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THE RATIONALS AND MECHANISMS OF PLAN HARMONISATION

## THE RATIONALS AND MECHANISMS OF PLAN HARMONIZATION

Introduction

The suggestion that "economic co-operation" should be pursued by developing African countries as a means of fostering rapid socio-economic development is not new. In fact, this has been a very common theme in the last ten years among those interested in the development of African economies; and in the forefront has been the Economic Commission for Africa which found it necessary to create a spare centre of Economic Co-operation in its secretariat in 1970 as a final expression of its strong interest in economic co-operation as an element of the strategy of development in Africa.

2. Indeed, economic co-operation movement has a long history on the continent. The different forms of association - economic, monetary, political and technical, among the African countries during the colonial days were a testimony to the spirit of co-operation. The dissolution of some of these organizations on the attainment of independence has been regarded by many as a tragic event when they think of the enormous efforts now being expended in order either to revive old associations or create new ones.

3. The rediscovery of the need for co-operation has in the last ten years led to various suggestions regarding what forms of association are desirable. The suggestions have included complete economic integration backed by continental political union 1/, free trade area, customs union and common market 2/, and various forms of joint production planning 3/. An assessment of the activities of past and existing arrangements is the subject of another paper for this meeting 4/.

1/ See "Unity or Poverty?" by Reginald H. Green and Ann Seidman for an exhaustive and partionate plea for economic integration backed by political unity. See also Kwame Nkurumah, "Africa must unite", and political speeches by African leaders like President Julius Nyerere.

2/ See the articles of association of such organizations as East African Common Market, UDEAC, UDEAO, OCAM, etc..

3/ See the various studies made by the Economic Commission for Africa (A list is available), the articles of association of such organizations as Maghrebain Standing Consultative Committee, the UDEAC, OERS, etc., and "Approaches to African Economic Integration" by ECA. An abbreviated version appeared in Journal of Modern African Studies Vol. 1, No. 3 September 1963. See also R.H. Green and K.G.V. Krisna, "Economic Co-operation in Africa, Retrospect and Prospect."

4/ However, see Peter Robson, Economic Integration in Africa, George Allen and Unwin for a full discussion. See also Arthur Hozelwood, African Integration and Disintegration Royal Institute of International Affairs, Oxford.

The appropriateness of an expert meeting on Economic Co-operation  
at the threshold of the UN Second Development Decade

4. In view of the various activities that had taken place in the past and are still taking place now, it may reasonably be asked why an expert meeting on an aspect of economic co-operation was still found necessary at the beginning of the Second Development Decade. After all, existing activities are at least an indication of the acceptance of the theoretical justification for economic co-operation.

5. Such a question will be a legitimate one. And the answer to it may be the following. Economic co-operation is still regarded as a factor to be taken into account in the efforts to effect socio-economic development in the continent despite all past disappointments. There are some missing elements, mainly technical, in most of the existing efforts. Even if all the elements have been functioning properly, there may still be lessons to be learnt from their operations, so that future actions may be rightly guided. Those who know and are genuinely concerned with African socio-economic development continue to stress the importance of economic co-operation.

6. Thus, at its third session which was held in Addis Ababa in 1968, the Committee for Development Planning, the body responsible for organizing the intellectual work behind the United Nations Second Development Decade, after examining in some detail the problems of planning and plan implementation in the African region, had the following to say, "The creation of unified multi-national markets would make possible faster economic expansion and greater economic diversification of the African economy and particularly of its industry. It would also enhance productive efficiency by permitting increased specialization and the operation of industries on a more economical scale. Further it would help in overcoming barriers to development appearing in foreign trade with the developed parts of the world" <sup>1/</sup>.

7. In sum, the economic reasons behind the continued advocacy of economic co-operation for the countries of the region are the need for faster economic expansion, greater economic diversification of the African economy, particularly of its industry, enhancement of productive efficiency by permitting increased specialization and the operation of industries on a more economical scale, and lastly, the need to overcome barriers to development which have appeared in foreign trade with the developed parts of the world.

<sup>1/</sup> Official records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-fifth session, Supplement No. 7 (E/4515), paragraph 68. Quoted in "Economic Co-operation and Integration in Africa: Three case studies, United Nations Publications, Sales No.: E.69.II.K.7.

See also, "Co-operation for Economic Development of Eastern Africa" - Report of the Eastern African Team, United Nations Publication, Sales No.: E.71.II.A.3-11 Parts one to nine. Similarly, the West African Team's report.

8. Any examination of the plans of the countries of the region will confirm that these are among the main objectives aimed at by the governments. The difference is that the sponsors of economic co-operation affirm that the achievements of these objectives can be better attained within the context of unified and hence wider markets. And the achievements of economic objectives, which have so far left much to be desired seem to justify this claim. However, what are the basic reasons for thinking that these benefits can more easily be achieved within an integrated market?

#### The aims and scope of this paper

9. In view of the above, our aims in this paper can only be modest.

10. In the first place, we need to remind ourselves about the economic justification for economic co-operation so that our discussion of the characteristics of the existing arrangements, their achievements and failures may be properly guided. Secondly, we need to justify our approach in this seminar. For this a review of the characteristics of African economies and the achievements of development in the past is briefly undertaken.

11. Having justified the approach of "negotiated" division of labour, a review of the feasible areas is undertaken. This is followed by the suggestions on the appropriate institutional arrangements. The paper concludes with a recapitulation of the main lines of argument.

#### The theoretical foundation of the benefits of unified markets

12. We only need to remind ourselves that the conclusions of the committee for Development Planning summarized above are based on the theory of the customs union which rests on the benefits which are believed to derive from "bigness" or "largeness".

#### The traditional theory of customs union

13. Assuming the existence of the factors of production, their perfect utilisation and their mobility, and the existence of all the elements of perfect competition, the traditional theory of customs union asserts that the removal of trade barriers among countries in a union will enable the countries to maximize their combined real income. This will be so because the removal of obstacles will lead to a more rational allocation of resources, i.e. specialization, a result of the working of the principle of comparative advantage.

14. Moreover, the resulting unification of markets will enable the firms to grow to their optimum size, that is they will be able to produce at that level of subject where unit cost is lowest. This optimum size is achieved through the exploitation of the advantage of economies of scale. Large firms are capable of installing large plants for mass production. They are usually favoured by financial institutions which are always prepared to bail them out of any financial trouble. Similarly, they are capable of employing competent managers and salesmen who can always work to minimize costs.

The relevance of the traditional theory of customs union

15. As is well known, the relevance of this theory to the conditions prevailing in developing countries and to their legitimate objectives of structural transformation has been seriously questioned <sup>1/</sup>.

16. In the first place, less developed countries are deficient in the appropriate factors of production, and in some cases, they cannot even use effectively the few they have. Secondly, they are at different levels of economic development. Thirdly, their economies depend mainly on the export of raw materials whose prices have fluctuated precariously over time. Hence, what less developed countries need is the structural transformation of their economies through industrialization. Moreover, since few of these economies are complementary to one another, they all have to pursue a similar path of industrialization. And because of their individual limited resources and small market sizes, they will be able to achieve these ends more efficiently if they can unify their markets and industrialize behind tariff protection. Indeed, the justification for the use of "protection" tariffs has been based on this need to industrialize.

17. Moreover, industrialization does not only lead to structural transformation, and hence domestic stability, it also leads to the development of new skills, and the attainment of higher level of income. These arguments have formed the basis of import substitution strategy as a means of industrialization.

18. However, while import substitution succeeded to a certain extent in the sixties, it left much to be desired mainly because of its being based on the national market sizes which are mainly sub-optimal both technically and economically. The results have been high costs of production, duplication of industrial establishments, and hence excess capacities. These are some of the reasons why many people still believe that salvation lies in economic co-operation through the pooling of factor resources and markets.

19. But although the traditional theory of customs union is not strictly applicable to the conditions in and the immediate problems facing less developed countries, its conclusions on benefits are quite valid. The argument for economic co-operation in less developed countries is based on the possibility of achieving greater gains through co-ordinated

<sup>1/</sup> For a review of the relevant literature and the specific objections, see Peter Robson, "Economic Integration in Africa", Ibid pp. 1-3.

development that will lead to rational allocation of resources through the principle of comparative advantage, and the exploitation of economies of scale that will accompany the pooling of factor resources and markets.

#### Forms of Economic Co-operation

20. The possible benefits from economic co-operation have been indicated in the foregoing statement of the Committee for Development Planning. However, the volume of achievable benefits and the extent of equitable distribution depend on the form of organization adopted.

21. The main forms of economic co-operation are free trade area, common market and customs union, all of which can be subsumed under the term "trade liberalization"; economic union which implies that markets are integrated to the extent that for practical purposes the unified area can be regarded as a country; and partial integration either in terms of commodities, economic sectors or functions such as monetary union.

22. The traditional theory of customs union is really concerned with the benefits of liberalisation of trade barriers among the member countries of a union. And as we have seen, the assumptions are too static to be completely relevant to the situations in developing countries. In fact, the adoption of this approach can lead to the deepening of existing imbalances in development among union members. In effect, development poles develop within the union due to advantages existing before the union. The less developed members in the union tend to become "back waters" in a way. We have seen examples of this situation in the East African Common Market and the UDEAC. The result has usually been the adoption of stop-gap measures like the transfer tax of the Common Market and the "taxe unique" of the UDEAC in order to redress the imbalances. Unfortunately, such measures are mere palliatives.

23. The experience of such arrangements has led many people to suggest the adoption of full economic union. In particular, this line of approach stresses the point that the combined size of developing African countries' markets is barely equal to that of India alone in 1968, for instance. Unfortunately, this argument ignores the reality of the nation-state and its tenacious holding to "sovereignty". Complete economic union of Africa seems to be a utopian idea, at least at the present time.

#### The meaning and rationale of "plan harmonization"<sup>1/</sup>

24. "Plan harmonization" belongs to the third approach to economic co-operation mentioned above - partial economic integration. By "plan

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<sup>1/</sup> For a full discussion of the problems involved, see Economic Bulletin for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) Vol. XV, No. 3, December 1964.

harmonization" we mean "negotiated" division of labour or "agreed" specialization, or complementarity agreements". Its heart is the principle of comparative advantage both in its static and dynamic senses.

25. The primary of politics demands the adoption of this approach. Moreover, its adoption will lead eventually to the other forms of economic co-operation. This can work in two ways. First, agreements on products to be jointly produced for a unified market or to be produced by a country for a unified market are bound to lead to liberalization of trade in those products and the imposition of a protective tariff against third countries. Secondly, the fact that benefits will have to be large to be equitably shared demands that many projects be evolved. This situation is likely to lead to complete economic integration in the end, although it will take time.

26. Acceptance of the interventionist approach to economic development, i.e. the adoption of overall economic planning at the national level is incompatible with the adoption of laissez-faire attitude at the multi-national level. Any planning of production at the national level must be accompanied by planning for trade, especially foreign trade. It is interesting as well as disturbing to see how African countries plan for the sale of their industrial products in neighbouring or other countries on the continent without having agreed to it with those countries. Unfortunately, this practice has led to unnecessary duplication of plants with consequent excess capacities. The only way out is negotiated specialisation.

#### The scope of "plan harmonization"

27. We have argued above that "plan harmonization" is the best approach to economic co-operation and integration under the existing circumstances in the continent. It is now necessary to indicate the feasible areas of harmonization and the extent of their viability.

#### The characteristics of African economies

28. African economies are known to exhibit various forms of climatic conditions. Such a situation favours complementary productions between countries. In fact, the little intra-African trade that now exists is mainly between the savanna and subsaharan countries and those countries on the coast. Unfortunately, the policy of autarky among countries of the region, especially those on the coast has so far made it impossible for specialization to be undertaken on an efficient scale.

29. Similarly, African countries have abundant raw materials - agricultural and mineral, and energy resources. Undoubtedly, these resources form the basis of industrialization. But the situation at

present is that these commodities are exported raw or in semi-processed form. In fact, these are the areas favoured by foreign investors. The results have been fluctuating earnings due to unstable prices brought about by weakening demand. This stagnation or fall in demand has been the result of economies achieved in the use of raw materials because of advancement in science and technology, and the low income elasticity for agricultural products.

30. However, the products manufactured from these materials have sometimes got to be bought by the countries of the region at very high prices. This has led to adverse terms of trade with discouraging results on development efforts.

31. These are some of the reasons why it is being suggested that the search for expansion for markets should be directed into many directions especially domestic and intra-African markets.

32. Indeed, there are possibilities for joint development of rivers for agricultural, fishing and navigational purposes. The examples of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and the Organisation of Senegal River States, etc. come to mind easily.

33. Similarly, co-ordination of policies on specific commodities is also possible. The existing organizations like cocoa Producer's Alliance on cocoa, and the Groundnuts Council on Groundnuts, etc. can be extended to cover other commodities. These arrangements could be worked out within the existing sectoral commodities.

34. The difficulties of import substitution at the national level, a result of smallness of markets, the fact that it is becoming difficult in some countries to make further progress in this direction, and the fact that the next most profitable stage in the industrialization process could be in the heavy industry areas make rationalization of industrialization policies imperative.

35. The possibilities for co-ordination in the field of industrialization have always been stressed. In fact, a lot of studies exist in the area 1/.

36. Other areas for co-ordination are the large-scale operation of public utilities, and public services in which indivisibilities are important. Specifically, opportunities abound in the field of air and rail transport as well as road transport services based on operation over a wide area and the utilization of scarce manpower. Power generation and distribution is another feasible area. So also are arrangements for common administration in such areas as money and banking, higher education, and development of science and technology through research organizations. It is encouraging that some institutions already exist in these fields. However, further integration is needed, and new ones need to be established.

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1/ See the list of ECA documents.

37. In concluding this part of the paper it is necessary to stress the inevitable fact that unless benefits are big, plan harmonization may be impossible. And this point has implications for the scope of harmonization in terms of co-ordination of, for instance, industrial projects with transport projects and power generation and distribution projects. The absence of one may make the execution of the others non-feasible.

38. Similarly, the problem of the extent of plan harmonization in terms of the number of countries should be tackled. Fortunately, the approach advocated here is a flexible one. The guiding principle will be the interest of each country. Hence, it is possible for a country to harmonize its plan with various countries at the same time provided contradiction is avoided.

39. Finally, it is necessary to stress the point that the areas for co-operation can only be determined within the framework of national economic policy. They will be based on the findings of the analysis of the economic problems and potentialities of the particular countries. Hence, the need for long-term planning, a point which is further discussed below.

#### Mechanisms for plan harmonization

40. The case for plan harmonization has been argued above. The means for achieving its various objectives need to be discussed now.

#### The need for political decision

41. Plan harmonization inevitably involves some cession of political sovereignty. However, it recognises the primacy of decision-making process at the national level. Thus, we have argued that the need for economic co-operation and indeed for plan harmonization must derive from the analysis of individual countries' economic problems and potentialities. Though "in relation to the progress of economic integration national considerations are no doubt important. These are unlikely to prevail, however, except where a majority of those who make political decisions in the countries in question identify their personal and group interests with the interests which integration would promote, and also where the prospective benefits are sufficiently large to overcome the obstacles presented by the inevitable uncertainties which major changes in economic policy necessarily entail" <sup>1/</sup>.

42. Hence, even though economic planners as technicians, as a result of the analysis of the economic potentialities of their countries, may see advantages in economic co-operation, such co-operation will be impossible if the politicians do not give it their approval. This is an intrinsic part of the problem since the viability of projects depends on the use

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<sup>1/</sup> Peter Robson, Ibid.

of appropriate policies - monetary, fiscal and others. Moreover, the harmonized projects will have to form part of the overall economic policy of the countries that are partners in co-operation, and there will be need for agreements to be signed for the execution of the agreed projects.

43. In this connection, it will be useful to establish a policy-making body at the political level, namely, a Council of Ministers of Development Planning or Finance. The Council will be responsible for formulating policies on projects to be harmonized. This is already the practice in some existing institutions established for economic co-operation in the region like the East African Economic Community, and it is the practice in other regions.

#### Standing Committee of Experts

44. In order to service the Council of Ministers, by preparing relevant studies and executing projects already agreed upon, a secretariat staffed by experts in various fields will be needed. These officials will be the link between the national-planning offices and the Council of Ministers. They will also be the link between their own multi-national organizations, international organizations, bilateral aid donors and other international agencies interested in their projects.

45. In co-operation with the national planning organizations, international organizations and other interested agencies, the secretariat will make arrangements for joint studies of new projects for execution at the multi-national level. Of course, projects for multinational sponsorship could also be submitted by individual countries, or group of countries as is the practice in the Latin American Free Trade Association. Similarly, they will also arrange for review and appraisal of progress achieved in the field of co-operation.

46. These responsibilities will require joint analysis of the economies of the countries involved in the harmonization process to establish areas of potential harmonization. They will also require the standardization of definitions and concepts, and agreement on minimum contents of plans and probably in what form plans should be drawn up. Hence, the need for perspective planning, especially at the national level.

#### The need for financing institutions

47. One major reason for plan harmonization is the need for co-ordination of the use of scarce resources. This type of co-ordination is very important in the field of funds for development. Hence, it is necessary to establish financial arrangements for joint projects or for encouraging investments in areas where private investors are not interested, and the need for developing such areas as part of equitable distribution of benefits is crucial.

48. Such arrangements can take various forms. The public development corporations may serve the same purpose. A special development bank may be jointly established. So can a consortium of interested investors be formed.

#### Harmonization of monetary and fiscal policy

49. While it is possible for harmonization of plans to operate without monetary union or fiscal harmonization, and for these arrangements to exist without plan harmonization, there are many reasons for supposing that realization of full benefits of harmonization will at least need harmonization of monetary and fiscal policies if not their unification. One reason is that trade will have to follow the harmonization of plans especially in respect of those commodities that have been agreed upon.

50. Hence, the need for removing tariffs or quantitative restrictions and the establishment of fixed exchange rates. Similarly, in order to prevent inequitable distribution of investments, investment laws and tax concessions for investments will have to be harmonized. Finally, customs and excise duties will have to be harmonized if smuggling, and hence loss of revenue, is to be prevented.

#### The role of international organizations

51. Because of the immense resources (technical and financial) of international organizations and the weakness of the less developed countries in these areas, these organizations can do a lot to promote plan harmonization.

52. They can help mount specific studies. They can help organize meetings of experts of countries that may be interested in a project. They can help finance projects or obtain sources of finance for the projects. Indeed, they can help in working out suitable procedures for distributing benefits equitably.

53. In connection with these different possible assistances, it is necessary to mention the work of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, especially the numerous specialized studies that it had undertaken either singly or in collaboration with such organizations as the Food and Agriculture Organization or the United Nations Industrial Development Organization. A list of such studies is attached to this paper. At this moment a study on the problems of equitable sharing of benefits is underway at the Centre for Economic Co-operation. The results of such a study should be invaluable to multinational institutions in the continent.

54. Similarly, such institutions as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the African Development Bank, the OECD's European Development Fund and etc. have always supported multinational projects. The United Nations Development Programme is also a possible source. And it will be good if bilateral aid donors are encouraged to support multinational projects. Of course, a harmonization of markets is likely to attract the so-called multinational companies which are noted for their money and technical know-how and have penchant for large markets.

#### Conclusions

55. We have argued above that even though the assumptions which underlie the traditional theory of customs union and too static to be strictly applicable to the less developed countries, and that they ignore the dynamic character of economic growth, and the fact that technology does change comparative advantage, the benefits claimed for customs union are also the benefits expected to be achieved by economic co-operation in the developing countries. Surely, any unification of markets that does not lead to gains from specialization, economies of scale, structural transformation and a change in the terms of trade to the benefit of the partners in co-operation will not be worth the efforts devoted to it.

56. Hence, we have arrived at the conclusion that less developed countries should pursue economic co-operation as a means of accelerating economic development because of the smallness of their national markets, and consequently of insufficient natural, human and financial resources. A pooling of such resources coupled with the integration of markets supported by external tariffs will lead to the gains claimed for liberalization of trade.

57. Because of the differences in the levels of development of these countries, the tendency for free operation of market forces to work against the weaker countries as well as the need for equitable distribution of the benefits of economic development, we have rejected customs union, common market, and free trade area without co-ordinated production planning as being inefficient, and have accepted economic union as the most efficient approach.

58. But because of the difficulties such an approach presents, we have suggested that "plan harmonization" i.e., "negotiated" division of labour or "agreed" specialization is the most acceptable pragmatic approach as least initially. In fact, we believe that this approach is bound to lead to the other forms of co-operation. The elimination of trade barriers is bound to follow "agreed" specialization, and a habit of negotiating will ultimately lead to complete integration, even though it will take time. Moreover, the acceptance of overall economic planning at the national level is incompatible with *laissez-faire* approach at the multinational level.

59. We have also indicated that opportunities for harmonization exist in agriculture, industry as well as public utilities. Our approach also indicates that harmonization can be at the commodity, functional, project and sectoral levels. Invariably, a package of projects from different areas may have to be adopted to ensure sufficient volume and equitable distribution of benefits. The guiding principle should be reasonable benefits to the particular countries, "reasonableness" being defined by the countries themselves.

60. For effective implementation of negotiated projects, we have recommended the establishment of appropriate institutions, namely a political decision-making body, a secretariat, sectoral technical or functional committees as well as financing institutions. The secretariat will maintain liaison with the national planning offices, the sectoral committees, international organizations and other multinational organizations. The need for special studies on the economies of the partner countries will be needed. So also will the need for exchange of information, standardization of concepts and definitions, investment and industrial laws and specification of equipment. Long-term planning is a pre-requisite. Harmonization of monetary and fiscal policies will be a great advantage.

61. In all these activities, international organizations have significant roles to play. They can undertake specific studies of projects of interest to more than one country. They can promote economic co-operation among countries. They can finance projects and service multinational technical meetings. Indeed, they should intensify the work that such organizations like the ECA, IBRD, AFDB and others have been doing and are still doing.

List of some of the documents on problems of economic co-operation  
and harmonization of industrial projects already published by the  
Economic Commission for Africa

1. Industrial Growth in Africa - A Survey and Outlook (E/CN.14/INR/1.Rev.1).
2. Report of the ECA Mission for Economic Co-operation in Central Africa. United Nations Publication, Sales No. 66.II. K 11.
3. Industrial Co-ordination in East Africa: A Quantified Approach to First Approximations (E/CN.14/INR.102).
4. West African Industrial Mission (E/CN.14/246).
5. East and Central Africa Industrial Mission (E/CN.14/247).
6. Report of the ECA Industrial Co-ordination Mission to Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, (E/CN.14/14/248).
7. Economic Integration and African Trade (E/CN.14/STC/4).
8. The significance of recent Common Market Developments in Latin America (E/CN.14/64).
9. "Co-ordination of development plans in Africa" published in Economic Bulletin for Africa, Vol. IV, January 1964 or E/CN.14/239B.
10. Bilateral Trade and Payments Agreements in Africa, (E/CN.14/STC/24/Rev.1).
11. Proposals for Co-ordinated Industrial Development in West Africa; Suggestions for Further Action, E/CN.14/INR/77.
12. "Recent developments in African Trade" in Economic Bulletin for Africa, Volume VI, No. 1 January 1966.
13. Report of conference on Industrial Co-ordination in West Africa (E/CN.14/324).
14. "Approaches to African Economic Integration", Journal of Modern African Studies, September 1963.
15. "Transport Problems in Relation to Economic Development in West Africa" (E/CN.14/63).
16. Intra-African Trade (E/CN.14/STC.20/Add.).
17. Background Paper on the Establishment of an African Common Market (E/CN.14/STC/20).
18. Report of the Conference on Industrial Co-ordination in West Africa (E/CN.14/173/24).
19. Inland Transport in the West African Sub-region (E/CN.14/TRANS/17).
20. The Problems of Transport across the Sahara, E/CN.14/194/Add.1.
21. Note on the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (E/CN.14/316).

22. Report on the Establishment of the African Development Bank (E/CN.14/310).
23. Iron and Steel in Africa (E/CN.14/INR/27).
24. Iron and Steel in West Africa (E/CN.14/IS/2).
25. ECA/FAO: Intra-sub-regional Co-operation and Trade in West Africa in the field of Agriculture: Phase 1.
26. ECA/FAO: Phase 1: East Africa  
    Intra-regional Co-operation and Trade in the Field of Agriculture.  
    Report prepared by Consultants Maurice C. Taylor and Richard O. Wheeler for ECA/FAO, Joint Agriculture Division.
27. ECA/FAO: Etude sur les Possibilités de co-operation dans le domaine de l'agriculture et du commerce des produits agricoles en Afrique Centrale: Phase I.

Note: 25, 26 and 27 have not yet been finalized.