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TECHNOLOGY IN THE WORK PROGRAMME OF ECLA

In the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade adopted by the General Assembly it is stated that the international community must rise to the challenge of the present age of unprecedented opportunities offered by science and technology in order that the scientific and technological advances may be equitably shared by developed and developing countries, thus contributing to accelerated economic development throughout the world.

In addition to referring to the efforts that must be made by both the developing and the developed countries to this end, the Strategy examines the role to be played by international co-operation in that process and states that international co-operation will be extended for the establishment and promotion of scientific research and technological activities which have a bearing on the expansion and modernization of the economies of developing countries. It also provides that particular attention will be devoted to fostering technologies suitable for these countries; concentrated research efforts will be made in relation to selected problems the solutions to which can have a catalytic effect in accelerating development; assistance will also be provided for building up and, as appropriate, for expanding and improving research institutions in developing countries, especially on a regional or subregional basis; and that efforts will be made to promote close co-operation between the scientific staff of the research centres in developing countries, and between those in developed and developing countries.

For its part, the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development has for some years been concerned with extending, as far as possible, the benefits that science and technology may provide for the growth of the developing countries. Indeed, as one of its many initiatives, the Advisory Committee several years ago began to prepare a World Plan of Action for the Application of Science and Technology to Development which will lay down many of the exact steps and procedures needed to fulfil the objectives set by the General Assembly.

In 1969, at the request of the Advisory Committee, ECLA, jointly with the OAS, submitted proposals to the Committee at its eleventh session, for the inclusion of certain topics in that part of the World Plan of Action that relates to Latin America. Those proposals covered the action recommended and the institutions that should be set up to promote the technological progress of the region, and the needs of the different sectors for the application of technology, particularly in such fields as natural resources, food and agriculture; certain industries; transport, housing and town planning, and education.

These sectoral proposals were transmitted to the specialized agencies of the United Nations, to be revised and completed within their respective fields of competence. Besides adding complementary points to the proposals on certain sectors, they added several important intersectoral concepts, such as, national science policy; national educational and research institutions; selection of techniques that were suitable for the countries at their stage of development; standardization; mobilization of the international scientific community; brain drain; pollution of the human environment, etc.

At the fourteenth session of the Advisory Committee, the draft World Plan of Action was approved in principle, and that part of the Plan dealing with intersectoral problems was adopted; it was decided to entrust to the regional economic commissions the task of preparing the final sectoral proposals in co-operation with the other regional organizations and the specialized agencies of the United Nations. The part of the Plan that relates to Latin America will mean intensive work for ECLA in the coming months, when it will have to outline and prepare a programme, and lay down the guidelines for active participation in the implementation of the programmes in the years to come, after approval of the World Plan of Action by the General Assembly.

Although the transfer of technology to the Latin American countries is on the work programme of ECLA's substantive divisions, it must be pointed out that there are gaps in the Commission's activities connected with the problems posed by technology. In particular, there are no systematic studies on the transfer, adaptation and creation of technology or on the

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various problems described as intersectoral in this document, such as, the general features that the technology should have if it is to be the most appropriate in each concrete case.

For these reasons, ECLA decided to take advantage of an offer made by the Government of the Netherlands to commission an expert to study the problems it faced in this connexion and, where possible, to formulate suggestions for specific action in the future. The preparation of the report was completed at the end of March 1971 by the economist I. Pels, of the technical/economic department of the Netherlands Instituut voor Technisch Natuurkundis Onderzder (TNO), after he had visited, in addition to ECLA, seven other international bodies, namely: the Economic Commission for Europe (Geneva), the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development (New York), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (Vienna), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, Geneva), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Paris), the Organization of American States (Washington) and, lastly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, Paris). It should be mentioned that the expert's visits to these bodies were sponsored by ECLA, not only so as to avoid possible duplication in the activities that would be recommended for it, but also so that its activities might fill in any possible gaps in the programmes of these bodies.

In his report, Mr. Pels proposes the establishment of a new ECLA Division, the "Technological Development Division", which would comprise three sections, namely: (a) Information and Liaison; (b) Users of Technology; and (c), Co-operation and Research. Their principal functions would be as follows:

(a) Information and Liaison Section

To collect full information on the activities of other organizations concerned with the transfer of technology. This section would consider what material connected with these extra-ECLA activities could and should be used in Latin America and would disseminate the information in ECLA;

/(b) Users

(b) Users of Technology Section

To determine the technological components of productive and service activities and make recommendations on the choice of techniques, the replacement of imported techniques by local technology, and for systematic research into the contribution that could be made by technology to improving the knowledge and use of natural resources;

(c) Co-operation and Research Section

To establish links with existing research institutes, and promote their development or the creation of new institutions in order to facilitate the solution of technological problems in the productive and service sectors through better co-ordination.

In conclusion, the task laid upon ECLA and the other regional commissions by the General Assembly in the resolution on the Second United Nations Development Decade, will involve intensive work during the next few years in encouraging more and better use of science and technology for development and in making regular appraisals of the progress achieved. From this year onwards, besides carrying out these new activities, which are already clearly defined, ECLA will have to carry out other tasks at the request of the Advisory Committee, and in compliance with resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council. Furthermore, the preparation of development strategies for the countries of Latin America demands, a considerable amount of technological knowledge at all levels - macroeconomic and microeconomic - that has not yet been sufficiently clarified anywhere in the world and which calls for considerable research and adaptation by ECLA. It was this last point which prompted the secretariat to ask the Government of the Netherlands for the report to which reference has been made.

Obviously, ECLA's present resources are far too slender to cover the new tasks that have been described, and they must be increased. It is essential that ECLA should begin to consider both the changes to be made in the structure of the secretariat and what additional funds it will need.