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Focus on Africa



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High-level NEPAD seminar on Africa's food reserve systems Regional advisory bodies seen as key

The setting up of Regional Food Reserve Advisory Committees is expected to be the major outcome of the NEPAD high-level seminar on food reserve systems in Africa held in Johannesburg, South Africa on 30 November – 2 December 2004. This was the view of Prof. Wiseman Nkuhlu, chairman of the NEPAD Secretariat, who opened the seminar.

The Advisory Committees would provide technical guidance on the structure and operation of food security information systems and facilitate the exchange of the information on food availability among member countries as well as help to monitor and supervise the integration of regional food markets and food reserve systems, he said.

The seminar was a follow-up to the decision taken by African Heads of State and Government at the African Union (AU) Summit in July 2003 in Maputo to launch a study of food reserve systems in Africa with a view to identifying actions that need to be taken at the regional and national levels to ensure the adequacy of food supplies at all times for all people in need.

NEPAD responded to the decision by undertaking a study of experiences with food reserves in a sample of eight countries – Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Ethiopia and Sudan – representative of the Sahel, East and Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa.

The seminar was attended by representatives from the AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) seven of the eight sample countries which participated in the study, three countries that did not participate in the study, two participants from the private sector and key strategic international and regional partners.

The objectives

The main objectives of the seminar were to:

- Offer an opportunity for participants to receive and discuss various presentations in addition to regional and national case study reports on food reserve systems
- Review progress at the level of each REC and
- Share experiences in the implementation of the appropriate food reserve systems and other food security strategies
- Develop and agree on actions to be taken to implement the study recommendations on food reserve systems suitable for each region
- Reach agreement on the division of labour between NEPAD, the RECs and the member countries in the implementation of the recommendations to strengthen food reserves and food security policies in Africa
- Come up with a clearly defined short-and-medium-term action plan for implementation in 2005 and for resource mobilisation with a specific time frame

The moderator of the seminar, Dr Namanga Ngongi, World Food Programme (WFP) consultant, welcomed seminar participants and presented an overview of the background and objectives of the

seminar.

Commitment at the top

Speaking at the opening session the Executive Secretary of the African Union's Southern African Regional Office, Ambassador Susan Sikaneta, said the African Union welcomed the seminar which afforded member states and stakeholders the opportunity to deliberate further and develop the actions needed at national, regional and continental level to ensure food security for all.

There was good will and commitment at the highest level of Heads of State and Government which should be matched with equal determination to getting results on the ground, she said.

The WFP Deputy Executive Director, Sheila Sisulu, highlighted the support given by the WFP to NEPAD particularly in relation to the home-grown school feeding programme and the food reserve study. It was now necessary, she said, to transform the results of the study into an action programme to eliminate the threat of hunger.

In his opening remarks Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu, pointed out the importance of the seminar to the implementation of the NEPAD programmes and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

He noted that despite its potential, Africa remained the only continent in the world where per capita food production was falling and many people were chronically undernourished.

Correct governance and food policies were needed in order to reverse this trend of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and declining agriculture productivity, he said.

He further noted that the CAADP had been endorsed by the African Heads of State and Government as a framework for restoration of agriculture growth, food security and rural development in Africa.

The issue of food reserve systems and emergency preparedness, together with the home-grown school feeding programme were among the priorities under the CAADP Pillars, identified by NEPAD as having a direct and immediate impact on food security in Africa.

Policy framework

The seminar recommended that:

- RECs in collaboration with NEPAD should support member states within a period of not more than two years to review their agricultural policies and come up with a comprehensive policy framework which incorporates food security priority issues including nutrition and food reserves in addition to the traditional agricultural policy strategies. In this regard the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is requested to prepare a conceptual framework by February 2005 to assist NEPAD and RECs to carry out this task.
- NEPAD in collaboration with RECs should lead a review process of both regional and national policies on emergency response and preparedness strategies and capacities that identify clear linkages with the food reserve systems.

Suggestions for follow-up

The seminar also suggested that NEPAD should undertake the following:

- Clearly identify the division of labour between NEPAD, RECs and national governments and other partners in the implementation of food reserve systems;
- Identify areas for further strategic alliance and co-operation with technical partners and regional international donors;
- Come up with an implementation workshop for 2005/2006 including a tentative list of scheduled activities;
- Prepare and circulate a format for periodic progress reports from RECs on the implementation of the food reserve systems and other CAADP Pillars;
- Ensure that an effective monitoring system is in place that includes the utilisation of the Regional Food Reserve Advisory Committees in addition to the existing NEPAD structure so that recommendations are implemented effectively.

Appeal to member states

Speaking at the end of the seminar Ambassador Susan Sikaneta reminded the participants that Africa remains the only continent where its per capita food production is falling and many people are chronically undernourished. She appealed to African authorities to rethink their agricultural and emergency policies.

"Member states need to put in place further enabling policy measures, including tax concessions, to

facilitate regional food trade, the importation of equipment and machinery which would contribute to increasing agricultural production, and the processing and marketing of food commodities,” she said

She also called for corrective governance and food policies to reverse the trend of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and declining agricultural productivity.

Contact

General Manager - Communications and Marketing

Ms. Thaninga Shope-Linney

Tel: +27(0)11 313 3776

Fax: +27(0)11 313 3778

Manager - Publications and Editorial

Ms. Mundia Kunyanda

Tel: +27(0)11 313 3161

Fax: +27(0)11 313 3778

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Fax: +27 (0)21 434 5217

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