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REGIONAL CO-OPERATION IN THE FIELD OF
HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

Report by the Executive Secretary



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CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
I. Institutional machinery	3
II. Programme of activities in the regional sphere	5
A. Background	5
B. Programme of activities	6
C. Implementation of the programme	8
1. Research	8
2. Training of human resources	9
3. Technical assistance	9
4. Information	9
D. Financial aspects of the programme	9
III. Co-operation among the countries of the region	10

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INTRODUCTION

At HABITAT: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held at Vancouver from 31 May to 11 June 1976, a Declaration of Principles was adopted, together with a number of recommendations for action at the national level and for international co-operation in several areas, including the regional and sub-regional spheres. In addition, in resolution 4, HABITAT recommended that steps should be taken to organize as soon as possible "within the framework of the regional economic commissions ... regional meetings to establish guidelines for the co-ordination, within each region, of action to be taken in order to deal with human settlements problems, and to report to the General Assembly (United Nations) on the results of their deliberations". In compliance with this resolution, CEPAL convened the Latin American Regional Meeting on Human Settlements (Mexico City, 13-17 September 1976), for which the secretariat prepared a note on regional co-operation in the field of human settlements. This note contained a brief description of the existing situation, and presented ideas and suggestions for a possible programme of regional co-operation in sectors such as planning and administration, research, and human resources training, taking into account the relevant recommendations and priorities established at the Vancouver Conference, and those reflected in the Declaration of Caracas on Human Settlements, adopted at the Regional Preparatory Conference for Latin America on Human Settlements (1975) 1/ and at the Latin American Preparatory Working Meeting for the fourth session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (1976).2/

At the Regional Meeting in Mexico, several recommendations were adopted on regional co-operation in the field of human settlements.3/ Some of these recommendations were addressed to the governments of the

1/ See Report of the Rapporteur (ST/CEPAL/Conf.55/L.5/Rev.1).

2/ See Final Report (UNEP/LA/76/4).

3/ See Report of the Meeting (ST/CEPAL/Conf.58/L.3/Rev.1).

region and others to the secretariat of CEPAL, in consultation with the governments. Among the latter were the following:

"That the necessary conditions be created for the establishment of a regional intergovernmental committee on human settlements composed of the countries of the region";

"That the secretariat of CEPAL, in co-ordination with regional bodies concerned with this subject, prepare a report specifying the institutional arrangements and procedures that would be most effective towards the achievement of international co-operation at a regional and sub-regional level, as well as a programme" based on the objectives indicated at the Mexico Meeting;

"To define regional and sub-regional programmes of common interest, and experimental pilot projects for urban and rural areas, which will take into account economic, social and cultural needs of the populations that are to benefit from them, mobilizing for this purpose the resources obtained from financial organizations inside and outside the region."

"That the above report be presented at the next meeting of the Committee of High-Level Government Experts of CEPAL, 'so that the Committee can prepare the recommendations to be submitted at the seventeenth session of CEPAL' that will be held in Guatemala from 25 April to 5 May 1977."

In compliance with the recommendations of the Mexico Meeting, the secretariat has prepared the present report for consideration by the Third Meeting of the Committee of High-Level Government Experts which will be held at Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, from 9 to 15 March 1977. This report deals with the subjects indicated in the above recommendations and also refers to the activities carried out by CEPAL, and to new activities undertaken in collaboration with other international agencies, including some in agreement with the United Nations Environment Programme in the field of human settlements.

I. INSTITUTIONAL MACHINERY

The Vancouver Conference recommended that "the regional economic commissions consider the establishment of intergovernmental regional committees on human settlements, comprising all members, where such committees do not already exist". The Latin American Regional Meeting on Human Settlements, for its part, as noted earlier, recommended "that the necessary conditions be created for the establishment of a regional intergovernmental committee on human settlements composed of the countries of the region".

If such a regional committee is set up, it would have to co-ordinate its activities with those of the world governmental organ which may be established by the United Nations General Assembly in the field of human settlements, reporting to it through the respective regional economic commission.

Without prejudice to the possible establishment of a committee on human settlements in CEPAL, it should be noted that difficulties may arise over its establishment and functions, until such time as the General Assembly may decide the nature and characteristics of the world intergovernmental organ and its relations with other organs of the United Nations system, including the regional economic commissions.

In response to the desire of the member States to make rapid progress in the implementation of the recommendations on human settlements adopted at Caracas, Vancouver and Mexico, a different type of regional intergovernmental machinery might be sought which, while serving the same purposes, would avoid the possible difficulties mentioned above.

Thus, the Commission could, for example, decide to convene periodical regional conferences on human settlements, with the same objectives and powers as the proposed committees. In this way, regional action could be linked, through the existing channels, with high-level United Nations organs.

/In any

In any case, the regional intergovernmental mechanism which it may be decided to establish would be responsible for "the formulation of regional policies and programmes and for their final implementation",^{4/}

Moreover, the regional intergovernmental mechanism would have to be taken care of by a unit of the secretariat of the respective regional economic commission, which should be created as soon as possible and be assigned the necessary resources for its operation.^{5/}

In the case of CEPAL, this unit could take the form of a Latin American centre for human settlements. Taking into account the Vancouver and Mexico recommendations, this centre would have the following functions:

(i) to provide the regional intergovernmental mechanism with supporting services;

(ii) to study and investigate on a continuing basis the general conditions of human settlements in the region;

(iii) to formulate, implement and/or supervise regional and sub-regional programmes and projects;

(iv) to assist the member States in the formulation of requests to international co-operation organs;

(v) to establish close links with the relevant specialized institutions and financial institutions at the regional and world level; and

(vi) to promote intra-regional co-operation among the member States, for which purpose it should maintain close links with national, regional and sub-regional institutions operating in the field of human settlements.

In addition, an advisory board composed of representatives of the most important financial institutions operating in this field in the region could be established to supplement the operation of these mechanisms. The main functions of this board would include advising the centre on the financial feasibility of the projects, and facilitating

^{4/} Report of HABITAT: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, resolution 1, section IV, paragraph 25.

^{5/} Ibid., paragraph 24.

the programming of the activities of credit institutions on the basis of a better knowledge of the countries' needs and possibilities in terms of human settlements. This would enable full advantage to be taken of its experience and the most efficient use to be made of the available financial resources.

II. PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES IN THE REGIONAL SPHERE

A. Background

The Latin American Regional Meeting on Human Settlements recommended the formulation of a programme on the basis of the following objectives:

- "(a) To facilitate national activities in this area, within the framework of the agreements and recommendations made by the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements held at Vancouver, and the basic principles approved by the governments in connexion with the natural environment;
- "(b) To establish permanent mechanisms for consultation between the countries of the region;
- "(c) To encourage co-operation between the countries of the region in order to utilize their own human, technological and methodological resources, in a complementary manner;
- "(d) To define regional and sub-regional programmes of common interest, and experimental pilot projects for urban and rural areas, which will take into account economic, social and cultural needs of the populations that are to benefit from them, mobilizing for this purpose the resources obtained from financial organizations inside and outside the region".^{6/}

In the recommendations to the secretariat of CEPAL at the Mexico Meeting, the basic functions of the programme that should be formulated in order to achieve the objectives established at that Meeting were research, human resources training, technical and financial co-operation, and information services.

^{6/} Report of the Meeting, op. cit., p. 21.

At the same time it is recommended that in these activities the following among other aspects should be taken into account: rural habitat, urban marginality, land use and tenure, legislation, areas of high population density, intermediate cities, participation of the people, suitable technology, techniques for the preservation of the natural environment, and natural disasters.^{7/}

As will be seen, this selection includes spatial categories (rural habitat, areas of high population density, intermediate cities), institutional categories (urban marginality, land use and tenure, legislation, participation of the people) and technological categories, which make it possible to define areas of priority interest to be covered by the basic functions of the programme.

These indications are largely the same as those put forward by the member States of the Commission in the Declaration of Caracas, and at the Latin American Preparatory Working Meeting for the fourth session of the Governing Council of UNEP, which served as a guide to the secretariat in preparing the activities already initiated, which are referred to below.

B. Programme of activities

On the basis of the foregoing, the secretariat would carry out the following programme of activities at the regional level:

1. Research

- 1.1 Social aspects of the human habitat in Latin America (1977-1978)
- 1.2 Technology of human settlements (1977-1978)
- 1.3 Study of the tropical habitat (1978-1979)
- 1.4 Organization and productive capacity of makeshift urban settlements and rural communities (1978-1979)
- 1.5 Methodology for evaluating the environmental impact of economic and infrastructural projects on human settlements (1978-1979).

^{7/} Ibid., p. 22.

- 1.6 Methodology of territorial planning applicable to strategies of spatial organization and decentralization of economic activity (1978-1979)
- 1.7 Studies of the institutional structure and management of local governments (1978-1979).

2. Training of human resources

- 2.1 Regional diagnosis of the needs for human resources in this sphere and of the installed capacity of the professional training centres which exist in the region (1977-1978)
- 2.2 Seminar-courses for professors of centres which offer professional training programmes in human settlements (1977-1978)
- 2.3 Promotion of and participation in a special programme of assistance to the centres providing professional training in human settlements.
- 2.4 Participation in matters connected with human settlements, in the activities of the United Nations system relating to environmental education (especially UNESCO).

3. Technical assistance

- 3.1 Technical assistance to countries of the region in the preparation of policies and plans relating to human settlements, if requested (from 1978 onwards)
- 3.2 Assistance to national bodies in the preparation of requests for international co-operation, including the financing of projects (from 1978 onwards)
- 3.3 Co-ordination of co-operation among the countries of the region, on such conditions as may be agreed on in respect of the questions described below.

4. Information

- 4.1 Systematization of the information available and preparation of a glossary for general information (1978)
- 4.2 Establishment of a general and specialized information system on the basis of the existing services and its integration into the global system of information on human settlements which may be established in the future (1978-1979)

/4.3 Formation

4.3 Formation of a specialized information network on the basis of national focal points (1978-1979).

C. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

1. Research

The activities described above are being initiated by the secretariat from this year onwards. Those relating to the social aspects of the environment will serve to define more precisely the characteristics of the habitat of the region, so as to facilitate the study and application of regional and national policies on human settlements. The activities on the technology of human settlements are designed to promote the development of suitable technologies by national and regional bodies, taking advantage as far as possible of the existing capacity of the region, with supporting action at the sub-regional level. The implementation of these two activities before the initiation of formally agreed regional action but taking into account the preferences previously expressed by the member countries has been made possible by the financial and technical co-operation of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the first case, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the second.

Item 1.3 is included in a sub-regional programme on environmental control also initiated this year in the Caribbean in co-operation with UNEP. The action of this programme will be concentrated in an important area of the region with predominantly tropical ecosystems. It is envisaged that at a later date these activities will be extended to other tropical areas of Latin America.

Items 1.4, 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7 constitute proposals for studies which would be initiated after 1978, in the light of the available capacity, with the possible co-operation of various international bodies, especially the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation and the United Nations Environment Fund.

/2. Training

2. Training of human resources

Item 2.1 will have to be tackled before the end of the year, possibly with the co-operation of the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation. The same applies to items 2.2 and 2.3, with the co-operation of the International Centre for Training in Environmental Sciences (CIFCA) and the Habitat Foundation of Venezuela. As to item 2.4, specific activities are being studied whose initiation for the moment depends on factors external to the region.

3. Technical assistance

The initiation of activities such as those envisaged in paragraphs 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 of the programme will depend on the availability of sufficient additional resources to enable the secretariat of CEPAL to offer member States the assistance they request.

4. Information

This activity also depends on the extent to which new capacity is available to the secretariat. However, the projects which the latter is undertaking contain arrangements for initiating the collection of information and its dissemination through the mechanisms existing in the region. In later stages this information can be distributed through an integrated system of regional and national centres.

D. FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAMME

The possibility of securing new external resources for the programme depends on the decision of the countries to create specialized institutional mechanisms - such as those recommended at the Vancouver Conference and the Mexico meeting - and on the establishment of a system of regional co-operation. International co-operation can only operate to the extent that the member countries show a desire to organize themselves regionally, to define the areas of common interest and to strengthen, through technical assistance, their capacity of securing external resources.

/Just as

Just as the new international order cannot be established without some changes in the dependent countries, external aid is of little avail if the countries do not organize themselves internally and adopt more efficient policies to confront the Latin American habitat situation, which gives rise to ever-increasing concern.

III. CO-OPERATION AMONG THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION

In Latin America exceptional conditions exist for organizing a system of intra-regional co-operation which, without neglecting international co-operation on a larger scale, can greatly increase the efficiency of the national efforts through the interchange of experience and human resources and the full exploitation of new scales of operation. A system of this type could also constitute an additional factor of great importance for regional activities, and it could quickly consolidate the institutional mechanisms which the countries of the region may create inside or outside the ambit of CEPAL.

To this end it is worth noting some regional characteristics. In the first place, it would seem that what is most important at the national level is to create financing, organization and control instruments to facilitate the application of national policies on human settlements. International co-operation may be more useful in the creation of instruments than in proposing policies, regarding which in any case specific recommendations were made at the Vancouver Conference.

Secondly, it is important to note that the development of the necessary knowledge, technology and human resources requires economies of scale which are not always viable, even in the largest countries of the region.

Thirdly, it should be recalled that the difficulties deriving from the long distances, language differences and inadequate knowledge about the regions complicate and protract the processes of the negotiation and implementation of intra-regional technical assistance, thereby reducing the efficacy of international co-operation.

/Lastly, it

Lastly, it should not be forgotten that the prospects of external aid in the future are not very encouraging and that it is necessary to consider complementing the traditional mechanisms with new formulae which make possible the participation of the countries themselves, not only as part of the decision-making process but also as donors. Co-operation among the countries of Latin America should be yet another manifestation of regional solidarity and the desire to remedy, as far as possible, the increasing limitations of external aid in this sphere.

Latin America is perhaps in a better position than other developing regions to establish and systematize co-operation among the countries which make it up. Similarities of culture, language and relative development; indigenous experience; the existence of advanced research and training centres in some of the countries of the region, and above all the existence of a broad margin of consensus, are factors which can be utilized more effectively.

The technology and forms of spatial organization applied to human settlements, for example, are at present mainly imitations of foreign models which do not always correspond to the cultural, economic and ecological conditions of the region. As a result they become less efficient and often even turn into obstacles to the emergence of concepts, forms of organization and technological designs better suited to the needs of the majority of the population.

Regional co-operation may indeed be defined as a way of expressing the determination to eliminate the exclusiveness of the North-South interdependence in order to open the way for horizontal interdependence, i.e., between developing countries.^{8/} Assistance between countries of the region is a true co-operative enterprise aimed at achieving self-sufficiency.^{9/}

^{8/} UNDP, Technical co-operation among developing countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Regional Intergovernmental Meeting, Lima, 10-15 May 1976 (DP/CTPD/DRAL/3).

^{9/} Ibid., p.6.

There is evidence of the validity of this concept, both in the countries of the region and in the international bodies. Cases of efficient bilateral assistance are frequent, particularly in large-scale infrastructure and economic projects.

International co-operation has shown great interest in assistance among developing countries. UNDP has set up a special unit to promote horizontal technical co-operation, and in addition has held a meeting for this purpose in Lima (May 1976). Similar meetings have also been held in other regions of the world.

The Inter-American Development Bank, for its part, began in early 1976 actively to promote assistance among Latin American countries, and has signed letters of intent with a number of them establishing assistance commitments, either directly or through intermediaries, with IDB financing.

Broadly speaking, the next step in the promotion of intra-regional co-operation appears to be the identification of concrete opportunities and the creation of efficient formulas. Here, human settlements might provide a particularly favourable case, above all because problems of commercial competition among countries, which might create natural obstacles in other spheres of international co-operation, do not arise.

In the case of human settlements, a number of specific fields of co-operation may be identified: the marketing of equipment (building materials, sanitary fittings, and transport equipment); the regional use of trademarks and patents from some countries; the exchange of consultants, experts and professors; the systematic exchange of experience; technological research calling for a large economic scale (such as public transport), the specialization of professional personnel and others.

It is highly important to tackle the problem at the sub-regional level, because of the similarity between human settlements of the same category and the existence of a variety of ecological ecosystems. For example, joint co-operative projects may be possible for groups of settlements, such as big, rapidly-growing cities, where there is a

/pressing need

pressing need to avoid the emergence of critical problems similar to those of the metropolitan areas. Consideration might also be given to co-operative projects of particular interest for certain ecosystems which need special treatment, such as the tropical systems; or projects to solve problems characteristic of certain zones: areas which suffer from earthquakes or other natural disasters, for instance.

In all these cases, the identification of specific projects in the countries offering the best conditions would be a practical means of carrying out internal co-operation at the sub-regional level. Furthermore, the likelihood of success of a programme of regional activities like the one suggested here would certainly be increased by the definition of needs likely to result from an effort at horizontal co-operation.

Naturally, the countries of the region must bear the main responsibility for the implementation of a system of Latin American co-operation, but international co-operation may also make a significant contribution by creating the necessary machinery and procedures for operating the system and also for linking horizontal co-operation with the more traditional forms of external aid. For this purpose, in accordance with UNDP recommendations, it would be necessary to: (i) design and establish a suitable institutional structure; (ii) develop the capacity to mobilize and receive the available international technical co-operation; (iii) set up an information system on the assistance capacities and needs of the countries of the region; and (iv), generate financing. The countries would also have to create focal nuclei to form regional and sub-regional networks to facilitate the action of the Governments interested in requesting and furnishing horizontal co-operation.

Intra-regional co-operation does not, in principle, have to keep the forms and procedures of existing international aid. Its innovative character should stem from a broad exchange of opinion and experience and be aimed at eliminating the main shortcomings detected in traditional international assistance. In general terms, the goal

/should be

should be a wide "pooling" of shareable resources and effective co-ordination to obtain additional resources from outside the region.

Experiments could be made with a number of ideas. For example, as the IDB suggests, in every financing project for human settlements it should be possible for the countries of the region with the knowledge and capacity to provide consultancy services to be able to offer their experience to the other Latin American countries. The corresponding lists of experts and consultancy firms would therefore have to be made available. The services of consultants could be provided through a "current account" settled annually, the deficits being made good by external assistance. Another possibility would be the joint purchase of material and equipment from outside the region, taking advantage of market research and consultancy services which are often unavailable for entities such as municipalities and minor public bodies.

The definition of the modalities and machinery of horizontal assistance in the field of human settlements should definitely emerge from a special agreement among the countries of the region. Bodies such as CEPAL, IDB and SELA at the regional level, and the World Bank, UNDP, the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation and the United Nations Environment Fund, at the international level, could help to define a system of regional co-operation.



