



General Assembly

Distr.  
GENERAL

A/37/260  
1 June 1982

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-seventh session  
Item 71 (f) of the preliminary list\*

DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION: FOOD PROBLEMS

Letter dated 17 May 1982 from the Permanent Representative of Italy  
to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Italian Government has long advocated the necessity of promoting the fight against hunger in the world in several competent international forums. Italy's initiative aims at a co-ordinated, action-oriented effort by the international community against the plight of malnutrition, which is widely recognized as a priority in development. Its ultimate purpose is to contribute to the survival of millions of people through the promotion of a strengthening and harmonization of all activities related to food aid, food security and agricultural development of developing countries, at the multilateral and bilateral levels.

The first stage of this initiative resulted in a meeting at the technical level, which was held in Rome from 26 to 29 April 1982, attended by representatives of 44 countries, 15 international organizations and 7 development banks and funds.

In accordance with the established practice, I have the honour to request that the text of the attached Summing up by the Chairman of the Rome Meeting to Fight Hunger in the World be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under item 71 (f) of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Umberto LA ROCCA  
Ambassador

\* A/37/50/Rev.1.

ANNEX

Summing up by the Chairman of the Rome Meeting to Fight Hunger in the World,  
held from 26 to 29 April 1982

INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with the undertaking given by the Italian government at Ottawa, the high levels "Rome Meeting" was held from 26th. to 29th. April 1982, to further the examination of the problem of the fight against world hunger, and to explore the concrete measures that might be adopted at a subsequent "Meeting" at ministerial level.

The "Rome Meeting" was opened by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Emilio Colombo, and was attended by representatives of the donor countries, international organizations, banks and development funds.

2. The "Meeting" confirmed the steadfast desire of the participants to pursue the goal of eradicating world hunger as the priority objective of the international community as a whole.

The wide-ranging debates revealed the commonly-held commitment to implement joint schemes to translate this political will into concrete actions.

3. The "Meeting" examined the following issues:

- \*general and emergency food aid
- \*food security
- \*agri-food strategies
- \*sectoral action themes
- \*the harmonization and coordination of aid

The debate on each of these issues was introduced by papers delivered by the delegations of Australia, France, the Netherlands, Kuwait and Canada, respectively

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## GENERAL AND EMERGENCY FOOD AID

4. The examination of this issue gave rise to many assessments and approaches, and an appropriate degree of consensus was reached. There was particular agreement that general food aid could only be a temporary measure, implemented jointly by developed and developing countries to meet the populations' fundamental needs in the framework of harmonious development.

To attain its objectives and avoid the well-known negative effects, food aid had to be geared to the development of the developing countries, and particularly to increasing local agri-food production to complement programmes designed to achieve national and regional self-sufficiency. A number of speakers on this issue confirmed the need to reach the target established by the 1974 World Food Conference, namely, to supply 10 millions tonnes of food aid in grain equivalent.

5. The participants agreed that emergency food aid will represent a recurring element in a world afflicted by calamities of various kinds.

By its different nature and within the limits of an appropriate use, it is unlikely to produce the negative effects on the recipient country that may be caused by general food aid. Three emergency categories have been identified (natural calamity, man-made calamity, crop failure). The emergency nature of the first two categories is generally accepted,

although it has been observed that there is a risk of some situations connected with refugee settlements becoming chronic, thus turning the problem into one of incorporating the refugees in suitable productive structures.

6. The need for a more precise definition has been acknowledged in relation to the third category. In this connection, it was thought to be advisable to set up a rapid and effective intervention mechanism based on the identification of emergency situations (Early Warning System) which would allow donor countries to initiate national aid procedures promptly. In this framework, it was suggested that the donor countries could keep on hand stocks of food for immediate dispatch to the countries affected.

It was confirmed that the WFP plays a basic role in emergency aid and it was acknowledged that the above Organization should proceed as rapidly as possible to defining the emergency, developing the required rapid intervention mechanisms and increasing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of aid transport.

7. It was confirmed that the International Emergency Food Reserve continues to be valid and that it appears necessary to enhance its continuity and predictability at the agreed levels. In this connection, several delegations said they would like to see the IEFK actually reinforced.

## FOOD SECURITY

8. Food security was examined in its short and long term aspects.

In the short term it was felt necessary to ensure foodstuff availability in the form of general or emergency food aid and by the provision of facilities for procurement or storage.

Satisfaction was expressed on the creation of the "food facility" recently opened by the International Monetary Fund, which some delegations expressed the wish to see enlarged. Other delegations mentioned the advisability of restarting negotiations to renew the International Wheat Agreement. It was also agreed to carefully examine the methodological and financial implications of the recent World Food Council proposal that loans should be granted to create food stock in the developing countries which would also have a stabilizing effect on international prices - a topic on the agenda for the next session of the Ministerial Session of the WFC.

9. It was also recalled that food security has to be achieved in the medium and long term through food self-sufficiency and increasing the rate of food production at a faster pace than population growth. It was felt that this could best be done if the countries concerned attributed priority to agriculture, allocating more public and private resources to the agri-food sector, and devoting more external aid to this sector. It was accordingly felt advisable to see how these objectives could be reached by adopting and implementing national food strategies.

## NATIONAL AGRICULTURE-FOOD STRATEGIES

10. A general consensus was reached on the importance of the strategies required to deal more effectively with the scourge of hunger. These strategies must cover the full cycle of agriculture-food production, conservation and distribution, encompassing all the appropriate measures to enhance productivity by making the best use of available human and material resources, and by alleviating the poverty of the less privileged groups.
11. Food strategies have been viewed as an essential element of broader development policies, which require an appropriate administrative framework. Due account must be taken of the way in which health education and social progress are interrelated. It was also acknowledged that national strategies cannot be related in terms of any single model, but that they require a case-by-case approach based on the specific situation, potential and needs of each country.
12. Strategies must stem from the initiative of the developing countries themselves, whose governments have the primary responsibility for them, in the exercise of their sovereign prerogatives.
13. The adoption of such strategies may require changes to be made in the developing countries' national policies, entailing risks and sacrifices; to offset these, it is necessary for the donor countries involved in this process to provide credible ongoing

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support. These strategies must be based on a freely reached understanding on the part of each developing country to cooperate with one or more donor countries, in full awareness of their mutual responsibilities and duties.

14. To foster such strategies, apart from direct agreement between the developing countries and the donors, it will be useful if the international organizations concerned are able to liaise between the developing countries and the potential donors. It was also recognized that strategies are not a panacea, and neither must they be a binding condition on the provision of development aid. They have to be seen more as the expression of a new political dimension of cooperation for development based on joint concerted action on an equal basis.

15. Current experiences and the willingness shown by many countries and international organizations to help draft new strategies were noted with interest. The general opinion was that the implementation of these strategies would require a necessarily dynamic and flexible process to be followed through, in the course of which constant dialogue between recipient and donors would be required, with appropriate methods for monitoring past progress and foreseeing future difficulties.

#### THEMATIC ACTIONS

16. It was agreed that, in order to achieve more valid

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cooperation for development in addition to implementing the strategies of the individual countries, suitable support should be given to thematic actions, e.e. to those interventions concerning problems of a regional nature (desertification, cattle disease) or a general nature (post-crop losses, seed, fertilizers, stocking). Although essential for agricultural development, those interventions cannot be fully implemented at the national level alone.

17. The regional dimension of a certain number of thematic actions also plays an important aggregating role between developing countries in the framework of a South-South cooperation that must be encouraged and funded by donor countries.

18. Owing to the amount of resources involved, implementation of the thematic actions may call for a combined effort by donor countries.

19. Special attention has been focused on broadening research in the sector of agricultural production, especially aimed at obtaining greater yields of local crops, which are part of the traditional food habits of the developing country populations. Several thematic actions lend themselves to a modular use and may thus profitably be incorporated in national strategies.

The drafting of thematic programs in the agri-food sector has been recognized as the specific task of the specialized agencies, particularly the FAO.

20. After the advisability of undertaking these actions

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had been acknowledged , it emerged that several delegations tended to identify specific themes on which to focus their technical and financial support

#### HARMONIZATION AND COORDINATION OF AID

21. It was unanimously recognized that in order to enhance the quality of aid immediately, and to maximize its effectiveness, development policies needed to be further harmonized, and the related operation coordinated.
  
22. While it was necessary to safeguard the individuality of the various forms of bilateral aid, it was felt that harmonization should be promptly introduced based on a number of criteria that were deemed to be of general validity. The following were given particular mention:
  - allocating a larger share of development aid to the agri-food sector;
  - increasing attention to regions and countries most seriously stricken by the problem of hunger, which under the present circumstances indicated Sub-Saharan Africa a priority zone;
  - establishing a balance between the different type of intervention to promote integrated rural development;
  - covering an increasing share of local and recurrent costs;
  - gradually moving towards types of aid that are not rigidly structured in the form of projects;
  - providing more accessory project support facilities, such as rehabilitation and maintenance;

- agricultural credit;
- mobilizing resources of the private sector.

23. It was noted that it is not possible to identify any one institutional coordination centre; but it was agreed that - following a pragmatic and flexible approach - it was advisable to make the best possible use of existing fora. For coordination between donors, DAC was mentioned; for coordination between donors and recipients, the consultative groups of the World Bank and the Club du Sahel/CILSS were mentioned.

24. It was agreed that very great importance should be attached to concerted act on a country level, with the full involvement of the recipient country. This approach required equal partnership, in a spirit of cooperation which it was in the interests of both sides to promote.

25. The broad conclusion reached by the participants showed that the donor countries endorsed the general spirit that had been generated at recent high-level meetings - in Ottawa, Cancun and at the Paris Conference - fully conscious of their joint responsibility to harmonize and channel their actions in a joint endeavor.

The struggle to combat world hunger has emerged once again an unchallenged priority, to which the international community must address its joint commitment.

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