



ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA  
Office for the Caribbean

A NOTE ON THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE  
UN ECLA OFFICE FOR THE CARIBBEAN  
WITH REFERENCE TO THE AREA OF NATURAL PRODUCTS

by

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The United Nations Regional Economic Commission (ECLA) was established in 1948. Its original Terms of Reference have from time to time been redefined, both to outline in greater detail the work the Commission was doing and to adapt to changing circumstances such as unfavourable developments in the economic and social evolution of members, formation of trade groupings, worsening prices of primary commodities, etc.

However, the role of ECLA remains strictly in accord with the Terms of Reference and can be summarized as follows:

- i. Conducting original research on the principal problems of the economic and social development of Latin America;
- ii. Utilizing the results of such research in the formulation of elements of policy and strategy for development;
- iii. Transference of this knowledge to persons who have an influence in the formulation of the corresponding policies at the national, regional and international levels; and
- iv. Organization of the necessary mechanisms for cooperation in solving economic problems.

The ECLA Office for the Caribbean was formally established in December 1966 at Port of Spain, Trinidad. Its broad terms of reference were to extend the work of the Commission in the Caribbean.

The Economic Commission for Latin America has a number of functional divisions covering a wide range of social and economic fields. Of particular relevance to this meeting are the Joint ECLA/FAO Agriculture Division, the Natural Resources and Environment Division and the Industrial Development Division. Complementary functions are carried out by the Port of Spain sub-regional office though on a much more limited scale.

The ECLA Caribbean sub-regional office now serves also as Secretariat to the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC), a body consisting of Caribbean countries, members of the United Nations and members and associate members of the Economic Commission for Latin America.

The functions of the CDCC are as follows: To act as a coordinating body for whatever activities relating to development and cooperation may be agreed upon and to serve as an advisory and consultative body to the Executive Secretary of ECLA in respect of Caribbean issues and circumstances.

To this end, the Committee:

- (a) Determines the carrying out of research and studies in connection with the objectives of advancing towards Caribbean economic integration and cooperation ... ;
- (b) Proposes to the participating Governments, concrete measures directed towards the development of the Caribbean area and greater integration of and co-operation among the economies of the Caribbean;
- (c) Indicates to the Secretariat, initiatives which should be pursued with a view to strengthening co-operation between the Caribbean countries and the other members of ECLA and integration groupings of countries of the Latin American region;
- (d) Discusses and proposes sub-regional and multinational technical cooperation programmes and projects to be carried out in the area.

#### Cooperation and Coordination

The new role of the ECLA Caribbean Office was spelled out in a Constituent Declaration of the Governments at the inaugural meeting of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC).<sup>1/</sup> In part, this Declaration emphasized that "... the execution of joint projects in areas of common interest may be the best way to implement the policy of economic cooperation and complementation among the Caribbean countries ... in order to facilitate the development and optimum use of the Caribbean

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1/ Report of the First Session of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) - (E/CEPAL/1010), 27 February 1976.

countries' human, natural and other resources." The Declaration emphasized the political will to promote the development of activities and projects beyond the scope of this Committee in order to facilitate more complete identification of the positions and interests of the countries of the Caribbean with the rest of Latin America ...". The CDCC Secretariat was authorised to implement joint complementation projects which would give impetus to exchange of experience and mutual aid and develop the necessary mechanisms which would contribute to these ends. The Declaration further stated that it was necessary to utilize the experience accumulated by CARICOM and other regional bodies in the promotion of activities.

It is therefore seen that the CDCC has been given a very significant role to play in many fields including natural resources.

#### Work Programme Elements Related to the Area of Natural Products

In furtherance of this catalytic role, a number of joint projects have been initiated with various international organizations. Among these are studies and other projects conducted jointly with UNESCO, UNICO, IMCO, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNEP, ITC and others. Of particular relevance to this meeting would be the Caribbean sub-regional seminar on Science and Technology, two studies related to Associations of Producers, Dealers and Exporters of Agricultural and Livestock Products and a seminar of librarians and documentalists jointly co-sponsored with UNESCO and others which led to the formation of the Caribbean Documentation Centre. Additionally, the office has participated in a wide range of activities (too numerous to list here) of the Secretariats of CARIFTA (fore-runner of CARICOM), CARICOM, ECCM, CDB and other organizations of the English-speaking Caribbean, including the recently formed Caribbean Group for Cooperation in Economic Development (CGCED).

The main work programme elements of the ECLA Office for the Caribbean, related to the area of concern of this meeting are in the fields of Agriculture, Information and Documentation, Statistics,

Science and Technology, Energy and International Trade and are given below:

I. Agriculture

- a) Establishment of an Agricultural Information Network allied to the Caribbean Documentation Centre

With assistance from UNESCO's Regional Adviser for Information Services, guidelines for the establishment and operation of a Caribbean Agricultural Information Network <sup>2/</sup> were prepared and distributed to agricultural librarians and Ministries of Agriculture for their consideration. It is expected that a sub-regional meeting of experts will finalize the operational procedures. The proposal is that development of the Caribbean Information System should commence in the fields of agriculture (where certain library and information infrastructure and basic tools for the development of a sectoral network already exist) and socio-economic planning.

The proposed Agricultural Information Network is to support agricultural planning, agricultural education, research, development and production by making timely and relevant agricultural information available in each country according to existing and potential user needs. These needs would be assessed continuously at the national level in collaboration with relevant national planning offices. The system is structured to provide for the coordination of existing agricultural libraries and information units at two levels: at the national level, the libraries to be co-ordinated by a national focal point, while at the sub-regional level they would be coordinated by a sub-regional focal point. The Caribbean Documentation Centre at the CDCC Secretariat will act as catalytic and monitoring agent.

- b) Convening a meeting of agricultural research institutions in the Caribbean

This arose out of recommendations of the Third and Fourth Sessions of CDCC, following joint studies involving UNCTAD, UNAPEC and the CDCC

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2/ ALBERTUS, Ursula, Caribbean Information System: Guidelines for the Establishment of Sectoral Systems (Agriculture); (CEPAL/CARIB/78/6)

Secretariat on strategies for development of Producers/Exporters Associations and for coordination of the activities of these Producers/Exporters Associations. Recommendations were made for coordination of the activities between CARDI, UWI, CARIRI, etc., and in the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean, and the Universities and similar research centres in Cuba, Dominican Republic and Haiti. The results of such investigations should be made readily available throughout the CDCC area.

Another recommendation stressed encouragement to training programmes at various levels in the following areas: - Agricultural Science and Technology - Livestock Science - Marine Biology and Fishing Techniques.

The study also made a series of recommendations on actions to be carried out on various product groups. The products involved are rice; legumes, fruits, vegetables and ground provisions; timber; livestock products and citrus. In summary, it is proposed to call meetings to deal with certain aspects of each of these product areas. These meetings will focus inter-alia on - (i) attaining coordination and cooperation at the level of production, (ii) cooperation in sharing information and documentation concerning production, marketing, prices, standards, etc., (iii) developing joint research programmes, (iv) carrying out feasibility studies, (v) improving intra and inter-regional trade, and (vi) in the case of citrus, revitalizing the British Caribbean Citrus Association (BCCA) and expanding its activities to include non-English speaking countries of the Caribbean.

c) Sugar-cane, sugar and its by-products

The CDCC Secretariat and GEPLACEA are to study a formula by which the results of the investigation on sugar-cane, sugar and their by-products could be made available to the CDCC Secretariat for diffusion among its members who are not members of GEPLACEA.

## II. Statistics

The Third Session of the CDCC had agreed to the proposal to establish a Statistical Data Bank (taking into account existing facilities in the sub-region) initially on a manual basis and then switching to a mechanized system. The proposed Data Bank would therefore, be complementary to national Data Banks. The Latin American Centre for Social and Economic Documentation (CLADES), a centre established under the aegis of the ECLA Headquarters in Santiago, has been collaborating with the ECLA Caribbean Office in this connection.

The series to be stored have already been identified and include data on agriculture, forestry and fishing, starting with the year 1965. The Data Bank is to be closely allied to the Caribbean Documentation Centre and efforts are being made to collaborate with other agencies and institutions involved with similar work in order to minimize duplication of efforts.

## III. Science and Technology

Work has been proceeding for some time, with the collaboration of UNESCO, to establish a Caribbean Council for Science and Technology. Recommendations and revised statutes were agreed at a meeting of Government experts since December 1977. It was agreed that a Steering Committee comprising two nominees from each of the CDCC countries should be set up. In the meanwhile, Governments are to give final consideration to the draft statutes of the Council. The CDCC Secretariat is to serve as an interim Secretariat until the Council Secretariat is established.

## IV. Energy

The Fourth Meeting of the CDCC, coming in the wake of the 1979 jump in petroleum prices, devoted a large portion of its time to the subject of energy. While there was concern for all aspects of energy, considerable attention was devoted to discussions on the need for exploration into the area of non-conventional energy. It was agreed

that renewable forms of energy resources should get priority in the work of the proposed Council on Science and Technology.

It was agreed that coordination should be implemented in three basic categories - within the United Nations System, within the Latin American organizations and other inter-governmental organizations, and between individual CDCC member countries. In this respect, the roles of the CDCC Secretariat in providing information, serving as a forum for discussion and exchanging ideas, establishing training workshops on methodology, planning, etc., and as a centre for horizontal coordination was stressed.

#### V. Regional and Inter-regional Trade

As a result of decisions taken at the Fourth CDCC Session, recommendations have been made for the establishment of machinery for exchange of trade information within the sub-region. Such information would cover a wide spectrum including available production, shortages, surpluses, prices, etc.

The UNCTAD/GATT information centre and the CDCC have collaborated in this project and a report has been prepared on the feasibility of establishing a Caribbean Trade Information System to serve as a focal point for coordinating the exchange of information to facilitate inter-regional trade.

In addition, ECLA in conjunction with UNCTAD, have undertaken a project with the ultimate objective of creating multinational enterprises for manufactured and semi-manufactured products. These enterprises would concentrate mainly on extra-regional markets and one of its aims would be to increase foreign exchange earnings.

#### Conclusion

From the foregoing, it will be observed that a large part of the work of the ECLA Office for the Caribbean involves coordination and complementation of various parallel activities that are currently being pursued. The object of this approach is to maximize the use of

scarce resources and to provide the maximum possible benefits to the countries of the sub-region.

The principal approach is to encourage self-reliance within and among the countries of the Caribbean which implies that as much use as possible should be made of technical expertise indigenous to the region. In this connection, maximum reliance will be placed on the United Nations Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries scheme. The second level of coordination involves the United Nations and the specialized agencies to which most of the Caribbean countries belong. The third level involves other non-Caribbean organizations and countries which provide bilateral technical assistance to the Area.

In concluding, we look forward to the practical conclusions of the meeting and would wish to express our willingness to assist in any way we can in the achievement of the goals of better utilization of natural products in the Caribbean area which should undoubtedly contribute to the larger goals of social and economic improvement.

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