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AFRICA'S FOOD AND AGRICULTURE CRISIS  
PROSPECTS AND PROPOSALS FOR 1985 AND 1986

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The failure of Africa to feed its population now holds the attention of the international community. For the last two decades, and the early 1980s, African countries failed continuously to meet the growing demand for more food. The food need and the availability of food have been growing at divergent rates. In most countries, the gap has been growing at more than 2 per cent per annum. As a result, Africa has been forced to rely more and more on commercial imports and food aid. In fact, food aid has become a permanent relief feature of the African food situation. Food imports averaged 20 per cent of the export earning of the African states during the 1970s, with critical implications on Africa's future economic development. Africa's export earnings has been deteriorating, while debt servicing is claiming close to a quarter of its export receipts.

Per caput food and agricultural production continually declined since the 1960's and the situation worsened in the 1980's. During the 1970's food and agriculture production increased at an annual rate of about 1.8 per cent against a population growth rate of about 2.7 per cent. Between 1980 and 1984 food and agriculture production increased at a mere 1 per cent per annum against a 3.1 per cent growth rate in population. On a per caput basis the index number of agricultural production decreased at an alarming annual rate of 2 per cent from 1980 to 1984. Cereal production decreased by about 19 per cent in a span of only 5 years (1980-1984). The value of cereal imports needed to cover the growing deficit increased from 0.6 billion US dollars in 1972 to 5.4 billion dollars in 1983. Between 1980 and 1983 the volume index of agricultural imports increased at an annual rate of 3.6 per cent showing slight decline compared to previous years as Africa's capacity to import deteriorated due to declining export revenue.

Africa's present predicament stems from the persistent drought over the continent during the last 2-3 consecutive years, and by an unfavourable global economic climate. While drought and the resurgence of diseases and pests can be blamed for the current emergency situation, the long-term decline in food and agriculture production has been a result of several long standing interrelated and interacting factors. These include technical, political, economic and socio-cultural factors, among others. Indeed development policies which gave agriculture less priority than it should have received as a prime source of growth is an important factor.

Despite the growing food imports and food aid, malnutrition, hunger and famine are rampant. At present about 150 million people in the continent are considered to be suffering from malnutrition and hunger. While surplus disposal is the problem in many developed countries, it is extremely disconcerting that African children die for want of food. The continent's immense potential to increase food production by several fold is well known, and it is therefore difficult to understand why African countries fail to realize and use this potential. The various declarations African leaders adopt clearly indicate that the political will and determination do exist.

Africa experienced a drastic decline in food production in 1983/84 and 24 countries faced exceptional food shortages. The food situation deteriorated further since 1984. In 1984/85, 21 African countries were identified as having exceptional food shortages. In the 21 identified countries, 1984/85 cereal production is estimated at 22.9 million tons, 14 per cent lower than the 1983 drought affected output, or 23 per cent below the average of 1981 and 82. The total import requirement is estimated at 10.2 million tons up from the 7.2 million tons, again 1.8 million tons more than 1983/84. The Sahel and the Eastern and Southern African countries have suffered most from the drought-induced food deficit. In Eastern and Southern Africa, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia and Tanzania are considered to be in an extremely difficult situation, while Angola, Botswana and Mozambique are considered critical in Southern Africa. In the Sahel, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal are faced with an exceptionally difficult food situation. The food problem is expected to continue into 1985 and possibly 1986. Continuation of food aid of the order of 1983/84 is expected.

Given the complexity of the problem the relief operations launched during 1983/84 were quite successful. The FAO/WFP Special Task Force has very regularly been monitoring supply situations in affected countries and close links were forged with donor countries and organizations to co-ordinate and facilitate timely food aid deliveries. According to available evidence, 1985 is expected to be worse than 1983/84 and the same degree of preparedness and cooperation is needed. While steps to save lives are proceeding, it is also recommended that recovery and rehabilitation efforts are simultaneously mounted. Besides food deliveries, the critical issues for recovery centre upon seeds, fertilizers, chemicals, medicine, and for livestock feed, veterinary medicine, water and destocking operations to keep the number of livestock compatible with the pasture carrying capacity. Provision of trucks, spare parts and maintenance facilities are also extremely important for the continuing success of relief operations.

Countries suffering frequent droughts need to improve their preparedness through early warning systems, all in urgent need of improvement and strengthening. In this respect FAO has, and continues to play, a notable role.