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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda**

MANAGEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION
PARTICULARLY DROUGHT AND DESERTIFICATION ASPECTS, IN THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF AFRICA'S PRIORITY PROGRAMME FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The African region has been very adversely affected by a series of bad and debilitating droughts which have spread over a period of nearly 20 years, since 1968. The worst-hit areas were located in the Sudano-Sahelian climatic zone which stretches from the West African States of Mauritania and Senegal and covers the whole of the Sahel countries including Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya in the eastern parts of the continent. The Southern African countries which include Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Angola were equally disastrously hit.

2. The droughts served to highlight and to exacerbate a process of permanent ecological damage. This ecological damage has been characterized by, among other things, severe soil erosion and the spread of sand dunes in former agricultural lands. The result was the rapid decline in agricultural lands, particularly those located in the ecologically fragile semi-arid and arid zones, the alkalinization and salinization of irrigated lands, the degradation of rangelands caused by overstocking and overgrazing, the decline in woodlands and forestlands caused by massive clearing and deforestation. It was soon realized that these processes were not only confined to the Sahel or, for that matter, to Africa alone, and that one was in fact declining with a global process.

3. It was the realization that this type of environmental degradation was a global process which led to the United Nations Conference on Desertification (UNCOD), held in Nairobi, Kenya in 1977. UNCOD provided an excellent forum for discussing the desertification problems of the whole world and its recommendations for action became known as the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD).

4. In response to the problems of drought and desertification and to the initiatives of UNCOD/PACD, a number of African subregional and regional initiatives were taken, notably the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the Institut du Sahel, the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) and the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) and, at the regional level, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN). All these initiatives have received the support of UNEP, UNSO-UNDP, FAO, WMO, ECA and other international organizations as well as bilateral agencies concerned with drought and desertification management in the region.

5. To give environmental considerations a greater dimension and the problems of drought and desertification greater emphasis than before, the first economic summit of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity which met in Lagos, Nigeria in 1980 and agreed on the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980-2000, identified drought and desertification as important aspects of natural resource development strategy in Africa.

6. Throughout this period, ECA has kept the OAU informed of its activities in the field of environmental management as well as in various economic fields. There have been joint action programmes to deal with pressing environmental issues such as the management of drought and the control of desertification. The latest example of this co-operation came in the joint ECA/OAU document on Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery, 1986-1990 (APPER) which was also adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD) in 1986.

7. ECA, therefore, plays the role of leadership in co-ordinating assistance to member States in the implementation of APPER and the UN-PAAERD. This has involved the incorporation of the principles of APPER and the UN-PAAERD, particularly the drought and desertification aspects into ongoing programmes with specific emphasis on the programmes of the subregional and regional inter-governmental institutions.

8. In order to obtain a closer look at the various activities to manage drought and control desertification within the context of the implementation of APPER, it is useful to review the situation at the subregional level and ultimately at the national level.

9. In the countries of the Maghreb - Algeria, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco and Tunisia - desertification is attributed to overall population growth, the settlement of former pastoral nomads in government settlement schemes and the spread of agriculture (mainly arboriculture) to marginal lands. Rangelands are overstocked and overgrazed; livestock pressure has led to wind and water erosion, woodlands are degraded by cutting for fuelwood, clearing or the ravages of bush fires. The spread of agriculture to fragile eco-systems is also followed by serious desertification. Sand drifting is common on croplands and waterlogging, silting and salinization all plague irrigation projects. It is with this background that the countries of this subregion are responding to drought and desertification and are attempting to implement this aspect of APPER within the context of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Desertification.

10. The problem of drought and desertification in the Sahel zone of West Africa is probably the best documented throughout Africa. In this subregion there are two different units, one of which is more affected than the other. The most severely affected countries include Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, the Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Senegal. The rest of the countries of the subregion are only partially desertified because large parts of their territory lie within the humid zone. These include Benin, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Cameroon. Apart from national programmes, the majority of the countries of the subregion are participating in trans-Saharan activities for combating desertification, either within the framework of CILSS or the Ministerial Conference on Desertification.

11. As regards the countries of Eastern Africa members of IGADD (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda), they also experienced

severe drought and desertification problems as much as those of the West African Sahel, though varying in degree from country to country. The most severely hit were Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia. National programmes have been developed, some of which are now being co-ordinated by IGADD.

12. In the countries of the Southern Africa that form SADCC (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe), they do not have the same objectives as either CILSS or IGADD. However, in the last 10 years, a series of bad droughts drew the attention of the member States of SADCC to study carefully the recommendations of UNCOD/PACD in the implementation of APPER and to adopt most of the strategies suggested, since the environmental issues addressed were virtually the same.

13. A number of recommendations were made for action at the national subregional and regional levels. Important among them are those dealing with the establishment of national early warning systems, ecological monitoring and assessment institutions as well as a review of the land tenure and land-use systems to better manage drought and control desertification. Within this context, ECA should play an active role in supporting member States in the formulation of their national plans of action using the newly established African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD).