocco, throughout the meeting.

4. The agenda of the meeting included five substantive items, including the review of (i) follow-up actions to the recommendations of the 14th ICE meeting; (ii) the report on economic and social conditions in North Africa (1999); (iii) a report on gender issues in North Africa; (iv) reports of seminars/workshops organized in 1999; and (v) approved work programme for the biennium 2000-2001.

5. While no major issue arose from the review of follow-up actions to recommendations by the 14th ICE meeting, the ICE deplored the fact that the management of the SRDC failed to mobilized the necessary resources in support of the planned long-term perspective study for North Africa. The meeting strongly suggested that efforts towards this study should be resumed during 2000. The meeting was informed of the initiative of

the Government of Morocco to earmark resources for a national long-term perspective study in the course of the 2000 financial year. In discussing the modalities for the conduct of a similar study at the sub-regional level, the meeting suggested that other countries should strive to mobilize resources at the national level (public or grant) for their respective national studies, bearing in mind that the sub-regional study should not be a mere compilation of national reports. In this respect, the meeting recommended that a Technical Committee should be established to elaborate a framework for the sub-regional study which core elements will be reflected in the national studies.

6. While the meeting said its appreciation of the quality of the report on economic and social conditions in North Africa, as compared with previous ones, the review of the report brought about the issue of data and information sources. Despite the fact that the SRDC confirmed to have used national focal points to collect the supporting data and information, several countries, including Tunisia, Mauritania and Sudan objected the validity of some of the data and thus some of the conclusions of the analysis. They pointed out that the focal should be a designated official/institution who can have access to various national data and information sources. The meeting also suggested that the SRDCs strive to consult other regional and international data and information repositories such as the Arab League, the Islamic Development Bank, the Bretton Wood Institutions and the African Development Bank.

7. The issue of water (drinking and for irrigation) was given special consideration by participants. In this respect, the representative of Libya proposed to host a sub-regional colloquium on water and desertification.

8. Participants also regretted that the report failed to deal with regional and international trade-related issues, including making reference to bilateral trade agreements between a number of countries of North Africa and the European Union. The meeting recommended that as part of the planned investment Forum, the SRDC attempt a study on the status of subregional trade support infrastructures with emphasis on transport and communications.

9. In discussing the social development component of the report, the meeting recommended that the SRDC should undertake, in collaboration with ECA Headquarters and other competent regional and international organizations, a study on linkages between education systems, skills development programmes and employment in North Africa.

10. In reviewing the report on gender equity and economic empowerment of women in the context of local cultural values, the meeting observed that the many recommendations formulated by the group of experts are pertinent and relevant to improving the status of women in Maghreb societies. Only Sudan made reservation with respect to the recommendation of reproductive health. The representative of Libya invited all countries of the subregion to participate in Forum on women, to be organized in his country in June 2000.

11. The meeting reviewed the outcome of the various seminars and workshops organized by the SRDC in 1999. The Committee took note of the reports of these meetings and recommended that key recommendations would serve as guidelines for the future work of the Centre.

12. Before the review of the programme of work of the NA-SRDC for the biennium 2000-2001 by the Committee, Mr. Rezig, Director the Centre, briefed the Committee on

his consultative missions to countries of the subregion, following his appointment. He pointed out the purpose of these consultations were to identify member States' own priorities with a view to reformulating planned activities to match with those, to the extent possible and within the limit of flexibility allowed. He pointed out that identified priorities include strengthened regional economic cooperation and integration, the promotion and involvement of private sector, water, and the advancement of women through gender approach.

13. In introducing the work programme as approved, the Director noted that proposed activities aim at pushing forward in member States' priority areas. What is further needed is to rationalized activities so as to optimize the use of scarce resources and bring about the desired impact. In this respect, Mr. Rezig stressed the critical need for more operational partnership with member States institutions, sister organizations of the UN system and chiefly UNDP, and regional intergovernmental institutions and chiefly the Arab Maghreb Union. The Director also informed the Committee of the organization, on a pilot basis, of a competitive essay on gender, in Morocco which, if proven popular, will be extended to other countries of the subregion.

14. The Committee fully endorsed the orientation of the work of the SRDC and encouraged the management to work towards the re-launching of UMA and closely work with the latter for the organization of the planned investment forum. The Committee welcomed the proposed Advisory Board to serve as a major reviewer of the Centre's activities and outputs. It however suggested that their respective competent national authorities confirm members of the Board.

15. Under any other business, the Committee accorded attention to a briefing by the mission on planned major events and on-going processes at headquarters, which are of relevance to the work of the SRDCs. Highlights on the forthcoming ADFII and ECA Conference of African Ministers enlarged to Ministers of Trade as well as the establishment of the SRDCs Coordination Unit was provided. The Committee took note of the two events and said its appreciation of the initiative of the ECA executive management to strengthen inter-action between SRDCs and Headquarters divisions.

16. The Committee expressed appreciation of the positive move of the NA-SRDC towards a more focused and most relevant programme of work as well as efforts in forging partnership with stakeholders and other actors within the sub-region. For this, the Committee commended the vision and pragmatism of the newly appointed Director of the NA-SRDC.

17. Before the closure of the meeting, members of the Committee decided that the 16th meeting of the ICE should take place before the next ECA Conference of Ministers, at a place to be determined in consultation with members.

Exchange of Views on Programmatic and Administrative Issues Confronting the NA-SRDC

18. The ICE meeting offered the opportunity for the mission which included Mr. Patrick Chiumya, Chief, Conference and General Services Division, to look into important issues pertaining to the operations of the Centre as well as modalities and strategies for the implementation of the two core activities of the NA-SRDC, including resource

19. Administrative and operations issues, including the host country agreement and relocation of the Centre at Rabat, as well as suggested alternatives were largely document in Mr. Chiumya's back-to office report, circulated in April 2000.

20. Programmatic issues discussed included the preparation of the investment Forum, a case study on employment in North Africa and strategies for re-launching UMA.

21. Major aspects of the preparation for the investment forum (which is a core activity of the NA-SRDC) reviewed included the possible contribution of Headquarters divisions, mobilization of resources and modalities for obtaining the active involvement of UMA and private sector organizations. It is worth indicating that as far back as in June 1999, the secretariat of UMA approached the Executive Secretary for ECA to assist for the organization of an investment forum in North Africa. Also, in view of the priority accorded to this activity by its member countries, the SRDC further worked out the idea and implementation modalities.

22. The Director of the Centre, not only ensured that the activity is among the core ones for 2000 but took the opportunity of his mission to Headquarters in March 2000 to consult with the relevant substantive divisions, including on this matter. Following the renewed interest of members of the ICE in this important activity, the mission suggested that the SRDC should prepare a more comprehensive task brief highlighting the main components of the activity, schedule of achievements and resource requirements as well as a strategy for mobilizing potential partners, particularly private sector organizations.

23. In respect to the re-launching of UMA, the mission reviewed with Mr. Rezig some of the major constraints (essentially political) that might continue to impede progress in regional cooperation and cooperation among member states in North Africa, but also the existing potential, including communications infrastructures, a vibrant private sector and common framework of bilateral trading agreement that the European Union entered with a number of countries of the subregion. It was felt that the re-launching process should put less emphasis on political mobilization and more on service-oriented strategy for UMA. In this respect, several potential initiatives were considered, including making the investment forum an unprecedented event under the umbrella of UMA and capacity building in international trade related issues, using the framework of an existing centre of excellence in one of the member country and in partnership with UNCTAD, WTO and ITC. The UMA hosted subregional database was also considered to be an important client-oriented service, if strengthened to become a sub-regional knowledge repository.

Required Follow-up Actions

24. Upon return from the mission, the Director of CGSD addressed administrative issues relevant to that Division. The issue regarding the premises of the NA-SRDC, along with that of CA-SRDC, was also considered by the Executive Secretary at Abuja, during a meeting with some of the ECA senior staff that arose out of the meeting of the Ministerial follow-up Committee. Decision was reached that for both SRDCs, in spite of provisions of the host country agreement regarding Governments' responsibility in securing premises or related charges, ECA should strive to pay for rent.

25. Matters relating to the preparation for the investment forum and analytical study on employment were brought to the attention of the Director, ESPD. Prof. Ali confirmed the

communicated, to the Director of the SRDC for consideration and reaction. The Deputy Executive Secretary was briefed on matters that arose from the ICE meeting and discussions with Mr. Rezig.

26. With respect to the re-launching of UMA, while the Director of the SRDC pursued consultations for the consultative meeting between the secretariat of UMA, ECA and the UNDP country office in Morocco, some preparatory work was initiated by the mission included finding out the treatment of previous request for assistance by UMA secretariat to ECA. With the full cooperation of the Regional Cooperation and Integration Division, it appeared that relevant substantive divisions to those requests gave not much attention.

27. What is further required is to bring about an informed knowledge of relevant divisions, especially ESPD, DMD, RCID and OPRM about their possible contributions to the successful organization of the Investment Forum for North Africa and to supporting the re-launching of UMA. The mission envisions the preparation of a briefing note for the Deputy Executive Secretary who will lead the consultations with UMA highlighting constraints that pertained to progress in recent past and elements of the proposed strategic approach, taking into accounts prevailing and anticipated circumstances. The draft briefing note is meant for review by RCID, NA-SRDC and SRDC Coordination Unit prior to the consultative meeting scheduled for the period from 22 to 23 June 2000.