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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

Co-ordination of ongoing activities of
 the United Nations system in the field
 of assistance in technology transfer

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1 - 5	2
II. INTERSECTORAL CO-ORDINATION	6 - 8	3
III. SECTORAL CO-ORDINATION	9 - 27	4
A. Water resources	9 - 13	4
B. Earth resource management	14 - 20	5
C. Energy	21 - 26	6
D. Mineral resources	27	7
IV. CONCLUSION	28 - 29	8

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly, in paragraph 8 of its resolution 34/201 of 19 December 1979 on multilateral development assistance for the exploitation of natural resources, asked the Secretary-General to request the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation to take the action necessary to co-ordinate the ongoing activities of the United Nations system in the field of technology transfer, taking into account the relevant recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development, 1/ which were approved by General Assembly resolution 34/218, and to report to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session. This report responds to that request and, in accordance with the scope of resolution 34/201, is limited to the field of natural resources.

2. In its resolution 32/176 of 19 December 1977, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare, with the assistance of a group of high-level experts, a report on the availability of mechanisms for the transfer of technology to developing countries for the exploration and exploitation of natural resources. Pursuant to this, the Secretary-General presented a report to the thirty-third session of the General Assembly entitled "Multilateral development assistance for the exploration of natural resources" (A/33/256) based on a paper prepared by a group of experts on mineral and energy exploration in developing countries.

3. With respect to the transfer of technology, the group of experts was of the opinion that:

"... an appropriate framework should be devised to co-ordinate assistance activities. At the intergovernmental level, this task could appropriately be undertaken by the Committee on Natural Resources of the Economic and Social Council. Within the United Nations system a central role should be assigned to the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development and, in particular to its Centre for Natural Resources, Energy and Transport".

4. The General Assembly, in its resolution 33/194, took note of the Secretary-General's report and decided the following:

"... in the light of the importance for developing countries of the transfer of the technologies required for natural resources exploration and exploitation, that the Committee on Natural Resources and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development should review the recommendations concerning the transfer of technology in the natural resources field".

5. In the Secretary-General's report to the sixth session of the Committee on Natural Resources (E/C.7/100) entitled "Transfer of technology: review of recommendations of the group of experts on multilateral development assistance for the exploration of natural resources", the Committee was invited to endorse the

1/ See Report of the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development, Vienna, 20-31 August 1979 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.79.I.21 and corrigenda), para. 103.

proposals of the group of experts that steps be taken to co-ordinate assistance to developing countries and to establish guidelines for technology transfer, through appropriate bodies within the United Nations system. The Committee took note of the Secretary-General's report and decided to delay its decision until after the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development.

II. INTERSECTORAL CO-ORDINATION

6. It will be recalled that, in document E/1978/144, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) had reported on the progress made in streamlining its subsidiary machinery. In that report the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly had been informed of the establishment of the Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (CCSQ) which would have two organizationally distinct components dealing with programme and related policy matters (CCSQ-PROG) and operational activities (CCSQ-OPS). The report had indicated that one of the tasks which would devolve on the new body dealing with programme matters would be in the area of transfer of technology (ibid., para. 19). In addition, it could be expected that CCSQ-OPS would concern itself with any co-ordination issues which might arise in operational terms in this particular field.

7. These new organizational entities have been established relatively recently but it would appear that they possess the capacity to deal with problems at the global level which might arise in this field. The Director-General expects to make full use of the facilities provided by these consultative entities to assist him in ensuring the necessary co-ordination among the organizations of the system. In addition to the consultative committees, it should also be noted that ACC at its first regular session in 1980 (ACC/1980/DEC/1-7) agreed to the establishment of a task force on science and technology for development whose functions, inter alia, would be "to advise and assist the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, as required, on a continuous and systematic basis in relation to the responsibilities assigned to him in the Vienna Programme of Action". This new task force would also seem to be an appropriate mechanism through which activities of the United Nations system in technology transfer in the area of natural resources may be co-ordinated as required.

8. For effective co-ordination at the country level, the responsible United Nations officials could be of considerable assistance to Governments, at their request, in attempting to ensure the application of integrated and compatible policies in regard to United Nations system-wide activities involving the choice, acquisition and transfer of technology. In this connexion, paragraph 34 of the annex to resolution 32/197 entrusted to a single official at the country level the "over-all responsibility for, and co-ordination of, operational activities for development carried out at the country level". The General Assembly, in paragraph 8 of its resolution 34/213 of 19 December 1979 on the implementation of section 5 of the aforementioned resolution, requested the Secretary-General, inter alia, to proceed with the designation of these resident co-ordinators. The Secretary-General has reported to the second regular session of 1980 of the Economic and Social

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Council on the progress being made in the designation of resident co-ordinators (E/1980/36). Once the system is fully in place, it could be a modality for enhancing the co-ordination of the activities of the United Nations system in the field of the transfer of technology at the country level.

III. SECTORAL CO-ORDINATION

A. Water resources

9. Following the United Nations Water Conference, 2/ co-ordination in the field of water resources is presently carried out through the Intersecretariat Group for Water Resources established by ACC through its Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (programme matters). The Group, which replaces the ACC Sub-Committee on Water Resources Development and subsequent ad hoc meetings, was established in response to paragraph 4 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1979/68 in which ACC, the organizations undertaking water-related activities and, where appropriate, the regional commissions, were requested to make the necessary arrangements for intensifying interorganizational co-ordination and co-operation, pending review of the terms of reference of a proposed Interagency Water Board by the Committee on Natural Resources at its seventh regular session (18 to 27 May 1981).

10. The Intersecretariat Group is currently involved in elaborating procedures by which the organizations and regional commissions could provide essential support for the periodic intergovernmental review of the Mar del Plata Action Plan. In order to enable Governments to review the implementation of the Action Plan, the United Nations system would need to co-operate closely in gathering, analysing and disseminating the relevant data. It is proposed to design a questionnaire to gather such information, and detailed consideration has been given to its scope and content and the frequency of data gathering. Once agreed, the questionnaire would be transmitted to Governments by the Secretary-General on behalf of the organizations of the United Nations carrying out water-related activities.

11. In addition, pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolutions 1957 B (LIX) and 2116 (LXIII), a programme for a comprehensive plan of action in the field of water resources will be prepared for the next session of the Committee on Natural Resources in 1981. The efforts being undertaken have evolved from reports containing a mere summary of programmes to a more analytical approach designed to identify and build upon the interrelationships of the activities of the various organizations in the system which in turn could lead to joint action in specific areas. These procedures are designed to offer a pragmatic approach to joint planning in the area of water resources development commensurate with available possibilities.

12. As regards a permanent machinery for intersecretariat co-operation, the Committee on Natural Resources will review the terms of reference for a proposed water resources board at its next regular session in 1981.

2/ See Report of the United Nations Water Conference (United Nations publication Sales No. E.77.II.A.12).

13. While matters relating to the transfer of technology have not been explicitly dealt with in previous intersecretariat meetings, the existing Intersecretariat Group offers ample opportunities for the consideration of issues relating to this question. In addition, the question of co-ordination of the transfer of technology would be fully taken into account in any consideration of future institutional arrangements by the Committee on Natural Resources.

B. Earth resource management

14. The current main areas of space applications are in the fields of science, meteorology, communication, navigation and earth resource management (remote sensing). This report will deal with remote sensing only.

15. Prior to the first United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, interagency consultation and co-ordination efforts were effected through correspondence and, where necessary, through interagency meetings held in New York or Geneva. As close co-operation was required in the preparation of the first Conference, where the specialized agencies had taken an active part, interagency consultation meetings were held more often; and since the adoption of the United Nations Space Applications Programme, in 1970, ACC ad hoc meetings on outer space were held annually. With the establishment of the ACC Sub-Committee on Outer Space Activity in 1965, which was then expected to serve henceforth as the interagency machinery for co-ordination efforts in interagency work related to space activity, meetings continued to be held annually. The reorganization of the machinery resulted in the decision to abolish virtually all ACC subsidiary bodies, including the ACC Sub-Committee on Outer Space Activity. Since 1979, interagency meetings on outer space activity have been subject to prior approval of the ACC Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions and the ACC Organizational Committee.

16. In remote sensing, the needs of Member States for assistance in training and expert advice are being extended by some organizations within the system. The training offered has been mainly in the software area.

17. Thus, FAO conducts training workshops on remote sensing related to various aspects of agriculture, forestry and fishery or more generally, of renewable resources. The Centre for Natural Resources, Energy and Transport (CNRET) conducts training workshops and seminars in the area of non-agricultural resources. UNESCO conducts (for instance, through its centre in Enschede), integrated training courses that include remote sensing as a component; the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and its Mekong Committee conduct remote sensing services workshops related to their fields of activity; the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Remote Sensing Council also undertake training programmes to meet the needs of their members.

18. Joint programmes in training have been largely undertaken through the United Nations Space Applications Programme (in co-operation with FAO, CNRET, UNEP, UNDP and the regional commissions). Other joint programmes include those conducted by FAO and WMO (in training connected with agrometeorology, for instance).

19. Assistance in advisory services has also been extended by many of the organizations within the system, including FAO, CNRET, UNEP, UNDRRO, the World Bank and the regional commissions. Joint programmes have included those undertaken by FAO, UNDRRO and WMO in the monitoring of the environment, under UNEP's Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS).

20. As part of the preparatory work for the Second United Nations Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in 1982, the United Nations under its Space Applications Section is organizing regional seminars intended to provide participants with technical information on the most recent developments in the applications of space technology, particularly in remote sensing and communications.

C. Energy

21. With the exception of the ACC Task Force on Development Objectives, which, inter alia, undertakes analysis on technical and economic aspects of energy and development, there has never been any machinery for intersecretariat consultation in the energy field as a whole. The ad hoc intersecretariat machinery has been established specifically for the purpose of co-ordinating preparatory work for the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy.

22. At its eighteenth session, the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on the cross-organizational analysis of the energy programmes of the United Nations system. Pursuant to this request, the Secretary-General prepared two reports (E/AC.51/99/Rev.1 and Add.1) and submitted them to the Committee at its twentieth session. These reports were also presented to the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy at its second session.

23. At its twentieth session, CPC recommended, inter alia:

"(a) That the General Assembly should consider the need to strengthen the activities of the United Nations system in the area of energy in order to make them more responsive to the needs of Member States;

(b) That the Economic and Social Council should:

(i) Undertake a review which would set objectives for the system in the energy field, distribute the tasks involved in attaining those objectives among the various organizations of the system and emphasize the need for co-ordination which such a distribution of tasks might reveal. That review would be carried out without prejudice to mandates that might emerge from the forthcoming United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy, and within the framework of the new international development strategy and of the discussions of the Committee of the Whole Established under General Assembly Resolution 32/174;"

and requested the Secretary-General and ACC to take measures to ensure the achievement by the United Nations system of the purpose described above.

24. Despite the absence of a standing intersecretariat co-ordination mechanism to deal with questions relating to the transfer of technology for energy exploration and development, the UNCTAD secretariat and the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development of the Secretariat have initiated certain co-operative activities in response to the General Assembly's decision, in resolution 33/194, that in the light of the importance for developing countries of the transfer of the technologies required for natural resources exploration and exploitation, the Committee on Natural Resources and UNCTAD should review the recommendations (contained in document A/33/256) concerning the transfer of technology in the natural resources field.

25. In response to this action by the General Assembly, the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development of the Secretariat and the Technology Division of UNCTAD have agreed to strengthen their co-operation in relation to the transfer of technology for natural resources exploration. In the first instance, the Department is convening an International Meeting on Petroleum Exploration Strategies in Developing Countries at The Hague from 16 to 20 March 1981 in co-operation with the Government of the Netherlands. UNCTAD is co-operating in this undertaking by contributing a paper on the transfer of petroleum technology.

26. Secondly, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 33/194 and 34/201 and the recommendations of the United Nations Symposium on State Petroleum Enterprises in Developing Countries, which was convened at Vienna in March 1978, the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development of the Secretariat and the Technology Division of UNCTAD have initiated a joint project to strengthen co-operation among developing countries for petroleum exploration. In its initial phase, the project centres on the joint preparation of a questionnaire to be addressed to Governments of developing countries with a view to obtaining information on their technological capacity for petroleum exploration and development. In view of the critical importance of expanding petroleum exploration, it is expected that the responses to the questionnaire will also assist the two secretariats in identifying gaps in their capacity. On the basis of the replies to the questionnaire, the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development and UNCTAD will analyse the information obtained and make proposals regarding measures to be taken to strengthen the technological capacity of developing countries for petroleum exploration, including measures to promote greater co-operation among themselves. The results of this joint undertaking could be presented to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session, and to the relevant UNCTAD meeting.

D. Mineral resources

27. At present no mechanism exists for intersecretariat co-ordination in mineral resources development in the United Nations system. However, in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1957 B (LIX) requesting, inter alia, "the Secretary-General, in co-operation with the organizations and programmes

concerned, to prepare reports to be submitted to the Committee on Natural Resources at each of its regular sessions ...", a cross-organizational analysis of the mineral resources development programmes of the United Nations is being prepared for the seventh session of the Committee in May 1981. The need for any parallel mechanism for co-ordinating mineral activities will be kept under review.

IV. CONCLUSION

28. Several organs, organizations and agencies of the United Nations system are engaged in a variety of activities concerning technology transfer in the area of natural resources. At the global level of intersectoral co-ordination, the new consultative committees of ACC, together with the Task Force on Science and Technology for Development, would appear to have the capacity to improve the co-ordination of these activities of the United Nations system. At the country level, effective intersectoral co-ordination could be furthered through the system of resident co-ordinators which is currently being set up.

29. With respect to sectoral co-ordination, new institutional arrangements on a system-wide basis are either currently in process of formulation, or will be submitted for consideration in various intergovernmental bodies, while working arrangements are in effect to carry forward specific aspects of joint programming and interagency co-operation.
