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THE MULTINATIONAL PROGRAMMING AND
OPERATIONAL CENTRES (MULPOCs) AS THE FOCAL
POINT FOR THE PROMOTION OF ECONOMIC AND
TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION AMONG AFRICAN COUNTRIES

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A. INTRODUCTION

Technical co-operation among developing countries (TCDC) is an important cornerstone for collective self-reliance and the building of a new international economic order. This is true of third world countries in general, and of African countries in particular. Aware that TCDC, as a new dimension of international economic co-operation, may well hold the key to sustained self-generated development in the developing countries, policy organs within the United Nations system - including the General Assembly - have specifically urged governments and the entire international community to co-operate fully in utilizing their combined skills, experience and capacities for mutual benefit.

The Buenos Aires Plan of Action, in a series of recommendations, spelt out concrete ways in which governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-intergovernmental organizations, and even private bodies, must pull together to harness the collective creativity, skills and resources of the developing countries. Following on the Buenos Aires Plan of Action, the fourteenth session of ECA and fifth meeting of the Conference of Ministers held in Rabat in March 1979 adopted resolution 355(XIV) which inter alia, recognized the importance of economic and technical co-operation among developing countries as an instrument for collective self-reliance and for the attainment of the new international economic order and supported the idea of the ECA Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) becoming the focal point for the combined efforts at the subregional level of all United Nations agencies and other multilateral organizations engaged in economic and technical co-operation activities in Africa.

The ECA secretariat has over the past three years concentrated its best efforts on launching the five subregional MULPOCs, and in compliance with the resolution stated above, it is now developing and using these MULPOCs as an instrument for implementing TCDC.

In order to become a more effective instrument for executing TCDC projects, ECA itself has established a TCDC focal point within the Economic Co-operation Office as well as an Inter-Divisional Committee on Economic and Technical Co-operation. Under the leadership of the Economic Co-operation Office, the Inter-Divisional Committee co-ordinates and monitors the Commission's TCDC activities, deliberates on various issues as they arise, and approves position papers prepared by ECA for TCDC meetings. The TCDC focal point is both the immediate point of contact for communications from outside ECA, and the centre from which information on TCDC and various proposals for action are made to

radiate to other parts of the Commission. In terms of actual execution, however, the bulk of the Commission's TCDC activities continues to be implemented by the Substantive Divisions themselves, whose work programmes have now become fully integrated with the work programmes of the MULPOCs.

B. ECA's TCDC ACTIVITIES

The activities of the Secretariat in the field of TCDC cut across every sector, and are carried out at subregional, regional and interregional levels. It is not intended to give an exhaustive account, but only a succinct summary, of such activities. For analytical convenience, we do so sector by sector.

(i) Agriculture

Presently, ECA is preoccupied with the implementation of the Regional Food Plan for Africa (AFPLAN) the success of which depends, to a large extent, on the effective co-operation of governments and intergovernmental organizations, particularly at the subregional level. During the past year, ECA undertook an evaluation of the activities of some forty intergovernmental organizations in connection with the implementation of AFPLAN. The analysis was carried out subregion by subregion, covering all the five MULPOCs. Existing programmes and projects of the IGO's were studied from the point of view of food development with the intention of providing guidelines for reorientation of their activities, or suggesting, where necessary, new projects and programmes.

Another aspect of AFPLAN which the secretariat is implementing in co-operation with FAO, is a pilot project on the feasibility of establishing a commodity intelligence service for food products. The systematic collection and dissemination of information on prices and quantities of food commodities in the African region is necessary for increasing intra-regional trade and regional self-sufficiency.

Two subregional activities should also be noted: the study of co-operation and trade in food, livestock, fishery and forestry products in the ECOWAS subregion, and the work aimed at increasing food availability through waste reduction and improvement of marketing systems in the Eastern and Southern African subregion. In addition, ECA is supporting the promotion of integrated rural development projects, a good example of which is the one involving the Mbeya-Rukwa region of Tanzania and the Northern Province of Zambia. Finally, ECA supports, jointly with FAO, a number of regional and subregional agricultural training and research activities.

(ii) Industry

The ECA secretariat is currently implementing sectoral development programmes related to basic industries which are considered strategic for African industrialization. These industries include chemicals, metals, engineering, food and agro-industries, and building materials and construction industries. The Regional Symposium on Industrial Policies and Strategies convened in Nairobi in September 1979 decided on certain priority projects, which were subsequently

approved by the Conference of African Ministers of Industry. Two of these deserve explicit recognition because of their regional TCDC potentialities - the African Regional Centre for Engineering Design and Manufacturing (ARCEDEM) and the African Industrial Development Fund (AIDF). During 1980, intensive efforts were pursued in the implementation and strengthening of these two regional institutions. The aim of ARCEDEM is to support directly, or through appropriate African institutions, the creation of suitable facilities to undertake the engineering design and the manufacture of spare parts, components and simple machines in limited product areas, and to promote the development of machine design capabilities within the African countries. AIDF, once it has fully materialized, can be expected to provide financing and technical assistance for industrial preinvestment feasibility studies for multinational regional and subregional projects.

There is also an important project to develop metals and engineering industries for the Eastern and Southern African subregion, several of whose countries are known to possess the requisite raw materials in comparative abundance. In co-operation with UNIDO, ECA has organized meetings and workshops on the subject, the most recent being a three-week workshop on Manpower and Technical Development for Metal and Engineering Industries for the Eastern and Southern African Subregion held in Lusaka in November/December 1980.

(iii) Transport and communications

Several activities of a TCDC nature are currently being undertaken by ECA in the field of transport and communications within the framework of the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade for Africa (UNTACDA). Probably the most important of them is the Trans-African Highway System: one highway will run North to South from Cairo to Gaborone, another East to West from Mombasa to Lagos, two more will cut across West Africa from Lagos to Nouakchott and from Dakar to Ndjamena, a fifth will run across the Sahara from Tripoli to Kinshasa. More highways are planned; from Nouakchott to Cairo, Ndjamena to Massawa; Tripoli to Windhoek; and from Beira to Lobito. When fully completed, this highway network plus its feeder roads will provide much needed physical links between the countries of the continent and thus give renewed impetus to regionwide TCDC. ECA's role in this is largely promotional and catalytic. Besides giving professional advice and backstopping support, it assists in setting up management co-ordinating bodies for each of the trans-African highways, and also assists in mobilising financial support from outside.

Joint ventures also exist or are under negotiation as regards inland water transport, maritime transport, railway transport and air transport, to say nothing of various forms of communications media. In the field of telecommunications, for instance, the establishment of the Pan-African Telecommunications network with ECA's support has marked another significant step in intra-regional TCDC.

(iv) Manpower development

ECA continues to place increasing emphasis on manpower training and utilization, limited only by available resources. Apart from organizing various training activities - workshops, seminars, symposia, etc. - at the request of

governments, the secretariat has been responsible for setting up or strengthening a number of regional and subregional training and research institutions such as the recently established African Institute for Higher Technical Training and Research based in Nairobi; CAFRAD; IDEP; and Subregional Schools of Business Management. In addition, it has been instrumental in converting some national institutions with multinational scope into regional or subregional training and research centres in given fields of specialization. The most recent examples include the conversion of the former East African Community Management Institute in Arusha, formerly belonging to and serving only three States, into the Eastern and Southern African Management Institute which now serves all the 18 countries of the subregion; another is the conversion of the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Centre into the Multinational Civil Aviation Training Centre of Addis Ababa to cater for the aviation training needs of the whole of English-speaking Africa, while the Franceville Mvengue Multinational Civil Aviation Centre in Gabon caters for the needs of French-speaking African countries. Both these centres have been established in 1980 largely through the efforts of the African Civil Aviation Commission, in close collaboration with ECA.

Current negotiations by ECA with Tanzania and Cameroon are also expected to lead to the conversion of the College of African Wildlife Management situated in Mweka, Tanzania, into another full-fledged regional institution to serve English-speaking African countries; and to the conversion of the Ecole de Fauna at Garoua in Cameroon into a similar regional institution for Franco-phone Africa.

Finally, ECA assists in administering an African fellowship programme which enables member States to assist each other, or to receive assistance from outside sources, which is then channelled by ECA to selected areas of manpower training available in particular institutions in Africa and abroad. The secretariat also compiles periodic directories of African skilled specialists in various fields to facilitate their hiring by governments or other organizations seeking to do so. Another way in which it is promoting increasing use of African skills is through the recent establishment in West Africa (and now also in the Eastern and Southern African subregion) of an Association of African Consultancy Organizations. ECA is advocating increased use of the capacities and skills of these organizations in the spirit of collective self-reliance and TCDC.

(v) Science and technology

In this field, most effort has been concentrated on institution building for the development, use and dissemination of special technologies for regional and subregional development. A number of regional and subregional institutions have been set up for this purpose. They include - to cite only a few - the African Regional Centre for Technology, the African Regional Organization for Standardization, the African Remote Sensing Council and its planned network of remote sensing facilities (in Ouagadougou, Nairobi, Kinshasa, Cairo and Ile-Ife), the Centre for Services in Surveying and Mapping in Nairobi, and the Regional Centre for Training in Aerial Surveys at Ile-Ife. The establishment of a Regional Centre for Solar Energy Research and Development is also currently being contemplated. In the sphere of mineral research and development, the East African Mineral Resources Development Centre has been set up in Dodoma,

Tanzania, and a second one is presently under consideration for the Central African subregion. Eventually, it is intended to have a comprehensive network of such centres covering all the subregions of Africa.

Despite the enormous teething problems that many of these young regional and subregional institutions for technical co-operation are experiencing, due largely to lack of financial support from member States and from outside donors like, their potential for the promotion of TCDC is tremendous, and ECA will continue to bend all its energies to sustain and improve them.

(vi) Other fields

Many more examples of institution building for TCDC could be cited - in the fields of statistics, population, social development, etc. - in all of which ECA is actively engaged. But space constrains us and the illustrations already given above, although far from exhaustive, should suffice for our present limited purpose. However, a word is in order about the women's programme. An important vehicle for TCDC with respect to the integration of women in the development process, is the African Training and Research Centre for Women, based in Addis Ababa, as an integral part of the ECA secretariat. During 1980, as in earlier years, the Centre conducted training courses, workshops and seminars aimed at enhancing the role of women in such fields as nutrition, child care, management of resources and rural living conditions in general. It also organized study-cum-training tours to several African countries and was instrumental in the establishment of a network of subregional machinery for programmes for the integration of women in development within the framework of the ECA MULPOCs. It is heartening to see that this programme has received the generous support of several funding agencies, including UNDP and USAID.

(vii) Interregional TCDC

Finally a word about interregional TCDC - an area with vast potentialities and where ECA has only begun to scratch the surface. Following on the Buenos Aires Plan of Action, ECA in consultation with the other regional commissions, has explored fruitful fields of mutual technical co-operation between Africa and other developing regions and many opportunities have been revealed in practically every field.

For example, there seem to be good opportunities for fruitful co-operation with the other regional commissions, particularly ECLA, the fields of manpower training, promotion of interregional trade, and the use of science and technology for development. With ECE, there is scope for close co-operation in problems of combating desertification, the exploitation of underground water resources, and afforestation. Co-operation with ECWA exists with respect to the "brain drain", and exchange of statistical information, particularly connected with the preparation of the Statistical Abstract of the Arab World. ECA and ESCAP have identified and are pursuing co-operation with respect to payments unions, State trading organizations, transnational corporations, and promotion of interregional trade.

However, due to severe financial and manpower constraints, it has only been possible for ECA to begin to implement a few of these interregional TCDC projects. Presently, after an initial financial setback, implementation has begun of the joint ECA/ECLA TCDC project in manpower development, trade promotion and the use of science and technology, for the development of Africa and Latin America. Financed partly by UNDP, and partly by ECA and ECLA Secretariats, the

project aims at identifying new opportunities and finding ways of intensifying existing economic and technical co-operation links between African and Latin American countries.

There has also been some limited bilateral funding from the Netherlands which has made it possible for ECA to begin implementing a project to strengthen its trade and financial relations with both ECLA and ESCAP. Nevertheless, far more resources are needed if the opportunities offered by interregional co-operation are to be seized and utilized.

C. CO-OPERATION WITH UNDP, OAU, ETC.

The Buenos Aires Plan of Action, as endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly, has conferred on the UNDP the primary responsibility for the promotion and co-ordination of TCDC efforts at the global level for the entire United Nations development system. Consequently, a Special Unit for TCDC has been set up at UNDP Headquarters as the focal point of UNDP efforts in this regard. Within the African region, ECA in line with the mandate given by the Buenos Aires Plan of Action to all regional commissions, and also in the spirit of the General Assembly's restructuring resolutions, has the over-all responsibility for ensuring co-ordination and harmonious development of the activities of the entire United Nations system in so far as they relate to economic co-operation and integration. It does, however, rely preponderantly on the financial support and good-will of the UNDP, which certainly has spared no efforts in its backing of the regional and subregional activities of the Commission. Not only are many of the regional and subregional institutions for TCDC financed, at least partly, by UNDP, but all but one of the subregional MULPOCs have been financed almost wholly by UNDP from the beginning.

In May 1980, UNDP organized, in collaboration with ECA, OAU and the specialized agencies, the second conference of governmental experts on the promotion of TCDC in Africa. Convened in Nairobi, the meeting adopted the "Nairobi Recommendations for Technical Co-operation Among African Countries" - an action programme designed to cement or accelerate TCDC activities, especially in the fields to which it was particularly addressed, namely, rural development, science and technology and the food sector. The recommendations also called for increased financial and material support for TCDC activities from governments and other agencies.

The Nairobi Recommendations are now being implemented, even if on a piecemeal basis. They are a tall order, requiring the best efforts and full resource mobilization of member States and their joint institutions. Of the recommendations currently being implemented, one calls for a study of alternative visions of TCDC by the year 2000. This study is being carried out under the auspices of UNDP, following on consultations with OAU and ECA. Other recommendations envisage the holding of subregional workshops to work out precise multinational projects for the implementation of the programme. There is also an important recommendation proposing the establishment of an African Trust Fund for TCDC, while another proposes the systematic earmarking of budgetary funds by governments and agencies for TCDC activities in Africa.*

* The full text of the Nairobi Recommendations is attached, for information, as an annex to this paper.

The Nairobi Recommendations clearly recognize the part to be played by governments and by their regional and subregional institutions, and they certainly underscore the key role to be played jointly by UNDP, OAU and ECA. For it is only when UNDP as a funding agency, OAU as a mobilizer of political good-will, and ECA as a deployer of operational capability, join forces in a complementary relationship that they can make the best impact on the development of economic and technical arrangements in Africa.

It may be noted that preparation for a third meeting of African governmental experts for the promotion of TCDC in Africa have already been initiated by UNDP in collaboration with ECA and other United Nations agencies. It will be devoted principally to problems of manpower development and human resources utilization and be convened some time in 1982.

D. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

The problems which TCDC efforts are encountering in Africa are well known to member States of the Commission and, of course, to the secretariat. They are only recounted briefly here. They include lack of political will, lack of financial resources, scarcity of skilled manpower, lack of understanding of the benefits of co-operation and of proper delineation of areas of co-operation, and a lack of knowledge of available facilities. Added to this, there seems to have been a lack of co-operation, or focal point, for multinational co-operation activities of many different agencies operating in the TCDC field in Africa.

It is scarcely necessary to elaborate on these problems. For example, it goes without saying that intergovernmental institutions for technical co-operation can only fulfil their function to the extent that they have the qualified manpower to do so, and there is sustained political good-will and commitment by the member States who have created the multinational institutes. Otherwise, such institutions become structures devoid of any means of effective action.

The most serious problem seems to be financial. All available evidence indicates that practically all African multinational co-operation organizations suffer from this. They are unable to undertake activities with high potential for want of funds. Too often, member countries fail to honour their financial obligations to the organizations they have created. International and funding agencies too have shown reluctance in financing multinational activities.

There is an imperative need to make countries more aware of the benefits of co-operation, to delineate mutually beneficial areas of multinational activity, and increase their willingness and capacity to share their experience with each other. In other words, it is necessary to substitute the spirit of co-operation for the spirit of competition that is all too prevalent, especially between many neighbouring States.

Another handicap to TCDC is engrained in the existing ignorance of facilities available in Africa, or in traditional prejudice against their use. There is still a lingering feeling that African institutions and even experts are inferior to their counterparts in developed countries. This feeling is nurtured partly by ignorance of the facilities available in the region. For example, the feeling that African educational facilities are inferior is still widely prevalent. Countries prefer to send their students to developed countries and students themselves tend to prefer institutions outside Africa. This is one serious attitudinal barrier to TCDC which must be overcome.

The need for better co-ordination of TCDC activities, particularly at the subregional level, must also be confronted. Fortunately, a mechanism already exists in the shape of the ECA MULPOCs that can be effectively mobilized for this purpose, given the co-operation of governments, intergovernmental organizations, and other development agencies.

E. CASE FOR STRENGTHENING THE MULPOCs

The case for strengthening the MULPOCs as the subregional basis for the implementation of TCDC is obvious. The greatest need, or prerequisite, for the success of multinational TCDC efforts is to secure firm support for them at the grassroots level. Appeals from centres like New York or even Addis Ababa, however well intentioned, cannot have as much impact as direct contacts on the spot with the countries themselves to learn their individual problems and development plan first-hand, and demonstrate to them how their particular problems can be effectively tackled through economic and technical co-operation either with neighbouring countries, or with developing countries farther afield.

Right now, the most urgent necessity is firstly, to strengthen the leadership of the MULPOCs and their professional and technical cadre, so as to give them greater capability for delivering required assistance to member States. Secondly, there is need on the part of governments, intergovernmental organizations and all development agencies, including UNDP and the specialized agencies, to recognize the central role of the MULPOCs as a focal point at the subregional level of all TCDC activities, in the same way as they should recognize ECA as the focal point at the regional level of economic and technical co-operation activities within Africa.

The Lagos Plan of Action, adopted in April 1980 by the Economic Summit of OAU Heads of State and Government, requires that African countries move progressively towards the creation of an African economic community by the year 2000. The only effective and pragmatic way to do so, as has been clearly recognized in the past, is to begin at the subregional level by establishing multinational enterprises, and economic co-operation arrangements within which conflicts can be resolved and policies harmonized, and continue the process of integration and internalization of economic co-operation until such time as full-fledged subregional common markets are created. This again, clearly underlines the significance of the MULPOCs, which should provide the environment and institutional framework for the creation of viable subregional common markets.

Of course, as the MULPOC programme grows and expands, there will be simultaneous growth of inter-MULPOC programmes which cut across countries

belonging to two or more MULPOCs, and also of regional sectoral programmes covering all or most African countries. It is this process of growth and consolidation of economic co-operation and integration starting at the subregional level, which can become a natural precursor of, and eventually bring to birth, the African economic community envisioned in the Final Act of Lagos.

F. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) The most important conclusion is that if TCDC is to be effectively implemented, it is now more necessary than ever to strengthen the MULPOCs by providing them with adequate resources. This follows logically from the fact that most multinational activities of a TCDC nature, which are the very stuff of the MULPOCs' work programme, must be identified and implemented at the grass-roots level if they are to muster the support they need, particularly at the national and subregional levels. For this purpose, the subregional MULPOC is the most appropriate instrument, if not always for implementation, at least for the general co-ordination and harmonization of such activities.

(ii) It is important and necessary for all agencies particularly UNDP, OAU and ECA to have their TCDC activities streamlined and rationalized. At the regional level, this should be done, by the ECA secretariat in general; at the subregional level it should be done by the MULPOCs.

(iii) The organization of conferences, meetings, seminars and workshops on regional or subregional TCDC in Africa, regardless of the agency that initiates them, should be done in close collaboration with ECA and OAU, and should pay particularly regard to the implementation needs and capabilities of existing organizations at the regional and subregional level. In particular, it is recommended that periodic African regional meetings of governmental experts on the implementation of TCDC should be organized and sponsored jointly by UNDP, OAU and ECA.

(iv) In view of the Final Act of Lagos, calling for the creation of an African Economic Community by the year 2000, and in view of the fact that the MULPOCs are the agreed vehicle for subregional economic integration working towards the early establishment of subregional common markets, it is recognized that every fruitful effort to strengthen the MULPOCs is ipso facto a step towards the realization of the principal objective of the Final Act of Lagos.