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E/ECWA/125/Add.1
13 April 1981

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

Eighth session
3 - 7 May 1981
Sana'a, Yemen

Item 14 of the provisional agenda

Decentralization of economic and social activities to,
and strengthening of, the regional commissions

Development and international economic co-operation





UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/35/546
23 October 1980

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-fifth session
Agenda item 61 (j)

DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

Implications of General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202
for the regional commissions

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Each of the progress reports on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, submitted by the Secretary-General following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 32/197 (E/1978/118, E/1979/81, A/33/410/Rev.1, A/34/736, E/1979/32 and E/1979/107), has included a summary account of measures being taken at both the intergovernmental and secretariat levels relevant to the implementation of section IV, as well as other related provisions, of the annex to that resolution concerning structures for regional and interregional co-operation (see Economic and Social Council resolutions 1978/74 and 1979/64 and General Assembly resolutions 33/202 and 34/206).
2. The present report, however, constitutes the first attempt made, since the adoption of resolution 32/197, to analyse the over-all implications of the resolution for the regional commissions and to present the General Assembly with an indication of the immediate programme requirements which must be met at the regional level in order to pursue the restructuring process along the lines mandated by the resolution.
3. It will be recalled, in this connexion, that the Secretary-General, in his statement on the administrative and financial implications of the recommendations contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197, indicated that, while it was not possible at that time to provide a quantitative estimate of the likely magnitude of the resources which might be required, nor of the time-frame in which requirements would arise, the recommendations in section IV of the annex to that resolution, on structures for regional and interregional co-operation, would, taken together, require in the course of time additional resources for the regional commissions. The statement added that an estimate of the magnitude of additional resources required could only be made at a later stage, after a phased plan for the implementation of the recommendations in section IV had been developed (A/AC.5/32/86, para. 30).
4. The first stage of the implementation of resolution 32/197 thus began with the restructuring of the secretariat support services at Headquarters and the redistribution of available posts and funds among the new organizational entities at Headquarters. In reporting on these initial steps to the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1978 (E/1978/118), the Secretary-General stressed that the arrangements made should not in any way prejudice measures of decentralization to the commissions.
5. A second phase was then initiated, involving consultations between the executive secretaries of the regional commissions and the heads of the units concerned at Headquarters, with a view to developing an over-all framework, as well as specific measures which would give effect to the provisions of resolution 32/197, concerning the regional commissions. Recommendations on the broad components of that framework were submitted by the Secretary-General to the Assembly at its thirty-third session (A/33/410/Rev.1). At that session, the Assembly adopted resolution 33/202 in which, inter alia, it decided that the regional commissions should have the status of executing agencies, in their

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own right, in respect of the categories of projects dealt with in paragraph 23 of the annex to Assembly resolution 32/197, and requested the Secretary-General to proceed expeditiously with the development and application of the measures contemplated in his report.

6. The Secretary-General identified at that time two interrelated aspects of the second phase of the process, namely:

(a) An examination of immediate opportunities for decentralization and redeployment of resources from Headquarters to the regional commissions; and

(b) An examination of the additional functions envisaged for the regional commissions in General Assembly resolution 32/197 and a review of the corresponding financial implications.

This approach was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1979/64 on regional co-operation and development, which, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General "to pursue actively the process of decentralization to the regional commissions" and "to expedite the decentralization of activities, including the redeployment of the necessary and appropriate resources"; and welcomed the intention of the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly a comprehensive statement of the administrative and financial implications of the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202, calling for decentralization and the strengthening of the regional commissions.

7. With regard to the redeployment of resources from Headquarters to the regional commissions, the General Assembly at its thirty-fourth session agreed, upon the recommendation of the Secretary-General (see A/34/649 and A/C.5/34/73), and as an immediate measure pursuant to the priorities expressed by the regional commissions, to decentralizing from the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs five posts, one to each of the commissions. These posts were provided to the commissions to strengthen their programme delivery capacity in the following areas:

(a) For the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), to participate in the preparation of major research activities, including the Economic Survey of Europe, with particular reference to the industrial sector in the centrally planned economics;

(b) For the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), to strengthen its integrated rural development programme, particularly in providing substantive support to the interagency Committee and Task Force on Rural Development, to liaise with member countries and with global organizations in the area, and to assist the substantive divisions of ESCAP in preparing and implementing an integrated programme of rural development;

(c) For the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), to develop further its capabilities for analysing social and economic aspects of development in an integrated manner, thus reinforcing ECLA's work on comparative analysis of national experiences in planning for social integration;

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(d) For the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), to strengthen its activities on relevant aspects of population policy and programming within the framework of economic and social development; and

(e) For the Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA), to strengthen its work on the Economic Survey of the Western Asian Region.

8. In the same context, the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly approved a redeployment to the regional commissions of resources available to the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development under the regular programme of technical co-operation, involving five regional advisers to perform advisory services in specialized areas, as identified in a joint review between the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development and the secretariat of each regional commission. As a result, the following priority sectors were agreed upon: water resources for ESCAP and ECLA; public administration and finance for ECA and ECWA; and transport for ECE.

9. The General Assembly at its thirty-fourth session did not complete its examination of the additional functions envisaged for the commissions in resolution 32/197 and of the corresponding financial implications. It adopted, however, a further resolution (34/206) on the implementation of section IV of the annex to resolution 32/197, which emphasized the need for more vigorous action to enable the regional commissions to play their role fully as the main general economic and social development centres within the United Nations for their respective regions; and requested the Secretary-General to intensify the development and application of the decentralization measures contemplated in his reports on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, submitted to the General Assembly at its thirty-third session.

10. The Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) at its twentieth session was informed of these developments and of the conclusion reached at the Executive Secretaries meeting held in February 1980 that a revised submission on the implications for the regional commissions of resolution 32/197 would be presented to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session, taking into account any views that might be expressed on the subject by CPC. 1/ The Committee agreed that "the report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session... apart from providing a record of the decentralization process so far, and taking into account the views of the regional intergovernmental bodies, should concentrate on the immediate requirements of the regional commissions for taking on functions assigned to them by the Assembly in its resolution 32/197. 2/

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/35/38), para. 169 (b); E/AC.51/1980/6, para.7.

2/ Ibid., para. 364 (a). The Economic and Social Council, in its decision 1980/179, took note of the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination on the work of its twentieth session, and decided to endorse the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee, and to transmit the report and the views expressed thereon in the Council to the General Assembly for consideration at its thirty-fifth session.

11. As indicated in paragraph 2 above, and in accordance with the relevant recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination quoted above, the present report has two objectives. The first part of the report sets out to specify further the expanded functions envisaged for the regional commissions in the context of the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system. This is attempted through an analysis of the implications of the provisions contained in section IV of the annex to Assembly resolution 32/197 for the general orientation of the activities of the commissions, with particular reference to the implications of the role of the commissions as "main general economic and social development centres within the United Nations system for their respective regions". In the second part of the report, the main programme requirements as defined by the regional commissions are conceptually linked to the provisions of the restructuring resolutions and an indication is provided of the immediate programme priorities of the regional commissions in the framework of the restructuring process.

12. The actions to be taken by the General Assembly at its current session on the proposals contained in the present report will provide the basis for the comprehensive report to be presented by the Secretary-General to the thirty-sixth session of the Assembly on the progress made in the implementation of section IV of resolution 32/197, as called for in Assembly resolution 34/206.

II. EXPANDED FUNCTIONS OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS
PURSUANT TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS
32/197 AND 33/202

A. Role of the regional commissions
within the United Nations system

13. Section IV of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 contains the most comprehensive legislative statement of the contribution expected of the regional commissions made by the General Assembly since the adoption of their terms of reference, including a reiteration or elaboration of established functions, as well as provision for new or additional tasks and responsibilities. It should be recalled in this connexion that the original terms of reference of the commissions comprised mainly a description of the activities to be undertaken by the commissions and their secretariats in each region, and did not elaborate on the role and functions envisaged for the commissions within the over-all structure of the United Nations. The mandates of the commissions are thus described in these texts in terms of undertaking or sponsoring the collection, evaluation and dissemination of economic, technological and statistical information; performing advisory services as desired by the countries of the regions; and initiating and participating in measures to facilitate concerted action and assist in the promotion of economic and technological development. So far as relations between regional and central bodies are concerned, the relevant terms of reference simply state that the commissions, "acting within the framework of the policies of the United Nations" and "subject to the general supervision of the Economic and Social Council", shall "assist the Council at its request in discharging its functions within the regions in connexion with any economic problems, including problems in the field of technical assistance".

14. The General Assembly, in its resolution 32/197, has clarified the role and position of the regional commissions within the United Nations and the system as a whole (para. 19 of the annex to resolution 32/197); indicated the tasks and responsibilities flowing therefrom (*ibid.*, paras. 20-25); and set out the conditions for the effective discharge of such responsibilities (*ibid.*, para. 27). The expansion in the mandates and authority of the regional commissions envisaged in resolution 32/197 results from a recognition - implicit in the resolution - of regional and interregional co-operation as an increasingly critical factor in the establishment of the new international economic order. In institutional terms, it stems from a concept of and approach to the regional commissions as integral and crucial components of the United Nations proper.

15. In particular, the statement in paragraph 19 to the effect that the commissions should be enabled:

"fully to play their role under the authority of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council as the main general economic and social development centres within the United Nations system for their respective regions, having due regard to the responsibilities of the specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies in specific sectoral fields and

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the co-ordinating role of the United Nations Development Programme in respect of technical co-operation activities"

puts the relations between the centre and the regions in the economic and social structures of the United Nations into a new perspective, in which the regional commissions are called upon to perform for their regional members a role akin to that performed at the global level by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in the economic and social field. The statement of the role of the commissions, quoted above, should thus be read and interpreted not only in the light of the subsequent provisions of section IV of the annex to resolution 32/197, relating specifically to regional and interregional co-operation, but also in the context of the description of the functions of central bodies contained in the preceding sections of the annex.

16. Particularly relevant in this connexion are the functions of the General Assembly for policy-making and the harmonization of international action; for promoting solutions to international economic, social and related problems; for the establishment of strategies, policies and priorities for the system as a whole, in respect of international co-operation, including operational activities, in the economic, social and related fields; for reviewing and evaluating developments in other fora within the United Nations system, and establishing appropriate guidelines for further action; and for promoting and supporting assistance to the member countries, in the context of measures agreed upon by these countries, for the purpose of strengthening and enlarging their mutual economic co-operation.

17. In the same context, reference should be made to the functions of the Economic and Social Council for serving as the central forum for the discussion of economic and social issues and for the formulation of policy recommendations thereon addressed to member States and to the United Nations system; for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of over-all strategies, policies and priorities established by the General Assembly in the economic, social and related fields; for ensuring over-all co-ordination of the activities of the organizations of the United Nations system in the economic, social and related fields; and for conducting policy reviews of operational activities undertaken throughout the United Nations system.

18. In serving as regional arms of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, in the performance of their policy-making and co-ordination responsibilities, the regional commissions, as subsidiary organs of the Economic and Social Council, have, in addition, a continuing responsibility to assist the Council in drawing the attention of the General Assembly to emerging policy concerns, so that the Assembly may give timely and effective attention to substantive issues requiring its consideration.

19. In analysing the implications of resolution 32/197 for the functions of the regional commissions, in the light of the considerations outlined above, a distinction can be drawn between:

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- (a) The functions of the regional commissions as consultative fora, involving, in particular, the exchange of policy experience, and co-ordination, as appropriate, of positions at the international level, including the preparation of common regional positions in the context of negotiations within or, as appropriate, outside the framework of the United Nations system;
- (b) The policy-making functions of the commissions in respect of the economic and social activities undertaken by United Nations organizations at the regional level;
- (c) Data collection, research and analysis in support of the above two sets of functions; and
- (d) Responsibility for an expanding range of operational activities.

An additional category of functions, in respect of which a strengthening of the contributions of the commissions is envisaged in resolution 32/197, relates to the involvement of both commissions and their secretariats in programme planning and the preparation of the medium-term plans.

20. The above sets of functions, taken together, point to a unique capacity of the regional commissions to contribute to regional development and co-operation. It should be noted at the same time that, until now, while "consultative" functions, as described above, are already regularly performed in a variety of ways throughout the work programmes of the commissions, the commissions' capacity to perform their review and co-ordination functions has not been developed to the same extent in all regions. Also, discussions so far on the implications of the restructuring process for the regional commissions have tended to concentrate on the operational and programming activities of the regional secretariats. Accordingly, while all aspects of the commissions' functions are discussed, the responsibilities of the commissions as intergovernmental bodies constitute a main focus of the present report.

B. Co-ordination and co-operation at the regional level

21. Paragraph 20 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 recommends, inter alia, that the regional commissions, "taking into account the special needs and conditions of their respective regions ... should exercise team leadership and responsibility for co-ordination and co-operation at the regional level". This recommendation should be read in conjunction with related provisions of resolution 32/197 concerning the co-ordination mandates of the General Assembly in the economic and social field and the Economic and Social Council, and the objectives of interagency co-ordination, particularly the provisions of section VII of the annex to the resolution whereby:

"interagency co-ordination at the intergovernmental level should be governed by the policy guidelines, directives and priorities established by the General Assembly and, under its authority, by the Economic and Social Council in the exercise of their over-all responsibilities".

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Accordingly, the regional commissions can be instrumental in transmitting to their member countries guidelines and priorities established at the global level. Also, through their high-level sectoral and interdisciplinary intergovernmental meetings, the commissions are well placed to formulate appropriate guidelines and priorities for relevant economic and social activities of the United Nations system in their respective regions. ^{3/} In particular, the interdisciplinary focus and representation of all regional members in the plenary sessions of the commissions at policy-making levels makes these bodies especially suited to define regional development priorities and to formulate guidelines for the promotion of concerted activities to be undertaken or promoted by the various parts of the system in the region.

22. It cannot be said that this potential has as yet been fully exploited. There appears, however, to be a growing concern, particularly in the developing regions, to develop this potential and, generally, to enhance the collective involvement of developing countries in each region in the setting of standards and priorities concerning intercountry co-operation and the co-ordination of the development activities of the United Nations system in each region.

23. In this connexion, in respect of intercountry programmes financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), concrete measures have recently been taken by the Governing Council of UNDP, pursuant to decisions by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, in order to enhance the collective involvements of developing countries of each region in setting priorities, following recommendations by some regional commissions ^{4/} and by the Governing Council of UNDP (for details on the measures taken by the Governing Council of UNDP, see the annex below).

24. At the sectoral level, the high-level ECA sectoral conferences exemplify the policy-making, co-ordination and review functions which could be performed at the regional level. ESCAP's committee substructures, at the technical level, could similarly assist in promoting co-ordination of programmes in areas where there is a need for system-wide guidance and better co-ordination of United Nations intercountry activities in the region.

25. Opportunities for improved interagency co-ordination at the intergovernmental

^{3/} The views of the specialized agencies on the recommendations contained in paragraph 20 were last summarized in the progress report submitted by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination to the second regular session of the Economic and Social Council in 1978 (E/1978/107, paras. 14-17).

^{4/} Thus, for example, ESCAP, in its resolution 19⁴ (XXXV) has called upon its Executive Secretary, "in co-operation, where feasible, with the executive secretaries of the other regional commissions, to consult the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, with a view to reviewing present practices for determining the utilization of regional indicative planning figures, in order to involve developing countries of each region in the collective setting, through their respective regional commission, of priorities for this purpose".

level also arise where specialized agencies and the regional commissions both regularly schedule sectoral intergovernmental meetings in the same or closely related fields. To the extent that such meetings cannot, for practical or constitutional reasons, be convened jointly under dual auspices of the commissions and the agency concerned, prior consultations on agenda and venue could do much to enhance the specific contribution which each of these bodies can make to the strengthening of regional co-operation in the policy sector concerned.

26. At the secretariat level, interagency co-ordination has been developed gradually, with due regard to the responsibilities of the organizations concerned in specific sectoral fields. The relevant arrangements tend to be determined by practical considerations based on the direct programming requirements of the particular organizations and activities concerned.

(a) ECE maintains close relations with other organs and organizations of the United Nations system which have programmes in the region. In the field of agriculture and timber, the ECE secretariat works through a combined division of ECE and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, thereby assuring harmonization of programmes pertaining to the region. With respect to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), there exists co-operation in certain limited areas of applied science where UNESCO has programmes in the region (e.g., new forms of energy, statistics). ECE co-operates with the World Health Organization (WHO) on certain problems pertaining to environment, water quality management, urban development, air pollution problems and standardization. One example of co-operation between ECE and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is the FAO/ECE/ILO Joint Committee on Forest Working Techniques and Training of Forest Workers. There is also joint activity with respect to standards for working conditions in inland transport. ECE's environment programme is developed in full consultation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which provides financial support for activities which further its objectives in the region. Regular co-operation on questions of common interest is maintained between ECE and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Annual review sessions are held in order to co-ordinate the activities of both secretariats and to strengthen co-operation. Areas of joint concern include trade between countries with different economic and social systems; industrial co-operation; transfer of technology; facilitation of trade procedures; tropical timber; multimodal transport. ECE also co-operates with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) regarding work of common interest, in particular, in respect of building materials and construction, chemicals, engineering and the coal industry.

(b) ESCAP maintains liaison with other organs and organizations through its permanent joint divisions or units: the ESCAP/UNIDO Division of Industry, Housing and Technology, the Environment Co-ordination Unit (jointly with UNEP), the joint ESCAP/ITU (International Telecommunication Union) Unit and the Joint ESCAP/CTC (Centre on Transnational Corporations) Unit on Transnational Corporations. ESCAP has continued its functions as regional co-ordinator and/or advisory agency of specific activities jointly with one or more specialized agencies. Examples of such collaboration include: (i) the Fertilizer Advisor Development Information

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Network for Asia and the Pacific, jointly administered with FAO and UNIDO and attached to the Agriculture Division of ESCAP; (ii) the Typhoon Committee and the Panel on Tropical Cyclones supported by the Natural Resources Division of ESCAP, and involving the participation of the World Meteorological Organization and the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO); (iii) the Regional Network for Agricultural Machinery, which receives technical support from the Industry Division of ESCAP, as well as from FAO and UNIDO; and (iv) the Regional Advisory Services on Trade Information located in ESCAP's Division of International Trade and supported by the International Trade Centre (ITC), UNCTAD, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and UNDP. In addition, ESCAP continues to co-ordinate regional programmes in the field of integrated rural development. The executive secretary of the commission acts as chairman of the Interagency Committee for Integrated Rural Development, while the Task Force, which assists the Committee in all aspects of the plan of action on integrated rural development, has as its co-ordinator an officer attached to ESCAP's office of the executive secretary. The agencies represented in the Committee and Task Force are FAO, UNIDO, United Nations Children's Fund, UNDP, UNEP, ILO, UNESCO and WHO. ^{5/} In the past year, ESCAP has initiated action towards a new area of interagency co-ordination with the convening of three sessions, between October 1979 and January 1980, of the Regional Interagency Working Group on economic and technical co-operation among developing countries. These sessions were attended by representatives of FAO, the International Civil Aviation Organization, ILO, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat), UNDP, UNESCO, UNEP, WHO and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities who reviewed the state of existing interagency collaboration with respect to technical and economic co-operation among developing countries, and the establishment of a regional information system to assist in promoting economic and technical co-operation among developing countries of the region. ESCAP has also initiated annual joint-programming exercises with the regional offices of specialized agencies in areas of mutual concern.

(c) ECLA has concluded over the years bilateral co-operative arrangements, both formally and informally, with UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNEP, ILO, the Inter-governmental Maritime Consultative Organization, ITU and ITC, involving the exchange of documentation and information, and the co-ordination of the agendas of meetings when applicable. ECLA has joint divisions with FAO and UNIDO and joint units with UNEP and the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations, which enable it to maintain permanent consultations with these organizations, to exchange information and to harmonize work programmes. Also, following sessions of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee, which is a subsidiary body of the commission, the ECLA secretariat has convened interagency meetings to examine the implications to ECLA and interested agencies of the programmes of work approved by the Committee;

^{5/} Proposals for follow-up action in the Asian and Pacific region to the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD), which designated FAO as lead agency in global programmes in this area, were first submitted by FAO to the ad hoc Intergovernmental Meeting on Integrated Rural Development called by ESCAP in December 1979. Recognition was thus given to the Interagency Committee as an effective co-ordinating body through which FAO could obtain support for proposals for regional programmes as follow-up to WCARRD.

(d) ECA maintains close collaboration in programming, policy and operational issues with specialized agencies and other United Nations organizations, particularly with FAO and UNIDO, with which it has established joint divisions; and with UNESCO, UNCTAD, UNEP, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and the Centre on Transnational Corporations. At the subregional level, ECA promotes interagency co-operation and co-ordination in the field of technical co-operation through its Multinational Programming and Operating Centres. They are intended to serve as the principle mechanism for fostering economic co-operation at the subregional and regional levels and for playing a catalytic role in the economic development of their subregions;

(e) ECWA has joint divisions with UNIDO and FAO and a joint unit with the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations as well as an environment co-ordination unit in co-operation with UNEP. It also maintains regular and close contacts and consultations with UNCTAD and other agencies.

27. The arrangements described above have proved effective in serving the specific purposes for which they were made. As a result of a full inventory by each regional commission, in full consultation with the agencies concerned, of the need and scope for improved intersecretariat co-ordination at the regional level, more systematic and comprehensive regional arrangements, patterned after the intersecretariat co-ordination arrangements at the global level envisaged in section VII of the annex to resolution 32/197, might prove to be desirable. This would contribute to the promotion at the regional level of the objectives of interagency co-ordination as expressed in resolution 32/197, particularly the provisions contained in paragraph 51 of its annex whereby:

"At the intersecretariat level, interagency co-ordination should aim at effectively assisting in the preparatory work for intergovernmental decisions, in the implementation of such decisions and in their translation into mutually complementary or joint programme activities. To that end, it should integrate into a coherent whole the relevant expertise and inputs of the organizations of the United Nations system. It should also be a built-in element of the substantive support to be provided to the intergovernmental bodies concerned for the discharge of their policy-making functions as well as an integral part of intersecretariat arrangements for policy and programme execution."

In addition, it is necessary for the regional commissions to fully participate in global co-ordination arrangements, particularly the ACC subsidiary machinery.

C. Participation in programme planning

28. The programme planning process at the regional level involves direct inputs from Governments, through their participation in expert meetings and sectoral conferences which formulate recommendations on the composition of the regional work programme as well as participation in the plenary sessions of the commission at which such work programmes are reviewed and approved. Arrangements should be made to enable the intergovernmental bodies responsible for programme preparation and

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programme review to exercise these functions effectively, thus appropriately involving the member countries of the commissions in all phases of programme planning and execution, including the formulation, review, implementation and evaluation stages.

29. The programming procedures now in force at the regional level do not, in all cases, enable the commissions, in the context of their consideration and approval of the regional work programmes, to carry out a full and systematic assessment of the sectoral programming inputs emanating from their substructures, in the light of over-all regional priorities. This requires a permanent dialogue between Governments and regional secretariats, aimed at the effective integration of sectoral inputs, and at maximizing the responsiveness of the work programmes, resulting from such inputs, to regional priorities. This objective could be provided for through a strengthening or reorientation of already existing institutional arrangements within each of the commissions at both the regional (such as, for example, ESCAP's Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives) and subregional levels (such as, for example, ECA's Multinational Programming and Operational Centres - see para. 90 below - or ECLA's Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee).

30. In accordance with the Financial Regulations of the United Nations, the provision of guidance by member Governments to the regional secretariats on programming matters should, in order to be as effective as possible, include full consideration of administrative and financial implications, so as to ensure that estimates of requisite and available financial means are systematically taken into account, and substantive and budgetary aspects are examined in an integrated manner at all stages of the process.

31. No reliable estimates are currently available of the share of activities within the over-all programme of work of the regional commissions that are undertaken for the exclusive or specific benefit of regional members, as distinct from activities related to the implementation of global programmes. Also, no objective criteria are available at present to draw up a clear-cut distinction between these two types of activities. Nevertheless, the enhancement of the authority of the plenary intergovernmental bodies of the regional commissions for programme formulation and review, particularly in respect of activities undertaken or sponsored by them which are aimed at the specific benefit of regional members, is an important objective which should be further pursued irrespective of the source of financing - whether regular budget or extrabudgetary resources - of such activities. The aim should be to promote a greater responsiveness of such activities to the over-all priorities for regional action established by the regional commissions, and, generally, to ensure that the decision-making authority rests as closely as possible with the intergovernmental forum that is most affected by the outcome of the decision-making process.

32. Paragraph 21 of the annex to resolution 32/197 states that the regional commissions should be consulted on the definition of the objectives to be included in the United Nations medium-term plan covering fields of interest to them, taking into account the special needs and conditions of their respective regions.

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Especially in respect of those programmes which the commissions and their secretariats are to implement, the time-table and arrangements for the preparation of the plan should allow for the active participation of Governments in each region in the formulation of objectives, identification of problems to be addressed and the determination of the most appropriate strategy and outputs. Also, consultations with the regional commissions on the definition of objectives for inclusion in the medium-term plan should not be limited to the objectives or regional activities, but should include objectives of global programmes and subprogrammes in the execution of which the commissions may be requested to participate.

33. At the secretariat level, greater interaction between regional and central secretariats in programming and evaluation exercises in areas of concern to the commissions has been recognized as a major objective in the implementation of the restructuring process. A degree of co-operation already exists between the centre and the regional commissions in the planning, programming and implementation of activities. This has, however, mainly taken place on an ad hoc basis. The processes of preparing and monitoring the implementation of the medium-term plan, 1984-1989, and the programme budget, 1982-1983, should offer an opportunity to review the over-all potential for improvement in this respect, including the synchronization of programme cycles and the harmonization of programme formats. The introduction of more systematic programme-by-programme reviews, involving the secretariats of the regional commissions and relevant units at Headquarters (including UNCTAD, UNIDO and UNEP), would assist in eliminating duplication and strengthening co-ordination in the implementation of activities, and would permit a detailed examination of possibilities for further decentralization of activities to the regional commissions.

34. The Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, at its twentieth session, took an important first step toward that end when, in preparation for the 1982-1983 programme budget and the 1984-1989 medium-term plan, it called for consultations between Headquarters and the secretariats of the commissions on an improved distribution of tasks and responsibilities in selected programme sectors. These analyses will deal with the allocation of responsibility for the execution of activities at the subprogramme level and should, in that context, explore the possibility of, inter alia, expanding the data collection and the analysis capacity of regional secretariats in support of global programmes. If these experiments are successful, consideration could be given to making the envisaged consultations part of regular programme-planning procedures. While this would entail added expenses related to travel and communications, such costs would be outweighed by the benefits to be derived by member States from better adjustment of regional and global efforts.

D. Contribution to global policy making

35. The commissions are increasingly called upon to participate in the preparation of substantive debates on development issues by central intergovernmental bodies and in the implementation of their decisions. The extent to which use is made of the facilities offered by the regional commissions for this purpose, and the degree

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to which the regional secretariats are requested to prepare substantive inputs for consultation and negotiation processes at the global level, vary from region to region, depending on, inter alia, the issues involved.

36. At the intergovernmental level, interaction between legislative bodies at the centre and in the regions often remains incomplete in timing as well as in content. While the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly are kept generally informed of the policy recommendations and decisions of the regional commissions, 6/ these decisions are not systematically analysed in terms of their possible implications for the policy-making process at the global level. Also, the impact of regional inputs on the course of substantive debates at the global level is not always commensurate with the level of intergovernmental preparation in the regions. Conversely, a selective presentation of global decisions and recommendations is regularly brought to the attention of the regional bodies, but plays only a limited role in the regional legislative context. Where decisions taken by central bodies are not systematically brought to the attention of the regional commissions, as between the regional commissions and functional bodies at the centre or between the regional commissions and specialized agencies (or, for that matter, among the regional commissions themselves), legislative interaction is even more limited. The following three aspects of the relations between regional and global structure would seem to deserve particular attention, with a view to strengthening interactions between them as called for in resolution 32/197.

37. At present, regional preparations for interregional or global negotiations are often undertaken at high-level ad hoc meetings. Within the regional commissions covering the developing countries, however, there appears to be a growing interest in utilizing the facilities of the regional commissions for the preparation of regional positions to be brought into negotiations at the global or interregional levels (e.g., the fifth session of UNCTAD, the Third General Conference of UNIDO, trade relations between developed countries and developing regions, and relations with transnational corporations). This interest is illustrative of the consultative and preparatory functions that could increasingly be carried out by the commissions, under the strengthened mandates provided for them in resolution 32/197. As most commissions maintain an elaborate institutionalized substructure, the vitality of this substructure could similarly be enhanced by its fuller involvement in these regional preparations, where timing and subject matter allow it.

38. In the context of a strengthened mandate for regional commissions in this respect, resources should be earmarked for a corresponding strengthening of secretariat support services, at the regional level, including the preparation of

6/ It should be noted in this connexion that the Economic and Social Council, in its decision 1979/1 of 9 February 1979, decided to discontinue the submission to it of the reports of the regional commissions. However, decisions or recommendations of the commissions that statutorily require approval by the Council are under that decision brought to the attention of the Council in the Secretary-General's annual report on the meetings of the executive secretaries.

up-to-date background analyses, and the provision of special assistance to member Governments for specific negotiating purposes. 7/

39. Second, is a need to strengthen interactions between central and regional secretariats in the implementation of resolutions adopted by legislative bodies. The efforts to improve the distribution of responsibilities between the regional secretariats and the Secretariat at United Nations Headquarters should begin at the time when new resolutions are adopted by relevant intergovernmental bodies. As a first measure, it would be useful for closer consultations to be undertaken with the secretariats of the regional commissions on the implementation of Economic and Social Council and General Assembly resolutions of concern to them with a view to making effective use of their contributions. In certain cases, the requested studies may already be in the work programmes of the regional commissions. In these cases, the role of the central secretariat should be to provide a global perspective on the basis of regional inputs. In other cases, it may be possible for a particular regional commission to play the "lead" role in view of its experience and expertise and in the interest of proper co-ordination. Conversely, a parallel exercise could be undertaken at the regional level to identify, in consultation with Headquarters, which parts of resolutions passed by the regional commissions should be implemented with active participation and assistance from the central secretariat including the secretariats of specialized bodies. While these efforts would be conducive to enhancing the efficiency and efficacy of programme delivery at both regional and global levels, and thus can be expected to result in savings in the long term, they are not without costs. Improved communication will necessarily involve a measure of increased travel requirements and related expenses for both regional and Headquarters staff that should be weighed against the benefits of a more effective division of labour in programme implementation.

40. Thirdly, as a longer-term measure that can be pursued in the context of the consultations between Headquarters and the regional secretariats for the preparation of the next programme budget and the medium-term plan, consideration might be given to the extent to which the data collection and analysis capacities of the Organization can be better co-ordinated and integrated, and greater responsibilities for the collection of primary data, particularly for new surveys, assigned to the regional secretariats, not only to strengthen regional activities as such, but in support of the execution of global programmes as well. Because of their access to national sources of information, the regional secretariats are particularly well suited to undertake the collection of both quantitative data on national social and economic development and qualitative information on domestic social and economic policies and on national positions on co-operation at the regional and interregional levels, which are basic data requirements for most United Nations research efforts. A more integrated approach to data handling, whenever feasible both from a managerial and substantive perspective, would, inter alia, ensure that Governments are not repeatedly approached by different

7/ The interest of member countries of the commissions in the provision of such services is reflected in various recent resolutions, for example, ECA resolution 369 (XIV) of 27 March 1979 or ECLA resolution 403 (XVIII) of 26 April 1979.

parts of the secretariat for the same types of data. In providing assistance for the conduct of global research activities, the regional secretariats should be expected not merely to serve as collectors of data for transmission to the secretariat at the centre, but should be fully involved in the design of appropriate research methodology and data presentation, for which the centre would, as a matter of course, retain the co-ordinating responsibility.

41. An increase in the number of entities involved in the implementation of a programme may, at least in the short term, lead to additional costs as relatively more time must be spent on preparations and on the transmission and circulation of documents. In the long term, these costs are, however, expected to be outweighed by the savings to be accrued from a greater integration of data collection and dissemination of information. Also, non-budgetary benefits, including, in particular, the greater responsiveness of analytical results to national needs, anticipated from strengthening regional capacities in this area, should be fully taken into account. As four out of the five regional commissions operate in developing regions, efforts to expand and strengthen the programme delivery capacity of the regional secretariats can contribute to bringing about a more effective participation of the developing regions in the United Nations development activities and can serve to enhance the responsiveness of the secretariats in the implementation of their programmes of work to the needs of these regions.

E. Common definition of regions and subregions

42. Paragraphs 22 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 states that:

"Subject to such guidance as may be provided by the Governments concerned and without prejudice to membership of the regional bodies concerned, the organizations of the United Nations system should take early steps to achieve a common definition of regions and subregions and the identical location of regional and subregional offices."

ACC has commented as follows on this recommendation:

"The issues raised in paragraph 22 of the recommendations which call for measures to "achieve a common definition of regions and subregions and the identical location of regional and subregional offices", have been extensively debated in the past in the Economic and Social Council and other forums. This is a difficult problem inasmuch as the present pattern of regional structures is the result of complex historical, political and technical factors. As acknowledged in the paragraph under reference, decisions on these matters are the prerogative of the legislative and governing bodies of the various organizations. Steps will be taken to place the recommendation of the General Assembly before those bodies, and the results of their consultations will be communicated to the Economic and Social Council, so as to enable it to provide further clarification and guidance."

43. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit on regional structures of the United Nations system (E/5727) - issued two years before the adoption of resolution 32/197 - contains a comprehensive review and analysis of the functions of regional offices and the definitions of regions and subregions. Five years later, this analysis is largely still valid. In relation to the functions of the regional commissions, non-identically defined regions and subregions affect the capacity of the commissions to exercise team-leadership and responsibility for co-ordination. At the intersecretariat level, the existence of non-coterminus regions and the establishment of field offices of different organizations in widely dispersed locations impede communication and increase costs. But the more fundamental argument for the harmonization of geographical definitions relates to the non-identical composition of intergovernmental bodies. The capacity of the regional commissions to perform policy-making and policy-review functions is diminished to the extent that their memberships do not correspond with the regional structures of other United Nations bodies. In particular, non-identical membership of regional intergovernmental bodies serves to hamper joint sponsorship of institutionalized regional conferences in many regions. The difficulties tend to be fewer in situations where the regional commissions interact with the regional offices of specialized bodies and funding agencies. The question of geographical coverage and of liaison arrangements with UNDP's regional bureaux may deserve particular attention in this context, in view of both the expanding operational tasks of the regional secretariats and the policy-making functions of the commissions.

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F. Operational responsibilities and executing agency status

44. Paragraph 23 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 recommends, inter alia, that:

"... Close co-operation with the United Nations Development Programme should be established and appropriate arrangements made to enable the regional commissions to participate actively in operational activities carried out through the United Nations system, including the preparation of intercountry programmes, as may be required, in their respective regions"

and calls for the commissions to be enabled:

"... to function expeditiously as executing agencies for intersectoral, subregional, regional and interregional projects and, in areas which do not fall within the purview of the sectoral responsibilities of specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies, for other subregional, regional and interregional projects".

45. The regional commissions have been collaborating with UNDP for several years and had acted as de facto executing agencies in a number of cases even prior to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 33/202 which gave the regional commissions the status of executing agencies in respect of the intersectoral projects described in paragraph 23 of the annex to resolution 32/197. The volume of operational activities financed from funds provided by UNDP has since expanded considerably.

46. The Economic Commission for Europe is increasingly being used in the execution of projects in the regional programme for Europe. At present, there are four approved projects (including one in the preparatory assistance phase) with a UNDP input of about \$1.7 million or 17 per cent of the European regional indicative planning figure (IPF), for which ECE is the designated executing agency.

47. The Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific is the major executing agency for UNDP-financed regional projects in Asia. During 1979, 25 such projects became operational and, for the second IPF cycle, ongoing projects amount to over \$US 13 million or an equivalent of over 18 per cent of the total regional IPF for the same period. In addition to the projects directly executed by ESCAP, the Commission also acts as associated agency for another 16 projects, totalling \$10.7 million.

48. The Economic Commission for Latin America has been performing for some time as an executing agency of UNDP. The four projects which are presently executed by the Commission amount to about \$4 million for the second IPF cycle, and the resources assigned to projects executed during this cycle correspond closely to 10 per cent of the total regional IPF.

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49. The operational programme of the Economic Commission for Africa that is financed by UNDP has two components:

(a) The "traditional programme" consisting of projects for which ECA had initially been given consultative responsibilities, and which were later given to ECA for execution, notably the African Institute for Development and Planning, Inter-African Trade and certain projects carried out by ECA's Multinational Programming and Operational Centres; and

(b) A new programme initiated in the last few years including, inter alia, substantial UNDP assistance towards the preparation of the Transport and Communications Decade for Africa.

The total of approved projects for the second IPF cycle executed by ECA amounts to over \$21 million or an equivalent of close to 18.5 per cent of the regional IPF for the same period.

50. The Economic Commission for Western Asia has been assigned the execution of four projects amounting to 15 per cent of the entire regional IPF, or \$3.6 million, during the second cycle.

51. This rapid growth of projects executed by the regional secretariats reflects UNDP's recognition of the important role in respect of operational activities assigned to the regional commissions in the restructuring process. At the intergovernmental level, particularly at the level of the sectoral subcommittees, the commissions can be instrumental in charting options for economic and technical intercountry co-operation in support of the preparation of project proposals within the framework of intercountry programmes of the funding agencies.

52. The operational responsibilities most frequently performed by the regional secretariats include the organization of training activities, institution-building, advisory services and dissemination of information. In the further application of the criteria provided by resolution 32/197 for the designation of executing agencies for regional and other relevant projects, the consideration should be borne in mind that while the specialized agencies should continue to serve as principal sources of technical expertise in the execution of regional projects in their respective areas of competence, the secretariats of the regional commissions could have an important catalytic role to play by, inter alia, identifying resources and capabilities in the region that can be mobilized for technical co-operation among developing countries. Within this context, operational programmes at the regional level would benefit from co-operative arrangements with the specialized agencies, by which the technical expertise of the specialized agencies would be more systematically brought to bear on the various stages of project execution.

G. Regional and interregional economic co-operation
among developing countries

53. Paragraphs 24 and 25 of the annex to resolution 32/197 state that:

"... the regional commissions concerned should intensify their efforts, with the assistance of the competent organizations of the United Nations system and at the request of the Governments concerned, to strengthen and enlarge economic co-operation among the developing countries at the subregional, regional and interregional levels"

and that they should:

"... as appropriate, expand existing arrangements for the continuous exchange between them of information and experience. Such arrangements may include the holding of periodic intersecretariat meetings, utilizing existing machinery as far as possible for that purpose."

54. The promotion of economic co-operation and the exchange of experience on the implementation of social and economic policies have always formed an intrinsic part of the mandate of the commissions. The regular work programmes and the annual reports of, in particular, the four commissions serving developing regions, reflect the contribution which the United Nations is making to the promotion of co-operation among developing countries. 8/ The relevant provisions in paragraph 24 of the annex to resolution 32/197 do not therefore, as such, involve new responsibilities for the commissions. At the same time, these provisions, in their emphasis on co-operation among developing countries, straddling the concepts of economic and technical co-operation among developing countries, are indicative of the priority accorded by the international community to a further strengthening of the role of the four commissions in this broad area, and of the directions along which such a strengthening could be undertaken.

55. Particular emphasis seems to be placed in this context on the support that can be provided by the commissions to intergovernmental co-operation schemes, not only those created under the auspices of the commissions themselves, but other bilateral and multilateral forms of co-operation outside the framework of the United Nations as well. For example, at the secretariat level, ESCAP provides assistance to several institutionalized co-operative efforts established for the representation of specific sector interests (e.g., the Asian Rice Trade Fund, Association of Natural Rubber Producing Countries, Asian and Pacific Coconut Community, Pepper Community, Asian Clearing Union, Asian Reinsurance Corporation).

8/ A synopsis of activities undertaken by the regional commissions in compliance with the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for the Promotion of Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries is provided in a joint paper submitted by the secretariats of the regional commissions to the High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting on Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries held at Geneva from 26 May to 2 June 1980.

56. The Economic Commission for Latin America has initiated discussions with the secretariat of the Latin American Economic System to examine modes of co-operation on several activities for the promotion of interregional economic co-operation. Similar discussions are to be initiated with other subregional and regional bodies in the region, including the secretariats of the economic integration schemes operative in Latin America and with the Latin American Energy Organization (OLADE).

57. The Economic Commission for Africa has maintained for many years a close working relationship with the Organization of African Unity, has supported various subregional integration mechanisms and maintains, in its programme of work, a project on the co-ordination of activities of intergovernmental organizations and the promotion of co-operation between the African region and other developing regions.

58. The Economic Commission for Western Asia has, since its inception, been concerned to develop and strengthen its relationship with regional and specialized Arab organizations and has now formalized co-operative arrangements with sixteen such organizations through a series of joint memoranda of understanding. Also, as part of its regular work programme, the ECWA secretariat has embarked on a major study examining various aspects of economic co-operation and integration efforts in Western Asia. The main objective of this study is to contribute towards a better understanding of the economic factors conducive to co-operation and those that presently hinder or obstruct it, and, consequently, to identify forms of co-operation to which current efforts should be directed, as well as the feasibility of and prerequisites for the realization of more advanced forms of co-operation.

59. In all developing regions there are many opportunities for further co-ordination and co-operation with regional organizations outside the United Nations, ranging from co-ordination, where appropriate, of the basic direction of the programmes of work at the policy-making level, to mutual provisions of technical support at the secretariat level. The conditions under which this support can be provided, in the context of established practices and of the specific characteristics and development requirements of each region, and its reflection in the commissions' programmes of work, deserve further specification.

60. As recognized in resolution 32/197 and other resolutions, the regional commissions have an important promotional role to play in the development of interregional co-operation. Various initiatives taken by all four commissions in developing regions illustrate the range of tasks and responsibilities that can be performed by the commissions and their secretariats. Thus, for example, the ESCAP secretariat organized in October 1979 an interregional expert group meeting on transnational corporations in primary export commodities which was attended by representatives of the five joint units of the Commission on Transnational Corporations and the regional commissions; certain of the United Nations specialized agencies were also represented. The expert group recommended that a high-level interregional seminar be convened (currently planned for early 1981) to be attended by senior government officials to whom policy recommendations arising out of the exploratory work of the regional commissions would be submitted. ESCAP furthermore sponsored a consultative meeting between the Government of

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India and 13 Latin American countries, held in New Delhi in June 1979, on trade promotion measures, joint marketing of commodities, shipping, participation in industrial programmes, collaboration in consultancy, technology transfer, co-operation in the energy, agriculture and water sectors, and the establishment of links among research and training institutions. The meeting drew up a plan of action in which the respective tasks of the ESCAP and ECLA secretariats were outlined in detail, thus ensuring that the collaboration would be effectively followed up.

61. Similarly, ESCAP and ECWA jointly organized a consultative meeting, on industrial co-operation among developing countries, which was held in January 1980 in Bangkok and brought together representatives of member countries of the ESCAP and ECWA regions for a discussion of mutual problems in the formulation and execution of industrial projects, and a review of prospects for enhanced co-operation between oil-exporting ECWA countries and countries of the ESCAP region. It was felt that the ESCAP and ECWA countries could fulfil a valuable role in disseminating information on the opportunities for collaboration among countries in such fields as trade and investment.

62. The secretariats of ECLA and ECA agreed on a proposal for an interregional action programme for the promotion of technical and economic co-operation between Latin America and Africa (pursuant to ECA resolution 302 (XIII) and ECLA resolution 363 (XVIII)), which would give priority to the following areas of co-operation: trade promotion, development of manpower resources and the adaptation and development of relevant technology.

63. The secretariats of ECA and ECWA currently co-operate on three projects covering studies on the brain-drain issue, a statistical abstract covering the Arab world and a documentation centre covering both African and Arab countries.

64. At present, the purposes served by most of these interregional activities concern the identification of development capacities and needs within each region, including technological and productive capacities and requirements, as well as trained manpower availability. Eventually, the full range of functions served by the commissions and their secretariats can be brought to bear upon the promotion of interregional co-operation. At the secretariat level, the meetings of executive secretaries, held twice a year, provide an opportunity for informal contacts in order to review interregional co-operation in general, agree on joint (bilateral and otherwise) programmes and projects to promote co-operation among developing countries and groups of countries from different geographical areas, compare experiences with regard to the activities of regional economic integration schemes in each of the regions; and for an exchange of information on operational and programme activities which regional commissions carry out in their own regions. As interregional contacts using the facilities of the regional commissions multiply, additional arrangements and resources may prove to be needed. This applies especially to the requirements of joint and co-ordinated programming in areas of mutual interest to the commissions. ^{9/}

^{9/} Thus, for example, ECA and ECLA plan to hold a joint interregional meeting on measures for joint programming in 1981, pending available resources.

65. With respect to UNCTAD's mandate for economic co-operation among developing countries, it should be noted that since UNCTAD has no regional structures of its own, its role and that of the regional commissions in support of economic co-operation among developing countries are complementary. This applies in particular to the consultative and preparatory functions of the commissions, which can be utilized for the regional preparation of interregional and global negotiations sponsored by UNCTAD. 10/ At the secretariat level, a fuller utilization of regional data collection and analysis capacities would likewise strengthen the global policy-making and negotiation functions of UNCTAD.

10/ The inclusion of the regional commissions in the regional preparations of negotiations at the global level is consonant with the provisions of the Action Plan for Economic Co-operation among Non-Aligned and other Developing Countries, which forms a basis for the larger part of UNCTAD's activities with respect to economic co-operation among developing countries.

H. Streamlining the conference and secretariat structures

66. In its paragraph 27, the annex to resolution 32/197 recommends that:

"Taking into account the special needs and conditions of their respective regions and bearing in mind the objectives set forth above, the regional commissions should rationalize their structures, inter alia, by streamlining their subsidiary machinery."

The efforts now under way to streamline the conference structures of the commissions relate mostly to the periodicity of meetings of the subsidiary structures in order to adjust the subsidiary structures to the requirements of the programme planning cycle.

67. Other objectives in recent streamlining efforts include the creation of more effective links at the intergovernmental level with regional organizations outside the United Nations system, and the promotion of a better distribution of secretariat resources in relation to requirements for the servicing of intergovernmental meetings on the one hand and operational activities on the other.

68. Thus, ESCAP revised its conference structure to bring about three main types of changes (see ESCAP resolution 210 (XXXVI)), as follows:

(a) An adjustment in the periodicity of legislative committee meetings so that each committee meets at least once in a biennium this arrangement ensures that the committees can effectively scrutinize the biennial work programmes prior to formal approval by the commission;

(b) A limit to the number of meetings to be held in any one year; the number of legislative committee meetings, including one ad hoc conference, may not exceed seven; the annual limit for intergovernmental meetings is set at fifteen;

(c) The deletion from the structure of meetings of the Council of Ministers for Asian Economic Co-operation, many of whose original functions are now being performed by the commission, its legislative committee and by ad hoc ministerial conferences in fields such as trade and industry.

69. The thirty-sixth ESCAP plenary session also formally approved, in ESCAP resolution 206 (XXXVI), the establishment in July 1980 of the Asian and Pacific Development Centre which would integrate the functions of and replace the Asian and Pacific Development Institute, the Social Welfare and Development Centre for Asia and the Pacific, the Asian and Pacific Development Administration Centre and the Asian and Pacific Centre for Women and Development.

70. ECLA will examine its institutional substructure during an extraordinary session of its Committee of the Whole which is scheduled to convene in New York in November 1980. Prior to this meeting, administrative measures have been taken

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with respect to the functioning of the ECLA secretariat, including the recent creation of a single co-ordinating point with responsibility for horizontal co-operation; and also including the programming and administrative integration of ECLA's regional institutes, the Latin American Institute for Economic and Social Planning and the Latin American Demographic Centre, in its programme of activities, while maintaining the identity of each in its substantive field.

71. ECA decided, at its fourteenth session, to abolish its Executive Committee and its Technical Committee of Experts and to establish, instead, a Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole to prepare the various matters for consideration by the meetings of the Conference of Ministers. On an experimental basis, ECA's plenary sessions would be held annually rather than biennially. It was also decided to merge the existing Conference of African Planners, the Conference of African Statisticians and the Conference of African Demographers into a single conference, to be known as the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers, which would be held biennially (ECWA resolutions 330 (XIV) and 368 (XIV)).

72. ECWA has not established a permanent intergovernmental substructure, but decided during its seventh session to form an intergovernmental ad hoc expert committee on the medium-term plan to advise the secretariat on programme priorities and institutional arrangements for the implementation of the medium-term plan (ECWA resolution 34 (VII)). Meanwhile, the terms of reference of the Programme Planning and Co-ordination Unit in the ECWA secretariat were revised to strengthen its role in evaluation and monitoring and to serve as a focal point for promoting co-ordination and co-operation among developing countries at the regional and interregional levels.

73. Reorganization efforts with respect to the conference structures of the regional commissions have so far mostly concerned the commissions proper and their regular legislative substructures. These measures will need to be extended to include ad hoc bodies and meetings in areas coming within the purview of the commissions which, although funded through extra-budgetary assistance, are often called upon to perform regular policy and consultative functions.

74. The commissions may strengthen their role in the promotion of co-operation by providing more opportunity for intergovernmental consultations on issues of special interest to their members. Several commissions have long allowed subregional groups of member countries to meet under the auspices of these commissions. Common economic interests (e.g., with respect to the production and marketing of primary commodities) or common status in relation to globally defined criteria (e.g., least developed countries, land-locked and island developing countries, etc.), may similarly be considered by the plenary commissions to provide grounds for special meetings, within resources available to them for conference services. Generally, the provision of conference facilities to perform policy-making and consultative and preparatory functions belongs to the core responsibilities of the commissions and should be, where appropriate, financed by the regular budget.

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75. Finally, all documentation for the meetings of regional commissions is generally prepared by the regional secretariats, with occasional inputs from other bodies. In the many areas of common concern between the specialized bodies (particularly UNCTAD, UNIDO and FAO) and the regional commissions, a greater utilization of information and expertise available in the various secretariats of the United Nations system would enhance the quality of the services rendered to the members countries. To that end, the modalities of agency participation and the types of inputs that can best be provided by these agencies and the regional secretariats deserve further specification.

I. Delegation of authority and provision of resources

76. Paragraph 26 of the annex to resolution 32/197 states that:

"In order to enable the regional commissions effectively to discharge the responsibilities indicated in the preceding paragraphs, the necessary authority should be delegated to them and, to the same end, adequate budgetary and financial provision should be made for their activities."

77. In the preceding paragraphs, five areas were identified in which the role and functions of the regional commissions and their "authority", as provided for in the above recommendation, may be better specified or expanded in the framework of their respective terms of reference. These areas involve the following aspects:

(a) The functional relations of the regional commission with the United Nations intergovernmental structures at the global level, so as to enable the commissions, under the authority of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, to perform, on behalf and in support of these bodies, policy-making and consultation functions at the regional level (paras. 19, 21, 24, 25 and 27);

(b) The exercise by the commissions of team-leadership and responsibility for co-operation and co-ordination at the regional level in the formulation of regional development priorities and the review of intercountry activities undertaken or financed by other United Nations bodies in the region, with due regard to the responsibilities of the specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies in specific sectoral fields and the co-ordinating role of UNDP in respect of technical co-operation activities (para. 20);

(c) Participation of the regional commissions in decision-making particularly concerning programme requirements and medium-term planning in respect of activities undertaken by the commissions for the primary benefit of the regional activities of their members countries, including involvement of the commissions in the definition of objectives covered by the medium-term plan (para. 21);

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(d) The responsibilities of the commissions vis-à-vis intergovernmental, regional, subregional or sectoral co-operation schemes outside the United Nations (paras. 24 and 27);

(e) The capacity of the commissions to draw upon information and expertise available at the secretariat level in different parts of the United Nations system, including in the specialized bodies.

78. In relation to resource requirements, it should be noted that currently a growing share of the resources available to the regional commissions derives from voluntary contributions provided by United Nations funding agencies, traditional donor countries and, increasingly, from the developing member countries of the commissions. While the greater part of these extra-budgetary resources is directed to the operational programmes of the commissions, to some extent these funds also increasingly finance basic research and related activities of the secretariats in support of the consultative functions of the commissions. On the other hand, resources available to the commissions under the regular budget are commonly used to supplement their overhead income for the substantive and administrative support of technical co-operation projects. A more rational earmarking of the resources provided by these two sources of financing, and one more consonant with the nature of the functions carried out, would promote stability and help meet, by helping to ensure the provision of adequate resources for the performance of essential commission functions, the requirements of multilateral programme planning and delivery.

79. The determination of adequate levels of resources for the programmes of work of the commissions should be based on the nature of the contributions expected from the regional commissions both in the fulfillment of regional development needs and in support of global United Nations functions. In this context, the short-term costs of strengthening the capacities of the regional secretariats must be weighed against its long-term benefit for the promotion of collective self-reliance in the developing regions.

III. IMMEDIATE PROGRAMME PRIORITIES OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS
IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE RESTRUCTURING PROCESS

A. General

80. In the context of the expanded functions entrusted to the regional commissions in the restructuring process, the commissions generally attach priority to the strengthening of their programme planning and co-ordination capacities. Present concerns expressed by ESCAP, ECLA, ECWA and ECA point first of all to a need to strengthen the capacity of their secretariats to contribute to interagency co-operation at the regional level and, generally, to expanded regional co-ordination with special characteristics for each region. Thus, as part of its efforts to decentralize its contribution to regional economic and technical co-operation among developing countries, ECA seeks additional means to promote better co-ordination with the organization of African Unity and secure a fuller participation of the various agencies at the subregional level; ESCAP is concerned to extend its initiatives in the establishment of interagency committees and task forces to additional substantive areas, while ECWA intends to further develop its co-operation arrangements with United Nations agencies and Arab regional organizations on the basis of the various agreements already concluded. In Latin America, ECLA's terms of reference would similarly allow for expanded co-ordination with organizations outside the United Nations system in that region.

81. Moreover, the commissions seek to intensify their participation in planning and co-ordination activities at the global level. ESCAP and ECWA, in particular, express concern that the participation of their secretariats in planning programme and co-ordination exercises with United Nations Headquarters be maintained at an adequate level. ECLA is likewise interested in improved co-ordination of its programmes with those carried out at Headquarters.

82. Among the five regional commissions, ESCAP and ECWA point to an urgent need for a strengthening of their activities in substantive areas. In relation to the functional strengthening of the regional commissions envisaged in General Assembly resolution 32/197 and, as manifested by recent decision-making in the legislative bodies of the regional commissions, there appears to be a growing recognition of the need to expand the capacities of the secretariats to perform regular research and policy analysis functions and provide, on request, special services to the member countries in substantive areas in which outstanding prospects for effective economic and technical co-operation among developing countries have become apparent, notably including the fields of transportation and natural resources.

B. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

83. The increased responsibilities of ESCAP as the main economic and social development centre for the Asian and Pacific region carry with it an expansion of the tasks of the ESCAP secretariat in maintaining liaison and ensuring programme co-ordination with other agencies and bodies within the United Nations system.

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84. One of these expanding tasks is the servicing of the interagency Committee and Task Force on Integrated Rural Development, the scope of which may be widened to cover other activities for the development of the region, particularly those related to the promotion of economic and technical co-operation among developing countries and to activities in the areas for development planning and social development. Another such task consists in maintaining more frequent contact with the specialized bodies of the system, particularly those with whom ESCAP operates joint units in the secretariat, to ensure co-ordination and harmonization of respective work programmes. Yet another one is the improvement of liaison with United Nations Headquarters and with the other regional commissions for the purpose of promoting an appropriate distribution of tasks and responsibilities in the implementation of the United Nations medium-term plan as well as for the provision of an effective follow-up to decisions made by United Nations intergovernmental bodies.

85. Within the framework of resolution 32/197, ESCAP is prepared to exercise a higher degree of responsibility for regional co-ordination and co-operation, taking into account the special needs and conditions of the region. The natural resources programme is one area where ESCAP has been given a strong mandate by its legislative organs. Indeed, the commission, at its thirty-sixth session (1980), in endorsing the 1980-1981 programme of work in the natural resources sector, stressed the need for the proper development and conservation of natural resources, particularly energy, water and mineral resources to achieve the targets of the regional development strategy for the 1980s. It also stressed the need for priority to be given to studies on the mineral potential of the region, improvement in legal and institutional arrangements for mineral exploration and development, environmental management of mineral exploration and development activities, and the promotion of the application of modern technologies for the exploration and development of minerals including fuel minerals.

C. Economic Commission for Latin America

86. Two basic spheres of action, as explained below, of the ECLA secretariat need to be reinforced as a priority.

(a) The recent attention paid by the United Nations to the planning process in all its phases is leading to important changes in current procedures, which will require adjustments in the relevant practices within the regional commissions; it also includes a recognition of the need to improve and strengthen the evaluation process as part of regular planning, programming and budgetary procedures; a third aspect is the need to improve co-ordination and collaboration with United Nations agencies and regional organizations so as to enhance interagency programme activities and avoid a duplication of efforts and inefficient use of resources in the implementation of programmes.

(b) It can be expected that, as a consequence of the decentralization process, the role of the ECLA secretariat will substantially expand in regard to the promotion of technical and economic co-operation among developing countries. While the promotion of technical and economic and co-operation and the exchange of

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experience have always formed an intrinsic part of the mandates of ECLA, the new emphasis placed on the concepts of national and collective self-reliance, and on the maximum use of resources, capabilities and experiences of the developing countries call for the expansion of activities relating to technical and economic co-operation among developing countries at the intraregional and interregional levels as requested by the Conference on Economic Co-operation among Developing Countries held at Mexico City in September 1976 (A/C.2/31/7, part one), by the Buenos Aires Plan of Action on technical co-operation among developing countries (Buenos Aires, August-September 1978), 11/ by the fourth Ministerial Meeting of the Group of 77 held at Arusha in February 1979 (TD/236) and by ECLA's resolutions 387 (XVIII) and 405 (XVIII).

D. Economic Commission for Africa

87. As outlined in part II of this report, the fulfilment of the mandates given to the regional commissions requires an intensification of the efforts already begun as well as new functions being started.

88. For the continuation of the traditional responsibilities of the Economic Commission for Africa, resources will be applied so as to provide optimal support for attaining the development objectives contained in the development strategy for Africa for the Third Development Decade. This strategy, which has been approved by the Heads of Government of the Organization of African Unity, together with its declaration of commitment on the guidelines and measures for national and collective self-reliance in social and economic development for the establishment of a new international economic order, gave priority to the attainment of self-sufficiency in food; placed emphasis on the physical integration of the region through the development of transport and communications at the national, multinational and regional levels; and accorded high priority to the establishment of a sound industrial base. In this context, special attention will be paid to the sectors of industry, transport, agriculture and trade in the programme of work of ECA.

89. The expanded functions of ECA relate, inter alia, to the promotion of regional, subregional and interregional economic co-operation among developing countries, to the exercise of team leadership and the responsibility for intersectoral co-ordination and co-operation at the regional level, and to the strengthening of relations with organizations of the United Nations system.

90. The principal mechanisms of ECA for fostering economic and technical co-operation at the subregional and regional levels are the ECA Multinational Programming and Operational Centres, established by ECA resolution 311 (XIII), which are expected to play a catalytic role in the economic development of their subregions. The activities which need to be carried out include, inter alia, the following:

11/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.78.II.A.11 (and corrigendum)).

(a) Securing the full and active participation of the various agencies in the identification, formulation and implementation of development programmes and projects in co-operation with the representatives of the member States concerned at the technical committee level as well as that of the Council of Ministers of the Multinational Programming and Operational Centres;

(b) Constant interaction with the various organizations in the United Nations system in order to ensure, in particular, that the staff of the Centres are fully acquainted with the work programmes at the subregional level.

91. At the regional and interregional levels, the following activities need strengthening on a full-time basis:

(a) Associating OAU and other intergovernmental organizations operating within the African region with the development activities of ECA and other United Nations organizations;

(b) Co-ordinating action between ECA and OAU, in association with the United Nations agencies, in co-sponsoring sectoral ministerial conferences to facilitate co-ordinated action in programme identification, formulation and implementation, thereby optimizing the use of limited resources available not only to the United Nations system organizations but to African Governments and institutions. These sectoral conferences would have the following functions:

- (i) To review problems on issues pertaining to their respective development sector;
- (ii) To formulate regional policies and strategies relating to the sector within their respective field of competence;
- (iii) To identify areas for multinational co-operation and integration;
- (iv) To formulate sectoral work programmes and priorities for consideration of the appropriate legislative or deliberative organs;

(c) Identifying, promoting and co-ordinating technical and economic co-operation among developing countries within the African region and between Africa and other developing regions.

92. Efforts to strengthen relations with the specialized agencies would entail, inter alia, preliminary contacts with agencies at the highest level; the identification of possible areas of co-operation by intersecretariat, multidisciplinary teams; and the drawing up and implementation of specific programmes in the areas of agreed co-operative effort.

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93. The functions referred to above are directly related to the activities of ECA as the executing agency and source of assistance to developing countries in identifying projects and in preparing programmes for the promotion of intercountry co-operation. The above list of activities is not meant to be exhaustive, but presents in summary form the main tasks and responsibilities with respect to which ECA's programme delivery capacity should be strengthened on a priority basis.

E. Economic Commission for Western Asia

94. The functions of preparing the programme activities of ECWA and the over-all monitoring and co-ordination of programme delivery have grown substantially in recent years to include such diverse tasks as the following:

(a) Interpreting and co-ordinating the planning for the implementation of resolutions emanating from the Commission and other legislative bodies of the United Nations;

(b) Reviewing and updating the medium-term plan in the light of all legislative decisions with programme implications passed subsequent to its adoption;

(c) Preparing the biennial work programmes and priorities of the Commission and its contribution to the medium-term plans in an integrated manner so that each programme element can be evaluated in the perspective of its relative importance to the goals established by the Commission and the central legislative bodies. This requires intensive co-ordination within the secretariat and with other United Nations bodies, as well as the development of task forces and focal points in selected priority areas;

(d) Co-operation and co-ordination with the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, within the context of the restructuring and decentralization process now under way;

(e) Cross-organizational programme analysis and promotion of technical and economic co-operation among developing countries at the regional level; participation in meetings on programme and co-ordination in the United Nations system and preparation of the relevant documentation;

(f) Further development of co-operation and co-ordination with United Nations and other international and regional organizations;

(g) Resource allocation and monitoring of programme implementation; development of output indicators and performance standards in order to ensure that the utilization of resources is in line with the accomplishment of the objectives.

95. In addition, ECWA promotes economic and technical co-operation within the region under a wide range of substantive programmes and activities which will be strengthened in the framework of the restructuring process. One of the areas with

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a special potential for regional co-operation, and where prompt action is in order, is transport infrastructure.

96. Despite improvements in the transport infrastructure of ECWA member countries over the last six years, some highway and railway alignments are still inconsistent with the present pattern of boundaries or with that of population concentration and economic activity centres. Transport services, as well as transport vehicles and fleets in many instances, are out of line with the capabilities of existing facilities and terminals. On the other hand, the introduction of modern transport technologies in the region is, in some cases, making the infrastructure facilities redundant and obsolete. The rural road transport systems in particular are not equal to their importance to the national, political and economic unity of member countries.

97. It is therefore proposed to reinforce work in the following two programme elements of the ECWA transport programme:

(a) Integrated transport planning. A master plan for transport in the ECWA region is currently under preparation and should be finalized in 1981. The following activities are envisaged:

- (i) Review of national transport plans for identification of suitable mechanism to promote co-ordination of land transport at the national and regional levels;
- (ii) Studies on specific disciplines of integrated intermodal land transport;
- (iii) Studies related to rural transport planning and development, with an emphasis on improvement of rural transport equipment vehicles and road construction technology;
- (iv) Studies on the improvement of railway management, planning, operation and maintenance.

(b) Low cost road construction in arid areas. The objective of this programme element is to promote low-cost road construction in arid areas of the ECWA region through the use of appropriate construction materials and equipment and to assist the member countries in their efforts to develop an adequate, efficient and low-cost rural road and rural transport system for socio-economic development, through studies, advisory services and technical assistance. The following additional activities are thus envisaged: surveys of the existing specifications used in road construction in arid areas and of the availability of suitable construction materials in the adjacent areas; and studies on the identification and use of appropriate construction material and equipment and the formulation of geometrical design standards for construction and maintenance of low-cost roads in arid areas and on economic evaluation and planning of low-cost roads in arid areas.

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ANNEX

Collective involvement of developing countries
in priority-setting for regional co-operation

1. In intercountry programmes financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), concrete measures have been taken recently in order to enhance the collective involvement of developing countries of each region in setting priorities for their regional programmes.
2. In its decision 79/10, the Governing Council of UNDP, at its twenty-sixth session, decided "to review present practices for determining the priorities for the intercountry programmes in order to enhance the collective involvement of developing countries of each region in setting priorities for the regional programmes of the third cycle and to include this review as an item on the agenda of its twenty-seventh session" and requested "the Administrator to prepare a report for this review, in consultation, when feasible, with the executive heads of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, with the executive secretaries of the regional commissions, and with the heads of other appropriate regional and subregional organizations of developing countries". a/
3. Subsequently, the Economic and Social Council, at its thirty-fourth session, adopted, inter alia, resolution 1979/64, on regional co-operation and development, in which it welcomed "the considerations being given by the Governing Council of UNDP and the regional commissions to measures for enhancing the collective involvement of the developing countries of each region in determining the priorities for intercountry programmes". The resolution further requested the Secretary-General to report to the Council at its regular session in 1980 on the "results of consultations on the role of the regional commissions in the determination of priorities for intercountry programmes".
4. In its resolution 34/206 on the implementation of section IV of the annex to the restructuring resolution, the General Assembly, inter alia, requested the Administrator "to prepare, in co-operation with the executive secretaries of the regional commissions, proposals for enhancing the collective involvement of the countries of each region, in the identification and the initiation of regional projects and activities as well as in the determination of priorities for inter-country programmes".
5. The Administrator of UNDP, after consultations with the executive secretaries of the regional commissions, prepared his report (DP/435) in response to the above-mentioned decision of the Governing Council and General Assembly resolution 34/206. The proposal contained in the Administrator's report includes, inter alia, the following steps:

a/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1979, Supplement No. 10 (E/1979/40), p. 136.

(a) Governments, regional commissions, intergovernmental regional and subregional groupings, and agencies, will be requested to provide views on priorities for the programmes for the third programming cycle;

(b) Agencies which normally convene regional and subregional sectoral meetings of Governments will be requested to seek the views of these sectoral meetings, specifically on programme priorities for the UNDP regional programmes, and agencies, with multisectoral responsibilities such as the United Nations and UNCTAD, as well as regional commissions, should be invited to attend;

(c) Using the above, inter alia, as inputs, the Administrator will prepare draft regional programmes taking into account also pertinent decisions of the General Assembly and other global and regional United Nations system conferences and meetings;

(d) In order to ensure the collective involvement of Governments in the final determination of priorities among the various inputs specified above, the Administrator will convene, in collaboration with the executive secretaries of the regional commissions, a special meeting of the Governments in each of the areas covered by the regional programmes to discuss and review the draft programme prepared by the Administrator referred to above;

(e) The Administrator will thereafter review the draft programmes in the light of the conclusions reached at these meetings and prepare a final programme for each region which would be submitted to the Governing Council together with a report of the main conclusions of the respective intergovernmental meetings.

6. The Governing Council, at its twenty-seventh session in June 1980, adopted decision 80/9 which endorsed the consultative process proposed by the Administrator. The Economic and Social Council, at its second regular session in July 1980, by its resolution 1980/65, inter alia, commended to the attention of the General Assembly the report of the Administrator, as well as decision 80/9 of 17 June 1980 of the Governing Council, by which it endorsed the consultative process proposed in the Administrator's report.

7. In accordance with these proposals, a meeting of the Ministers of Planning and Economy was convened for the African region, under the auspices of ECA, which approved priorities for 1982-1986 for Africa. For the Latin American region, a special intergovernmental meeting will be convened on the occasion of the nineteenth session of ECLA, to be held in April 1981 at Montevideo, to review the priorities for intercountry projects.

8. A similar meeting will be convened in co-operation with ESCAP for the Asian and Pacific region, at the beginning of February 1981, at Bangkok. The intercountry programming for the Arab region will be submitted to ECWA and ECA for their consideration at their regular annual session.
