



Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

**Special event on
THE FOOD CRISES IN AFRICA**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The statement that has been jointly prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which I represent, and the World Food Programme (WFP) on the occasion of this special event, has a clear message: the food crises in Africa that make the newspaper headlines are but the tip of an iceberg and constitute the visible part of a deep-seated economic crisis that has evolved in the region over time.

In recent months, there have been numerous articles and reports on the crisis in Niger, Sudan, the Horn of Africa and southern Africa. The latest estimates are that 35 million Africans are in an emergency situation, requiring food aid. That is the tip of the iceberg. In the submerged portion are 204 million Africans who can barely survive today because they have insufficient food, and who tomorrow, in the event of a conflict, drought or other shock, could find themselves in a situation where their survival depended on emergency food aid. Their precariousness makes them terribly vulnerable to the slightest external shock.

These 200 million or so people – approximately one African in three – are already weakened and cannot exert their full capacity to work or to improve their living conditions. They have been rendered fragile, especially the children, and are easy prey for disease: malnutrition and hunger are viewed as the primary cause of mortality in the world, before AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. This mass of Africans suffering hunger, is the army of sufferers, of what people have called the “forgotten emergency”.

This situation, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the result of a long process of economic decline that has translated into a steady increase in poverty: in 2001, almost half the African population were living below the poverty threshold of US\$1 per day. The reduced share of national budgets allocated to agriculture and rural development, the collapse of investment and the abandonment of public services in rural areas, coupled with inappropriate policies are largely to blame for feeble economic growth and economic stagnation in rural areas where growth is very slow, slower than population growth. For example, food production in sub-Saharan Africa increased by an annual average of 2.4 percent between 1961 and 2003, while the population grew by an annual 2.8 percent during the same period.

Everyone recognizes the crucial role of food aid in crisis situations and the capital importance of WFP's work. WFP has been able to develop new intervention strategies that have considerably boosted the effectiveness of aid while lessening its potential negative consequences, especially on markets. Many lives have been saved thanks to its intervention. However, many more lives could have been saved if sufficiently sustained efforts had been made to promote agricultural and rural development and thus prevent the gradual increase in chronic food insecurity in Africa.

With WFP and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), FAO has proposed a twin-track approach that addresses both the short term and the long term, and that combines safety nets for the most vulnerable populations with programmes of investment and support for production activities to enable the poorest populations to move out of food insecurity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sustainably enhancing the food security of populations suffering hunger in Africa requires both an increase in food production and higher income for the very poor. Examination of successful poverty reduction experiences shows that the best way to increase income is to promote growth in those sectors in which the poor work, in those regions in which they live; growth based on production factors they have to hand and serving to produce goods they consume. Agriculture meets these four criteria. The development of agriculture, and in particular the development of food production, therefore seem the best means to reduce poverty and food insecurity in the immediate term. Agriculture is the sector in which the cost of investment to create work is lowest. It is also a sector in which growth can have significant knock-on effects on the rest of the economy, upstream in the fertilizer and machinery industries, downstream in the agrifood industry, and in the services.

I should like to emphasize the fundamental importance that needs to be given to agricultural and rural development programmes. They are indispensable if these vulnerable populations, these potential victims of dramatic situations, are to be able to experience a sustainable improvement in their situation, so that they no longer have to face food crises and depend on external aid in the future.

We need to take the offensive against the pessimism over Africa that too often prevails. It is true that African agriculture, taken as a whole, has not demonstrated a strong capacity for growth in past decades. The figures that I have cited bear this out. However, a number of African success stories encourage us to believe that agriculture can be equated with growth and success. Many IFAD projects for the poorest communities testify to this. An analysis of successful outcomes in African agriculture – the strong development of cassava, tea, horticultural and milk production in Kenya and the achievements of Guinea and Mali in rice cultivation – reassures our hope and pinpoints the basic ingredients of success: peace and economic stability, a good production infrastructure, especially irrigation, and communication infrastructure, an appropriate institutional framework, enabling policies for private initiative, and dynamic research and extension services.

FAO's flagship Special Programme for Food Security which is implemented in 102 countries, including 42 in Africa, has also shown that it is possible to rapidly increase agricultural production by mobilizing the necessary financial and human resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Efforts are under way in Africa. We need to encourage and step up these efforts. In order to arrest and reverse the decline in agriculture, African Ministers for Agriculture meeting at the Twenty-second FAO Regional Conference for Africa, in Cairo in February 2002, adopted a resolution that included the main actions needed for agriculture under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Subsequently, in June 2002, in parallel to the World Food Summit: *five years later*, the same ministers approved the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) that was formulated with FAO assistance. This document was approved by the Heads of State at the Summit of the African Union held in Maputo in July 2003, during which the commitment was made to raise the allocation of government budgets to agriculture to 10 percent within five years.

Following the Maputo Declaration and to reinforce the process of implementation of NEPAD's agricultural programme, FAO has helped formulate almost 50 national medium-term investment programmes and over 120 bankable projects, representing a total investment of more than US\$5.5 billion. Regional food security programmes have also been formulated by regional organizations, some of which, including that of UEMOA and COMESA, are currently being implemented.

The Special Programme for Food Security, which I mentioned earlier, has so far mobilized some US\$300 million, with about half being financed by African states. We have firm indications from our partners and the countries themselves that they intend to significantly increase the resources allocated to this programme.

These are encouraging initiatives that are beginning to have an impact in the field; but much more will have to be done if we are to sustainably reverse the number of people suffering from hunger in Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to thank the President of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for his initiative in organizing today's special event, and am heartened by the high level of participation that today's theme has mustered. There is no limit to what we should do to help improve Africa's food situation.

Agriculture and rural development have a central role to play in overcoming the chronic food insecurity that exists in Africa. FAO has demonstrated its commitment, alongside the countries of the region, the regional organizations and its partners in Africa and in the world, to address the root causes of hunger. We are ready to further intensify our efforts, in close cooperation with our partners, to help Africa achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the objectives set at the World Food Summit.

Thank you for your attention.