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Report on the FAO Regional Meeting for Africa

Background

1. Every two years, at the invitation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Regional Office for Africa, ministers of agriculture in Africa meet for over a week to deliberate on the problems of agriculture in Africa. This gathering has as its primary objective to bring together all shades of opinions from African policy makers with respect to agriculture with a view to securing a better understanding of the problems and peculiarities of African Governments with respect to agriculture, which the FAO can translate into the regular programme of work of the organization as means of resolving African agricultural problems in a manner consistent with the policies of member countries.

2. Prior to such meetings and concurrently with them, technical committees meet again for over a week, they are comprised of technical experts representing the Governments members of the FAO African region. While the ministerial sessions are largely devoted to matters of policies and strategies, the technical sessions are devoted mainly to the review of technical papers in the field of agriculture, with FAO having responsibility for the subject matter and programmes of these sessions. The reports of the technical sessions are invariably submitted to the ministers for approval in plenary meetings.

Ninth FAO Regional Conference for Africa:

3. The Ninth FAO Regional Conference for Africa was held at Freetown, Sierra Leone, from 2 to 12 November 1976. The two technical committees were held from 2 to 6 November and the ministerial meeting immediately after, from 8 to 12 November.

4. Technical Committee I discussed the Regional Representative's review of FAO activities in the region (ARC/76/2); exports of tropical wood products (ARC/76/3); prospects of freshwater fisheries development in Africa (ARC/76/4); improving livestock production in Africa (ARC/76/5); and the orientation of agricultural marketing policies in the African region (ARC/76/6).

5. Technical Committee II considered African Agricultural development, with special reference to food production (ARC/76/7); investment policy requirements for increasing food production in Africa (ARC/76/8); and the new international economic order: policy implications for African agriculture (ARC/76/10).

6. The ministerial meeting, which was opened by the President of Sierra Leone in the presence of the Director-General of FAO, discussed the following substantive items: country papers and reports submitted by heads of delegation; orientation for the future work of FAO in the region (ARC/76/9); election of two members of the African region to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and to the Consultative Group on Food Production and Investment (CGFPI); the reports of the Technical Committees; and the Freetown Declaration. The major decisions of the Conference are summarized below.

Elections

7. The Conference elected the Congo and Ghana to represent the African region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and decided that Senegal and Sierra Leone should continue to represent the region on the Consultative Group on Food Production and Investment.

Orientation for the future work of FAO in the African region

8. The Conference considered document ARC/76/9, which highlighted the major FAO policy orientation for the future work of the organization within the African region. The areas identified in connexion with the policy orientation - investment promotion, training, transfer and adaptation of technology, human resources development and fisheries and forestry development - were endorsed.

9. More specifically, the Conference requested FAO to (a) give priority to training of extension personnel within the envisaged training programmes and strengthen extension departments in schools of agriculture; (b) assist member States in the structuring of their extension and information services; (c) ensure that fellowships and training programmes were offered in educational establishments in the region, thus making such training more relevant to the needs of the countries of the region; (d) increase the practical content of such training programmes and foster technical co-operation among the countries of the region; (e) accord the greatest priority to the effective implementation of programmes within the priority areas identified and to report on programmes undertaken; and (f) recognize the importance of livestock development and to accord it the necessary priority, paying special attention to applied research.

10. For their part, member Governments were requested to: (a) allocate resources commensurate with the importance of the agricultural sector; (b) support FAO measures in programmes at the national and regional levels to promote agricultural development generally and enhance regional co-operation; and (c) take a regular inventory of FAO assistance to them and to indicate the effectiveness of such assistance in solving problems and enhancing agricultural production.

The Freetown Declaration

11. Significantly, in the Freetown Declaration (see annex), the countries members of the region expressed their frustrations and hopes for the future of agriculture in Africa. Attention is drawn in particular to paragraph 10 of the Declaration, which is of great significance to the work programme of ECA in general and that of the Joint ECA/FAO Agriculture Division in particular.