

ITEM 12: REPORT ON REGIONAL COOPERATION

Statement to ECOSOC:

**by Mr. K. Y. Amoako,
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New York, 25 July 2000

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is a great pleasure to be with you today and to participate, once again, in the annual dialogue on the work of the regional commissions and the review of the economic and social trends in each of the regions of the world.

I would like to begin by sharing with you ECA's assessment of Africa's economic performance in the past year. I would then like to share with you the approach that ECA and the other UN system agencies working in Africa propose to take to strengthen co-ordination and enhance synergies in the UN's developmental efforts in Africa.

ECA's Economic Report on Africa, 2000, the Summary of which is before you, shows that Africa's economy grew at an estimated 3.2 percent in 1999, barely improving on the previous year's modest performance of 3.1 percent, but much better than the meagre 2.1 per cent growth of the last decade. The report further reveals that Africa is now in its fifth year of economic recovery with growth in GDP outstripping population growth for the first time in many years. Moreover, in sharp contrast to the previous year, no African country recorded negative GDP growth in 1999.

Another key finding is that most of the best performers benefited from the cessation of civil wars, greater stability, and sustained economic and political reforms. Conversely, almost all the poor performers suffered from serious civil conflicts and unrest during the period under consideration. This confirms that peace, stability and deepening political and economic reforms are necessary conditions for Africa's development in the 21st century.

Despite this positive story, economic growth remains far below the 7 percent level required to make any meaningful dent on the incidence of poverty. Poverty in Africa is higher than in any other region of the world. We cannot, therefore, afford to be complacent because the margin of safety in the growth of the continent is still too thin. Our economic growth rate needs to be increased substantially and made sustainable in order to meet the internationally agreed poverty reduction targets in the stipulated timeframe. We also know that growth alone will not be sufficient. Growth must be complemented with policies that deliberately attack poverty and promote education, health and social safety nets.

Being able to concentrate on reducing poverty and expanding growth in the years ahead depends upon coping with a variety of challenges. ECA's Economic Report on Africa, 2000 refers to these challenges as the constraints imposed by the initial conditions for development at the beginning of the 21st century. Among them are inadequate levels of human development as evidenced by low education and health indicators; inadequate physical infrastructure; unfavourable terms of trade; the debt overhang; low savings; weak institutions of governance; war and conflicts; and high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate.

Against the backdrop of these challenges and with one fifth of its population residing in countries disrupted by conflict, Africa enters the 21st century as the poorest and least developed region of the world. This is the setting that clearly defines for us the imperative for the UN's partnership with Africa - supporting member States in their quest for sustainable peace and poverty reduction.

The vision for this partnership was articulated in the framework of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa launched in 1996 and reinforced by Secretary General in his 1998 report on Africa. Our challenge in Africa is to translate this vision into action through enhanced co-ordination and synergies using the

framework we have at hand.

I think we can safely say that we have already started addressing this challenge. Clearly, the reform of the UN has ushered some progress in the content, scope, and modalities of the UN's work in Africa over the recent past. But we will all agree that much more remains to be done to improve program coherence, to deepen the UN's poverty-focus, and to ensure that the regional dimension of the continent's development challenge is incorporated in the country-level programs. These are among the issues that UN agencies need to resolve collectively to engage in a credible developmental partnership with African member States.

The UN agencies working in Africa are looking at these issues in the context of their annual regional consultation. You will recall that these consultations were mandated by ECOSOC and that Ms. Louise Frechette, Deputy Secretary-General, chaired the first consultation for the Africa region in March 1999, in Nairobi, Kenya. Having reviewed all the co-ordinating mechanisms, the Nairobi meeting decided that the SIA, modified to be inclusive of all UN entities, was best suited to serve as the co-ordinating framework for the UN's work in the continent.

Last month, I convened the second annual regional consultation for the Africa region. With fairly high-level participation of twenty-two UN system agencies, including the Bretton Woods Institutions attending, we met at the ECA Headquarters in Addis Ababa. Within the framework of the modified SIA, the two-day meeting took stock of the collaborative work of the UN system in Africa and through cluster reporting exchanged information on the work of agencies in key SIA clusters. A special feature of this meeting was that the discussions around these clusters were forward-looking, with agreements being reached by cluster agencies on the specific activities that they plan to undertake jointly during the coming year and on the benchmarks they will use to assess their implementation performance.

We also considered in some detail a number of issues related to co-ordination and coherence of the UN's work in Africa. At the end of the two days, we came up with a shared vision of how UN agencies collectively should go about addressing these issues in the context of their annual regional consultations. We reached agreement around the following areas, which will go a long way towards enhanced coherence of the UN's effort in Africa.

- Supporting sustainable peace and poverty reduction must remain the overarching objective of the UN's partnership with Africa. As such, the country programs of UN entities must be guided by the most basic requirements associated with this objective - - investing in people, improving governance, and preventing conflict.
- Each annual regional consultation will be dedicated to deepen collaborative action by the UN in the five priority sectors under the SIA where demonstrable progress has been achieved - health, education, governance, water, and information technology. At the same time, the regional consultation will encourage stronger collaboration in other sectors and facilitate strategies for a clear way forward in these sectors. Based on such strategies, other sectors will be included to the priority sectors under the SIA.
- The value-added of the UN rests on the developmental impact of its collective efforts at the country-level. This will require more effective leveraging of the complementarities among the various instruments - such as CCA, UNDAF, CDF, and PRSP - for enhanced coherence and synergies in country programs. It will also entail stronger operational linkages between the regional priority-setting and policy consensus-building functions of the ECA and the country-programming function of the UN Resident Co-ordinator system.
- There is need to streamline the multiple reporting requirements on the UN's work in Africa and to improve the analytical quality of the relevant reports. This should be undertaken as a matter of urgency particularly in the context of the numerous mandated reviews of the Africa-related UN programs that are planned over the next two years.

Touching upon many of these areas, there has been past efforts to co-ordinate the UN's role on the continent through system-wide initiatives on Africa with goals largely defined at the regional level. Unfortunately, many of these efforts have lacked practical mechanisms to integrate the regional goals to country programs and to mobilize the UN system's effort in a coherent manner around such programs. If adequately implemented, the decisions reached at the Second Annual Regional Consultation will go a long way to address many of these past weaknesses.

In addition, there is also one major ECA initiative - the African Development Forum - that will help address these weaknesses. The ADF was launched last year to define an Africa-driven agenda around priority development

issues and to facilitate consensus among major stakeholders on how to address these issues. The Forum is also designed to mobilize the UN system's support for follow-up country-level actions.

The inaugural ADF (ADF'99) was held in Addis Ababa in October 1999 on the theme "*The Challenge to Africa of Globalization and the Information Age*". ADF 1999 brought together leading ICTs experts and policy makers from Africa and beyond. The Forum constituted a watershed in efforts by Africans and their development partners to define an information society. The Forum outcomes include consensus on the broad policy thrust for the development of information technology in Africa and agreements around concrete proposals for implementation at the country level with the support of UN and other external partners. The issues discussed and projects developed provided a strong foundation from the African perspective for the global debate on IT for development at ECOSOC 2000.

Indeed, ECA considers the decision to devote this year's High Level Segment of ECOSOC to Information Technology as an important modality for strengthening support for the outcomes of ADF '99. ECA is currently organizing a Post-Forum Summit to seek endorsement from the highest levels of African leadership for the ADF '99 outcomes. This is in line with the Secretary-General's recommendation to ECOSOC that high level political leadership is required if Africa is to capture the benefits and avoid the pitfalls of the information age.

The second ADF (ADF `2000), scheduled to take place from 22 to 26 October 2000, is on the theme "*AIDS: The Greatest Leadership Challenge*". ADF 2000 is a partnership effort involving ECA, UNAIDS, the World Bank, UNDP, and UNICEF to stimulate coherent UN system responds to the AIDS development challenge in Africa. ADF 2000 and aims to address and heighten awareness of the crucial elements now missing in the fight against AIDS: - - political will and leadership, comprehensive approaches, and the requisite resources. The Forum is therefore designed at generating the highest level of leadership commitment to HIV/AIDS prevention and care. It will bring together African leaders and their development partners to share experiences, suggest appropriate actions required to promote local, national and international partnerships and to find mechanisms to harness the efforts of governments, the private sector and civil society organizations in the design and implementation of intervention programs.

To facilitate follow-up action at the country level, UN partners are supporting the preparation of country action plans, which will be tabled for discussion at the upcoming ADF 2000 Conference. ADF constitutes a key opportunity for Africa and its partners to build on the momentum gained from the recent international conference in Durban, and to upscale Africa's response to the pandemic.

Thank you.
