

Speech at the opening of the
Expert Group Meeting of the
African Centre for
Applied Research and Training in
Social Development

Tripoli, Libya, 15 January 1980

by

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that, at long last, we can see and testify to the initiation of work of the African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development - which we call ACARTSD, for short.

It was in 1968 that the idea of such regional centres for social welfare and social development was first mooted by the United Nations. But the efforts of the Economic Commission for Africa go back a few years earlier when, in 1964, an international team of consultants was assembled by the Commission to make a study tour of schools of social work in selected countries of Africa, in order to determine the particular needs of such schools and research institutes. Among the many recommendations of the Team was one on the establishment of a region-wide professional association of social work educators and the purposeful promotion of applied research and higher forms of training in the fields of social welfare and rural development. As a follow-up, in 1965, a Seminar for Social Work Educators was organized in Alexandria, Egypt. The Seminar brought together, for the first time, both French and English-speaking social work educators from sixteen African countries

which had succeeded in establishing social research and social work training facilities at the national level.

Since then we have not relaxed our efforts in pursuing the promotion of a viable regional institution which would adequately cater for the needs of Africa in the group of fields now designated as Social Development. Through the joint effort of ECA and OAU, the First Conference of African Ministers of Social Affairs was organized in Cairo, Egypt, in August 1967. It was impressively attended by twenty-seven African countries, nineteen of which were represented at the ministerial level. That first Conference of African Ministers of Social Affairs deliberated upon an agenda that included the discussion of the need for intra-regional co-operation in the development of social welfare

programmes, and the need to define a common strategy for the African representatives to the First World Conference of Ministers responsible for social affairs, which had been planned to take place in New York, in 1968

One major recommendation of the First World Conference of Ministers of Social Affairs urged the establishment of regional social welfare centres for advanced training (including training of teachers), comparative studies and assistance in the production of suitable indigenous training materials. It was in direct response to the recommendations of the World Conference that the European Centre for Social Welfare Training and Research was established in Vienna, in 1974. Two to three years later, in 1976, the Asian (ESCAP) Regional Centre for Social Welfare was inaugurated in the Philippines.

Before plunging headlong into the establishment of a regional research and training Centre, we, in ECA, found it expedient first to set up, in 1971, a regional professional Association of Social Work Education which was duly charged with the promotion of basic research in social work in African institutions; the establishment and maintenance of higher standards among all types of institutions engaged in different levels of social work education; and the promotion and exchange of professional information and experience among research students and trainers in institutions existing in the region. It is my fervent hope that the professional activities of ASWEA will be closely related to, and will eventually be incorporated into, the programme of work of this Centre. In the course of your deliberations, an opportunity will be given to the representatives of ASWEA to lead a discussion on how they see the future relationship between ASWEA and ACARTSD.

Ladies and gentlemen. While still pursuing relentlessly the development of ACARTSD, the ECA convened in 1973 an Expert Group Meeting to assess the needs of the region for such a Centre. The Group submitted a report outlining the general and immediate objectives of such a regional Centre, and recommended a list of African countries which it felt should be visited in order to determine suitable location for the Centre. Due to lack of funds, the study tour envisaged did not materialize. Instead, member States were contacted with a request to offer host facilities for such a regional Centre. The responses of member States with respect to the hosting of the Centre were duly considered at the Second Conference of Ministers of Social Affairs in Africa which took place in Alexandria in 1977.

It is needless for me to observe that the history of the ACARTSD will for ever stand as a fitting monument to the calculated patience and the extreme perseverance which have characterized the United efforts of the ECA, the OAU and the Host Government of Libya.

Thus, in co-operation with our sister organization, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and after the passage of over 15 years, we are to-day witnessing the initial functioning of ACARTSD.

Almost a year ago, while addressing the ECA Seminar on Alternative Patterns of Development and Life-Styles, I mentioned that:

"the situation in which almost all African economies are today makes it imperative for us to seek alternative patterns of development and life-styles

before it is too late. For almost two decades after political independence, the African region is more dependent on the outside world economically than ever before in respect not only of skilled manpower, entrepreneurial resources, raw materials, capital goods and services, consumer goods and food. But even more basic is the fact that we are much more dependent on the outside world for ideas as to what the operational meaning of socio-economic development is and how it should be brought about. ... Indeed we in Africa have over the years become the mimic people. ... all we really have succeeded in doing is to mimic other societies and their life-styles. ... [and] unless we make a break with the past and set about the urgent and imperative task of evolving our own pattern of development and life-styles, the social and economic transformation

which we so earnestly seek to bring about and the dramatic improvement in the standard of living of our people, both quantitatively and qualitatively, which was promised the African Peoples during the struggle for independence will continue to elude us".

My distinguished colleagues, these are the harsh realities of the African situation, and unless Africa as a whole rises to the challenge this would mean a further tragic prolongation and multiplication of the misery of the majority of the African people.

This task would require that we Africans should be able to search for and adopt patterns of development that are truly Africanized. These patterns should also be capable of generating a process of socio-economic transformation that would lead not only to significant improvements in

the material, cultural and social livelihood and life-styles of the majority of the African people, but would also ensure the active and effective popular participation in the development process and in the sharing of the fruits of that process on an equitable basis. A process that would be built on the basis of the principles of self-sustenance, self-reliance and collective self-reliance, on sub-regional and on a regional basis.

We at ECA are greatly concerned with the question as to how to bring about and promote the desired transformation and have explored various ways in our endeavours to achieve that goal. One of our more important vehicles is the establishment of regional institutions which could make valuable contributions to the development process in the continent, through their policy-oriented research, their practical training and advisory activities.

IDEP, CAFRAD and - I am happy to add - the establishment of the African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development are important sign posts in this direction.

It is indeed a singular pleasure to see that ACARTSD has finally become a reality, and a positive African reality at that; and that the substantive activities of the Centre are actually being started with this important Expert Group Meeting.

You have been specifically assembled here so that you can assist ACARTSD, through your expertise in the elaboration of a conceptual framework for its programme and in the light of such a framework draw up a Five-Year Plan for the Centre. You will also be required to assist in the preparation of a work programme and a budget for the biennium 1980-81.

Let me assure you that your effort will be instrumental in setting the orientation of the Centre and charting the path for the next few but crucial years of ACARTSD. I am looking forward with a great sense of anticipation to the recommendations of this distinguished gathering. For your recommendations to be realistic and helpful, you should need to start with a critical examination of precisely what role this Centre was established to fulfill. Specifically, ACARTSD was created to achieve the following objectives:-

- (a) To provide training of high-level personnel required for research and training and the promotion of social development programmes;
- (b) To organize seminars, undertake applied research programmes; and to develop indigenous teaching and

research materials for the use of schools, colleges and university departments of social work, development and administration;

- (c) To undertake or contribute towards research aimed at the development of rural development programmes;
 - (d) To contribute to the formulation of national strategies for social development programmes;
 - (e) To provide assistance to national universities and social work institutions in the field of training;
 - (f) To facilitate and maintain relations with other centres, institutions and organizations having objectives or
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engaged in activities similar to those of the Centre, within and outside the African region; and

- (g) Engage in such other activities calculated to further the objectives of the Centre.

Furthermore, before I leave you to grapple with the tasks ahead, I should like to share with you the following thoughts, which I think are important as an over-all orientation to your work.

If we are to succeed in making the desired developmental impact on the continent, ACARTSD must understand fully its role which is to promote the concept of social development within the context of the framework outlined earlier in this statement. The Centre should in particular strive, first of all, to contribute to a better understanding of the

dynamics of social change and social transition in the African Life-style, through the adoption of a broad inter-disciplinary approach to the problems of social development.

Secondly, it should contribute to the identification and formation of "indigenized" social development strategies and policies that are based on the African realities and are more responsive to the African needs and priorities; and enhance the African potentialities and capabilities for a better implementation of those strategies and policies.

Thirdly, the Centre should strive to build a body of knowledge and experience that is relevant and applicable on a regional and sub-regional basis.

And, fourthly, it should strengthen intra-regional co-operation and co-ordination in the field of social development at all levels.

We have convened this expert meeting so that you can advise the Fourth African Ministers of Social Development and Welfare what should be the main programme thrust of this Centre. While it would be naive to pretend that the Centre can meet all the needs of the continent with its 49 member States, it is my hope that it will provide substantial complementary inputs into the national efforts and by ~~adding~~ the regional dimension enrich various national endeavours. I hope therefore you will spell out clearly and unambiguously the philosophy of the Centre not only in research, training and consultancy activities but also in terms of its relationships with existing national and sub-regional institutions.

Unless we give the Centre an imaginative programme which complements rather than competes with national efforts and fills the gap which currently exists many member States will not give it the political and material support it deserves.

In this connexion, I should like to acknowledge publicly the generous financial and material support which the Government of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya have made towards the establishment of the Centre. Without such support we could not have made any progress at all. And needless to add that it was this support of the Government that made the realisation of this expert meeting possible. The present temporary premises that you are in have been donated by the Government which has also promised to provide in the near future permanent premises for the Centre.

It is now up to all African Governments to demonstrate their support in material terms to this Centre and for all our African experts in this field - both academics and practitioners - to become involved in the objectives programmes and projects of the Centre.

Let me assure you that we at ECA and OAU pledge our total support and commitment to the complete success of the Centre in realizing its objectives and thereby contributing significantly to Africa's development effort.

I wish you a more productive meeting.