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COMMITTEE I

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING

Held in Africa Hall, Addis Ababa,
on Tuesday, 25 February 1964, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. SIDIKOU (Niger)

Secretary: Mr. EWING

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AGRICULTURE (Item 5 (c) of the agenda) (continued)

The land reform situation in Africa (E/CN.14/278)

Mr. ZAYATI (Tunisia) said that his delegation had already explained the reasons for which it had requested that the question be included in the agenda. It was not a matter of discussing the principle of land reform, for many international organizations, particularly the General Assembly of the United Nations, had already had to deal with it but of comparing the experience required by countries which had already taken measures for its realisation.

The Economic Commission for Africa had explained the situation in document E/CN.14/278. Although conditions differed from one country to another, the objectives remained everywhere the same; to ensure a decent life for the rural population and to establish social justice in the countryside through an improvement in agricultural production and an equitable distribution of the yield from the land.

The Economic Commission for Africa might find it useful to make a comparative study of original experiments made in Africa. The African countries which had already gathered their own experience might find material for reflection and possible corrections in such a study and the other countries might draw positive lessons that would help them to direct their own agricultural development.

The Tunisian delegation proposed that a committee or a study group composed of national experts should be established to carry out the study with instructions, under the aegis of the Economic Commission for Africa, to visit the countries which had already instituted land reform and present a report to the Economic Commission for Africa at its seventh session. His delegation was prepared to submit a draft resolution to that effect to the Commission.

Mr. LOKO (Dahomey) observed that for most African States it was indispensable to reform traditional agricultural structures, which were ill-suited to the development of modern techniques. That required

land reform; it would be necessary to divide the land into small holdings or re-distribut it. It was also necessary to reform the systems of inheritance, which conflicted with any improvement of production. Furthermore, the adoption of modern techniques called for the establishment of agricultural co-operatives. All those measures would have to go hand in hand with solving the difficulty of water supply and road and school construction. But it was above all necessary to train leaders, within the rural population itself, who would help the latter to overcome its mistrust of the urban environment.

Mr. NAPOMA (Northern Rhodesia) observed that although land reform was very important for the development of agriculture, it was nonetheless a very delicate question for which it was difficult to find any simple and generally applicable solution. Land reform was linked to the question of property title and to various local customs, particularly those respecting inheritance.

Property title had an important role in the grant of agricultural loans; for that reason it had been observed that agriculture was better developed where farmers had been able to register their title to the land.

He thought that the maximum benefit to the African States would accrue from an exchange of information on what each country was doing by way of land reform.

Mr. TIEBILE (Mali) announced to the Committee that he would contribute to the archives of the Economic Commission for Africa a document on land reform in Mali. Mali had carried out 80 per cent of the recommendations listed on pages 3 and 4 of document E/CN.14/278. That list was not exhaustive, however, and the delegation of Mali felt obliged to suggest that the ECA should be commissioned to carry out the following work: a comparative study of motorized cultivation as opposed to cultivation with draught animals; a study of the positive measures to be taken to integrate stock-breeding into agriculture; a study of the role of small-scale hydraulic works in agricultural economy so as to create a supplementary activity in the dry season; the preparation of simple technical reports on the most effective methods is small-scale hydraulic installations.

Mr. MEKOUAR (Morocco) supported the proposal of the representative of Tunisia to appoint a team of experts to prepare a general study of interest to all the African States.

On the other hand, he observed that land reform was defined in the document published by the ECA as an integrated programme of measures for the elimination of defects in the land structure which were obstacles to economic and social development. But land reform should not be an end in itself, but rather a kind of catalyst, capable of accelerating development, on condition that it was accompanied by a plan that provided for the use of resources and new activities in other sectors of the economy. Also, the document had not sufficiently stressed the advantages of marketing and had merely enumerated the defects in land structure and organization in a large number of underdeveloped countries. But it was thanks to marketing that those defects would be corrected and outmoded methods would disappear.

Mr. CURTIS (Guinea) said that there were two methods of land reform: the first arranged for a progressive transition period and the second, a revolutionary method, gave the land all at once to those who cultivate it.

Guinea itself had solved the problem by declaring all land the property of the State: it had thus prevented speculation and placed all arable surface at the disposal of the peasants.

Mr. BENYELLES (Algeria), who also agreed with the observations of the representative of Morocco, pointed out that in Algeria most land already belonged to the State and was exploited by worker management committees.

Mr. HART (Nigeria) said that fragmentary studies undertaken separately or relating to sub-regions chosen at random were not sufficient for treating the important and complex problems facing land reform. It was necessary to make a complete study of the land systems of all the regions of Africa so as to give the Commission a general idea of the prevailing situation. Without for a moment refusing the active participation of the ECA and specialized agencies concerned, it would be wise to entrust those studies to a more competent body, such as the African Economic Development

and Planning Institute. On the other hand, regional land reform institutes, the establishment of which had been advocated in document E/CN.14/278, could undertake research in their respective zones while providing for the training of land reform specialists.

The Nigerian delegation noted with satisfaction that international financial bodies had often been invited to be among the first to submit projects concerning land reform. In fact, the success of the measures recommended by the ECA for adoption by the member States depended largely on the availability of the necessary funds. But in practice financial bodies were more willing to give assistance to enterprises they knew to be profitable, which was not the case with very costly land reform programmes. It was therefore necessary to induce those bodies to review their credit policy and make their rules more flexible. This was all the more important in that at least 60 per cent of the necessary capital had to be obtained from outside sources.

The establishment of a land reform bank did not seem necessary for the time being as it was best not to establish a multiplicity of new institutions, and all efforts should be directed to establishing an African development bank through which, moreover, the capital required for financing land reform programmes might well be channelled.

In any case, it was best never to lose sight of the fact that land reform was one of the most delicate operations to carry out and that such projects should be undertaken only in close consultation with the Government concerned and the national organizations because they were familiar with the difficulties at the local level.

Mr. OKELO-ODONGO (Kenya) stressed the importance for Africa of carrying out land reforms which would have an immense influence on the lives of the rural masses who formed the majority of the population and, thereby, on the rate of development of national economies. It was obvious that the development of agriculture was unthinkable without the complete reform of the systems of land tenure which determined how the land was used; but there was no easy solution to those problems. In most cases, the local usages had to be reconciled with a foreign system introduced during the colonial period. The African system of land holding, though its forms varied from region to region, was based on communal property, which meant that an African farmer could not enforce rights for which registration was necessary; he could not, for example obtain a loan against title deeds under a farm credit system. In view of the far-reaching influence of the system of land tenure on the economic and social position of farmers, it was essential that a complete study of existing systems of land tenure in Africa should be made, that the principles on which they were based should be analysed and that those capable of operating within a modern economic system should be selected. Another method might be to attempt, on the basis of such a general study, to design a land-holding system the adoption of which could be recommended to African States, and in particular to areas where no deeply-rooted traditions existed, such as those which had recently been opened to cultivation by irrigation or reclamation works. The studies should be carried out by the Economic Commission for Africa.

Mr. SMITH (Secretariat) stated that unfortunately land reform had not yet been undertaken by all African countries, and that the programmes which were being carried out were mostly very recent. In those circumstances, it would be premature for ECA to engage in a general study covering various regions as suggested by the Nigerian representative.

The Economic Commission for Africa had already organized, in collaboration with FAO, two Development Centres on land policy, one

for East and Central Africa, set up in 1960, and the other for West Africa, set up in December 1963. The Nigerian representative would doubtless be glad to hear that similar centres for other regions would doubtless be organized in the future.

The remarks of the representative of Morocco concerning commercialization were well founded. Africa obviously suffered from the fact that it produced for subsistence and not for the market. If the authors of the document before the Commission had emphasized production, that was because commercialization belonged, strictly speaking, to another section and was only treated here in the broadest terms, that is to say, in connexion with local and international markets.

The Tunisian representative had suggested that a group of experts be appointed to make a comparative study of the land reforms being undertaken in Africa. It should be pointed out that every two years the United Nations and the specialized agencies prepared for the Economic and Social Council a report on the state of agrarian reform throughout the world, which obviously dealt with the position in Africa also. The previous report had been submitted to the Council in 1963, and the next would be in 1965.

Mr. KOHN (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that those taking part in the Development Centre on Land Policy organized in 1962 had recommended that farm credit institutions should no longer be encouraged to treat title deeds to land as the only valid securities for their loans; loans should be granted in accordance with the solvency of the borrower for whom, for example, agriculture co-operatives could stand as guarantors.

It followed that the difficulties arising from land-holding systems mentioned during the discussion could be overcome in countries which possessed a satisfactory farm credits system.

The CHAIRMAN closed the discussion on the item and reminded members of the Committee that the Commission had already expressly invited all Member States to provide the secretariat with whatever information they possessed on the state of land reform.

Irrigation problems in Africa

Mr. ZAYATI (Tunisia), said that one of ECA's activities in 1963 had been a very interesting study on irrigation as a method of increasing output from land in Africa which had been published in the Agricultural Economics Bulletin for Africa (No. 4, November 1963 - E/CN.14/AGREB/4). That study drew attention to certain problems which merited further investigation by ECA in collaboration with FAO.

Certain countries had launched considerable hydro development schemes, which included the irrigation of vast areas. Such programmes required the perfectioning of methods to ensure the optimum use of the water resources involved. It would be very valuable if ECA would collate and disseminate the experience gained. Results might be analysed by a special institute of highly qualified irrigation experts which might be set up in the northern sub-region under the auspices of FAO and ECA. The Tunisian delegation was ready to submit a draft resolution on that subject to the Commission.

Mr. DIAKITE (Mali) thought that as the subject had not yet received careful consideration from ECA, it would be better to postpone the discussion of it to a later session. In the meantime ECA could examine the question and consider the desirability of calling a conference once it had completed a synthetic study of the methods used and the experience gained in various African countries.

Mr. KANE (Mauritania) supported the suggestion of the representative of Mali.

BY 12 votes to 2, the Committee decided to defer the study of irrigation problems in Africa till fuller information was available.

The CHAIRMAN said that it remained open to the Tunisian delegation to submit a draft resolution in plenary if it thought fit.

Mr. GABDOU (Chad), supported by Mr. ABDELKADER (Algeria) proposed a short suspension of the meeting before taking the next item on the agenda.

Mr. CURTIS (Guinea) opposed the proposal.

The motion was adopted by 16 votes to 12.

The meeting, suspended at 4.50 p.m., was resumed at 5.10 p.m.

The CHAIRMAN said that the delegation of Morocco and the Congo (Leopoldville) had tabled a motion that the Committee should consider the question of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development after completing item 5 of the agenda.

Mr. ZAYATI (Tunisia) and Mr. LOKO (Dahomey) supported the motion.

The motion was adopted by 15 votes to 2.

INDUSTRY, TRANSPORT AND NATURAL RESOURCES (E/CN.14/245, Add.1 and Corr.1) (Item 5 (e) of the agenda)

The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to consider item 5(e) of the agenda, recalling that the Commission would deal with air transport and telecommunications in plenary.

Mr. ABDELKADER (Algeria), as Chairman of the Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources and Transport, introduced the report of that Committee on its Second session (E/CN.14/245, Add.1).

That important meeting had been attended by highly-qualified representatives of 21 African countries, and conducted in a spirit of great earnestness. As an illustration of the care with which participants had approached their work, he recalled that the part of the Committee's report concerning industry, and more particularly the part dealing with the Industrial Co-ordination Mission to West Africa, had been left pending, after heated discussions. It was later to be given further consideration by a Committee of Ten, which, after several meetings, for which it had invited comments from governments, had recently submitted a revised text (E/CN.14/245/Corr.1).

The programme of work (annexed to the Report), which was to be spread over two years, also indicated the Committee's desire to achieve positive results. The preparation and organization of the session had imposed a heavy burden of work on the secretariat, for which it deserved high praise.

With a view to seeing their decisions carried out, but not wishing to betray any lack of confidence or a spirit of discrimination, the participants, considering that delegates bore sole responsibility in the matter and that it was for the governments to define the scope of their work, decided that the Bureau of the Committee should meet again in June 1964.

He then outlined the main decisions of the Committee regarding industry, transport and natural resources, as set out in the report. With regard to internal transport, he regretted that the report made no reference to a suggestion by the Algerian delegate that a committee of experts should be appointed to investigate the standardization of road legislation, with particular reference to road signs, trade documents, customs regulations and the weight and size of vehicles.

In conclusion, he pointed out that the adoption of the report by the Commission would allow the Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources and Transport to pass on to the stage of positive achievement.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.