

West African experts adopt strong recommendations to improve food security

Niamey, March 17, 2014 (ECA). The seventeenth Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of the Sub-Regional Office for West Africa of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa was held on March 3-4, 2014, at the President Hotel in Yamoussoukro, presided over by the Prefect of the Region of Bélier representing the Minister of State, Minister of Planning and Development of Côte d'Ivoire.

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Three important speeches marked the opening ceremony. One was delivered by the Director of the Sub-Regional Bureau for West Africa of the United Nations Commission for Africa, Dr. Dimitri SANGA who first thanked on behalf of the UNECA the Ivorian Government which in two successive years has accepted to host the meetings of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) of the Sub-Regional Office. Afterwards, he underlined all the importance of the meeting which was held at a moment when the sub-region is undergoing a period of high growth that makes most regions pale with envy, not only in Africa but also in the rest of the world. In effect, he continued, the ECOWAS space has experienced average growth rates of over 5% since 2005 and the outlook for 2014 is situated around 6.6%. However, this remarkable performance does not mask some challenges that the region faces. These are notably unemployment, food insecurity, the high demographic growth. In view of this array of problems, Dr. Dimitri Sanga requested the experts to reflect on and to find the ways and means of transforming the economies of the region in order to render them apt and propitious for generating inclusive growth that will generate decent jobs. He concluded that these reflections will be submitted to the Conference of Ministers planned for Abuja in Nigeria on March 25-30, 2014.

Speaking in turn, the outgoing President of the ICE thanked and encouraged the Sub-Regional Office for West Africa for its coherent implementation of recommendations formulated during the 16th ICE. After presenting an overview of the activities conducted during his mandate, notably the analyses on themes such as: mining operations, the green economy, gender, energy, initiatives to improve the economic and social situation through the creation of a forum of IGO working in West Africa, Mr. Anatole TOHOUGHE expressed the pressing need to have a common data base for all of the countries of the sub-region. Mr. TOHOUGHE then praised the excellent professional and cordial relationships that he had with the Sub-Regional Office during the whole of his mandate and invited his successor to work towards achieving the same dynamic.

Presiding over the opening ceremony on behalf of the Ivorian Minister of State, Minister of Planning and Development, the Prefect of the Region of Béliér first extended a warm welcome to the experts before congratulating them on the choice of his country, Côte d'Ivoire by the UNECA to host such an important meeting. For André Akponon, the West African sub-region has an important agricultural potential with very diverse ecosystems which create complementarity between production basins, thus facilitating the regional integration of agricultural economies and trade. The 17th session of the ICE, he continued, would thus make it possible to conduct solid reflections on food security, notably strengthening the productivity, quality and quantity of agro-sylvo-pastoral products for industrial transformation. After the opening ceremony, the experts listened to the report presented by the secretariat on the review of progress towards the MDGs and the regional and international agendas with a special emphasis on sustainable development (MDG 7). The participants also listened attentively to the report on the economic and social conditions in West Africa which show that our continent has been able to record a high growth rate. Moreover, they examined the report on the theme of the meeting "Food Security in West Africa: what is the contribution of the industrialization of the agricultural sub-sectors". This report underlined that West African agriculture which occupies over 60% of the active population is a determinant sector for employment and growth, but which is struggling to modernize and industrialize. The report advises Member countries to apply the recommended models of industrialization for the agricultural sub-sectors on strategic food products that are the most consumed in the sub-region, with a view to ensuring sustainable food security. The Secretariat also informed the experts on new strategies developed by the UNECA in the areas of capacity strengthening, partnership and knowledge management before reviewing the activities carried out by the Office between March 2013 and February 2014. These activities consisted primarily of meetings, seminars, publications and advisory services.

In the wings of the ICE meeting, the Director of the Sub-Regional Office for West Africa of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa made a joint presentation with the Director of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Statistique et d'Economie Appliqué (ENSEA) in Abidjan, who is also the Director General of the Felix Houphouët-Boigny National Polytechnical Institute of Yamoussoukro (INPHB), for a conference-debate for which the title of the theme was, "The challenges of measuring development efforts: Statistical tragedy or opportunity for rebirth?" This conference-debate, which raised much interest in the audience, had mobilized numerous experts and public servants in Côte d'Ivoire and 39 graduating students in statistics and economics from the ENSEA in Abidjan. At the end of the meeting, the participants of the 17th session of the ICE formulated some important recommendations which, according to the Prefect of the Region of Béliér representing the Ivorian Minister of State, Minister of Planning and Development, will make it possible without a doubt to find durable solutions to our problems. These 13 recommendations, aimed, among other things, at the following:

- Broadly disseminate the study on the contribution of the West African sub-region within the framework

of consultations on RIO-20 and specifically the objectives of sustainable development held in Addis Ababa;

- Encourage the ECOWAS and WAEMU Commissions to continue their efforts to popularize the texts adopted in the framework of integration, notably the measures concerning the implementation of the Common External Tariff (CET) of the ECOWAS in order that it be appropriated by all the actors concerned such as the private sector, civil society and media professionals;
- With a view to achieving the objective of creating a single currency, bring Member states to accept a more active multilateral surveillance that grants to the ECOWAS through the WAMA a role in the formulation and development of finance laws and in monitoring the execution of public finances;
- Call on Member states of the ECOWAS to select strategic local products and adopt industrialization models to develop their value chains from production to transformation and marketing;
- Strengthen the mechanisms of promotion for agricultural sub-sectors and the research and development structures;
- Favor strategic partnerships and alliances at all levels within West Africa and beyond the borders in order to promote at the regional scale public-private partnerships in order to intensify investments in agriculture;
- Invite the Member states of the ECOWAS to strengthen their state structures with the aim of producing statistics of quality and to make them available in time.

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