

**ASSURING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA BY 2020:
Prioritizing Action, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships**
April 1–3, 2004, Kampala, Uganda

SUMMARY NOTE

Parallel Session: **Priorities for Action: Perspectives from Northern Africa**

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Title: **Food and Nutrition Security in Africa, With Emphasis on Experiences from Sub-Saharan Africa**

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Introduction

1. The focus of this presentation is to identify priorities for action in three countries from North Africa, namely Egypt, Morocco, and Sudan. The North Africa region is characterized with some exceptions by: (i) high rate of population growth; (ii) high population density along narrow strips of inhabited land especially Egypt and Libya; (iii) countries like Sudan and Morocco are hit frequently with prolonged droughts; (iv) decreasing agricultural land in absolute and relative terms leading to decreasing per capita productive land; (v) serious water problems in terms of quantity (per capita consumption), quality and efficient water use or unit productivity per water/land unit; and (vi) profound government role and share in investment in agricultural and food production as well as in product and input markets.

Food Security versus Production and Self-Sufficiency

2. Food security is generally defined as physical and economic access to food. In the absence of effective interregional and international trade, adequate production of food is a prerequisite for food security. Availability of grains or other staples was in the past the main indicator for food security. However, recent studies identified crucial indicators besides food availability (FA): food consumption (FC) as a proxy for access and nutritional status (NS) as a proxy for food utilization. These indicators have direct implications for the individual and household levels in terms of availability from the market and/or from own farm production and in terms of diversification of food consumption and nutrition. In the presence of efficient product and input markets, income levels determine food security status. Given that (rural) economies are increasingly monetized, household earnings have become a determinant factoring food security.
3. At the national level, some countries in the region continue to confuse the issue of food self-sufficiency with that of food security and consequently devote scarce resources to food production. The irony is that such confusion often leads to less than optimal resource allocation and hence renders the economies more vulnerable to food deficiencies. It violates the principles of comparative advantage and could result in reduced producers' income and in some cases jeopardizes the monetization of the local economy. In some situations, like the grain producing semi-mechanized farming in the mid-plains of Sudan resulted in serious environmental degradation, which reduces the future capacity to produce food and other agricultural products. For strategic reasons, Egypt continues to reclaim land and expand agricultural production in marginal lands. Libya has adopted similar policies and executed the Great River Project for the utilization of underground water in agricultural and food production.

4. Dependence on cross-border trade to provide food needs to the countries of the region is viewed with suspicion, especially by the general public. In Egypt, Sudan, and probably Morocco, there is an outcry for production of wheat (a proxy for food security in urban communities, in particular) within the national or regional borders. As a response to this public demand, scarce land and water resources have been devoted to this task and as a result production is attempted in marginal areas with low productivity for both inputs.

Effects of Globalization and Technological Advancement on Food Security

5. Does a full integration of the economies of these countries in the world economy, being the most neutral definition of globalization, ensure their food security? What would be the impact of globalization with its free flow of goods (including food), services, technologies, financial flows, investments, labor, information, and cultural flows on the allocation of resources and the efficiency of national markets?
6. Answers to these already complex issues are complicated by the technological advancement in the field of gene engineering and the production of genetically modified food products. To date, there is a significant psychological barrier as well as political resistance to the genetically modified foods, but these barriers will eventually be overcome and the cheaper products will flood the markets. This will be facilitated by the powerful transnational corporations that are controlling the production and marketing of these high-tech products.
7. Up to the present, food security at the household level in the region is dependent on smallholder production with accessible local markets and some significant cross-border trade. With increased globalization and highly competitive food products, smallholders are not likely to stand the fierce competition. Thus, the countries of the region are likely to depend more than less on globalized markets for their food needs.

Priorities for Africa

8. The governments of the region had, in the past, adopted food security policies that supported food consumption of the urban population through large subsidy programs. Egypt has been constrained with these and large budgetary resources were devoted and possibly not to the very needy. Sudan had a similar situation but was gradually phased out. Cross subsidies from wheat producers to urban consumers of bread was a common practice in Sudan. It is important to avoid distortions in resource allocation and to ensure that the national market forces are working and providing the right signals.
9. The national markets should be developed and product and input market failures should be avoided. Unless small producers that are behaving as subsistence producers believe in the markets to satisfy their consumption needs, they will not transform into commercial production. Hence, integration of small producers into the economy through appropriate policies, strengthening of institutions and physical/road links should receive high priority. It is essential to enhance their coping strategies through diversification of crops and enterprises, pro-poor and pro-small producer adaptive research, produce insurance, marketing loans, etc.
10. It is also important to enhance the integration into the international markets. Improving productivity, marketing services, standardization of products, and differentiation of markets are needed. Adaptive production research to improve returns to unit inputs of land and water and to enhance comparative advantage is a prerequisite to competition in the world, and particularly African markets. Special effort should be made by African countries to encourage their markets, given that Africa's share of world markets is negligible (1 percent).

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