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DECENTRALIZATION: GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION
32/197 ON RESTRUCTURING OF THE ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL SECTORS OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

84-0258

1. Following the establishment of the first three regional commissions, the United Nations adopted the policy of a progressive development and strengthening of the role and responsibilities of these organs with a view to promoting, inter alia, an effective process of decentralizing the activities of the United Nations.
2. Although some significant efforts have been made in this direction, the dissatisfaction of the developing countries with the prevailing approaches to development co-operation at the regional and interregional levels has underscored, since the 1970s, the importance of viewing decentralization as part of a broader process for the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system. These efforts aim at rendering the constituent structures of the United Nations more responsive and effective in meeting the challenging needs of the developing countries.
3. The results are reflected in General Assembly resolution 32/197, which sets forth the basis for the current decentralization exercise. In the annex section IV of the resolution, the role of the regional commissions has been recognized to encompass not only research and operational activities at the regional level but also global policy-making, inter-agency co-ordination and programme planning. It further provides that in order to enable the regional commissions to effectively discharge these responsibilities, the necessary authority should be delegated to them and adequate budgetary and financial provision should be allocated for their activity.
4. Action for the implementation of resolution 32/197 focused, in its initial stage, on the restructuring of the Secretariat support service at Headquarters. This was followed by General Assembly resolution 33/202 which resulted in transferring to the regional commissions the status of executing agencies for regional, subregional and interregional projects that were of an intersectoral character or were in areas that did not fall within the purview of specialized agencies, for which the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (DTCD) was hitherto serving as executing agency.
5. More recently, in 1982, the General Assembly in its resolution 37/214 gave a further mandate to pursue the desirability of additional delegation of authority to regional commissions. Paragraph 3(b) of this resolution calls for "an examination of the progress made thus far in the decentralization of United Nations activities ... with a view to determining the specific authorities, responsibilities and resources that should be decentralized and the timing of such decentralization."
6. Pursuant to this resolution, particularly paragraph 3(b), the Secretary-General after consulting the senior officials of

the Organization, namely the heads of departments and the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions, decided that a review of activities in the programme areas of public administration, development issues and policies, social development, science and technology, and population should be undertaken in order to consider a more effective distribution of responsibilities at global and regional levels, with a view to decentralization of activities, whenever necessary, to the regional level.

7. In accordance with this decision, the regional commissions and the concerned Headquarters units exchanged views on the present distribution of responsibilities in each of the identified programme areas, including suggestions on improvements in the distribution of responsibilities, measures to enhance co-ordination, and possibilities for decentralization. Each substantive area was assigned to a regional commission as the lead institution, the responsibility of ECWA being that of social development. Thus, meetings between the concerned officers from Headquarters units and the regional commissions were convened by the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation according to the following time-table:

(a) Population: New York, 2-3 February 1984 (in conjunction with meetings of the Population Commission, Preparatory Committee for the Population Conference and the Inter-agency Meeting on the Population Conference);

(b) Social Development: Vienna, 13-14 February 1984 (in conjunction with the meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women);

(c) Science and Technology: New York, 22-23 February 1984 (in conjunction with the meeting of the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for Development);

(d) Development Issues and Policies, and Public Administration: New York, 27-28 February 1984.

A. Activities proposed to be decentralized

8. Based on the consultation which took place during the above meetings and the subsequent discussions between the Director-General and the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions, the following types of activities

were identified for progressive decentralization to the regional commissions:

(a) Activities which require empirical research and analysis of data and information largely within the regional/subregional context. work on subjects such as reduction of poverty and changes in the distribution of income, the problems and prospects of developing countries, mobilization of personal savings in developing countries, management of sectoral development programmes, specific problems relating to least developed countries, comparative studies of national experience in population policy, impact of social and economic changes on demographic trends, and the role of the family in the development process. Such activities could increasingly be undertaken at the regional level given the diversity of situations and the proximity of the regional commissions to national administrations. The role of Headquarters would be to provide common frameworks and methodologies, and to draw upon regional contributions in synthesizing and analysing the conclusions to central legislative bodies;

(b) Follow-up of activities at the regional, subregional and national levels consequent on international years and anniversaries and global conferences. While Headquarters has a major role to play in catalysing public awareness of specific issues, including the problems of the disadvantaged groups and societies, and should continue to undertake overall monitoring at the global level of actions taken in pursuance of international years and anniversaries and global conferences, much of the follow-up work could be more effectively undertaken at the regional level. Regional commissions are well placed to encourage national administrations to incorporate such follow-up action in their development plans. The multidisciplinary mandate of the regional commissions would ensure effective follow-up action in all related areas. This should be the approach in regard to follow-up action on activities such as the International Year for Disabled Persons (IYDP) the World Assembly on Aging, and the International Youth Year. Similarly, the integration of the recommendations of the Vienna Programme of Action on Science and Technology for Development in national policies and plans can be effectively undertaken by regional commissions. The forthcoming conferences on women and on population would provide further opportunities to strengthen activities in these areas at the regional level;

(c) Activities to promote planning and management of human resources development, which given the differences between, and similarities within, regions could be more effectively undertaken by the regional commissions. Such

activities are found for example in the programmes on science and technology and on public administration;

(d) Activities to prepare inventories of capabilities and capacities at the regional, subregional and national levels, such as for example, inventories of technology institutes and agencies, in the science and technology programme;

(e) Activities to promote economic and technical co-operation among developing countries. There is undoubtedly a major role for Headquarters units in analysing at the global level, regional and subregional experiences and in encouraging interregional co-operation. Nevertheless, a substantial portion of the work required to intensify co-operation among developing countries can be more effectively undertaken at the regional level. Regional commissions should have a major role in designing and planning activities in this field.

9. There may be difficulties in implementing some of these proposals in the context of the present programme budget. While such implementation should be attempted, it is essential to ensure that the next programme budget fully reflects the agreements reached on these proposals together with any consequential reallocation of resources.

B. Activities proposed to be jointly undertaken

10. The need to progressively increase the involvement of regional commissions in planning and implementing activities in the five programme areas was also recognized in the consultations. These activities are specified in the attached annex. The list in the annex is drawn from the consultations and includes activities in which there is scope for strengthening joint action between Headquarters units and the regional commissions. While retaining the main responsibility for these activities, Headquarters units will have to go beyond existing patterns of collaboration and co-operation and ensure a more systematic involvement of the regional commissions in these activities.

C. Operational activities

11. The consultations dealt with operational activities to the extent necessary, but excluded the issue of execution of country-level projects. UTCO has expressed willingness

to utilize fully expertise that may be available in the regional commissions and to explore with them arrangements which should enable the Department to draw on the advice, expertise and inputs of the commissions in both the elaboration and actual execution of projects. The regional commissions are therefore expected to submit to DTCD specific proposals in this regard.

D. Summary and conclusion

12. As a result of the consultations between Headquarters and the regional commissions, a consensus was reached on the following:

(a). The need for devoting more attention to reinforcing the capacities of regional commission so that they can implement their responsibilities in areas to which they have accorded priority;

(b). The need to secure an agreement on the types of activities for decentralization or progressive decentralization and to make an effort to implement such an agreement in the present biennium, and to the extent that this may not prove possible, in the context of the next programme budget 1986-1987;

(c). The need to consider the list of joint activities contained in the annex for implementation as early as possible;

(d). While the issue of decentralization of resources is an important one, it should be addressed in the light of agreements reached on a better distribution of responsibilities. However, additional resources will inevitably have to be secured to the regional commissions to enable them to undertake larger responsibilities emanating from their increased involvement in the activities undertaken at Headquarters;

(e). In preparing for the next programme budget, improvements in the division of responsibilities including decentralization of activities in sectors other than those which have already been identified will need to be examined.

Annex

LIST OF ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY HEADQUARTERS UNITS
IN WHICH THERE IS SCOPE FOR STRENGTHENING JOINT ACTION

I. Activities undertaken by the Department of International
Economic and Social Affairs (DIESA)

A. Population programme

Subprogramme 1: World demographic analysis

- (i) Programme element 1.2: Internal migration and development
- (ii) Programme element 1.4: Demographic aspects of urbanization
- (iii) Programme element 1.5: Mortality analysis

Subprogramme 2: Demographic projections

Programme element 2.4: Comparative analyses and evaluation of population censuses around 1980

Subprogramme 4: Population and development

Programme element 4.4: Demographic studies needed for development planning

Subprogramme 6: Factors affecting patterns of reproduction

Programme element 6.1: Comparative analysis of World Fertility Survey data

Subprogramme 7: Dissemination of population information

Programme element 7.2: Population Information Network (PIN)

B. Social development programme

Subprogramme 1: Participation of the population in development

Subprogramme 2: Social integration and social welfare

Programme element 2.1: Developmental social welfare policies and services

Subprogramme 3: Analysis of the rights and the status of women

Programme element 3.4: Integrated reporting system on the status of women

Subprogramme 4: Integration of women in development at national, regional and international levels

(i) Programme element 4.1: Preparation for the world Conference in 1985

(ii) Programme element 4.2: Implementation of the World Plan of Action

Subprogramme 5: Participation of women in international affairs and strengthening of peace and security

Programme element 5.2: Research and policy analysis

Subprogramme 6: Youth

(i) Programme element 6.1: Preparations for the International Youth Year (IYY)

- (ii) Programme element 6.2: Youth policies and programmes
- (iii) Programme element 6.3: Channels of communication
(Directory of Youth Organization)

Subprogramme 7: Aging

Programme element 7.1: Implementation of the Vienna International Plan of Action

Subprogramme 8: Disabled persons

- (i) Programme element 8.1: Implementation of the World Programme of Action
- (ii) Programme element 8.2: Research policy analysis on disabled persons

Subprogrammes 9, 10 and 11: Crime prevention and criminal justice

C. Ocean economic and technology programme

Subprogramme 1: Promotion of planning and management of the resources of coastal areas and exclusive economic zones

Programme element 1.1: Institutional arrangements for marine resources development

Subprogramme 2: Marine resources development in the global economy

Programme element 2.5: Analysis of trends and development

Subprogramme 3: Marine and coastal technologies

- (i) Programme element 3.1: Marine technology capability
- (ii) Programme element 3.2: Links between producers and users of marine technology

D. Development issues and policies and public administration programme

Subprogramme 1: Development perspectives

- (i) Programme element 1.1: Perspective studies
- (ii) Programme element 1.2: Policy modelling
- (iii) Programme element 1.3: Data bank development and research

Subprogramme 5: Fiscal and financial issues

- (i) Programme element 5.1: International taxation
- (ii) Programme element 5.2: Avoidance of double taxation

II. Activities undertaken by the Centre for Science and Technology for Development

A. Science and technology for development programme

Subprogramme 1: Policy, analysis and research

- (i) Programme element 1.1: Policies studies, guidelines and directives relating to the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and operational plan
- (ii) Programme element 1.4: Analysis of the levels of attainment of scientific and technological development among different countries.
- (iii) Programme element 1.6: Strengthening of research and development-related institutions and their linkage to the productive sectors
- (iv) Programme element 1.2: Early identification and assessment of new scientific and technological development

Subprogramme 2: Co-ordination monitoring and review of the activities of the United Nations system

- (i) Programme element 2.2: Harmonization of activities of the United Nations system

- (ii) Programme element 2.4: Co-ordination of, and support to, activities of secretariat units
- (iii) Programme element 2.5: Scientific and technological information

Subprogramme 3: Financing for science and technology for development

Programme element 3.2: Promotion of the financing of science and technology as an integral part of national capacity building

Subprogramme 4: National and regional activities

B. Public Administration

In this area, the consultations covered both research and analysis and operation activities. The need for increased collaboration between Headquarters and the regional commissions in the area of operational activities was noted.