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Statement
by
Mr. Oloche A. Edache

**Assistant Director-General/
Regional Representative for Africa**

**On the occasion of the Meeting of
Ministers in charge of
Agriculture, Water and Environment
of the Community of the
Sahel - Saharan States (CEN-SAD)**

5-7 March 2005, Bamako, Mali

Mr Chairperson,

Special Guest of Honour,

Honourable Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Mali, Mr Seydou Traoré

Honourable Ministers,

Secretary General of CEN-SAD

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honour for me to represent the FAO Director-General, Dr Jacques Diouf, at this Ministerial meeting of the Community of the Sahel - Saharan States (CEN-SAD) on issues related to agriculture, water and environment. I bring you warm fraternal greetings from him.

It is most gratifying for me to be here among distinguished personalities who share together with FAO the noble ideal and the commitment to create a world free of hunger, poverty and malnutrition.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the Government of Mali for hosting this important meeting, and especially for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to us since our arrival in this great and historic country, a country whose history and culture are always so enchanting. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the CEN-SAD Secretariat for inviting and associating FAO to this event.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Agriculture as we all know plays a dominant role in the economies of the large majority of CEN-SAD countries. It contributes about 32% of total GDP and employs nearly 75% of the active labour force. For many of these countries agricultural development is necessary, if not a pre-condition for economic development. The priority which CEN-SAD has accorded agriculture and water resources development therefore is a very well placed choice.

Despite the importance of agriculture in the economy of the majority of CEN-SAD countries, chronic food insecurity continues to afflict a large segment of the population. Agricultural growth has failed to keep pace with the rising population, with a declining agricultural productivity and output.

The reasons for these disturbing results are related to a number of issues among which are poor water resources development, negligible use of modern inputs and lack of infrastructure, to mention only a few.

Available statistics for the Africa Region suggest that only about 4 percent of the available water reserves is being used for irrigation. For Sub Saharan Africa, it is even lower, approximately 1.6. percent, compared

with Asia's 17 percent. Taking account of domestic and industrial usage, Africa uses 5 percent of its total resources, compared to 20 percent in Asia. Only 7 percent of arable land is irrigated in Africa, compared with around 40 percent in Asia. Comparable data for fertilizer use reveals similar disparities - 10 to 24 kg of fertilizer per ha of arable land for Africa and 144 kg for Asia.

Within the aggregate CEN-SAD-wide picture, there is considerable country variation that opens up the scope for using mutual complementarities for growth and development.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

FAO strongly believes that with the right leadership and with sufficient political will, the situation can be changed. Such political will is indeed manifest in the Maputo Declaration on Food Security in Africa, calling for an immediate implementation of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme - CAADP/NEPAD) and the Syrte Declaration on Agriculture and Water, and more recently at the CEN-SAD Leaders and Heads of States 6th Summit held in Bamako in May 2004. It is also gratifying to note that last year, water control and agricultural development were identified as the key priority areas of the Malian Chairmanship of CEN-SAD.

To address the CEN-SAD challenges of raising agricultural production, reducing production instability in a sustainable manner and focusing on the needs of small-scale producers, concrete action programmes must be developed and supported with the necessary resources. This should also contribute meaningfully towards the achievement of the World Food Summit and the Millennium Development Goals of halving the number of people suffering from hunger by the year 2015.

FAO initiated the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) over 10 years ago. The programme is now operational in almost all the CEN-SAD countries, with the exception of one or two where it is at formulation stage. The results are generally promising and provide sound basis for adopting the SPFS approach to integrate agricultural projects that aim at increasing food production and productivity, while reducing the year-to-year variability of production and improving access to food through a multidisciplinary participatory approach, on an economically and ecologically sustainable basis. It is gratifying to note that the SPFS models are now being scaled up in several countries.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

FAO has provided assistance in the preparation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development (CAADP) within the framework of NEPAD. As you would recall, "*Extending the area under sustainable land management and reliable water control systems*" is one of CAADP pillars. I urge CEN-SAD member countries to give priority to the implementation of this pillar, and I note with delight the preparatory work undertaken in many countries.

FAO remains at the disposal of the CEN-SAD countries to continue assisting them in the preparation of national, sub-regional and regional programmes.

At the request of the CEN-SAD Secretariat, a project under the FAO Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) is at final assessment stage. This will assist in the preparation of a Regional food security programme for CEN-SAD, as well as the preparation of a preliminary study which would provide options for the development of the 100,000 ha of irrigated land in the *Office du Niger* (Mali) made available to CEN-SAD by the Government of Mali, for hydro-agricultural development.

The Organization is ready to support your efforts to define priorities and implement regional strategies as well as projects relating to the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors to achieve national and regional food security, in cooperation with other institutions, organizations and individual donor countries. Ultimately, however, the responsibility will rest with the countries themselves to implement strategies and policies which are conducive to ensuring food security for all.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This address cannot be complete without reference to the locust plague that is threatening the Sub Region of CEN-SAD. I wish to assure you that FAO is carefully monitoring the locust situation and that the Organization will continue to provide the assistance expected from her. I wish, on behalf of the FAO Director General, Dr. Diouf, to express profound gratitude to all the donors who have contributed resources to the locust fund.

In conclusion, I wish, on behalf of FAO, to congratulate CEN-SAD member countries and the Secretariat for their achievements and extend my best wishes for the future with the hope of further strengthening the excellent cooperation between CEN-SAD and FAO. I wish to thank the Malian authorities for giving us the opportunity to visit the Sélingué Project and for sharing with us their experiences in water resources development yesterday. It is our hope that through the instrumentality of CEN-SAD, more of such multi-purpose projects designed to provide water for hydro electricity, irrigation fisheries and agro-forestry will emerge to improve the quality of life of the people of the Sub Region.

Thank you for your attention.