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UNITED NATIONS TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS
DECADE FOR AFRICA
(UNTACDA)

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**THE ROLE OF ECA AS THE LEAD AGENCY FOR THE
UNITED NATIONS TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS DECADE IN AFRICA
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I. Background of the Decade

1. The importance of improving transport and communications at Africa's present stage of development has been recognized in several ways. The large capital investments (ranging between 20 and 40 per cent of all public sector investments) which African countries normally allocate for the development of the transport and communication sectors stems from each country's realization of the importance of the transport and communications systems. Transport and Communications were given top priority in the development strategy of subregional organizations such as the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Preferential Trade Area of Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA).

2. It was in recognition of the need to highlight the importance of transport and communications that in March 1977 the ECA Conference of Ministers adopted a resolution recommending that a decade be proclaimed in order to focus attention on the special needs of Africa in these sectors. This recommendation was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at its meeting in July 1977 and the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa was officially proclaimed by the General Assembly in December 1977. ECA was designated as the lead agency entrusted with the preparation of the groundwork for the Decade. In this endeavour, ECA was assisted by financial support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and by the technical advice of all specialized and other agencies of the United Nations as well as African inter-governmental organizations with competence in transport and communications. The outcome of these efforts was the formulation of a Global Strategy and a Plan of Action for developing transport and communications in Africa. The Strategy and the Plan of Action were approved by the Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning in May 1979.

Objectives and strategy of the Decade

3. The principal goals of the Strategy for the Decade have been re-affirmed on many occasions since; they are that African countries should work towards:

- (a) promoting the integration of transport and communications infrastructure with a view to increasing intra-African trade;
- (b) ensuring the co-ordination of the various transport systems in order to increase their efficiency;
- (c) opening up of land-locked countries and isolated regions;
- (d) harmonizing national regulations and eliminating physical and non-physical barriers with the aim of facilitating the movement of persons and goods;

- (e) stimulating the use of local human and material resources;
- (f) standardizing networks and equipment;
- (g) carrying out research and disseminating information and techniques appropriate to the African context in transport and communications;
- (h) establishing and expanding the manufacture of transport and communications equipment;
- (i) mobilizing technical and financial resources for the development and modernization of transport and communications; and
- (j) restructuring the transport and communications sectors to ensure that African trade within the region and with the rest of the world takes place under conditions most favourable for the continent.

4. These goals were to be realized through the implementation of policies, plans and projects at the national, subregional and regional levels, with the main burden and costs being borne by the African countries themselves. To complement and reinforce their efforts, it was agreed that there would be an ECA co-ordinated regional effort based on projects classified in the following order of priority:

- (a) regional projects, subregional projects, and national projects having regional and subregional implications;
- (b) projects for the least developed, land-locked, newly independent, island and front-line countries; and
- (c) purely national projects; i.e., national projects of countries other than those mentioned in (b) above.

Mechanism for the implementation of UNTACDA

5. The 1979 Conference of Ministers also decided to implement the Decade programme in two phases:

Phase I (1980-1983) with the programme consisting of:

- (a) completion of ongoing projects;
- (b) implementation of projects already identified and studied but awaiting finance;
- (c) identification of technical/feasibility and related economic studies of other projects and a search for their financing.

Phase II (1984-1988) with the programme envisaged as covering:

- (a) completion of projects begun in the course of the first phase;
- (b) financing and implementation of new projects;
- (c) continued identification and study of future projects.

6. As to the manner in which the programme was to be financed, it was envisaged that, in addition to the resources they normally provide, bilateral and multilateral donors would increase their assistance for transport and communications substantially. To this end the UN Secretary-General, assisted by ECA was expected to initiate a dialogue with the major donors in order to mobilize the additional resources needed. African financial bodies and those within the United Nations system were to play a particularly active role, not only by earmarking more of their resources for transport and communications, but also by assisting ECA in the search for additional resources. The primary responsibility for resource mobilization, however, was to remain with the African Governments themselves.

II. Decade programme

Phase I Programme

7. At the beginning of the first phase of the Decade, some 771 projects estimated at a cost of \$9 billion were identified; of these 610 projects estimated \$8.3 billion were in the transport sector and the balance in the communications sector. After some time, the programme underwent modification as some projects were added, some revised and others abandoned. By August 1982, the cut-off date for any further changes to the programme, there were 1,091 projects estimated at \$15.44 billion, with the transport sector's share being 779 projects, estimated at about \$14.3 billion or 93 per cent of the cost of the entire programme.

Phase II Programme

8. The second phase Decade programme has similarly undergone some changes and modifications from what was approved by the Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning at Conakry (Guinea) in February 1984. The changes have mainly been the withdrawal of some eleven transport and five communications projects from the programme.

9. As a result of the above, the current second phase programme consists of 1,034 projects, estimated at a cost of US\$16.675 billion with the following breakdown:

567 transport sector projects estimated at US\$12.797 billion and 467 communications sector projects estimated at US\$3.878 billion.

10. In summary, the entire Decade programme consists of some 2,125 projects, estimated at a total cost of about US\$32.115 billion.

III. The role of ECA as "lead agency"

11. As to the manner in which ECA was to execute UNTACDA, the role of ECA as the lead agency of UNTACDA was broadly defined during the drawing up of the Global Strategy and Plan of Action for the first phase (1980-1983). The agency was assigned the following responsibilities (para III, vol.I, Doc. E/CN.14/726.E/CN.14.Trans/147):

(a) Co-ordination and implementation of the preparatory activities for the elaboration and finalization of the strategy and work programme of the Decade;

- (b) Co-ordination and monitoring of the planning and elaboration of the individual projects within the Decade programme;
- (c) Assisting the Secretary-General of the United Nations in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Decade programme;
- (d) Monitoring and evaluation of the actual implementation of these projects by designated "executing" agencies both within and outside the United Nations system; and
- (e) Reporting on an annual basis to the United Nations General Assembly, through ECOSOC, on the progress of the implementation of the Decade programme.

12. An analysis of the above functions shows that (a) and (b) were time-limited to the programme preparatory phase, while the latter three were to be periodic in nature. It would also be noticed that the functions are phrased in extremely general terms and do not specify the ways and means and methodology, let alone the sub-activities which are necessary for the implementation of the functions.

13. Given the nature and scope of the programme, it could not have been otherwise, since it was not possible to predetermine or predict the specific and actual elements of activities which the implementation of each responsibility would entail. As a consequence of the above ECA has discharged its role in the above on a time/issue/problem activity basis over the years. In effect, issues and problems have been tackled and activities carried out from time to time as they arise.

14. The ways and means by which ECA has carried out the functions of lead agency have been varied and wideranging from technical, promotional/public relations to fund-raising activities, just to mention a few. Some of these activities are briefly described below under the above three categories.

Technical activities/functions

15. From the outset, ECA was charged with the task of preparing the policy background documents, including the Global Strategy and First Phase Programme of the Decade. This was successfully carried out with the co-operation and collaboration of several UN specialized agencies and African intergovernmental organizations.

16. After the initial preparation of the programme, African member States continued to submit a number of projects for inclusion in the programme. As a result, ECA had to review the projects for their economic and technical justifications and consistency with the global objective of the Decade, as well as rank them in order of priority and categories of activities. Quite often, this involved communications with and advice to the member States and institutions for additional information and occasional follow-up by ECA.

17. The project profiles and all the relevant information on the additional projects were then compiled into a report for review by the Inter-Agency Co-ordinating Committee and subsequent approval by the African Conference of Ministers of Transport and Communications prior to their inclusion in the Decade programme.

18. The technical functions of ECA as lead agency are best illustrated by the size, content and methodologies of the first and second phase programmes. It would be briefly recalled that the first phase programme was hastily prepared after the Decade had been declared - rather than before. As a consequence, member States continued to submit projects for inclusion after the programme had been approved, and eventually the number of projects increased from 771 to 1,091 while the estimated cost went from US\$9 to US\$15.44 billion (see paragraph 7).
19. The Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning had advised ECA that its role as lead agency was limited to preparing detailed project profiles and incorporating the projects into the programme. In other words, ECA could not reject any project submitted by a member State.
20. In contrast to the first phase programme, ECA had devoted adequate time, resources and expertise in preparing the second phase programme. Yet the initial phase two programme prepared on the basis of national project submissions consisted of 1,346 projects at an estimated cost of US\$32.6 billion (DEC/TRANSCOM/CM/III/3/Corr.1). Through the insistence and persistence of ECA and prior to consideration of the programme by the 1983 Cairo Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning, the programme had been reduced to about US\$24 billion.
21. At Cairo, ECA prevailed on the Conference - pointing out that the US\$24 billion programme was unrealistic and out of proportion, given the experience in implementing the first phase programme, the absorptive capacity of the continent, the capital base of member States, the duration of the programme, the then prevailing world economic conditions and poor prospects of any substantial external assistance, etc. (see DEC/TRANSCOM/CM/IV/4 (ALT)).
22. On the basis of the above, ECA sought and was granted the authority to revise and revamp the programme to a manageable level. This mandate enabled ECA to prepare and convene the Paris Roundtable, at which expertise opinion was sought and the programme was subsequently revised.
23. In the revision, ECA categorised or classified the entire programme on the basis of critical problems e.g. maintenance and rehabilitation, training and technical assistance, transport corridors, Trans-African Highways, regional and subregional projects, etc., which marked a departure from the purely modal approach.
24. The end result of this effort was that a rational programme consisting of only 1,034 projects, estimated at a cost of US\$16.7 billion (see para ...) was submitted to and approved by the Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning in 1984 at Conakry. It is therefore evident that ECA was not only instrumental, but played a critical role in reshaping and reducing the cost of the second phase programme. From that point onward, member States have generally accepted that ECA's role as lead agency extends beyond mere co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation of the programme - thus the apparent constraints placed on the ECA in judging and or evaluating the relevance of certain projects prior to their inclusion into the programme, were effectively removed.

Project follow-up activities/functions

25. One major activity of ECA as the lead agency has been the follow-up work associated with the entire Decade preparation and implementation. Information has been requested and received from African member States on a periodic basis relating to the financial and implementation status and other aspect of national projects contained in the Decade programme. ECA on its own, or through its subregional MULPOC offices and UNDP national offices has gathered and compiled useful information on the Decade.
26. These activities in themselves have not only constituted follow-up action, but have enabled subsequent follow-up activities, based on the analysis and evaluation of the information.
27. In order to enable effective reporting and monitoring of the programme, ECA has carried out systematic and ad hoc evaluation of the programme. The systematic evaluations is done biannually while the ad hoc evaluations are infrequent either at the request of a member state(s) or at the discretion of ECA.
28. The results of such evaluations are usually analysed and retained for subsequent use in the preparation of reports to the IACC, Conference of Ministers of Transport and Communications, ECA Conference of Ministers, subregional MULPOC organs, ECOSOC, and the UN General Assembly, as well as the UNDP.

Promotional/Public relations activities/functions

29. An important function of ECA as the lead agency has been the promotion of the Decade within and outside Africa, through publicity, sensitization and correspondence. It is apparent that many African and foreign countries, institutions, organizations and prominent people in policy/decision-making positions were unaware or only vaguely aware of the Decade - especially its objectives, strategy and programme and the modality by which they could or were expected to contribute effectively to its implementation.
30. As a consequence, ECA carried out promotional and sensitization missions to several countries (Belgium, Canada, the United Kingdom, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, Holland, Norway, Japan, United States of America, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirate, Oman, etc) and international financial and donor institutions (World Bank, USAID, KfW, CCCE, Opec Fund, EDF, ADB, BADEA, Islamic Bank, Kuwait Fund, Saudi Fund, etc.). During these missions, ECA not only briefed the countries and institutions on the objectives and strategy of the Decade, but most importantly, indicated the various modalities by which the countries/institutions could effectively be involved in the implementation of the programme.
31. Documents on the Decade programme and on specific activities of the programme, such as TCM and CFM and special reports have been sent to African and foreign countries and institutions, as well.
32. The initial objective and visible results of the above activities are that contact and dialogue between African countries and donor countries/institutions and international financial organizations have been greatly facilitated through the organization and servicing of TCM, CFM and other meetings in which all the above parties come together.

33. Very serious efforts go into the promotional activities of the Decade, including but not limited to co-ordination with other Divisions and ECA secretariat, the preparation of data and fact tables (selected status reports, project profiles, implementation and financial resources status) and UNTACDA budget, etc.

34. ECA has also used the occasions of the meetings of the policy and technical, as well as other ad hoc and special meetings of the organs of UNTACDA, to promote and brief, as well as persuade member States, delegates and representatives on the objectives and advantages of the Decade programme.

35. As lead agency, ECA has been responsible for the preparation of documents, correspondence, convening and the servicing of the Inter-Agency Co-ordinating Committee, which is the highest technical body responsible for the final technical analysis and verification of the Decade programme and annual reports. ECA plays a dominant role in this meeting and is ultimately responsible for the finalization and production of the reports.

36. Meetings of the Conference of African Ministers of Transport and Communications are held once every two years. Preparation of documents, invitations, draft resolutions as well as servicing of the meetings are carried out by ECA. This Conference is the highest policy body of the Decade and is responsible for approving the programme, reports and future activities of the Decade.

37. The amount and quality of work which ECA devotes to the preparation of documentation, reports and draft resolutions are designed to provide not only factual information but to indicate the future direction of the Decade and the individual and collective efforts African States should make towards achieving the objectives of the programme. On the basis of factual and/or analytical information, ECA has found it necessary, on occasions, to reformulate some programme aspects and recommended them for the Conference's approval.

38. There have also been occasions when extraordinary or ad hoc meetings of the Conference of African Ministers of Transport and Communications and the IACC have been convened at the initiative of ECA to consider urgent business which could not wait for the regular meetings. For all such meetings ECA has been responsible for inviting the appropriate participants, preparing background and relevant reports and servicing the meetings as well.

Resource mobilization activities/functions

39. One of the mandates of ECA in the Global Strategy for the Decade was that ECA should assist the UN Secretary-General in mobilizing resources for the implementation of the programme. In November 1979, the Secretary-General, with the assistance of ECA organized the first pledging conference in New York for the purpose of obtaining international support and financial pledges for the Decade. Although the results were not satisfactory, discussions and contacts during and subsequent to the conference revealed the inappropriateness of global pledging conferences as a means of mobilizing resources for a vast and complex programme such as UNTACDA.

40. In general, donor countries expressed preference for smaller meetings devoted to a select number of projects, chosen either on modal or subregional basis and specially focused on some African Transport and Communications problems. As a consequence, the idea of Technical Consultative Meetings (TCM) was formulated by ECA.
41. The primary objective of TCM was to be a medium for soliciting funds for Decade projects. However during the meetings, a secondary but equally important objective was recognized i.e. a medium for publicizing and promoting the Decade to the developed/industrialized countries, donors, international financial institutions, as well as African countries.
42. A total of nine TCMs have been organized and serviced by ECA and in addition to the US\$1.1 billion generated by them, a lot of useful contacts and dialogue between donors, financial institutions and African countries have been established.
43. At the wane of TCMs, ECA devised the idea of Co-financing Meetings (CFMs) which will specifically focus on the problems of select transit transport corridors serving the land-locked countries. The objective and advantages of CFMs are that the scope of the programme or projects is limited to one transit corridor at a time and that the number of African countries would be limited to those directly involved and committed to the projects, while that of donor countries and financial institutions (co-financiers) would also be limited to those who are interested and/or committed to the development of transit transport on the corridor.
44. It is hoped that the smaller the number of countries, donors and financial institutions and the smaller and/or more compact the programme, the better its chances of being co-financed by donors/financial institutions. It is also evident that countries involved in transit corridor are easily identifiable and that their interests are more likely to converge than diverge - due to the necessity of co-existence.
45. ECA not only initiates, but is actively involved and responsible for the resources mobilization meetings. A series of activities precede the meetings and continue during and even after the meetings. Relevant documents for the meetings ranging from agenda, list and profiles of projects, cost estimates, classification and justification of the projects or programme are prepared by ECA. The selection and invitation of participants, search for a host country, promotional/publicity missions to donor countries/financial institutions are usually done by ECA.
46. During the actual meetings, ECA plays the multiple role of organizer, adviser, advocate and middle-man to ensure that the deliberations are clear and fruitful. A report of the proceedings is always prepared and distributed to participants by ECA.
47. After the meetings, ECA maintains contact with African countries to ensure that follow-up action is taken by them on pledges or leads made during the meetings. In addition, technical advisory services are offered to African countries, where needed, in order to enable them to comply with specific requests by donors or financial institutions.
48. One important aspect of ECA's responsibilities as lead agency relates to the relationship between ECA on the one hand and African member States, the relevant

UN specialized agencies and African intergovernmental organizations, on the otherhand. The importance of this relationship is based on the fact that (i) first and foremost, the Decade programme is by and for the member States and therefore its implementation, changes, phasing and timing of activities are largely determined by the member States themselves; (ii) the relevant UN specialized agencies and some African intergovernmental organizations have specific mandates, programmes and projects in the respective transport modes and communications subsectors in Africa. The agencies and organizations are not only experts in their respective fields, but have a legitimate and professional interest in the development of these sectors in Africa.

49. Consequent to the above, ECA has maintained close relations with and has received reasonable collaboration and assistance from the member States, specialized agencies and African intergovernmental organizations in the discharge of its responsibilities as lead agency. For example, member States, the specialized agencies and intergovernmental organizations have provided ECA with crucial information on programmes and project implementation/financial status; assisted in the sensitization/promotion of the Decade, participation in and servicing of ad hoc and statutory meetings, as well as in the search for funding sources.

50. In brief summary, without their collaboration and assistance, ECA would have found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to play the role of lead agency.

Future activities

51. It is evident from the above that some of the important activities in which ECA, as the lead agency has played a critical role, have occurred during the implementation of the Decade programme and are of a nature and character that could not have been predetermined at the beginning of the programme. This excludes activities such as routine statutory meetings, conferences and the preparation of required periodic reports.

52. Given the past experience, it is not unlikely that new problems and issues may arise, which require the initiatives and efforts of ECA, in their solution, during the remaining period of the Decade programme and beyond. Indeed the final evaluation of the Decade programme, which ECA is required to carry out, should preferably be done two years after the end of the programme, partly so as to enable completion or partial implementation of some projects and partly to enable the gathering of detailed data and information on the large number of projects involved in the Decade for any meaningful analysis and results.

Retrospect

53. In concluding this section of the report, it is perhaps necessary to look back at the responsibilities initially assigned ECA as the lead agency and the activities which ECA has actually carried out and make some rudimentary evaluation or analysis of how well or otherwise these responsibilities were executed - or on the other hand, the relationship of the mandate and the actual activities carried out by ECA.

54. It has been already pointed out above that the responsibilities assigned to ECA as the lead agency were rather broad and general, since they did not indicate the modalities or time-frame within which the activities were to be performed (with the exception of the requirement that annual reports be submitted to the General Assembly through ECOSOC).

55. The magnitude and complexity of the programme in terms of cost (US\$32 billion) and number of projects (2,125) respectively, have been ~~added~~ to above. In addition, the range of activities carried out by ECA in fulfilment of the responsibilities have been outlined above. It has similarly been pointed out that the general broad nature of the responsibilities was appropriate in view of the magnitude and complexity of the programme, the difficulty (if not impossibility) of defining some ten years in advance as to which and when specific activities would be carried out. The approach adopted by ECA in fulfilling its role as lead agency was basically flexible planning with ample provision for adjustments and modifications to resolve problems which developed or take advantage of opportunities on a time scale.

56. It can be argued that there are few viable alternatives for managing such a large-scale activities than those done by ECA. It can be concluded that the series of activities which ECA initiated and carried out with the collaboration of the relevant UN specialized agencies and African intergovernmental organizations, were in direct response to and enabled a reasonable fulfillment of the role of lead agency. This is particularly so because of the general and broad nature of the mandate or responsibilities and the fact that any detailed planning and further refinement of the activities, were impractical - given the magnitude and complexity of the programme. In this respect it should be pointed out that while ECA was the initiator, designer and co-ordinator of the programme and is responsible for monitoring and evaluating its implementation and achievements, in reality, the Decade programme belongs to and is being implemented by Africa countries, who make the final decisions and take necessary actions.

57. In retrospect, intensive collaborative and co-operative efforts between ECA and the specialized agencies and African intergovernmental organizations in first analysing the mandated responsibilities and arriving at how best each agency/organization could contribute to the discharge of the responsibilities, might have enabled better performance.

58. In the absence of such a detailed analysis of the assigned functions by ECA in collaboration with the specialized agencies/African intergovernmental organizations, leading to the establishment of a clear understanding and agreement on the roles and contributions of all parties, it was natural and inevitable that some agencies/organizations might have felt that ECA was encroaching on and/or usurping their mandates. Thus, while there was co-operation with and contributions by the agencies/organizations, ECA is of the opinion that much closer co-operation with and greater contributions could have been made by the agencies/organizations, had the procedure mentioned above been followed by ECA.

59. ECA fully acknowledges the important specialized roles, competence and devotion of the specialized agencies/African intergovernmental organizations in the development of transport and communications in Africa, in spite of its own overall role as the Commission and/or the lead agency for the Decade.

60. ECA made the best effort in preparing the Decade programme (Phases I and II), consisting of projects in the transport and communications sector, yet keeping each

sector distinct and separate. On reflection, it is evident that the two sectors are largely ~~complementary~~ and in some cases, competitive and therefore substitutable. It would have been desirable and appropriate if some transport and communications projects were designed or formulated in tandem to ~~supplement~~ and reinforce each other.

61. The fact that this was not the case, stems partly from ECA's lack of an acceptable methodology for integrating transport and communications projects and partly from the prevailing compartmentalization of transport and communications held in vogue by professionals/experts in the two fields.

62. Given Africa's limited resources and the rudimentary stage of transport and communications development in the region, there is urgent need for rethinking the future development strategy of these sectors, within or outside the auspices of the Decade, from a truly integrative perspective.

Conclusion

63. It will be recalled that the decision relating to the proclamation of a **Transport and Communications Decade** for Africa was taken before ad hoc studies on the Decade and had been undertaken. This led ECA to incorporate in the first phase of the Decade an impressive number of national projects indicated by ~~ECA~~ member countries. Of course, under those circumstances, it has not always been possible for ECA to show the linkages among all those projects themselves and between them and the main objectives of the Decade.

64. However, as stated above, ECA has endeavoured to prepare the second phase programme ~~more carefully~~ by keeping a fewer number of projects (national, subregional and regional) and showing, wherever possible, linkages among them. The programme of the second phase of the Decade was approved by the Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning in Conakry in February 1983, and endorsed by ECA Conference of Ministers in May of that same year. This programme includes 1,034 projects to be implemented before 31 December 1988. One of the main weaknesses of the decade discovered by ECA itself is that the Decade was subject to manipulation simply by increasing or reducing the number of projects, irrespective of their nature, magnitude or timing. This was possible because the Decade was left without a programme of its own (see paras 54-55 and 56).

65. A little over two years separate us from the end of the first Transport and Communications Decade for Africa. Whether a second decade is declared or not, ECA will continue to discharge its responsibilities in the field of transport and communications. In this connection, and in compliance with another decision taken by the IACC in Lome in February 1986, ECA will soon prepare and submit a document expounding its responsibilities after December 1988.