



UNITED NATIONS

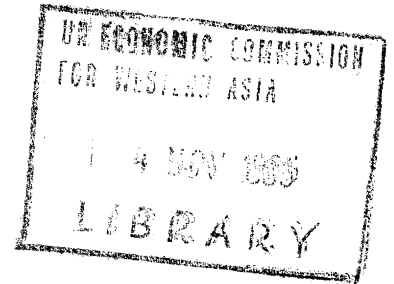
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

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Expert Group Meeting on Critical Factors
in Wheat Production and Distribution
9-11 December 1985
Baghdad, Iraq



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I. Background Information

Over the last two decades or so, a rapid growth of the population and increasing per capita income have boosted demand for food in the countries of the ESCWA region without comparable adjustment in the level of production. The growth of agricultural production has generally been limited by unfavourable agro-climatic environment, socio-economic constraints and difficulties in implementation of development programmes. As a result, the declining trend in per capita food production in most countries in the region has led to an increased reliance on imports to meet the national requirements and a deteriorating regional food security situation.

This issue has received close attention on the part of the governments of the ESCWA countries as well as regional and international organizations operating in the region. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has taken an active part in the regional efforts for a strengthened food situation in the member countries, particularly through a programme of promotion of national food strategies and support to agricultural development planning. Yet, despite some good results achieved in the region, food security remains an unsolved issue which ranks highest among the development objectives of all countries of the region.

The present programme of work of the Commission in the field of food planning and policy aims at taking advantage of the extensive experience gained in the region, drawing lessons from the past experience and focusing on practical policy aspects for improving the present and future food situation of the region, particularly in regard to wheat production and distribution.

Being the most important staple food in the region, wheat and wheat products play a strategic role in the food security policy of the member countries. Moreover, since wheat is a basic commodity, it has important linkages with the rest of the economy, especially in the rainfed areas where adverse climatic conditions do not allow viable alternative to cereal farming. In this respect, it is a priority for the region to improve its wheat production, keeping in mind the constraints and limitations affecting this activity.

Owing to the very nature of the agricultural development process, one cannot objectively expect a growth of regional wheat production sufficient for covering the requirements in the short run. However, the issue of adequate wheat supply is an immediate problem for most countries of the region: the regional self-sufficiency ratio for cereals went down from 73 per cent in

1970/1971 to 46 per cent in 1980 and the largest share in these imports is that of wheat and wheat products.

As food security necessitates inter alia, the rational use of resources to maximize adequateness, stability and accessibility of food supply, in the short and medium terms, improvements in the regional wheat situation will come from better management of the import, storage and distribution. A preliminary condition for improved wheat policy management is the narrowing of the information gap on the net requirements - a gap created largely by the high variability of wheat production in arid or semi-arid drought-affected areas in the face of an increasing and inelastic domestic demand. This information could be best made available by an Early Warning System for wheat production providing the decision-makers with early and reliable forecasts of the current domestic wheat production.

II. Objectives

The main objectives of the meeting are:

1. To review the past and ongoing programmes for achieving optimal production, improved distribution and trade arrangements for wheat with a view to identifying areas of priority programmes and projects for improvement of grain food security in the ESCWA region;

2. To identify potentialities for intra and interregional co-operation in the field of wheat production and distribution development programmes;

3. To prepare for the implementation of a regional programme of development of national crop forecasting and early warning systems for wheat production in the ESCWA region;

III. Dates and venue

The Expert Group meeting will be held from 9 to 11 December 1985 at ESCWA headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq.

IV. Participation

Senior governmental experts directly involved in agriculture and/or food planning policy in the main wheat producing countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia will be invited.

Invitations will also be extended to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and to specialized agencies of the League of Arab States: the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the Arab Center for Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID) and the Arab Federation for Food Industries (AFFI).

Invitations will also be extended to the International Wheat Council and specialized organizations concerned with wheat production and distribution and agro-climatology, in addition to a few selected experts invited in their personal capacity.

V. Documentation

The documentation of the meeting will cover three topics, namely (1) constraints affecting wheat production and distribution in the countries of the ESCWA region, (2) potentialities for intra and inter regional co-operation in the field of wheat production and distribution and (3) review of international experiences in crop forecasting and early warning systems and prospects for the ESCWA region.

1. The documentation on major factors affecting wheat production and distribution will be prepared by the ESCWA secretariat and will consist of case studies for selected countries of the region. Each country case study aims to (i) identify the major socio-economic factors constraining the domestic production of wheat, (ii) assess the optimum domestic production

levels, (iii) review the wheat production, trade and distribution policies, and (iv) evaluate wheat security arrangements in line with the country's production potential and domestic requirements.

2. The documentation on potentialities for intra and inter regional co-operation in the field of wheat production and distribution will be prepared by the ESCWA secretariat in consultation with regional and international organizations having an active role in the promotion of regional food security programmes and projects.

3. The documentation on crop forecasting and Early Warning Systems for wheat production will be based on (i) regional aspects of the issue, for which the documents are being prepared by the ESCWA secretariat, and (ii) regional or national experiences from outside the Western Asia region, for which an input is expected from other organizations and experts.

V. Language

The language of the meeting will be English.

Any further inquiries may be addressed to the Joint ESCWA/FAO Agriculture Division which is responsible for the organization of the meeting.

