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UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR WESTERN ASIA
26 APR 1982
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Distr.
GENERAL

E/ECWA/154
8 March 1982

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

Ninth session
8-12 May 1982
Baghdad, Iraq

Item 10 of the provisional agenda

DECENTRALIZATION OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
ACTIVITIES TO, AND THE STRENGTHENING OF,
THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. The Commission has continued since its sixth session to give due consideration to the issue of decentralization of economic and social activities to, and the strengthening of the regional commissions in the light of General Assembly resolution 32/197 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system. In this regard, the Commission has identified a number of activities to be carried out by the secretariat corresponding to its role as "a main regional economic and social development centre"^{1/}.

2. At its eighth session, ECWA adopted resolution 105 (VIII) on defining and strengthening the functions of the Commission within the context of the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system. This resolution called, in its operative paragraph 2, upon the General Assembly through ECOSOC to provide for the effective participation of regional commissions within their regions and without prejudice to the United Nations global organs, in:

(a) The formulation of the objectives of global programmes in the execution of which the regional commissions are expected to participate;

(b) The preparations for negotiations at the global and the regional levels taking due account of the pressing needs of the developing countries members of the regional commissions and in accordance with established United Nations practices in these matter.

3. In operative para. 4, this resolution called upon the Secretary-General "to take the necessary measures to provide as expeditiously as possible the resources for carrying out the activities identified by the ECWA secretariat and resulting from the increased responsibilities of the Commission in the light of General Assembly resolution 32/197"; while in operative para. 5, it requested the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, in deciding on arrangements for the planning and co-ordination of global and regional programmes,

^{1/} Reference is made to documents E/ECWA/79, E/ECWA/92 and E/ECWA/125 on the **subjects** which were presented to the sixth, seventh and eighth sessions of the Economic Commission for Western Asia.

including the distribution of tasks and responsibilities between the global and regional bodies, to take fully into account the priorities established for their respective regions by the regional commissions at their intergovernmental sessions.

4. At the secretariat level, the resolution requested the Executive Secretary to "pursue consultations with heads of organizations of the United Nations system maintaining regional programmes, with a view to investigating the possibility of setting up appropriate interagency arrangements, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/197" (operative para. 3), and to intensify efforts for promoting co-operation among developing countries at the regional and interregional levels (operative para. 6)^{1/}.

5. The secretariat, in consultation with the secretariats of other regional commissions, pursued further and at various levels the continuous process of decentralization of activities to the regional commissions.

6. At the global level, the twenty first session of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) reviewed in connexion with the redistribution of tasks and responsibilities the subject areas of water and environment only. This review should be extended to such areas as statistics, population, trade, development issues, science and technology which are of greater concern to the regional commissions since they constitute and absorb at Headquarters numerous activities and substantial resources.

7. At their meeting in July 1981, the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions, under the chairmanship of the Director-General for International Development and Co-operation, reviewed the situation following the adoption of resolutions on the subject at the annual sessions of their respective commissions. They also considered the draft report of the Secretary-General on section IV (structures for Regional and Interregional Co-operation) of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 which had been requested under resolution 34/206 of the General Assembly.

^{1/} The full text of operative para. 6 and its follow-up is reported in E/ECWA/153 on Co-operation among Developing Countries being discussed under item 9 of the provisional agenda.

8. The Secretary-General in his report (A/36/577) to the 36th session of the General Assembly takes into consideration the resolutions adopted by the regional commissions and discusses their role and functions as main general development centres in their respective regions. It also discusses co-ordination and co-operation at the regional level, participation in programme planning, regional contributions to United Nations policy-making, operational activities of commissions, regional and interregional co-operation among developing countries, and financial requirements in the light of budgetary constraints.

9. In relation to financial requirements arising as a result of the expanding range and volume of programme activities urged upon the regional commissions by their member countries as well as by the United Nations at the global level, the Secretary-General proposed in his report the following special arrangements^{1/}:

(a) Increased reliance on governmental contributions as well as local personnel and facilities, not only for the implementation of operational projects but also in the organization of appropriate regional and subregional meetings;

(b) The granting to the regional commissions of sufficient flexibility including flexibility in the administration of their budgetary allocations, in order to enable them to respond to unforeseen requirements for the servicing and the provision of support to consultations of a non-recurrent nature at the regional level;

(c) Further efforts to link the activities of the regional commissions, particularly those of an operational nature, to intercountry programmes and projects for which the participating countries have made budgetary provision in their national budgets; as many operational projects sponsored by the regional commissions are designed for promotional or supportive activities, their impact will tend to be correspondingly larger if the respective programmes are sustained through bilateral efforts of the participating countries;

(d) Efforts to link more closely the allocation of extrabudgetary resources to the planning and priority-setting process in each commission.

^{1/} A/36/577, p. 11.

10. In addition, the report of the Secretary-General proposes to explore arrangements which will "strengthen co-operation and consultations between Headquarters and the commission secretariats in the preparation of statements of administrative and financial **implications** on programme decisions for consideration by the commission as well as in subsequent phases, in such a way as to enhance the capacity of the commissions to conduct meaningful reviews of such implications, as provided for in the Financial Regulations of the United Nations, on the basis of full and authoritative statements, and to relate this process more closely with subsequent budgetary phases, involving the preparation by the competent units of budgetary submissions for review and action by the General Assembly".

11. In response to the Secretary-General's report, the General Assembly, at its 36th session, adopted resolution 36/187, which made the following two decisions:

(a) To transmit to the Economic and Social Council, for consideration at its second regular session of 1982, the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 35/203 and the comments of the Secretary-General on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, and to return to the question of the interrelationships between the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation and the entities of the United Nations Secretariat at its thirty-seventh session, in the light of the deliberations of the Economic and Social Council, in order to continue to implement fully section VIII of the annex to resolution 32/197;

(b) To return, at its thirty-seventh session, to the question of the implications of the restructuring process for the regional commissions, within the over-all context of resolution 32/197, as well as in the light of further observations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at its next session, to be held in 1982, and of the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session 1982.

12. General Assembly resolution 36/187 simply defers to the 37th session the restructuring process for the regional commissions in the light of CPC's observations on the subject. Such a process has been in fact advancing slowly despite great efforts by the regional commissions. It has also been facing difficulties as reflected in the failure of developing countries attempts to have ECOSOC adopt a resolution on regional development requesting the General Assembly to provide for greater administrative authority to the regional commissions including authority of financial and personnel management. Thus a new drive and stronger support are needed in order to provide the decentralization process with additional impetus.