ACC Guidance Note on
Regional and Sub-Regional Development Cooperation

Approved on behalf of ACC by the
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I. Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Council and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) have emphasized for several years the importance of regional and subregional dimension of development cooperation, the potential for greater synergy with country-level activities and the need for a concerted approach to enhance the system’s efforts in this regard. Most recently, the General Assembly “stressed the growing need for incorporating the regional and subregional dimension in United Nations operational activities for development”.

2. Recent developments at the regional and subregional level have contributed significantly to the broadening and deepening of multilateral cooperation. First, the number of non-United Nations intergovernmental bodies at the regional and subregional levels has increased. Second, their activities have expanded into new sectors and development themes. Third, growing interdependence among countries has been effectively demonstrated through:

   (a) Consensus-building on political, security and humanitarian issues;
   (b) Reaching common positions on questions dealing with international trade, investment and finance;
   (c) Developing mutually acceptable strategies on major development issues, e.g. environment, gender, population, poverty, social development etc.

Thus, regionalism and subregionalism have become important building blocks in multilateral cooperation.

3. These developments present the United Nations system with many challenges of: further strengthening multilateralism; improving links between regional and subregional agendas and priorities and global commitments on the one hand, and country-level priorities and strategies on the other; bringing regional and subregional concerns more fully into the system’s work; and enhancing the relevance of the system’s operational activities to regional and subregional bodies.

4. The comparative advantage of the United Nations system regional and subregional development cooperation is based on several factors. The United Nations system has a long history of active engagement at the regional and subregional levels. This has been accompanied by programmes of regionalization and decentralization of the system’s structures; provision of technical advisory capacity and decentralization of management, technical and financial support to operational activities; and establishment of several institutions for research, training and capacity-building. Thus, the availability of technical and operational expertise and services at the regional and subregional levels has expanded in many subject areas.

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2 See, for example, Council resolutions 1996/41 and 1998/46; General Assembly resolutions 50/120 and 50/227; ACC/1997/POQ/CRP.26; and ACC/1998/7 of 19 May 1998, sect. II.C, paras. 72–75.

3 See General Assembly resolution 53/192 of 15 December 1998, para. 41.
5. The system’s operational activities have traditionally covered a wide range of development issues which derive from its mandate and competence. At present, there are four major streams of United Nations system development cooperation at the regional and subregional levels: UNDP, United Nations funds and programmes, the regional commissions and the specialized agencies. Some of the smaller technical agencies have a prominent inter-country focus. Each organization or agency has its own rationale, programming and implementation modalities and funding arrangements. A critical minimum degree of convergence is required, especially on carefully selected themes and issues which lend themselves to an inter-country approach and where collaborative action will enhance the impact of United Nations system’s operational activities.

II. Main objectives

6. This guidance note has been established for this purpose as a result of system-wide consultations within the framework of CCPOQ, especially the regional commissions.

7. The main objectives are to:

(a) Support and encourage regional and subregional development cooperation and link it, as far as possible, to country-level priorities, on the one hand, and global conference commitments and plans of action on the other hand;

(b) Inject a regional and subregional dimension into country-level activities;

(c) Promote synergies between country and inter-country programmes in order to enhance the impact of the latter on the system’s country-level work;

(d) Increase coordination in the system’s operational activities.

8. With a view to furthering these objectives, several steps should be taken by the different components of the system, and more especially by the regional commissions, regional and subregional offices and bureaus of organizations and agencies, and the resident coordinator system at the country level. In all cases, headquarters offices and technical divisions should provide active support to regional and subregional technical cooperation through technical and financial resources, as required.

III. Action to be taken

9. Organizations and agencies of the United Nations system should review their working relationships at the regional and subregional levels, especially with non-United Nations regional and subregional bodies, with a view to increased collaboration. Care should be taken to avoid establishing new layers of bureaucracy and to recognize the lead role of governments in formulating country programmes.

10. The following broad categories, among others, provide a basis for facilitating joint and collaborative action within the system and for increasing the regional and subregional dimension in operational activities:

(a) Issues which are of a sensitive nature or may require further advocacy or negotiation, e.g., governance, civil society and human rights;
(b) Themes or programmes of a cross-sectoral nature where a regional or subregional scale of operations would be cost-efficient, would further complement and add value to country-level efforts, utilize national and subregional institutions and expertise, and facilitate exchange of experience and technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) for capacity-building, e.g., population, gender, employment, poverty and environment;

(c) Issues which are of a transboundary nature and would benefit from collaborative inter-country approach and effort, e.g., climate change, desertification, disaster management, civil conflicts, high-incidence diseases (malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS), migration, trafficking in women and children, transboundary crime and drug abuse;

(d) Common problems which would benefit from regional or subregional analysis, strategy and programme development, e.g., globalization, international trade, investment and economic management, economic integration, food security, and utilization of water and other shared natural resources;

(e) Development of regional norms and standards in different fields, including specific areas where further normative work, standardization or capacity-building is required, e.g., pharmaceuticals and food products.

11. The Council, in its resolution 1998/46, welcomed the establishment of annual meetings, to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, in each geographical area, among the relevant entities of the system engaged in regional and inter-country activities. The purpose of these meetings is to:

(a) **Review existing coordination mechanisms at the regional level with a view to assessing their effectiveness and adequacy**;

(b) **Propose ways of improving the system’s collective response and achieving greater coherence in operational activities across the components of the system**;

(c) **Sharpen the policy dialogue, develop shared goals and define priority areas for joint work to respond to regional and subregional needs and challenges**;

(d) **Identify ways of providing further support to the system’s work at the country level**.

12. United Nations funds and programmes, including UNDP, should take the lead in promoting joint system-wide collaborative action. A number of steps should be envisaged. Among these are:

(a) **Strengthening the policy dialogue on regional policies, priorities and strategies identified by regional commissions and non-United Nations intergovernmental bodies**;

(b) **Closer involvement of all United Nations system partners in regional programming**;

(c) **Establishment of joint task forces to examine cross-sectoral themes**.
13. The funds and programmes, such as UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP, in developing their regional and subregional programmes, should:

(a) Take into account the policy analysis and priority identification carried out by the regional commissions;

(b) With a view to forming improved linkages with the system’s country-level activities, regularly inform the resident coordinator system about their regional and subregional activities and their specific links with country-level action.

14. Some of the specialized agencies have already largely regionalized and decentralized their operational activities, and established significant regional and subregional technical capacities. They are also participating in various regional coordination and information-sharing mechanisms with the regional commissions. They should:

(a) Explore the feasibility of setting up joint teams or task forces with UNDP and the regional commissions, especially to examine cross-sectoral themes and issues, with a view to greater collaborative action;

(b) Review the links between their regional and subregional activities (irrespective of funding source) and the system’s country-level work;

(c) Inform the resident coordinator system about any relevant global, regional or subregional exercise (research, policy analysis, programming or technical cooperation) in which the country is participating and in which specific country-level activities are envisaged.

15. The smaller technical agencies have a prominent inter-country focus in their operational activities, and work in collaboration with regional and subregional bodies. They should keep themselves informed of regional and subregional policies and priorities in their fields of competence identified by regional commissions and non-United Nations intergovernmental bodies. At the country level, they are normally represented by the United Nations resident coordinator/UNDP resident representative; they should facilitate his/her task by providing information on the linkages between their inter-country and country-level activities.

16. The Council, in its resolution 1998/46, reaffirmed the important role of the regional commissions in the United Nations system’s global-to-regional-to-country-level continuum. In the recent past, the commissions have strengthened their role in developing regional perspectives, building regional consensus on various development issues, and addressing cross-sectoral themes. Each commission operates in a different socio-economic and institutional environment. However, their main roles include:

(a) Advocacy and consensus-building on global and regional issues within the region;

(b) Analytical functions, including collection, analysis and dissemination of information and statistics on social and economic trends; research and analysis of economic and social policies and of cross-sectoral themes from a regional multidisciplinary perspective;

(c) Operational activities and facilitating exchange of experience;

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(d) Dealing with a variety of subject areas, e.g., regional infrastructure, transport and communications; regional trade, technology, natural resource development, environmental issues, governance, economic integration, social development including gender etc.;

(e) Establishing regional norms and standards.

17. The commissions have also set up mechanisms for system-wide coordination by bringing together all the funds and programmes, agencies and departments of the system engaged in regional and inter-country activities to exchange information, promote joint action and reduce duplication. In addition, they liaise with and support, where necessary, non-United Nations intergovernmental bodies at the regional and subregional levels.

18. In order to reinforce synergies, the regional commissions should:

   (a) Consider organizing meetings with non-United Nations regional and subregional intergovernmental bodies as the need arises;

   (b) Systematically seek a closer interaction with such bodies;

   (c) Undertake, when possible and as consistent with the overall objectives of the United Nations, joint endeavours with them, thus contributing to wider intergovernmental coordination at the regional and subregional levels.

19. Regional commissions can make a valuable contribution to these exercises by bringing to bear upon them the influence of regional perspectives; sharing experiences on regional best practices in various areas of policy-making and development; and reinforcing the system’s contribution to linking national development to regional cooperation.

20. The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/192, calls for greater involvement of regional commissions in UNDAF. For this purpose, the regional commissions should interact directly with country teams within the resident coordinator system, and:

   (a) Make known to them their fields of competence in different sectors and specific expertise and capacities which can be provided to support country-level programming processes;

   (b) Communicate their programme of work, especially the issues and priorities identified at regional and subregional levels and details of country participation in different operational activities, including capacity-building.

21. The actions envisaged above should serve to increase the synergies between the system’s country-level and regional and subregional activities. This should particularly be the case where:

   (a) Regional and subregional programmes are simply a clustering of national activities for reasons of cost-effectiveness;

   (b) The use of national institutions and expertise is a major component;

   (c) TCDC is a strong element.

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5 See General Assembly resolution 53/192, para. 41.
To promote these synergies, therefore, it is important to pool the information on regional and subregional activities and opportunities in formulating country-level programmes. Country-level programming instruments, such as the country strategy note, the common country assessment, UNDAF would benefit from an analysis of operational information on inter-country activities which relate to country priorities or sectors of emphasis. It is important to adopt a “net additionality approach” in this regard — to bring funding, higher quality and catalytic capacity-building from the regional and subregional levels — to the benefit of country-level activities.

22. The resident coordinator system, on its part, when embarking on a programming exercise, should:

   (a) Secure greater and more active involvement of all components of the system at all stages of the process, including the country strategy note, the common country assessment and UNDAF by seeking specific inputs from them on the basis of guidance provided above;

   (b) Inject a regional and subregional dimension by linking the system’s relevant regional and subregional activities to country priorities and the system’s country-level activities;

   (c) In order to facilitate the above, develop at the country level, an inventory of regional and subregional activities, carried out by various parts of the system (regional commission, United Nations funds and programmes, specialized agencies) in which the country is participating, more particularly those involving policy analysis, priority identification and capacity-building, and those where the country is providing expertise, institutions or facilities;

   (d) Maintain liaison with non-United Nations intergovernmental bodies located in the country.

23. Recognizing the importance of the regional and subregional dimension of operational activities and their direct and indirect benefit to country-level work, an agreed system-wide framework for the allocation of resources for inter-country activities should be developed. This should represent higher levels of allocation from regular budgets and extrabudgetary funds of agencies and departments of the system, and especially all United Nations funds and programmes than those currently available.

IV. Monitoring of action

24. The regional meetings, to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, will monitor the action being taken on paragraphs 12–22 within the framework of their annual programme.

25. In addition, the monitoring of action taken by various components of the system on this guidance note will be effected in the context of system-wide reports on follow-up of global conferences and triennial policy reviews of operational activities of the United Nations system for development. Resident coordinators should report on it in their annual reports.
Annex

Examples

The examples of good practice set out below have been selected from readily available material, responses from a few organizations, and annual or biennial reports.

I. Asia

1. An ASEAN pharmaceuticals project (WHO) is a collaborative project with the ASEAN Subcommittee on Health and Nutrition with the main objective of capacity-building, standard-setting and quality control in the pharmaceutical sector. Its framework and activities are reviewed by the ASEAN Working Group on Pharmaceuticals while ASEAN country coordinators prioritize programme activities. Each participating country takes responsibility for one or more components, utilizing national institutions and expertise. For example, Malaysia has taken responsibility for quality assurance training, the Philippines for drug evaluation, Indonesia for training auditors on good manufacturing practices, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam for training in clinical pharmacy, and Thailand for training for production and utilization of regional standards. Funds for TCDC are provided in national budgets. WHO provides overall management and technical support and high-level technical inputs, as required.

2. An assistance in agricultural project formulation, monitoring and evaluation in ASEAN (FAO) was a collaborative project with ASEAN’s subsidiary body agricultural development planning centre. It aimed at capacity-building and trained a pool of agricultural personnel in the identification, formulation, monitoring and evaluation of regional technical cooperation projects in food, agriculture and forestry.

3. The ASEAN Network for Women in Skills Training (ILO) is a similar project in collaboration with gender focal points in ASEAN countries. Its objective is to create a pool of trainers using subregional expertise and national institutions with catalytic inputs (international consultants, fellowships etc.) being provided by the ILO.

4. An ESCAP-ASEAN project on multimodal transport development and transport of dangerous goods was organized jointly with the active participation of member countries to explore options and propose policy and programme action.

5. An ESCAP-ASEAN joint seminar on trade and investment cooperation in South-East Asia was organized at the request of ASEAN to examine various aspects of intraregional trade and investment focusing on the accession of new member countries.

6. A regional consultation to help identify joint strategies and serve as a basis for joint resources mobilization for response to HIV/AIDS was planned jointly by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the European Commission and UNAIDS in July 1997.

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6To be complemented with ECE and UNOPS/UNHCR inputs.

7Association of South-East Asian Nations.
South Pacific

7. A basic education and life skills project (UNESCO) was implemented in cooperation with subregional institutions; it covered 11 countries and helped strengthen the quality of literacy and primary education through training of teachers to improve classroom performance, curriculum innovations to enhance life skills, and training in educational management.

8. An innovative regional project, the Asia Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP), funded by UNEP and managed by UNOPS, seeks to spread the benefits of information technology in the Asian region. Under APDIP, a pilot project, “Mobile Internet unit” involving information technology education for rural schoolchildren, is being launched in Malaysia.

II. Arab region

9. A training workshop was covered to strengthen sustainability issues in agricultural policy analysis and planning in the Arab region (FAO). The workshop, cost-shared by the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas was held in collaboration with the Institute of National Planning at Cairo, under the aegis of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region.

10. UNDP’s first regional cooperation framework for the Arab States (1997–2001) identified regional priorities on the basis of a sustained high-level dialogue with the main stakeholders and regional experts since 1996. Priority programmes include, among others, support to governance for social development; regional food security; social and economic reform; multilateral economic cooperation; sustainable management of natural resources, with special focus on water, etc.

III. Latin America

11. A project on assessment of the impact of trade liberalization and policy implications for the agricultural sector of the Caribbean Economic Community (CARICOM) (FAO), in collaboration with the CARICOM secretariat and selected member States, analysed the impact of recent trade liberalization arrangements (North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA), Uruguay Round) on the agricultural sector, and identified policy options aimed at increasing and sustaining the competitiveness of agricultural products.

12. A project on a tropical forestry action plan for CARICOM (FAO), in cooperation with CARICOM, assisted in the preparation of an action plan for the forestry sector in some member countries.

13. A project on the harmonization of food standards and certification, in the framework of Economic Cooperation of Southern Cone Countries (MERCOSUR) (FAO), assisted in the comparative analysis of food standards in member countries, and drafted programmes for standardization and certification in cooperation with the national authorities.

14. A project on the role of social actors in overcoming social exclusion in MERCOSUR (ILO), in cooperation with national institutions from Argentina and Brazil and consultants from Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, would carry out analytical work on social exclusion. It would cooperate with ECLAC (Montevideo). Five national workshops and one subregional workshop are planned. It is expected to prepare minimum elements for a socio-economic policy to promote social integration.
IV. Africa

15. A drought monitoring centre at Harare (WMO) capacity-building project aims to train personnel of 12 member countries of the Southern African Development Committee (SADC) to provide better and more reliable services for detecting and monitoring drought and hazardous weather events.

16. A forest industries training centre for SADC (FAO) project strengthened the subregional training centre for forest industries and carried out training of trainers.

17. A project on a remote sensing component of the early warning system in SADC countries (FAO) was carried out in several phases, and helped establish an early warning system for agrometeorological purposes.

18. A Southern African TB control initiative (WHO) aims to build partnerships among the member countries to implement effective TB control programmes and integrate them into the normal health systems.

19. An occupational health and safety programme for SADC countries (ILO) aims to reduce the existing high rates of occupational accidents and reduce occupational hazards through training of personnel in member countries.

20. A study on textbook provision and the feasibility of cooperation among SADC countries (UNESCO) assisted seven member countries in developing appropriate policies for textbook production as part of their basic education objectives. It involved the establishment of national task forces and exchange of experience among the participating countries.

21. An SADC/European Commission conference held in December 1996, with the participation of UNAIDS, focused on regional approaches to HIV/AIDS in southern Africa and proposed multisectoral initiatives to fight the epidemic in the region. As recommended by the conference, a draft code of conduct for HIV/AIDS and employment for SADC member States was issued in May 1997, with inputs from the ILO through the SADC Employment and Labour Sector.

V. Europe

22. The Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) is a subregional framework in which countries from and around the former Yugoslavia work together, implementing specific projects to resolve technical obstacles to economic development. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) provides SECI with the intergovernmental forum in which all participating as well as supporting States are equal members. ECE also provides the technical support to the projects decided upon by the participating States. These projects address transboundary problems which cannot be solved at the national level.

23. Cooperation between the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Central European Initiative (CEI) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), two subregional organizations, are two other examples of synergies at the regional level. The cooperation takes various forms: the sharing by ECE of its policy analysis and the instruments of integration it negotiates (conventions, norms, standards), technical advice and assistance in the preparation of projects and the organization of workshops and seminars.

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8All programmes in the SADC subregion are prioritized by the sector coordinators and sector ministerial meetings, and are carried out in cooperation with national institutions; TCDC components are built in wherever possible.
VI. Other groups

24. An onchocerciasis control programme in West Africa (WHO), a major subregional project to eradicate river blindness, is a successful example of several countries joining together to deal with a common problem. In all, 11 countries have participated in it over almost 25 years with massive donor contribution. Close inter-country collaboration and progressive transfer of activities to national health systems was achieved through the establishment of a joint programme committee with the participation of recipient countries and donors, and networks of national coordinators and technical personnel engaged in the different aspects of the programme.

25. A series of African network projects (UNESCO) aim to train and research networks to facilitate capacity-building, establish priorities for research, provide a forum for cooperation and exchange of information, and contribute to indigenizing high-level research. Among these are: African Biosciences Network; African Network of Microbiological Resource Centres; and Training and Research on African Coastal Marine Systems. The projects were based on cooperation and participation by OAU and regional and subregional organizations, e.g., African Network of Scientific and Technological Institutions, West Africa Rice Development Association, Pan-African Union for Science and Technology, and Regional Coordinating Committee for the African Coastal Zone.

26. The Development Programme for Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons (PRODERE) stands out as an example of an integrated approach linking emergency relief and development on a subregional basis, involving a number of United Nations agencies (UNOPS, UNHCR, WHO, the ILO and others). The Programme covered countries in Central America and was the major outcome of the International Conference on Central American Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons (1989).