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The ECA Role

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is the regional arm of the United Nations, mandated to support the economic and social development of its 53 Member States, foster regional integration, and promote international cooperation for Africa's development. Established in 1958 and based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, ECA is one of five regional economic commissions under the administrative direction of UN Headquarters. It reports directly to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) through the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning, and convenes a number of intergovernmental organs and committees.

As of October 1998, the Commission had a staff of some 850, comprising professionals with a wide range of expertise as well as general support and field service personnel. The UN General Assembly votes biennially for ECA's regular organizational budget. Supplementary resources are negotiated by ECA with Africa's bilateral and multilateral partners, including UN agencies and programmes.

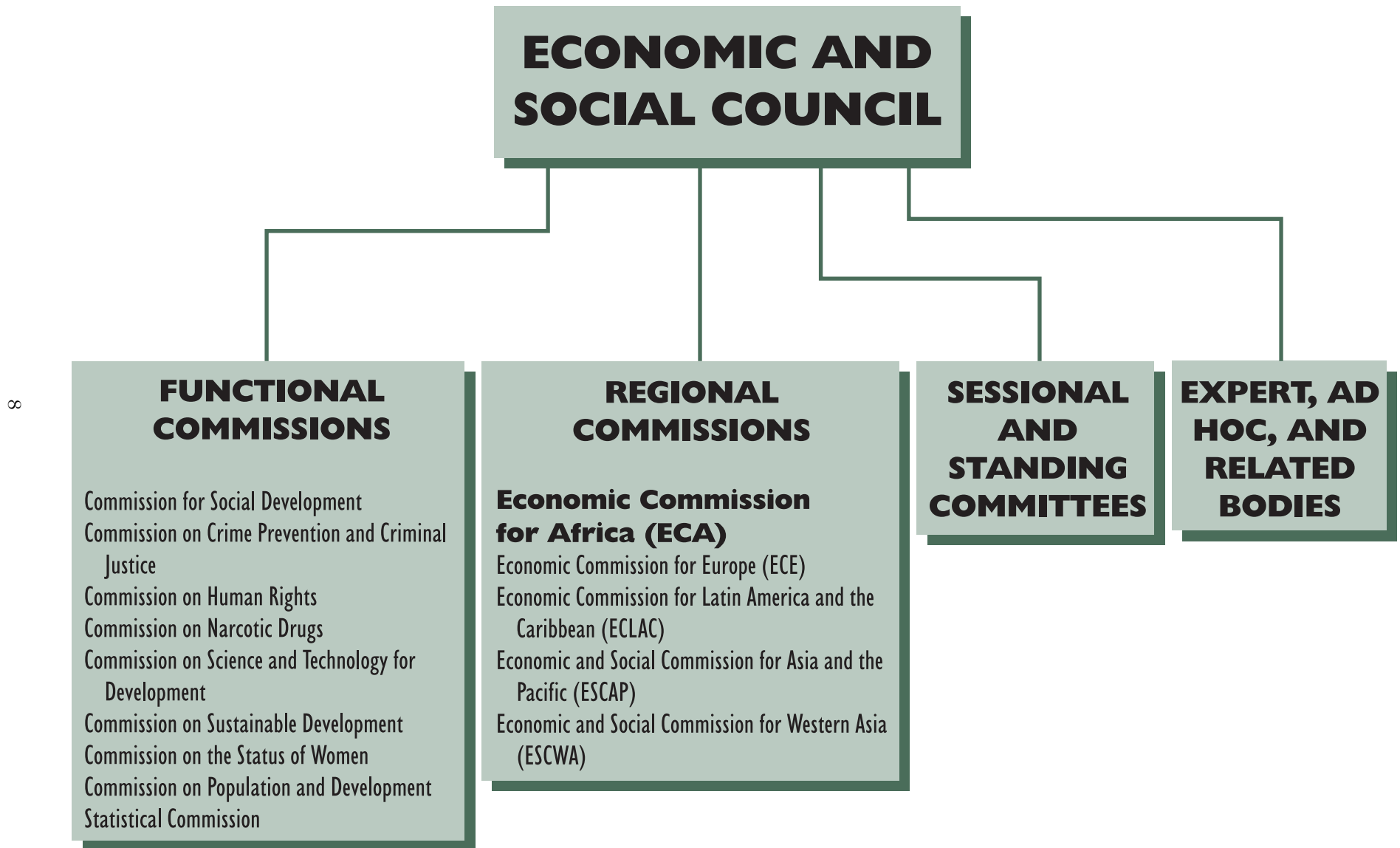
During its 40-year history, the Commission has made several significant contributions to African development. The Commission was instrumental in setting up the African Development Bank (ADB), which today is the continent's leading multilateral development financier. It facilitated the establishment of a number of subregional organizations, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA), now the Community of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). It was instrumental in building some 30 technical institutions to buttress the socioeco-

nomical development of Africa, encompassing such fields as technology, banking and finance, minerals and remote sensing, and planning and management. Notable among these is the Eastern and Southern African Management Institute (ESAMI) and the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP). The Commission also played a key role in the articulation of landmark economic strategies, such as the Lagos Plan of Action and the Cairo Agenda for Re-launching Africa's Development. ECA continues to provide Member States with technical assistance in many fields and to foster the development of civil society groups, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), professional associations, and intellectual networks.

Services and Modalities

The products offered by ECA, and some modalities for delivery of these services, can be broadly grouped within the following clusters:

Figure 2. United Nations Economic and Social Council



1. Advocacy and Policy Analysis. Analytical activities are central to the overall work of ECA, which serves as a policy advocate on critical development issues to encourage the policy initiatives and reforms necessary for economic and social advancement in Africa. Services in this cluster include research on, and analysis of, the economic and social situation in Africa. To deliver these services, ECA is increasingly drawing on the work of other sources of knowledge and expertise. National and regional African research institutions, African researchers, and development professionals are notable examples of this outreach.

Advocacy is closely linked to the analytical functions and is focused on internal and external constituencies. Within Africa, it involves promotion of sound policies and dissemination of best practices in economic and social development. Externally, ECA's advocacy is geared towards promoting increased understanding of the complexity of Africa's development context. It is also aimed at informing and sensitizing Africa's external partners in development about the region's need for sustained inflows of external resources to complement the resources and efforts mobilized by Africans on their own. An important part of ECA's advocacy work is fostering regional cooperation and integration, by helping Member States strengthen intraregional linkages and helping establish and strengthen subregional organizations and institutions.

2. Convening Stakeholders and Building Consensus.

Conferences, seminars, workshops, and ad

hoc meetings of groups of experts are the most widely employed means of disseminating ECA's analytical work: engaging in advocacy, and sharing norms, standards, and best practices. Convening stakeholders to define, articulate, and agree on common positions is also an important service offered by ECA. The Commission serves as a catalyst for African development activities by assisting the many organizations on the continent that have common goals to coalesce and coordinate efforts.

An important ECA modality of dissemination is ECA's new Communications Strategy, which aims to deliver the message about key African development challenges to various African and other stakeholders. A revitalized portfolio

of publications, regional and international conferences on specific themes, policy seminars and workshops, enhanced relations with the media, and targeted dissemination strategies are all manifestations of the priority ECA devotes to outreach. To ensure that the widest possible audience is reached, particularly within Africa but also in the rest of the world, modalities for dissemination

As the regional arm of the UN in Africa, ECA plays an important role in fostering Africa's development within the United Nations system. The Commission maintains overall regional and subregional perspectives within which activities of other UN organizations take place at the country level. The Commission's regional vantage facilitates coordination and synergies between UN programmes, mainly those of the funds, the programmes and the specialized agencies, in support of the continent's development.



Curt Carmemark/World Bank

Through ECA's advisory services, institutions are developing their capacities to design and implement programmes.

include media articles, CD-ROMs, Internet publishing, and other multimedia forms.

3. *Technical Cooperation and Capacity-Building.* ECA has a mandate to assist Member States and institutions in developing their capacities to design and implement development policies and programmes through technical cooperation activities. Such technical cooperation, which does not involve disbursement of financial resources, takes the form of on-demand regional advisory services to Member States and their intergovernmental organizations, training workshops, seminars and fellowships, institution building, and field projects.

Advisory services—ECA's main vehicle of delivering country-level support—are provided by a multidisciplinary team of regional advisers deployed in the various substantive divisions of the Commission. These services focus on clearly defined policy and technical challenges facing Member States, for which the countries lack specialized expertise. ECA annually organizes more than 40 group training workshops and seminars to enhance skilled human resource capacity in Member States.

4. *Enhancing the UN's role in Africa.* As the regional arm of the UN in Africa, ECA plays an important role in fostering Africa's development within the United Nations system. The Commission's regional vantage facilitates coordination and synergies between UN programmes, mainly those of the Funds, the Programmes and the Specialized Agencies, in support of the continent's development. Of particular importance is ECA's role in the implementation of the UN System-wide Special Initiative on Africa (SIA). SIA was launched in March 1996 to accelerate the execution of the UN's New Agenda for the Develop-

ment of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), which was launched in 1991 (see Chapter 10).

ECA also has the mandate to ensure regional and subregional follow-up of global UN conferences, such as the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference, and the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development. This role is facilitated by ECA's streamlined intergovernmental machinery, which involves a number of expert-level bodies (the Committee on Regional Integration, Committee on Development Information, Committee on Sustainable Development, Committee on Women and Development, Committee on Human Development and Civil Society, Committee on Industry and Private Sector Development, and Committee on Science and Technology and Sustainable Development). All of these mechanisms can be used by the UN agencies for greater advocacy and programme development. An example is the partnership that is developing between ECA and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), through the Committee on Sustainable Development, on issues relating to women's reproductive health (see box 7), as well as in the follow-up to the ICPD. The intergovernmental machinery provides for annual or biennial meetings of senior policy-makers and African ministers in the aforementioned sectors to deliberate on issues of importance to Africa's development. ECA puts this machinery to good use through careful selection of agenda issues, preparation of thematic discussion papers, selection of lead discussants and other key participants, design of discussion formats and special events, and dissemination of emerging consensus positions. The machinery acts as a node that attaches regional dimensions to strategies and programmes of African countries and their development partners.