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UNITED NATIONS
Economic Commission for Africa

ECA AT A GLANCE

1958-1988

**30 years of service
to Africa**

ECA AT A GLANCE

The establishment of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) goes back to resolution 1155(XII) of 26 November 1957, in which the General Assembly requested the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations to give prompt and favourable consideration at its next session to the establishment of a regional economic commission for Africa.

Accordingly, the Council, by its resolution 671 A(XXV) of 29 April 1958, established the ECA and laid down its Terms of Reference. By then, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), later renamed the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), which is now known as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), were already in existence. Later, in August 1973, the Council was to establish the Economic Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The birth of ECA was not easy. A handful of African independent States and their friends had laboured since 1947 for the creation of such a Commission. For a variety of reasons, the Economic and Social Council failed to take action on the matter until 1957, when the General Assembly urged it to do so.

Only eight African States belonged to ECA at its inception: Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, the Sudan, Tunisia and the United Arab

Republic. In addition, the then colonial powers - Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom were full members, as was the Union (now Republic) of South Africa, whose membership was later revoked by the Economic and Social Council because of its racial policies. Membership was open to all African States who might join the United Nations Organization after independence. ECA at present has 50 member States and one associate member, Namibia.

The raison d'être for the creation of ECA was expressed by the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, when he said that new States were emerging in the historical process with geographical boundaries which, in many cases, were not suited to the requirements of rapid economic development. If such growth was to be achieved, concerted action and joint efforts were needed, so that different States would be able to develop within a common framework that took cognizance of the peculiar needs of each State or combination of States; and, above all, this should be achieved without losing present advantages deriving from existing relationships with the rest of the world. At one time he referred to ECA as giving Africa a "new significance in world affairs".

The first order of business was to compile ECA's Terms of Reference which were laid down by the Economic and Social Council. In addition to its responsibilities for promoting the region's economic development, the Commission was also to take account of the social dimensions of economic development and the inter-relationship between economic and social factors. Making recommendations to African Governments and the United Nations specialized agencies is within its Terms of Reference. All the same, it is required to submit for the consideration of the Economic and

Social Council any proposal that could have an important effect on the world economy.

ECA was founded at a time when most African countries were emerging from the dark corridors of colonialism. Their trade was shackled to the economies of western Europe in such a way that the continent produced raw materials for European markets and served as a captive market for European finished manufactured goods. Education was tailored to the needs of colonial powers who only needed middle-echelon cadres to make administration function according to their requirements. Under the circumstances, African peoples and countries hardly knew each other. Economic exchange between them simply did not exist. The establishment of ECA could not have been more timely. It took up the challenge of promoting African economic and social development and giving accurate information on the actual state of African economies. Only statisticians could do the job. ECA, therefore, embarked on a "crash" programme to train skilled manpower. It embarked on research programmes, training seminars and skill-updating workshops. It compiled, within a very short time, the biggest corpus on economic and social statistics on Africa. The decision to treat statistics as a priority has amply paid off.

The next step was to sponsor and establish institutions that would cater for Africa's economic and social development needs. In time, the ECA-sponsored institutions, with or without the participation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) were to reach thirty-six (see annex).

Prophetically, at the inaugural meeting of the Commission in December 1958, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, had this to say:

"The economies of African States have too long existed as separate, self-contained isolated entities ... But it is impossible to believe that individual countries, working alone and isolated from their neighbours, can ever achieve their objectives."

Thirty-one years later Professor Adebayo Adedeji, United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the ECA, enunciated the very same sentiment on the occasion for opening of the twenty-fourth session of the Commission.

It is already almost certain that the decade of the 1990s will be one of regional economic blocks and groupings - what with the planned economic unification of Western Europe in the form of a truly European Common Market; what with the de facto existence of a North American economic bloc made up of Canada and the United States, and the increasing reality of closer economic ties among the newly-industrialized countries by the Pacific rim.

At one time, he observed, when other continents were strengthening economic and commercial ties; Africa could not afford to be the odd man out, and thus the need for the preparatory processes that would lead to economic integration in Africa and to the establishment by the year 2000, of an African Common Market as envisaged by the Lagos Plan of Action and Final Act as far back as 1980.

Professor Adebayo Adedeji went on to say that it was imperative for African countries to strengthen ties among themselves to enhance their ability to participate fruitfully in the international economy. He underlined that as Africa entered the 1990s economic operation and integration would have to be fostered at the regional and subregional levels through closer co-ordination of economic and social

policies; through the development of multi-country projects in the key economic sectors and through the promotion of intra-African trade. Even more immediate, he said, was the creation of African Monetary Fund which has been on the drawing board for the last ten years.

Going back to the efforts of ECA in the way of institution building the first institutions to be established by the Commission during its formative years were the African Institute for Economic Development (IDEP) and the African Development Bank (ADB).

The ADB, to which all African independent States belong, had a slow start because, *inter alia*, its unpopularity in certain circles, its membership being limited to African independent States to avoid foreign domination which, in turn, had a restrictive effect on its capital and lending capacity. Things of course have dramatically changed over the years to such an extent that the ADB has become a major financial source for Africa.

IDEP and ADB, which were to deal with two basic problems of Africa - the training of manpower indispensable for the economic and social development of the region and the mobilization of the resources - were followed, after a decade of relative inactivity, by the establishment of the Association of African Central Banks (AACB) in 1968 to promote co-operation in the monetary, banking and financial spheres. The Association has developed steadily and has established important subsidiary organs such as the African Centre for Monetary Studies and the African Clearing Houses. IDEP too has established itself as a leading African institution in its field.

The following 15 years (1968-1983) in the life of the Commission witnessed an upsurge in the

establishment by ECA of multinational institutions at the regional and subregional levels; in all the period saw the establishment of over 30 such institutions.

Notable among these, to mention only a few, were the African Regional Centre for Engineering Design and Manufacturing, the African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development, the African Regional Centre for Technology, and the Association for African Trade Promotion Organizations.

At the subregional level special mention must be made of the role the ECA has played in the establishment of multi-purpose subregional institutions. ECA prepared the comprehensive and complicated treaty and protocols of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern African States (PTA), the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) were midwived by the Commission.

In specialized fields the African intergovernmental organizations established by the ECA cover a wide range of economic and social fields such as national resources, science and technology, social development, trade, industry, training and human resources development, transport and communications.

The institutions built by the ECA were all designed to foster economic and social development and are, by implication, complimentary in their aims and activities. Horizontal co-operation among them is therefore crucial. For example, the Centre for Services in Surveying, Mapping and Remote Sensing in Nairobi, Kenya, is closely related in its aims and activities to its sister Regional Centre for Training in

Aerial Surveys at Ile-Ife, Nigeria, and to the African Remote Sensing Council based in Bamako, Mali.

The African Regional Centre for Technology based in Dakar, Senegal, receives specialized inputs from the Industrial Property Organization for English-speaking Africans with headquarters in Harare, Zimbabwe. The linkages between the African Regional Organization for Standardization in Nairobi, Kenya, and the African Regional Centre for Engineering Design and Manufacturing in Ibadan, Nigeria, are also self-evident. Lastly, and many more examples could be given, the African Institute for Higher Technical Training and Research in Nairobi, Kenya, and the Eastern and Southern Africa Management Institute in Arusha, the United Republic of Tanzania, have many things in common.

ECA believes that there is great deal that it can offer to African multinational institutions apart from playing the role of midwife. Indeed the ECA can assist, as it is already doing, in respect of some institutions in the mobilization of resources from bilateral and multilateral donors which would lead to the emergence of a systematic and comprehensive programme of assistance to institutions that would promote stable long-term planning and budgeting and avoid wastage and duplication of effort.

The ECA secretariat has also over the years acted effectively as an interim secretariat or executing agency for several important projects such as the PTA, the Statistical Training Programme for Africa, the Eastern and Southern African Mineral Resources Development Centre, the African Regional Centre for Technology, the Regional Institute for Population Studies among others. Funds put at the disposal of ECA as an executing agency have steadily increased over the years.

ECA's performance as an executing agency has enabled it to play a more operational role in the implementation of various mandates of multinational institutions.

A great many of the institutions have suffered from the ill-effects of lack of political will on the part of many African Governments, the very Governments which had pressed so consistently for their establishment.

This lack of political will finds expression in many ways, the most common being that, after pressing for the establishment of an institution and even after having approved the legal instruments for setting up the institution concerned, many Governments either fail to accede to membership or, if they do, they fail to give it adequate material and financial support. The net result is that the growth of the institution is stifled, disillusion sets in, and the collective self-reliance of African countries is severely undermined.

As for the scope of its activities, ECA acts within the framework of United Nations policies and under the supervision of the Economic and Social Council and assists member States only on request.

The highest legislative organ of ECA is the Conference of Ministers which meets every year at its headquarters in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) unless it is invited by a member State. The Conference of Ministers' meeting is preceded by a meeting of the Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole, composed of experts and government officials, who make recommendations to the Conference of Ministers on all aspects of the functions of ECA.

The ECA secretariat is the key to the institutional framework of the Commission. At its apex is the Cabinet of the Executive Secretary

(COES), under which come the African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW), the Information Service, the Policy and Programme Co-ordination Office (PPCO), the Technical Assistance Co-ordination and Operations Office (TACOO), and the Pan-African Documentation and Information Service (PADIS). The substantive office and divisions of the Commission are:

1. Economic Co-operation Office (ECO)
2. Socio-Economic Research and Planning Division (SERPD)
3. Joint ECA/FAO Food and Agriculture Division (JEFAD)
4. Industry and Human Settlements Division (IHDS)
5. Trade and Development Finance Division (TDFD)
6. Natural Resources Division (NRD)
7. Transport, Communications and Tourism Division (TCTD)
8. Public Administration, Human Resources and Social Development Division (PHSD)
9. Statistics Division
10. Population Division
11. Administration and Conference Services Division

The functions of these divisions and ECO are self-evident. In order to implement resolutions adopted by successive meetings of the Conference of Ministers it was decided that Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) should be established at the subregional level. In adopting resolution 311 (XIII) at its fourth meeting, the ECA Conference of Ministers took account of the experience gained during the 1960s and early 1970s especially in the context of ECA subregional office, which had shown that follow-up action on the implementations of resolutions on economic co-operation was difficult and slow process and that

the operational effectiveness of subregional institutions created by ECA for the purpose would depend on their integration into the decision-making machinery of the governments. The United Nations Development Advisory Teams (UNDATs) had outdone their usefulness.

Consequently, the Conference directed the MULPOCs should assist in generating and cementing the process of subregional economic integration in the subregions. They served as a first and pragmatic step towards the creation of regional economic community. Resolution 311 (XIII) provided for the creation of policy organs for each MULPOC: a Council of Ministers or Plenipotentiaries and a Committee of Officials, as well as sectoral committees, as required. The MULPOCs are the operational arm of ECA in the field. They are: Lusaka (Zambia)-based MULPOC serving 18 East and Southern African countries; the Gisenyi (Rwanda)-based MULPOC for the three countries which constitute the Economic Community of the Great Lakes countries (CEPGL); the Yaounde (Cameroon)-based MULPOC for seven countries in Central Africa; the Niamey (Niger)-based MULPOC for the countries which are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and the Tangier (Morocco)-based MULPOC for six countries in North Africa.

Through the years, ECA conceptualized those economic and social strategies and programmes which at present make up the policy framework for Africa's socio-economic development. As long ago as the first Conference of the Independent African States in 1958, Africans recommended setting up of an Economic and Research Committee in each country and a joint Economic Research Committee composed of representatives of all independent African States to consolidate economic development. Consequently, the Monrovia, Casablanca and

Brazzaville Groups each advocated the formation of an African common market, an African payments union and an African bank for economic development.

Beginning around 1962, a more gradual approach to African economic development and co-operation was adopted. Because of major obstacles in the way of comprehensive regional co-operation, the merits of the geographically narrow, close neighbourhood approach was given recognition by the Commission's first programme of work and priorities.

At its sixteenth session, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) meeting in Monrovia (Liberia) in July 1979, following the adoption of the Monrovia Strategy and the associated Monrovia Declaration, decided to hold an extraordinary session on economic problems of Africa in Lagos (Nigeria). Accordingly, the Assembly directed the Secretary-General of OAU, in co-operation with the ECA Executive Secretary to "make the necessary arrangements for the proposed extraordinary session".

In consequence, the second extraordinary session of OAU was convened in Lagos in April 1980 and adopted the Lagos Plan of Action, which the ECA Conference of Ministers had prepared earlier. The Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos had an impressive pedigree with which ECA was closely associated.

The first meeting of the Conference of Ministers (tenth session of the Commission) held in Tunis (Tunisia) in 1971 adopted the African Strategy for Development in the 1970s, calling for self-reliance. It was updated in 1973 in Accra (Ghana) and in 1975 in Nairobi (Kenya) by the second and

third ECA Ministerial Conferences, respectively. In 1977 in Kinshasa (Zaire), the fourth session of the Ministerial Conference adopted the revised Framework of Principles for the implementation of the New International Economic Order. Rabat (Morocco) in 1979 saw the adoption of resolution 332 (XIV) on the Development Strategy for Africa for the third United Nations Development Decade which, together with its accompanying Draft Declaration of Commitment, was submitted to the sixteenth session of the OAU Summit Meeting in Monrovia in July 1979.

Pursuant to a directive of the OAU Summit, the sixth ECA Conference of Ministers met in Addis Ababa to adopt a draft Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy for the Economic Development of Africa. That draft was adopted by the OAU Special Economic Summit on 28 and 29 April 1980 as the Lagos Plan of Action. It also adopted the Final Act of Lagos for the achievement of an African Economic Community by the year 2000.

In March 1979, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and the Executive Secretary of ECA had this to say: "... For too long the impression has been created that African development strategies and lifestyles are an imitation. Indeed, a poor imitation of the strategies and lifestyles developed elsewhere for other societies, with different historical, cultural, economic and political backgrounds." The Lagos Plan of Action was to obliterate this impression.

The strategy of the Lagos Plan of Action is as simple as it is far-reaching. It overturns the thinking of decades of development planning in Africa. In a "nutshell", it states that the continent had hitherto looked to the outside world for its development needs but to no avail. Perhaps Africa should adopt

new strategies and plans based on African co-operation and integration, with a view to fostering and then making a reality of African self-reliant and self-sustaining economic and social development. But, of course, since Africa does not live in a vacuum, the role of co-operation and inter-action with the international community was given due cognizance.

Next came African's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) and the United Nations Programme of action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD), in 1985 and 1986, respectively. ECA, with the co-operation of OAU, conceived APPER under very different circumstances from those which obtained in 1980.

Since 1982, it was obvious that the Lagos Plan of Action could not be decided by circumstances which were largely out of the control of African countries: the worst drought in recent African history was already in the making. By 1984, it was to affect 34 of the 50 ECA member States. Human and material losses throughout the continent were incalculable. On top of this, Africa, in an adverse international economic environment, had to operate in a situation where it was saddled with a crushing debt, which reached the staggering figure of \$US 230 billion by the end of 1988.

Apper came into being to arrest African economic decline and then, hopefully, to reverse it. Composed of emergency and medium-term measures, it was designed as the foundation for long-term development with the twin concept of self-reliance and co-operation firmly built in.

The UN-PAAERD was, and remains, a mirror image of APPER. Once again it reaffirmed that African States themselves were primarily responsible for African social and economic development. The

UN-PAAERD assigned an important role for the international community. It was estimated in APPER that during the period 1986-1990, the region would need \$US 128.1 billion and hoped that African States would provide \$US 82.5 billion. The international community was enjoined to provide the shortfall of \$US 45.6 billion over the same period.

In the UN-PAAERD the international community was not bound to any specific measures, or level of assistance, but it recognized that changes were needed in the external economic environment, if the General Assembly's goals for Africa were to be met. Elimination of protectionism, higher prices for agricultural commodities, greater balance-of-payments support and consideration of ways to lighten the debt burden were amongst the measures cited as important. ECA had been the motive force behind the special session of the United Nations General Assembly which had adopted the UN-PAAERD.

To assist African Governments and the international community to fully exploit the advantages which the Commission can offer, ECA, with the collaboration of OAU, ADB and the Nigerian Federal Government, organized a major International Conference from 15 to 19 June 1987 in Abuja (Nigeria) on the Challenge of Economic Recovery and Accelerated Development. Coming a year after the United Nations General Assembly's special session on Africa which culminated in the adoption of the UN-PAAERD, and two years after the adoption of APPER, it was hoped that the Conference would undertake a preliminary assessment and evaluation on the prospects of economic recovery and accelerated development and would recommend necessary future action. The Abuja Statement, adopted after the conclusion of the Conference, testifies to the success of that exercise.

From 5 to 9 March 1988, a similar exercise was undertaken by ECA, in collaboration with the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system. The theme was: The Human Dimension of Africa's Economic Recovery and Development and was held in Khartoum (Sudan). The Conference devoted its energies to ameliorating the lot of the disadvantaged, as African States embarked on programmes under APPER and the UN-PAAERD, both of which by their nature entail a lot of belt-tightening, as African States try not only to recover but also to develop in a sustained manner. It was observed at the Conference that those two programmes could make the situation of disadvantaged Africa far worse than it is already unless steps are taken to retrieve the situation. Among the disadvantaged are the rural and urban poor, women and children, refugees and displaced persons.

This booklet would not be complete without reference to at least one concrete programme that shows the scope and breadth of ECA activities as it pursued African development and integration: the trans-African highways project. It is a 7,000 km link between Kenya's coastal port of Mombasa and Lagos (Nigeria) traversing Uganda, Zaire, the Central African Republic and Cameroon. Approved in 1971, it has since been decided to connect the highway to other subregional networks, thus providing access to the Trans-Sahel Highway [Dakar (Senegal) - Ndjamena (Chad)], the Coastal Highway (Dakar - Lagos), the Trans-Saharan Highway and the Trans-East African Highway [Cairo (Egypt) - Gaborone (Botswana)]. The implications of this project for African development and integration are self-evident.

ANNEX

List of ECA-sponsored regional and subregional institutions

1. Central African Mineral Resources Development Centre
2. Regional Centre for Training in Aerial Surveys
3. Eastern and Southern African Mineral Resources Centre
4. Eastern and Southern African Management Institute
5. Regional Institute for Population Studies
6. Organisation interafricaine du café
7. Autorité de développement intégré de la région du Liptako-Gourma
8. Comité permanent consultatif du Maghreb
9. Institut de formation et de recherche démographiques
10. African Institute for Applied Research and Training in Social Development
11. Port Management Association of West and Central Africa
12. Port Management Association of North Africa
13. Association of African Development Finance Institutions
14. Centre régional de télédétection
15. Office de l'énergie solaire
16. African Institute for Higher Technical Training and Research
17. Southern Africa Labour Commission
18. African Centre for Monetary Studies
19. Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Intellectual Property Organization
20. Association of African Central Banks
21. Association of African Tax Administrators
22. Association of Trade Promotion Organizations
23. African Regional Centre for Solar Energy
24. Association for the Advancement of Agricultural Sciences in Africa
25. African Institute for Economic Development and Planning
26. African Regional Centre for Technology
27. Regional Centre for Services in Surveying, Mapping and Remote Sensing
28. African Centre for Engineering Design and Manufacturing
29. African Regional Organization for Standardization
30. Port Management Association of Eastern and Southern Africa
31. Geological Society of Africa
32. West African Clearing House
33. African Development Bank
34. Autorite de la route transafricaine
35. Organisation africaine de la propriété intellectuelle
36. African Organization for Cartography and Remote Sensing

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