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UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Intergovernmental Committee of Experts for

Science and Technology Development

Fifth Meeting

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2-6 November 1987

REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE

WEST AFRICAN WORKING GROUP

1. The West African Working Group on Science and Technology held its first meeting in Dakar, from 6-9 April 1967, at the seat of the African Regional Centre for Technology (ARCT). Togo, which was the convener for the subregion, could not host the meeting, and the ARCT agreed to host it and provide the necessary secretarial support. Eleven member States participated in the meeting which was chaired by the representative of the Government of Senegal.
2. Since it was the first meeting of the Working Group, the ECA secretariat had to highlight the objectives which were to enable government experts of the subregion to analyze in depth three main areas, namely:- development of science and technology, basic needs, and industry, - and on the basis of subregional and geographical requirements, to come up with concrete project ideas for priority considerations.
3. Each delegate gave an overview of the science and technology structure and activities in his/her member State. When the main themes were taken up, the delegates found that there was need for more in depth discussion, and expressed the desire to meet again before the main meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Science and Technology Development, scheduled for the first week of November, in Addis Ababa. Project ideas were agreed upon for the subregion, and some of them needed further consideration at the following meeting.
4. In the field of development of Science and Technology, it was recognized that manpower development was the main problem. Because of the costs involved, training through regional centres was encouraged, and ECA was asked to organize such training in collaboration with UNDP. Concern was expressed on brain drain and the need to get back African experts working outside the subregion.

When it came to the issue of basic needs, the field being very wide, it was agreed that an integrated project for improving food production be set up, having components on the utilization of new technologies now available. The African Regional Centre for Technology is already putting up such a project for UNCTAD and other bilateral funding.

In the field of industry the meeting recommended the organization of a training workshop on agro-based industries and food technologies, with emphasis on the means to commercialize the research results available, for the gap between the researcher and the end-user is widening. Application of available research results could accelerate the process of ample food production. It was also recognized that the industrial sector should contribute to funding science and technology activities in the subregion. Other issues raised needed to be sharpened at the next meeting of the Working Group.

5. This Working Group which comprises sixteen member States is the largest, and has both English speaking and French speaking member States besides a few Portuguese speaking. To enable the subregion to meet regularly and to conduct the activities assigned to the member States, it is not only necessary to have funds for their displacements, but also funds for interpretation costs. This restricted the group

in meeting earlier, and the first meeting could take place with a UNDP grant to OAU, through the United Nations Fund for Science and Technology. The activities of the working group can be implemented in a steady way if resources are available both from the member States themselves, and from international organizations. As the recommendations have brought out, food security and environmental degradation through desertification are priority issues to be tackled, and projects in these areas need international funding. International organizations operating in the subregion are to pool their resources together in order to tackle the problems. The working group has highlighted the need for such co-operation.