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PROPOSED CEPAL PROGRAMME OF WORK IN SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY FOR 1980 TO 1983

1. Introduction

This paper has been prepared by the CEPAL Unit on Science and Technology as an input for the regional ACAST/CEPAL meeting to be held in Mexico City on 1-2 June 1978. Its main objective is to serve as a basis for discussion when covering item 5 of the agenda for the meeting and to invite comments and suggestions from the participants.

After the meeting, the document including the relevant changes proposed during the discussions held, and the recommendations of forthcoming subregional meetings, will be submitted to the respective CEPAL authorities for revision and approval through the established channels.

The main premises on which the proposed programme of work is based are:

- a) It should be action-oriented;
- b) It should be based on points of common interest for the member states;
- c) It should stress regional cooperation and reinforce integrational efforts;
- d) It should coordinate different programmes and projects of the various United Nations bodies in Latin America;

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e) It should serve as a basis for a coordinated action with other regions and non-governmental organizations;

f) It should be flexible enough as to be easily integrated into whatever programmes or plans of action come out of the 1979 United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development.

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that, although point 5 of the agenda for the ACAST/CEPAL meeting calls for a programme of work in science and technology for 1980-1983, the time gap between the Regional Conference (July-August 1978) and the World Conference (1979) has to be taken into account, hence some of the proposed projects should be started this year according to the funds available. This point is further stressed by the fact that many of the actions hereby proposed are related to ongoing activities.

2. Proposed Programme of Work

Taking into account the above mentioned premises, the main purposes of CEPAL's short term programme of work in science and technology should be:

1) To reinforce CEPAL's capability to integrate the technological and scientific variables into its current studies and projects;

2) To develop and strengthen CEPAL's role in Latin America and the Caribbean as a coordinating agency for ongoing and future science and technology activities in the region, so as to be able to build up a coherent set of those activities and avoid duplication of efforts and waste of resources;

3) To help create at a Latin American and Caribbean level, sound conceptual approaches to policy issues in fields related to science and technology development which have been until now either neglected or not given appropriate consideration;

4) To develop a regional and subregional capability for cooperative action in the field of science and technology;

5) To create and strengthen national capabilities in the member states using primarily assistance provided by countries of the same region;

6) To link the Latin American and Caribbean efforts in science and technology with the efforts being made in other regions.

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Having in mind, the above guide-lines, and taking into account the time span of the programme and the predictable resources available, in addition to its general role as a coordinating agency for all science and technology activities in Latin America, CEPAL participate actively in the following programmes and projects:

a) Latin American Technical Information Network (RITLA)

The Latin American Economic System (SELA) is working towards the setting up of a technical information network to benefit all Latin American and Caribbean countries. The SELA Secretariat has already shown interest in CEPAL's assistance in this context.

b) The Regional Center for Transfer of Technology

As a response to UNCTAD resolution 39(III), its Transfer of Technology Division has been very active in setting up centres for transfer of technology in different regions, and is studying the feasibility of setting up such centre in Latin America, perhaps using RITLA as a point of depart. CEPAL's participation in such studies could be important to achieve results which correspond to the needs of the region.

c) Topical Seminars

The General Secretariat of UNCSTD is planning to organize several interregional seminars on topics related to science and technology for development. CEPAL will have the responsibility to define the topics that would be of interest for the region and to coordinate the preparation of technical papers in those matters.

d) Policies on Patents, Trade Marks and Other Related Industrial Property Rights.

In spite of all the studies made about the relevance of intellectual property to development and the ongoing discussions on the revision of the Paris Convention, there is a strong need for the developing countries to evaluate the real effects, both positive and negative, of the actual

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industrial property system on their development, so as to be able to establish the appropriate legal and administrative procedures, as well as national and regional policies, to ensure that the system will be instrumental to their science and technology development. An agreement with WIPO and UNCTAD may be reached regarding this project.

e) Basic Research Policies

With very few exceptions, there have not been serious efforts in Latin America to establish sound basic research policies. This is due mainly to the fact that decision makers and policy makers have become aware of the need of technological research and development in their countries, but have not seen any well-documented proof of the need to invest substantially in basic research. A project should be developed to assess the situation of basic research in Latin America, establish its relevance for social and economic development, and formulate policies to link basic research to national plans.

f) Evaluation of Engineering Capabilities in Latin America

One of the key elements in technological development is the existence of engineering firms and of national policies to strengthen the engineering capabilities of the country. Such capabilities are needed to develop national projects, achieve technological self-reliance and national R&D results, have a real control over the transfer of technology, and be able to profit from international cooperation. A study could be made to assess the engineering capabilities in the region and to devise systems by which they could be used in an integrated way both at the national level and with regard to regional cooperation efforts.

g) Financing of R&D Activities

In Latin America, and in other developing regions, different mechanisms for the financing of R&D activities have been developed and tested. An appraisal of the advantages and disadvantages of these mechanisms

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should be made, as well as an analysis of the type of environment appropriate to each such mechanism. Also, new mechanisms, adapted to special situations or specific sectors, could be established.

h) Special Sectorial Projects

There are some industrial sectors in which special projects can be started to develop policies or strategies for technological development. Studies in this direction can be undertaken either in some selected countries, as pilot projects, or in subregions or for the whole region. Such studies could include:

i) A pilot project for the electrical capital goods sector in Mexico to link the main consumer (CFE), the producers, the technical information service (INFOTEC), the policy making governmental agency (Secretaría de Fomento Industrial), the transfer of technology regulating agency (Registro de Tecnología), the agency in charge of fiscal incentives (Dirección de Estímulos Fiscales), and the concerned research institute (IIE). From this project will evolve an industrial development strategy for that sector, taking into account all the necessary instruments to use the technical capability of the country.

ii) A pilot project in the industrial and professional electronics sector that will encompass an analysis of the present situation, the development potential of the sector and the technological barriers that should be surmounted to put to work a strategy for that sector. This project could be implemented at subregional (i.e. Andean Group) or regional level.

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