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REPORT ON THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

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THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

In accordance with the general programme of work approved by the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit, three Inspectors visited Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia in May and June 1968 and examined, among other things and as a matter of priority, the functioning and activities of the ECA and its role and place in the economic and social development of Africa. This report sets forth the results of that examination and some recommendations and proposals.

2. The Inspectors spent three weeks in Addis Ababa itself - which is the headquarters of the ECA - and had prolonged talks with the Executive Secretary, his Deputy and responsible officers of all the Divisions of the secretariat. The talks were free and frank, and all these officers acquainted the Inspectors with the difficulties and problems the ECA had to face and also with the sort of solutions they envisaged. The Inspectors also had the advantage of talks with responsible members of African Governments, the OAU and other African inter-governmental organizations, as well as with representatives of other members of the United Nations family. While the Inspectors benefited much from all these talks, the recommendations and proposals they make in this report are naturally based entirely on their own judgement.

3. The Economic Commission for Africa, which is the youngest among the regional economic commissions, was created to provide the African continent with an instrument of economic and social progress. As its name implies, its function, according to its terms of reference, is economic: to initiate and participate in measures for facilitating concerted action for economic development of Africa, including its social aspects, with a view to raising the level of economic activity and standards of living in Africa, and for maintaining and strengthening the economic relations of countries and territories of Africa, both among themselves and with other countries of the world. The Commission was authorized to make or sponsor relevant investigations and studies, to assemble, analyse and disseminate economic data, to promote statistical services, economic and social planning etc.

4. After the initial task of ensuring the availability of basic statistical data (through the establishment of centres for training statisticians, the holding of

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seminars and expert meetings), the structure of the ECA has been enlarged to cover the full range of economic and social activities in Africa, viz. regional economic co-operation, international and inter-regional trade, monetary and fiscal affairs, industrial promotion and development, food and agricultural development, natural resources, surveys and development, transport and communications, economic analysis and planning.

5. These are tremendous tasks which the ECA has set for itself. The Inspectors are able to report that, in spite of shortcomings and difficulties resulting from a variety of factors, the ECA is performing these tasks with persistence and devotion.

6. We may give one or two examples of such difficulties. In the field of social development programmes, sponsored or envisaged by the ECA, it must be recognized that African Governments as a whole tend to give them priorities lower than those given to plans for strict economic development. Again, in the matter of the development and utilization of human resources, there could be better co-ordination among the various ECA sections concerned. It is hoped that the recent establishment of the Division of Human Resources Development will ensure the desirable degree of co-ordination. Also, considering the vastness and heterogenousness of Africa, and the limited staff and resources of the ECA, it is unable to assess to the full extent the practical needs and the programming of individual countries.

7. The Inspectors did not, and could not, go exhaustively and in depth into all the activities and difficulties of the ECA. They confined their attention to possible urgent improvements to enable the Commission to perform its task more efficiently and effectively, and to ensure that the ECA's activities are rationally integrated into the total activities of the entire United Nations family in Africa. Later in this report, the Inspectors make a number of recommendations. They propose to pursue their study not only of ECA, but also of the other regional commissions in order to determine to what extent these recommendations, and any others which they may formulate at a later stage, may be applicable to other commissions.

8. The talks which the Inspectors had with representatives of some African Governments indicated that, while these Governments appreciated the research and analytical work so far undertaken by the ECA, they were eager to see practical

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development programmes under way. This attitude of African Governments to the ECA's primary role of research and advice may strike one as a reflection of their impatience and even of their indifference. It is, nevertheless, true that African Governments wish the Commission to become a more efficient and more practical mechanism - an instrument on which they can rely for their everyday requirements.

9. Faced with this dilemma, it is not surprising that the ECA, in order to attract and sustain the serious attention of these Governments, is tempted to overstep its research and advisory role, and to embark on operational or quasi-operational activities.

10. Some senior members of the ECA expressed the opinion that the ECA should foster regional and sub-regional groupings in Africa in order to accelerate the process of development, particularly in the field of industrialization. Such regional groupings could in their view agree on multinational development programmes, after careful study (assisted by ECA) of technical and economic details. They considered that the ECA was in a position to help to organize such activity.

11. In brief, in order to ensure that operations of the United Nations family of organizations make an effective contribution to African development, these senior officials of ECA consider that the programming of assistance, especially from the UNDP, to all multinational projects should be carried out principally by the ECA secretariat with the assistance of the specialized agencies and not vice versa as at present.

12. This implies that the ECA should be made the executing agency for carrying out technical assistance programmes designed to produce "feasibility" studies, and to identify "bankable" projects, on the basis of which practical multinational development could take place. On the basis of such a proposal the ECA would be given the necessary resources, including the usual allocation to provide for the administrative cost of the programmes.

13. We are commenting on this suggestion later in this report, but it indicates how anxious the ECA is to prove itself to be acceptable to African Governments in practical development steps and measures, instead of confining itself to research, analysis and planning. The following are some more instances of the ECA attempting to be "operational" within its existing resources of finance and staff:

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(a) it lends the services of its own staff to Departments and Ministries of African Governments (at the request of the Imperial Ethiopian Government the secretariat provides technical assistance in the preparation of the Third Five-Year Development Plan);

(b) it lends "regional advisers", appointed by headquarters on the recommendation of the Commission, to African Governments (their travel, however, must be approved by Headquarters);

(c) it conducts training seminars and assists training institutes; it organizes working groups, expert meetings, sub-regional seminars, study tours;

(d) it attempts to establish, on its own, industrial centres, gets them blessed by UNIDO (which, however, says it has no funds to finance them), and is unable to execute the projects it promised to undertake;

(e) it recruits "consultants" and lends them to countries.

14. The Inspectors consider this to be a very important problem having special significance for the African continent. Apart from the question of principle whether, and to what extent, regional economic commissions should take part in operational functions, they wonder whether the existing organizational structure of the ECA and its staff is, either in quality or quantity, geared to the level necessary for undertaking such "extra-curricular" activities.

15. The regular professional staff of ECA consists of about 137 officers (including translators and interpreters). We doubt whether such a staff is sufficient even for the proper research, advice and planning role - considering the size and complexity of Africa. Although most of the staff are devoted to their work, we have heard and have reasons to believe that better qualified experts in specific fields are needed in ECA. It was also explained to us that particular need was felt for middle-level assistance, e.g. to prepare statistical material for senior professional officers; and also for the provision of suitably qualified and trained secretarial assistance.

16. We noticed that four of the five Chiefs of Division were at the P-5 level. In the ECA, professional officers of P-5 and higher grades form only twenty of the total, whereas this proportion in the other regional economic commissions is between 22 and 24 per cent. While the proportion of the staff holding P-4 and higher posts is 40 per cent in the ECA, it is between 45 and 50 per cent in other commissions.

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17. Under existing procedures ECA receives periodically curricula vitae of African and other candidates from the Office of Personnel (Secretariat Recruitment Service) in New York for possible consideration, as well as applications for employment from individuals. The curriculum vitae is then sent to the appropriate substantive Division for an appraisal by the Head of the Division. Once a favourable evaluation is made, reference checks are initiated and a recommendation is put forward to the Office of Personnel in New York which makes a presentation to the Appointment and Promotion Board. The Head of the United Nations office (UNDP or UNIC) is sometimes invited by ECA or Headquarters to interview candidates in their home country. Interview reports, reference checks etc. are transmitted to United Nations Headquarters. Pending a decision of the Appointment and Promotion Board the applicant is informed that his candidature is under consideration and is also invited to undergo a medical examination. ECA or Headquarters sounds national Governments to obtain some indication of willingness to release a candidate to United Nations service. When Headquarters cables the decision of the Appointment and Promotion Board to ECA, a formal offer is made to the candidate. The Executive Secretary has authority delegated to him by the Director of Personnel in New York to recruit, without reference to the APB, a professional staff member against a vacant established (manning table) post, for up to a maximum of eleven months.

18. We were also informed by government representatives to whom we talked that the existing grades in ECA were not sufficiently attractive to qualified Africans as a career. We think this question of grading should be approached seriously and realistically.

19. Of the 137 Professional staff members authorized for the Commission during 1968, 114 posts are presently encumbered and there are 23 vacancies. Eight African candidates (5 French-speaking and 3 English-speaking) have recently accepted appointment offers and are due to report to ECA between now and the end of December 1968. For the remaining fifteen vacancies, seven African candidates are under active consideration. As of now, there are, on the staff of the Commission secretariat, sixty African staff members (of whom twenty are French-speaking and forty English-speaking).

While Africanization is highly desirable, we must recognize the fact that most African Governments, because of the present shortage of trained manpower, are unwilling to release suitable men for service with United Nations and its technical

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missions. They want them to run their own civil Administration, where obviously non-Africans cannot be employed. They are quite willing to have non-Africans as technical experts for a long period, rather than weaken their own civil Administration.

20. We should also recognize that some African countries are more developed and advanced than others; and, if Africanization is inordinately speeded up, we might have United Nations African offices being manned extensively by Africans from one or two comparatively advanced African countries. Such geographical imbalance is not desirable and may give rise to embarrassing problems.

This points to the necessity of the United Nations family laying greater emphasis on manpower and training programmes more particularly in the less developed countries.

21. One other field where we consider a careful review is needed is the question of the funds allocated to the ECA. Under existing procedures the member Governments of the regional economic commissions have little or no say in the preparation of the commission's budget estimates. The problem of the provision of sufficient funds to perform its tasks was also frequently raised before the Inspectors by officials of the ECA.

22. The Inspectors agree that the ECA does not have adequate funds to carry out the various tasks it has set itself and are recommending, in the latter part of this report, the adoption of some measures to relate the tasks to its resources or vice versa. In regard to travel funds, however, the Inspectors feel that a more rational utilization of the existing allocations under this head is necessary. From the list of the official travel effected by the staff of ECA in the course of 1967 it would appear that some of it could have been easily cut down - or undertaken by less senior officials. While we recognize that some travel outside the ECA region may be useful and important, we feel that the greater part of the limited travel funds should be used for travel within the region rather than outside it. We also suggest that the appropriate charging of all travel expenditures be reviewed.

23. In the light of our observations in the foregoing paragraphs, we consider that a careful study should be made of ECA and its functions and role in Africa and we recommend that the Secretary-General be requested to initiate such a study as soon

as possible. In our view the ECA should either confine its activities to its assigned role of research and advice and accept the fact that this role does not fully satisfy African Governments, or its terms of reference should be modified and geared to the practical needs and wishes of African Governments, including limited operational activity if necessary in which case the ECA should be organizationally and financially strengthened.

24. We are in any case convinced that the ECA should be brought more into the picture in regard to regional and multinational projects and that the expertise, experience and facilities of ECA should be fully utilized within the United Nations family.

25. The Inspectors are aware that this is a large question on which a decision can be taken only after careful and thorough study. Pending, and without prejudice to, the results of such study, the Inspectors are of the opinion that some measures could, and should, be undertaken now in certain fields to make ECA's activities more effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

26. Co-operation in the technical assistance field

(a) Regular technical assistance programmes

We suggest the adoption of the following procedure:

Out of the appropriations for the regular technical assistance programmes approved by the General Assembly, a portion should be earmarked for the African region to be utilized on the recommendations and proposals of the ECA. Each African country requesting assistance from this fund should be requested to approach the Commission in the first instance. Thus, the function of examining individual requests from countries and of making budget appropriations out of the total grant and of advising and assisting countries in the technical sphere, at present undertaken at Headquarters, would be carried out mainly by the ECA. The general policy in the field of the technical assistance would, however, continue to be determined by Headquarters.

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(b) Technical Assistance component of the UNDP

In the case of this programme the countries concerned would continue to submit their requests to the UNDP through the Resident Representatives. But regional and multinational programmes should, upon the request of member Governments, be presented to UNDP by the ECA (after consultation with the Resident Representatives in the countries concerned).

This will enable the Commission to participate at all stages of the preparation of projects. The ECA should also have the right to follow the execution of regional and multinational projects and in some cases even to be the executing agency, e.g. in case of regional seminars, study groups etc.

(c) Special Fund component of the UNDP

In the case of the Special Fund programmes the ECA should be authorized to play a consultative role in respect of regional and multinational projects. The Commission should be in a position to make effective observations and recommendations on regional and multinational Special Fund projects at an early stage. In some cases, at the request of the Governments, the ECA should be authorized to initiate and sponsor multinational projects before the UNDP.

27. The Inspectors do not foresee any difficulty in carrying out these proposed measures, especially those concerning the regular technical assistance programmes and the projects financed out of the technical assistance component of UNDP. The major part of the expenditure of these two technical assistance programmes falls under three main headings: (a) fellowships, (b) provision of experts, (c) seminars, workshops, study tours, training courses and similar activities. These are precisely the services that could be more effectively and more expertly rendered by the ECA which is fully aware of existing conditions in the region and the needs of its countries. In practice the Commission is already participating to some extent in the programming of country projects; also, in consultation with Headquarters and within specific financial limits, the ECA secretariat does prepare regional projects.

28. In respect of the regional projects administered by the Commission, a major part of the responsibility remains with Headquarters. For instance, approval for changes and upward revisions in the various elements of the projects and their

costs has to be obtained from Headquarters. The regional commissions are further required to submit to Headquarters periodical reports on the implementation of the projects and their financial implications. The Inspectors feel that, in such matters, more responsibility could be delegated to the ECA in the interests of expeditions and efficient operation of the projects.

29. Financial responsibility of the ECA

It has been reiterated on several occasions that it is imperative to bring together programme formulations and budget appropriations, particularly in the field of economic and social activities which absorb the major part of the expenditure of the United Nations regular budget.

30. Under the present procedure the regional economic commissions are fully responsible for the formulation and the execution of their regular programmes of activities, but they are able to exercise inadequate influence over the administrative and financial planning which will ensure and enable the execution of the approved programmes. The United Nations Controller reviews the Commission's budget estimates, incorporates them in the over-all budget of the United Nations Secretariat and submits them to the Secretary-General for approval. The Controller, acting on behalf of the Secretary-General, is responsible for the justification of the estimates before the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. After the estimates have been approved by the General Assembly, the Controller, by means of allotment advices, authorizes the Executive Secretary to incur expenditures within the level of resources, and for the purposes approved by the General Assembly. The Executive Secretary is responsible for ensuring that the funds allotted to him are so expended

31. On the matter of budget presentation, the present position is that various items of the budget of the regional economic commission are dispersed and appear under different headings of the United Nations composite budget. We think that, considering the importance of regional economic commissions, their budget should be shown separately and be easily identifiable, perhaps in present circumstances, as an annex to the budget document.

32. The centralization of control in the financial field has in our view its merits. But in the case of regional economic commissions, this centralization has disadvantages because the responsibility for the elaboration of programmes is

with one body (the ECA) while responsibility for their financial implementation is with another (the Controller).

33. The Inspectors therefore consider the existing procedure of preparation, presentation and execution of the United Nations budget should be modified in order to permit member States of the Commission to have a clear picture of the purposes for which the funds are requested and allotted. The Inspectors suggest that, on an experimental basis, the draft programme of work and its financial implementations proposed by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa be first examined by a working group composed of the representatives of eight member States (elected by the Commission) before their final submission to the Secretary-General. Such a working group has already been established for UNIDO by the Industrial Development Board by resolution 3 (II) dated 10 May 1968. The comments and recommendations of this group, together with any observations by the Executive Secretary, should be sent to the Secretary-General and be made available to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions when it considers the United Nations budget estimates as a whole.

34. Recruitment of the staff

For the sake of efficiency and to avoid long delays in recruitment, more authority should be delegated to the Executive Secretary of the ECA (and indeed the Executive Secretaries of all the regional economic commissions). Along these lines we propose the following:

(a) In future, the representatives of the regional economic commissions should be allowed to participate either in person or by correspondence in the proceedings of the Appointment and Promotion Board which considers candidates for appointment to the Commission.

(b) The Secretary-General should carefully review the question of the grading of various posts in the secretariat of the ECA, and consider whether upgrading of certain posts is not called for having regard to the level of responsibility they carry, and to the age and experience of the incumbents.

35. Co-ordination between ECA and other members of the United Nations family

Some degree of co-ordination already exists at the ECA headquarters at Addis Ababa. The WHO and FAO have attached "Liaison officers" to the ECA. The UNDP Resident Representative at Addis Ababa is invited to attend policy meetings of the ECA secretariat and relevant documentation is exchanged between them. The Inspectors found all these very useful.

36. The Inspectors think that co-ordination should go further than this and should cover contacts with all UNDP Resident Representatives in Africa, as well as the regional, country and area representatives of the United Nations specialized agencies. In this connexion they welcomed the proposal that regional meetings of UNDP Resident Representatives be held at regular intervals with the active participation of ECA, as well as that of the regional, country and area representatives of United Nations specialized agencies. From our various talks, we are aware that the heads of many specialized agencies consider that there should be far more frequent, and far more intensive, contacts between the agencies and the ECA than exists at present. We fully support this view.

37. Co-ordination and co-operation between ECA and its member States

Although the Inspectors had visited only three African countries, and their experience was therefore limited, they are of the view that much can be done to improve co-ordination in this field. They consider that attempts should be made to achieve the maximum degree of co-operation between the ECA and (1) individual African Governments, and (2) OAU and other inter-African organizations. As regards the former, the Inspectors are aware that the ECA, regardless of the technical limitations of its terms of reference, lends its staff for short-term service with African Governments on request. The Inspectors recommend the continuation of this practice since the ECA should be prepared to render its services as required by African Governments within the limits of its resources.

38. Co-ordination between the ECA and OAU and other inter-African organizations is more delicate and complicated. The talks that the Inspectors had with representatives of some of these organizations convinced them that it is necessary to take positive steps to ensure much better and closer co-ordination and co-operation than does in fact exist at present.

39. Sub-regional offices

On the basis of its initial experience, the ECA came to the conclusion that a concerted policy of co-ordination at sub-regional levels must replace the previous patchwork of isolated activities in individual countries. It therefore established four sub-regional offices in Tangier, Lusaka, Niamey and Kinshasa to serve North, East, West and Central Africa.

40. It would appear that these sub-offices were established primarily for the purpose of promoting sub-regional economic co-operation among the countries in this huge continent. It was felt that most of these countries were not economically viable individually, and that some kind of sub-regional co-operation was desirable so that economic development in each country could be made complementary to that in neighbouring countries.

41. It is not clear to the Inspectors on what basis these sub-regional offices were apportioned among the various countries. It was not easy to group them in a rational way. Solely economic considerations might suggest one grouping; but this may not be either ideal or realistic. It is not therefore surprising that the ECA's idea of having neat economic entities was often unworkable.

42. The ECA sub-regional office in Lusaka provides a striking example of this type of difficulty. The ECA sponsored a conference in Lusaka in 1965 which "recommended" the establishment of an "Eastern African" Economic Community to comprise some fourteen countries of the region including Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. It also recommended the establishment of an inter-ministerial council and a secretariat serviced by the ECA.

43. This "Eastern African" Community was to be formally established after a minimum number of Governments concerned ratified the recommendations and terms of association. In fact, however, the requisite ratifications have not yet been received. Out of the fourteen countries which were potential participants, three - Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania - now sovereign States within this region, consolidated the economic ties already existing and formed the "East African Community" after having ironed out their initial differences. Of the remaining eleven, Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia and Zambia have now, either formally or informally, expressed the wish to be admitted to the already established "East African Community" of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

44. As far as the Inspectors are aware, there is no legal, operational or integral relationship between the small East African Community, which already exists legally and in fact, and the larger Economic Community for Eastern Africa (envisaged by the ECA) whose terms of association have not yet been approved or ratified.

45. It is obvious that the membership and functions of the two Communities will overlap. Some responsible authorities expressed to the Inspectors the view that the fourteen-member Community conceived by the ECA should now be abandoned and the existing three-member Community allowed to be the nucleus of a larger set-up in this region.

46. It is because of these factors that the Inspectors found that the Lusaka sub-regional office had little to do. Indeed they understood that its Director had already recommended to ECA headquarters that it should be shifted to Arusha (Tanzania), which is now the seat of the established East African Community. All this indicates the sort of practical difficulties the ECA has to face and overcome; and how it has to take into account realistic and pragmatic factors in addition to strictly economic ones.

47. The Inspectors did not have time to visit the headquarters of the remaining three sub-regional offices to investigate on the spot their functioning, role and possibilities. Considering the different economic and political factors now in existence in some of these sub-regions, it might well be that the pattern of difficulties encountered by the Lusaka sub-regional office would also be found in some of the other sub-regional offices. However, the Inspectors wish to verify on the spot the real situation and some of them will be visiting the sub-regional offices in Tangier, Kinshasa and Niamey later this year or at the beginning of next year.

48. It would appear that, on the basis of its experience of the sub-regional office in Lusaka, the time has come for the ECA to have another look at its sub-regional offices in order to decide their appropriate location, area covered, etc., and indeed whether they are necessary at all.

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