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PROBLEMS OF ACQUIRING AFRICAN GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

Government publications are of vital importance in the field of information on development as they provide first-hand data on the current economic and social situation in each country and such information cannot be easily obtained through other information media.

Realizing the vital role these publications play in research, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has been struggling throughout the years to obtain this indispensable material for its research programmes, through various channels: corresponding with departments, ministries and other African government agencies, as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Offices in the region and by requesting ECA staff to collect material while on mission. However, none of these attempts has resulted in a steady flow of these publications.

This is partly due to the fact that in most member countries there unfortunately does not exist one government agency solely responsible for the distribution of all government publications, such as Her Majesty's Stationery Office in the United Kingdom and the United States Superintendent of Government Publications Office in the United States of America. The case in most African States is that Government printers are responsible for the sale and distribution of publications printed by them. The departments and ministries which prepare these studies may in some cases, also distribute the publications. Moreover, Ministries of Information, in some member States, distribute those government publications meant for wide circulation. Government publications published by private printers are usually distributed by the department or ministries which sponsored the studies.

This problem of which agency is to distribute government publications has been discussed in many regional and international meetings on information dissemination and the acquisition of government publications.

To cite an example, the International Conference on the Development of a Documentation and Information Network in East Africa which was held at Nairobi from 24 July to 2 August 1973 adopted a resolution calling on member Governments to designate one distributing agency to facilitate the acquisition of government publications by interested bodies.

The types of government publications in which ECA has particular interest are: Department and Ministry annual reports, economic reports, economic bulletins and special studies, economic surveys, budgets, development plans, topical censuses, statistical bulletins and abstracts, laws, official gazettes, etc.

The major obstacle that ECA faces in its attempts to acquire these publications as they become available is the fact that member countries have not as yet legally designated the ECA Library as a depository library to receive their publications gratis. This would save the time now spent in lengthy correspondence between ECA and government departments to acquire free of charge urgently needed material for its current research work and would guarantee a steady flow of this valuable material to the ECA Library, which is envisaged to become a storehouse of information on socio-economic development in Africa.

In view of the above-mentioned problems that the ECA secretariat encounters, the Executive Secretary requests the assistance of the Executive Committee in adopting a resolution on the designation of the ECA Library as a depository library entitled to receive regularly member countries' unclassified government publications free of charge by air mail.

Draft resolution

The Executive Committee,

Realizing the indispensable role played by government publications in the field of information on African socio-economic development,

Recognizing that such information is essential to ECA research work,

Recommends that member States designate by law the ECA Library as a depository library entitled to receive by air mail, free of charge, two copies of all unclassified government publications, as they become available.