

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

XXI United Nations Fellowship Programme
Seminar for Educators

Addis Ababa, 19 October - 6 November 1981

UNITED NATIONS

AND THE TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS DECADE IN AFRICA

I. Background

The United Nations through the Economic Commission for Africa, and in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity, has for many years promoted the economic integration of Africa. Paramount in these efforts was the recognition that transport and communications constituted a most important sector on whose development depends not only the growth in other sectors but also the socio-economic integration of Africa, as well as the promotion of intra- and extra-African trade.

In recognition of the special importance of the transport and communications sector for African economies, the United Nations system, represented by the Member States of the United Nations and by the specialized agencies and other organs, initiated a series of actions to highlight the crucial role of transport and communications in Africa's development effort. The starting point was the Conference of Ministers of the Economic Commission for Africa which was held in Kinshasa in March 1977 when the African ministers adopted a resolution recommending that a special decade be proclaimed in order to focus attention on the special needs of Africa in the field of transport and communications. This recommendation was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council at its meeting in Geneva in July 1977 and in its turn ECOMC requested the Secretary-General to make all necessary arrangements for the convening of a pledging conference of donor countries and institutions for the purpose of mobilizing resources for the implementation of the Decade programs. Finally, the General Assembly in December 1977 during its 32nd session put its stamp of approval on the two resolutions of ECU and ECOMC and officially proclaimed the "Transport and Communications Decade for Africa" for the years 1978 to 1988.

Ever since that historic proclamation, the whole United Nations machinery has been activated to carry out the mandate of the General Assembly. To this end ECA which was designated as the lead agency prepared the groundwork for the Decade. ECA was not alone in this endeavour; it was assisted by financial support of UNDP and by the technical advice of all the specialized and other agencies having competence in matters of transport and communications. The outcome of these efforts was the drawing up of a global strategy and a plan of action for developing transport and communications in Africa. Both the strategy and the plan of action were approved by the Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning which met in Addis Ababa from 9 to 12 May 1979.

The declaration of a Decade for just one of the regions of the world was an unprecedented action in the history of the United Nations. The reason for this is to be found in the fact that Africa faces serious problems in transport and communications, problems which inhibit its efforts to achieve rapid development through trade and other links both within the continent itself as well as between Africa and the rest of the world.

Africa, although wealthy in human and natural resources which should enable her in time to emerge from its under-development, is still a disadvantaged continent. The continent has the largest number of countries listed by the United Nations as the least developed: 30 out of the world total of 30 countries.

One of the major obstacles to its development is the weakness of its system of transport and communication, its lack of a modern infrastructure enabling people, goods and information to circulate under reliable conditions and at competitive prices.

What is striking about the African continent is its fragmentation in many and small countries, each of which has for historical reasons developed its own transport and communication network separately from its neighbours. Thus there are in fact 52 independent networks each operating within national frontiers, without attaining the necessary density and diversification.

Most of these lines of communication run from the coast to the interior, because they were constructed as means of penetration which were useful in the past for the exportation of raw materials and the importation of capital goods from the metropolitan countries. But what may be termed channels of integration, that is, those facilitating trade between the various regions of the same country or between neighbouring countries are still rare and unreliable.

Such a situation is no longer relevant for the independent and sovereign countries which must reorientate their development strategy by restructuring their trade relationships.

II. General strategy

The principal goals of the strategy for the Decade therefore are that African countries should work towards:

- (a) Promotion of the integration of transport and communication infrastructures 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 the land-locked countries and isolated regions;
- (d) Harmonization of national regulations and reduction to a minimum of 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, the standardization of networks and of equipment, research and dissemination of techniques adopted to the African context in the building of transport and communication infrastructures;
- (f) Promotion of an African industry in the field of transport and communications equipment;

- (g) Mobilization of technical and financial resources during the Decade with a view to promoting the development and modernization of transport and communications infrastructures in Africa, and
- (h) Restructuring of the transport sector to ensure African trade with the rest of the world under the most favourable conditions for the continent.

These goals have to be realized through the implementation of projects classified in order of priority as follows:

- (a) regional projects, subregional projects and national projects with regional or subregional implications;
- (b) projects for the least developed, land-locked, newly independent, island and frontline countries; and
- (c) purely national projects.

The Conference of Ministers decided also to implement the Decade in two phases:

Phase I: 1980-1983

- continued implementation of ongoing projects;
- implementation of projects already identified and studied and which are only waiting to be financed;
- identification of technical feasibility and economic studies of other projects and a search for their financing.

Phase II: 1984-1988

- continued implementation of projects undertaken in the course of the first phase;
- financing and implementation of new projects;
- continuation and identification of other new projects

III. Mechanism for the implementation of the Decade

To ensure a proper and successful implementation of the Decade mechanisms for co-ordination and monitoring have been set up at both regional and subregional level.

At the regional level, ECA has been designated by the United Nations General Assembly as the "lead agency" with over-all responsibility for the whole Decade programme, including co-ordination of the implementation of the programme at all levels as well as assisting in the mobilization of the resources required.

In carrying out this work, ECA co-operates through an Inter-agency Co-ordinating Committee with all relevant United Nations organizations, OAU and African regional organizations in the field of transport and communications.

At the regional level, a Conference of African Ministers responsible for transport and Communications matters is convened every two years to follow up the implementation programme for the Decade and to define the means for mobilizing the resources needed.

At the subregional level, ECA set up in 1977 Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) in five African subregions (Eastern and Southern Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, North Africa and the Great Lakes Community). These MULPOCs co-ordinate the implementation of the Decade programme at this level.

In each MULPOC, the respective ministers of transport and communications will review annually the implementation of selected projects under the Decade.

IV. The first phase programme

In order to further the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa, ECA was entrusted with the responsibility of drawing up the groundwork for the first phase of the Decade programme, i.e., the identification of projects in the different subsectors of transport and communications.

These projects were subsequently screened and approved by the Conference of Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning in Addis Ababa in May 1979.

Resulting from the Conference, the total projects and their costs have been published in two volumes named "Global Strategy and Plan of Action: First Phase 1980-1983".

Volume I contains an analysis of the present state of the various modes of transportation and means of communications in Africa and an attempt to formulate specific recommendations in the light of which projects have been identified.

A technical description of each of these projects and an estimate of its advantages and costs are compiled in Volume II. This last volume is, in fact, divided into 12 parts corresponding to the 12 subsectors of transport and communications which have been analysed.

The total number of projects ready for implementation during the first phase comprises 309 transport and 156 communications projects. Of the projects approved for the first phase, some 160 transport and 54 telecommunications projects required further studies, and would therefore be implemented during the second phase.

The cost of the 545 projects that were ready for immediate implementation, plus the cost for studies relating to the 214 remaining projects, amounted to a total of \$US 8.05 billion.

A classification of projects by subsector, including projects ready to be implemented and other studies to be conducted, showed that there was a preponderance of railway projects, which represented 36.5 per cent of the total programme. Next came port projects (25 per cent), which were followed by road projects (20 per cent). Air transport projects, representing 7 per cent of the total, were in fourth place, followed by communications (6 per cent), maritime transport (4 per cent), inland water transport (1 per cent), and multimodal transport (0.5 per cent).

It should be pointed out that the breakdown of projects as between the various subsectors did not represent a decision defining their respective importance. It merely meant that in some subsectors (mainly, railways and ports), projects selected by the Conference of Ministers, which accounted for a large part of the total programme, had already been studied and were only waiting for financing, while in other subsectors (mainly roads) further studies were required before the projects could be implemented. (Road studies accounted for 50 per cent of the total cost of the studies, estimated at \$US 350 million, to be undertaken during the first phase).

Most of these projects consisted of new construction, i.e., road construction, realignment or rehabilitation of railways, renovation of ports and airports. They accounted for 86 per cent of the total programme cost. Within this, the projects relating to purchase of equipment for maritime or inland transport vessels, aircraft, ports and airports represented 10 per cent. Training projects which include construction and extension of vocational training establishments as well as organization of courses and the granting of fellowships amounted to 5 per cent. Assistance for further feasibility or technical studies and technical assistance accounted for the remaining 9 per cent.

A classification of the projects according to the priorities set up by the Conference of Ministers shows that projects which are of regional interest represented 40 per cent of the programme and cost a total of \$US 4.2 billion. Their breakdown was as follows: 16 per cent for regional and subregional projects which consisted mostly of technical assistance and particularly training programmes, 32 per cent for the category of "national projects having regional or subregional impact" which were investment projects.

The projects for the least developed, land-locked, newly independent countries and frontline States which were accorded a special priority by the Conference of Ministers accounted for 32 per cent. They consisted of national projects with a subregional impact and other national projects and amount to \$US 2.8 billion.

The statistics which I have just read out represent the position at the time that the programme of the first phase was first drawn up. There have, however, been some changes since it has been decided to bring the programme up to date periodically and the second Conference of Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning held in March this year approved the addition of new projects, the deletion of some and the merger of others. The new figure therefore is 904 projects at a cost of some \$US 11 billion. These changes, however, have not substantially altered the relative proportions of the subsectors.

V. Review sector-by-sector of the projects selected

Most of the projects selected by the Conference of Ministers were aimed at specific targets relating to the main problems encountered in the relevant mode of transport or means of communication.

Roads and road transport

Projects under this subsector are designed to promote the interconnexion of national networks with those of neighbouring countries. Most of them are part of the planned trans-African highway (its main trunks and feeder roads), the object of which is to provide in the long run an effective network for the transportation of goods and persons which will facilitate trade and communication within and between African countries.

Railways and rail transport

The projects selected under this subsector are aimed at making the present railway services fully efficient. They deal with rehabilitation of existing tracks, purchasing of new rolling stock, and with training programmes at all levels to improve operational and management techniques.

Maritime transport

African countries have only recently become interested in maritime transport. They require technical assistance to set up the various activities required to develop maritime transport.

Moreover, a large manpower training programme has been approved including the construction of two regional maritime academies as well as national nautical colleges.

Maritime ports

African ports require a large programme of renovation and provision of modern equipment to enable them to cope with the growing traffic which they all now face.

Thus, port projects were selected to meet these requirements. Furthermore, the importance of training for all categories of port staff has been emphasized in various identified projects.

Air transport

It has become necessary to adapt the airport infrastructure in many countries to modern operating condition, which will soon prevail in Africa (new generation aircraft).

Projects for extension and modernization of airports represent the main body of the projects selected.

Projects concerning training have been stressed and the construction of a few regional schools has been recommended.

Projects on technical assistance in the form of task forces to undertake ad hoc advisory missions and study activities which would encourage better air transport integration for the continent have been taken into consideration.

Inland water transport

The projects selected are either studies to determine the navigability potential of African rivers and lakes as well as investments in those which are already in operation (e.g., setting up of river craft schools, renovation of ports, purchase of vessels).

Multimodal transport

Among the multimodal transport projects, the study on determining the scope of a transport institute and the conditions for its establishment is the most prominent one.

Telecommunications

Projects in the telecommunications **subsector** consist first in the continued implementation of the Pan-African Telecommunication Network (PANAFTEL) for routes which have already been studied and secondly in the survey of additional routes.

Other projects deal with telecommunication management development, operation and maintenance systems and the introduction of rural telecommunications.

Communications by satellite

The African countries have expressed a desire to establish a regional satellite communications system for Africa as a complement to the PANAFTEL system.

A feasibility study on such a regional satellite system and the holding of seminars or workshops on satellite communications has been selected for the first phase to implement this objective.

Broadcasting

Projects selected relate to the setting up and improvement of broadcasting training institutes, manpower development, the provision and expansion of broadcasting facilities to rural areas as well as the exchange of programmes.

Postal services

The projects approved are designed to facilitate staff training, the setting up of postal sorting centres and regional transit centres, the establishment of rural postal services and the expansion of postal savings facilities.

Telecommunications manpower development and training

The importance of qualified operational and management personnel, essential for effective communications development will require, in the first phase, the establishment of training centres at national and subregional levels in the various fields of telecommunication operations, and the organization of specially oriented seminars and workshops.

VI. Conclusion

Since the Decade was launched, ECA has attempted to carry out its mandate as "lead agency" of mobilizing resources for the implementation of so big and complex a programme and it has not been an easy task. Not only was a Pledging Conference held in November 1979 but a number of consultative technical meetings which bring together technicians of donors and those of African countries to consider selected projects have been programmed. The first meeting was held in Lomé, Togo, in June this year and three more will be held in 1982.

ECA has also received the support of UNDP for the financing of some Decade projects during the Third Programming Cycle (1982-1986). Bilateral assistance has also been obtained from some developed countries for funding regional and subregional studies. But all these are miniscule compared to the bilateral assistance that flows to the countries. All in all to date 298 projects have been financed at a cost of \$US 4.5 billion of which \$US 3.1 billion is by African countries. If this trend continues we are hopeful that 75 per cent of the programme will have been financed by 1983, i.e. the end of the first phase. Those projects which will remain unfunded from Phase I will be carried over into Phase II whose preparation starts next year.