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# Report on the National Situation: Zaire

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## REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SITUATION : ZAIRE

BY

Michael LIPTON \*

### 1. What the Authorities understand by “National Food Strategy” (NFS)

Normally a NFS has four objectives : *food self-sufficiency* (no. or fewer, net food imports) ; higher *peasant productivity* ; lower fluctuations in national and/or household food output and/or availability – *food security* ; and improved *nutrition*. All four countries with operational NFSs backed by EDF Aid (Kenya, Mali, Rwanda, Zambia) have official papers specifying these objectives. In implementation, however, food self-sufficiency has been overwhelmingly emphasized [5] \*\*.

This is also the dominating concern in Zaire. The 1982 *Plan de Relance Agricole* specifies just three goals : food self-sufficiency, and faster output growth in crops used for raw materials and for exports. Improved nutrition is not an explicit objective.

Why is Zaire's official approach to NFS so trade-dominated ? First, with anything from 59% to 72% of workers in agriculture [3, p. 55 ; 12, p. 238] and despite falling output of key cash-crops [10, vol. 2, pp. 4-7], this traditionally food-exporting country has had high and rising food imports – some 10% of total imports by 1978 [10, vol. 1, p. 105], but recently absorbing over 30 per cent of foreign-exchange earnings, and exceeding agricultural exports by almost 50 per cent [9 ; 4, para 8] ; 200,000 tons each of wheat and maize were imported in 1981 [4, p. 11]. Second, the “rural exodus” allegedly cut the rural population share from 89% in 1965 to 64%

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\*\* Figures between square brackets [ ] refer to the references, pp. 271-272.

in 1980 [3, p. 44] ; more domestic food to feed the exodus, and/or more rural jobs (mainly in food-growing) to restrain it, are seen as political and economic priorities. Third, undernutrition is (incorrectly) viewed as minor, exclusively urban, and/or due to idleness or ignorance [4, paras. 232, 249-252].

Crudely, then, the official aim of NFS is "feed Kinshasa and Shaba without imports". However, the Government of Zaire (GoZ) has not yet adopted any NFS. The donors want one, because (like the GoZ) they are disillusioned with a project approach to agriculture. Belgian and EDF bilateral aid in 1982-1983 represented, respectively, about 30% and 10% of Zaire's total aid [12, p. 208 ; 8, pp. 307, 314]. Thus the Belgian aid authorities in 1982-1983, and the EEC in 1984, commissioned reports outlining the problems and prospects for a NFS [1 ; 4]. If EEC or GoZ has responded to these reports, I do not know.

Both reports stress the need to meet three *preconditions* before a NFS can be usefully put in place. *Output data* for main food crops are worse than useless -- they are pseudo-scientific and thus mislead policy. *Information* about how and why farmers act as they do is almost absent. *Agricultural budgets* are niggardly (typically 2-3% of public outlays) and unpredictable ; hence, and for other reasons, agricultural policy is weakly integrated with finance or planning. It will take 2-3 years for the GoZ to remedy these deficiencies sufficiently to design a NFS. Impatient attempts "to get on with it", before the preconditions are met, will prove even more disappointing than the earlier fashion of *ad hoc* projects without proper preappraisal of the affected farming and community systems.

GoZ and donors realise these facts. Hence the pressure to "test-design" a NFS, yet also the paralysis in responding to reports. But it would be too cynical to see NFS as sought merely as a new, fashionable way to spend aid (following Article 215 of Lomé III) and hence to employ donor and GoZ officials. They are right to see NFS, including agricultural research (AR) reform, as potentially a "human face" of policy dialogue -- lacking which its negative face ("getting prices right" and restraining public expenditure), even if needed to avoid disaster, can evoke little or no long-run food-production response. Yet GoZ and donor officials in 1984-1985 appreciated both sides of the problem : an NFS offers one of the few available chances to improve on the dismal record of fragmented, projectized, non-strategic agricultural policy in 1965-1985 ; but if an NFS is "rushed" -- without meeting preconditions on data improvement, farm information, and rationalized agricultural budgeting and planning -- it will fail.

## 2. Food and Nutrition, 1984-1985

Nobody has any idea of the level of output of main food crops in Zaire, let alone of whether food output per person is more or less now than in 1960 or 1970. Since smallholder output is a significant part of GNP, claims that "real GNP [in 1983-1984] is only one-third of 1960 levels" [1, p. 15] — or, contrariwise, that it grew at 3.9% yearly from 1965 to 1973, then fell by 1% yearly to 1984 [12, p. 182] — are baseless. The official numbers for manioc (fresh tubers) indicate output in 1981, the latest available year, of 13.2 m tonnes ; for maize, of 0.64 m ; for milled rice, of 0.15 m ; for decorticated groundnuts, of 0.24 m ; and for beans and peas, of 0.16 m [3, pp. 67, 75, 83, 91, 97]. However, all these numbers rest on guesses by an extension agent. He can seldom find the dispersed farmer (and lacks transport to reach her) ; is not trained to interview her, or to assess the output in (usually mixed) fields ; and is not trusted, because he doubles as a tax-collector and cultivation-imposer. The officers of the "Departement de l'Agriculture et du Developpement rural" (DADR) lack staff or time to complete or check output reports, which are many years out of date, and which face four tiers of processing bottlenecks — collectivite zone, sub-region, region, and in Kinshasa [4, paras. 43-48]. The data for food output, on which GoZ and donors rely, are in effect random numbers.

Analytical methods are as haphazard as data collection. The central document for agricultural planning calculates "food crop growth", year-on-year, as the unweighted average of growth rates of manioc, maize, paddy rice, and groundnuts ! It measures each crop's price-elasticity of supply by taking the average, over several years, of its year-to-year percentage changes in output and in price, and dividing the former average by the latter ! The main changes, proposed by rival donor groups, are to insert a mainframe computer into DADR (Kinshasa), and to insert microcomputers into its regional offices ! [4, paras. 56-57, 68, 70].

Data for marketed or internationally traded food outputs may be a little better. There are some cross-checks, though also much cross-border (and until recently internal) smuggling. Maize *marketing* allegedly fell from a triennial average of 148,000 tonnes in 1972-1974 to 130,000 in 1979-1981. Maize *imports*, only 77,000 tons in 1973, have recently been around 200,000 tons yearly, as have wheat imports [10, vol. 2, p. 4 ; para. 2 above]. Such figures confirm the impression of falling food output per person. Soil erosion, shortening fallows, and disappearance of forest galleries — plus extreme neglect of agricultural inputs, research and investment — would, with

population growing at over 3% yearly and with labour leaving the land, lead to a worsening food situation.

Nutritional data — which are much better than food output data — confirm this, despite Zaire's natural advantages (*viz.*, outside the East and North-East, no absolute land shortage, and very few severe climatic fluctuations). In Bandundu (which has the best data), in April-May 1983, 12% of urban under-fives were below 80% of Harvard weight-for-height, 14% of savanna children, and 21% of more remote ("forest") children; overall proportions were highest among children aged 1-2 and 4-5 years [2]. Undernutrition in Zaire is due to poverty, not ignorance or sex-bias; it seems especially bad in Kivu [4, paras. 250-252]. Nutrition on estates, bad in much of SSA, is an unknown factor. Exceptionally bad water supply, and hence a strong synergism between undernutrition and infection, in 1979 gave the new-born Zairois a 25% chance of dying before age 5 (*cf.* 17% for all low-income countries) and a life expectancy of 47 (57) — despite per-head availability, and rural-urban distribution, of doctors and para-medics rather better than African (or than low-income) country averages [10, vol. 2, pp. 102-103].

### 3. Means Available and their Efficacy

#### 3.1. BUDGET RESOURCES

The budgetary limitations do not seem as severe in Zaire as in many other places. In 1983, public and publicly-guaranteed medium-term foreign debt, while large relative to GNP (80-90%), was in 1983 "soft" enough to absorb below 10% of export earnings — and public consumption absorbed 19% of GNP (average for SSA, 16%) [11, pp. 174, 182, 204]. Central government expenditure (CGE), including transfers and investment, absorbed 28% of GNP — well below the 38% that prevailed in 1972 (and 1982), but well above the 20% average for SSA (and for LIC's) as a whole [11, p. 224; 12, p. 222]. The tax base seemed securer, and (surprisingly) diversion to defence less, than for the SSA average — 23.3% of CGE was financed by direct taxes and social security receipts (16.6% for SSA), and 7.9% of it went to defence (10.3%) [12, pp. 222, 224].

Hence the extreme, persistent budgetary neglect of agriculture — the "priorite des priorites" — is even more striking. DADR's voted funds (*normal, pour ordre, investissements*) total about 2% of government expenditure (the 1984 figure was 0.9%). Typically only two-thirds of funding is released. One-third comes from the *budget pour ordre* — unplannable,

because reallocated from day to day by the *Conseil Exécutif*. At least four other *Départements* spend on agriculture — e.g. perhaps a quarter of rural doctors' time is diverted to (mostly food-related) agricultural issues — but one-third of DADR funds go to rural road maintenance, i.e. to all-purpose transport rather than agriculture proper. This indeed gets some 2% of functional budgets of all Ministries [10, vol. 1, pp. 123-125] including a typical 7% of public *investissements*, which are mostly donor-financed. Agriculture's share in domestically-financed current outlays is probably nearer 1-1.5% [4, paras. 115, 135-143, 271].

The tiny, switched-on-and-off, non-coordinated funding has predictable effects. Bad pay and rising prices encourage moonlighting and corruption : outside Kinshasa, pay is often late, and basics (e.g. pencils and paper) are lacking; because counterpart funds on aid projects are withheld, DADR personnel cannot often visit without "lifts" from donors ; skilled agronomists, statisticians, etc., trained at public expense, are readily attracted away from GoZ, often abroad [4, para. 116 and *passim*; for effects on research, cf. 6, e.g. pp. 30-33]. No NFS can work unless its objectives have been reconciled to budgets, and until the procedures for allocating those budgets have been made less opaque and more predictable.

### 3.2. TRANSPORT AND STORAGE INFRASTRUCTURES

Slow, ill-maintained transport systems — and hence high marketing costs — deprive Zaire's farmers of growth-inducing inputs, and deter them from producing surpluses for market. This has long been agreed, while transport systems have worsened [3, p. 10]. Do resources suffice — in this vast, forested country — to develop transport *and* agriculture? The conventional wisdom is shaky. Except near towns, inputs may often be unused because, even if transport were available at real cost, they would be unprofitable (e.g. fertilizers, given available crop-mix, seeds and technology) [7, paras. 2.15, 4.12-25 ; 4, paras. 167-168]. The view that output is constrained by the need to sell very small amounts of surplus via local marketing monopolists with high transport margins echoes familiar fallacies about "wicked middlemen", and wrongly assumes that profitable, low-cost technologies exist to raise output, if only surpluses could be transported cheaply and efficiently.

The Plan's strategy for "*îlots de développement*" — regions of local exchange keeping transport costs down — seems sensible, especially for products with weight/volume ratios. Rural development based on exchanging all surpluses with Kinshasa, in the far West, will prove prohibitively costly.

But the "lots" so far identified are politicized, yet (confusingly) do not correspond with political or administrative borders. They *cannot* be selected on economic grounds, because the local and regional levels and trends of crop outputs, surpluses, and hence exchange potentials are unknown. Anyway, land use has long changed to adjust to high and rising transport costs [1, pp. 22-23].

Thus the slowness, bad maintenance, and deterioration of transport — while *the* talking-point about Zaire's agriculture — may not be the main alleviable constraint on output. Big outlays to tackle it should wait until the facts are known, and budgets rationalized, for agriculture itself.

This is even clearer for storage. On-farm storage is probably much more efficient than officials believe [4, para. 100]. Costly urban silos would encourage the belief that "food strategy" is about getting food to cities — at high transport (including cross-haulage) costs. In view of Zaire's small growth and fluctuation in food output, local storage systems are likely to be well adapted.

### 3.3 PROCESSING

Few big concerns process staple foods in Zaire. One is Continental Grain (Midema), which controls 90% of the wheat flour market. Manioc and (surprisingly?) maize appear to be processed almost entirely locally and on a small scale. Substantial sugar refining exists, but appears to be confined to plantations [10, vol. 2, p. 7]. Here and with other cash-crops, the "nucleus estate" idea might help stabilize smallholders' income (and nutrition) [1, p. 63]; it may be under way for cotton.

### 3.4. GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

*Départements* involved in agricultural planning and budgeting include DADR, Planning (weak), and Finance (strong), with overview and intervention from the Conseil Executif. Other government departments involved in agriculture include Health, Women, Prisons and Environment. *Commissaires* and *Secrétaires d'Etat* change *Départements*; often, even annually, sometimes with senior and even technical staff.

DADR centrally, like most Departments, is headed by (1) a *Commissaire d'Etat* (Minister), (2) a *Secrétaire d'Etat* (Permanent Secretary), (3) a *Conseiller Principal de Cabinet* (running a *cellule de conception* or policy unit), and (4) a *Secrétaire général*. Beneath are eight *Directeurs*: general services; project administration (DAGP); studies and planning; crops;

animals ; markets, prices and credit ; génie rural ; and rural extension. There are eight ARD *inspecteurs régionaux*, 24 *sous-régionaux*, 133 *agronomes des zones*, 500 *agronomes des collectivités* (one each), and, in the lowest echelon, the *vulgarisateurs* [4, pp. 67-68]. Agricultural research is split (sec. 3.5. below).

As stressed by ARSOM [1, pp. 33-34], the machinery for dealing with ARD is grossly and unpredictably under-budgeted, is very badly co-ordinated, yet contains many excellent, devoted workers. Further, much of the technical assistance and donor support, received by GoZ for agriculture, has been below par — not only in project preparation (sec. 2. above) — and sometimes too self-interested.

A few special aspects of "who does what" need attention. Formal *smallholder credit* comes either via projects or via the Banque de Crédit Agricole, "in principle" devoted to smallholders ; in practice, however, two-thirds of BCA loans go to traders, and almost all the rest to big farmers (SOFIDE finances agro-industry, but since 1982 has devoted 30% of loans to food crops and made a few trials — successful but not followed up — with smallholder credit) [4, paras. 183-203]. *Projects*, which get the lion's share of agricultural investment, can seldom be visited by DAGP personnel, for lack of transport funds ; they generally lack GoZ involvement, continuity of officials in post, co-ordination, or preparation for takeover ; donors' administration suffers from preappraisals that have usually ignored farmers' initial systems and preferences [4, paras. 283-289]. *Extension agents* are numerous but untrained, underpaid, unsupervised, without transport, and cross-pressured ; few farmers we met had ever seen one ; the Caisse Cotonnière's scheme to introduce "training and visit" food-crop extension is promising — but otherwise extension workers are unable to diffuse research results [4, pp. 176-182 ; 6, p. 18]. As for *nutrition*, surveillance is confined to the USAID's Bandundu project, implemented by CEPLANUT, which also prepares nutrition education materials nationwide ; its future priorities are to combat nutritional anaemia, goitre, and PEM, but its progress against the latter will be impeded by its (i) lack of cash and field staff, (ii) absence of formal channels into policy-making at DADR or into the National Plan, (iii) belief that PEM is caused by poor nutritional habits, plus farmers' ignorance [4, paras. 255-259].

*Local administration* often lacks transport, office equipment, and even current salaries to do its job in health or agriculture. Outside project areas, it often hardly exists ; even inside them, it is often locked in conflict with local traditional chiefs, who frequently have more resources and local control

than public officials [4, p. 26 ; 1, p. 25]. In contrast to Rwanda and Burundi, "in Zaire, performance of tasks of direct economic relevance is not among the things that central authorities effectively demand of local ones" [7, p. 26].

### 3.5. FOOD AND NUTRITION RESEARCH FOR NFSs

Nutrition research is confined to USAID/CEPLANUT work in Bandundu and Kinshasa (1974 and 1978-1979) and isolated work in Kivu [4, paras. 272-273]. Food-crop research is split between (i) INERA at Yangambi, which has almost ceased to operate as a research agency, being compelled (by underfunding and non-research tasks) to devote its land, and most of its qualified staff, to self-provisioning and the maintenance of genetic stocks ; (ii) national commodity-specific programmes. Of these only PRO-NAM, adapting and testing new manioc varieties with IITA help, has achieved clear results ; PNM's maize work had limitations so severe that CYMMIT withdrew its support. USAID, via its programme of "recherche, agriculture, vulgarisation" (RAV), hopes to revive these ; but neither the rice nor the vegetable programmes have a clear future. Also, no programme yet has clear impact on smallholdings, nor recommendations tested for profitability and safety in farmers' fields and systems ; the latter may be remedied by IITA/USAID proposals to incorporate farm systems research into the RAV, but the current incapacity of the delivery system to transport, on time, appropriate crop varieties to farmers each season will remain a constraint (except for rice, which self-pollinates). Fertilizer delivery also raises problems.

### 3.6. TRAINING

Extension problems were summarized in sec. 3.4 but there is a wider issue. Since the early 1970s some 16% of central government outlay has gone to education, slightly above the African average [12, p. 222]. Especially in tertiary education, this has also absorbed huge aid — e.g. over half Belgium's — but has often been Eurocentric and unpractical. The agrotechnical and economic requirements of an NFS (or anything else) for Zaire have been largely ignored [1, pp. 69-72]. Neither donor nor national programmes have often asked how to economize on scarce skills ; how to ensure handover, rather than brain-drain ; or how to learn from, and build up, local technical skills, rather than jumping from no-wheel sledge-based technologies to "technological cathedrals in the desert" based on motors or computers.

### 3.7. EXTERNAL AGENCIES

In the early 1980s Zaire received net aid around 7% of GNP. Low-income SSA countries averaged 10% ; low-income Asian countries, only 1% [8, p. 121]. An unusually high 38% of aid comprises technical assistance [10, vol. 1, p. 109], partly reflecting Zaire's needs, but partly the high cost and sometimes high quality of European TA personnel. Disillusion with Zaire's projects has reduced net aid receipts from a \$428 m peak in 1980 to \$314 m in 1984 (while SSA's total was rising by 4%). Meanwhile, Zaire's terms of trade worsened by 16% (SSA, only 1%) [12, pp. 196, 220].

Some non-aid external agencies are *reducing* Zaire's capacity to pay for a NFS. The 1984 net inflow of *all* publicly-guaranteed external capital was only \$77 m. This implies an *outflow* of non-aid external e\$ publicly-guaranteed capital of \$237 m. Offsetting this, the net inflow of \$138 m of direct private investment was well down on the 1983 figure (\$330 m) and did not offset the outflow of bank capital [12, pp. 206, 210, 220].

Much of Zaire's aid has gone to agricultural projects : at least 33 are now under construction, mostly area-based. Though there have been successes (e.g. North Shaba), the overall record has been poor. Extreme time and cost overruns from initiation to handover ; isolation of project staff from (shifting and weak) local authorities ; selection of projects irrelevant to (and without pre-appraisal of) local technologies, institutions or needs : all these are familiar in Africa (cf. the World Bank's *Annual Reviews of Project Performance Audits*), but extreme in Zaire. Hence there has been a shift (i) away from integrated area projects that overstrain ministerial co-operation ; and (ii) towards national projects for strengthening services overall (not just to favoured areas), e.g. in rural water supply (UNICEF) ; maize and manioc research (USAID) ; statistics (FAO/UNDP) ; farming systems (ITA) ; and extension (Belgium) [4, App. D and pp. 274-281].

One of Zaire's strengths is the work of NGOs, especially in the health sector. External agencies have increasingly supported this work. This is an excellent move if it seeks to support and catalyse State action. Indeed, support for "*zones de santé*" could develop into a promising nutritional component of a future NFS. It will, however, be disastrous if donors misguidedly see NGOs as alternatives to State action, and abuse aid to them "pour contourner l'État".

### 3.8. FOOD AID

While a major component in the EC's planned support for NFSs ever since the Pisani Memorandum, and despite Zaire's growing grain deficit,

food aid is invalidated by port and transport facilities — and by GoZ and donor preferences — as a major component in Zaire. EC gives 12-15,000 t yearly, the USA \$15m and Canada \$7 m, mostly wheat, wheat and sardines respectively [4, paras. 292-294]. Wheat creates tastes that Zaire's ecologies are ill-placed to satisfy; sardines feed the better-off and damage markets for poor fisherfolk, undermining at least two ongoing aid projects.

#### 4. Problems and Options

##### 4.1. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS, AND PRICE POLICY

In transport and communications, the problem is not the State's (theoretical but ineffective) monopolization of many media, but bad maintenance both of GoZ-owned media and of those used by private transport firms (e.g. rural roads). Possible threats to the Southern rail link, especially for copper, place special importance on rehabilitating the *voie nationale*, viz. the Shaba-Ilebo and Kinshasa-Matedi waterway and the Ilebu-Kinshasa rail route. Since one-fifth of 1981 tax revenue came *direct* from Gecamines, this transport system — plus copper prices — substantially determines GoZ's financial capacity to support NFS. The continued reversal, in the 1980s, of the steady deterioration in performance of ONATRA (carrying some 70% of river, freight and the CMFK railway) thus requires simultaneous improvement in SNCZ activities [10, vol. 1, p. 119; vol. 2, pp. 71-76]. More directly, local "islets" for food exchange — as well as long-distance transport for cash-crops — remain deterred by the underfunding and underperformance of the *Office des Routes*, despite recent decentralization.

The size, dispersed population, and climate of Zaire all caution against making transport — even rehabilitation or maintenance — into the lynch-pin of any NFS. So does the lack of improved food production technologies that might produce high or quick supply response to improved transport (sec. 3.2. above) or indeed to better prices. "The existing organizational structure in transport is largely the result of studies in the early 1970s" and "is basically sound and ... does not require major reforms"; low pay is "at the root of most of the weaknesses" [10, vol. 2, p. 75]. Even a big thrust to remedy the serious lack of spares and garages [3, p. 10] would respond less to agroclimatic reality than (i) a major effort, following farm systems research, with animal traction in appropriate non-tryp areas, and (ii) support for public and private local, short-distance exchange [4, paras. 191-194]. It is the approach of "everything to or through Kinshasa and Matadi" in the

context of an unproductive agriculture that makes transportation's tasks impossible — not public-private (or modal) splits or policies.

As for price and commercial policy overall, donors have made much of GoZ's courageous liberalization of September 1983. But earlier food price policy was, in the actual state of local government and transport, quite unforceable. *Cash-crops* price-fixing to the massive disadvantage of smallholders has persisted despite past verbal "liberalizations", e.g. for coffee in Eastern Kivu in mid-1983 [7, pp. 24-25] despite supposed liberalization in April 1981 [10, vol. 2, p. 28]. "*Cultures imposées*" and restraints on regional trade persist locally — whether via chiefs or via government — despite officially stated policy [4, paras. 202, 212, 214]. In this context, a 2% budget share for agriculture may matter more than a liberalization, perhaps confined to prices never much affected by past (nominal) controls, in default of inputs or technology permitting much supply response. Conversely, the claims of improved consumer price stability in Kinshasa following liberalization are certainly premature [4, paras. 202-206].

#### 4.2. INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

Recent figures for sectoral allocation of public investment are not available, but all agree that there are almost no effective links among Plan, Public Investment Programme, annual budget, and outturn. A functional budget for 1975-1979 outturns, when public investment ran at 100-150 m. Z., showed general and presidency services absorbing 25% (almost half on defence); social services, 6% (over half for education); and economic services the remaining 69%. 7.9% of *all* public investment went to economic services in agriculture, 8.4% in transport, 13.7% in other public works, only 0.3% in mining — and 34.0% in energy [10, vol. 1, p. 251]. Private investment data are unavailable, and indeed inconceivable. Clearly, public investment has not seen agriculture as "priorité des priorités".

#### 4.3. FOOD VERSUS EXPORT CROPS

Smallholders usually mix several crops, mostly for food, in the same field. Often, mixing of food and other crops helps both agronomically [7, p. 58]. Plantations, notably of oil palm, concentrate on pure strands. In neither case does obvious food-nonfood competition arise, though abundant evidence shows price-sensitivity in allocating fertilizers (or marginal or new land or labour) among crops. What is most notable is that export crops (especially palm oil) and domestic raw-materials crops and (if we believe the

output numbers, or more plausibly the foreign-trade evidence) food crops too, have *all* been in decline, some absolutely but all relative to population [10, vol. 2, pp. 4-7].

Hence most specialists [e.g. 1, pp. 29-30] see food-cashcrop integration – of course with prior farm systems research – as the way forward. Yet at national level many resources (transport, research, extension, etc.) are allocated among cash-crops. Though many smallholders grow cash-crops, a *general* policy to favour them tilts transport, pricing, and research to favour plantations; the employment effect then largely determines welfare outcomes.

#### 4.4. POPULATION AND LAND

With over one-third of area still forested, widespread slash-and-burn, and low population densities, Zaire *seems* immune from overpopulation. Indeed agricultural research, to attract farmers, must often help them to relieve labour shortages, at least seasonally. Except in East and North-east Zaire, it is safe to assume that almost all the rural poor are farmers, not labourers. Yet appearances are deceptive, not only in the East and North-east where population pressure is overt, but almost everywhere; erosion, shortening fallows, and reduced tree cover testify to growing risks of "soil mining" as person/land ratios grow [1, pp. 16-17]. The search for low-input, high-output crops (especially manioc varieties) increases this risk.

Lack of data and farm-systems information renders it almost impossible to formulate a servible policy (e.g. urban population proportions are estimated at 25% to 45 per cent). The central SSA problem, extreme in Zaire, is the combination of low agricultural productivity with low rural population density. Population growth worsens the first difficulty but alleviates the second – provided that urbanization is not too fast.

#### 4.5. CO-ORDINATION AND NFS

No unit oversees NFS, as Kenya's FNPU does. Eventually such a unit may be needed. But many years of reformed, co-ordinated, cross-cutting, but non-functioning institutions have convinced most people that the first need is to establish preconditions – budget, data, etc. – before creating yet more bodies. However, donors should at least refrain from sharpening their differences into new sources of institutional non-coordination, as is happening with agricultural research (Belgians for INERA, Americans for national commodity programmes) and statistics (FAO for micro-computers in the

regions, USAID for a main-frame in Kinshasa, nobody for trained Zairois cadres to gather viable numbers from farmers) [6, p. 33 ; 4, para. 296].

Certainly, lack of co-ordination is a serious problem, notably for nutrition policy [1, pp. 51-52]. Agricultural research neither receives any inputs from health and nutrition authorities, nor gives them guidelines. Yet when "national seminars" are set up by Government to improve on matters, as with the 1983 Nutrition Seminar, there is no follow-up [4, paras. 254, 258, 260-264]. It should be recognized that any country's bureaucrats need policy guidance *and* career incentives to get them to co-ordinate ; otherwise, inertia and self-preservation direct many of them towards narrow departmentalism.

### 5. Efficiency of Foreign Assistance

Aid lives through specific projects, with decent returns and gains to the poor. I have no sympathy for proposals to retreat from the alleged difficulties of project aid — manageable enough in Kenya or Sri Lanka — into some idyll of imagined ease through programme aid or policy dialogue. Nevertheless, if a government (whatever it says) is giving low or no budgetary and personnel priority to a sector or region — e.g. agriculture, or rural areas — it is worse than useless for donors to create "island projects" that (i) depend, for continued success after *sevrage*, on government commitment [1, pp. 35-36], and (ii) divert, from other places and from system-building, such few resources (and *operational* planning inputs) as might otherwise reach the low-priority sector despite real (as opposed to rhetorical) governmental priorities [4, para. 287]. This is why aid to food production and nutrition has been so cost-ineffective in Zaire.

In these circumstances, if donors want to aid a sector (e.g. food production, nutrition) effectively, projects must be complemented with exchange of ideas and knowledge between Zairois and donor *experts*, in post for long periods, in ways that lead to *agreed* conditions. These conditions are likely to affect the share and management of real public resources reaching the sector, not to concentrate on price changes to which, for want of such real resources, producers cannot respond by large increases of the total production.

Place-specific projects must continue to accompany (more serious) policy dialogue. But they will often need to be longer-term, given the fact that considerable income increases must be proven, to persuade poor farmers to take the risks needed to reach income and food-security thresholds [1,

p. 45]. Point interventions, without training and incentives to attract *competing* local people to stay on, merely reinforce quasi-feudal structures [1, pp. 40-41].

Aid projects, without *implemented* commitments by GoZ to provide promised counterpart funds and personnel, are useless. Donor softness about current costs merely harms Zaire. If GoZ, the final authority, proves *by its action* that it does not really want a project, donors should promptly withdraw the project [4, para. 284].

An NFS, if genuinely developed by GoZ (with appropriate help), can by end-1989 provide a useful framework for donor help with agricultural and health activities, but only if three preconditions are met. First, a cadre must be created, trained, and paid to provide reasonably reliable estimates, by season and area, of outputs of manioc, maize, rice and groundnuts. Second, farming systems analysis must be supplemented to understand performance in the context of community and family. Third, a Zairois budgetary commission needs to be helped to establish — and to get GoZ commitment to — coordinated procedures by which predictable GoZ resources, commensurate with NFS tasks, will be made available. Technical assistance can help in all three tasks, but it is up to GoZ to decide if it wants them completed and implemented. If not, a NFS would be a waste of Zairois time and donor money, as would further major donor involvement with agricultural projects in Zaire.

## 6. Modalities of NFS Aid : Perspectives for 2000

It is a necessary feature of all three tasks of building up Zairois capacity — to generate usable food output data series ; to understand farm-community systems ; and to rationalize the agro-rural budget — that each is worth doing on its own, even if no NFS materializes. An NFS is a useful co-ordinating device, not a god. Perhaps donors would do best to help ensure the device works in the four countries where it is already in place, before pushing it onto other countries.

In any case, three shifts in aid modalities are indicated. One is under way, but may go too far : the shift from area projects. A second has hardly started : donor co-ordination is hesitant, informal, and (despite serious EEC Delegation efforts) insufficiently integrated with GoZ, which should feel that it is in charge (in the chair), not outside the process. A third is now anathema, but will be seen to be needed : a switch of "policy dialogue" from obsessive concentration with macro-prices, towards (i) mutual learning about

real micro-variables, especially on agricultural research content ; (ii) mutual agreement, and GoZ acceptance, of only, and all, those NFS-linked projects where it will meet its current funding and personnel commitments [4, paras. 236, 259, 279-282, 296-298]. An informal context for these necessary formal changes could very well be provided by a recipient-donor, academic-administrative "NFS club" to review, regularly and publicly, issues of agriculture, poverty, nutrition and rural development – and to co-ordinate a library [1, pp. 53-55].

If an NFS is put in place around 1989-1990, by the year 2000 the earlier of the new-style, longer-term (7-10 year) rural projects – fully supported by GoZ commitment, cash and persons – will be ready for completion of the handover process. Zaire's population will be approaching 50 m., fewer than half rural. Erosion and shortening fallows will take an increasing toll ; landless labour will have begun to emerge, first but not only in the East and North East, as a core poverty problem. Perhaps the nutritional, and even production, conditions of the plantation sector will remain shrouded in mystery. But *either* we shall have usable region-specific food output data, agro-budgetary rationalization, and some understanding of farmers' methods and goals – *or* Zaire, potentially Africa's richest country, will face nutrition problems now associated with Bangladesh or Ethiopia.

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