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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

Thirty-third session of the Commission/  
Twenty-fourth meeting of the Conference  
of Ministers/Seventh session of the  
Conference of African Ministers of Finance

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
6 – 8 May 1999

**Issues from the subsidiary and sectoral bodies of the  
Commission requiring a decision of the  
Conference of Ministers**

## **Subregional Follow-up Conferences to the World Summit for Social Development**

In consonance with the United Nations General Assembly mandate (Res. 50/161 of 22 December 1995), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) convened two subregional conferences as follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD). These meetings were held on 15-17 March and 23-25 March 1999, in Nairobi, Kenya and Marrakech, Morocco, respectively, to monitor progress in the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the Summit level in 1995. Since only a short time has elapsed from March 1995, the conferences were intended to take stock and monitor rather than undertake comprehensive evaluation of the policy measures undertaken by the various member States. The purpose of these exercises was to highlight advances in the implementation of the Copenhagen commitments, and to provide the necessary information for decision makers and development actors to design interventions and strategies to speed up progress towards the targets. Specifically, the conferences focussed on monitoring progress in poverty reduction, employment creation, achieving social sectors objectives, pertaining to education, health, and in establishing enabling socio-political environments; and good governance. Special events were held for the civil society forum (in Nairobi) and youth (Marrakech).

### **Major conclusions emanating from the Conferences**

#### **A. Progress since Copenhagen**

Poverty appears pervasive particularly in the Eastern and Southern subregions except in Botswana, Mauritius and Seychelles. Those living below the poverty line have been estimated at over 50 per cent in these subregions. Poverty incidence is estimated to have been lower in North Africa, affecting about 22 per cent of the population. Participants recognised that unless serious efforts made to alleviate poverty, poverty levels would continue to rise well into the next millennium.

All the countries have reported progress in implementing poverty reduction strategies, encapsulated in the establishment of National Poverty Eradication Programmes and the provision of Social Safety Nets. For instance, Algeria's Social Safety Net, with emphasis on employment benefits, aims at poverty reduction of 20 per cent per annum, up to the year 2005, while Mauritania has sectoral strategies for the poor, which aim at 18 per cent poverty reduction during 1998-2000. The Libyan programme also targets the poorest families in the country. Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia and Zambia, have put in place mechanisms for monitoring levels of poverty, while Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Mauritius and the United Republic of Tanzania had initiated special poverty eradication programmes originating before the Summit as had Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Similarly, the Sudan has incorporated a poverty eradication programme into its development strategy.

Regarding health and education issues, various countries have reported tangible progress. For instance, absolute enrolment rates at the primary level have increased while gender gaps have somewhat narrowed. A number of countries reported increased budgetary allocations to the education and health sectors. The orientation of health programmes remains curative services and

health policy frameworks with emphasis on primary health-care. A number of countries focussed on HIV/AIDS pandemic, mitigation of high maternal mortality rates and addressing major childhood diseases responsible for high infant and under-five mortality rates (U5MR). Significant progress was reported regarding the reduction of U5MR. Some countries have almost achieved the desired levels in the provision of basic health services.

All countries in the related subregions have reported actions geared towards expanding employment opportunities, protecting and creating jobs, especially for the vulnerable groups, and improving the overall environment for employment creation. Legal frameworks were being reviewed, with the aim of providing an enabling environment for the promotion of the private sector and self-employment in the informal sector. Many countries were in the process of formulating or putting in place national employment policies with the assistance of International Labour Organisation (ILO) and UNDP. Programmes aimed at increasing the productivity of small-holders in the agricultural sector have also been implemented in a number of countries. It was however pointed out that unemployment rates have surpassed those of population growth.

Good governance was recognised as one of the fundamentals of socio-political and economic development. Almost all participating countries at the conferences reported significant progress in improving governance structures and modalities, linking it with the imperative of working towards peace, stability and security. To that effect, several initiatives aimed at fostering legitimacy, transparency, participation and accountability were reported as being undertaken by the countries. Democracy, human rights and the necessity of establishing adequate institutions have been recognised as essential elements of good governance.

## **B. Constraints and Challenges**

Poverty remains a daunting challenge, with incidence observed at more intensity in sub-Saharan than in the North African countries. The implementation of the Commitment on Poverty Eradication was reported to be constrained by several factors common among most of the countries, notably: inadequacy of public funds allocated for poverty eradication programmes; external debt burden; over-dependence on rain-fed agriculture; inadequate economic and social infrastructure; insufficient human capacity for policy formulation, implementation and evaluation; lack or inadequacy of economic and social infrastructure in the rural areas; impact of HIV/AIDS; and incessant and protracted social instability and civil strife in several countries of the subregions.

There are also a number of constraints to employment creation. In this regard, a major challenge is the designing of comprehensive, integrated and coherent employment policies to facilitate the attainment of employment generation objectives. An integrated employment programme should comprise four essential components: (a) a policy component; (b) a mechanism for operationalizing, monitoring, and coordination of the programme; (c) an integrated and interconnected set of employment promoting project proposals; and, (d) proposals for target groups expected to be the principal beneficiaries of the programme. A necessary condition for arresting the deterioration in employment creation is to achieve a high rate of sustained economic growth and make it more employment intensive. There should also be a link between employment policies, development needs, education and human development and women in development. Particular activities are needed in the area for productive employment for women. The technical and financial empowerment of women will have wider positive implications not only for the

family but also for the community at large. More progress is also needed in the development of comprehensive and reliable data base on the labour market. Youth employment and participation should also be integrated in comprehensive national development programmes.

A number of constraints have been identified regarding social sector activities. In the area of health, the most challenging constraints relate to: the mobilization of financial resources; strengthening institutional and human capacity; rehabilitating the health infrastructure; poor health management information systems; reducing the burden of HIV/AIDS on families and households; inadequate coverage of and access to health services, such as immunization; drugs and health-care facilities; clean water and sanitation; reducing infant and under-5 mortality rates; and maternal mortality rates.

Improving the quality, internal efficiency and relevance of education as well as enhancing enrollment ratios especially at the first and second levels, are major challenges for most countries. Infrastructural limitations, including over-crowded classrooms, inadequate human and financial resources and lack of teaching materials are major problems in most countries. Gender imbalances at all levels of the educational ladder are widespread, although the incidence of this problem varies across regions. Provision of free and compulsory primary education remained a major challenge for the majority of the member States of the two subregions. Cost-sharing and cost-recovery arrangements are often impeding access to social services.

Conflicts and instability from which a number of countries suffered have impeded efforts towards good governance. In some cases civil service has been criticised as having been politicised and resistant to change. Among the areas where action is called for are the following: capacity-building for good governance; improving people's participation in decision-making, especially at local level; improving governance and establishing cooperative partnership between various structures of governments; enhancing accountability in the management of public affairs; and, respect for human rights.

### **C. Renewed Commitments and Recommendations**

Countries pledged to:

- (a) Institute instruments for measuring and monitoring levels and progress made in poverty reduction;
- (b) Identify the poorest segment of the population in their countries to be targeted by special poverty programmes;
- (c) Mobilise financial resources required for micro-credit and safety nets;
- (d) Put creation of productive employment at the top of their development agenda;
- (e) Develop policies to ensure workers have the requisite education and training they need to adopt to changing economic conditions, technologies and labour markets;
- (f) Reinforce training and human development programmes to suit the labour market and continue the efforts to reform and improve the labour market and its structures;

- (g) Establish integrated information networks and databases;
- (h) Improve health-care financing, integrated problem solving approach, and health-care reforms;
- (i) Intensify the campaign against HIV/AIDS pandemic;
- (j) Provide free and universal primary education and reduce gender imbalances;
- (k) Improve the quality of education including addressing the plight of teachers especially in the rural areas;
- (l) Address the negative effects of structural adjustments programmes on the social sector;
- (m) Intensify dialogue between political leaders in order to forestall the eruption of conflicts;
- (n) Consolidate democratic institutions and create the necessary environment for the promotion of good governance;
- (o) Share experiences among countries at the regional and bilateral levels;
- (p) Coordinate preparatory activities for the extraordinary Session of United Nations General Assembly in the year 2000 regarding the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Plan of Action;
- (q) Reinforce decentralization and local institutions through legal, financial and institutional support;
- (r) Reinforce training and human development programmes to suit the labour market and continue the efforts to reform and improve the labour market and its structures;
- (s) Give priority to national institutions and experts in the implementation of development programmes; and,
- (t) Ensure regular monitoring of programmes including issuance of annual reports on social developments.

Development partners and international financial institutions were called upon, through the Marrakech Declaration, to:

- (a) Establish foreign investment guarantee structures to encourage the flow of foreign direct investment and to strengthen sustainable development;
- (b) Cancel external debt and allocate their equivalents to support the social development programmes;

(c) Provide technical assistance support as a contribution from development partners to the development of African countries; and

(d) Obtain the data on social issues from member States.