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FOOD STRATEGIES IN SAHEL COUNTRIES

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FOOD STRATEGIES IN SAHEL COUNTRIES

INTRODUCTION

The food strategy brings a new dimension to the development of Third World Countries. It provides donors with the possibility of changing their methods of cooperation. A food strategy creates a framework leading to improved coherence between internal policies and external resources.

In 1977 the CILSS and the Club du Sahel understood the possibilities opened up by food strategies when they established, together, a strategy for drought control and development in the Sahel. They agreed on the main objective of the strategy: food self-sufficiency, and they understood that the strategy was a long-term process.

The World Food Council launched the idea of National food strategies in 1979. It suggested that the CILSS and the Club du Sahel monitor their elaboration in Sahel countries.

In 1982 the Commission of European Communities (CEC) saw in the food strategy, a framework and a means to renovate the cooperation between Europe and the Third World countries. In a first step, the Commission began to support the strategies prepared by Kenya, Mali, Rwanda and Zambia.

I. The Status of Food Strategies in Sahel Countries

In CILSS Member countries the status of food strategies is as follows:

The Gambia: A food strategy was prepared between November 1980 and March 1981. The authors, four Gambian officials and four planners provided by the United Kingdom, met with an Interministerial Steering Committee several times to discuss the various drafts prepared by the Team in collaboration with all Ministry involved in the formulation of the Second Nation Development Plan (1981/82-1985/86). The editorial group proposed including Volume II of the food strategy (Major Constraints and Strategy Options) in the Second National Plan.(1)

Cape Verde: A study of the food strategy was prepared between April 1981 and March 1982 with technical assistance from the Royal Dutch Tropical Institute under the auspices of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The draft study was discussed with officials from different Cape Verdian ministries involved. The objective of the study was to propose a development plan aimed at increased economic self-sufficiency, in particular for food, with particular attention given to the most needy groups. The provisional report was presented to Cape Verdian authorities in 1983. (2)

Mali: An Interministerial Commission to Elaborate a Food Strategy (CESA is the French acronym) drafted a food strategy in Mali from June 1981 through April 1982 with the support of four experts provided by France and the United States, under CILSS and Club du Sahel auspices. The food strategy was approved by the Government.

(1) The Gambia, Food Strategy Report (I-Review of food nutrition in the first national development plan 1975/78-80/81; II Major constraints and strategy options; III - Summary of programmes and projects for FYP II), March '81.

(2) Food Strategy Study, The Republic of Cape Verde. Preliminary Report (I. General Outline of the Strategy. II. Water Resources and Irrigation. III. Food Storage. IV. Food and Water Technology. V. Fisheries. VI. Export Marketing of Fish and Fish Products. VII. Harbor Development and Inter-Island Shipping. VIII. Food Marketing. IX. Nutrition. X. Maps)

of Mali in August 1982 (1), one year after the approval of the Five Year Plan (1981-85). At the request of the Malian Government, the Club du Sahel provided an expert who prepared a reflection document on the cohesion between the strategy and the plan. (2) The Malian government presented the document at a meeting of donors at the Round Table held in Bamako (December 1982). At the Round Table, donor agencies confirmed their adhesion to the food strategy and in June 1982, the Commission of European Communities proposed a support for the strategy. In March 1983, the Government of Mali decided to create a National Consultative Commission on the Evolution and Monitoring of the Implementation of the Food Strategy. The Commission is responsible for coordinating all cooperating agencies in view of the implementation of the strategy. The CEC organized support from its member countries to carry out the strategy. It should be noted that there has been a concerted program to restructure the cereals market in Mali since 1981.

Mauritania: A study of a food strategy was prepared in 1982 by two consultants from SCET-AGRI with French Ministry of Cooperation financing. The object of the study was to analyze and compare different documents and information concerning the food and nutritional situation in Mauritania and to propose the elements that would be needed to attain the objective of food self-sufficiency (3).

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- (1) Elaboration de la stratégie alimentaire, République du Mali/ Ministère de l'Agriculture/CESA, CILSS/Club du Sahel, July 1982.
 - (2) Problématique de la cohésion entre projets de développement rural et stratégie alimentaire. CILSS/Club du Sahel. December 1982.
 - (3) République Islamique de Mauritanie - Ministère de Développement Rural, Etude d'une Stratégie alimentaire. SCET-AGRI. November 1982.

Senegal: In 1977 the Ministry for Rural Development prepared a Food Investment Plan for 1977-85 which was an integral part of the economic and social development plan. As a first attempt to establish a new voluntary policy in food and nutrition, the plan proposed a novel way of favoring or restraining, in a selective way, the consumption of wheat and rice. It assigned new objectives within the limits of a new consumption structure, as defined, and took into account the actual possibilities, rather than acquired habits. The VIth Four Year Plan (1981-85) confirmed the orientations chosen but the actual carrying into effect of the food investment plan has not gone very far.

Upper Volta: During a meeting on agricultural policy and food strategy organized by the Upper Voltan Government with the support of the CILSS and the Club du Sahel in April 1983, the national authorities and donor agencies discussed how a food strategy could become the main axis of a national development plan. An Interministerial Commission prepared terms of reference for a food strategy. It was recommended that the draft food strategy, to be elaborated by the Upper Voltan services, would be the subject of concerted action by donor agencies and the government.

Chad: On 19 September 1983, the Minister of State of Agriculture and Rural Development sent a letter to the Executive Secretary of CILSS to request the support of CILSS in preparing a national food strategy which would help local authorities to approach in a methodical way a process that would result in improved food security. He also requested the Executive Secretary of CILSS to contact the Club du Sahel to obtain technical assistance to help Chad in preparing its food strategy. The Secretariats of CILSS and the Club du Sahel intend to respond positively to the Chadian request.

II. The Main Orientation of Food Strategies

How can a food strategy help Sahel governments and donor agencies to proceed differently and what are the main directions a food strategy can take?

First, a food strategy puts agriculture, and above all food crops, at the center of economic and social development. It re-establishes a balance which was upset by excessive confidence in industry and the service sectors.

Food strategies are aimed at the rural world. They help to create conditions which will permit farmers to reveal their dynamism, starting with african realities and those exterior to Africa, and in particular the point that farmers can assume their own economic and social development if they can benefit from products and services they need (seeds, fertilizers, equipment, agricultural credit, incentive prices, markets, etc...), as well as from improved living conditions. A food strategy aims at creating a favorable environment for farm initiatives and not at making them adopt models proposed by others to them. It proceeds on the assumption that extension structures that are directive will be more and more conceived as service and support structures.

Also, a food strategy is global and integrated.

A food strategy proposes a number of different actions, both upstream and downstream from production, which must be undertaken to assure increased food production. Global development of a country becomes the consequence of the dynamic created by a series of actions.

If governments which adopt food strategies have a development plan, the food strategy should become the motor and the compass for the plan and give it a different meaning than the usual meaning attached to development plans. Until now, development plans have been essential plans for investment projects. A food strategy has the advantage of being able to integrate the supporting

actions in the plan that are organizational, as well as policy measures in the widest sense. It also provides the possibility of ranking and integrating different sectoral, financial, social, economic policies so as to obtain a convergence between them and programs and projects aimed at the same objective.

In the short term, a food strategy does not require additional planning. It permits adjustments to be made and identifies practical obstacles to development and tries to remedy them with all concerned parties. It also permits an identification of unproductive investments, defines priorities and reveals constraints and contradictions.

Finally, food strategies indicate a process which requires patience and perseverance. They should not be understood as a recipe proposed from outside and accepted to obtain the additional financing that they might generate. The process should be taken in steps to bring out, little by little, its application and the reforms to be made, both by governments and donors.

III. Some Methods of Application of a Strategy

Different methods of application may be employed to ensure a successful food strategy:

- if a government adopts a food strategy, it can create a national coordinating commission to monitor its execution; the Commission can establish guidelines for the food strategy to determine the coherence between policies, objectives, methods, resources and progress attained;

- donors which join in the implementation of a strategy must organize in a practical way the coordination of the action in the field. One operational solution would be to group all donors directly concerned by different themes in the strategy around the local authorities.

- contracts between the government and donors could define the responsibilities between the partners and the respective commitments they intend to make in support of the strategy.