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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Fourth meeting of the Regional
Technical Committee for PADIS

Addis Ababa
23-25 March 1989

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

REPORT ON QUESTIONS ARISING
FROM PRECEDING MEETINGS OF ECA

1. Since the third Meeting of the Regional Technical Committee (RTC), held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 15-16 April 1987, several meetings with a bearing on PADIS activities have been held, including the eighth and ninth meetings of the Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole (TEPCOW), the thirteenth and fourteenth meetings of the ECA Conference of Ministers, the fifth session of the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers, the eighth meeting of the Chief Executives of ECA-sponsored Institutions and meetings of the policy organs of the Tangier - Niamey - Gisenyi - Lusaka - and Yaoundé-based MULPOCs. At the time of writing, the second meeting of the Standing Committee on the Harmonization and Standardization of Information and Documentation Services in ECA-sponsored institutions to be held on 15, 16 and 17 March 1989 has not yet taken place. The report of this Committee's meeting will be presented to the Regional Technical Committee under provisional agenda item 5.

Eighth meeting of the Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole

2. At its eighth meeting, held in Addis Ababa in April 1987, the report of the third meeting of the RTC was submitted to TEPCOW, which took due note of it.

Thirteenth meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers

3. The meeting adopted two resolutions of direct relevance to the PADIS work programme. These were resolution 600 (XXII) on Information Systems Development in Africa and resolution 618 (XXII) on an In-depth Study of the United Nations Intergovernmental Structures and Functions in the Economic and Social Fields.

4. In the operative paragraphs of resolution 600 (XXII), the meeting (i) adopted the report of the third meeting of the PADIS Regional Technical Committee and took note of its recommendations as well as the PADIS work plan for 1987-1988 and strategies for the period 1987-1991 contained therein; (ii) called upon the Government of the Niger and the ECA secretariat to intensify their efforts to launch as soon as possible the West African Documentation and Information System; (iii) expressed its appreciation to the United Nations Development Programme and the International Development Research Centre of Canada for their continued support of PADIS as it enters its third phase; (iv) commended the continuously evolving co-operation between ECA/PADIS and UNESCO/PGI in assisting African member States in the areas of documentation and information, particularly the programme being developed in the context of the UNDP Fourth Programming Cycle; (v) commended also Zaire and Zambia for their financial contributions to the development of the PADIS system and network, in particular, to the establishment of the Central African Documentation and Information System (CADIS) and the Eastern and Southern African Documentation and Information System (ESADIS) respectively; (vi) called upon member States and the international community to include PADIS in their pledging to the United Nations Trust Fund for African Development; (vii) called upon PADIS to continue its ongoing activities in systems and network development and to extend its activities to the development of advisory services in information systems development and policy, innovative user services, training

in information systems, promotion of horizontal co-operation in information exchange in the region, provision of access to its data base for African member States and undertaking research on improved methodologies for statistical and non-numerical data base development; (viii) requested the specialized agencies of the United Nations system to intensify their support to PADIS, particularly by making available the data base and information products they generate to allow for wider dissemination in the region; (ix) requested also the Executive Secretary to assist member States in this vital area by taking the necessary measures to make information systems development and user services as part of the activities to be financed from the regular budget of the United Nations, beginning with the Medium-term Plan for the period 1990-1995; (x) requested further that the Executive Secretary should explore ways and means of including more technical co-operation activities on information systems development in the ECA work programme and budget for 1988-1989; (xi) further requested the Executive Secretary to report on progress made in the implementation of this resolution to the twenty-third session of the Commission.

5. In the operative paragraphs of resolution 618 (XXII) relating to methods of work, including periodicity of meetings and agenda of the institutional machinery of the Commission, the Conference of Ministers decided that the technical subsidiary bodies of ECA, including the RTC, should continue to meet on a biennial basis. The same point also stipulated that meetings should be short and business-like. The lengths of documents to be submitted to them and of those of their own reports should conform to the standards set by the United Nations.

Fifth session of the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers

6. At the fifth session of the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 21-28 March 1988, the Information Science Committee took note of a study prepared by the secretariat on Training facilities available for the training of information and documentation scientists in Africa. A report on PADIS activities (1986-1987), the approved work programme (1988-1989) and the draft work programme (1990-1991) was also submitted to the Committee.

7. The Information Science Committee recommended the extension for a further period of four years, of the mandate of the five experts representing member States on the PADIS Regional Technical Committee, viz., Algeria, Ethiopia, the Niger, Zaire and Zambia.

8. The secretariat of PADIS presented two documents to the session of the conference: The first on the Use of micro-computers in statistics and information systems was examined by the Statistics and Information Science Joint Committee. The other on the supportive role of adequate documentation in plan preparation, implementing and monitoring was presented to the Planning and Information Science Joint Committee.

Ninth meeting of the Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole

9. At its ninth meeting, held in Niamey, Niger, 6-13 April 1988, TEPCOW took note of the report of the Joint Conference on African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers and of the recommendations contained in it.

Fourteenth meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers

10. The ECA Conference of Ministers, at the recommendation of the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers, supported by TEPCOW, decided to renew the mandate of the experts already sitting on the RTC, for a further term of four years.

11. The meeting also adopted resolution 634 (XXIII) co-operation between ECA and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States and European Programmes. In the operative paragraphs, the Conference of Ministers urged the Administrator of UNDP to take the necessary measures that would enable the Regional Bureau for Arab States and European Programmes to allocate, within the framework of its Fourth Programming Cycle, the resources to enable the countries within its jurisdiction (Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Somalia, the Sudan and Tunisia) to participate effectively in ECA's regional and subregional programmes and to involve ECA in the preparation and implementation of projects concerning those States.

Meetings of the policy organs of the MULPOCs

12. The policy organs of the Tangier-based MULPOC (Morocco) met in Tangier: the Committee of Experts from 30 January to 1 February 1989 and the Council of Plenipotentiaries, 2-3 February 1989. These meetings were preceded by the third Meeting of the Subregional Technical Committee of PADIS (SRTC) for North Africa, which was also held in Tangier on 29 January 1989.

13. The Subregional Technical Committee of PADIS first reviewed PADIS activities both in the Central Co-ordination Office and in the subregion, before drawing up the following recommendations:

(a) For the attention of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States and European Programmes:

- (i) To release the money allocated to the project once the regional bureau has ensured that the project document has been signed by three member States (Morocco and Somalia have already signed).

(b) For the attention of PADIS:

- (i) To complete and publish as soon as possible a brochure on the services offered by PADIS, in all three languages (Arabic, English and French);
- (ii) To compile and distribute a leaflet on the international data banks installed in PADIS, accompanied by a summary of the contents;

- (iii) To distribute more widely PADIS's existing publications in order to benefit the maximum possible number of users;
- (iv) To set in operation the Arabization programme, giving priority to publishing an Arabic edition of DEVINDEX AFRICA and to ensure the participation of member States in training activities in Arabic;
- (v) To reduce the costs of publication and the delays, by using local publishing facilities;
- (vi) To carry out a study on user needs in the subregion, similar to the pilot study by PADIS in three English-speaking countries;
- (vii) To make as much use as possible of subregional skills to carry out advisory missions;
- (viii) To promote an increased awareness of the nature existing documentation centres in the subregion by funding information study tours and studies for national administrations, in co-operation with officially designated participating centres.

(c) For the attention of member States:

- (i) To ensure more participation at the required level in the activities of the SRTC;
- (ii) To request those who have not already done so (the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Tunisia) to designate their national participating centres as soon as possible, in order to complete the sub-network.

14. As regards the presidency of the Committee whose mandate is about to expire, the SRTC unanimously decided to renew the mandate of the current President, Mr. Ahmed Fassi-Fihri (Morocco) for a further period of four years.

15. The President of the SRTC presented the Committee report and an account of activities carried out in the subregion during the past year, to the committee of experts. The representative of Egypt raised the question of duplication and of whether the moment was opportune for creating such a system (NADIS), a question which had given rise to the same reservations expressed by his country at the eighth meeting of experts in 1988. The President of SRTC, while recognizing the relevance of this concern nevertheless drew attention to the complexity of information matters which made the creation of a specific network essential. The meeting of the committee of experts took note of the report of the Subregional Technical Committee NADIS/PADIS.

16. During the meeting of the Council of Plenipotentiaries, the Egyptian delegation reiterated their reservations on the programme, expressing the opinion that the creation of NADIS was a duplication of existing similar institutions in the subregion.

17. The policy organs of the other MULPOCs were made aware of PADIS activities both in the Central Co-ordination Office and within their respective subregions.

18. The Council of Ministers of the Niamey MULPOC adopted resolution No.7, the operative paragraphs of which: (i) requested the Executive Secretary of ECA to seek the funds necessary to bring WADIS into immediate operation; (ii) further requested the MULPOC to prepare a project document to be submitted to funding agencies for financing; (iii) urged the MULPOC and those intergovernmental organizations having documentation and information systems to work closely in order to avoid duplication of effort.

19. The Committee of Experts of the Lusaka MULPOC, which met in Harare, Zimbabwe, 1-4 March 1989, took note of the report on PADIS activities and requested that ESADIS be made operational as soon as possible.

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