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PANEL 12: SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: FOOD SECURITY, DIVERSIFICATION AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

ORGANIZER AND CHAIRPERSON

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PANEL DISCUSSANTS

Abating Sub-Saharan Africa's Food Insecurity Through Targeted Capacity Building *Anthony Ikpi (University of Ibadan, Nigeria)*

The Contributions of Livestock to Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Technology and Policy Issues *Simeon K. Ehui (ILRI)*

Unrecorded Cross-border Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa: Implications for Export Diversification and Food Security *Chris Ackello-Oguta (University of Nairobi, Kenya)*

Towards Food Security in Southern Africa: New Roles for the Agriculture Sector *Johan Van Rooyen (University of Pretoria, South Africa)*

RAPPORTEUR

Igbekele A. Ajibefun (Federal University of Technology, Nigeria)

Food security in this session was defined as 'access by all people at all times to adequate food for a healthy and productive life and where such access is stable over the years'. Projections for the future of the sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) food situation are gloomy. It is the only region of the world where the proportion of people who are unable to consume sufficient energy has not decreased during the recent years. Owing to population growth even optimistic versions of food situation models predict that the absolute number of malnourished people in the region will increase during the years to come.

Food security through capacity building

Ikpi emphasized that lack of capacity is a major reason for food insecurity in SSA. His discussion of existing strategies for tackling food security problems

and unsustainable agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa included macroeconomic strategies which involve formulation of consistent policies, thereby creating a conducive policy environment for production, distribution and consumption of food to ensure access to adequate and nutritive food at all times by households. Under this strategy, specific programmes could include the promotion of private-sector development. He identified four major areas around which sub-Saharan Africa's food security issues revolve: sustainability of agricultural production, environment and related natural resource management; the interface of agriculture and income diversification; market deregulation, development and liberalization; and sub-regional co-operation, integration and trade.

Ikpi emphasized that each of these issues is a force which cuts across ecological zones and poses challenges which are needed to abate Africa's food insecurity. Concerning natural resource management, one of the greatest challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa is the population, poverty and land degradation nexus. To address these environmental challenges effectively, SSA has to build up capacities of policy makers and analysts who can analyse the problems and tactically solve them. With respect to agriculture and income diversification, the identified challenges include ensuring that technology-driven agricultural intensification develops strong linkages with the non-farm economy and improves the transfer of resources to the agricultural sector. Under market deregulation, the challenges lie in combating uneven bargaining power and unfair competition; price instability; and getting access to food for the poor excluded from the market. Effective translation of agroecological complementarities in SSA into dynamic trade links is the main challenge under regional cooperation and integration.

Food security through increased livestock production

Ehui discussed the importance of increased livestock production to achieve food security. He identified four factors which affect food security in sub-Saharan Africa: (1) high variability of food supplies with skewed distribution of purchasing power, (2) high population growth rate, (3) limited resources, low input use and low level of technology adoption, and (4) government policy unfavourable to the agricultural sector, with rapid urbanization at the expense of agriculture. Ehui was optimistic that, overall, the reforms now being implemented by many countries in the region would continue to have a positive impact on agricultural development. Concerning the role of livestock, he distinguished several factors contributing to food security, among them the direct access of poor smallholder farmers to more food of livestock origin, reduction of prices of livestock products resulting from increased production, and reduction of imports of livestock products.

Effects of trade on food security

Ackello-Ogutu identified fluctuation in regional food production as a major factor responsible for food insecurity and argued that trade liberalization for

agricultural products would contribute to greater price stability on international markets and make it easier for low-income countries to import food, thereby improving the availability of food supplies. Constraints on formal intraregional trade were discussed. Such constraints included commodity price controls which act as disincentives to farmers, cropping seasonality and differences in comparative advantage, and lack of commitment to the ideal of a free market economy.

The presenter noted that, whereas formal trade within Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) has not been encouraging, investigations indicate that informal cross-border trade (ICBT) is thriving and may have significant employment potentials. For example, the results of an empirical study of cross-border trade between Kenya and Uganda suggest that Kenya has comparative advantage over Uganda in manufacturing and processing, while Uganda has comparative advantage in production of agricultural commodities which could be exported to Kenya.

Some issues concerning cross-border trade in ESA remain unresolved to date. These include the magnitude and direction of ICBT and whether it conforms to existing comparative advantage, how informal traders cope with restrictions and other non-tariff barriers faced by formal traders, the transaction costs of ICBT, who loses and who gains when cross-border trade becomes liberalized, and how informal trade contributes to national and regional food security. Policy makers in ESA have clearly not been successful in promoting formal trade because of inconsistent and unstable policies and trade restrictions which encourage informal cross-border trade.

Features of the agricultural sector for food security

Van Rooyen discussed the traditional roles of agriculture in a nation's economy. His conceptual framework for analysing the importance of the positive stimulation of agriculture for successful economies includes the following components: the relationship between the agricultural sector and other sectors of the economy, the way agriculture is treated in the political process and the chosen model for regionalism.

The discussion indicated that, apart from unfavourable state intervention in agriculture in the Southern African region, there has also been a range of regional political influences that have not had a favourable impact on farming and agricultural trade. The following features were emphasized: (1) rural poverty, food insecurity and lack of rural employment, where a regional approach is required to find a solution, (2) the fragile resource base of the region, with a potential of large areas that can be brought under agricultural production, but lack of physical infrastructure, (3) available opportunities to raise productivity of agriculture in the region, (4) agricultural trade and marketing, and (5) the status of regional cooperation. Owing to the diversified conditions within the continent, there is need to harmonize policies to capture the opportunities for expanded intraregional trade in sub-Saharan Africa.

Floor discussion: challenge for further research

It was suggested that SSA has a large potential to combat food insecurity. The consensus of the discussion was that SSA faces big challenges because of the need for rapid transformation of the agricultural sector. One of the challenges is that the labour force still engaged in semi-subsistence agriculture amounts to 60–70 per cent of the total. It could be contended that 'low-input' sustainable agriculture in SSA will not be able to achieve needed productivity growth in order to meet rapidly changing food needs within a socially acceptable time frame.

At a methodological level, it was noted that the use of the ratio of agriculture's value-added to GDP as a measure of the contribution of agriculture to the national economy could lead to underestimation of the sector's relative importance. This is because agricultural products are artificially under priced relative to non-agricultural products, owing to existing policies that suppress farm prices. This, however, is more than a quibble about economic statistics. Policy often does not assist farmers and provide them with real incentives. They do not even have strong lobby groups to change the situation.