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TRADE INTELLIGENCE

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1. Efficient trade policy and a good performance in foreign trade are unconceivable without an accurate and up to date supply of information on all the relevant aspects of international trade. As far as the Government and semi-public bodies are concerned the function of collecting, classifying and presenting such information is generally best performed by some kind of intelligence unit.
2. The raison d'être for any Government intelligence unit is to provide the basis for recommendations on policy issues confronting the Government. In the trade field this implies keeping the Government bodies informed about relevant **trade** and trade policy developments, including commodity policy issues. Such an intelligence service may take various forms, from the issuance of regular current reviews to the servicing of ad hoc requests from Government bodies. It could also perform a useful service in preparing material necessary for briefing of officials participating in various international negotiations.
3. The Unit may be a full fledged research Unit in the field allotted to it, or it may just aim at keeping up to date and distributing complete records of news items on the relevant questions, thus leaving the analysis and the policy evaluations to other bodies. If the latter solution is adopted, countries with rather limited resources may find it advisable to centralize in a single unit all documentation and intelligence work on economic questions without restricting it to trade. The following remarks cover only the collection and presentation of trade information. This does not mean that the evaluation and assessment of the data provided are less essential. It is, however, felt that this does not raise special administrative problems in most African countries. The first task is on the other hand not performed in such a systematic way, and in quite a number of cases no arrangements exist at all. Little is known about the set-up in the various member and associate member states. The Secretariat has therefore prepared a questionnaire which may be

submitted after discussion to member Government in order to enable the Secretariat to assess the situation and to improve its assistance in this field. A draft of the questionnaire is annexed to this paper.

4. Many of the necessary elements of an intelligence unit already exist in several African countries. Thus, there is frequently a Government library and several services, particularly statistics and research departments, have some kind of reference service with at least a modest collection of documents, newspapers and periodicals. In a few countries there is also some effort made to keep officials informed about acquisitions and/or important articles and newspaper cuttings.

5. There are, mostly in Western Europe and the USA, a large number of agencies who supply on a commercial basis trade information, either general or specialized. Similar services are furthermore performed on a non-profit basis by certain international and national bodies.

6. The ECA started this year the publication of a Foreign Trade Newsletter, which it intends to issue four times a year. It is based primarily on cuttings from newspapers and periodicals. It is hoped, however, that later on correspondents will be nominated in most African countries in order to enable the Newsletter to present an as accurate and comprehensive account of events to foreign trade officials as possible. The Newsletter gives information on trade policy matters of concern to African countries, including tariffs and quotas, trade agreements, marketing of produce, trade promotion etc. This is in other words a very broad service which does not intend to cater for the specific needs of each Government. The Trade Section of the ECA may nevertheless be prepared to help the Governments on specific questions in which a sufficiently large number of Governments are interested.

7. Specialization in particular problems of interest to individual Governments can, however, best be carried out in national units equipped for this job. Such units should normally be able to inform more efficiently and promptly than an outside body. The ready availability of adequately

classified information is of particular importance for any research department.

8. The ECA would be happy to help Governments in member and associate member states in reorganising or setting up of intelligence units. There are two fields where the ECA already could provide some assistance, particularly if the questionnaire enables it to complete its documentations: a) a list of the most useful sources, classified by subject, b) advice on filing arrangements (classification and techniques of filing). There are undoubtedly quite a range of subjects where the resources of the individual countries are not sufficient to justify their maintaining services of their own. In such cases it may be envisaged services organized on a regional or a sub-regional basis.

DRAFT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are there any economic intelligence units in your country?
 - (a) Specialized in trade
 - (b) General
2. What is the administrative status of each of the units mentioned above?
3. What is their budget?
4. Do they have their own collection of:
 - (a) books
 - (b) documents
 - (c) newspapers and periodicals
5. Do they perform any of the following services:
 - (a) newspaper cutting
 - (b) cards on newspaper/periodical articles
 - (c) classified files of a) and b)
 - (d) lists of books and documents received
 - (e) regular publication of reference material
 - (f) answers to ad hoc requests
6. Do they have access to unpublished sources of documentation (official reports and other internal communications)?
7. Give a list of periodicals and newspapers which are regularly monitored by the services?
8. What are the relations between these units and research departments and policy making bodies?

9. Are any formal relationships established with:

- (a) similar agencies abroad
- (b) non-governmental local agencies
- (c) trade and business

10. Enumerate difficulties and obstacles encountered.
