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Sixth meeting of the Technical
Preparatory Committee of the
Whole

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,
15-22 April 1985

Item IV.1 of the provisional agenda*

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Twentieth session of the Commission/
Eleventh meeting of the Conference
of Ministers

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 25-29 April
1985

Item V A. of the provisional agenda*.

Report of the First Meeting of
the Regional Technical Committee for PADIS

(Addis Ababa, 26-28 March 1985)

Executive Summary

*E/ECA/TPCW.6/1/Rev.2
E/ECA.CM.11/1/Rev.2

I. Introduction

1. This executive summary contains a summary of the discussions and main recommendations of the First Meeting of the Regional Technical Committee for the Pan-African Documentation and Information System (PADIS).

II. Background

2. The First Meeting of the Regional Technical Committee for PADIS was convened by the Executive Secretary of ECA from 26 to 28 March 1985 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in accordance with Resolution 498(XIX) adopted by the Conference of Ministers at its tenth meeting.

3. The resolution contained a request for the establishment of a Regional Technical Committee to consist of:

(a) The Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, serving as chairman ex-officio;

(b) Five high-level experts in telecommunications, documentation, library science, information or computer science, elected to represent their respective subregions and to serve in their personal capacities for a period of four years;

(c) A representative of OAU;

(d) A representative of UNESCO;

(e) A representative of UNDP;

(f) Members co-opted in accordance with the terms of reference mentioned below; on condition that there shall not be more than three such members at any time.

4. The meeting was attended by representatives of Algeria, Ethiopia, the Niger, Zaire, UNDP, UNESCO and OAU. The African Development Bank (ADB), the Secretariat of the United Nations Advisory Committee for the Co-ordination of Information System (ACCIS), and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) attended the meeting as observers.

5. The terms of reference of the Committee were:

(a) To establish the overall policy of PADIS, including technical and financial guidelines;

(b) To advise the Executive Secretary on the formulation and implementation of the work programme of the project in accordance with the aforementioned guidelines;

- (c) To oversee the execution of the project at all levels of the system;
- (d) To take any other action to enhance the effectiveness and economic viability of the project;
- (e) To meet as often as required, but not less than once a year; during the transitional phase the Committee shall meet at least twice a year;
- (f) To co-opt specialists in the relevant disciplines, as necessary; and,
- (g) To report annually on its activities to the Conference of Ministers through the Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole.

6. The agenda of the meeting appears as annex I.

7. The Regional Technical Committee considered and approved a final report (E/ECA/CM.11/51) containing recommendations on the future implementation of the PADIS programme.

III. Status report on PADIS

8. The meeting heard a report on the developments that have taken place since the creation of PADIS. It was explained that PADIS was initiated as a system designed to cater for the information needs of planners, technicians and researchers involved in the social and economic development of the continent. However, it had been found desirable for PADIS to expand its scope to include the collection, processing and dissemination of sectoral and multi-sectoral information in order to take proper account of the development priorities set out in the Lagos Plan of Action.

9. The meeting also heard a description of the various information sub-systems and their components, in particular those related to the bibliographic, referral and statistical sub-systems.

10. The meeting was informed of the readiness and capability of the PADIS Central Co-ordination Office to provide technical assistance to member States.

11. In addition, the meeting heard a report on the networking aspects of PADIS and the plans made for the transmission of data between the national, subregional and regional nodes of the PADIS network. It was also informed of the progressive approach to extending the network from national to regional level.

12. The capacity of the Central Co-ordination Office to execute the PADIS regional programme including the financial, manpower and material resources available to it was examined. In particular, a review of the financial situation of the Project revealed that there was a significant budgetary shortfall which might curtail its work programme for 1986.

13. The meeting was provided with a work plan to be executed during the period 1985-1986.

IV. Observations of the Regional Technical Committee

14. The Committee observed that the progress in implementing the PADIS Programme was in line with the prefeasibility studies conducted. Further, the fact that the expanded scope of PADIS took into consideration the priorities set out in the Lagos Plan of Action was appreciated.

15. The Committee took note of the fact that divergent opinions existed regarding priorities for certain types of information.

16. The Committee also noted that PADIS was ready to provide assistance in accordance with the expressed needs of member States.

17. The Committee was of the opinion that the criteria used for locating sub-regional centres in MULPOC Offices would not be the most appropriate in certain cases such as the Central African subregion where two MULPOCs existed. Alternative ways of establishing subregional centres and particularly possibilities of developing national centres into subregional centres should be examined. In such cases, the choice of locations for subregional centres should be related to the willingness of the host countries to share the costs involved. In addition, the existence of maintenance and telecommunication facilities and the availability of local manpower had to be taken into consideration.

18. It was stressed that the existence of national centres was essential for the emergence of the subregional and regional networks. It was also observed that national centres would be linked to subregional centres and, through them, to other subregional, regional and international networks.

19. The Committee heard proposals on the separation of the existing resources shared by the ECA secretariat and the PADIS Project. It was found premature to arrive at an immediate decision in view of the difficulties this might create for the work of both parties. It was suggested that the proposals be further examined.

20. The Committee heard that the use of different brands of software and hardware by participating centres was not necessarily an obstacle to the compatibility desirable between them. However, the use of similar data preparation formats and indexing and retrieval vocabularies was essential.

21. After considering the financial and human resources available to the project for 1986, the Committee was of the opinion that they were insufficient and would have to be increased to enable the Project to maintain its current level of activity. It was decided to prepare a draft resolution concerning the long term financial needs of the Project empowering the ECA Executive Secretary to negotiate with prospective donors, for the consideration of the Conference of Ministers at its next meeting. (A draft resolution appears as annex II to this report).

22. The representative of UNDP informed the meeting of the pending Evaluation Mission which would determine the continuity of UNDP's assistance to the PADIS Project. It was proposed that a member of the Regional Technical Committee should participate in the exercise. The Committee requested that ECA should take note of the issue during its discussions on the terms of reference and composition of the evaluation mission.

23. The Committee noted with appreciation that subregional technical committees were already established in the East and Southern and West African subregions in accordance with the decisions of the Conference of Ministers. It was realized that the subregional technical committees were valuable channels for communication to member States of decisions taken at regional levels.

V. Recommendations

24. Recommendation No. 1. The Regional Technical Committee, cognizant of the vital role that has to be played by national information and documentation centres if the objectives of the PADIS Project are to be realized, recommends that:

(a) Member States should establish national level inter-ministerial committees responsible for information and documentation affairs;

(b) PADIS should intensify its assistance to member States for the creation of new or strengthening of existing centres, as appropriate;

(c) PADIS should undertake field missions for the purpose of assisting member States in identifying and establishing their national centres;

25. Recommendation No. 2. Considering the plan for a regional tele-data-transmission network that will use the most appropriate technologies and noting the need to study the plan in greater detail, the Technical Committee recommends that:

(a) PADIS should undertake a thorough feasibility study as soon as possible, with the collaboration of competent African and international organizations;

(b) Member States should take into account when - upgrading or modernizing their telecommunications infrastructure - PADIS potential requirements for data transmission (e.g., in the framework of PANAFTEL or any future Pan-African Telecommunication Satellite project).

26. Recommendation No. 3. Recognizing the significant work that has been done in developing methods for the collection, processing and dissemination of information and data; considering the desirability of maintaining compatibility among participating centres; and considering the substantial amount of information that is already available at PADIS, the Technical Committee recommends that:

(a) PADIS should make known to member States, through the appropriate channels, the methodologies it has developed and that these will be made available free of charge;

(b) Member States should utilize, as far as possible the methods, norms and standards devised by PADIS for gathering, processing and disseminating bibliographic, referral and numerical information;

(c) PADIS should strengthen its information dissemination and document delivery mechanisms.

27. Recommendation No. 4. Considering the diversity, magnitude and complexity of the activities that are to be implemented by PADIS, the Technical Committee recommends that:

The size and quality of the staff currently available to the PADIS Project should be increased by recruitment of additional personnel as regional technical advisers.

28. Recommendation No. 5. Realizing that the financial resources currently available to the Project are insufficient for its work programme, the Technical Committee recommends that:

The ECA Conference of Ministers should empower the ECA Executive Secretary to negotiate on behalf of member States with prospective donors to secure the financing required to execute the third phase of the PADIS Project (see also annex II).

29. Recommendation No. 6. Cognizant of the pending evaluation mission which will determine the continuity of UNDP assistance to the PADIS Project, the Technical Committee recommends that:

A member of the Regional Technical Committee should participate in this exercise on behalf of member States.

30. Recommendation No. 7. Taking into consideration the draft work programme for 1985 submitted to it and considering the desirability of short-, medium- and long-term plans for purposes of proper management and successful fund raising, the Technical Committee recommends that:

(a) A medium-term plan covering the period 1986 to 1990 should be prepared and submitted for consideration at its next meeting;

(b) A short-term biennial plan covering the period 1986 to 1987 should be prepared and submitted for consideration at its next meeting.

31. Recommendation No. 8. Considering that the Arabic language is one of the official working languages of the ECA and a carrier language of PADIS, and noting the efforts being made to set up an Arabic Unit in PADIS, the Technical Committee recommends that:

✓ Consultations with the Arabic League Documentation Centre should be continued with a view to introducing the use of the Arabic language at the operational level for the purpose of gathering, processing and disseminating information available in Arabic.

First Meeting of the Regional Technical
Committee for PADIS

Agenda

1. Opening statement
2. Election of officers and adoption of the agenda
3. The evolution of the PADIS programme
4. The establishment of a regional co-operative information system
5. Assistance to member States and African institutions
6. The establishment of a data-transmission network using up-to-date telecommunication technologies
7. The capacity of the Central Co-ordination Office of PADIS to execute the PADIS regional programme
8. The choice of computer technologies for the PADIS system
9. Financial implications of the PADIS programme
10. PADIS work programme for the period 1985-1986
11. Any other business
12. Date and venue of the next meeting
13. Adoption of the report
14. Closing of the meeting

First Meeting of the Regional Technical
Committee for PADIS

Draft Resolution for the Consideration of the Technical
Preparatory Committee of the Whole at its Sixth Meeting

The Conference of Ministers,

Recalling resolution 359 (XIV) of 27 March 1979 concerning the project for a Pan-African numerical and non-numerical data bank,

Recalling also resolution 377 (XV) of 12 April 1980 concerning the implementation of the Pan-African Documentation and Information System project (PADIS),

Further recalling resolution 413 (XVI) of 10 April 1981 regarding financial support for PADIS,

Recalling the resolution on PADIS adopted by the third session of the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers,

Recalling resolution 438 (XVII) of 30 April 1982 on the PADIS system,

Recalling resolution 469 (XVIII) of 2 May 1983 on African statistical services,

Recalling resolution 498 (XIX) of 26 May 1984 on the establishment of a PADIS Regional Technical Committee,

Noting with satisfaction the progress made by certain member States with a view to participating in PADIS,

Noting with satisfaction that the implementation of the PADIS network is progressing satisfactorily with the setting-up of the Central Co-ordination Office and two of the four subregional centres,

Having examined the report of the Regional Technical Committee for PADIS at its first meeting held at Addis Ababa from 26 to 28 March 1985,

1. Adopts the report of the First Meeting of the Regional Technical Committee for PADIS;
2. Expresses its thanks to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the African Development Bank (ADB) for their financial assistance and to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Government of France for their technical support to the PADIS Project;
3. Invites member States which have not yet done so to designate their participating centre to PADIS;

4. Requests the Executive Secretary to inform agencies responsible for development aid programmes of the importance member States attach to the implementation of the PADIS programme;

5. Empowers the Executive Secretary of ECA:

(a) to negotiate, on behalf of member States, with development aid agencies (UNDP, EEC, ADB, and IDRC in particular) likely to provide the financial assistance needed to execute third phase activities of PADIS at the regional, subregional and national levels;

(b) to negotiate with member States on the details of their active participation in the technical and financial aspects of the PADIS regional project;

(c) to negotiate with specialized technical bodies (PATU, ITU, IBI and ESA), the preparation of a feasibility study on the establishment of a Pan-African data-transmission network for PADIS requirements;

6. Further requests the Executive Secretary to set up a team of regional technical advisers to assist in the implementation of the Project;

7. Also requests the Executive Secretary to submit to the next meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers a report concerning:

(a) the detailed plan of work for Phase III of the PADIS programme (1986-1989);

(b) planned and secured financing for Phase III of the PADIS Project;

(c) the degree of active and expected participation by member States in the PADIS System and Network.