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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

Food problemsReport of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. General Assembly resolution 35/69 of 5 December 1980 deals with the food and agricultural situation in the African region. Paragraph 10, in particular, defines the role of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in assisting the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to establish regional food trade and distribution organizations in Africa. In that paragraph, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to co-operate with OAU in undertaking a study on the establishment of regional food trade and distribution organizations in Africa and to submit a report thereon to the Assembly at its thirty-sixth session through the Economic and Social Council.

2. While it is not yet clear what form and degree of assistance OAU may need from ECA in implementing the resolution, the Secretary-General is submitting an interim report, as prepared by ECA, in response to the request of the Assembly in paragraphs 10 and 14 of the resolution.

3. In preparing this interim report, a number of issues, given the different mandates specified in the resolution, had to be dealt with on a preliminary basis. A particular concern to ECA has been the meaning of regional organizations for food trade. A number of interpretations can be attached to this issue. One interpretation is that studies could be undertaken at the subregional level which would look at the trade potentials that exist and the feasibility of establishing subregional marketing organizations with a focus on the major local food commodities along the following lines:

East Africa: maize, rice, livestock, cassava;

North Africa: wheat, millet, sorghum and potatoes;

West Africa: rice, cassava, tubers, sorghum/millet.

4. Another interpretation is that the resolution requires exploration of the possibilities of establishing regional organizations for regional food trade for each important food crop or group of food crops in Africa such as cereals, tubers and root crops, fruits and vegetables, etc.

II. INTERIM REPORT: AFRICA'S FOOD AND AGRICULTURE PROBLEMS IN THE 1980s

5. General Assembly resolution 35/69 on the situation of food and agriculture in Africa came about as a result of many previous developments, including Assembly resolutions 3201 (S-VI) and 3202 (S-VI) of 1 May 1974 on the new international economic order. Other decisions, such as those of the 1974 World Food Conference, the Twentieth General Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in the Regional Food Plan for Africa (AFPLAN) (FAO document ARC/78/REP) and the Lagos Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy for the Economic Development of Africa (A/S-11/14, annex I), all culminated in Assembly resolution 35/69.

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6. In general, agriculture has been the lagging sector in African countries and responsible for slowing down the over-all growth of gross domestic product (GDP). During the period from 1970 to 1975, the annual real growth rate in agriculture was estimated at 2.5 per cent for the continent. For the period 1970 to 1979, the indices of food production averaged an annual growth rate of 1.5 per cent, compared to the regions' population growth rates of between 2.5 and 2.8 per cent (see annex).

A. The problems

1. Poor production

7. The contribution of agriculture to GDP varies considerably from country to country, but for most of the continent agriculture remains the basis for any sustained future development. Unfortunately, the performance of agriculture in Africa has worsened steadily in the last two decades, resulting in stagnant or declining growth rate in food and agriculture (total and per capita), chronic food insecurity, which has become perennially precarious, mounting food import bills and declining dietary energy supplies against stagnating agricultural exports, and all these in the face of rapidly increasing population and urbanization. In 1979, 29 countries showed negative growth rates, while only 4 had a growth rate of higher than 3 per cent (see table 1 which presents a summary of the information in the annex).

Table 1

Indices of agricultural production, 1979

<u>Category</u>	<u>Percentage of increase/drop in 1978-1979</u>	<u>Countries</u>			
		<u>Total</u>		<u>Per capita</u>	
		<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
I. Increasing	+ 2.5 and over	16	33	6	12
II. Negligible increase	0.0 to 2.49	25	51	14	29
III. Negligible decrease	- 0.1 to - 2.5	2	4	16	33
IV. Marked decrease	- 2.5 or more	6	12	13	26

2. Rapidly increasing demand

8. The annual demand for the major food commodities in the 80s is estimated to grow between 2 and 6 or 7 per cent annually. This implies that food production must double or triple the previous performance: an impossible task, since in many countries the colonial pattern of emphasizing the production of industrial or export crops over food crops still continues.

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3. Ineffective national policies and programmes

9. Agricultural production, particularly of the main staples such as maize, rice, sorghum, millet, roots and tubers, although marginally sufficient during normal production periods, suffers from almost permanent fluctuations due to severe climatic conditions such as drought and attacks from pests such as locusts, etc. Livestock, cattle, pigs, poultry, etc., fare no less well given the ravages of major diseases such as trypanosomiasis, East Coast fever, foot and mouth disease and a number of others.

10. Specifically, areas of ineffective national policies include the following:

- (a) Policy and priority for food as a secondary instead of a primary priority;
- (b) Allocation of a marginal or submarginal level of resources and finance for agricultural development. Investment in agriculture has been very low, and that at a time when Governments were inflicting a heavy development tax burden on the agricultural sector;
- (c) Inadequate socio-economic structure, including poor marketing and credit facilities;
- (d) Poor planning and a low rate of plan implementation;
- (e) Poor transport systems such as feeder roads, etc. and an intra-country network for intra-African trade;
- (f) Poor, disoriented research lacking national support and ineffective extension services;
- (g) Ill-conceived and inconsistent producer-pricing policies. Lack of price incentives at the farm gate is an important explanation for a lack of response on the part of the farming community to increased food demand from population growth and urbanization;
- (h) Weak administrative capacity, overburdened with intractable bureaucratic details and time-consuming procedures, particularly in countries faced with serious manpower shortages;
- (i) About 90 per cent of usable land estimated to be unproductive today owing to infestation of tse-tse fly, among other scourges, poor water and soil management, etc.;
- (j) Lack of adequate training and poor incentives for agricultural officers generally which hinders efficient adoption of modern technologies.

B. The remedies: action and programmes

1. National efforts

11. Africa's poor performance during the first two United Nations Development Decades will therefore call for a new orientation for the African region during the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade. There is an urgent need for fundamental changes in strategies, policies and priorities at the national, regional and international levels in the fields of food production, food losses, food security and forest production.

12. The countries of this region will have to rededicate themselves to the principle of the "big push" in the agricultural sector, especially in food production. This approach was strongly recommended by the World Food Council (WFC) in 1974, and by the tenth FAO/ECA Conference of African Ministers of Agriculture, held in 1978, which adopted the Regional Food Plan for Africa (AFPLAN) and which aims at food self-sufficiency by 1990, the resolutions of the Fourteenth Session of ECA, held at Rabat, 1/ the Monrovia Strategy for Economic Development in Africa, 2/ the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, by WFC in its Mexico Declaration; 3/ and more recently and more succinctly by the Lagos Plan of Action.

13. For the improvement of the agricultural and food situation in Africa, the fundamental requisite is a strong political will on the part of member States and Governments to devote an increased volume of national resources to agriculture and to adopt appropriate social systems that induce small farmers to encourage inter-country co-operation.

2. ECA subregional and regional programmes

(a) AFPLAN subregional reports

14. On its part, and in implementing the Regional Food Plan for Africa (AFPLAN), ECA has, therefore, delineated the Plan into subregional food plans to be implemented at the level of the Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs), which are the decentralized implementing centres with technical expertise from ECA headquarters with particular respect to project formulation and implementation. ECA has also carried out a detailed study of 50 or so subregional and regional African intergovernmental organizations that are directly or indirectly engaged in the development of food and agriculture, fisheries, forestry

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1979, Supplement No. 15 (E/1979/50), part II, sect. D.

2/ See A/34/552, annex I, resolution CM/Res.722 (XXXIII).

3/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 19 (A/33/19 and Corr.1), part one, para. 1.

and rural development in general. The various development aspects include economic and customs unions; co-operation in land and water-resources development; co-ordination in research programmes; prevention of droughts; harmonization of trade, fiscal and monetary affairs; improvement of marketing, distribution and storage systems; processing; agro-industry and investment development; and training at all levels.

15. ECA has evaluated the continuing and planned food development programmes and projects of the MULPOCs in addition to its study of the intergovernmental organizations in Africa. The evaluation includes an examination of the constraints and a strategy for overcoming those constraints and, thereby, improving the situation.

16. At present, ECA is in the process of initiating a training programme in project analysis for intergovernmental organizations and member countries of the MULPOCs. It is also initiating assistance to the intergovernmental organizations in identification, formulation, monitoring, execution and evaluation of projects.

(b) Lagos Plan of Action

17. During the sixteenth session of the Commission and the sixth meeting of the Conference of Ministers, held at Freetown, in March and April 1981, proposals and recommendations for the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action were presented for the guidance of member States (E/CN.14/801). The document stressed the urgency of the Plan and its implementation now and without any further protracted delays. In the Lagos Plan of Action, increased resources (financial and manpower) for investment in the agricultural and food sector have been strongly stressed. During the session, held a year after the adoption of the Plan, this imperative was further stressed and ECA hopes soon to get some concrete reactions from the member States.

18. In the field of agriculture, in April 1981, ECA submitted five projects based on some of the priorities of the Lagos Plan of Action for consideration under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Third Regional Programme for Africa (1982/86 cycle), but all were turned down for, according to UNDP, there were no funds even later in the cycle. ECA is now searching for other possible sources of funds, including bilateral assistance.

(c) ECA marketing studies and reports

19. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has also approved additional funds for the Agricultural Marketing Project to cover the period 1981-1982. A more comprehensive programme for this Project extending to the 1982-1985 period is being finalized and will be submitted to USAID for review and appraisal.

(d) World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development

20. As a follow-up of the Conference, the secretariat participated actively in the meetings held by the Administrative Committee or Coordination (ACC) Task Force on Rural Development under the leadership of FAO. Furthermore, the secretariat has

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taken the appropriate steps to participate in the high-level missions that will be visiting the African countries on request in the context of the intensive national supporting programme launched by FAO as one of the main tools for implementing the resolutions and plan of action of that Conference. In this context still this year, it is expected that a mission will visit the United Republic of Tanzania and Ethiopia.

21. The secretariat has been careful to include women's participation in such undertakings in view of the importance of contribution of rural women to food production and marketing, especially in West Africa.

(e) Livestock research: monitoring

22. During the Sixth Conference of Ministers, held in Freetown, in April 1981, several member States expressed their interest in a study focusing on the possibilities of improving, co-ordinating and monitoring mechanisms of research in livestock and livestock development in Africa. Accordingly, ECA has taken the preliminary steps to satisfy such a request by carrying out a study which would appraise the situation in the sector under consideration and make recommendations for improving the present conditions. Such a study will be completed by the end of 1981.

C. Summary and conclusion

1. Short-term recommendations

23. In the short term, therefore, the over-all objective should be to bring about an immediate improvement in Africa's food situation and lay the foundations for the achievement of collective self-sufficiency in cereals, livestock, fish and forestry products by:

(a) Formulation and implementation by countries or group of countries of appropriate food policies, programmes and strategies for agricultural development and rapid industrialization;

(b) Reduction of losses of staple foods during harvesting, threshing, cleaning, drying, storage, processing, transport, packaging and distribution;

(c) Improvement of farming practices and technologies, including inputs produced from local sources, through training at all levels;

(d) Price incentives;

(e) Input subsidies;

(f) Adequate production incentives and appropriate pricing policies;

(g) Food security at the national level;

(h) Establishment of a commodity intelligence service in the region;

(i) Free movement of food products and raw materials within Africa to promote Intra-African Trade in agricultural products.

2. Medium-term recommendations

24. The following medium-term measures are also suggested, among others:

(a) Reduction of food losses;

(b) Agro-economic research, especially for basic cereals;

(c) Food security programmes at national, subregional and regional levels;

(d) Social and economic reforms aimed at rapidly developing the agricultural base for food self-sufficiency and marketable surplus;

(e) Appropriate programmes towards as great a reduction as possible of Africa's current food imports in order to reduce the region's dependence on other continents for its food needs, while at the same time increasing intra-African agricultural trade.

3. Long-term recommendations

25. In the long term, the crisis of the agricultural sector is strongly related to the crisis of the rural sector, which has itself been affected by interrelated factors including physical, economic, social and political considerations. These remedies can, therefore, only be taken at the highest governmental level and must include the following strategies:

(a) Rural structural transformation, involving the revision of national development plans, investment budgets and other expenditures in favour of the rural sector as a whole, requiring heavier investments in feeder roads, land and water development, training, social facilities, etc. in order to change the living conditions of rural life and thus make a significant impact on the problems of poverty;

(b) Development of infrastructural facilities, including an adequate transportation network, storage and marketing facilities to service the rural sector generally and the agricultural sector in particular;

(c) Improvement of human and institutional structures for channelling credits and other farming inputs and to widen employment and job opportunities in the rural areas;

(d) Economic co-operation among African countries, which has to be developed as one of the basic foundations of economic and social progress; hence

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intensive and sustained political will for technical and economic co-operation among African member States;

(e) Bringing about a closer integration between forestry and agriculture because of the former's important environmental impact and its contribution in maintaining the productivity of the eco-systems and its role as the principal source of rural household energy for cooking, etc.;

(f) Research and exchange of information on adaptive technology, skills and training programmes.

ANNEX

Food production in Africa

Crop	(in thousands of metric tonnes)				Growth rate in percentages	
	1970	1977	1978	1979	1978-79 (Annual average)	1970-79 (Annual average)
Wheat	6 504	5 900	6 920	7 763	6.4	1.5
Rice paddy	7 373	7 851	8 851	8 145	1.4	1.2
Millet	9.427	9.444	10 373	10 155	-2.1	0.9
Sorghum	8 895	9 583	10 148	9 679	-4.6	1.0
Maize	14 824	16 654	18 253	16 209	-11.2	1.0
Cereals (total)	52 099	53 668	59 122	56 735	-4.0	0.9
Roots and tubers	68 262	77 615	79 094	80 859	2.2	2.9
Pulses	4 895	4 768	4 953	5 004	1.0	0.3
Groundnuts in shell	4 903	4 604	4 709	5 138	9.1	0.8
Sugar (centrifugal raw)	3 125	3 771	4 003	3 997	-0.2	2.7
Total meat	4 374	4 843	4 960	5 094	2.7	1.7
Cows milk (whole fresh)	6 468	7 204	7 453	7 612	2.1	1.8

Source: FAO, Rome Statistics Division, 27 November 1979.
