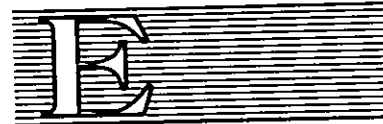




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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Twenty-eighth session of the Commission/
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Ministers

Libreville, Gabon
19-22 April 1993

**Restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations:
Strengthening the Economic Commission for Africa to face
the challenges of the 1990s**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The eighteenth meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers considered a policy paper entitled "The Economic Commission for Africa in the 1990s: A policy and management framework for facing Africa's development challenges" presented by the secretariat. The paper was intended simultaneously to make proposals for adjusting ECA's activities to respond to new and emerging needs of African countries and to respond to the orientation of reforms underway in the economic and social sectors of the United Nations. Thus as a policy document, it articulated proposals designed to ensure that ECA remains at the forefront of strategic thinking and policy innovations on Africa's socio-economic development. As a management framework, it made suggestions for enhancing the quality and efficiency of ECA's operations so as to better serve member States, its primary constituency.

2. Following very in-depth discussions on the paper, the Conference of Ministers adopted resolution 726 (XXVII) of April 1992 on "Strengthening of the Economic Commission for Africa to face Africa's development challenges in the 1990s". This report details the actions taken by the secretariat towards the implementation of that resolution. Two other reports pertaining to the implementation of specific aspects of that resolution, namely the ECA-sponsored institutions and restructuring of the intergovernmental machinery, are being submitted separately. The Conference will, of course, discuss other aspects of the resolution under separate agenda items. This report, therefore, focuses on those issues not covered by other reports.

II. ENHANCING PROGRAMME FOCUS AND QUALITY OF DELIVERY

A. Programme focus

3. The 1990s have so far brought little respite in Africa's socio-economic problems. At the eighteenth meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers, a sense of considerable urgency was expressed in the need to come up with new, imaginative responses to growing poverty, unemployment and the continued deterioration in the quality of life. In reviewing this state of affairs, the Conference recognized that Africa's productive base had remained narrow due to poorly integrated structures. Export earnings had declined with the collapse of commodity prices, and the lack of access to international investments and markets. The debt burden in itself constituted a major obstacle to the region's development.

4. In the continuing search for a way out, and in response to the ongoing changes in political, economic and social relations in the world, several countries in Africa were introducing democracy and pluralism in their system of governance. Many countries had also accepted that economic reform was the inevitable road to structural transformation, and that regional cooperation and integration were vehicles to accelerate the attainment of the goals of self-reliance in a world that was rapidly reorganizing itself into economic and trading blocs. The Conference was also particularly seized of the implications for the growing competition for scarce international development resources and of the threat of increasing protectionism and discriminatory terms of trade. The need for African countries to ratify and implement the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community as the strategy for fostering regional integration, and the urgency in resolving internal conflicts and redeploying resources from military activities into constructive development programmes were, therefore, stressed by the Conference.

5. Against this background, the eighteenth meeting of the Conference recommended that new appropriate strategies be formulated to respond to the challenges of the changing world. For ECA, it recommended a reorganization of programmes around critical areas of focus to enhance the synergy between related areas of priority and thereby increase programme impact. It specifically recommended the further strengthening of ECA's advocacy role in socio-economic development at all levels and the continuous monitoring of global and regional issues of relevance to Africa's pursuit of sustainable development. The promotion of closer cooperation within and between the subregions of Africa was also singled out as an area for greater focus within ECA's programme of work. In view of the important role that governments have

to play in providing the enabling environment for enhanced private sector initiative and activities, and in fostering sound management of economic reforms and development processes, the Conference requested ECA to increase its assistance to member States to enhance the policy-making and analytical capacity of the public sector in promoting economic development and in fostering entrepreneurship. Cognizant of the persistent incongruence between population growth and food production, the considerable neglect of the rural areas, rapid urbanization and environmental degradation, all of which continue to characterize Africa's socio-economic situation, the Conference recommended that ECA should increase its assistance to member States to ensure a desirable balance between food supply, population, human settlements and environment through concentrated programmes of activities emphasizing the inherent potentials of the interrelationships between those sectors for alleviating poverty. The importance of placing people at the centre of all development activities and ensuring that they are the main beneficiaries of the development process could be over-emphasized. The Conference, therefore, recommended that ECA accelerates its assistance to member States on ways and means of fostering human-centred development. In this regard, activities for the promotion of women in development were viewed as being of crucial importance. The diversification of Africa's economy is predicated on the development of an efficient physical capital infrastructure. The Conference, therefore, requested ECA to assist member States to strengthen their capacity to achieve structural transformation and diversification.

6. Since the eighteenth meeting, there has been further reflection on how best to reorganize the implementation of ECA's activities for maximum impact in supporting the efforts of member States. Programme planning has also been influenced by new and emerging global and regional issues such as the growing consensus between the environment and development as introduced in Agenda 21 adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. ECA has already begun taking steps to reinforce its internal capacity to render assistance to member States to manage sustainable development in its interrelated dimensions. It will in particular, identify and promote regional and subregional projects to give effects to the goals of Agenda 21 and, in cooperation with other partners, advocate increased international support for the implementation of Agenda 21 in Africa.

7. The indivisible linkage between peace, security and economic and social development as demonstrated in the in-depth analysis of the United Nations Secretary-General's report on an Agenda for Peace has also been another source of influence. No longer can the effects of prolonged civil unrest and armed conflict with their resultant destruction of economic bases and the social fabric be considered purely within political dimensions. It is in recognition of this that the Commission's intervention is now indicated simultaneously in the critical areas of humanitarian assistance; rehabilitation and reconstruction; and long-term development and transformation. The Commission must now bring its analytical and programme formulation and coordination capabilities to bear on conflict prevention and on the efforts of countries in need of rehabilitation and reconstruction and those managing transitions to democracy and pluralism. In this connection, the implications of the imminent transition of South Africa into democratic majority rule has brought new dimensions into the Commission's programme of work.

8. The growing recognition that population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development are intricately interrelated means that population policies and programmes must be integrated in development strategies, focusing on such issues as strengthening the social sectors with a view to influencing human development, tackling the underlying causes of environmental degradation and placing greater emphasis on food security, appropriate agricultural mechanization and marketing services, etc. This is yet another area where the Commission will concentrate resources to help promulgate policies and formulate programmes that reflect this understanding.

9. The reorganization of ECA's programmes to bring them into sharper focus is now reflected in the revised structure of the Medium-term Plan 1992-1997. The work programme for the first biennium of this plan period has now been formulated. Both programme documents, which are before the present meeting for consideration, reflect the interdisciplinary and multisectoral approach to problem solving which remains the comparative advantage of the Commission.

10. Steps are also being taken to restructure the secretariat to bring about greater compatibility between organizational units and programme clusters. Similarly, proposals in respect of the structure of the intergovernmental machinery are also before the present meeting. The proposed subsidiary bodies are to oversee and guide integrated clusters of activities. The frequency and length of meetings of the proposed organs have also been rationalized in an attempt to concentrate resources.

B. Managing for quality and efficiency

11. ECA has continued to take steps to enhance the quality of its products and efficiency in the process of their delivery. Publications are among the most important of ECA's products. Many technical publications are produced every year by all divisions of the secretariat. These constitute the bulk of the analytical work of the Commission and the vehicle by which ECA provides the strategic framework for concerted regional action to face regional and global challenges. The effective packaging, presentation and distribution of these products have, however, left much to be desired owing largely to resource inadequacies. There is urgent need to upgrade the equipment and ensure the stability and professional competence of the publication staff.

12. Considerable efforts have been expended on various other aspects of document production, processing and distribution. In this regard, the existing mechanism for the preparation of publications programmes, the calendar of conferences and meetings, follow-up on the administration and substantive organization of approved conferences and meetings including their agenda are increasingly being revitalized. Efforts will be made to take a more assertive stand on issues with regard to the preparation of conferences, publication of documents, provision of the necessary resources for quality production and the application of existing mechanisms for quality control in the production and distribution of ECA's publications including peer and external review of documents.

13. The importance of establishing and implementing a coherent communication strategy for reaching the Commission's constituencies has been fully recognized. Strengthening the existing information network, therefore, ranks high on the list of the secretariat's priorities and efforts will increasingly be directed towards the implementation of such a strategy.

14. Boosting the efficiency and capability of the secretariat is directly related to the quality of its staff. Among the measures envisaged to assure and safeguard the efficiency of ECA staff is a variety of training programmes for the enhancement of their skills at all levels. Built into the concept of staff development also is the importance of mobility within the United Nations system. The staff is, therefore, encouraged to view itself within the broader framework of the United Nations Secretariat.

C. Resources

15. At least 50 per cent of ECA's funding is from extrabudgetary sources. The eighteenth meeting of the Conference of Ministers took note of the current erosion of this funding base and urged ECA to do its utmost to expand it in order to enhance its options to respond faster and with more flexibility to development issues in Africa as they arise. A careful analysis of the Commission's need has just been completed with respect to its work programme, the Medium-Term Plan, the priorities of member States and the various directives to establish a strategy for raising the extrabudgetary resources it requires.

16. The strategy to be subsequently adopted comprises a programme approach to fund-raising with a sound management component to it. Once a target for extrabudgetary resources has been established, the Commission will embark on maintaining an ongoing dialogue, contacts and good relations with its donors. In this connection, an adequate data base on donors with provisions for regular update will be indispensable. It will also be necessary to develop information materials to be used by the media within Africa and in the donor countries so that they can be kept well-informed of activities, achievements and prospects of the Commission.

Commission. ECA's credibility will be maintained at a high level through activities that will influence the perception of partners vis-à-vis the Organization. (17) To ensure that adequate resources are directed towards the fund-raising programme, clear targets that can be monitored will be set on a regular basis. They will be thoroughly evaluated periodically for necessary adjustment and modification of strategies.

III. REINFORCEMENT AND INTENSIFICATION OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH ECA'S CONSTITUENCIES

(18) Maintaining and reinforcing excellent relationships with ECA's principal constituencies is one key element emphasized by the resolution under review. During the past year, ECA took several measures to promote the realization of this goal in its dealings with African Governments, other major regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

A. African Governments

(19) Reinforcement and intensification of relationships with African Governments is the centrepiece of ECA's operations. African Governments are the main beneficiaries of ECA's policy advice and analysis, but they are also a key source of funding for the Commission's activities through their regular budget and extrabudgetary contributions. During the past year, ECA used several avenues to promote and sustain dialogue with member States. It continued its briefing meetings with African Ambassadors in Addis Ababa and held others with African Ambassadors in Brussels, Geneva, Rome and New York. In the course of his official missions to African countries, the Executive Secretary had discussions with senior government leaders in the various countries.

(20) At the same time, ECA has continued to help African countries as a group in articulating African common positions on many international policy issues, in particular, preparatory to major international conferences. Thus, ECA played a major role in the development of an Africa common position on the African Environment and Development Agenda preparatory to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development [the Earth Summit] held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 1992. ECA is presently helping to develop African common positions preparatory to the International Conference on Population and Development to be held in Cairo in 1994, the World Social Summit, 1995 and the fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in 1995.

B. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Development Bank (ADB)

21. ECA has been equally active in fostering cordial relationships with OAU and ADB, the two other major regional organizations in Africa. Together, and in the exercise of their respective mandates, these three organizations have major responsibility in promoting economic and social development, regional integration and an enabling environment of harmonious political relationships. Consultations and coordination among the three organizations continued during the year through the vehicles of the OAU/ECA/ADB joint secretariat and the biannual meetings of the heads of the three organizations. During their December 1992 meeting in Abidjan, the three heads reviewed, *inter alia*, the international economic and political situation and its implications for Africa; progress towards the establishment of the African Economic Community and other initiatives on economic integration in Africa.

C. Subregional organizations

22. The ECA Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) are located in the five subregions of Africa where major intergovernmental subregional economic groupings have been established over the years with ECA's help. In addition to the ECA secretariat helping to organize meetings for the intergovernmental organizations, the MULPOCs now have the responsibility of working in close

collaboration with them. Through close consultations, the priorities of the subregions are defined and are used as the basis for the draft work programme of the MULPOCs. This is then approved for implementation by both the intergovernmental Committee of experts of the MULPOCs and the ECA Conference of Ministers. Through this method of work, the MULPOCs are reinforcing the links between ECA and the intergovernmental organizations.

D. Non-governmental organizations

23. The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Africa are another important constituency of ECA. To strengthen relationships with non-governmental organizations, ECA created, during the year, a focal point for popular participation in development funded as a project by the Federal Republic of Germany. The other activities of this project are: the publication of a biannual newsletter entitled "People First" which is a vehicle for exchange of ideas and concepts as well as a forum for dialogue among people's organizations; the carrying out of two baseline surveys on the state of popular participation in development and sustainable development and supporting two small-scale demonstrative projects to enhance grass-roots participation in areas related to sustainable development in two pilot countries, namely Namibia and Uganda; and providing assistance in the publication of two national newsletters on sustainable development in the pilot countries.

E. Private associations and the private sector

24. The Commission is committed to reinforcing its activities for the promotion of the private sector and professional associations in Africa. In addition to professional organizations with which ECA already has close collaboration, the Commission is working with associations of women entrepreneurs in individual countries towards launching the federation of African women entrepreneurs. Work is progressing in preparation for the establishment of the African bank for women. The establishment of this bank should facilitate increased access to credit for women which, in turn, will accelerate the process of their integration in development. A progress report on the establishment of the federation and the bank is before the Conference.

IV. ECA OPERATIONAL ARMS AND ECA-SPONSORED INSTITUTIONS

25. ECA's operational arms, the MULPOCs and the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), serve to operationalize ECA activities at the subregional and individual country levels, particularly in the areas of furthering regional cooperation and integration. Following resolution 726 (XXVII), specific measures have been taken to strengthen them as discussed briefly below:

A. The MULPOCs

26. Resolution 726 (XXVII) recommended that the MULPOCs be further strengthened through the redeployment of resources and through a clear definition of their role and functions with respect to technical assistance and advisory services to member States within the framework of the subregional intergovernmental organizations. In the context of the restructuring exercise and in conformity with the resolution, adequate resources will be deployed to enable the MULPOCs to become veritable focal points for the collection, analysis and dissemination of information on all aspects of economic cooperation and integration. As mentioned above, the MULPOCs will programme their own activities in close consultation with the subregional IGOs who will establish their priorities. The activities of the MULPOCs will be programmed in close collaboration with the substantive divisions of the secretariat. Their activities will therefore be complementary to the work programmes of the substantive divisions, particularly with respect to the implementation of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community and other activities of economic integration. The 1994-1995 programme of work fosters this new dynamism through better focus and linkage of the expanded set of activities of the MULPOCs both with the ECA secretariat and MULPOC constituencies.

27. Renewed support for strengthening of IDEP has come from three different sources: ECA regional advisers and other experts to help implement IDEP's research and training programmes in the past year; member States that have increased the number of nominees to the institution's regular training programmes (152 applicants have been received from 34 countries from all the subregions), increased their requests for advisory services from IDEP, and paid their assessed contributions which attained an all-time record in 1992; and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which now seems positively inclined to finance projects in research, consultancy, networking, short-term training and internal management audit. IDEP itself is making attempts to diversify its funding sources even as it continues to push for the inclusion of its professional posts in the United Nations regular budget.

C. ECA-sponsored institutions

28. Resolution 726 (XXVII) recommended that the ECA Executive Secretary, in close collaboration with the Secretary-General of OAU, examine the "problems and constraints facing the ECA-sponsored institutions and ... make concrete proposals aimed at alleviating (them) including consideration of such options as the merging of some of the institutions". The study on rationalization of the institutions that is before the Conference at its present meeting has been prepared in response to the resolution.

V. STRENGTHENING ECA'S TEAM LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION ROLE AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL FOR UNITED NATIONS ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA

29. In 1977, the General Assembly adopted resolution 32/197 on "Restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system". The resolution has been the most far-reaching statement by the General Assembly on the role of the regional commissions within the system. In it, the General Assembly decided that the regional commissions should, among other things, serve as the main general economic and social development centres within the United Nations for their respective regions; strengthen relations between themselves and the organizations of the United Nations system; function as executing agencies for intersectoral, subregional, regional and interregional projects; and provide inputs for the global policy-making processes of the United Nations and participate fully in the implementation of the relevant policy decisions. Paragraph 20 of the annex to the resolution stipulates specifically that the regional commissions, "taking into account the special needs and conditions of their respective regions ... should exercise team leadership and responsibility for coordination and cooperation at the regional level. They may convene periodic meetings, as necessary, for the purpose of improving the coordination of the relevant economic and social activities of the United Nations system in their respective regions."

30. These far-reaching mandates have, of course, so far been implemented only to a limited extent, principally because the delegation of the necessary authority and the provision of resources foreseen in the resolution did not take place. The relevance of the mandates is, however, increasingly mirrored in recent decisions related to the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations. The current frame of reference for enhancing the role of the regional commissions derives mainly from the recent presentations of the Secretary-General to both the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the General Assembly of his expressed intention to "strengthen the regional commissions". The point of departure for this strengthening is increasingly being seen in the context of decentralizing to the commissions those activities that can be more efficiently implemented at the regional level and the concept of greater coordination at the regional level.

31. Team leadership and coordination have particular significance for Africa where the planning and programming environment is characterized by 51 member States with varying sets of economic and social problems and who have to deal often separately with a multiplicity of partners including not only United Nations system agencies but also other multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental organizations. The

number of these organizations and the assistance they provide have been increasing as the diversity and scope of their activities have widened causing confusion, sometime duplication and often waste.

32. In its 1982 report on ECA, the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) states that, "ECA is well situated to perform a coordinative programming role. It has accumulated more than 20 years of experience with African economic and social development problems, and has become the primary source of basic socio-economic data on Africa. Its research, conference and seminar activities, together with its institution-building work throughout Africa, have given it an intimate knowledge of the requirements and potential for African development. Its emphasis on regional cooperation and integration is strengthened by its activity in all major development sectors. It has a predominantly African staff schooled in the problems of the continent." The function of providing continuity between early warning systems, peace-keeping negotiations, and reconstruction, rehabilitation and long-term development is another role that is already present at the Commission which must be fostered through greater coordination.

33. In the discharge of its coordinating functions, ECA has forged joint programming and formal working links with a number of specialized agencies and other units of the United Nations system including in particular the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) with which it operates a joint division; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) with which it undertakes joint programmes harmonized through regular joint concertation meetings; the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the former Centre on Transnational Corporations which provide funds for some of ECA's activities in their respective areas of interest; the World Bank, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in matters concerning the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa (UNTACDA); and the World Health Organization (WHO) which, like UNDP, has a liaison office with ECA located at ECA headquarters. ECA's cooperation with UNDP has grown and expanded not only in terms of the scope of mutually supportive activities that have been undertaken for the benefit of member States, but in terms of the use UNDP has made of the Commission's "development centre" and "team leadership" roles in establishing priorities and orientations for intercountry programmes.

34. All these links together with several others established with other agencies within the United Nations system such as the Bretton Woods institutions and outside such as with OAU, ADB, other African intergovernmental organizations and other multilateral and bilateral programmes are progressively being deepened and extended. The Commission needs now to be given the required authority and resources to make coordination a reality. The Inter-agency Task Force which oversees the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) has considerable potential in this regard. The Task Force should be suitably strengthened both in terms of authority and the level of representation to be able to play an active role as catalyst for joint planning and programming and for the coordinated establishment of system priorities, the allocation of resources and the implementation of programmes.

35. At the subregional level, the Commission's five MULPOCs also suitably strengthened as is the intention, should, with their separate high-level intergovernmental technical committees, provide the focal points for the coordination and integration of United Nations intercountry activities at the subregional level.