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DECENTRALIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC  
AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND STRENGTHENING  
OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMISSIONS

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. A note by the Secretary-General has been distributed to the Commission, relating to decentralization of the United Nations Economic and Social Activities and strengthening of the regional economic commissions<sup>1/</sup>, a subject on which the General Assembly adopted resolution 1518(XV). A Statement made to the Second Committee of the General Assembly by the Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs during the discussion of the corresponding draft resolution has also been distributed.<sup>2/</sup>
2. The General Assembly in the resolution just mentioned also acknowledges the importance of the regional commissions to member Governments while at the same time recognizing past work performed by the commissions as the "regional arm" of the United Nations.
3. At this ninth session, the Executive Secretary would appreciate learning the Commission's views in connexion with General Assembly resolution 1518(XV) and Economic and Social Council resolution 793(XXI)<sup>3/</sup>, dealing with the same subject. In this paper, the questions raised in these resolutions are explored, with specific reference to technical assistance activities in the ECLA region.
4. It seems clear that the regional commissions have a much more effective contribution to make to technical assistance activities in their respective regions than is at present possible. Both the Managing Director of the Special Fund and the Executive Chairman of the Technical Assistance Board have stressed to the Executive Secretary the need for ECLA's assistance at the stage of drawing up Special Fund projects or technical assistance programmes by the countries in this region. However, recognition of this need is not sufficient because for ECLA's contribution to be effective, resources must be made available so that this work can be done without

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<sup>1/</sup> See document E/CN.12/564

<sup>2/</sup> See document E/CN.12/572

<sup>3/</sup> See Information Document N°1

/affecting adversely

affecting adversely the other high priority work in the Commission's programme. Additional substantive staff is required not only to assist in the development of sound technical assistance projects, but also to provide technical supervision once projects are in operation. ECLA's existing staff has in the past been spread too thinly in an effort to cover simultaneously both certain technical assistance projects and other aspects of its work programme.

5. If the regional commissions are to realize their full potential under a programme of decentralization of technical assistance activities, they will have to give serious consideration to the need for further rationalization of the country programmes by cooperation with each Government. There has been a long-standing need to relate these more closely to first-priority economic and social development requirements. There is a clear recognition in Latin America of the need for economic development planning in order to make the most efficient use of available human and material resources. These requirements should be reflected in technical assistance activities.

6. It is believed, therefore, that a decentralization programme for technical assistance and Special Fund activities for the Latin American region should take into account the following substantive and administrative suggestions:

- (a) In the fields of its competence, and with particular reference to economic and social development programming, the secretariat could send senior staff members to discuss with Governments, in collaboration with the Resident Representative of the Technical Assistance Board, those aspects of the country programmes relating specifically to problems of economic and social development.
- (b) In those countries where Advisory Groups are operating or are planned, the country's technical assistance programme should be geared, as far as considered desirable, to the high priority projects arising from the work of those Groups.
- (c) Even in cases where technical assistance or Special Fund projects may not appear to be directly connected with ECLA's work, consultation at the pre-project stage would be advisable.

- (d) With respect to joint ECLA programmes and technical assistance projects in the fields of economic and social development, consideration should be given to the desirability of decentralizing various administrative functions. Some administrative decentralization has already taken place, but in addition, it is suggested that the over-all funds for such projects should be given to ECLA for administration in accordance with a previously agreed budget, but that ECLA should have full authority for transferring funds within that project according to operational necessities. Moreover, a broader delegation of authority for recruitment of short-term experts would be advantageous, if not essential, for an efficient operation. With respect to experts employed for longer periods - one or more years - the Technical Assistance Recruitment Services might well be requested to consider attaching one of its officers to ECLA for this purpose; alternatively, authority could be delegated directly to the ECLA secretariat particularly with regard to recruitment within the region. The essence of successful decentralization is that the Secretariat of the regional commission must have adequate freedom of action to take immediate operational decisions, combined with sufficient means to implement them. This must be done in agreement with the governments concerned, and based on authority for alteration of the programme, financial amendments or emergency recruitment as may be required acting within the basic rules and regulations established by appropriate bodies responsible for over-all direction of the technical assistance programmes.
- (e) In relation to ECLA's present activities, it has already been necessary to request provision in the 1962 budget for a Technical Assistance Co-ordinator, but additional staff will also be required in order to build up an effective Operational Unit.