

UNITED NATIONS
ÉCONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL

66898



CONFÉRENCE
LINGUISTIQUE



Distr.
GENERAL
E/CN.14/177
31 December 1962
Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
Fifth session
Leopoldville, February-March 1963
Provisional agenda item 16

STANDING COMMITTEES
(Note by the Executive Secretary)

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1. At present, within the ECA secretariat there are Standing Committees on Trade and on Industry and Natural Resources. The Conference of African Statisticians also has the character and functions of a Standing Committee. The Standing Committee on Social Welfare and Community Development is not a Standing Committee within the proper sense of the term, and this has given rise to problems outlined below. The Executive Secretary wishes to draw the attention of the Commission to these and a number of other problems arising in connexion with standing committees.
2. The Standing Committee on Trade was set up by resolution 28 (III). It was clearly the intention of the Commission to set up a permanent committee as is evident from the discussion on trade during the third session of the Commission and the reports which served as background for those discussions. In the preambular paragraphs the resolution referred specifically to the report on the impact of Western European economic integration on African trade and development (E/CN.14/72 and Corr. 1 and 2, and Add. 1), the report of the ad hoc Committee (E/CN.14/100) and the note by the Executive Secretary (E/CN.14/100/Add.1). It would therefore seem that the reference to rule 19 of the Commission's rule of procedure was inadvertent, since this rule pertains to committees of the whole or committees of limited membership which may be set up by the Commission during each session.
3. It is therefore suggested that the Commission should include in its report on the fifth session a passage making it clear that the Standing Committee on Trade will henceforth be considered as being governed by rules 67 and 68 of the rules of procedure, which apply to subsidiary bodies of the Commission. The Commission may also wish to make it clear that as long as the Committee does not adopt its own rules of procedure, the rules of the Commission itself apply.
4. The Standing Committee on Social Welfare and Community Development is not a standing committee within the normal meaning of the term and this appears to have given rise to misunderstandings. The present "Standing Committee", which meets annually shortly before each session

of the Commission, is made up of experts designated by the Executive Secretary, whose expenses are paid out of UN funds. Subject to a broader consideration referred to below the Commission may wish to adopt a new resolution establishing a standing committee for social welfare and community development composed of governmental representatives. The establishment of such a new committee would in no way diminish the Executive Secretary's authority to convene from time to time meetings of experts who could report to the inter-governmental standing committee. The wording of such a resolution could make it clear that the body established by resolution 36 (III) was not intended to be a standing committee but rather a group of experts convened by the Executive Secretary. If, however, the Commission decides, as is suggested below, that it is premature to establish a true standing committee on social welfare and community development, it is suggested that the Commission should include in its report on the fifth session a passage making it clear that the group of experts now convened each year by the Executive Secretary is not a standing committee.

5. In addition to the specific problems referred to above concerning trade and social welfare and community development, a broader question of policy now arises which the Commission may wish to consider. There appears to be some misunderstanding concerning the distinction between the three basic types of meetings (apart from the Commission itself) which can be convened under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Africa:

- (a) there is the standing committee which is an inter-governmental body to which all Members and Associate Members are invited. Those attending are nominated by their governments, represent their governments and have to be wholly paid for by their governments. Unless the Executive Secretary designates those attending the meeting, he has no power to pay any contribution to travel and other expenses of delegates. Working Parties to which all members and associate members are invited and which are inter-governmental in character also fall within the first category. The same applies to smaller policy-formulating bodies which may be set up by the Commission from time to time, e.g. the Committee of Nine on the African Development Bank;

- (b) the second type of meeting consists of experts in a specific field. Such experts are designated by the Executive Secretary and their travel and per diem expenses are paid in accordance with regulations laid down. However, such meetings of experts can be convened only if specific financial provision is made in advance and approved by the General Assembly;
- (c) The third type of meeting is a seminar with largely educational and training objectives in view. Here again those attending are selected by the Executive Secretary on the basis of nominations by governments, in consultation with the Bureau of Technical Assistance Operations. Here again financial provision for each seminar has to be made and approved in advance, but governments may be entitled to send additional participants at their own expense.

6. The experience of the Standing Committee on Industry and Natural Resources, where it proved impossible to attain a quorum largely, it is understood, because a number of governments were unable to make the necessary financial provision to send delegates, gives rise to two questions of policy. The first is that the Commission may wish to consider modifying rule 42 of the rules of procedure of the Commission so far as standing committees are concerned. The rule reads "a majority of the members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum". This might be modified by adding an additional sentence reading "one third of the members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum in the case of standing committees". It is true that rule 68 states that "subsidiary bodies shall adopt their own rules of procedure unless otherwise decided by the Commission", but it would seem preferable for standing committees to operate normally under the same rules of procedure as the Commission, particularly so far as practical with regard to the constitution of a quorum is concerned.

7. The second policy question is of a more far-reaching character. In view of the heavy expenses involved in sending delegates to a growing number of meetings, which bear heavily on the smaller African countries, it would seem that great caution should be exercised before setting up new standing committees. The fifth session will have before it recommendations from both the Standing Committee on Trade and the East African Transport Conference to set up a standing committee on transport.

It may well be that the Meeting of Experts on Housing to be held in January will make recommendations for the setting up of a standing committee on housing, building and town planning. If these two new committees were set up and if the present body dealing with social welfare and community development were to be converted into true standing committee, there would be a total of five standing committees, as well as the Conference of African Statisticians.

8. It is for the Commission to consider whether at the present stage it would be possible to convene meetings, presumably annually, of so many standing committees and for them to be fully attended. A possible course of action might be to extend the terms of reference of the Standing Committee on Industry and Natural Resources to include transport with, of course, much of the work in all these fields carried out by meetings of experts normally financed out of UN funds; to defer the setting up of a standing committee on social welfare and community development, the work to continue to be carried out on the present basis through meetings of experts; and to envisage at this stage the setting up of a working party on housing, building and town planning which would be inter-governmental in character, which need not meet too frequently and whose activities would be largely carried out for the time being by smaller meetings of experts financed by the UN. If the Commission decides that the time has come to set up an organ with continuing functions in the field of public administration, it would seem desirable to adopt the same practice as is suggested in the case of the working party on housing, building and town planning, and to set up a working party on public administration.
