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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION: RESTRUCTURING
OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SECTORS OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Economic Commission for Africa: regional programming, operations,
restructuring and decentralization issues

Comments of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Economic Commission for Africa: regional programming, operations, restructuring and decentralization issues" (A/37/119).

* A/37/150.

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Economic Commission for Africa: regional programming, operations, restructuring and decentralization issues" (A/37/119) has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system and within the context of the mandate and approved work programme of JIU. At its eighth meeting, in April 1982, a/ the ECA Conference of Ministers considered the JIU report; the text of the resolution containing the Commission's conclusions and recommendations is appended below.

2. The Secretary-General welcomes the comprehensive manner in which the Inspectors have reviewed the programming, operational and other issues confronting the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in its expanding role for the promotion of economic development in Africa through support for subregional and regional co-operation and self-reliance. He is in general agreement with the conclusions and recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit and is working out appropriate modalities for their implementation. In that process, he will take into consideration the views expressed by other organizations and agencies of the United Nations system.

3. The Inspectors place their report on ECA in the context of the objectives and recommendations of the Lagos Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy for the Economic Development of Africa (A/S-11/14, annex I), which emphasizes the development of indigenous capabilities and self-sustained, diversified economic growth and stresses the need for the achievement of self-reliance through expanded economic and technical co-operation in the region. The report observes that ECA, since its inception, has acted both as a catalyst and as an active participant in regional development activities and has had an important role to play in further strengthening economic co-operation and promoting national and collective self-reliance in Africa. The Inspectors identify a broad range of issues and concerns bearing upon the Commission's capacity to meet the increasing demands and expectations of its members in this respect, including in particular:

(a) The resource situation of the Commission: the Inspectors note that the Commission's regular budget has remained stable for several years, growing by about 1.7 per cent annually in real terms, while demands for expanded programme delivery have been heavy; extra-budgetary resources, however, have grown substantially over the past decade and account at present for about half of the financial resources available to the Commission;

(b) New approaches to regional programming in light of the requirements of the Lagos Plan of Action: particular attention is given to the need to involve Governments more directly in the programming and implementation of the Commission's programmes, including its operational activities funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other funds;

a/ For the report of the meeting, see Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1982, Supplement No. 11 (E/1982/21).

(c) Interagency co-operation and co-ordination: the report draws attention to the Commission's responsibilities for the promotion of co-operative practices and arrangements between the various organizations and agencies active in the region, including co-operation with appropriate organizations outside the United Nations system so as to ensure more integrated support to the region's development effort;

(d) Management issues: the Inspectors identify a range of management issues which deserve further attention in order to enable the Commission to implement more effectively its programmes. Attention has been focused by the Inspectors on, inter alia, personnel management and recruitment and on the management of operational activities;

(e) Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs): the report traces back the history of the Commission's efforts to decentralize some of its main functions and emphasizes the growing importance of MULPOCs in the over-all programme of activities of the Commission; various measures are suggested to strengthen further the operations of those subregional development centres;

(f) Restructuring and decentralization: the report reviews the progress that has been made so far in respect of restructuring, with particular attention to measures affecting the Commission and gives an historical account of intergovernmental decisions and administrative measures taken in respect of redeployment of resources from Headquarters to the regional commissions. It urges that further efforts should be made to implement promptly the relevant provisions of the restructuring resolutions, particularly as they concern decentralization and the strengthening of the regional commissions.

4. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202 of 29 January 1979 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations, the Secretary-General has on several occasions expressed his support for the strengthening of and the decentralization of activities to the regional commissions, which serve as the Organization's main economic and social development centres in their respective regions with a view to strengthening their consultative functions and operational capacity. A firm commitment to the principle was reaffirmed at a meeting between the executive secretaries and the Secretary-General soon after his appointment.

5. It will be recalled that the restructuring process was initiated with a view to ensuring the equitable, full and effective participation of the developing countries in the formulation and application of United Nations policies in the field of development and international economic co-operation. The approach of the Inspectors is oriented towards the same objective and their recommendations are geared towards achieving effective institutional arrangements and practical measures for enhancing the responsiveness of the Organization's regional structures to the development needs of the developing countries; in the particular case of ECA, to the priorities specified in the Lagos Plan of Action.

6. The Secretary-General concurs in this connection with the Inspectors' position that regional programming should be aimed at ensuring that inter-country programmes emanate from and respond to the priority needs of the participating countries. The Secretary-General will take steps to investigate further the proposals made by the Inspectors to this effect, in close consultation with the organizations and agencies concerned. In this connection, the Secretary-General emphasized in previous reports that the Commission's multidisciplinary focus makes it especially

suited to define regional development priorities and to formulate guidelines for the promotion of activities undertaken or promoted by the organizations within the United Nations system in the region.

7. The provisions of the General Assembly on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system placed special emphasis on the contribution of the regional commissions to global policy-making and on the need for consistency between policy formulation and implementation at the regional level and the over-all strategies and priorities established by the Economic and Social Council and the Assembly. It is, in this context, particularly important to ensure that the follow-up to the Lagos Plan of Action and the process of review and adaptation of the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade should reinforce and support each other.

8. The Secretary-General agrees that, in considering the programming and management functions of ECA, particular attention should be given to the scope for further strengthening its role at the subregional level. The operational, programming and co-ordination functions envisaged for MULPOCs fully correspond to the main areas of emphasis reflected in the provisions of the restructuring resolutions concerning the regional commissions. If adequately supported, these Centres could prove to be increasingly important instrumentalities in the promotion of economic and technical co-operation in the region and could effectively contribute to Africa's quest for regional and subregional integration.

9. The Inspectors draw attention to the gaps which exist between the resources provided to the regional commissions and the expanded responsibilities entrusted to them in the restructuring process. This is, at least in part, the result of financial and other constraints which affect the Organization as a whole. It should be mentioned that "the steady decline" in the number of Professional posts available to ECA over the period 1976-1983, to which the Inspectors refer in the report, is not a real decline but appears so owing to estimates regarding extra-budgetary posts presented in the programme budget submissions for 1976-1977, 1978-1979 and, to a lesser extent, 1980-1981, which did not, in fact, prove to be correct. None the less, it is the determination of the Secretary-General to do his utmost to ensure that the recommendations relating to the regional commissions and the provisions to them of adequate financial resources embodied in the restructuring resolutions are given full and speedy implementation.

10. The Inspectors observe that the objective of self-reliance, a key element in the Lagos Plan of Action and in the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade, is being pursued in the programming of development activities at the national level. The Inspectors go on to say that at the regional level, however, new policy approaches would be required with a view to ensuring the full and effective participation of African States in the programming and implementation of intercountry development activities.

11. The specific comments of the Secretary-General which follow should be read within the context of the above considerations.

A. Recommendations relating to the United Nations system

Recommendation 1

12. The Secretary-General agrees with the Joint Inspection Unit concerning the desirability of further investigating, in consultation with the organizations of the system concerned, approaches to regional and subregional programming and management of intercountry projects of the United Nations system. Bearing in mind the views expressed on the recommendation by some of the agencies, the Director-General would intend, in the first instance, to transmit this recommendation to ACC.

Recommendation 2

13. The Inspectors observe that the Commission's capacity for the promotion of co-ordination and the exercise of team leadership at the regional level could be further developed and, in that context, recommended, inter alia, that "regional, subject-oriented, high-level interagency meetings should be instituted under the aegis of ECA to discuss common issues, and [that] firm guidelines should be developed for co-ordinated action aimed at the objectives of the Lagos Plan of Action". (A/37/119, para. 137 (a)). The Secretary-General supports this recommendation, noting that interagency co-ordination at the regional level is being developed gradually, in Africa as well as in other developing regions. Further strengthening of co-operative arrangements involving joint programming and review exercises, as well as collaboration in the implementation of relevant programmes and activities, will enable participating organizations to orient more closely their sectoral activities at the regional level to the objectives and priorities of relevant global and regional development strategies, including, in particular, the Lagos Plan of Action. The Secretary-General supports, in this connection, the Inspectors' recommendation that all organizations should report periodically to the Economic and Social Council and to their respective governing bodies on their contribution to the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action, in conformity with the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 35/64 of 5 December 1980 on special measures for the economic and social development of Africa. In the same context, the Inspectors recommend that, at the national level and in the framework of the country programming process United Nations bodies concerned should, with the assistance of the respective resident co-ordinators, provide support to African Governments in adapting their sectoral country programmes to the goals and objectives of the Lagos Plan and to subregional and regional development priorities. This will require special efforts to relate the country programming process more closely to the programming process at the regional level. The Secretary-General supports the view that the Commission, as the main regional development centre with responsibility for the exercise of team leadership, is well placed to promote such efforts, particularly through expanded interagency co-operation at the regional and subregional levels and closer co-operation between the secretariat of the Commission and the resident co-ordinators, as recommended by the Inspectors.

14. The Inspectors furthermore recommend in this context that "all organizations should consider the possibility of seconding experienced and competent staff to ECA and/or its MULPOCs to assist in specific tasks related to the Lagos Plan, and to other regional commissions as well" (A/37/119, para. 137 (d)).

15. In considering this recommendation, one organization observed that, for the smaller specialized agencies, the secondment of personnel poses special financial and organizational problems. The Secretary-General recognizes this and will endeavour to ensure that further measures to be proposed by the secretariat with a view to promoting the temporary exchange of staff will be based on full and appropriate consultations between all bodies concerned regarding the budgetary and administrative implications of such measures.

B. Recommendations relating to the United Nations

16. The Inspectors observe that, despite resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly over a period of more than two decades on the need for strengthening the roles and functions of the regional commissions, progress in the implementation of those resolutions has been slow; they recommend that the present piecemeal approach towards the issues involved should be replaced by closely related measures for the provision of authority and resources based on a clear, comprehensive and specific determination of the meaning of "restructuring" and "decentralization" for the regional commissions. The Secretary-General concurs with this approach.

Recommendation 3

17. The Secretary-General notes the continuing interest of Member States in pursuing decentralization of United Nations activities. This interest was specifically reflected in General Assembly resolution 34/206 of 19 December 1979, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its thirty-sixth session on restructuring measures taken pursuant to the relevant Assembly resolutions. b/

18. In its resolution 36/187 of 17 December 1981, the General Assembly decided to return, at its thirty-seventh session, to the question of the implications of the restructuring process for the regional commissions within the over-all context of resolution 32/197, as well as in the light of further observations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at its session in 1982, and of the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1982.

19. The Secretary-General intends to pursue actively the measures required to advance the decentralization process, in the light of relevant discussions at the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly and taking into account the experience of specialized organizations of the system with various forms of decentralized operations, as well as other relevant suggestions of the Joint Inspection Unit.

b/ Pursuant to that request, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session (A/35/546) on the implications of General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202 for the regional commissions. At that session, the Assembly decided to request the views of the regional commissions on the issues involved and return to the matter at its thirty-sixth session. The Secretary-General submitted a further report (A/36/577) to the Assembly at its thirty-sixth session in the light of, inter alia, the relevant conclusions and recommendations of the regional commissions.

Recommendation 4

20. The promotion of expanded interagency co-operation at the regional level constitutes one of the main objectives of the restructuring process and offers many opportunities for practical measures aimed at a more effective United Nations presence in the regions. The Secretary-General therefore sees merit in the Inspectors' suggestions that the Economic and Social Council "might consider devoting a regular agenda item to United Nations system co-ordination problems and needs at the regional level" (A/37/119, para. 14C (a)). He estimates, however, that this should be supplementary to, rather than a replacement for, the present oral presentations of the executive secretaries, as these presentations, in addition to addressing co-ordination questions, also form an indispensable part of the Council's general debate on economic and social development.

21. The Secretary-General shares the view of the Inspectors that "the commissions should increase their exchanges of staff whenever possible, as part of the broader scheme of interregional co-operation urged by the restructuring resolutions" (A/37/119, para. 140 (b)). In this connection, he recognizes that, as interregional contacts using the facilities of the regional commissions multiply, additional co-operative arrangements and resources may be required.

22. With regard to recommendation 4 (c) on the recruitment procedures of the Technical Assistance Recruitment Service (TARS), the Secretary-General would recall that, in accordance with procedures on decentralization, the authority delegated to the regional commissions relates to recruitment and appointment, under the 200 series of the Staff Rules, of regional advisers for service with the Commission and project personnel required for projects. TARS is responsible for recruitment action in all cases above the P-5 level and in cases of persons domiciled outside the region, mostly in order to facilitate the process of recruitment, given the greater access to communication networks which it enjoys. In addition, regional commissions frequently have recourse to TARS for roster searches, the world-wide distribution of job descriptions, dispatch of candidates' files etc. These practices will be kept under review in order to ensure that the most expeditious and effective recruitment procedures are adopted.

23. The Inspectors recommend, furthermore, that the status and functions of the Regional Commissions Liaison Office at United Nations Headquarters should be strengthened to carry out better its representation responsibilities. The Secretary-General fully endorses the importance of appropriate liaison arrangements between the regional commissions and the main United Nations offices at the global level. Practical measures aimed at strengthening these arrangements will be formulated in consultation with the executive secretaries of the regional commissions.

Recommendation 5

24. The Secretary-General recognizes that the principal mechanisms of ECA for fostering economic and technical co-operation at the subregional and regional levels are the Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) and shares the view of the Inspectors that they have a considerable potential as an important element in African development. In this light, he supports their view that adequate financial resources should be provided to MULPOCs to ensure their continuity and viable operation. In this connection, the Secretary-General would

refer to his report on the financing, on an established basis, of the MULPOCs of ECA, in which he concludes that, "in order to enable the MULPOCs to continue playing an effective role in the implementation of their work programmes, which include a substantial part of the traditional activities of ECA, substantial support would be required from the regular budget of the United Nations ..." (E/1982/70 and Corr.1, para. 47).

Recommendation 6

25. The Inspectors recommend that ECA should strengthen its internal programming and management structure by, inter alia, the expanded provision of resources for senior staff and a more consistent division of duties and responsibilities at the senior level regarding programming and administration and management; by the designation of the Policy and Programme Co-ordination Office as focal point for programming matters in the Secretariat; by the establishment of a small unit for monitoring and evaluation; by the training and assignment in the divisions of ECA and in MULPOCs of programme assistants to help with programming tasks and, generally, by an expansion of the Commission's back-stopping capacity; by yearly reporting to the Commission's Conference of Ministers on progress towards joint programming with United Nations bodies and other relevant organizations in Africa; and by expanded co-operation between ECA and ECWA in programming matters. As far as evaluation is concerned, the Secretary-General would draw attention to the need for linkage between programming and evaluation. This linkage should be borne in mind in introducing evaluation functions in the work programme of the Commission's secretariat.

26. The Secretary-General firmly supports the expanded involvement of the regional commissions in the promotion of interregional co-operation and would particularly welcome further co-operation between ECA and ECWA in the promotion of economic and technical co-operation between Africa and Western Asia.

27. With regard to the proposal to establish a second D-2 post in ECA, the Secretary-General recalls that, in 1980, the Administrative Management Service (AMS) had recommended that the functions delegated to the Deputy Executive Secretary be increased. Against this background, consideration will be given to the JIU proposal during the preparation of the 1984-1985 programme budget.

28. As to the need for expansion of the back-stopping capacity of ECA to match the development of its operational activities, the Secretary-General feels that the resources available to the Commission as reimbursement of programme support costs should be fully utilized.

Recommendation 7

29. ~~The Secretary-General agrees with the inspectors and indeed urges that ECA should ensure continuing attention to the establishment of an effective management system for its new operational responsibilities. However, the Secretary-General does not concur in the establishment of a separate organizational element. As a matter of principle, the Secretary-General believes that the type of services recommended and required fall within the purview of the Administrative Management Service, which has been established under the responsibility of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration, Finance and Management. In this regard, appropriate consultations will be undertaken to determine the most viable method of ensuring that the required management improvements are introduced.~~

Recommendation 8

30. The Secretary-General welcomes the practical proposals contained in recommendation 8. In this connection, he shares the view of the Inspectors that, if Governments agree, greater use could possibly be made of MULPOCs and of the office of the resident co-ordinator/resident representative by all ECA missions to member countries. The time-limit recommended for the dispatch and distribution of documentation to member Governments constitutes an established practice of the Organization and the offices of the resident co-ordinators/resident representatives could be of assistance in the distribution process, as recommended.

31. The Secretary-General furthermore considers it desirable that careful consideration should be given to the scope for expanding the facilities available for language training of ECA staff, with particular attention to the language requirement of MULPOCs.

32. He concurs with the Inspectors that expanded and more systematic arrangements for the provision of substantive support and the exchange of information between MULPOCs and the country offices of UNDP and of other organizations of the system would enhance the operational effectiveness of MULPOCs. Likewise, due provision should be made for substantive backstopping of programmes of MULPOC from ECA headquarters in the context of resources available in the regular budget as required for the proper execution of the programme of work of the Commission.

APPENDIX

449 (XVII). Regional programming, operation, restructuring and decentralization issues

The Conference of Ministers,

Recalling General Assembly resolutions 3201 (S-VI) and 3202 (S-VI) of 1 May 1974 containing the Declaration and the Programme of Action on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order and 3281 (XXIX) of 12 December 1974 containing the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States,

Recalling also General Assembly resolution 3362 (S-VII) of 16 September 1975, by which, inter alia, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System was established for the purpose of preparing detailed action proposals with a view to initiating the process of restructuring the United Nations system so as to make it more fully capable of dealing with problems of international economic co-operation and development in a comprehensive and effective manner, and to make it more responsive to the requirements of the provisions of the Declaration and the Programme of Action on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order as well as those of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States,

Recalling further General Assembly resolutions 32/197 of 20 December 1977, 33/202 of 29 January 1979 and 34/206 of 19 December 1979 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, which process was affirmed as an integral part of the efforts required to ensure the equitable, full and effective participation of the developing countries in the formulation and application of all decisions with the United Nations system in the field of development and international economic co-operation and which assigned specific, additional tasks to regional commissions, including the task of being the main general economic and social development centres for their respective regions, providing team leadership and responsibility for co-ordination and co-operation at the regional level and acting as executing agencies,

Mindful of the terms of reference of the Economic Commission for Africa which state, inter alia, that the Commission shall participate in measures for facilitating concerted action for the economic development of Africa, including its social aspects, with a view to raising the level of economic activity and levels of living in Africa and shall assist in the formulation and development of co-ordinated policies as a basis for practical action in promoting economic and technological development in the region,

Mindful in particular of the importance attached by the Commission to economic co-operation among member States, particularly at the subregional level, and the various resolutions adopted by the Conference, in this regard, culminating in the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos, a/

a/ A/S-11/14, annexes I and II.

Having considered the Joint Inspection Unit report on the Economic Commission for Africa, regional programming, operations, restructuring and decentralization issues, b/

1. Welcomes the report, expresses satisfaction with its findings and conclusions and fully endorses its recommendations;
2. Invites the Economic and Social Council to consider devoting a regular agenda item to United Nations system co-ordination problems and needs at the regional level;
3. Calls upon the Secretary-General to institute arrangements to simplify and expedite technical assistance recruitment procedures with a view to decentralizing fully recruitment functions to the Commission;
4. Urges the Secretary-General to strengthen the status and functions of the Regional Commissions Liaison Office at United Nations Headquarters to better enable it to carry out its representation responsibilities;
5. Appeals to the Secretary-General to provide the necessary regular budget resources to ensure that the Multinational Programming and Operational Centres are suitably staffed and equipped to carry out their basic functions, inter alia, the over-all direction and management of their programmes; the organization of annual meetings at both official and ministerial levels; the preparation of studies; the collection, synthesis and dissemination of information, and general research into development questions;
6. Invites the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation to investigate new approaches to regional and subregional programming and management of United Nations system intercountry projects, working closely with the organizations of the system;
7. Invites further the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, in consultation with all concerned United Nations organizations, to examine the progress made in decentralization of United Nations activities and report thereon to the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Economic and Social Council with a view to determining what specific authorities, responsibilities and resources will be decentralized and the timing of such decentralization;
8. Calls upon the Executive Secretary to institute, under the aegis of the Commission, regional, subject-oriented, high-level interagency meetings to discuss common issues aimed at the development of firm guidelines for co-ordinated action towards the attainment of the objectives of the Lagos Plan of Action;
9. Urges the Executive Secretary to undertake the necessary organizational and administrative arrangements as recommended by the Inspectors in their recommendations 6, 7 and 8 in order to ensure that the Commission functions at optimum efficiency and effectiveness;

10. Urges the executive secretaries of the regional commissions to increase their exchanges of staff in order to foster the broader scheme of interregional co-operation;

11. Requests organizations within the United Nations system to assist African Governments within the framework of their country programming process in incorporating the goals and objectives of the Lagos Plan of Action into their sectoral country programmes and projects, and adapting them to subregional and regional priorities;

12. Invites the Executive Secretary to report progress on the implementation of this resolution through the ninth meeting of the Conference and eighteenth session of the Commission, to the 1983 summer session of the Economic and Social Council and to the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

222nd meeting,
30 April 1982