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PANEL REPORT: SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: SAME OLD CHALLENGES  
IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM – WIDESPREAD POVERTY,  
ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND SHRINKING  
OPPORTUNITIES IN A GLOBALIZED MARKET

**ORGANIZER AND CHAIRPERSON**

*Chris Ackello-Ogutu (ARCC, Nairobi, Kenya)*

**PANEL DISCUSSANTS**

*Brian D'Silva (USAID, REDSO/ESA, Nairobi, Kenya), Anthony Ikpi (Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Ibadan, Nigeria), Akinwumi Adesina (Rockefeller Foundation, Zimbabwe), Isaac Minde (ECAPAPE, Entebbe, Uganda), Willis Oluoch-Kosura (Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Nairobi, Kenya – moderator)*

**RAPPORTEUR**

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The organizer began by highlighting the myriad problems experienced in sub-Saharan Africa, among them cross-border wars and civil conflicts, droughts, famine, widespread poverty, environmental degradation and floods. The following questions were posed to the participants: will the past misfortunes that have bedevilled the region continue in the new millennium and what are the opportunities for sub-Saharan Africa in the new millennium? A panel of four distinguished scholars led the discussions by sharing their experiences and lessons learnt from different parts of sub-Saharan Africa, with the moderator leading the discussion.

*Conflict and food security in the Greater Horn of Africa (GHA): lessons from Southern Sudan*

Donors' experience with the issues of conflict and food security in GHA were presented by Brian D'Silva who observed that the crisis in GHA is a result of instability arising from economic, political, agricultural and climatic conditions that merge into a 'confluence of instabilities'. A combination of political weaknesses and instability, stunted economic progress, and unre-

liable agricultural production in some areas, creates conditions that are conducive for conflict. He argues that conflict, in turn, aggravates these instabilities and feeds into the cycle of crises witnessed in the region. Using US Agency for International Development (USAID)'s experiences in the West Bank of Southern Sudan, he noted specific trouble areas that have been sources of conflict in the region. These have included the Nile waters, Sudanese oil and cross-border livestock movements exacerbated by increased variability in rainfall, access to modern weapons and issues of traditional access to grazing lands. These conflicts have threatened food security in terms of physical availability (through production and importation), stability of supplies (through storage), economic access to food (incomes) and food utilization (nutrition and health status).

As a result of these crises and conflicts, USAID and other donor agencies have spent billions of dollars in humanitarian aid (emergency food aid and disaster assistance – health, water and sanitation, food security and agricultural rehabilitation) and development assistance. Millions of people in the region are affected by conflict and hence are in need of humanitarian assistance, yet there is little hope that the civil strife and the ensuing crises will subside in the near future. Since the current levels of humanitarian assistance are unsustainable, it is imperative that the international community devises innovative approaches for responding to the region's needs.

USAID has used selective humanitarian interventions in areas where there is a likelihood of greater and long-term benefits to the population. This helps to reduce relief costs and buttress the coping mechanisms of the Sudanese as a means of averting famines or minimizing their severity. The strategy aimed at undertaking rehabilitation-oriented activities that do not fall under the conventional definition of emergency assistance.

The rehabilitation activities implemented since 1994 have included road rehabilitation and maintenance, agricultural rehabilitation, local grain purchase (to stimulate markets and encourage transition from relief dependence to market orientation), local production of seeds and tools (to substitute for imports), improving traditional grain storage methods and having farmers adopt them, use of indigenous knowledge (wild plants and the indigenous knowledge system surrounding their use, as a means of promoting both food security and health), support for local rehabilitation initiatives, and promotion of trade. Development assistance under the Sudan Transition and Rehabilitation (STAR) programme is being used to strengthen grassroots organizations working to solve rehabilitation problems and to provide training for the nascent civil administration in transparency, accountability, public finance and respect for human rights. These interventions have proved very effective.

The USAID experience in southern Sudan demonstrates not only the ability but also the value in implementing transition activities in stable and secure areas prior to the peace agreement. This approach should be considered when designing assistance strategies for other conflict-torn countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

*Civil strife and conflict resolution: lessons from West Africa*

Anthony Ikpi led the discussion focusing on the causes of civil strife and conflict resolution with examples from West African states. Four broad categories of the causes of civil strife are recognized: political disputes (power struggle), between or within nations, social/religious conflicts, economic problems (due to resource endowment) and natural disaster (drought, famine and floods). Examples of conflicts arising from exploitation of natural resources can be found in Nigeria (the Niger Delta), Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, while those due to political or power struggle can be found in Liberia. Other causes of civil strife such as religious/social considerations include Sharia law as experienced in Nigeria and the 'Bakassi Boy Syndrome', whereby individuals assume the role of police because of the ineffectiveness of the police force. Related to the latter is a state of anarchy, symptomatic of unjust judicial systems. The cost of all types of civil strife includes loss of human lives, destruction of farmland and food, and waste of government resources.

In Nigeria, efforts towards resolution of civil strife have included military suppression, organizing stakeholder conferences and constituting inter-community peace committees. Another attempt has been made through the restoration of civil government and democratization efforts, which have made Nigeria safer today than one year ago. It is also important that the judiciary be granted the autonomy to execute its duties. With regard to the Niger Delta problem, a formula has been developed for a proportion of proceeds arising from exploitation of resources to be ploughed back into the area. Infrastructural issues, including pollution and the settlement of the displaced people, are also being addressed. Overall, it was observed that civil strife is best addressed using home-grown solutions.

*Africa's food crisis: old questions, new challenges and opportunities*

According to Akinwumi Adesina, the challenges facing agricultural research, extension and policy for the promotion of agricultural transformation in Africa are varied, as are the options for resolving them. Research and development investments are needed to sharpen the pace of food production, given the population growth rate. This has not been the case for a number of reasons, among them poor economic performance, general lack of appreciation for research, weak demand constituencies for research and decline in overseas development assistance. The other reasons are poor management and weak performance of many research institutions.

The way forward is to strengthen farmer organization for demand-driven research and, more importantly, stronger political leadership supportive of agricultural research. Owing to the lack of political vision, dedication and commitment to agricultural transformation, Africa has lost to the donors the central position on issues that affect agriculture. The future of agricultural research will also need to be pluralistic, encompassing the public sector, private sector, universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The

private sector will be the key as experience the world over indicates that the biotechnology revolution is largely in the private sector, unlike the 'Green Revolution' that was driven by the public sector. In addition, research institutions need to improve accountability to stakeholders and their evaluation should be on the extent to which they have developed technical innovations that can help farmers to achieve their production targets in different agroecological zones. Other measures would include improvement in research coordination for greater effectiveness and in avoidance of undue duplication of efforts; strengthening CGIAR centres in Africa, including an improvement of their links with the national research institutions; and strengthening human and institutional capacities. Last, but by no means least, is the development of flexible technologies for easier adaptation by farmers, making them agroecological zone-specific.

But these efforts alone cannot guarantee success: infrastructural issues have to be addressed and governments have to encourage increased investments in agriculture, growth of non-farm income sources and better access to complementary inputs like credit and extension systems. Integrated input, output and credit markets are important for assuring investments in productivity-enhancing technologies. Continued market reforms and market expansion (through regional initiatives) are also prerequisites. Finally, agricultural services have to be demand-driven, flexible, participatory and sustainable.

#### *Regional trade issues in eastern and southern Africa*

On trade issues in eastern and southern Africa, Isaac Minde made reference to the Regional Trade Analytical Agenda (RTAA) which covers the two subregions and which was initiated in 1994 with funding from USAID/Regional Economic Development Services Office for East and Southern Africa (REDSO/ESA). The agenda estimated informal cross-border trade (ICBT) and how that form of trade contributes to regional food security. It also analysed agricultural comparative advantage for seven countries in southern Africa as well as costs of transport along the major transit routes in the region. Results and lessons learnt from the regional trade component of the RTAA are summarized below. The ICBT border surveys revealed the following:

- this form of trade, at over US\$600 million annually, with the bulk of it involving agricultural commodities, was significant, thus dispelling the view that the countries in the region have little potential to trade with each other;
- informal trade channels were used, even in cases where official tariffs were low or non-existent, implying existence of non-tariff barriers that consumed valuable time but did not necessarily lead to any significant cost increases for traders;
- traded commodities (such as unprocessed fish and grains) were of low value-added quality;
- informal trade contributed to food security (especially for border communities) and unofficial transactions were maintained even in cases of

official market failure caused, for example, by droughts, civil strife and legislated border closure or import/export bans;

- the direction of informal trade flows did not always reflect the underlying comparative advantage in production but, rather, supply availability and other factors such as information, capital, storage and infrastructure that influenced competitive advantage (for example, agricultural commodity flows between Mozambique and South Africa);
- all forms of cross-border trade were depressed in cases where road networks did not exist or were underdeveloped (as in the case of Tanzania and Uganda or Mozambique and Tanzania);
- there were serious weaknesses in institutional capacity, especially with regard to policy analysis and implementation of market reforms. These weaknesses have far-reaching consequences for the region's ability to take advantage of globalization and capacity to bargain/lobby effectively with industrialized countries (or their trading blocs such as the EU) and at the WTO platforms.

The ICBT follow-up work that aimed principally at in-depth analysis of the institutional and fiscal implications of regional integration (for example, who loses and who gains from trade liberalization as well as the question of safety nets) revealed extremely important points that should be taken into account when one is contemplating external intervention aimed at influencing trade policies in the sub-Saharan region.

- Losses from trade liberalization are quite significant for countries with a narrow tax base and do constitute a major obstacle to implementation of zero tariffs advocated under Free Trade Areas (FTAs).
- Sub-Sahara is characterized by frequent market failure that typically originates from natural resource use conflicts that often lead to full-blown wars. Market failure also arises from natural disasters (for example, the ravages of *El Niño* and, recently, the devastating floods in Mozambique), inappropriate policies and poor governance.
- If markets do not function, it would be reckless on the part of policy analysis to recommend unbridled trade liberalization unequivocally. Uganda for example argues, rather convincingly, that opening of its borders will open the flood gates for Kenya's manufactured products and thus kill the country's infant industries, lead to job losses, jeopardize food security and even fuel civil disobedience. As much as this argument may be one-sided (only considering the immediate costs of industrial adjustment that in any case have to be paid), trade policy intervention has to be cognizant of the serious political innuendoes it reveals.
- Preoccupation with national food security (taken literally to mean food self-sufficiency) was seriously hampering regional integration efforts. The issue of food security has to be tackled jointly with that of widespread poverty that generally has an adverse impact on agricultural productivity, household incomes and purchasing power, but also more

specifically on access to food. National parochialism and protectionist trade policies have been the consequence of these concerns and many stakeholders are worried that the many regional trade blocs being created in the sub-Sahara region may have a bleak future.

*Concluding remarks*

The mini-symposium was concluded with calls for political commitment to develop effective institutions, policies and infrastructure that will spur technological change in sub-Saharan Africa. Selective interventions in conflict-prone pockets of the region have been shown to yield encouraging results, and solutions to the conflicts must be home-grown. The mini-symposium called for the appreciation of the complexity of the agricultural and rural development process. The importance of involving the participation of all legitimate stakeholder groups in the process of implementing and sustaining market, institutional and political reforms was emphasized.