

Talking Points: Briefing to Ambassadors

by Dr. K. Y. Amoako, ECA Executive Secretary
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A. Welcome and Thanks to Ambassadors

B. Review Recommendations and Proposals on Eca Renewal Presented to Conference of Ministers.

In Summary:

The three guiding principles of the renewal: excellence, cost-effectiveness and partnership.

The renewal aims to:

- sharpen programme focus;
- a Clearing House for best practices in Africa;
- a policy integrator being not the sole source producer of thinking, but the integrator of the best minds we can find in Africa.

To achieve these aims, I indicated that ECA would:

- improve the dissemination of our projects;
- use more electronics means of communication;
- produce fewer but more policy-relevant reports;
- hold fewer but more goal-oriented meetings; and
- work with member States to rationalized sponsored institutions which are either duplicative or inviable.

C. Outcome of the Conference

As you recall, the Conference strongly endorsed the Strategic Directions for ECA and in doing so:

It approved the Commission's Medium-Term Plan 1998-2001 which was based on the Strategic Directions.

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- It directed that the 1997 Work Programme be revised to conform to the new programme structure of ECA, which goes into effect from 1 January 1997.
- The Medium-Term Plan subsequently was approved by the Committee on Programme Coordination of the General Assembly.
- It adopted a resolution on strengthening the MULPOCs and requested that I follow up on the implementation of this resolution and report to the next Conference of Ministers.
- It adopted in principle the African Information Society Initiative as an action framework for building African Information Society and called upon member States to incorporate the African Information Society Initiative in their national development plans according to national needs and priorities, and requested that I report to the next Conference of Ministers on the progress in implementing this resolution.

D. Progress to Date

Work Programme

Have almost completed preparation of 1998-1999 Biennium Programme and are revising the 1997 programme to result in sharply focused activities for ECA. Member States will, of course, have the opportunity to review the 1998-1999 Work Programme at the next Conference of Ministers. Meanwhile, we will be consulting with the Bureau of the Commission on the 1997 Programme of Work.

MULPOCs' Review

Several measures have been taken to implement the resolution on strengthening the MULPOCs. An in-house task force on rationalization and strengthening of the MULPOCs was established. The recommendations from the task force and insights from other staff have been developed into executive guidelines to serve as a framework for consultation with member States within the next month.

Sponsored Institutions

The issue of rationalization of ECA-sponsored institutions has been on the agenda of the Conference of Ministers as far back as 1983. The major thrust of previous recommendations are:

Consolidation of institutions and activities to eliminate duplication, promote a coordinated development effort and improve efficiency in the use of limited resources.

Streamlining of the institutional arrangements and statutes of the institutions to enhance the decision-making process, management and control and resource mobilization.

Fostering of self-sustenance by establishing private sector support units within institutions to serve as business intelligence bureau to develop strategies and attract revenue-making opportunities for the institutions.

There is currently an impasse on the rationalization process. The Conference of Ministers during the session two years ago, did not make any decisions whether or not to implement the recommendations made by previous ECA studies which were also endorsed by the Ad-Hoc Committee of Ten member States. Using resources provided by UNDP, I am fielding a consultative team to explore how these institutions could be revitalized. We are exploring three options:

Institutions that are viable and whose services are great demand which will be supported by ECA.

Institutions that operate in closely related fields which should be merged to as a way of strengthening their capacity to be of increased service to member States.

Institutions which are attracting less and less support from member States.

We intend to design ECA strategy to support selected number of institutions that meet the priorities of ECA's Strategic Directions.

African Information Society Initiative (AISII)

We organized a coordination meeting on the African Information Society Initiative here in Addis from October 21-23, 1996. It was attended by nine multilateral organizations (including ITU, The World Bank, UNESCO, UNDP, etc.), three bilateral organizations and three NGOs involved in the implementation of this initiative. Five resource persons attended in their personal capacities.

The aims of the meeting included:

Obtaining a consensus of the partners in the AISI on objectives and priorities for action;

Growing up an implementation plan and securing the commitment of the partners to working together and to share goals;

Coordination of the implementation of the AISI/HITD;

Setting up a regional mechanism to assist in the development, coordination and follow up of an implementation plan; and

Developing strategies for resource mobilization.

Institutional Strengthening Steps

New divisional structures.

Training and skills upgrading of staff.

Communication strategy.

Automation, i.e. the introduction and use of modern technology in many operations of the Commission is being vigorously pursued.

The MRAG Advisors.

New Management Team.

Engaging the Partners

In April this year, I convened a meeting with ECA's major partners -- bilateral donors and multilateral agencies, including several agencies of the UN System. Many of the partners not only welcomed the new directions for the Commission but also indicated their willingness to consider collaborating with ECA on a wide range of activities.

As a follow-up to the April meeting, ECA is developing that details the specific activities in which it is seeking various forms of collaboration, the nature of partnership being sought vary from proposal to proposal:

In some, collaboration will take the form of financial support;

In others, it will entail exchange of staff;

Still, in others, it will involve a combination of all.

The prospectus will be ready in early January 1997 for discussion with donors.

International Conference on Reviving Private Investment in Africa

This conference which was organized by ECA with the co-sponsorship of several bilateral and multilateral donors was a watershed event in fostering a regional and international commitment to an enhanced role for the private sector in Africa's development and stimulating private foreign and domestic

investment in the region.

The Conference was attended by over 650 delegates from Africa, Asia, Europe and North America.

A key event of the Conference was a Round Table Summit which provided a forum for dialogue among Heads of State and Government and senior business executives.

Another major event was the launching of the African Capital Markets Forum -- a multi-country advocacy group which brings together members of stock exchanges, insurance and banking as well as other financial institutions in Africa.

A series of recommendations on strengthening private sector in africa, reviving private investment, managing privatization and fostering public-private sector partnership for development were produced by the Conference.

Special Initiative

As you will recall, the United nations System Wide Special Initiative on Africa was launched in March 1996. Following are highlights of major activities in education, health, governance, water and harnessing information technology for development.

Education: Work has started on the basis of strategy defined by the Association for Development of african Education (DEA), World Bank and UNESCO. An education sector investment programme for Ethiopia was discussed in the context of the SIA at the December 1996 Ethiopia Consultative Group Meeting held at the ECA headquarters.

Health: The sector approach is outlined in "Implementation Strategy for the Health Sector" of the WHO-led inter-Agency Consultation of the SIA Health Component which met in July 1996. The Panel of Experts on Health in Africa is now expected to meet in March to finalize implementation, monitoring and evaluation arrangements under the Initiative

Governance: UNDP, in consultation with ECA, is finalizing the framework paper for the "Special Initiative on Governance in Africa". ECA is expected to handle the secretariat function for the SIGA component.

Water: UNEP and WHO are taking the lead in this area. The UNDP-led Informal Water Working Group has started work to coordinate on-going and planned UN work in the area of water resource management.

Harnessing Information Technology for Development (HITD): ECA is the lead agency for the HITD and co-sponsored the Coordinating Meeting on African Information Society Initiative that took place in ECA in October 1996. The ACC Steering Committee is expected to hold its next meeting in March 1997.

E. LOOKING AHEAD

1997 Meeting of the Conference of Ministers

We have began preparations for the next meeting of the Conference of Ministers to be held in 1997. At this stage, I would like to brief you on three aspects of the Conference:

Theme

The proposed theme of the Conference around which the Ministerial Policy debate will be held is Investment Promotion, Trade Expansion and Regional Integration for the Accelerated Development of Africa.

The theme has been chosen to build on the momentum of the International Conference on Reviving Private Investment in africa, further explore the issues arising from the First Ministerial meeting of the WTO in Singapore and reflect on the first meeting of ECOSOC of the African Economic Community held in Abidjan in November.

The theme reflects more significantly the importance of investment, trade and enhanced regional integration for sustained growth and development in Africa.

Issues

Building on the changes introduced at this year's meeting of the Conference of Ministers

Agenda for the next session will be kept short, both to permit an in-depth discussion on the issues and to use the allotted time more efficiently.

Besides the Ministerial Policy debate on the theme, the agenda feature such issues as review of the intergovernmental machinery of the Commission, rationalization of the ECA-sponsored institutions and the work programme of the Commission for 1998-99 as well as progress reports on the African Information Society Initiative and the MULPOCs (now Subregional Research Centres - SDRCs).

Format

United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC)

Formal opening to coincide with Conference of Ministers;

Action plan for obtaining art pieces, artifacts, etc.

Possibility of setting up a committee of ambassadors.

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