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GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR THE  
TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS DECADE IN AFRICA  
(1978-1988)

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General strategy for the Transport and Communications Decade in Africa

A. Definition of the strategy

1. A strategy is a plan of co-ordinated activities to achieve an objective or objectives laid down. Document E/CN.14/ECO/90/Rev.3, "Revised plan of action for the establishment of the new international economic order in Africa, 1976-1981-1986", defines the global development objectives in Africa for the Decade 1976-1986 and the strategy to achieve them.
2. Consequently, the first task is to define the general and sectoral objectives in transport and communications, formulate strategy which properly reflects the principles of the new international economic order and assess the resources necessary to implement programmes of the Transport and Communication Decade in Africa.
3. In view of the already existing multinational co-operation among African countries at sub-regional, and regional levels in joint development projects, the establishment of a general strategy for the Decade may not be very difficult. Instead, the onus lies on the ECA in the choice and technical analysis of projects with the most integrative economic impact in Africa and persuasive presentation of these to the meeting of Ministers for approval and implementation during the Decade. In one view, the overriding primary objectives for the decade would be independence, self-confidence (self-reliance) and regional co-operation.
4. This means that at the national level the countries should possess their own material, technical, administrative and financial resources and manage their transport and communications services themselves; and that they must, at the international level, whenever it is socially and economically justified, pool these facilities and develop the international transport and communications networks for the benefit and welfare of the African peoples.
5. These objectives must be reflected in each of the modes of transport (road, rail, maritime, inland water and air ....) and communications (telecommunications, radio, television, post) in the adoption of a strategy followed by concrete activities to be carried out in a co-ordinated manner to achieve the objectives laid down. This strategy must, in each of the subsectors mentioned above, concern (i) the training of administrative and technical staff, (ii) the establishment of transport and communications infrastructure, (iii) the establishment of national transport and communications industries, (iv) the adoption of appropriate and harmonized legislation, particularly in the field of international transport (v) the establishment of national policy centres for the development of transport and communications and (vi) creation in ECA of an African centre for transport and communications studies working with these national Centres.

B. Concrete measures to be carried out during the Decade

Road transport

6. The African road network is at present rather undeveloped. It is made up first and foremost of seasonal earth roads. If one considers the roads open to traffic all year subject to a few restrictions, the parameters indicate that the backwardness of the African continent in this respect is still substantial. Thus for 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> of area, there are 3 to 60 km of asphalt and/or improved earth roads, the lowest figures corresponding to the very small countries such as the Gambia, for example; while in the countries of Western Europe the road density is of the order of 1,500 km of asphalt roads for 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>; this is the case, for example, for the Federal Republic of Germany, France and Great Britain.

7. Not only is the infrastructure inadequate, but the general condition of the network of both asphalt and earth roads often leaves much to be desired in many countries. Maintenance is insufficient if not poor and irregularly carried out, generally because of the very limited number and quality of technicians, equipment; and lack of financial resources.

8. These considerations also apply to the few existing international highways whose primary role is to promote economic and social exchanges among neighbouring countries. They are often less maintained than the national roads and can bear a substantial volume of traffic only with difficulty.

9. Thus the following measures are advocated:

(a) Final construction and improvement of the major international highway, the links between all the African capitals and the feeder roads, so as to permit easy movement. It would be desirable that before the end of the Decade all the major African highway should be fully asphalted and operational.

(b) Training of design engineers and road technicians: - this is all the more essential as the present training provided overseas is very costly and does not permit the training of a large number of staff and is not always suited to the technological and environmental conditions in which African technical staff have to work. In order to create viable and suitable training institutions in view of the limited resources of the countries, special stress should be placed on multi-national establishments jointly financed by the countries concerned and obliged to accept students from all these countries.

(c) For the harmonious development of each country, assistance be given to national efforts at development of rural roads serving areas of high agricultural productivity.

- (d) As far as international road transport is concerned, apart from the need to co-ordinate efforts to construct the network and provide it with reasonable geometric and technical specifications, it is an urgent task to harmonize the various national highway codes and road signs/signals, adopt similar load weights, standardize border crossing formalities, and apply all the conventions relating to international roads such as the TIR Convention, etc....
- (e) Development of vehicle assembly plants in Africa and repair and maintenance garages.

Maritime transport

10. Almost 90 per cent of African traffic in goods and merchandise is currently effected by sea; 97.5 per cent of this maritime traffic is itself carried by non-African liner conferences which have shared the whole of the continent among themselves in areas over which they exercise a near-monopoly: fixing freight rates for the various products; and determining unilaterally the transport conditions, without or almost without any consultations with the shippers and the countries. Each "conference" in fact is a kind of "closed club" determined to maintain its privileges and advantages at all costs, and using all kinds of means to limit intervention of the countries they serve. Thus the Code of conduct for liner conferences prepared under the auspices of UNCTAD is encountering the opposition of many developed maritime countries. This Code of conduct, which is very favourable to the developing countries, introduces the Right for these countries of shipping 40 per cent of their own fleets and leaving 20 per cent to the shipping companies of third countries.

11. But even when the Code is ratified by all the Members of the United Nations, its application will require that the developing countries should have their own vessels, technicians and administrators to manage, administer and operate their shipping services themselves.

12. For all these reasons, the following actions appear essential for inclusion among the activities of this Decade under the maritime transport subsector:

- (a) Special emphasis must be placed on the development and improvement of the ports in Africa. One of the difficulties if not the most pressing problem in maritime transport, is inefficient ports operations; poor management; poor transport interpace at the ports, as well as poor radio links between ships on the high seas and the ports. It is important to distinguish between the inadequacy of physical facilities and the inefficiencies in port operations in designing solution to reduce the turnaround time of vessels.
- (b) Adoption of transport by containers, and development of multimodal transport, and of cabotage.

- (c) Adopt, ratify and ensure proper application of the code of conduct for liner conferences; make every effort to convince member States of the material and financial benefits of adopting the code.
- (d) Establishment of subregional and regional centres and institutes to train engineers, administrators, technical staff and skilled labourers in all the activities of maritime and river transport.
- (e) Establishment of regional and/or subregional shipping companies to enable the countries to apply the provisions of the Code of conduct for liner conferences. The setting up of a shipping company with vessels and technical and administrative personnel requires very substantial investment and presents considerable risks; the viability of such investment is closely linked to the management efficiency and guaranteed annual tonnage, since below a certain cargo tonnage threshold, the vessels generally operate at a loss. This fully justifies pooling of their technical facilities in setting up multinational companies which, by carrying the quotas of several countries, will result in viable operations.
- (f) Harmonization of the administrative and customs formalities of the ports and adoption of identical nomenclatures, documentation, etc., by all the countries. This will make it possible in particular to harmonize port statistics which should result in the establishment of a data bank and assist in rational planning and operational analysis.

#### Air transport

13. Air, like maritime transport, is a sector in which investment presents considerable risks of losses if a certain traffic threshold is not guaranteed. This seemed so well understood that many African countries had pooled their efforts and set up multinational air transport enterprises such as East African Airways and Air Afrique. Unfortunately and contrary to common sense and the need to strengthen these joint undertakings and co-operation to compete with the major extra-African airlines which continue to carry the largest part of the continent's international air traffic, many countries for political or often prestige reasons are abandoning these multinational companies and setting-up individual national companies which often operate below the profitability threshold.

14. Another problem is the poor distribution of airline routes, thus some countries are linked daily to Europe, America, even Asia, but have no air link or very few with certain region of the continent; other countries are only served irregularly with the result that it is often impossible to get there at short notice. This is the case in particular for certain land-locked countries which have no national airlines providing international services.

15. The Transport and Communications Decade in Africa should attach special importance to seeking and applying solutions to all these crucial problems. The activities suggested under the Decade should have the following objectives:

- (a) to regroup the small and inefficient African national airlines providing international flights, often on the same routes, and which are generally represented in the same towns; this regrouping could be effected within three or four major airlines of the Air Afrique type or the defunct East African Airways, which will be set up on a multinational (subregional or regional) basis;
- (b) or failing that, to prompt African countries to adopt multinational conventions harmonizing and distributing the activities of the various African airlines and to sign agreements to ensure that, firstly, all the countries are linked by regular flights to certain large African airports, and secondly, the companies operate in a more rational and more profitable manner;
- (c) to regroup the facilities of the countries in order to set up, on a subregional basis, institutes and centres for the training of flight engineers, pilots, aircraft mechanics, air traffic controllers etc.... In that regard, the Niamey School might be enlarged, the training specializations broadened and the training levels raised with assistance from the appropriate UN and other international organizations;
- (d) to promote development of air freight in Africa;
- (e) to promote pooling or sharing of ground facilities and services by the regional or national airlines.

16. For the proper co-ordination of the transport activities in the region, and for the promotion of intra-African transport during this Decade of Transport and Communications in Africa, in each of the four subregions, a Council of Ministers of Transport should be set up with a Permanent Secretariat.

#### Rail Transport

17. The economic progress of Africa is closely linked to the establishment of means of transport in the various countries, and to the communications between them. The means of communication are necessary between the economic centres. Beside the road and river traffic, the railway is also an important means of transport in most African countries.

18. To date, most of the African rail networks have been designed to transport mining products and goods from the interior of the country to the ports. The rail networks of several African countries have different technical specifications, and are not interlinked.

19. During the Decade of Transport and Communications, the following activities within the railway subsector should be carefully analysed and where feasible, implemented.

(a) Standardization of the following:

- gauge
- rolling stock structure gauge
- authorized weight per axle
- fraction system
- breaking system
- etc.....

(b) Linking together by conversion of standards the railways of various countries so as to develop international traffic; the elimination or mitigation of a number of differences is necessary first. Standardization is also necessary for the regulation of goods traffic, assessment of accident damage, and effective use of scarce technicians and expensive equipment.

(c) For future development, it is desirable that African countries should meet as soon as possible to create uniform proposals. The different countries should decide immediately on the regulations to be applied to the rails, the vehicles, the superstructure and the (railway land).

(d) Involvement of the Union of African Railways (UAR), is implied in all activities in the railway subsector.

#### River and Lake Transport

20. The major African rivers and lakes offer great potential particularly in the transport field, but to date most of them have not benefited from improvement works designed to regulate them and provide them with infrastructure to improve conditions of navigation or make them fully navigable. In many cases this is the result of the international status of these rivers and major lakes, which means that any important development necessarily requires a degree of co-ordination among the countries concerned, to ensure the safeguarding not only of the interests of each country but also of the potentialities in other areas of use. For example if the construction of a dam for hydroelectric purposes is required on such a river, the choice of site and the specifications of the structure will need to be determined taking into account the potentialities of the river for navigation and for other uses such as irrigation for example.

21. During the transport decade, special attention should be given to the major international rivers which offer possibilities for transport and can in particular serve land-locked areas or regions of the continent. Studies to determine all the conditions of navigability of these internal waterways should be carried out and the development plans formulated. The principal rivers and lakes on which activities during this period should focus are, on the one hand, the Nile, Senegal, Niger, Zambezi, Volta and Mano Rivers, and on the other lakes Chad, Tanganyika, Malawi, Victoria and Kariba.

Communications

22. The communications sector comprises:

- common carrier communication or/telephone/telegraph/telex communication
- the postal services
- broadcasting (radio and TV) communication.

23. With the completion of the design of panaftel in which ECA was involved, ECA now along with ITU, ADB and OAU are concerned with the Panaftel financing and construction of the network. Attention will therefore be concentrated on studies of the effects of new technologies on national networks, of alternative technologies for rural communications, and a joint study (UNESCO, ITU and OAU) of satellite communications (telephone, telex, telegraph, radio and television for information and educational purposes).

24. An ECA/ITU joint mission on telecommunication manpower development is expected to lead to a programme of institutional expansion and availability of skilled manpower.

25. A programme of action on the development of postal services (including the establishment of an African Postal Union) is expected to be established with UPU. It may include such aspects as mail routing, tariffs, expansion of postal services infrastructure in urban and rural areas and training programmes on a larger scale than envisaged in the current Work Programme.

26. For the Transport and Communications Decade, the following topics should be elaborated upon:

(a) Telecommunications

- Complete implementation of all the phases of the Panaftel network;
- Semi automatic interconnexion of the capitals of the African countries without extra-African transitting;
- Institution of operational compatibility, within Africa;
- Development of the Telecommunication industry in Africa;
- Strategy to meet manpower needs at all levels of skill including university professionally trained engineers over the decade;

(b) Postal services

- Development of postal services; infrastructure (in both urban and rural areas);

- Development of mobile rural mail services;
- Organization of multinational Transit centres;
- Strategy to meet manpower needs over the decade;
- Organization of international accounting among African countries.

(c) Radio and television

- Improvement and expansion of broadcasting infrastructure to assist in social and economic development effort particularly in rural communities;
- Facilities for exchange of programmes;
- Development of a multi-national satellite communication system for common carrier and broadcasting communications.