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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

REGIONAL LEVEL ISSUES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN  
ON COORDINATION OF INTEGRATED YOUTH POLICIES AND  
PROGRAMMES \*/

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CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION.....	3
I. ACTIVITIES OF ECLAC IN CONNECTION WITH INTERNATIONAL YOUTH YEAR.....	3
II. PROBLEMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN FOLLOW-UP TO IYY.....	3
III. ON-GOING AND PROPOSED ECLAC ACTIVITY IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH.....	4
IV. PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF INTER- INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL.....	6
V. REFLECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS.....	7

## INTRODUCTION

1. This resource paper is divided into four sections, dealing with the following topics: i) activities of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) related to International Youth Year (IYY 1985); ii) problems and achievements in carrying out follow-up activities to IYY; iii) key areas of current and projected activities of ECLAC in the youth field and iv) reflections and suggestions for action on inter-institutional coordination of youth related activities in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

### I. ACTIVITIES OF ECLAC IN CONNECTION WITH INTERNATIONAL YOUTH YEAR

2. Up to 1985, ECLAC played a very active role, in close coordination with the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (CSDHA), in carrying out regional meetings, in intergovernmental coordination, in research and in the promotion of youth related issues, leading up to and culminating in International Youth Year (IYY). Especially relevant in terms of their beneficial impact on inter-governmental coordination were: the Regional Preparatory Meeting for IYY, held in San José, Costa Rica in 1983 followed immediately by the Latin American Forum of NGO's; the holding of a seminar on problems and prospects of young women, in Santiago, Chile in 1984; the publication of a book on the situation of youth in Latin America and the Caribbean; the publication of a book on young women in Latin America and the Caribbean; and the preparation of a series of national-level technical studies on the problems of youth.

### II. PROBLEMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN FOLLOW-UP TO IYY

3. In the years following IYY, growing resource constraints (both in terms of finances and of staff) severely constricted ECLAC activities in the youth field. These constraints led to a reduction of outputs on all fronts (research, publication, seminars, inter-governmental meetings, technical assistance) despite the fact that the problems of youth were incorporated into the regular work programme of ECLAC's Social Development Division beginning in 1984.

4. Despite these limitations, ECLAC's activities in the four-year period 1986-1989 included the following youth related outputs:

- a) seminars and meetings - expert group meeting on

situation and needs of youth in the Caribbean Basin (Caracas, Venezuela 1988);

b) publications - a special number of the ECLAC Review (Number 29) dedicated to articles on youth prepared by the Social Development Division; national studies of youth in Uruguay and Colombia; book of articles entitled Escépticos, Narcisos, Rebeldes: Seis Estudios sobre la Juventud, published jointly with the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, (FLACSO);

c) research - two policy-oriented research projects currently under way (see below); and

d) technical assistance - assistance to the Uruguayan government in the design of a survey questionnaire for youth (see below).

### III. ON-GOING AND PROPOSED ECLAC ACTIVITY IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH

5. An evaluation of needs and resources for activities in the field of youth has led to the identification of research as a key area in which ECLAC can make a major contribution to Governments of the region. This includes original research, technical assistance to governments in designing and carrying out youth policy-related research, and coordination of governmental and non-governmental institutions involved in research throughout the region.

6. One of the most successful activities of ECLAC in connection with IYY was the realization of a series of policy-related studies based on computer analysis of official statistical sources (censuses and household surveys). These studies, however, dealt mainly with long-term trends in the situation of youth in Latin America, based on the census material for 1960, 1970 and 1980. Now, ECLAC's Social Development Division is initiating a new study, based on official household surveys, on changes in the situation of youth during the current decade in several countries of the region. The main focus of this study, which is being carried out in conjunction with the Social Development Division of CSDHA in Vienna and receives financial support from the United Nations Youth Fund, is on emerging problems of youth in their role as human resources for equitable development.

7. The relevance of such a study for planning in the current circumstances of the debt crisis in Latin America goes far beyond a mere up-dating of the Division's earlier studies. During the long period of economic growth prior to the crisis that began in 1982, a substantial proportion of youth in the region had a reasonable hope of achieving a better occupational and economic situation than their parents, from the very beginning of their working lives, thanks largely to the rapid expansion of modern sector employment and of public education in most Latin American countries during the 1960's and 1970's.

Since 1982, however, the creation of new jobs in the modern sector seems to have come to a virtual standstill in many countries of the region. At the same time, the reduction of real wages, whether because of galloping inflation or because of the application of the more traditional type of economic adjustment policy, seems to have forced some young people to abandon their studies prematurely in order to work and to contribute to their families' incomes.

8. It is these worrying possibilities that make research an insufficiently explored "key area" (as the aide-memoire for this meeting has expressed it), for planning and coordination at the regional level in Latin American and the Caribbean. Planners require urgently more exact information about the nature of these growing educational and employment problems currently facing youth in the region: their magnitude, different ways in which they affect youth, both men and women, from different social strata, and, especially, the possible causes that are associated with such problems.

9. The study hopes, therefore, to be able to differentiate concrete situations as they affect different subsectors of youth. For example, one subsector severely affected by the job crisis consists of young people with higher education and even professional degrees who have seen their legitimate expectations frustrated as they are forced to accept menial service jobs, become underemployed in the informal sector, or simply join the ranks of the unemployed. Another subsector with different problems consists of youth who have had to abandon formal education to seek work, before completing a secondary or even a primary school programme. This group presents a more severe problem for the longer term, when it is hoped that the economies of the region will have recovered some degree of dynamism in employment creation, but when educational credentials will be a sine qua non for access to productive employment.

10. In addition to the above-mentioned research project, one of whose results will be a methodological guide for application by other institutions wishing to carry out similar policy oriented studies at the national level or in other regions, ECLAC has also initiated technical assistance in the research field through its sub-regional office in Montevideo. This has involved collaborating with the Uruguayan Government's office of statistics in the design, application and analysis of a special survey on Uruguayan youth, their situation, attitudes and hopes. The Montevideo office of ECLAC has also provided technical assistance through training courses and publications carried out jointly with the Government of Uruguay.

11. It is expected that both of these policy-oriented studies will lead to technical reports during the coming year. In the case of the multi-national study being carried out by the

Social Development Division of ECLAC headquarters in Santiago, Chile, a sales publication summarizing the main findings and policy implications is also planned.

#### IV. PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

12. One of the main difficulties encountered by ECLAC in the coordination of youth-related activities in the region has been that, lacking a full-time post dedicated exclusively to youth matters or special funding for youth activities, there is very little basis for constant, regular activation of a specialized network of planners and research workers in the region. Once an intergovernmental meeting or an expert seminar has ended, the connections established there tend to fade away through lack of use. This is unfortunate, since valuable experience and expertise in the implications for youth of the current crisis is now being accumulated in most countries of the region.

13. An obvious solution would be to hold more working group meetings and more intergovernmental consultations, and to intensify the exchange and discussion of results of research. Once again, however, ECLAC's resource constraints make the possibilities of progress in these directions somewhat limited. But another way of looking at the problem is that, although ECLAC is the official United Nations Secretariat focal point on youth in Latin America, it is not necessarily the only United Nations or inter-governmental focal point in the region; there is so much activity under way and so much to be done that there is room for more than one instance of coordination in the region.

14. In fact, it is the Latin American Center on Youth (CELAJU), founded a few years ago with support from UNESCO and the Government of Spain, that has provided the most valuable focalization of youth related topics in the region, through the organization of meetings, numerous publications, and the maintenance of a youth policy research network in collaboration with another non-governmental body, CLACSO, the Latin American Council on Social Sciences. ECLAC maintains close contacts with both these organisms, which have already proven fruitful in the coordination of the above mentioned regional level research on current challenges facing youth policy makers.

15. Thus, our main thrust at this moment in regional coordination in the field of youth is to optimize communication with other supra-national organizations in this field: on the one hand, with CELAJU, and on the other with CSDHA; the reports of their inter-regional advisor on youth on missions in the ECLAC

region are of great value to our Division, and we in turn try to provide constructive comentaries on them.

#### V. REFLECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

16. Our suggestions for possible ways of improving regional and inter-regional coordination in the future, in addition to the obvious need for closer contact with individual Governments, would therefore concentrate on this fertile inter-institutional ground. We feel that there is vast potential for fruitful coordination by intensifying interaction both at the inter-regional level with CSDHA, and at the regional level with regional and non-governmental bodies such as CELAJU and CLACSO, as well as with a number of other supra-national Non-Governmental Organizations that are active in the youth field in the ECLAC region.

17. In putting into practise these general suggestions for improved coordination in the ECLAC region for integrated youth policies and programmes, several concrete lines of action may be proposed, as tentative medium term objectives, insofar as they can be achieved within existing resource constraints:

- a) closer integration and expansion of the regional research network on youth, and more active participation by ECLAC in the network. This is a high-priority immediate objective both since ongoing ECLAC research requires cooperation with national research correspondents and since ECLAC is now building up its expertise in policy-oriented empirical analysis of relevance to planning in the field of youth. This could also involve the realization of expert group meetings.
- b) the holding of informal interagency consultative meetings in the region, involving those agencies which are members of the world-wide informal interagency consultation on youth.
- c) the holding of regional meetings of non-governmental organizations active in the field of youth in Latin America and the Caribbean. These would include regional offices of NGO's that are members of the Geneva Informal Meeting and the UNESCO collective consultation.
- d) the holding of regional meetings of representatives of governmental offices that constitute national machinery in the field of youth.

- e) the holding of a training seminar, if resources become available, for young women, by the Women and Development Unit of ECLAC, to improve understanding and to formulate proposals answering the needs of young women in the region.

18. It should be noted that most of the above coordination activities have been carried out in the past in the region by CELAJU and UNESCO, in particular, or that preparations are underway for their realization in the future.

19. Specifically, the Fourth Intergovernmental Conference on Youth Policies in Iberoamerica, which is to be held in Quito, Ecuador in June 1990, is expected to be the scene of meetings of national machineries on youth, as well as of a seminar of the Regional Research Network and of a meeting of the non-governmental youth organizations of the region. It might be feasible to take advantage of the occasion to hold an informal regional interagency meeting involving, in addition to ECLAC, the regional offices of such United Nations family agencies as UNESCO, ILO, WHO and PAHO, FAO, etc.

20. Looking further into the future, the possibilities of coordination in the region will undoubtedly be enhanced if a proposed Euro-Latinamerican Youth Centre, to be sponsored by the Government of Spain, becomes a reality. For this as well as other reasons mentioned above, there is a reasonable basis for optimism concerning possibilities for greatly improved coordination of youth policies and programmes in the short and medium terms in the Latinamerican and Caribbean region.