

GENERAL

E/ESCAP/1152
23 March 1999

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Fifty-fifth session
22-28 April 1999
Bangkok

**ACTIVITIES OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVES AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES
DESIGNATED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION**

(Item 10 of the provisional agenda)

**REVIEW OF REFORM MEASURES UNDERTAKEN AT ESCAP
IN PURSUANCE OF COMMISSION RESOLUTION 53/1**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission has played an active role in reviewing the reform efforts being made at ESCAP. As requested in Commission resolution 53/1 of 30 April 1997, the present document provides a general description of the status of those reform efforts made pursuant to mandates given by the Economic and Social Council and the Commission, as well as issues requiring further attention.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1
I. STOCKTAKING: REFORM MEASURES TO DATE	2
II. ISSUES CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE COMMISSION	11
Annex. Summary of follow-up action taken to implement relevant recommendations of the internal and external oversight bodies and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions	13

INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission has, for several years, exerted efforts to review and revise its conference structure, with the objective of rationalizing, streamlining and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of its work, to enable it to focus more sharply on the complex development issues faced by the countries in the region, in particular the specially disadvantaged group of countries.
2. In its discussion of the continuing reform efforts of ESCAP, the Commission, at its fifty-fourth session, identified the following activities for further action, as set out in the letters dated 18 May 1998 from the Chairman of the Commission to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Economic and Social Council: (a) to rationalize its work programme based upon its core competencies; (b) to further strengthen project monitoring and self-evaluation of both ongoing and completed projects on a systematic basis; (c) to further reduce the percentage of resources devoted to programme support activities; (d) within the programme of work, to redeploy resources from meetings and publications to technical assistance activities; and (e) to implement promptly the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations Secretariat.
3. The Commission noted that ESCAP reform efforts needed to be pursued in the broader context of economic and social developments in the region and the Commission's ability to respond, in an adequate and timely manner, to emerging problems. The Commission emphasized the need to devise clearer objectives for the activities of ESCAP and to set time-frames for achieving those objectives.
4. In considering operational activities, the Commission emphasized the need to continue forging strategic alliances between ESCAP and other United Nations bodies and agencies, as well as other relevant organizations in the region. It emphasized that resources, including regular budget resources, should be directed more to operational activities than to meetings and publications. It urged that members and associate members which had not yet done so should, in order to define more clearly the Commission's work programme priorities, complete the questionnaire on resource allocation that had been circulated by the secretariat in February 1997.
5. The Commission, in its resolution 53/1 of 30 April 1997 on restructuring the conference structure of the Commission, *inter alia*, charged the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) with the functions of assisting the Executive Secretary in drawing up proposals for the medium-term plan, programme budget and the work programme priorities and resource allocation, consistent with the guidelines provided by the Commission, and in monitoring and evaluating the implementation, outcome and effectiveness of the Commission's programme of work. At its fifty-fourth session, the Commission recognized that ACPR was a unique and productive forum within the United Nations system and served as an important link between the member governments and the secretariat. The Commission acknowledged that ACPR played an important role in advising the secretariat in its efforts to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of programme delivery within the wider reform being undertaken by the United Nations

I. STOCKTAKING: REFORM MEASURES TO DATE

6. The reform of the United Nations at the Headquarters level, in particular the process set in motion through the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolutions 50/227 of 24 May 1996 and 52/12B of 19 December 1997 and by the Economic and Social Council of its resolutions 1998/44 and 1998/46 of 31 July 1998 further guided ESCAP in its continuing work on reform and restructuring.

7. Within the Commission, the reforms undertaken pursuant to resolution 48/2 of 23 April 1992 on restructuring the conference structure of the Commission have resulted in the reduction of the number of components of the Commission's subsidiary structure from nine to seven, comprising three thematic committees, two technical committees and two special bodies. In 1996-1997, the Commission reviewed the thematic orientation of the intergovernmental structure and programmes of the Commission that had been mandated by the above resolution. At its fifty-third session, held in April 1997, the Commission recognized that the advantages of the thematic approach outweighed the disadvantages, and considered that a process of evolution was preferable to any radical change, and that the right approach would be to consolidate the gains wherever they had been made and to effect necessary changes only in the case of those committees and subprogrammes where some reordering of programme areas or a clearer expression of focus could be of advantage. That was particularly felt with respect to the themes relating to poverty alleviation and environment and sustainable development. Accordingly, the Commission, through its resolution 53/1 on restructuring the conference structure of the Commission, decided to retain the five-committee structure with changes in the two thematic committees to sharpen their respective focuses and renamed them the Committee on Socio-economic Measures to Alleviate Poverty in Rural and Urban Areas; and the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Development. The Commission also decided to retain the two special bodies, the Special Body on Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries, and the Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries. The Commission emphasized that the reform of the conference structure should seek to bring about wider participation of members and associate members in the Commission, and should aim to sharpen the focus of work of the Commission and its committees, thereby improving effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of the ESCAP programme of work. Within that context, the terms of reference of the committees should be flexible to enable ESCAP to respond to new demands and adjust its priorities in the light of the region's rapidly changing economic and social circumstances. In conformity with the revised conference structure and to carry out the programme of work of the Commission efficiently, the Commission, at its fifty-fourth session, decided to streamline the programme structure from the existing 10 subprogrammes to 7, effective in the biennium 2000-2001. Under the revised programme structure, two subprogrammes, Regional economic cooperation: trade and investment and Regional economic cooperation: industry and technology will be merged into one subprogramme. The new subprogramme will seek to strengthen regional economic cooperation in the promotion of trade, investment and

technology linkages, and the acceleration of industrial development. Three subprogrammes relating to poverty alleviation will be structured into two subprogrammes, one to deal with social development issues and concerns, human resources development, and women in development, with specific reference to the alleviation of poverty, and the other to address social and economic issues in the areas of population and rural and urban development that are directly related to the alleviation of poverty.

8. Furthermore, to achieve congruence between the programme and the secretariat structures, the secretariat has been reorganized, in two phases, entailing a reduction in the number of substantive divisions from nine to seven. This fulfils a major recommendation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations Secretariat. The consequent mergers, consolidation of functions and redeployment of resources to priority areas are reflected in the proposed ESCAP programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. Pursuant to the Commission's directives, the programme areas to be strengthened through the redeployment of resources are (a) development research and policy analysis, for research and analysis of the effects of the regional economic crisis, and the formulation of recommendations on ways and means for countries to respond and to minimize the attendant risks necessary to overcome them; (b) social policy and integration of disadvantaged groups and women in development; (c) tourism development; and (d) statistics. Further efforts to sharpen the focus of work of the Commission's legislative bodies are ongoing.

9. Through its resolution 53/1, the Commission reduced the duration of legislative meetings to a maximum of 48 meeting days per biennium from the previous maximum of 70. It also reduced the maximum number of ad hoc intergovernmental meetings during a calendar year from 15 to 5, and the attendant maximum number of meeting days from 100 to 25. In pursuance of paragraph 1(7)(c) of resolution 53/1 and the recommendation of ACPR at its two hundred and twenty-first session in December 1997, a panel discussion was organized during the ministerial segment of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission with focus on an aspect of the theme topic study, "Impact of the current financial crisis on social development and implications for regional cooperation strategies". While reviewing that session of the Commission at its two hundred and twenty-sixth session in May 1998, ACPR recognized that the panel discussion had afforded a good opportunity for promoting interaction between the delegations, and proposed that it be continued.

10. Various measures were undertaken in pursuance of the Commission's directives at its fifty-fourth session, as referred to in paragraph 2 of the present document, including the following:

(a) The Commission's endorsement of the revision to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, taking into consideration the emerging needs of countries in the region, especially to cope with both the economic and social adverse affects resulting from the financial crisis which had hit South-East and East Asia in 1997. Furthermore, the Executive Secretary established a task force with the aim of identifying issues and challenges into the twenty-first century and the areas of focus of ESCAP as a direct result of the People's Management Training Programme,¹ held for ESCAP staff at Kanchanaburi, Thailand, in September 1998. The recommendations of the task force on the follow-up to the People's Management Training Programme are duly reflected in the programme overview and subprogramme narrative in the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001 submitted to the Commission for consideration.² The task force will continue to assist the Executive Secretary in future programme planning.

(b) ESCAP conducts regular reviews on the implementation of extrabudgetary (XB) projects, based on the requirements of bilateral donors. Progress and terminal reports on ongoing and completed projects are examined jointly by the secretariat and the respective bilateral donors with a view to identifying problems and taking corrective action to ensure timely and effective project implementation. Guidelines for the preparation of progress and terminal reports are updated regularly, taking into account the expressed needs of the donors. Monitoring and evaluation of XB projects funded by United Nations funds and programmes are undertaken in accordance with their respective established procedures. In 1998, evaluation of five selected technical assistance projects funded from the Japan-ESCAP Cooperation Fund (JECF) was undertaken jointly by the secretariat and the Government of Japan. Special project review meetings are planned, including a subregional human resources development evaluation workshop on post-literacy programme development for women in South Asia, to be held in March 1999 under funding from the Government of the Netherlands. The findings of the evaluation will be reflected in subsequent project design, implementation and delivery. To facilitate access by project managers to up-to-date information on financial delivery of their respective projects, the secretariat developed on-line retrieval and monitoring of financial statements of XB project accounts in June 1998.

/...

¹ The People's Management Training Programme is part of a long-term strategy to create a new management culture in the United Nations by strengthening the skills of managers to manage its human resources and carry out managerial responsibilities effectively. The training was called for in the Secretary-General's strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization, as well as in his report on the establishment of a transparent and effective system of accountability and responsibility.

² E/ESCAP/1143.

(c) The redeployment of regular budget posts in the context of ESCAP restructuring and programme budget exercises has been undertaken in two phases, as referred to in paragraph 8 of the present document. Phase one of the redeployment was effected as of 15 July 1998, and phase two is to be effected as of 1 January 2000. Regular budget staff resources have been redeployed from the programme support areas to the programme of work as well as within the programme of work, taking into account the priority areas identified by the governments' assessments in response to the 1997 questionnaire on the resource allocations of ESCAP, and subsequent decisions of the Commission.

(d) In pursuance of Commission resolution 53/1, the number of meeting days for servicing intergovernmental meetings, including legislative meetings, has been drastically reduced. The number of recurrent and non-recurrent publications has been reduced from 439 issues for the biennium 1996-1997 to 310 issues for the biennium 1998-1999, and further to 233 for the biennium 2000-2001. The number of recurrent titles has also decreased, from 45 for the biennium 1996-1997 to 41 for the biennium 1998-1999, and to 39 titles for the biennium 2000-2001. The ESCAP Publications Committee, which was reconstituted in December 1997, has recently completed the "Guide to ESCAP Publication Activities", a reference document to assist the secretariat staff in preparing publications and to contribute to overall improvement in the quality of ESCAP publications. In June 1998, ESCAP introduced a general policy whereby (a) XB projects involving the organization of group training activities should not envisage printing the report/proceedings of the training activities as publications; and (b) more extrabudgetary funds should be allocated for the conduct of training activities.

(e) ESCAP has continued to make significant progress in achieving timely compliance with the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations Secretariat and other internal and external oversight bodies. Among the recommendations which have been implemented are those relating to the establishment of congruence between the programme and secretariat structures, the streamlining of the ESCAP publications programme and the management of trust funds. Other recommendations yet to be implemented include some which require further consultations within the United Nations system or policy changes at the Headquarters level. A summary of follow-up action taken to implement relevant recommendations of the internal and external oversight bodies and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) is annexed to the present document. It should be noted that the annex has been prepared in a standard format as required for submission to Headquarters, and reflects the status of action taken as of December 1998.

11. Concurrently, various other efficiency initiatives already under way within the secretariat (covering management, information systems and internal reporting; documentation and publications; conference services; general services; utilities and communications, staff training; and staff travel) continue to be vigorously pursued. On the administrative side, the first-stage implementation of the United Nations Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) commenced at ESCAP in May 1996. The IMIS project, approved by the General Assembly in 1988 with the aim of developing and

implementing integrated software for the processing of and reporting on administrative actions at major duty stations, would replace numerous independent local systems currently in use, and is expected to provide more efficient and cost-effective support in the areas of general services and personnel and financial management. IMIS Release 1, on "Personnel action processing", and Release 2, on "Staff entitlements" are fully implemented at ESCAP. At present, Release 3, on "Accounting, procurement and travel" is implemented only at Headquarters, while the implementation schedule at other duty stations is yet to be finalized. Thereafter, the implementation of Release 4, on "Payroll" is expected to commence. It is envisaged that more tangible productivity gains and savings, including more timely and reliable accounting information for programme managers, will be realized when these releases are fully operational at ESCAP.

12. In addition to IMIS, the idea of developing an Internet-accessible management information system was endorsed by the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs³ in New York in May 1997. In this connection, the Information Support Unit of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is undertaking the construction of a comprehensive inventory of work based on programme activities to be undertaken by the United Nations Secretariat in the biennium 1998-1999. The prototype, which is known as the Integrated Meeting and Documentation Information System (IMDIS), is also designed to assist with the further coordination and management of the economic and social development agenda across the United Nations system. Linked to the inventory of work would be a comprehensive register of United Nations system intergovernmental and expert bodies, an on-line journal of United Nations meetings, and a rudimentary index to United Nations resolutions and decisions. IMDIS would include a programme performance monitoring component, which is still at the pilot project stage. While the development of the IMDIS programme performance monitoring component is still ongoing at Headquarters, ESCAP commenced work in May 1998, through financial assistance from the Government of Japan, to upgrade substantially the Programme Monitoring System (PROMS) software, which was developed in the late 1980s as a computer-assisted means of collecting and consolidating the information required for the preparation of programme performance reports for submission to United Nations Headquarters and reports for submission to intergovernmental bodies

/...

³ The Executive Committee is one of the two bodies established by the Secretary-General in 1997 to assist in the management and coordination of economic and social affairs and development work within the Organization. Its executive body comprises the heads of relevant Secretariat departments and offices as well as the regional commissions and relevant funds and programmes, and works to enhance coordination and cooperation between policy entities and the distinct operational programmes.

/...

on the implementation of the programme of work. The redesigned PROMS became operational in September 1998. Written in a popular PC database language, it offers enhanced functionality, including secretariat-wide networking to facilitate direct entry and retrieval of programme performance and meetings information, including data for the ESCAP calendar of meetings, which can be posted to the ESCAP Web site. The use of the upgraded PROMS has resulted in the elimination of duplication of work, and the reduction of cycle time in the preparation of outputs. Consequent savings in resources are envisaged in the programme support area.

13. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1998/46, *inter alia* welcomed the proposal of the Secretary-General to convene yearly meetings to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General in each geographical area, among the relevant entities of the United Nations system engaged in regional and intercountry activities. It further noted that such meetings should be cost-effective and build up on already existing coordination mechanisms and should focus on specific issues requiring coordination at the regional level. Preparations are under way for convening the first such meeting for the ESCAP region, under the chairmanship of the Deputy Secretary-General, on 3 and 4 June 1999. The objective of the meeting is to improve coordination and promote collaborative action in order to reinforce synergies and avoid overlapping. Letters of invitation have been addressed by the Deputy Secretary-General to all member organizations of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), urging them to be represented by the most senior official in charge of the regional programme.

14. Among the other recommendations pertaining to the regional commissions in Council resolution 1998/46, the following may be noted, along with the corresponding action initiated by ESCAP as indicated below each recommendation.

- (1) Contributions of the regional commissions in implementing the outcome of major global conferences should be reflected in the work of the functional commissions.

Action This is being done through the preparation of inputs for or participation in sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission for Social Development. The recent contributions include a regional review of the progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, by the Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development at its third session, held in 1996, in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly, held in New York in June 1997; a regional review of the progress in implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region, by the Fifth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Development, held at Manila in November 1997; and the Asia-Pacific Position adopted by the Second Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on Human Resources Development for Youth, held at Bangkok in June 1998, for the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, held at Lisbon in August 1998. It may be recalled that the

Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1998/44, invited the regional commissions [to pursue conference follow-up on a systematic basis, within their respective mandates and priorities].

- (2) Active involvement of the executive secretaries of the regional commissions, or their representatives, in the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Group with a view to linking the activities of the regional commissions more effectively with the overall activities of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors.

Action The Executive Secretary of ESCAP has participated regularly in meetings of the Executive Committee. The Regional Commissions New York Office has represented the regional commissions at meetings of the United Nations Development Group and has kept the commissions briefed on important developments.

- (3) With regard to priority-setting, the Council welcomed the ongoing exercises in some of the regional commissions, and encouraged the other regional commissions to carry out similar activities. It noted that the involvement of governments in that process should help the commissions achieve greater effectiveness and efficiency.

Action In February 1997, the secretariat sought the views of governments on the question of setting priorities for the activities in the programme of work of the Commission and the allocation of resources to ensure the optimum utilization of the regular budget resources allocated to ESCAP. Based on the outcome of that exercise, the decision of the Commission and within the context of the reform of ESCAP, regular budget staff resources have been redeployed from programme support to programme of work as well as within the programme of work from low-priority to high-priority areas. Pursuant to the Commission's recommendation at its fifty-third session, ACPR set up an Open-ended Informal Working Group of ACPR, which carried out a review of issues relating to the reform of ESCAP during the period May to August 1997. As one of the direct results of the work of ACPR, the ESCAP Publications Committee was reconstituted in December 1997, which led to the completion of the [Guide to ESCAP Publications Activities].

- (4) Improved coordination of the activities of the regional commissions and various United Nations entities operating at the regional level, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), within their respective mandates and priorities through, *inter alia*:

- (a) Reactivation of the UNDP/regional commissions task force for the purpose of addressing issues of common concern more effectively;
- (b) Closer consultation of the regional commissions by UNDP during the programming stages of its regional activities;
- (c) The potential for active involvement of the regional commissions in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

Action The reactivated UNDP/regional commissions task force met in September 1998 under the chairmanship of the Administrator of UNDP and with the participation of the five executive secretaries of the regional commissions. The task force decided to revise its terms of reference and to draw up a "compact" for cooperation between UNDP and the regional commissions. The regional commissions have also been included as partners in the Common Country Assessment (CCA), which is considered an essential first step in the effective formulation of UNDAF.

- (5) The undertaking of joint exercises in accordance with their respective mandates and priorities should be encouraged between each of the secretariats of the commissions, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) secretariat on the basis of memoranda or letters of understanding.

Action ESCAP had earlier signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Economic and Social Development and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). It also maintains close collaboration with UNCTAD, including recent joint regional preparatory work before the third session of the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference as well as follow-up to the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s. ESCAP and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) are collaborating in the development and implementation of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) for five Central Asian countries. SPECA was launched with the adoption of the Tashkent Declaration in March 1998 and ESCAP and ECE are providing support to the four project working groups established in the areas of (a) development of transport infrastructure and border-crossing facilities; (b) rational and efficient use of energy and water resources; (c) an international economic conference on Tajikistan and a joint strategy for regional development and promotion of foreign investment; and (d) regional cooperation in the development of multiple routes for the pipeline transport of hydrocarbons to the global market. With financial inputs from the UNDP Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC), ESCAP and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) will jointly implement a project on the framework for interregional cooperation between

Asia and the Pacific and Latin America. A similar interregional TCDC project, developed by ESCAP and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on enhancing economic cooperation among the developing countries of Asia and Africa as a follow-up to the Bandung Framework for Asia-Africa Cooperation, has been also approved by the UNDP Special Unit.

- (6) Regional commissions are encouraged to intensify their cooperation and regular exchange of information, as determined by their respective intergovernmental bodies, with relevant regional bodies, institutions and networks.

Action ESCAP has been playing a role in fostering regional-level coordination and enhancing synergies through the Regional Inter-agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific (RICAP), for which it serves as the convener and provides secretariat support. Some of the 13 subcommittees of RICAP are actively promoting joint programming as well as funding for joint projects. Their membership also includes subregional groupings, non-governmental organizations and civic society organizations.

ESCAP also provides substantive support to the subregional organizations through its analytical work and project-based assistance, at their request. At the initiative of ESCAP in 1994, an annual consultative mechanism was established between the executive heads of the subregional organizations and ESCAP. The first meeting, held in 1994, identified trade and investment, transport and communications, energy and human resources development as priority areas for intersubregional cooperation. The fourth meeting was hosted by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) secretariat at Kathmandu in October 1998. ESCAP cooperation with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and SAARC is undertaken within the framework of the memoranda of understanding established with those organizations, respectively, in 1993 and 1994. A similar Memorandum of Understanding was also signed with the Asian Development Bank in 1993 as well as with the Forum Secretariat. Cooperation with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is based on specific requests.

15. At the intra-secretariat level, the following reform initiatives, some of which have been alluded to briefly earlier in this document, may be noted:

- Reactivation of the Publications Committee (ACPR has been kept apprised of developments on the matter)
- Reduction in the number and length of documents of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, and revision of their format to highlight their action-oriented nature
- Institution of a system of self-evaluation of projects
- Substantial upgrading of PROMS programme monitoring software to facilitate, *inter alia*,

the direct entry and retrieval of programme performance and meeting information

- Redeployment of staff resources from programme support to the programme of work in 1998. Furthermore, as a result of ongoing and anticipated streamlining and productivity gains in the programme management, information (library), conference (language), personnel and general services areas, it is envisaged that a number of posts may be eliminated from programme support during the biennium 2000-2001. The savings thus realized will be proposed as sources of contribution to the Development Account.⁴ In proposing productivity projects where savings realized will be made available for that Account, priority has been given to ensuring that the level of services and resources directly related to the secretariat's capacity to implement the programme of work effectively is maintained.

II. ISSUES CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

16. In preparing for the panel discussions during the ministerial segment of the Commission sessions in 1998 and 1999, the secretariat experienced serious constraints in securing panelists owing to non-availability of funds. In paragraph 1(7)(c) of its resolution 53/1 of 30 April 1997 the Commission called for the organization of an informal session among the heads of delegations during the ministerial segment of each Commission session on a year-by-year basis. It also stipulated that the organization of such an informal session should not be institutionalized. The resolution was adopted by the Commission at its fifty-third session in 1997 without additional programme budget implications, on the basis that an informal session among the heads of delegations during the ministerial segment would have no financial implications for the Commission. The organization of a panel discussion on selected issues related to the theme topic for that session would require resources to finance the participation of expert panelists. The allocation of regular budget resources to this activity, which has not been mandated by the Commission, may not be approved by the Committee on Programme and Coordination (CPC) and ACABQ. Should the Commission decide to endorse the continued organization of panel discussions in the biennium 2000-2001, a mandate to that effect is required.

17. To further sharpen the focus of the work of the Commission and its committees, the secretariat proposes to entrust an informal open-ended working group of ACPR, in consultation with the Executive Secretary, to define priorities for the programme of work and recommend to the Commission strategic directions for its future activities in line with the terms of reference of ACPR as established by resolution 53/1.

/...

⁴ See General Assembly resolution 52/235 of 26 June 1998.

/...

18. With regard to the regional coordination meetings to be convened by the Deputy Secretary-General (see para. 13 above), the Economic and Social Council, in annex III, paragraph 13 of its resolution 1998/46 requested that "The outcome of these meetings should be reported to the Council through the respective intergovernmental bodies of the regional commissions, as appropriate". As the regional coordination meeting at ESCAP will be held in early June 1999, that is, after the fifty-fifth session of the Commission, ESCAP would not be in a position to consider and transmit to the Council any report on the outcome of the regional coordination meeting. Accordingly, in order to comply with the terms of resolution 1998/46, the Commission may wish to formally authorize the Chairman to transmit to the President of the Economic and Social Council a report on the outcome of the regional coordination meeting following its consideration by ACPR.

Annex

**Summary of follow-up action taken to implement relevant recommendations of the internal and external oversight bodies
and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions**

Section 17. Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific

Source of recommendation	Brief description of recommendation	Action taken to implement the recommendation
Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the audits of the regional commissions (A/52/776), annex, para. 25	The Office recommended that, in the context of the progressive reorganization of the Commission's work on a thematic basis, ESCAP should ensure the quality and relevance of publications on a continuous basis. The response of ESCAP management was pending as of the date of the present report.	<p>In December 1997, the Executive Secretary reconstituted the Working Group on Publications and renamed it the "ESCAP Publications Committee". The Executive Secretary also requested that readership surveys be intensified and that such surveys should be undertaken as an integral part of all publications produced by ESCAP in order to assess the relevance and usefulness of the publications for the target groups concerned. The objectives of the exercise are to streamline the ESCAP publications programme in the context of the United Nations reform exercise, and to ensure that only quality publications are produced in the most time-efficient and cost-effective manner.</p> <p>The Publications Committee established three working groups to address various aspects of its work: (a) on publications and related issues, including joint printing arrangements, sales of publications, mailing lists of recipients, desk-top publishing, cost effectiveness of printing funds, electronic dissemination, and readership surveys; (b) on review and update of the guidelines developed in 1993; and (c) on quality control. The Committee met 13 times in 1998 and is now in the process of finalizing its report, which would consist of a summary of recommendations arising from the analysis undertaken by the three working groups, together with the "Guide to ESCAP Publications Activities". The Guide is intended as reference material to assist ESCAP staff members in preparing publications and to contribute to the overall improvement in the quality of ESCAP publications.</p> <p>Some salient features of the Committee's recommendations are (i) the outline of steps towards institutionalizing a peer review; (ii) attribution of authorship to consultants as an incentive for producing quality outputs of the highest standard possible; (iii) assignment of more responsibility and credibility to officers directly concerned, in addition to the overall responsibility of the division directors; (iv) periodic review by the Office of the Executive Secretary of ESCAP publications as a whole, with a view to improving the future publications programme, and to providing feedback to the divisions concerned; (v) special importance attached to the "Guide" to serve as a guiding principle in producing quality manuscripts; (vi) promotion of the use of electronic publishing technologies to save time and cost; (vii) the ESCAP mailing list of sales publications should be critically reviewed from time to time, in consultation with the divisions concerned, with a view to updating and streamlining it, as appropriate; and (viii) evaluation, including standardization of readership surveys to the extent possible, provision of incentives to target readers and recipients to attract feedback from them, and establishment of a line of communication with the United Nations Publications Office to collect feedback on sales of ESCAP publications.</p> <p>The finalized report would be submitted to the Executive Secretary for approval and adoption.</p>
A/52/776, annex, para. 42	OIOS recommended that ESCAP establish expeditiously the trust funds for which contributions have	ESCAP fully endorses the recommendation of OIOS with regard to the importance of and the need for expeditious programming of the extrabudgetary funds available to it for specific projects and activities in consultation with the donors concerned. These funds include new annual contributions of donors along with savings of completed projects funded with the previous years' annual contributions as well as the interest income accrued to each donor

Source of recommendation	Brief description of recommendation	Action taken to implement the recommendation
	<p>already been received, close all completed projects and determine the disposition of unspent balances in consultation with donors. The response of ESCAP management was pending as of the date of the present report.</p>	<p>programme.</p> <p>It may be useful to point out that, while intended contributions are normally announced by donors at the annual Commission session (normally held in April), the actual payment of such intended contributions normally takes place towards the end of the year. Nevertheless, such intended contributions are meant for utilization in the following calendar year. To expedite programming, ESCAP now undertakes an annual extrabudgetary project formulation exercise, normally during the months of May-August of a calendar year, based on the announcement of intended contributions by donors at the annual session. Packages of project proposals resulting therefrom are then submitted to the various traditional donors for consideration and approval for implementation in the subsequent year. In 1997, ESCAP also managed to obtain cooperation and support from one of its major traditional donors (Japan) in expediting its review and approval process, which resulted in approval of new project proposals towards the end of December 1997 and in January 1998. Prior to this, approval was received by ESCAP only in May of the following year. This has greatly expedited the programming schedule. ESCAP will continue its efforts to ensure expeditious programming of extrabudgetary funds with other donor programmes.</p>
A/52/776, annex, para. 69	<p>The Office recommended that ESCAP establish an independent security function within its Electronic Services Section with overall responsibility for the security of the Commission's technological environment. The Office further recommended that ESCAP develop a disaster recovery plan in order to provide a level of system dependability that satisfied the requirements of both ESCAP and Headquarters.</p>	<p>As has been indicated previously, the Electronic Services Section is not staffed with the requisite number of personnel to permit it to compartmentalize functions. In the specific instance of security, this is one of a number of responsibilities assigned to the post of supervisor of the Technical Services Unit. The job description for the post has been submitted for classification. Once vacancy announcement and recruitment procedures have been completed, the incumbent will be requested to review and document the existing disaster recovery plan of ESCAP, with a view to formalizing and improving on the associated responsibilities and procedures.</p>
Report of the Board of Auditors to the General Assembly on the accounts of the United Nations for the biennium ended 31 December 1997 (A/53/5), para. 162	<p>The Board recommends that the Administration establish the conference centres of ECA and ESCAP as separate cost centres and that all costs associated with their operation be apportioned to them for more accurate determination</p>	<p>ESCAP had indicated that the activities and services relating to the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) will be operated under Income Section 3 in the biennium 2000-2001. Further to the management audit of UNCC and subsequent discussions and consultation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts which took place in the third quarter of 1998, a feasibility study on the various uses of UNCC and their profitability had been planned. Although the study had not been developed beyond the planning stage in time for ESCAP to formulate and submit a revised proposal for inclusion in the proposed budget for 2000-2001, further action on this matter will be pursued in 1998-1999. It is anticipated, however, that the current economic situation in the region will limit available options somewhat.</p> <p>Meanwhile, ESCAP will continue maximizing use of UNCC. Separate accounts have been established to record</p>

Source of recommendation	Brief description of recommendation	Action taken to implement the recommendation
A/53/5, para. 214	<p>of their profitability.</p> <p>The Board recommends that the Administration of ESCAP ensure that appropriate staff are allocated to projects after priorities have been identified.</p>	<p>all costs associated with the operation in order to determine the profitability of the operation.</p> <p>See above.</p>
ACABQ (A/52/7 Chap II, Part V), paras. V.4 and V.44	The Committee recommends that the format of presentation of programmes of activities of the regional commissions should be reviewed with a view to delineating more clearly substantive activities vis-à-vis programme support and harmonizing the budget presentation.	The ESCAP programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 included, under programme support, (a) substantive services to the Commission and its subsidiary bodies and the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR); (b) formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Commission's programme of work; (c) facilitation of inter-agency dialogue at the regional level; and (d) substantive activities related to technical cooperation among developing countries (TDCD). These functions are performed by the Programme Management Division, which is considered a part of the programme support, along with Conference Services (which also clearly relate to the programme of work), the Division of Administration and the United Nations Information Services. In the case of ECE and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), most of these functions were included under executive direction and management in their respective programme budgets for the biennium 1998-1999. The organizational structure of the five regional commissions differs, based on the needs as well as the historical background of each of the commissions. On the basis that the existing ESCAP organizational structure in the programme support will be maintained for the biennium 2000-2001, the work relating to (a)-(d) above has been included under programme support with the aim of maintaining a clear linkage between the work performed and the organizational unit responsible for it.
ACABQ (A/52/7 Chap II, Part V), para. V.5	The Committee notes that the level of resources proposed for programme support in some regional commissions continues to be high in relation to resources requested for the programme of work. In this regard, the Committee reiterates its view contained in paragraph V.7 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997	The ESCAP programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 includes the proposed redeployment of two RB Professional posts (one P-3 and one P-2) from the programme support to programme areas with a view to increasing the allocation of RB resources to substantive activities. In addition, 88 per cent of the minimum savings required of ESCAP for the Development Account, amounting to US\$ 795,400, has been identified from the programme support, including nine local-level posts. There has been a net increase in the number of RB Professional posts allocated to the programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001, compared with a decrease of 11 RB posts, at both the Professional and local levels, in the programme support. The programme support costs of ESCAP include conference services and common service expenses which are clearly directly related to the substantive divisions in carrying out their work. Common services include such items as computer and office equipment, furniture, office and other supplies, communications costs, office and building maintenance and utilities. The possibility of decentralizing the common service costs from the programme support to the respective programme of work was considered. However, to ensure cost-effectiveness and optimal use of limited RB non-staff costs, and to avoid increasing the administrative procedures required of substantive divisions, ESCAP decided

Source of recommendation	Brief description of recommendation	Action taken to implement the recommendation
	that the requirements for programme support should have been considerably lower and that the resources thus released could have been diverted to substantive activities.	<p>to continue with the central management of the common service expenses under programme support.</p> <p>Monitoring the level of "non-programme costs", as put forward in the Secretary General's report in document A/52/758, may be a better indicator of the proportion of funding being utilized by the programme of work. However, following several issues raised by ACABQ in relation to the basis of calculation, ESCAP is awaiting further information on this subject.</p>
ACABQ (A/52/7 Chap II, Part V), para. V.6	Budget submissions should indicate the extent of review by inter-governmental organs of the programmes of work of the Commission and its various organizational and institutional issues, including intergovernmental structure. The submission should identify the financial implications resulting from intergovernmental reviews, as well as proposed re-allocation within the same budget section of released resources to other priority issues. All increases in requirements resulting from intergovernmental reviews should also be indicated in the budget submissions.	<p>The draft programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001 pertaining to subprogrammes 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 were reviewed by the respective legislative committees during the period September-November 1998. As the duration of the legislative committee meetings had been reduced from the previous five to three working days by Commission resolution 53/1 of 30 April 1997, the legislative committees conducted a review of the respective programme of work at the programme area level rather than at the output level. The draft programme of work of ESCAP will be reviewed by ACPR at its regular session on 28 January 1999, and by the Commission at its fifty-fifth session, scheduled to meet from 22 to 28 April 1999. Changes recommended by the Commission at its fifty-fifth session will be communicated immediately to PPBD for incorporation in the ESCAP programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, prior to the issuance of the programme budget fascicle on Section 15 (ESCAP).</p> <p>The outcome of the governments' assessment in response to the 1997 questionnaire on the RB resource allocations of ESCAP to the programme of work, 1996-1997 and the subsequent mandates and priorities of the Commission in 1997 and 1998, specifically called for the allocation of additional RB resources to: (1) statistics; (2) tourism; (3) research and analysis on the causes and consequences (both economic and social) of the financial crisis, and the action necessary to overcome them; and (4) regional implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region. More allocation of RB staff and non-staff resources have been proposed for these four areas in the proposed ESCAP programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.</p>
ACABQ (A/52/7 Chap II, Part V), para. V.7	The Committee recommends that future budget submissions should identify publications initiated by the secretariat, including studies to be undertaken by consultants, and indicate more clearly intended users of United Nations publications, both recurrent and non-recurrent. The Committee also reiterates its	Starting from the programme budget 1998-1999, ESCAP differentiates its recurrent and non-recurrent publications into two categories, "mandated" and "discretionary". Moreover, ESCAP reduced a number of "discretionary" recurrent and non-recurrent publications for the biennium 2000-2001 with a view to rationalizing its publications programme. For the biennium 1998-1999, ESCAP proposed a total of 310 technical publications, comprising (a) 184 mandated recurrent publications; (b) 10 discretionary recurrent publications; (c) 57 mandated non-recurrent publications; and (d) 59 discretionary non-recurrent publications. At the time of the ESCAP programme budget submission to the Programme Planning and Budget Division, RB contractual printing amounted to US\$ 274,000 and internal reproduction amounted to 2.52 million page units. For the biennium 2000-2001, ESCAP proposes a total of 234 technical publications, comprising 168 mandated recurrent publications and 66 mandated non-recurrent publications. RB contractual printing is estimating at US\$ 245,200 and internal reproduction at 2.3 million page units. Compared with the biennium 1998-1999, these figures represent 10.5 and 8.7 per cent reductions, respectively.

Source of recommendation	Brief description of recommendation	Action taken to implement the recommendation
	<p>view, reflected in paragraph 76 of its first report on the proposed budget for the biennium 1996-1997 (A/50/7), that the secretariat should indicate to the relevant intergovernmental bodies the number, type, cost and audience of each publication, the date intended for publication, the date when each publication was first requested, who requested the publication, when it was last reviewed and by whom.</p>	<p>In May 1997, ACPR constituted an open-ended informal working group to undertake in-depth reviews of, among others, ESCAP recurrent publications for 1998-1999. In August 1997, the working group reviewed the profile of each of the 41 recurrent publications, including the mandate, the general contents, the intended readership, the readership survey, the source of funding (direct costs), the issuance dates for the past five years, distribution and stock, and sales record where applicable. To obtain actual sales records of the priced publications for the period 1992-1996, the secretariat contacted the Sales and Marketing Sections of the United Nations offices at Geneva and New York. As a result of this review, the readership survey was made mandatory for all ESCAP publications, and the Publications Committee, which had been established in 1993 but had not met since early 1994, was reconstituted. The member and associate member Governments were advised of the result of this exercise at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission held in April 1998. The Publications Committee is currently finalizing the "Guide to ESCAP Publications Activities", reference material to assist ESCAP staff members in preparing publications and to contribute to the overall improvement in the quality of ESCAP publications.</p> <p>For the 2000-2001 programme budget exercise, ESCAP introduced a revised publication proposal form (D-3.B form), which requires the author divisions to provide detailed information, including the intended users, source of funding, etc. which can be made available to member and associate member Governments.</p> <p>A number of member and associate member governments of the Commission, particularly those of the least developed, landlocked and island developing countries, expressed concern over the shift in the mode of information dissemination from the traditional publications to electronic issuance, i.e. the Internet. They cautioned that a large number of the intended audience in those countries were not yet adequately equipped with the necessary information technology hardware. They therefore requested the secretariat to ensure that the needs of the primary end-users of ESCAP technical publications in those countries were met.</p>
ACABQ (A/52/7 Chap II, Part V), para. V.8	<p>The Advisory Committee draws attention to its comments and observations in paragraph 83 of chapter I and points out also that requirements for consultants in future budget submissions should be prepared in accordance with such guidelines which the General Assembly may wish to establish as a result of its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on the comprehensive policy guidelines on consultants, to be submitted in accordance</p>	<p>The Secretary-General's guidelines on consultants have not yet been finalized by United Nations Headquarters. ESCAP has reviewed the question and ensured that consultancy funds requested under the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 are kept to the minimum to cover specialized consultancy services not available in the secretariat and for mandated outputs/activities.</p>

Source of recommendation	Brief description of recommendation	Action taken to implement the recommendation
	with section VI, paragraph 4, of Assembly resolution 51/226 of 3 April 1997.	
ACABQ (A/52/7 Chap II, Part V), para. V.10	The Advisory Committee recommends that the description of international cooperation and inter-agency coordination and liaison should be significantly improved so that member States are provided with a clear picture of how these activities relate and contribute to other quantifiable and/or identifiable mandated activities.	Full description of international cooperation and inter-agency coordination and liaison is provided in the ESCAP programme budget proposals for the biennium 2000-2001. Travel required for international cooperation and inter-agency coordination and liaison is quantified and the source of funding is also identified in each annex of the programme budget.
ACABQ (A/52/7 Chap II, Part V), para. V.11	The Advisory Committee notes that proposed estimates for travel in the budget submissions for ESCAP, ECE and ECLAC show various rates of growth. The Committee recalls, in this connection, its earlier observation that, with the advent of technological innovations and the on-line availability of information, expenditure in this area could, in some cases, be lowered considerably. The Committee reiterates its position on this matter and requests that additional measures be taken to reduce travel costs in ESCAP, ECE and ECLAC in future	The proposed estimates for travel (both 220 and 242) for the biennium 2000-2001 have been reduced from the initial appropriations for 1998-1999. In addition, ESCAP has been mandated by the General Assembly and the Commission to provide assistance to new regional institutions/programmes such as Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) and the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), for which additional travel funds are required.

	budgets.	
ACABQ (A/52/7 Chap II, Part V), para. V.46	The Committee welcomes the intention to increase electronic dissemination of information. It trusts that the next budget submission of ESCAP will reflect savings and other benefits resulting from electronic dissemination of information.	During the review of the ESCAP publications programme for 1998-1999, a number of member and associate member governments of the Commission, particularly those of the least developed, landlocked and island developing countries, expressed serious concern over the shift in the mode of information dissemination from the traditional publications to electronic issuance, i.e. the Internet. They cautioned that a large number of the intended audience in these countries were not yet adequately equipped with the necessary information technology hardware. They therefore requested the secretariat to ensure that the needs of the primary end-users of ESCAP technical publications in those countries be met.

.