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ECLA'S FUTURE ROLE IN THE RATIONALIZATION OF THE REGIONAL  
STRUCTURES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Conference document

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO UN REGIONAL STRUCTURES  
QUESTIONNAIRE

Canada has supported the trend toward increasing emphasis on regional structures as a means of assisting the UN system as a whole to influence more directly and effectively the social and economic development of members of UN system. It is recognized, however, that the present arrangements and structures have evolved over a long period of time and have been affected by many different factors. Thus they may well not represent an efficient and effective system for meeting the challenges of the 1970s in general and the Second Development Decade in particular. Canada, therefore, welcomes the present UN study as a means of obtaining detailed information and learning the views of all UN members on this difficult problem which, it is hoped, will provide the means for making significant improvements in the interests of maximizing the benefits to be obtained from the limited resources available to the UN system.

2. As a basis for its policies concerning the Regional Secretariats' proper role in the UN development cooperation the Government of Canada accepts the recommendations on this question contained in the capacity study. That is, we favour implementation of the study's suggestions in appendix 3, paragraphs 33 - 45 to make regional structures more effective generally, and we endorse the specific proposal for operational relationships between the Regional Secretariats and UNDP which are listed in chapter seven, paragraphs 112 - 118.

3. The UNDP Governing Council has adopted the two fundamental principles of the capacity study (acceptance of the country-centred approach and, to the extent possible, acceptance of UNDP as the coordinating element for all operational activities undertaken by the UN development system) in its consensus document. We feel that the study's proposals referred to above follow as a natural consequence of the adoption of these two fundamental principles and that it would be unwise, during a time of comprehensive reorganization of the system, for the Secretariats of the Regional Economic Commissions to undertake new

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functions which the study has considered and rejected. Rather, we believe that this is an ideal time for consolidation and rationalization of regional structures along the lines suggested in the capacity study.

4. We would hope that the decision by the UNDP to implement country programming will play a significant role in achieving closer cooperation and coordination between the Regional Secretariats, the UNDP Resident Directors and the specialized agencies. Granted this cooperation, it should prove easier to identify for the region priority needs and to harmonize the work programs of Regional Secretariats, the UNDP and the specialized agencies.

5. As a means of simplifying difficult coordination problems, it is clearly desirable to have the maximum consistency in the definition of regional grouping and in the location of regional centres. This is particularly true in the case of defining and pursuing general economic and social goals. On the other hand, it would be unfortunate if activities in special technical fields with quite specific and particular problems, and purposes were seriously hampered through the implementation of a too rigid regional policy. We would hope that this study will bring to light additional information which would permit the formulation of a sound policy on regional structure on the basis of full information on both advantages and disadvantages in specific instances.

6. Principal regional offices should, wherever possible, be located in a single centre to permit significant savings on common services and facilities and to encourage, to the maximum extent possible, the coordination of regional activities. This should apply in all cases except where it can be demonstrated that the gains to be expected under centralization within a region would be more than off-set by the financial and or technical difficulties involved.

7. In many cases, we should favour a further division to permit action at the subregional level for special purposes particularly where significantly different conditions pertain between the subgroups of a region. Any decisions in this regard would, however, have to be taken on the merits of the particular situation rather than by the strict application of a general rule.

8. The problems of coordination cannot be solved simply by the implementation of particular institutional arrangements or by guidelines for relations with other parts of the UN system. Coordination ultimately depends on the attitudes of those directly involved. Unless there is a clear willingness on the part of all concerned to achieve effective coordination, there is little that can be done. With respect to the aims and objectives of the International Development Strategy, every effort must be made to ensure that all members of the UN system and everyone working within that system are thoroughly familiar with these objectives and are made fully aware of the coordination which will be required for their successful implementation.

9. The effectiveness of the Regional Economic Commissions is determined by the degree of cooperation, the quality of participation and the importance which members place upon their activities. Thus, every effort should be made to encourage active participation in these commissions while at the same time ensuring that the staffs of the Regional Commissions present their findings and direct their work in such a way as to encourage the active participation by members.

10. We should favour periodic discussions in the Regional Economic Commissions, in cooperation with the specialized agencies concerned, of particular sectoral topics with a view to permitting a closer relationship between sectoral policies and actions of overall regional development policies. It would, of course, be essential to ensure that the choice of topics was agreeable to all members and that such discussions could hopefully lead to specific and concrete results.

11. It would be hoped that a more rational system of regional structures within the UN would encourage regional organizations not directly involved in the UN system to adjust their actions accordingly if this could lead to a significant improvement in cooperation.

12. In implementing the results of this survey we believe that the UN itself should, through the CPC and ECOSOC, be charged with ensuring a greater degree of cooperation and coordination in these matters.