

47692

Distr.
LIMITED

ECA/NRD/MIN. 80/Inf. 3
6 December 1980

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Regional Conference on the Development
and Utilization of Mineral Resources
of Africa

Arusha, Tanzania, 2-6 February 1981

Experience Derived in Establishing a Regional Mineral
Resources Development Centre

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I. Introduction

The Eastern and Southern African Mineral Resources Development Centre (ESAMRDC) is one of a network of regional and subregional technical institutions sponsored by the Economic Commission for Africa and established as a result of a specific request by the governments of the Eastern and Southern Africa subregion. It is a forerunner of other to be created in Central, Western and Northern Africa.

The Centre is an independent, intergovernmental, non-profit making organization, headquartered in Dodoma, the United Republic of Tanzania. The member States of this subregion are eighteen and they include Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Actual participating member States at present however are Comoros, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda.

II. Brief Historical Background

The Centre came into force as a result of signature in June 1976 by Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tanzania of the Agreement establishing the former East African Mineral Resources Development Centre. The Inaugural Meeting of the Governing Council of the Centre was convened in Dar es Salaam from 12-14 September 1977. Comoros became the fourth statutory member State during that meeting. However, ten governments at high level were represented in that Meeting and without exception they expressed their total support for the creation of the Centre and its practical objectives, indicating meanwhile their interest in full participation before long. In the words of one celebrated delegate "...you are preaching the gospel to the converted...". The final document was unanimously adopted after a detailed examination, discussion and some amendments of the Working Papers. Representatives of governments who attended the meeting and who were not contracting parties to the Centre were urged to request their governments to sign the Agreement establishing the Centre "preferably by 15 November 1977".

III. Need for Regional Mineral Resources Development Centres

Even though the need for the creation of such a Centre was very obvious and the timing could not have been more appropriate, the ECA engaged in 1974 its own experts coupled by two outside consultants to form a team which was charged to study the feasibility of establishing the ESAMRDC and identify its requirements. This team of qualified experts visited eight countries and compiled facts for its mission, based on inventories of facilities and capabilities of existing institutions dealing in mineral resources and their activities, quality and quantity of available manpower in the mineral industry and related academic institutions.

This mission demonstrated the existence of such a need and strongly recommended the establishment of this multinational Centre. The mission brought to focus the inadequacy of existing laboratory facilities, lack of basic equipment, shortage of skilled and trained manpower, lack of spare parts for acquired machinery and general absence of liaison with similar institutions in the neighbouring countries.

IV. Justification for the Centre

The subregion is not poor in mineral wealth. Besides the known mineral deposits whose viability was assessed by transnational corporations there are areas with potential mineral occurrences and other areas not yet investigated. Criteria used by transnationals to classify the economic viability of a deposit is a separate topic on its own merit. However, except in a couple of cases, minerals contribute a very small share in the economic development of these countries.

Efforts of individual governments for the exploration of these areas must be co-ordinated through co-operation on subregional level, in view of costs and other factors involved. Training facilities for upgrading the skills of technical and professional staff through specialized courses do not exist in most countries of the subregion. The majority of these countries taken individually lacked the necessary capital, skilled manpower and technology to assess their mineral resources endowments accurately and to use such information for effective resources planning and utilization purposes.

Among many other resolutions the ECA Conference of Ministers at its meeting of 22 February 1973 adopted resolution 238(XI) on Africa's Strategy for Development in the 1970's which inter alia, reads as follows, "...In addition, resources should be pooled to establish Centres on subregional basis for undertaking research in such fields as mineral economics, ore-dressing technology, etc. to back step African mining undertakings...."

V. Objectives

The objectives of the Centre are practical and they are the following:

- (a) Advisory and operational services and guidance, upon request, in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of geological and mineral exploration projects;
- (b) Advisory services, upon request, relating to technical and economic prefeasibility studies for the development of mineral resources;
- (c) Short practical courses for technical and professional people in the field of applied geology, geochemistry, geophysics, hydrogeology and mining technology to complement the training provided by universities and other institutions;

(d) Specialized laboratory services, upon request, in the field of mineral exploration and development to supplement national and other non-national laboratories in the contracting member States.

(e) Services for the collection, processing and dissemination of data and information, including publications and maps, on mineral exploration and development;

(f) Promotion of technical co-operation, transfer of technology and exchange of data and information in the field of mineral development among the countries of the subregion and African countries in other subregions; and

(g) Any other services relating to mineral resources development as decided upon by the member States.

VI. Status of the Centre

(a) Mannpower

The ESAMRDC officially launched its operation Phase One activities as of July 1980. In addition to the Director-General and the UNDP assigned Chief Technical Adviser, three other experts from the UNDP source, two from the subregion, one from other donors and one seconded by ECA have already assumed their responsibilities in Dodoma. In the first quarter of 1981, five additional experts are expected to join the Centre. If everything goes well, ten more will be joining the group by the end of the phase in June 1982.

(b) Budget

Eventhough concrete commitment from bilateral donors is lacking, it has been realistically estimated that a total of approximately \$US 3.3 million input is required as operational budget for Phase One. This figure does not include fund required for the premises and other infrastructure of the Centre. Also, only minimal allocations have been made for basic equipment.

(c) Premises and Equipment

Presently the Centre operates out of offices temporarily allocated to it by the host government. However, the complete architectural and engineering design of the premises of the Centre is ready along with the tender documents. Soon a special meeting of Donors to the ESAMRDC will be convened and a plea will be made for their assistance in this crucial matter. At current rates the building is estimated to cost \$US 6.5 million including furniture. Additional \$US4.0 million will eventually be required for the technical equipment.

(d) Plan of work

The plan of work of the Centre is basically drawn from actual request put forth by its contracting member States. This of course is complemented by regional programmes conceived by the Economic Commission for Africa and by the Centre itself. Co-operation with international organizations dealing with earth sciences like the IGCP and with regional bodies such as the Geological Society of Africa will always be fostered and maintained.

(e) Complimentarity of Staff

A counterpart system will be adopted, wherever possible. This means that for every expert provided by Donors, a subregional professional will be assigned, who will be the executive head of his department, division or section. The expert from the donor source will act as a technical adviser. It falls upon the Centre to provide administrative support for the whole team.

(f) Grand Strategy

Experience that will be gathered during the establishment and operation of the ESAMRDC will serve as a guiding light for others to be established. The eventual aim is to make the Centre financially independent and self-sufficient, which it will attain by starting to charge for its services. This stage will be reached optimistically after six to eight years from the date it became operational.

VII. Operational Difficulties

(a) The Subregional member States

Reaction to visits by officials of the Centre to most of the countries and to a string of correspondence to them to remind them of their obligation and to solicit their participation in the Centre can only be judged as apologetic giving one excuse or another for their inaction. Prodding at higher level has not met with better luck either. Following are some of the most recent recommendations in this connection by some higher bodies.

(i) Council of Ministers of MULPOC

The Third Meeting of the Council of Ministers of MULPOC for Eastern and Southern African States convened in Gaborone, Botswana, from 28-29 January 1980 and attended by the Executive Secretary of the ECA expressed its concern at the slow rate at which the member States of the subregion were participating in the ESAMRDC. The Council "...emphasized that once member States took decisions to establish and operate subregional institutions, they should honour their obligations in terms of their provision of political and material support to the institutions". The Council also decided to "recommend to the countries of the Lusaka-based MULPOC which have not yet signed and ratified the Agreement on the establishment of the ESAMRDC to do so, in order to facilitate its operation".

Eventhough Kenya and Zambia have formally informed the Centre that they would sign the Agreement hopefully before the end of the year, only one country, Uganda, became the fifth statutory member State since the Inaugural Meeting of the Governing Council.

(ii) Economic Summit of OAU Heads of State and Government

The "Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy of the Economic Development of Africa" adopted by the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government at their Second Extraordinary Session held in Lagos, Nigeria from 28 to 29 April 1980 recommended that "those states members of the Eastern and Southern African subregion not yet participating in the subregional mineral resources centre based in Dodoma (United Republic of Tanzania) should do so by the end of 1980".

(iii) Bureau of the Governing Council

Acting on the directive of the Bureau of the Governing Council of the Centre which convened on 10 June 1980 in Addis Ababa the Executive Secretary of the ECA in his letter of 28 July 1980 reminded all subregional governments of the above-referred-to Plan of Action and the recommendations which was adopted by the Heads of State and Government seeking their ratification of the Agreement establishing the ESAMRDC. So far, only Zambia reacted positively to the above letter.

(iv) Points for Consideration

- One would like to pose the following questions—What formula should be devised whereby proclamations, resolutions and recommendations adopted by high government personalities in international, regional and intergovernmental form, in order for those pronouncements to be honoured?
- Is there really a genuine belief in the philosophy of regional co-operation or in the idea of collective self-reliant, self-sustaining socio-economic development?

(v) - If it is realized that mineral resources constitute an indispensable base for all kinds of development, how can we then afford to relegate it to the background, leaving it to the mercy of those who entertain intrinsic interest for selfish exploitation? In other words how can we expect to exercise real, effective and permanent sovereignty over our mineral wealth when we pay lip service to the vehicles that will enable us eventually to just do that?

- For example, a prerequisite to knowing a country's mineral wealth is a systematic inventory of mineral resources with little regard to their worth - because the worthiness of a deposit is a relative factor and depends on the criteria used for such classification.

- To go a step further, it is true that there is a built-in element of risk capital involved when one talks of mineral exploration. Plan for such expenditure, however, must be made with full awareness of its consequences. And, it is not unusual that one successful venture out of ten will more than compensate for previous losses.
- There is a chronic complaint in many circles of our developing countries, to the effect that there are so many priorities with only limited resources to cater for them. While this problem is often very real we should perhaps bear in mind also that untimely frugality sometimes results in the non-wisdom of saving a penny to spend the pound.
- Finally, we should be aware that we are striving to borrow mundane technology at a time when the industrialized world is on the verge of a breakthrough in the development of appropriate technology for exploitation of deep sea resources and has embarked on an advanced research for outer space. An October 1979 Mining Magazine article predicts that by the year 2000 "it can be expected that deep ocean mining for the recovery of polymetallic nodules and their contents of copper, nickel, cobalt and manganese will already be an established and fast expanding sector of the industry served by a growing cadre of specialists".
- In conclusion it sounds all the more urgent that we immediately co-operate to jointly put an end to the perpetual dependence, which threatens to become a way of life, on foreign capital, skill and technology in this vital sector of natural resources. This can be achieved only through creating indigenous capabilities and by pooling resources.

(b) Donors

Prior to the convening of the Inaugural Meeting of the Governing Council of the ESAMRDC, the UNECA in its capacity as the sponsoring organization of the ESAMRDC had contacted potential donors and UN Agencies to find out their views on the proposed establishment of the Centre and the likelihood of their participation in the provision of required moral and material assistance to it. Encouraging response was received which was translated into figures and appropriately termed "Anticipated" Budget Estimates in the document entitled "Report of the Inaugural Meeting of the Governing Council".

(i) First Donors Meeting

At the first Meeting of Donors to the ESAMRDC which immediately followed the Inaugural Meeting of the Governing of 12 - 14 September 1977, the Executive Secretary of the ECA informed the donors that the countries of the subregion were seeking their assistance in obtaining for the Centre resources then estimated at \$US 5 million. This was to be matched by an estimated \$US 4 million from the contributions by governments. The meeting

was attended by representatives of 11 potential donor countries, the EEC, and United Nations agencies. Donors were requested to maintain their future contacts with the UNESCO in respect to their offer of assistance to the Centre.

The Office of the Chairman of the Governing Council and the Centre itself tried hard to keep the momentum by keeping regular contact with donors through personal calls, distribution of Circulars and Explanatory Notes and finally by convening a Second Meeting of Donors, on 29 May 1979 in Dar es Salaam.

(ii) Second Donors Meeting

The Second Donors Meeting was convened in Dar es Salaam on 29 May 1979 and was attended by representatives of 15 potential donor countries, the EEC, UNDP and ECA. Detailed requirements of the Centre in laboratory buildings, equipment and manpower, both long and short term, were distributed to donors well in advance of the meeting. During the meeting, the Chairman of the Governing Council reviewed the status of the Centre and emphasized the importance of donors' assistance especially for the laboratory buildings and equipment. He told donors that a total of US \$ 5 million was required for Phase One of two years, of which US\$3.5 million was anticipated to come from donor sources including fund for the first stage of laboratory buildings. In addition, the Chairman told donors that he was well aware that longer time was perhaps needed by Donors to get official response from their respective governments and he requested them to do everything they could to let him know of their definitive positions soon thereafter.

(iii) Response of Donors

From actual experience, it is only fair to label the response of donors as lukewarm at best, except for UNDP and the Government of Belgium. Donors tend to look over each other's shoulders and impart a sense of hesitancy. A few seem to dwell over the political orientation of the contracting member States. Yet others tend to worry over the number of subregional countries who showed enough interest in the Centre by signing the Agreement establishing it.

Seven donors expressed their token support by promising to assign experts to the Centre. Two donors had commissioned advisers to travel to Dodoma to discuss the requirements and assess the viability of the Project and recommend to their governments actions to be taken by them on this matter. One donor has already recruited an expert who is expected shortly in Dodoma. The second donor will very likely be assigning an expert early in 1981. On the rest, one donor reneged on its written commitment while another deferred fulfilment indefinitely. The remaining three have failed to commit their oral promise to paper, but continue expressing their willingness to assist. However, there are two refreshingly encouraging exceptions:

UNDP

This United Nations agency is the greatest benefactor to the ESAMRDC. From the outset it gave strong moral support to the establishment of the Centre and culminated it by approving nearly \$US 1.5 million for a Phase One period of two years beginning in July 1980. This is a package deal consisting of experts, equipment, fellowships and consultancy services.

The UNDP assistance to the ESAMRDC is the corner stone of the Project, and without that contribution the implementation of the Project would have been seriously hampered.

The Government of Belgium

A generous financial contribution was made by the Government of Belgium to the Centre and it must be mentioned that Belgium is the only bilateral donor who did so. The Second Governing Council Meeting of the Centre noted with deep appreciation the encouraging gestures of Belgium and expressed its gratitude to that Government for its generous contribution.

(iv) Major Obstacle

By far the greatest problem with donor representatives in Dar es salaam is their claim that their embassies deal only with bilateral assistance, to the country of their accreditation. It is in realization of this dilemma that the Bureau of the Governing Council in its Ad Hoc Meeting of 10 June 1980 decided to convene the next meeting of Donors in Addis Ababa. Apparently only the embassies accredited to Addis Ababa are in a position to discuss genuine and package aid for regional projects - presumably because of the location of the ECA and the OAU in that city and through which donor assistance to regional projects is normally channeled.

(v) Points for Consideration

- We are living in a world where the population is forecast to double in less than half a century and raw material demands at current rate of consumption will soon outstrip supplies in many sectors of natural resources.

- Whatever the reason, it should be pointed out that the Mineral Resources Development Centres established and to be established in the various parts of the Continent by the ECA constitute the only realistic and equitable framework for mutual co-operation between the largely under-developed producer nations of mineral raw material and the industrialized largely manufacturing consumer nations of the developed world. Meanwhile the reluctance of

transnations of the developed world.
transnations to co-operate in the establishment of these MRDC's is understandable, in what they essentially consider to be an encroachment on their long-enjoyed monopoly. But it will be a great disservice to Africa if we extend a helping hand for perpetuating our dependence on the unholy system that was imposed on us for so long.

- What we are trying to accomplish can in no way be called an over-ambitious scheme. In its final form of establishment, over a period of some eight years, the Centre shall have about sixty professional staff to render services for eighteen countries. But such an organization is a very common thing in individual countries, elsewhere.
- In this world of give-and-take the less-privileged partner in the association of the developing versus the developed seems to have put its cards on the table. The next move will be up to the other partner. Certainly, reasonable, lead-time has been given to potential donors to ponder over our request and come forth with their long-awaited assistance. In the event that contact with donors not producing the desired result we must resolve to mobilize our scarce resources and make determined sacrifices to stand on our own feet. Chances are very unlikely that we will ever regret having done that.

VIII. Concluding Remarks

The need is there for a regional Centre in mineral resources. Generally speaking there is also the political will for its establishment. However, there is growing uneasiness over low participation in the Centre by the governments of the subregion coupled with foot-dragging by donors in regard to meaningful assistance to the Centre. There is genuine fear that these factors may cause delay in the effectiveness of the Centre.

The concept of the Centre as a whole is a practical one. It demands however a big change in attitude from all parties involved in its realization. To the Economic Commission for Africa, as the sponsoring agency and the biggest supporter of the ESAMRDC to the United Republic of Tanzania as the host country and to the officials and staff of the Centre who have been delegated to make it a reality the task is nothing short of a challenge. In their struggle they need understanding, co-operation and moral and material support.