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CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS AND
THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

Report of the Secretary-General

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* A/37/150.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On 9 December 1981, the General Assembly adopted resolution 36/80 on co-operation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), part of which reads as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"...

"Noting with satisfaction the useful decisions and proposals which emerged from the Geneva meeting for enhancing co-operation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity,

"...

"5. Approves the decisions, recommendations, proposals and arrangements contained in the conclusions of the Geneva meeting of representatives of the General Secretariat of the Organization of African Unity and the secretariats of the United Nations and other organizations within the United Nations system;

"6. Calls upon the competent organizations and bodies in the United Nations system to give urgent consideration to the various recommendations and proposals contained in the conclusions of the Geneva meeting with the objective of enhancing co-operation between the United Nations system and the Organization of African Unity;

"...

"9. Requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, to arrange for the next meeting between representatives of the General Secretariat of that organization and the secretariats of the United Nations and other organizations in the United Nations system to be held at Rome in April 1982, as called for in the conclusions of the meeting held at Nairobi in June 1980."

2. The present document gives a brief account of the Meeting between representatives of the General Secretariat of OAU and the secretariats of the United Nations and other organizations within the United Nations system, as called for in paragraph 9 of resolution 36/80.

3. Information regarding the implementation of other aspects of resolution 36/80, as called for in paragraph 22 of the resolution, will appear as an addendum to this document.

II. PREPARATORY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MEETING

4. The Secretary-General, in consultation with the Secretary-General of OAU, convened the Meeting between representatives of the OAU General Secretariat and the

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secretariats of organizations within the United Nations system from 6 to 8 April 1982 at the Palais des Nations at Geneva. It was not possible to hold the Meeting at Rome as the dates suggested in General Assembly resolution 36/80 subsequently proved inconvenient for the OAU delegation.

5. The United Nations participants comprised representatives from various departments and offices of the United Nations Secretariat and from the specialized agencies and other organizations and bodies within the United Nations system:

Office of the Director-General for Development and International
Economic Co-operation

Office for Special Political Questions

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Namibia

Department of Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonization

Division of Human Rights

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO)

World Food Council (WFC)

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

World Food Programme (WFP)

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

World Health Organization (WHO)

World Bank

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Universal Postal Union (UPU)

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)

6. The General Secretariat of OAU was represented by the Assistant Secretaries-General for Political Affairs and for Economic Development and Co-operation, as well as by senior officials from the General Secretariat and regional bureaux. Representatives of the African Civil Aviation Commission, the African Union of Railways, the Pan African Postal Union and the Pan African Telecommunications Union also attended.

7. The documentation for the Meeting consisted of a paper giving extracts of information provided by various components of the United Nations system on the action taken by them in pursuance of the conclusions and recommendations of the Meeting that took place at Geneva from 13 to 16 April 1981 between representatives of OAU and the United Nations (A/36/317, sect. IV). Introductory papers to certain of the main agenda items were also circulated to participants beforehand. These included a paper by ECA on the Pan-African Documentation and Information System (PADIS), a paper on the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy for the Economic Development of Africa (contained in document A/S-11/14, annex I) submitted by OAU, a paper on the food situation in Africa submitted by FAO, papers on environmental programmes submitted by UNEP and a paper on development assistance to deal with the refugee problem in Africa submitted by OAU. Other documents were made available at the Meeting.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

8. It was agreed that, as in past years, the meetings would be chaired alternately by a representative of the United Nations system and a representative of the General Secretariat of OAU.

9. The agenda covered a broad range of items including information and communications, a progress report on the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action, the food situation in Africa, the Industrial Development Decade for Africa, environmental programmes relating to desertification and the regional seas programme, and development assistance to deal with the refugee problem in Africa.
10. On the basis of those discussions, views were exchanged on a number of draft conclusions and recommendations. Proposals for future meetings were also considered.
11. The Meeting was addressed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Secretary-General of OAU, the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, the Executive Director of the World Food Council and the Executive Director of UNITAR.
12. In his statement, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, said that there could be no question about the value and importance that the co-operation between the United Nations and OAU had for the development of Africa and, more generally, in the field of international relations. A very close relationship had developed between the two organizations in matters relating to international peace and understanding, particularly in situations directly affecting Africa. Referring to increasing co-operation in the field of social and economic development, the Secretary-General recognized that much more needed to be done in Africa to raise living standards and to ensure for its people a more hopeful future. He considered the Lagos Plan of Action a great challenge, requiring total effort between OAU and its member States and a maximum input by the international community.
13. Referring to the rich resources of Africa, the Secretary-General said that it was a tragedy that many of its people should have to depend so extensively on outside food assistance in order to stave off hunger or avoid the threat of starvation. He called for every effort to be made to increase food production, protect the environment, combat desertification, and build the necessary defences to minimize the adverse effects which drought continued to wreak on the economies of many African countries.
14. On the subject of the African refugee situation, the Secretary-General said that much more needed to be done to improve the condition of the refugees and to provide them with prospects for a more helpful and secure future.
15. The Secretary-General expressed his appreciation for the role which the Secretary-General of OAU and his staff were playing in furthering co-operation between OAU and the United Nations system. He was confident that the excellent relationship between the two organizations would be further strengthened, and that they would continue to collaborate closely towards the achievement of common objectives.
16. In his address, the Secretary-General of OAU, Mr. Edem Kodjo, said that the OAU Council of Ministers, at its meeting at Nairobi in 1981, had expressed satisfaction with the degree of co-operation between OAU and the components of the United Nations system.

17. Referring to his appeal for the support and co-operation of the international community in the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action, Mr. Kodjo said that he was satisfied with the commitment to integrate the Plan into the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade. He had also been glad to receive from organizations in the United Nations system observations on how best to improve the quality and execution of the Plan.

18. Mr. Kodjo said that recent consultations between OAU and ECA had led to a better understanding of their respective roles. A memorandum of understanding, setting out the modalities that would guide their two secretariats in the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action and Final Act of Lagos had been agreed upon.

19. Speaking of the economic problems facing Africa, Mr. Kodjo was of the view that there should be a comprehensive strategy that would take into account the needs of all developing States - rich or poor. The Lagos Plan of Action, he said, had been conceived in that spirit. It envisaged a programme consisting of specific projects vital for Africa's development and capable of attracting international financing.

20. On a specific aspect of co-operation between OAU and the United Nations system, Mr. Kodjo suggested that arrangements for periodical meetings of the OAU and United Nations secretariats should be reviewed to ensure that they were better prepared and their objectives more clearly defined. He suggested the setting-up of a small joint United Nations/OAU committee to study ways and means of reinforcing the efficacy of those meetings, define the framework for United Nations/OAU common actions in order to give added substance to the meetings, and to clarify aspects that were as yet vague. In illustration, Mr. Kodjo referred to the need to define the role of development agencies in dealing with refugee problems. He pointed out that solutions to such problems involved developmental as well as social and humanitarian assistance.

21. Concluding his statement, the Secretary-General of OAU said that the question of the allocation of developmental resources by international institutions and agencies to the African continent should be dealt with in a more equitable manner than was currently the case, so that Africa did not continue to be treated as "the poor relation".

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

22. The following conclusions and recommendations emerged from the discussion of the agenda items:

A. Pan-African Documentation and Information System

1. The representatives to the Meeting welcomed the establishment of the Pan-African Documentation and Information System (PADIS). They recognized that the success of the System required prompt technical co-ordination to ensure the rapid supply of accurate and up-to-date information and documentation to its users.

2. Regarding the use of the System, the representatives took note of the proposal by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) of the need to update information and co-ordinate information and documentation activities, both within the United Nations system and between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), through the active and regular participation of all organizations concerned in the meetings of the System and through the secondment of technical advisers to the Central Co-ordination Office of PADIS.

3. At the national level, the representatives took note of a proposal by ECA that all national institutions interested in information and documentation on development should co-ordinate their activities and subsequently become associated with the System and its data base. In this connexion, note was taken of the efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to develop co-ordinated national systems through the formulation of information policies, norms and standards, the building of information infrastructures and the training of specialists and users.

4. It was also noted that, conceptually, there was a similarity between the general information programme of UNESCO and PADIS and that discussions had taken place between UNESCO and ECA to harmonize and co-ordinate their activities.

5. It was noted that an interagency consultative committee had been established at ECA headquarters to co-ordinate and harmonize all telecommunications activities in Africa and it was suggested that agencies that had developed data bases should supply the System with copies of their records, thus permitting easy retrieval for the benefit of development in Africa.

6. It was noted that the World Health Organization (WHO) had an extensive information system programme which collated, stored and diffused specific information on health situations, country profiles, country projects, regional programmes and global programmes, and that this programme had been decentralized to the regions, including the Regional Office for Africa.

7. It was also noted that the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) had, over the years, developed an extensive Industrial and Technological Information Bank (INTIB). The work of UNIDO in this field could be harmonized with that of ECA related to PADIS. It was therefore suggested that the two secretariats should meet to discuss and agree on practical measures for harmonizing their relevant activities.

8. It was further noted that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) had already established co-operation with PADIS, and transferred out of its information data 40,000 records relating to labour relations and employment for the use of PADIS. ILO could continue to co-operation especially through the International Research and Training System (IRTIS) after its establishment.

B. Matters relating to the environment

Desertification

9. The following constraints impeding implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (A/CONF.74/36, chap. 1) were noted:

(a) Failure of countries facing desertification to assign high priority to desertification prevention and control;

(b) Need to strengthen co-operation within the United Nations system;

(c) Need to fill gaps in the knowledge of techniques of desertification control;

(d) Insufficiency of financial resources available for anti-desertification activities.

10. It was felt that the following measures would accelerate the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification:

(a) The OAU and ECA secretariats should urge, as appropriate, States faced with desertification to assign high priority to their development plans and programmes, and should suggest to Governments that had not yet done so that they should prepare, with the assistance of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other United Nations organizations, national plans of action to combat desertification.

(b) Pertinent United Nations organizations should, through the appropriate machinery, seek ways and means of strengthening co-operation within the United Nations system to ensure an effective multidisciplinary approach to projects and arrange for the effective pooling of the efforts and resources of various agencies and bodies, with a view to their most efficient utilization in Africa.

(c) OAU and ECA should encourage research institutions in Africa to play their role in filling the gap in knowledge in the techniques of desertification control, particularly in regard to integrated interdisciplinary approaches, and the United Nations bodies concerned should assist these research institutions in that respect.

(d) OAU, ECA and pertinent United Nations organizations should seek all possible ways and means to mobilize additional financial resources for the implementation of the Plan of Action, and Governments should be urged to contribute to the Special Account for combating desertification established by the General Assembly at the initiative of the African States.

Regional seas programme

11. Currently, 37 African coastal and island States were co-operating either in the implementation or the development of action plans sponsored by UNEP for the protection and development of resources in marine and coastal areas.

12. The Meeting noted that financial resources were required to support the implementation of activities called for by the action plans and to strengthen and develop national capabilities for undertaking those regional co-operative activities. It was suggested that OAU, ECA and UNEP and other organizations concerned should initiate, at the earliest date possible, consultations on ways and means to mobilize the required financial resources and strengthen national capabilities for the protection and development of the marine environment and the resources of coastal areas.

C. Lagos Plan of Action

13. A consensus was reached on the following proposals concerning the Lagos Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy for the Economic Development of Africa (A/S-11/14, annex I):

(a) In support of efforts by African States to promote a greater awareness of the Lagos Plan of Action and of its importance and implications at the national level, United Nations specialized agencies and other organizations within the United Nations system should help in their respective fields in publicizing the Plan.

(b) OAU should be kept regularly informed by United Nations agencies and organizations of the progress of their programmes for or related to the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action.

(c) United Nations agencies and organizations should increase their assistance to the General Secretariat of OAU to strengthen its capacity to cope with its role in monitoring the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action at the regional level.

(d) An institutional framework of co-operation between OAU and each of the United Nations agencies and organizations should be established or defined to ensure the harmonization and co-ordination of their respective activities in the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action.

(e) Appropriate focal points should be agreed upon for the over-all and sectoral monitoring and co-ordination of the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action and to which the implementing organizations and agencies would submit periodic reports on their current and planned activities relating to the implementation of the Plan. In that connexion, the reactivation of the Joint OAU/ECA Committee was noted and it was recommended that it be brought to the attention of all concerned.

(f) OAU should play a role in the identification of specific activities, programmes or projects in the major sectors of the Lagos Plan of Action through joint programming sessions with ECA and the United Nations body or bodies concerned.

(g) In the light of the work carried out on the Industrial Development Decade for Africa (General Assembly resolution 35/66 B) and of the conclusions reached at the United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting held at the headquarters of UNIDO in March 1982 on the subject, all United Nations agencies should, within their respective mandates, intensify their efforts in support of the implementation of the programme for the Decade, which was formulated within the framework of the Lagos Plan of Action. In order to minimize the number of interagency meetings, it was proposed that subsequent interagency meetings on the Industrial Development Decade for Africa should be held within the framework of the annual meetings on co-operation between the OAU and the organizations of the United Nations system.

(h) Attention should be drawn to the importance of African leaders addressing meetings of the legislative bodies of United Nations agencies and organizations on issues of specific interest to Africa.

(i) United Nations agencies and organizations should consider expanding the scope of their assistance to the General Secretariat of OAU either by financing or facilitating the participation of the relevant staff members of OAU in policy and technical meetings and other appropriate activities of those organizations. Such a measure would help to improve the capacity of the General Secretariat for the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action.

(j) Consideration should be given by OAU to the strengthening of its regional offices in Geneva, Brussels, New York and elsewhere to ensure prompt attention and closer liaison with the United Nations agencies and organizations on matters relating to the Lagos Plan of Action.

D. Food situation in Africa

14. After hearing statements and views on the critical food situation in Africa, the representatives suggested the following proposals and measures for urgent consideration by the competent authorities:

(a) African countries should be fully informed as to the nature and extent of assistance, whether financial, specialized, technical or material, that they were eligible to receive from individual specialized agencies and other organization within the United Nations system, either in times of emergency or in support of their development efforts. Such information should be communicated to Member States by OAU.

(b) With regard to food development, an interagency co-ordination committee should be established to harmonize the relevant work of the agencies and organizations with the work of OAU and ECA. The food situation in Africa should also become a permanent item on the agenda of the Committee's meetings.

(c) The African Inter-Ministerial Committee on Food might wish to consider the question of food aid co-ordination in addition to its existing concern with harmonizing information on food production, processing, storage and supply.

(d) Countries which were the subject of General Assembly resolutions on special economic assistance, but which were not included in the list of least developed countries should be accorded by the World Food Programme similar privileges to those granted to the least developed countries in the provision of a contribution to the internal cost of transport, storage and handling of food aid.

(e) It might be desirable for OAU and ECA to sponsor a meeting consisting of all donors and other relevant agencies and organizations to discuss the Lagos Plan of Action with a view to establishing a common co-ordinated approach towards the implementation of the Plan.

(f) OAU should consider participating in the intercountry consultations organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to promote technical co-operation among developing countries in agricultural extension training. The second such consultation was scheduled to take place in October or November 1982.

(g) OAU staff would be welcome to participate in a staff orientation programme on rural development which was being organized by FAO.

E. Development assistance to deal with the
refugee situation in Africa

15. The representatives were concerned by the continuing plight of refugees in Africa. Following statements by OAU, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other relevant specialized agencies and other organizations within the United Nations system, it was suggested that the competent developmental or funding agencies should be called upon to inform the Steering Committee of the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, as soon as possible and not later than July 1982, of their programmes, current or planned, to provide assistance to countries of asylum to enable them to strengthen their social and economic infrastructure to cope with the caring and resettlement of refugees in those countries.

16. Recognizing that emergencies can disrupt the development process, taking into account the long-term nature of the African refugee situation and its grave adverse impact on the fragile economies of the countries of asylum, OAU proposed, and the representatives noted that:

(a) The list of additional needs submitted to the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa should be studied by UNHCR to ascertain which projects fell within its area of competence;

(b) The remainder should be included in a new list which could form the basis for submission to the international community, including the United Nations development financing agencies, for possible funding;

(c) The additional assistance requested for refugee-related projects should not be at the expense of the host country's own development needs;

(d) The competent United Nations agencies and organizations should assist the countries concerned in preparing credible and pertinent project documents to facilitate consideration by funding agencies;

(e) Every support should be given to the sponsors in the organization of a second international conference, should that be approved by the General Assembly.

17. Some of the funding agencies pointed out that, although they were cognizant of the adverse effect of refugee problems on the national development plans of host countries, their ability to provide developmental assistance for such purposes depended on the initiative of the host country.

V. FUTURE MEETINGS AND ARRANGEMENTS

23. It was agreed that the next Meeting of the General Secretariat of OAU and the secretariats of the United Nations system should take place a few days before the spring meeting of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination in 1983. The meetings would be held in Paris to make it easier for those also involved in the work of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination to be present.

24. Regarding future meetings, some views were expressed concerning their frequency, nature and structure. These included suggestions that consideration should be given to holding meetings biennially and to excluding from the agenda matters that could best be discussed on a bilateral basis between the OAU secretariat and the United Nations body or specialized agency directly concerned. It was generally agreed that the agenda should focus on matters of broad concern and that items selected should be kept to a minimum to allow sufficient in-depth examination in the time available. Discussion papers on each item should be prepared well in advance of the meeting to permit prior study by all participants.

25. At the end of the Meeting, the Chairman announced the following provisional draft agenda for the 1983 Meeting together with the agencies and organizations that would be approached to prepare discussion papers on the various items:

1. Status report on the implementation of programmes of assistance to national liberation movements (OAU).
2. Progress report on implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action (OAU/ECA).
3. Role of the media and functional literacy in development (UNESCO).

4. Co-operation in dealing with the conservation, development and utilization of water resources in Africa (FAO).
5. Co-operation and co-ordination activities and programmes in the field of human resources development (ILO).
6. Development of a concerted approach in dealing with the African refugee situation and natural disasters (OAU).
7. Progress report on the contribution of United Nations organizations to the programme for the Industrial Development Decade for Africa (UNIDO).
