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REPORT TO THE CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS ON  
THE SITUATION OF FOOD IN AFRICA

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### Introduction

1. Since the beginning of 1983 the African food crisis has been the central concern of the international community. Almost all sub-Sahara African countries experienced exceptional food shortages requiring unprecedented food aid and food imports. In 1984/1985, FAO identified 21 countries as having critical food supply problems. The combined cereal production of the 21 countries in 1984/1985 was 14 per cent lower than the drought-affected 1983/1984 production, or about 23 per cent below normal.

2. The long-term African food situation has been particularly disturbing. During the 1970s per capita food production declined at an annual rate of 1 per cent. The decline accelerated during the early 1980s reaching nearly 2 per cent per year. Volume of food imports rose by 4 per cent per year while the volume of agricultural exports stagnated. Low-level technology, lack of technological packages suitable to the problems of small farmers, weak support services, inefficient administrative machinery, weak incentive schemes and policy framework aggravated by hostile environmental conditions and unfavourable international economic climate interacted to bring about the poor long-term performance of African agriculture.

3. The response of the international community to the plight of the African countries was very gratifying. International machineries such as the FAO/WFP Task Force set up to monitor the food supply situation of the affected countries, the FAO global information and early warning system on food and agriculture, the Special Office set up in Nairobi by the Secretary-General of the United Nations provided valuable services in sensitizing the international community.

4. This report discusses very briefly the food situation in Africa during 1985/1986, the rehabilitation efforts and some issues related to the long-term development of African agriculture.

#### I. THE FOOD SUPPLY SITUATION IN 1985/1986

5. According to the latest FAO reports, with favourable rainfalls in almost all African countries, a substantially improved food situation is estimated for sub-Sahara African countries in 1985/1986. The position of many of the 21 countries which were critically affected by the drought of the last three consecutive years is back to normal. A number of countries have even achieved surplus production for exports.

6. Although there has been a marked improvement of food production for many countries, this does not mean the problem of African agriculture is over. Many countries still face exceptional emergency situation. According to FAO six countries, namely Angola, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Mozambique and the Sudan require exceptional emergency assistance. Moreover, most of

the remaining 15 countries affected by drought previously and other countries not listed as needing exceptional assistance will continue to require food aid and commercial imports to cover their structural deficits. Provisional estimates by FAO show import requirements of 6.6 million tons, some 5.6 million tons less than the previous year's import requirements by the 21 countries.

7. According to preliminary estimates the African region registered the highest production increases in 1985 (table). In most of the countries affected, production is back to the 1981/1982 level which was the best year ever. The preliminary estimates of index number of production for 1985 for the 21 countries is 30 per cent higher compared to the 1980-1984 base level production. The seven Sahelian countries severely affected by drought earlier have achieved a record crop in 1985. The aggregate estimated output is 6.7 million tons compared to 1984 production of 4.4 million tons, of the seven Sahelian countries affected previously, only Cape Verde is expected to need emergency food aid because 1985 production is estimated to be about 1,000 tons short of 1984 production.

8. In the Eastern African subregion crop assessments by FAO indicated a good crop of 4.6 million tons in the Sudan and a shortfall of some 1 million tons for Ethiopia primarily due to unfavourable rainfall conditions in Wollo, north-east Shoa and Harargie administrative regions and shortage of seeds and draught power. In the Sudan a continuing relief need is expected in Darfur and Kordofan regions. Logistic support would be required to transfer available surplus within the country to the areas of deficit.

9. In southern Africa due to favourable weather conditions the 1985 harvest has been good and in most countries the food supply situation is reported to be back to normal. Only Angola, Botswana and Mozambique will continue to experience exceptional food shortages requiring food aid. The aggregate food aid needs of the six countries in the subregion, namely Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe is about 0.75 million tons, of which 0.56 million tons are required by Angola, Botswana and Mozambique.

10. The outlook for 1986 appears to be good as crop production is back to normal in the majority of the previously affected countries. Shortage of rainfall in the northern areas and Harargie regions, critical logistic problems and shortage of seeds and other inputs such as fertilizers, shortage of draught animals, displacement of people and generally malnourished and weak rural population still render Ethiopia susceptible to continued food supply problem. In Angola, although rainfall has been favourable and crop harvests have been good in 1985, due to continued disturbances and displacement of people there is need for continued assistance. The situation in Botswana is less favourable. Production in 1985 is estimated to be 50 per cent lower than normal. Pasture conditions have also been poor and the national herd has been estimated to have been reduced from 3 million to 2.3 million. FAO estimates indicate 648,000 people as eligible for drought relief. Cereal import requirement for Botswana is estimated at 180,000 tons of which 41,000 is food-aid which has already been covered by donor allocations.

## FOOD PRODUCTION, AFRICA 1980-85

|                            | UNIT   | 1980  | 1981  | 1982  | 1983  | 1984  | 1985  | Average annual change % |           |
|----------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------------------|-----------|
|                            |        |       |       |       |       |       |       | 1980/1984               | 1984/1985 |
| Cereals total              | 1000mt | 61922 | 61439 | 62640 | 55820 | 56209 | 70202 | -9.2                    | 24.9      |
| Maize                      | "      | 18658 | 19091 | 19455 | 17973 | 18869 | 22867 | 1.1                     | 21.3      |
| Rice                       | "      | 8576  | 8713  | 8886  | 8985  | 8809  | 9324  | 2.7                     | 5.8       |
| Millet                     | "      | 10035 | 10341 | 9768  | 8279  | 8267  | 11001 | -17.6                   | 33.1      |
| Sorghum                    | "      | 10575 | 11633 | 9941  | 8945  | 8219  | 11058 | -22.3                   | 34.5      |
| Wheat                      | "      | 7593  | 6659  | 8033  | 6983  | 7212  | 9134  | -5.0                    | 26.7      |
| Barley                     | "      | 4642  | 3400  | 4647  | 3087  | 3448  | 5275  | -25.7                   | 53.0      |
| Roots and tubers           | "      | 86248 | 88117 | 91905 | 89340 | 97292 | 95772 | 12.8                    | -1.6      |
| Cassava                    | "      | 48377 | 49575 | 51514 | 50728 | 56230 | 54369 | 16.2                    | -3.3      |
| Yams                       | "      | 22756 | 23108 | 24442 | 22614 | 24734 | 24784 | 8.7                     | 0.2       |
| Pulses total               | "      | 5262  | 5362  | 5833  | 5507  | 5417  | 5604  | 2.9                     | 3.5       |
| Meat total                 | "      | 5572  | 5742  | 5929  | 6013  | 6106  | 6264  | 9.6                     | 2.6       |
| Milk total                 | "      | 11993 | 12366 | 12976 | 13414 | 13286 | 12754 | 10.8                    | -4.0      |
| Citrus fruit total         | "      | 3889  | 3768  | 4088  | 4017  | 4347  | 4461  | 11.8                    | 2.6       |
| Plantains                  | "      | 15425 | 16007 | 16801 | 16766 | 16707 | 16744 | 8.3                     | 0.2       |
| Fruit excl. melons, total  | "      | 32118 | 32375 | 33894 | 33933 | 34433 | 34656 | 7.2                     | 0.6       |
| Vegetables & melons, total | "      | 22093 | 22664 | 22921 | 23896 | 24392 | 24858 | 10.4                    | 1.9       |

Source: FAO, 1985 FAO Production Computer Print-outs, 12/16/85  
 Statistics Division, Rome, Italy.

## II. REHABILITATION OF AFRICAN AGRICULTURE

11. The objective of rehabilitation is to bring the economies of the affected countries back to at least the level it had been before the emergency and to create the conditions for sustained growth and development in the spirit of self-reliance. Rehabilitation efforts are distinct from medium- and long-term development programmes, but they should complement and reinforce ongoing programmes of the countries concerned.

12. In the aftermath of the emergency the distressed countries find themselves in a state of bankruptcy. In the attempt to combat the effect of the drought, normal development programmes had to be suspended; resources, administrative machineries, manpower, transportation facilities and services had to be redirected. Foreign exchange reserves are depleted and the whole state machinery is overstrained. At the farm level assets are depleted, inputs such as seed have been eaten to sustain life, draught animals are either dead or too weak to work, farm lands have been degraded. People are too weak to work in the field. Rural areas are depopulated due to migration of the people to cities in search of food and employment opportunities which are not there. These are some of the odds against which the affected countries have to function, thus calling for outside assistance to rehabilitate their agricultural sector and restore the health of their economies.

13. The components of agricultural rehabilitation activities include: (a) provision of crop and livestock production inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, livestock feed, veterinary supplies; (b) provisions of farm assets such as draught animals, farm tools and equipment; (c) maintenance and rehabilitation of existing irrigation, storage and other infrastructures; (d) development of small (micro) irrigation systems; (e) development of water supplies; (f) rehabilitation of projects disrupted by the emergency; (g) water and soil conservation practices; (h) provision of credit facilities and streamlining of marketing and incentive schemes; (i) training of farmers in improved crop and livestock husbandry practices and providing in-service training for rural development agents.

14. As soon as the emergency situation subsided, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in close collaboration with the concerned countries, undertook the task of preparing projects for the rehabilitation of the agricultural sectors of the critically affected countries. The projects were designed with the objectives of enhancing efficient utilization of existing capacities and programmes in selected areas and better use of new programmes and resources. The criteria applied in the selection of the projects were:

(a) Complementarity to ongoing or future government actions and/or other assistance, including present FAO programmes and projects operating in the country;

(b) Possibility to start most projects within a few months, and to achieve a significant impact in less than three years;

(c) Benefit to a large number of food producers and populations recently affected by calamities;

(d) Projects containing a technical assistance and training component, especially for in-service training;

(e) Availability of efficient logistic and institutional infrastructure, and the delivery support services at the project site to guarantee reasonable prospects for impact. If necessary, the project may help strengthen these infrastructure and services.

15. On the basis of the above criteria FAO initially prepared 122 projects estimated to cost \$US 228 million. In view of the seriousness of the emergency situation a separate programme was drawn for Ethiopia. The Ethiopian programme was presented to donors on 30 January 1985 and for the rest of the affected countries on 29 March 1985.

16. According to the Director-General's report to the twenty-third session of the FAO Conference in November 1985 projects costing about \$US 200 million have been covered by tentative or definite pledges from various sources of finance up until that time. It has also been reported that FAO had redirected its regular programme activities to the extent of 50 per cent of budget for the purpose of rehabilitating African agriculture.

17. FAO is also conducting an indepth study of the African agriculture to provide basis for the future development of the agricultural sector.

18. A special session of the General Assembly is planned to be held in May 1986 which will focus on Africa's economic problems. That meeting will devote considerable emphasis to the rehabilitation of African agriculture. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank and the Organization of African Unity are preparing programmes to be considered by the special session.

19. The cost of rehabilitating the agricultural sector of the affected countries is no doubt enormous, but there is no better alternative to the increasing dependence on food aid.

20. The rehabilitation of their agricultural sector is the responsibility of the African Governments themselves. But the problems are overwhelming and beyond the capacity of most of the affected countries because of their weakened position as a result of the emergency. Thus, generous flow of resources and technical assistance over and above emergency aid is needed. The past three years have provided a unique opportunity to study in great detail the problems and potentialities or lack of it. There is now a growing sense of responsibility and indeed a desire to assist the development of African agriculture, through well-planned and integrated approach so as to lay strong foundation and not to witness similar human tragedies in future. This prevailing awareness among the international community about the precariousness of African agriculture and the strong commitment among African Governments themselves, that concerted effort on their part is essential to put their agriculture on a firm foundation, provides a particularly opportune time for action.