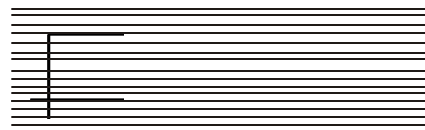




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Johannesburg, South Africa
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ENHANCING ECA's OPERATIONS

THE ROLE OF THE SUBREGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning at its thirty second session approved several measures in Commission resolution 828(XXXII) of 8 May 1997 to strengthen the Economic Commission for Africa's (ECA) subregional presence. These included the transformation of the Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) into Subregional Development Centres (SRDCs); the adoption of new functions for SRDCs; and the redistribution of the membership of SRDCs. Since then, the Commission has strengthened its support to member States by focusing on building synergies between Programme Divisions located at ECA Headquarters in Addis Ababa and SRDCs.

2. SRDCs play a key role in drawing on the policy advocacy capacity of the Commission to influence the policy process at the national and subregional levels. Specifically, this note seeks to inform the 2002 Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development of the new strategic direction of ECA in strengthening its outreach at the subregional level.

II. REVIEW OF SRDC OPERATIONS

3. As ECA is not represented at the country-level, it established five SRDCs to work closely at the operational level with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), UN agencies and member States to support development activities in the subregions. SRDCs are carrying out these efforts by promoting effective networking among governments, civil society and private sector as well as serving as forums for policy dialogue on priority development issues. They are also providing technical assistance to RECs in order to assist in accelerating the integration process in the respective subregions. In this regard, several key activities include:

- ◆ Promoting stakeholders' participation to ensure sound planning and effective provision of assistance in the implementation of projects and programmes by member States.
- ◆ Organizing forums for policy dialogues and consensus building among various stakeholders on key issues of development (for example, post-African Development Forum [ADF] I and II, subregional follow-up meetings, pre-ADF III subregional preparatory meetings, Intergovernmental Committee of Experts' meetings, special events, symposia);
- ◆ Providing assistance for institutional and human capacity building to ensure the sustainability of programme benefits beyond the implementation period. Such capacity building is provided for through group training workshops and seminars on topical issues (e.g. privatization, public-private sector partnerships, HIV/AIDS, gender mainstreaming).
- ◆ Serving as a catalyst for policy dialogue on issues of critical importance to member States through the effective dissemination of ECA's work; its advocacy role; and participation in the work of the UN Country Teams (e.g. Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Framework (CCA/UNDAF), Poverty Reduction Strategic Papers (PRSPs), etc.

4. In an effort to enhance synergies between ECA programme divisions at Headquarters and SRDCs, a programme performance evaluation of SRDCs was conducted in February 2000 that led to a re-focusing of the SRDC programmes on technical cooperation and outreach. These changes have been reflected in the 2002-2003-programme budget. In consequence, all SRDCs have made a significant shift to operational rather than analytical work, as well as to closer coordination of activities with the respective major RECs. This is exemplified by their active participation in subregional programmes such as the Mano River Union (MRU) Initiative, the Joint ECA/World Bank/OECD/GCA/UNDP Great Lakes Initiative, the joint Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)-Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) road transport project financed by African Development Bank (ADB), and the Zambia-Malawi-Mozambique Growth Triangle Project, the post-ADF'99 subregional meeting for Southern Africa (2000), the North Africa Investment Forum (2002), and the subregional preparations for the third African Development Forum (ADF III).

5. Furthermore, an SRDC Coordination Unit was established at ECA headquarters to facilitate the implementation of these collaborative arrangements. This present note also seeks to inform the Conference that the name "SRDC" should be changed to the original designation of "ECA Office" for a given subregion. This change will, among other things, remove the prevailing misconception that SRDCs are separate entities from ECA.

III. STRENGTHENING ECA'S OUTREACH AND IMPACT

6. To increase ECA's impact in influencing the policy-making of member States, measures are being taken to strengthen the functions of SRDCs to ensure that they effectively serve as the critical link between knowledge generation emanating from the substantive programme divisions at ECA headquarters and knowledge transference to stakeholders.

7. Such measures include more effective outreach, better promotion of ECA's advocacy work in fostering regional cooperation and integration, assisting member States in strengthening interregional networks as well as forging strategic alliances with RECs in the implementation of major programmes and initiatives for Africa. To this effect, ECA organizes annual consultative meetings with respective RECs to identify mutual areas of cooperation for incorporation into the work plan of the Commission for the subsequent biennium. Additionally, SRDCs channel knowledge generated by ECA's African Knowledge Network Forum (AKNF), the PRSP Learning Group, and the ADF processes, for example, to RECs and other development partners. A key feature of the work of SRDCs is to support RECs in the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) objectives and action plan in the subregions.

CONCLUSION

8. The establishment of a separate sub-programme for SRDCs was intended to broaden their scope to better encompass the work of the programme divisions at ECA to ensure that ECA's policy analytical work is effectively disseminated by SRDCs to ECA member States. It is hoped that the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development will view the approaches and activities, as described in this note, as further strengthening the economic development objectives of their governments.