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Government expert meeting
"Towards an environmentally sustainable development"

Santiago, Chile, 11-13 September 1990

ANNOTATED PROVISIONAL AGENDA

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II. ANNOTATIONS ON THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

This technical meeting, "Towards an environmentally sustainable development", has been organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Government of Norway. It will be attended by government experts from the member countries of ECLAC.

This meeting may be viewed as part of the follow-up of the resolutions deriving from the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission. Its aim is to explore and recommend ways of solving certain problems and processes considered to be of fundamental importance for attaining an environmentally sustainable style of development. It has been decided to deal with specific topics, as other international agencies working in the region have assumed responsibility for tackling global-scale tasks and plans.

Some guidelines are given below with regard to the various items on the provisional agenda.

1. Election of Officers

In accordance with established practice, every meeting convened by ECLAC shall commence by electing a Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur.

2. Adoption of the agenda

Participants will have before them for their consideration the provisional agenda prepared by the Secretariat and presented in this document. According to the Rules of Procedure, delegations may make such observations and suggest such modifications as they deem appropriate.

3. The environmental sustainability of changing production patterns with social equity

At the twenty-third session of the Commission, the ECLAC Secretariat presented the document entitled "Changing production patterns with social equity" (LC/G.1601(SES.23/4)), which contains a succinct version of the main lessons left by the crisis of the 1980s. These lessons centre around what is considered to be the prime common task of all the countries: to change the region's production patterns within a framework of progressively greater social equity. ECLAC's proposals give special priority to some of the inherent objectives of development: growth, improvement of

income distribution, consolidation of processes furthering democracy, achievement of greater autonomy, improvement of the quality of life of the population, and creation of conditions that will halt the deterioration of the environment.

The proposals submitted for the consideration of the government experts at this technical meeting seek to further the last-named objective. To this end, they explain and enlarge on the main aspects of the document referred to, further enriching it with the views and considerations stemming from an approach based on the environmental dimension. This is the purpose of the document entitled "The environmental sustainability of changing production patterns with social equity", which will serve as the basis for the discussions on this item.

It is expected that the discussions on this topic will deal with such aspects as the challenges of the 1990s; the conditions for changing production patterns; the internal effort and international co-operation. Particularly interesting areas of discussion may be those dealing with concrete proposals on macroeconomic change, trade and exchange rate policy, policy on technology, the training of human resources, sectoral policies (industry, agriculture, mining) and the interaction among the various agents of production.

4. The environmental dimension of economic policies

The debate on the relationship between development and environment has given renewed topicality to the subject of the importance of economic policies vis-à-vis the environmental situation of the countries. For this reason, it is necessary to explain the part that the State should play in promoting economic development and environmental management, with special emphasis on the relationship between crisis, structural adjustment and the environment.

With regard to the crisis and adjustment policies, it is necessary to determine whether or not there is any evidence of their effects on changing environmental trends, since the main hypotheses put forward in this respect have not yet been fully proven, although they are undoubtedly worthy of discussion.

The adjustment measures and the new economic strategies involve implicit environmental policies which contrast with the explicit policies regarding the environment. Although these two types of policies sometimes coincide, in most cases they do not, and there are substantial disparities between the environmental intentions of development policies and what actually happens in practice.

In addition to the supporting documents, there are two basic documents which will contribute to the analysis of this topic: "The

environmental dimension of economic policies in the Latin American and Caribbean countries" and "Crisis, external debt, macroeconomic policies and their relation with the environment in Latin America and the Caribbean".

It is hoped that the discussions will help to clarify some queries such as: what are the environmental implications of the adjustment policies?; how can economic policies be reconciled with environmentally sustainable development policies?; what is the real usefulness of the environmental appraisal instruments to which such importance is currently attached?, and what benefits can environmental policy derive from the improvement of national accounts through heritage accounting?

5. Technological change and the environmental sustainability of development

Technological change is now shaking the world at a rate that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. The Latin American and Caribbean region is no stranger to this technological revolution which will oblige it to embark on a period of highly significant restructuring of its societies. There can be no doubt that the new technologies will represent an instrument that may open up a wide range of development possibilities, but at the same time this technological change will undoubtedly be accompanied by serious social, economic, political and also environmental difficulties.

Unquestionably, the Latin American and Caribbean environment will be faced with a number of queries deriving from the possible directions that technological change can take. At all events, the general view is that the region will face even more complex situations than those of the developed countries.

It is therefore important to analyse the possible environmental impact of the new situations created in the region. This, in turn, will make it possible to trace the probable path of the most significant ecological changes.

ECLAC considers it essential to make an in-depth analysis as to whether the new changes in technology will improve the environmental sustainability of development, so as to establish strategies for changing production patterns with social equity. This involves analysing the opportunities and restrictions for making the new technological revolution an instrument of environmental sustainability.

The discussions on this topic will begin with consideration of the document "The environmental sustainability of development and technological change in Latin America and the Caribbean".

It is expected that, in dealing with this complex topic, the experts will give priority to discussion of the different countries' perception of the main technological changes in the short term and their environmental effects; the main social, political and economic repercussions of these changes; the national, subregional and regional capacity to generate and utilize environmentally sustainable technologies, and the relationship between scientific policy and the generation and utilization of such technologies.

6. Global climatic change and its possible consequences

This topic is dealt with more and more often in the world and regional press, and is often accompanied by warnings of impending catastrophes. It is therefore necessary to clarify certain aspects in the light of the scientific background evidence and the models constructed on the basis of such data. Although it is difficult to make a clear forecast for the region as a whole and there are variations between the different projections, it is nevertheless possible --within broad ranges of magnitude-- to estimate some probable economic and social repercussions of the possible climatic changes.

In planning changes in production patterns, sufficient attention is not always paid to the conditions which are indispensable for the environmental sustainability of such changes. Indeed, it is often forgotten that the consideration of possible climatic changes is a necessary and even essential complement to any environmentally sustainable development strategy.

Some of the ecosystems of the region will suffer greater impacts than others. It is therefore desirable to analyse those impacts, especially in the case of ecosystems currently suffering processes of rapid deterioration.

ECLAC is presenting this topic on the basis of the document "Possible climatic changes in Latin America and the Caribbean and their consequences". It is expected that the experts will deal with the perceptions of climatic change in each country; the possible national repercussions; the action taken by governments with regard to the decisions contained in agreements and protocols, and the position to be taken by Latin America and the Caribbean regarding the need for agreements to reverse the processes of world climatic change.

7. Changes in the public sector and its institutional context with a view to achieving environmentally sustainable development

The diagnosis made in the region is generally speaking rather discouraging with respect to the public sector, which --with a very few exceptions-- entered into a crisis situation during the last decade. If, in previous decades, certain excesses had been committed which were reflected in excessive bureaucracy, inefficiency and inappropriate allocation of resources, these shortcomings became painfully obvious in the context of the severe financial restrictions characterizing the economic situation of the 1980s in most of the countries.

In these circumstances, such a new and increasingly important activity as that of concern for the environment failed to gain access both to the organizational structure and to the necessary financing, leading in many cases to a slackening of the initial impulse achieved at the beginning of the decade.

For a number of years, the debate on the organization of the public institutional structure revolved around the conflicting criteria on the incorporation of the environmental dimension. Many held that this should be incorporated into the work of the various existing public bodies, while others maintained that it should be approached through the establishment of a public body specifically devoted to that subject. The discussion was further enriched by complementary proposals midway between the two approaches. Not much real progress was made, however, because the need to promote new structures incorporating the environmental dimension entered into conflict with the restrictions and constraints already referred to.

It is for these reasons that ECLAC, in response to the concerns of the countries of the region, has postulated the need to renew the terms of the debate, especially in the light of the proposal for a form of development based on changing production patterns with social equity and environmental sustainability, with all the corresponding requirements in the institutional sphere.

As a contribution to this discussion, participants will have before them the document "Structural and functional requirements of a public sector capable of furthering environmentally sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean". The participating experts may wish to analyse more specifically the prevailing trends regarding the role of the State and its environmental responsibility; the significance of the environmental sustainability of development in terms of the structure and functionality of the public sector, and the changes which should be made in order to secure the full incorporation of the environmental dimension in policies for popular participation, science and technology, and regional development.

8. Adoption of the report

The Rapporteur will present a draft final report of the meeting for approval by the participants.



