



**EIGHTH SESSION OF THE JOINT CONFERENCE  
OF AFRICAN PLANNERS, STATISTICIANS AND DEMOGRAPHERS**

**Opening Statement**

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**UNITED NATIONS UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL,  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE ECONOMIC  
COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

**Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA  
21 March 1994**

Mr Chairman,  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Africa Hall, the Headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and to the eighth session of the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers. From the outset, I want to stress the importance of the present session in the context of the current efforts in the African region to implement socio-economic reform programmes. As you know, the central theme of this Conference is: "Managing Africa's development in the 1990s and beyond". You are therefore expected to formulate appropriate recommendations for consideration by the forthcoming ECA Conference of Ministers, scheduled in May 1994, in order to ensure that Africa regains its lost development momentum.

I should like to point out that the fervor and determination with which African Governments adopted the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) have not diminished during the three-year of the implementation phase of the programme (1991-1993). Since its adoption a growing number of African countries have taken concrete steps towards the redefinition of problems and priorities and the introduction of measures aimed less at short-term stabilisation and more at medium/long-term development. Domestic policy reforms designed to rehabilitate and revitalize the African economies have been particularly significant. I refer to the far-reaching measures which have been initiated in respect of exchange rate adjustments, budgetary deficits ceilings, tax reforms, and price and production policies, all of which are designed to create the enabling environment for sustained increases in output.

These have indeed been encouraging developments. But as I said in my end-of-year statement last December making an assessment of the performance of the African economy, there is a minimum policy package which every African country must continue to pursue to sustain the momentum of recovery. Efforts aimed at domestic resource mobilization, structural transformation of agriculture, the rationalization of total public investment, better management of foreign debt and external assistance, consolidation of African cooperation through the promotion of intra-African trade and economic integration must be intensified. At the same time efforts should be directed towards indigenous capacity building. At UNECA we believe that capacity building is a necessary condition for relaunching Africa on to the path of economic revival and transformation.

Since your last meeting two years ago, there has been little change in the socio-economic situation of the region. In 1993, total regional output grew by 1.4 per cent - a slight improvement over that attained in 1992. This small growth rate still contrasts unfavourably with the relatively strong recovery of nearly three percent that was realized in 1989, and remains far below the UN-NADAF target of 6 per cent. Throughout 1990-1993 per capita income continued to record a negative growth rate. While the agricultural sector had a favourable year in 1993, with value-added in the sector rising by 1.4 per cent, the international economic environment was particularly unfavourable for African development in 1993. Brent crude oil prices declined from \$19.3/barrel in 1992 to \$17.7/barrel in 1993. This had a direct and devastating impact on the nine developing African oil-exporting countries. As a consequence, GDP in this group of countries which normally accounts for about two-thirds of total regional output, decelerated to one half of the 1991 growth rate. By contrast, the overall output of the non-oil exporters surged by a full percentage point during 1993 to 1.9 per cent and the group of the least developed African countries also performed better than in previous years with a rise of nearly three per cent in combined output. A major factor behind the encouraging performance for these two categories of countries is the continued recovery in agriculture and lower oil prices.

Performance was not uniform, however, across the continent. Good results were recorded in West Africa and in the Eastern and Southern African subregions with a GDP growth rate of 2.7 per cent and 1.5 per cent, respectively, but output performance was poor in North Africa and in Central Africa with an estimated growth of 0.1 per cent and -0.03 per cent, respectively. A combination of continuing civil conflict and political crisis; natural disasters, especially drought; and economic stagnation in the industrialized nations have been primarily responsible for the low growth of output in 1993.

During the 1980s, Africa was confronted by a series of economic and climatic crises which have perturbed the whole world. These included a massive shortage of foreign exchange, debt overhang, underutilization of industrial capacity and high unemployment. In response to these crises, African Heads of State and Government adopted regional strategies giving priority to the development of food and agriculture with the aim of achieving food self-sufficiency and food security on the continent. These strategies, reflected in the Lagos Plan of Action, APPER, and UN-PAAERD, have not received adequate attention in the national development plans

adopted during the decade of the 1980s, and have generally been overshadowed by structural adjustment programmes.

The main problems of African agriculture, - low productivity of basic crops, the decline of per capita food production, erosion and the deterioration of farm lands and rural exodus - have been exacerbated, with the result that the immediate perspectives for development have become even more uncertain in this sector. For Africa as a whole, the rate of self-sufficiency in cereals is below the level reached in 1980. Many countries have had to resort to massive food imports, costing the continent more than US\$ 5.5 billion in 1990 alone. Thus under one of your agenda items, you are invited to discuss the main problems of African agriculture, and the search for the ways and means to achieve strategic planning in the food sub-sectors. Food self-sufficiency and security must continue to constitute the strategic objective of development in the agricultural sector; food planning is the main instrument for the realization of such an objective. It requires not only a new framework of cooperation between farmers, governments, agricultural and livestock research institutes, but also the introduction of modelling tools to assist farmers in the choice of profitable farming activities.

In June 1991, the African Heads of State and Government signed the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, aimed at strengthening the existing economic communities and the integration of African markets and structures. The study on the sub-regional cooperation perspectives among the CEPGL countries on your agenda attempts to analyze the structures of production and trade; and invites the member States to elaborate a model of economic integration for which UNECA is ready to provide assistance. The prerequisites for the successful elaboration of such a model are the restoration of peace in the sub-region; the harmonization of national development plans to reflect community priorities; and the harmonization of development activities with other neighbouring sub-regional organizations.

One of the agenda items for your consideration deals with the updating of the ECA perspective study which is to be revised every five years. To cope with the problems at hand, African countries have resorted increasingly to crisis management. Frustrated by lack of financial and other development resources, countries have been tempted to abandon development planning for the management of their economies and have resorted to structural adjustment programmes. Despite ten years of these reform programmes, the socio-economic conditions of most African

countries have continued to deteriorate rather than improve. The chronic state of underdevelopment on the continent, marked by inherent structural deficiencies and fragility, ecological vulnerability, physical limitations and the small, fragmented markets has led to considerable rethinking of approaches to development. The answer must lie in the economic integration of the African region. Recognizing this, the Final Act of Lagos (FAL) and the Abuja Declaration have called for the immediate consolidation of the continent, starting with the strengthening of existing institutional cooperative structures and culminating in the establishment of the African Economic Community.

With economic integration of the African economies at the core of the Commission's area of focus for the 1990s, the updated perspectives study should contribute to the strengthening of long-term strategic planning for subregional economic integration. While most of the current work on development perspectives has focused on the strengthening of development planning at the national level, few attempts have been made to strengthen the development of long term planning at the subregional and regional levels. This is an approach which must be tried. Economic development planning from subregional and regional perspectives will generate useful complementarities leading to a harmonized approach to economic policy design among African countries and increased cooperation, especially since the economic structures of most of the African countries are remarkably similar and the economic crises facing them are comparable. I invite you all to give this important issue your most serious consideration.

The road to recovery and development is paved still with formidable challenges calling for sustained efforts on the part of African countries both to resolve short-term crises and to achieve medium and long-term development. We will present you with a model that attempts to quantify the short-term consequences of changes in domestic policies, particularly those related to government budgetary and monetary policies and their effects on overall economic performance. Pursuant to your recommendations, the UNECA secretariat has also made a review of some of the existing development models on the continent with a view to facilitating the exchange of experiences in modelling exercises of African economies. These models serve as tools for monitoring policy packages within the framework of implementation of short or medium-term programmes.

Another area of prime importance on the agenda is the upgrading of planning skills in the African region. As you know, efforts are now being directed to make

IDEP an effective Pan-African institute, servicing all subregions on the continent. Thus IDEP is presently developing a strategy and plan of action to reach out to the under-serviced sub-regions. IDEP is also in the process of rationalizing and restructuring its training and research activities to make it a centre of excellence for its services to meet the needs of African governments in the field of development planning. In order for IDEP to play that role, vigorous efforts to mobilize resources will have to be undertaken. Last year I sent letters to all member States urging them to pay their assessed contributions and estimated arrears. However, the response has not been very encouraging. Hence, I am once again appealing to all the parties involved, member States, multilateral institutions and development partners, to assume collective responsibility to ensure that enough resources are made available to IDEP so that the Institute can effectively carry out its mission.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 was a significant turning point for the realization of the environment as an integral part of the development process. This has thrown a challenge to development planners. The environmental crisis has been a major cause of the African economic crisis of the last decade. Drought and desertification have reduced the carrying capacity of African ecosystems to lamentable proportions leaving agricultural production at such low levels that famine, malnutrition and death have resulted. There is, therefore, an urgent need to develop programmes to restore and sustain the equilibrium between population, environment and resources for sustainable development. The combined actions of the planners, statisticians, population and information scientists are called to task: population scientists to provide information on population dynamics in relation to environmental resources, statisticians to develop a database of all environmental resources in an environmental accounting system and information scientists to develop bibliographical, referral and geographical databases on environment to enable planners to formulate integrated development programmes. These issues are discussed in the document before you which takes you through some of these challenges and provides possible actions to address them.

Mr Chairman,  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

The strategic role of statistics and quantitative analysis for improving decision-making for sustainable development and for monitoring and evaluating on-going programmes on economic policy reforms cannot be overemphasized. The last session of this Conference endorsed the "Strategy for the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s" which was subsequently adopted by the twenty-seventh session of the UNECA Conference of Ministers responsible for economic development and planning in 1992. The Strategy provides a comprehensive framework for the current efforts by all parties concerned to rehabilitate, revitalize and develop African statistics and to build up statistical capacities in the region. During the present session you will have the opportunity to consider the progress made in the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action and to propose measures to accelerate the process. In particular, I would like to encourage you to promote the necessary action to enable your respective countries to conduct, as soon as possible, Needs Assessment and Strategy Development exercises in order to identify needs and priorities of your national statistical systems, taking into account local conditions and the state of statistical development.

For a successful implementation of the Plan of Action, it is necessary to synchronize technical cooperation programmes in statistics with the new arrangements instituted by the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund as well as with those of other multilateral and bilateral agencies which put emphasis on national execution of projects. There is also need to strengthen coordination of statistical activities at the national, subregional, regional and global levels in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of activities and to ensure the most effective way of utilization of resources. In this connection, I am pleased to note that the coordination machinery at the regional level is already in place with the establishment of the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD) and four sub-committees on training, data processing, organization and management of national statistical systems and research, methods and standards. These sub-committees met at UNECA last week, and the fourth meeting of the main Committee will be held during the present session of the Joint Conference.

The adoption of the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA) was unanimously recommended to the United Nations Economic and Social Council by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-seventh session in New York last year. This recommendation was subsequently endorsed by the Council which urged the member States to consider using the 1993 SNA as the international standard for the compilation of their national accounts statistics, to promote the integration of economic and related statistics, and as an analytical tool. The 1993 SNA is responsive to many changes that have taken place since the adoption of the previous System in 1968 in the institutions and policy concerns of the world's economies. Your Conference is expected to consider ways and means of implementing the new System in the African region.

As you know, the main objective of the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA) is to ensure that the African region has an adequate supply of statisticians for national statistical services and other departments in the public sector as well as for parastatal organizations and the private sector. In accordance with your recommendation, a survey on the "Evaluation of 15 years of the STPA" was carried out by ECA in 1993 in order to identify strengths and weaknesses of the programme. The present session of the Joint Conference is invited to propose appropriate measures to revitalize the STPA to enable its full objectives to be achieved, particularly in view of the termination in 1993 of the UNDP-financed project titled "Statistical Development Programme for Africa" which provided regional support to the programme.

At the request of the Statistical Commission, your Conference is also expected to express its views on the possible application and usefulness of decision C(47) on fundamental principles of official statistics in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe at the regional and global levels. It appears from the preliminary consultations with all directors of national statistical offices in Africa, held by UNECA during 1993, that there was general support for the decision. However, the present Conference may wish to discuss the issue further, particularly as regards the modalities for the implementation of the decision in the African region in the context of the strategy for the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development. The outcome of the deliberations of all regional commissions on this issue will be considered by a special session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, scheduled to be held next month in New York.

The agenda for this Conference includes an item on "Economic and social information systems in support of sustainable development and regional integration in Africa" in view of recent initiatives aiming at the creation of exchangeable statistical and related data and information holdings at national, regional and international levels. New information technology and communication advances and use of connectivity through network hierarchies are important developments for such systems which will provide wide-ranging data-exchange capabilities and lead to coordinated statistical compilation and development for the benefit of member States and other users, including international organizations.

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Turning to the area of information systems development, it should be noted that Africa has entered its fourth development decade in a weaker economic position than any other developing region. There is no question that a dynamic approach is needed in every sector to bring Africa out of its current development malaise. Information support for development is no exception to this. Solutions to Africa's socio-economic problems require *inter alia* a constant and adequate supply of accurate and timely information. A dynamic approach to information sharing can contribute to a relaunching of African development, particularly through a strategy emphasizing networking and economic integration.

Both the understanding of and implementing of solutions to African development problems require substantial amounts of information input. But alterations in priorities cause corresponding changes in emphasis in information needs.

In most African countries, agriculture is considered the cornerstone of the economy. The present emphasis in development strategies in favour of agriculture and agro-industry, therefore, becomes a foundation for priorities in information activities. Many African countries already possess agricultural statistics units, libraries and documentation centres. There has been much recent talk of early warning food security information systems. An effective way to meet the needs arising from multi-dimensional agricultural problems and rural development concerns includes farm management, adult education, credit, water management and appropriate technology, among others. It also includes the needs of multiple users involved in such processes such as planners, extension agents, peasant leaders and district administrative officers. This type of development requires innovative information

collection, processing and delivery together with continuous experimentation and updating of methods. Recent technological advances in remote sensing, communication and data processing show unsurpassed potential in this area.

Sectoral development strategies in areas such as trade, industrialization, transport and communications, and natural resources exploitation require greater emphasis. Trade and industrial information services are still at an embryonic stage. Most African governments have not as yet been able to secure an in depth knowledge of their natural resource base. The information needs and means of seeking such information on the African private sector are still little understood.

Public administration and economic planning, implementation and monitoring are the weakest links in the chain of government functions. Some of the shortcomings result from the inadequate availability and use of information. In addition, there is the need to follow-up and monitor the structural adjustment and readjustment processes which virtually all African countries have initiated, particularly in their impact on social and economic life. There are three particular problems in this area: inadequate indicators to explain and monitor the phenomena; the lack of a mechanism for generating information and data; and the absence of the information systems to regularly collect, process and deliver these indicators which have been defined and generated.

Information support for development pursuits takes numerous forms. Conventional thinking gave exclusive emphasis to printed, textual sources so that visual outputs with major information components such as cartography or geological surveys were not considered as information outputs for dissemination and enhanced utilization. In order to effectively make use of the available information resources in Africa, information technology utilisation by African countries is becoming imperative.

A review of the information infrastructure in Africa and the appraisal of the application of information technologies by libraries and information and documentation centres established to meet the information needs of development of development planners in respective countries of Africa highlight a number of inadequacies in these two areas. The shortcomings derive primarily from the lack of appreciation of the role of information in development by most countries in Africa. This lack of appreciation has resulted in a number of policy gaps in those

areas which are vital to the acquisition and use of modern technology for implementing socio-economic development objectives.

If Africa is to achieve its socio-economic development goals and create an African Economic Community, African countries must give priority to the development of their information infrastructure. They must strengthen existing establishments and where necessary create additional ones at national and regional levels.

By the same token, African countries must place adequate emphasis on the acquisition and use of modern information technologies in view of the important role which these technologies play in the generation and dissemination of information for development planning. The capacity of these technologies to store large quantities of data, process and disseminate such data with a high degree of speed and accuracy overtime and space makes their use in the information activity imperative. It is against this background that an examination of the policy and related issues on the application of information technologies should be undertaken. African countries should put attention on this in their respective efforts at getting information technologies to respond to their individual and collective needs for plan development and execution.

Mr Chairman,  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the issue of population which is the central focus of all our socio-economic development efforts. Continued rapid population growth in the context of sluggish economic growth is making it difficult for African countries to provide sound education, adequate health facilities and productive employment for their teeming populations. At the same time it is aggravating problems of uncontrolled urbanization and environmental degradation in many African countries. In this context the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action emphasized that population growth should be compatible with desired socio-economic development. In most countries population growth rates are about 3 per cent and at such rates the population doubles in 23 years. Reduction of population per se does not automatically resolve the problems of low economic and social development. However, reduction of population growth in combination with other efforts to accelerate socio-economic development will go a long way to alleviate poverty and improve the living conditions of our people. The time to take concrete action is

now. Every effort should be taken by our governments and the people to ensure that demographic trends are compatible with our desired socio-economic goals.

At your last session, you were informed that an International Conference on Population and Development would be convened this year. This meeting will take place in Cairo from 5 to 13 September 1994. As preparatory to the Cairo Conference, the third African Population Conference took place in Dakar, Senegal, in December 1992. For the first time, this type of meeting was at ministerial level and it was attended by nearly all African countries. This reflects the common concern and importance accorded to population issues by our member States.

The Conference adopted the draft Dakar/Ngor Declaration on Population, Family and Sustainable Development which was approved by the ECA Conference of Ministers at its nineteenth meeting in April/May 1993. The Declaration has reaffirmed the continued validity of the KPA as a framework for African development. This Declaration which will be submitted to the International Conference on Population and Development has set, for the first time, both quantitative and qualitative demographic targets to moderate population trends consistent with accelerating the rate of implementing the KPA. I would therefore urge that all African countries should send delegations at the highest level to the Cairo Conference to support the views reflected in the Dakar/Ngor Declaration.

On your agenda there are items on implementation of the KPA and the Dakar/Ngor Declaration; preparations for the Cairo Conference - the African Common Position. You will also be discussing the socio-economic and demographic consequences of HIV/AIDS, family planning and birth spacing programmes and other population related problems.

You may be aware that there has been a new orientation in delivery of our advisory services supported by UNFPA in the areas of population and statistics. In the past, regional advisers were all based in Addis Ababa. Since 1992, our advisers are located in Addis Ababa, Dakar and Harare where they form teams with advisers from WHO, ILO, UNESCO and UNFPA. Each team is headed by a UNFPA Country Support Team Director. The teams are known as Country Support Teams (CSTs). The advisers provide technical support services (TSS) at country level. This change emanated from the UNFPA Governing Council mandates.

Since UNFPA discontinued its funding of population information activities of the Commission, we have not been able to find resources to reinstate population information activities. You may want to reflect and make possible suggestions on this issue which is very important in the socio-economic development of Africa.

With regard to the regional demographic training institutes, IFORD, in Yaounde and RIPS in Accra, I want to inform you that the problems of these institutes have continued without satisfactory solution. UNFPA has discontinued paying for the United Nations recruited staff except the directors whose last month on UNFPA support is June of this year.

**Mr Chairman,**  
**Distinguished participants,**  
**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Before ending this statement, I would like to invite you to review the terms of reference of your Conference in order to take into account new developments which have taken place since its establishment in 1980. In particular it may be advisable that the title of the Conference better reflects the composition of the participants which since 1984 have included information specialists. In addition, the term "demographer" is no longer appropriate as population issues go much beyond demographic aspects.

You have a heavy agenda to cover during this week, and I understand that some parallel meetings will also use the opportunity of the Joint Conference to convene. However, I hope that you will be able to discuss thoroughly and critically the various issues submitted for your consideration and that your deliberations will result in concrete and useful recommendations. I wish you a fruitful and successful Conference.

I now declare this eighth session of the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers open.