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Item 5 of the provisional agenda**

**SUBREGIONAL CO-OPERATION ON THE PRODUCTION OF TUBERS
AND CEREALS IN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA,
WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN**

Executive Summary

* E/ECA/TPCW.9/1/Rev.1.

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The deterioration in the food situation in numerous African countries during the last few years, has caused and continues to cause serious disquiet both at subregional and international level.

Without doubt, the persistence of drought and its catastrophic effects on agriculture and the damage caused by cyclones in the Indian Ocean have contributed to the worsening of the situation, which has been further exacerbated by the repercussions of the international economic crisis.

The fall in the price of agriculture exports has seriously lowered export earnings in African countries and has, therefore, sapped their import capacity, particularly of foodstuffs, but also of the equally important goods necessary to building up their economies in order to pay their debts.

Nevertheless, the insufficiency of development policies, particularly in the rural and agricultural sector, is important as one of the serious causes of food deficit.

National development policies have often been biased in favour of export crops and few efforts have been made to balance population growth and food needs.

The crisis, therefore, is not only the result of external factors in Africa, but results from the combination and interaction of different internal and international forces.

Cereals and tubers are the staple foods of the populations in the subregion (74.5 per cent of total cultivated land). Although the region was 95 per cent self-sufficient in staple foods during the 1970s, it has become a large importer of cereals and dependent upon international aid to fulfil the needs of the large population.

In spite of the progress achieved as a result of considerable effort in the subregion, particularly as a result of policy readjustment and a more judicious choice of methods, the food situation remains critical and some countries continue to experience serious food shortfalls, even though climatic conditions are more favourable.

Today it is largely recognized that African women play a crucial role in the production, conservation and marketing of agricultural products and foods.

Nevertheless, women have often been neglected in development policies and strategies, partly because they are not considered as production agents.

Their role has been highlighted in numerous United Nations resolutions and in Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery, 1986-1990, which strongly recommended the inclusion of women in strategies aimed at solving the food crisis.

Bearing in mind the different parameters affecting the world economy in the long term and the finality of the food problem, which is also a security problem, it is more than ever essential that the countries in the subregion reorientate their economic development strategies.

In view of the dangers inherent in food aid, in whatever form, countries must make every necessary effort to improve their productive capacity and to orientate their strategies towards the development of the small peasant sectors, including women.

Taken in isolation, however, national economies in these countries are fragile. Thus, it is crucial that the countries pool their efforts to achieve their food objectives and so promote subregional economic co-operation in the production of foodstuffs, particularly of cereals and tubers.

In addition, by their activities as a pressure group in international relations, the subregional grouping can significantly contribute to the self-sufficiency of the subregion.

Such co-operation requires the definition of common interests and joint actions, as well as a harmonization of national food policies.

All strategies aimed at food self-sufficiency, however, will only succeed if women are given their rightful place.