

The role of the ESCAP Regional Mineral Resources Development Centre

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Abstract: The ESCAP Regional Mineral Resources Development Centre (RMRDC) is one unit in a rather complex structure of international bodies promoting mineral development. The Centre is regional, covering all of the Asia Pacific countries and is inter-governmental. Some information is included on this structure and the way that the various units interact.

The major activities of the ESCAP Regional Mineral Resources Development Centre (RMRDC) include provision of advisory services, organizing training activities, exchange of information and development of information services, promotion of research and assistance to countries in preparing project requests for assistance. The programme is supported by UNDP (20%), donor governments from outside of the region, mainly in the form of expert services (45%) and participating countries from the region mainly in the form of facilities and services (35%). To date specialists from the Centre have carried out more than 250 advisory missions and prepared more than 200 reports.

Now that it is well established, RMRDC is making special efforts to establish working links with other organizations, both inter-governmental and non-governmental which promote mineral development and plans to give greater attention to its role as a catalyst and coordinator of related activities in the Asia/Pacific region. Suggestions would be welcomed on how the role of the Centre could be made more effective.

Although the geoscientists attending the GEOSEA Congress are involved in a regional activity, some may not have given much thought to the way in which regional and international organizations are structured, and the role which they can and do play in promoting their area of interest. One such organization is the Regional Mineral Resources Development Centre, which is a United Nations body designed to promote mineral development in the countries of the ESCAP region, the whole of Asia and the Pacific.

Before describing how RMRDC operates, it might be useful to explain how it fits into the series of somewhat parallel regional and international groups. There are many such groups, often involving the same people, but each one attacking the problems of geology and mineral development from a somewhat different angle. The basic distinctions are first whether they are governmental or non-governmental, then whether they are international, regional or sub-regional, then within their selected area what is their special interest and clientele, and what type of activities do they undertake.

For example, the International Union for Geological Sciences (IUGS) and the Association of Geoscientists for International Development are international non-governmental organizations which have related but not identical objectives, and which can support and supplement one another. GEOSEA and the Association of Geoscientists for Southeast Asia are sub-regional non-governmental organizations operating in Southeast Asia but on a quite different basis. All of these groups rely heavily on the services of their members and their elected officers for their success, and draw the limited financial support they need from a wide variety of sources, both governmental and non-governmental, to which these officers have access.

RMRDC, which is a part of ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), the UN regional office for Asia is a regional inter-governmental organization, and as such, deals with many of the same people and the same questions as non-governmental organisations but from a somewhat different approach. There are relatively few inter-governmental organizations which deal specifically with geology and mineral development. On the international level IGCP (International Geological Correlation Project) is something of a hybrid involving Unesco on the inter-governmental and IUGS on the non-governmental level. CCOP (Committee Coordinating Offshore Prospecting) and SEATRAD (South East Asia Tin Research and Development Centre) which are also closely linked with ESCAP are inter-governmental, sub-regional bodies dealing with limited areas within mineral development. COIME, the ASEAN Committee on Industry, Minerals and Energy is inter-governmental and sub-regional, but has a rather broad interest with mineral development a relatively small part. Thus each group slices the field of geology and mineral resources at a different angle.

RMRDC was established by ESCAP in 1973 to promote mineral development in the Asia/Pacific countries. It deals with all countries which are members of ESCAP. The Centre has permanent facilities provided by the Government of Indonesia in Bandung, and full-time staff ranging between 15-20, roughly half professional and half administrative and support staff.

Professional staff are seconded to RMRDC at the expense of their governments, normally for a period of 3 years. Thus the size of the professional staff, depends on the generosity of donor countries and on the capacity of ESCAP and the RMRDC to call forth such support. To date, specialists have been provided by Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, France, Japan, Republic of Korea and the United Kingdom and negotiations are being carried out with a number of countries for additional staff. Seconded professionals carry out advisory missions and implement the other parts of the RMRDC programme, but are not involved directly in administrative work at the Centre.

The programme, which is guided and approved by a Governing Council made up of nine representatives of countries of the region, is divided into five areas:

1. Providing advisory services on various aspects of mineral development. These services usually involve missions of 1-8 weeks by staff members in response to country requests.

2. Assisting governments in preparing requests for assistance from development agencies such as UNDP, EEC, ADB or bilateral sources.
3. Organizing training courses, workshops, seminars, etc. in areas approved by the Governing Council.
4. Promoting of information exchange, development of information services and mineral inventories. Here RMRDC publishes its own newsletter twice a year.
5. Promoting of regional research activities and the organizing of regional laboratory facilities. Here it should be noted that RMRDC does not have research facilities, and performs mainly a catalytic function.

For the implementation of these programmes support is provided by donor countries (about 45% of our budget), mainly in the form of expert services but also in support for specific research or training activities, by assistance programmes such as UNDP (about 20%) and by participating countries, partly in cash and partly in supporting services (about 35%). On this basis, the budget runs between \$1 million and \$1.5 million/year.

As examples of the way the programme works, advisory missions have recently been undertaken to Malaysia, Thailand and Nepal, and other missions during 1984 have been carried out in the Maldives, Sri Lanka and the South Pacific. Such missions are carried out in cooperation with national specialists at government request.

During 1984 two major activities are being organized which have a training component, a Symposium on the Geology of Tin Deposits to be held in China in October–November, and a Workshop on Mineral Policy for Small-scale Mining to be organized in conjunction with the 12th World Mining Congress in India in November. RMRDC also sponsors participants to attend an annual Post Graduate Training Course organized by the Government of India. In addition the Centre cooperates with other organizations, both inter-governmental and non-governmental in co-sponsoring activities in the region related to mineral development. Thus support has been provided to some of the activities at GEOSEA. For activities which we organize ourselves, we must work through government since we are inter-governmental, but co-sponsored activities are not restricted in this way.

The Centre is not equipped to carry out research, and staff members are not attached for long enough to develop their own research projects (assignments are limited to three years). However, a number of areas have been identified in which RMRDC has been requested to promote and stimulate regional research activities.

These include a project to investigate rock magnetism and other physical properties of rocks in the tin granite belt, and a project to strengthen and improve the facilities for age-dating in the region. Work is also being done on geochemical reference samples for collaborative chemical analysis. All of these projects are carried out with support from Japan.

Further projects will identify other areas in which there is real advantage to applying a regional approach. Special emphasis is being given to the strengthening and development of information and data systems in the region which will include mineral

resources inventories. More attention is also being paid to the role of industrial minerals in participating countries, and a number of missions have been undertaken dealing with the various non-metallic industrial minerals.

With this as background it may be useful to explore the role of the RMRDC in the region—what is it, what could it be, and perhaps most important, what scientists working in the region in areas related to mineral development see as the most useful and effective role that an organization such as RMRDC might play. During the 10 years that the Centre has existed, most of its efforts have been in the area of advisory missions and training activities, but during these 10 years the situation in the region has changed and advanced to the point where new and different approaches might be warranted.

Now that the Centre is quite well established, it is in a position to broaden its base of operations, particularly through linking with and cooperating with other organizations in activities designed to promote mineral development in the region. There are a number of such groups—including those already mentioned such as IUGS, AGID, CCOP and SEATRAD as well as GEOSEA itself, which are organizing regional activities in Asia. In these cases a link with RMRDC might provide additional support, new points-of-entry, and other new dimensions. Because RMRDC is inter-governmental, it has access to governments and international organizations. In addition it has some funds for support, although such funds are mainly for participation in rather than organization of activities. Above all, the Centre has a full time staff which is dedicated to mineral development and which can assist and participate in such activities.

One related capacity which RMRDC has is to monitor and coordinate activities in the region. During its more than 10 years of existence the Centre has built up extensive contacts with governmental agencies as well as with the various groups both governmental and non-governmental which carry out and support activities in the region. A degree of coordination is achieved automatically, by making information on these activities available through newsletters, which in the case of RMRDC we now plan to circulate twice a year. Here we hope to include information on large national programmes as well as regional programmes, since in many cases the national programmes can provide the base for a regional workshop or demonstration project. This also involves identifying and promoting likely linkages among geoscience groups. Coordination is much more complex than people think, but it is necessary, and in many cases a UN body such as RMRDC can make a useful contribution.

One of the main things RMRDC must do is to make its programmes and its potential as well as its limitations known in the region, both to mineral scientists and engineers, and to the officers of other organizations, both inter-governmental and non-governmental which are working in areas related to mineral development. Thus we are pleased to take advantage of the opportunity which GEOSEA has presented to us to do this and would welcome suggestions on how the Centre might play a more effective role in the region.