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Implications of declaring an international year for the  
mobilization of financial and technological resources  
for food and agriculture in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The seriousness of the food and agricultural situation in Africa has been, for the past few years, a subject of major concern and discussion in various forums and at various levels. It is a well recognized fact that, unlike other regions of the world, the production of food and agriculture in Africa has drastically deteriorated during the past two decades and that its present state, which has resulted in malnutrition and mounting food imports, continues to hamper all efforts for the development of the region.

2. This recognition is clearly reflected in the Lagos Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy for the Economic Development of Africa 1/ and the Regional Food Plan for Africa and in many General Assembly resolutions, among which are resolutions 35/69 of 5 December 1980, 36/186 of 17 December 1981, 37/245 of 21 December 1982 and 37/246 of 21 December 1982. The above Plans and resolutions clearly underline the urgent necessity to reverse the current trend in food and agricultural production in Africa, and to define and recommend programmes of the action and policies required at various levels to deal effectively with the

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problem. Among the programmes and action to be undertaken at the national, regional and international levels, within the context of tackling the problem of food and agriculture in Africa, is the mobilization and allocation of adequate financial, technical and manpower resources devoted to the agricultural sector. Despite the awareness of and concern for the necessity to increase resource allocation for food and agriculture in Africa at both the regional and international levels, most African countries are still in a very difficult position since the world economic recession continues to undermine most international assistance programmes through the entailed budget reduction and difficult money lending terms. An Inter-Agency Consultation on Food and Agricultural Technology in Africa met at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) at Addis Ababa, from 23 to 27 May 1983. The result of their deliberations is described below. Among the international organizations and agencies that participated in the meeting were the following: the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), as well as the International Livestock Control Association (ILCA).

3. Food and agriculture, more than any other sector in the African economies, has suffered from the nefarious impact of the current world recession and inflation. Its ability to generate income declined because of the regressing international market prices for agricultural products, the increase in imported agricultural input and the lack of adequate investment allocation to food and agriculture development. It is with this understanding and fully in line with the objectives set out in the above-mentioned Plans and resolutions which emphasize the necessity to mobilize substantial resources - both financial and technical - in order to deal effectively with the problem of food and agriculture in Africa, that the General Assembly adopted resolution 37/246. In that resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, after appropriate consultations with Governments, OAU, ECA, FAO, the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and UNDP, to submit an interim report through the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1983, to the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session on the implications of declaring an international year which would be committed to mobilizing financial and technological resources for food and agriculture in Africa, in accordance with the criteria for holding international years set out in the annex to Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/67 of 25 July 1980.

4. The following assessment by ECA of the feasibility and desirability of declaring an international year for the mobilization of financial and technological resources for food and agriculture in Africa is made in compliance with the above request and the guidelines for the designation of international years set out in the annex to Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/67.

5. The implications of proclaiming an international year may be considered from four major standpoints, namely: political, social, economic and financial.

6. From the political standpoint, the need and support for designating an international year for the mobilization of financial and technological resources

for food and agriculture, especially in Africa, has been expressed implicitly and overtly in the aftermath of the World Food Conference, held in 1974, through various political statements made by Heads of State in United Nations and OAU resolutions and at international and regional conferences. General Assembly resolution 37/246 could be seen as the crystallization of the ideas and movements that have mushroomed since the mid-1970s, especially after the Freetown Declaration of November 1976 which led to the preparation of the Regional Food Plan for Africa in 1978 and to the adoption in 1980 by African Heads of State and Government of the Lagos Plan of Action.

7. From the social viewpoint, the preambular paragraphs of General Assembly resolution 37/246 bespeak the magnitude of the suffering inflicted upon African populations by an unabated deteriorating situation as regards living conditions, nutritional and dietary standards and life expectancy, resulting from a decline in food production and worsening conditions in the agricultural sector.

8. From the economic angle, the proclamation of an international year on the subject would enhance and even accelerate the measures taken by African countries to increase substantially national food and agriculture production, and to implement the Lagos Plan of Action.

9. The financial aspect is that the proclamation of such a year should provide an opportunity for the mobilization of additional financial and technological resources from the international community to tackle the problems of productivity in food and agriculture in Africa.

10. On the one hand, the proposed year may be considered to meet most of the basic criteria established in the guidelines annexed to Council resolution 1980/67: (a) it is consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations; (b) it is of priority concern in the political, social, economic, cultural and humanitarian fields; (c) the subject is of concern to at least three continents: Africa, Asia and South and Central America; and (d) the subject definitely involves action at the international and national levels.

11. On the other hand, it should also be pointed out that a number of international years proclaimed for various developmental fields, including food and agriculture, are quite sufficient to sensitize the international community to the mobilization and allocation of needed resources for the development of agriculture in Africa. However, the importance of appeals being made - as they usually have been - for more resources from the same group of Western industrialized countries cannot be over-emphasized. The Lagos Plan of Action clearly emphasized the need for resource mobilization and for the effective use of these resources, in addition to those of several international and regional organizations, such as FAO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, the African Development Bank (ADB), IFAD and WFP, to name a few, which are entrusted with similar tasks. However, the problems of food and agriculture are of such a magnitude that more resources from both within and outside the United Nations system, as well as co-ordinated and consistent programmes for their utilization at the national, subregional and regional levels, have become essential.

12. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that to gauge the full implications of declaring such a year, full consideration should be given to all factors affecting African economies, particularly in the agricultural sector. These factors include the new international economic order, the North-South dialogue, restructuring of the international monetary and trade system, South-South co-operation, aid issues and the mounting debts of African countries under the present global economic recession.

13. As far as the procedures for proclaiming an international year on this particular subject are concerned, it should be borne in mind that the basic arrangements necessary for its organization and for its financing should be made before such a year is proclaimed. Such financing should, in principle, be based on voluntary contributions. The scope and the amount of the needed resources will have to be defined, estimated and provided for before a final decision is taken on the implementation of the year.

14. The organization of an international year will imply, among other things, a two-year period between the proclamation and the beginning of that year; the establishment of national committees or similar mechanisms which would prepare for, conduct and follow-up the international year at the national level; and the effective co-ordination of the activities of all United Nations organizations and bodies concerned.

15. The ECA secretariat, as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, will have to play an important role in organizing, co-ordinating, evaluating and reporting on the year at the regional level. Such a responsibility will entail the availability of substantial, additional financial and manpower resources, the source of which is not yet known.

16. Finally, past experience indicates that the declaration of an international year per se is not likely to increase the inflow of resources appreciably and that, even if more resources were made available, without the removal of policy, social, economic, administrative and technical bottle-necks at the national, regional and international levels, such additional resources could hardly help to improve the situation.

#### Notes

- 1/ See A/S-11/14, annex I.

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