Document 11

United Nations New Agenda for development of Africa (UN-NADAF) Mid-Term Review
1991

This Review Document assessed the socio-economic landscape across the continent to evaluate progress since the 1986 adoption of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development, which sought to establish a new partnership between donor nations and Africa to facilitate increased external resource flows for the continent's rapid development. The Mid-Term Review found that the socio-economic conditions in Africa have deteriorated, stating that the socio-economic environment in the 1990s is worse than it was five years prior to the adoption of UN-PAAERD, and emphasized that the issues that prompted the creation of the Programme of Action remain relevant today, just as they were in 1986.

Questions for consideration: What specific justifications does the UN Secretary General provide for the adoption of this new Document? What implications arise from the statement that despite progress, Africa remains burdened by economic and social challenges? What responsibilities and commitments do African leaders and institutions hold under the UN-NADAF agreements? How does the international community fit into the commitments and responsibilities defined by these agreements? What are the ambitious development goals outlined for Africa within the framework of UN-NADAF? Lastly, what challenges must be confronted to realize these goals as indicated in the Document?

In New York, 1991

Overview

"The New Agenda for the Development of Africa is a new departure in international development cooperation. I am strongly committed to it. It must be made to yield results,"

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Geneva, 28 December 1992

As the international community begins the Mid-term Review of the UN New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), it is clear that the New Agenda has succeeded in achieving some tangible results. But despite the various efforts of African countries themselves, donor countries and international organizations, those results have fallen far short of what was envisioned when the New Agenda was launched in 1 991. Many of the problems Africa faced five years ago have become even more acute, while most of the region's potential has yet to be realized.

On the positive side, in 1995 a dozen African countries achieved UN-NADAFs target of 6 per cent annual growth in gross domestic product (GDP), while the number of countries suffering negative growth rates dropped from 19 in 1992 to three in 1995. Most countries also have implemented, to varying degrees, political and constitutional reform, and multi-party elections are now a regular occurrence across the continent.

In almost all countries, domestic prices and external trade have been liberalized, and about 35 countries have made monetary adjustments. Regional integration is moving forward, with sub-regional groupings building the economic ties between countries that will help serve as the foundation for the African Economic Community. Governments also have revised their foreign investment codes to make their countries more investor-friendly, and most are promoting private sector growth.

Economic and social woes

But despite the progress that has been made, Africa continues to be plagued by economic and social woes. In the 1 990s, Africa's GDP has accounted for less and less of world output (about 2.04 per cent on average), even though its share of world population has increased (to about 12 per cent in 1995). And while Africa's GDP grew by 2.3 per cent in 1995, its population increased by 2.9 per cent, resulting in an actual per capita income decline of 0.6 per cent.

Africa still relies on a handful of primary commodities for its export earnings, and its share of world trade has steadily decreased, falling from 3.1 per cent in 1990 to 2.1 per cent in 1995. External indebtedness has swelled, with total debt stock reaching $322.4 bn in 1995, while foreign direct investment has declined significantly.

In the social real sector, widespread unemployment and cutbacks in public expenditures in real terms, particularly in health, education, and social welfare, continue. Due to inadequate economic growth, many countries lack sufficient resources to invest in human development.

A shared responsibility for development

UN-NADAF grew out of the General Assembly's 1991 final review of the UN Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UNPAAERD), which represented a unique agreement between African countries and the international community on specific and far-reaching efforts to accelerate Africa's development process. UN-PAAERD was the first such programme ever adopted by the United Nations and it created major expectations of better prospects for Africa. But as the final review of UN-PAAERD noted, "economic and social conditions actually worsened during the five years (1986-90) of the UN-PAAERD period." Indeed, even though 30 African countries had embarked on political and economic reforms through structural adjustment programmes, the economic and social crisis facing the continent since the early 1980s had continued unabated.

The New Agenda was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1991 after three months of protracted negotiations. Ambassador Martin Huslid of Norway, who chaired the negotiating sessions on UN-NADAF, said "it was not a perfect document" and "was not so rich in concrete figures," but it firmly placed Africa on the UN agenda for all of the 1990s.

Under UN-NADAF it was agreed that although Africa had the primary responsibility for its own development, the international community "shared responsibility" in achieving the continent's goals. Within this context, the principal priority objectives of the New Agenda were "the accelerated transformation, integration, diversification and growth of the African economies, in order to strengthen them within the world economy, reduce their vulnerability to external shocks and enhance self-reliance."

Ambitious development goals

In addition to an annual GDP growth rate of 6 per cent, UN-NADAF cited the Secretary-General’s estimate of $30 bn as the minimum net official development assistance (ODA) needed for Africa in 1992, a level that should increase at a rate of 4 per cent per year. It also reaffirmed the goal of devoting 0.7 per cent of gross national product to ODA. In order to achieve UN-NADAF’s objectives, both Africa and the international community accepted certain commitments and responsibilities.

Africa's commitments

- achievement of sustained and sustainable growth and development;
- promotion of regional and sub-regional economic cooperation and integration;

- Promotion of investment;
- pursuit of agricultural and rural development policies and strategies in order to fully integrate rural economies in their national context, achieve food security and strengthen self-reliance;
- Protection of the environment

The international community pledged to provide full support to Africa in its efforts to growth and development. Key areas of this support included:

- a solution to Africa's debt problem;
- Increased resource flows;
- enhancing Africa's export earnings by providing greater access to markets and by supporting the diversification of Africa's economies;
- Regional economic integration.

In his 1993 preliminary report on UN-NADAF implementation, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali noted that in 1991-93, economic growth rates stagnated or turned negative, per capita incomes fell further, financial inflows were down sharply, the debt burden grew steadily, and terms of trade worsened. In a speech to the panel of High-level Personalities on African Development following the release of the report, Mr. Boutros-Ghali said that "while Africa strives to put its own political and economic house in order, the international community must not remain idle or indifferent." Responding to the Secretary-General's report, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for "full and tangible" international support for UN-NADAF. The resolution reminded member states of the need for a 4 per cent real annual rise in aid flows to Africa, and for measures in support of capital formation. It also reaffirmed Africa's need for debt relief and debt cancellation and urged African countries to continue with efforts to improve the investment climate.

The challenges ahead

The Secretary-General's mid-term report on UN-NADAF implementation outlines what has been achieved by Africa so far, as well as the many challenges the continent still faces as it looks ahead to the second five years of the New Agenda.

Perhaps the major challenge will be how Africa can marshal the massive amounts of resources needed to effectively implement the New Agenda and forge ahead towards economic recovery and sustainable development. Clearly, most of these resources will have to come from Africa itself.

African countries will have to create an enabling environment that will enhance investor confidence, arrest, and reverse capital flight, and attract foreign and domestic investment. Diversification of exports and the penetration of new markets will be key to regaining and increasing Africa's share of world trade. Political stability, together with accountability and transparency, are also critical ingredients for mobilizing both domestic and external resources.

And if Africa is to regain economic viability in the run-up to the millennium, the international community will have to lend full and tangible support. International assistance will have to be re-channeled to focus on the well-articulated priorities of African countries. Efforts at preventing and resolving conflicts as well as reconstruction of post-conflict societies will need to be supplemented by international financial and technical assistance.

Finally, further steps will have to be taken to alleviate the crushing debt burden, which the Secretary-General has described as a "millstone around the neck of Africa."

Resource flows

Africa faces major problems in mobilizing resources for development, although most African countries have pushed through difficult policy changes since the 1980s. *The continued low levels of domestic savings are insufficient to boost the pool of resources needed for both public and private investment.* And despite the commitments made by Africa's international partners in the framework of UN-NADAF, external resources also remain inadequate due to the continent's debt crisis, low and declining levels of foreign direct investment (FDI) and the decline in official development assistance (ODA). UN-NADAF described the provision of adequate resource flows as a "critical element" of international support for Africa. To achieve sustained per capita growth, the Secretary-General estimated that a minimum of $30 bn in net ODA was required in 1992, with real net ODA subsequently growing at an average 4 per cent a year.

Bearing these targets in mind, the international community undertook to "pursue its efforts to provide additional resource flows" which would complement Africa's own drive to mobilize domestic resources. International commitments included the effort to find durable solutions to Africa's debt crisis and to attain the target, which the UN adopted in 1970, of devoting 0.7 per cent of gross national product to ODA. Africa's development partners also promised to introduce measures and devise programmes to encourage foreign direct investment.

Africa's debt crisis

Africa's external debt is now widely acknowledged to be unsustainable, and the search for durable solutions has intensified. African debt has risen from $289 bn in 1991 to over $314 bn in 1995. Sub-Saharan African debt has climbed from $194.7 bn to $223.2 bn over the same period, and from over 239 per cent to almost 270 per cent of export earnings. Although Africa's annual debt-service payments fell from $30 bn in 1991 to $22 bn in 1994, they leaped to $33 bn in 1995. Reflecting this trend, Africa was using 31.3 per cent of its export earnings to service its debt in 1991. Although this ratio fell to 23.4 per cent in 1994, it rebounded last year to nearly 31 per cent. Sub-Saharan Africa's arrears on debt-service payments have nearly doubled from $32.6 bn to $62.2 bn in the 1991-94 period. As the UN Secretary-General has pointed out, debt service claims nearly one-fifth of Africa's savings and over 4 per cent of gross domestic product. Servicing multilateral debt in turn accounts for nearly half of total debt service. With Africa's low level of savings, such burdens are not considered sustainable. Faced with this growing debt overhang, the emphasis with regard to bilateral debt has shifted from simply rescheduling debt service on more concessional terms to include an effort to cancel more of the debt stock.

The growth of multilateral debt has also become a prominent issue, prompting the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to announce a plan in early 1996 for deeper relief of both bilateral and, for the first time, multilateral debt. Up until then, the major advance at the bilateral level had been the adoption of the 'Naples terms" by the Paris Club of official bilateral creditors in late 1994. These terms permit up to 67 per cent reduction of export credit debt stock or debt service owed to Paris Club creditors. Due to the strict criteria for eligibility, only a handful of African countries have so far received Naples terms for debt service. With nearly half of African countries bearing unsustainable debt burdens, the Secretary-General said in 1995 that the impact of Naples would remain "limited unless it is applied to a sizeable part of outstanding debt and debt stock and extended to a larger number of countries."

Uganda's case has shown that Paris Club action under the Naples terms "is unlikely, on its own, to resolve the debt problems of countries with high proportions of multilateral debt," the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said recently. With multilateral debt comprising 77 per cent of Uganda's total debt, the 67 per cent reduction by the Paris Club of its eligible bilateral debt stock resulted in Uganda's total outstanding debt falling by just 4 per cent.

Responding to international pressure to find solutions to the growing problem of multilateral debt, the World Bank and IMF have targeted some 20 heavily indebted and poor countries, mainly African, as potential beneficiaries of a new plan. They have recommended that the Paris Club grant relief of up to 90 per cent of bilateral debt and have asked major creditor countries to provide the bulk of funding for a trust fund to help certain countries pay off their multilateral debt. Both developing and developed countries have raised objections to key aspects of the plan, ranging from the rigidity of the criteria for eligibility to the distribution of the financing burden. While the Group of Seven (G-7) leading industrialized nations gave their backing to the Bank/Fund plan in principle at their June 1996 summit, crucial aspects remain to be settled, not least the financial input to be made by the Bank, the Fund and by bilateral creditors. Some decisions are expected at the annual Bank/Fund meetings in late September.

Low investment flows

The importance of progress on debt has repeatedly underscored since heavy indebtedness been identified as a disincentive to foreign direct investment (FDI). The Secretary-General has urged investors "not to treat Africa as a whole as an inhospitable location for FDI and ignore potential opportunities." He cited as evidence a UN inter- regional study of FDI profitability for foreign affiliates of US companies which showed that net income as a proportion of owner's equity was 24 per cent in African countries compared to an 11 per cent average for all developed countries. Although the OECD has noted "some sign of an incipient increase" in foreign direct investment, associated with policy changes in some countries and "the emergence of South African companies as investors in the continent," recent data do not confirm this view.

In spite of the political and economic reforms implemented in some 37 African countries, the continent is being bypassed by the boom in investment flows. For all developing countries, net FDI inflows have risen remarkably from $22.6 bn in 1991 to $60 bn in 1995. But the story has been very different for Africa, with net FDI increasing from $1.8 bn in 1991 to $2.9 bn in 1994, before falling back by 27 per cent in 1995 to $2.1 bn. This confirms the continuing decline in Africa's share of total FDI to developing countries, which has fallen from 10 per cent in 1987-91 to 5 per cent in 1992-94, and to just 3.6 per cent in 1995. Most African countries continue to improve their investment regimes and other parts of the regulatory framework in order to enhance the role of the private sector, both domestic and foreign, in economic growth and development. The Secretary General has recommended further effort in this direction and has urged donor countries to help develop local infrastructure and build local capacity for investment promotion. However, the recent trends in development aid have not been very encouraging.

Concerns over development aid

In contrast to the Secretary-General’s estimate, cited in UN-NADAF, that Africa would need an increase in ODA from $25.2 bn in 1991 to $30 bn in 1992, with a subsequent annual rise of 4 per cent, total net ODA actually fell by $212 mn in 1992. It then plunged to $21.5 bn in 1993 before recovering to $23.5 bn in 1994. The decline is mainly attributed to the near halving of ODA to North Africa from $6.9 bn in 1991 to $3.9 bn in 1994. Over the same period, sub-Saharan Africa's net ODA rose from $17.7 bn to $18.9 bn. But while multilateral disbursements have risen (from $6.3 bn in 1991 to $7.2 bn in 1994), there has been a steady fall in bilateral ODA to sub-Saharan Africa from the 21 members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD (from $11.1 bn in 1991 to $10.4 bn in 1994). The latter figure accounted for 32.7 per cent of total ODA to sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest proportion since 1991.

Sub-Saharan Africa’s dependence on largely concessional ODA "remains almost total," the OECD noted. However, the overall trends for concessional aid are disturbing. In 1995, global ODA fell 9.3 per cent in real terms from a 1991 high of $63.4 bn to $57.2 bn in 1995, marking the fourth successive year of decline. Indeed, ODA as a proportion of gross national product (GNP) fell for 16 of the 21 DAC members, including all G-7 countries. This led to a decrease in the combined aid effort of DAC countries from 0.30 per cent of GNP in 1994 to 0.27 per cent in 1995 the lowest ratio since 1970.

According to the OECD's 1996 Development Cooperation Report, diminishing ODA inflows can be explained either by donors reducing aid to more dynamic economies (such as Mauritius and Morocco) where both foreign and domestic private investment have risen, or by aid cuts to troubled countries such as Sudan and Zaire. But IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus recently warned against the "dangerous slippage" in development aid and argued that many donor countries had been using the "fallacious alibi of budgetary savings" to make sometimes severe cuts in their ODA. He also cited US President Clintons statement to the 1995 world Bank/lMF annual meetings that cuts to concessional aid programmes such as the International Development Association (IDA) were not required to balance the US budget.

The US remains the single greatest influence on the overall declining trend of ODA, slipping from second to fourth among the 21 DAC countries in absolute dollar terms, and falling to last place in terms of its ratio of ODA to GNP. ODA from the US fell by 28 per cent in real terms, the largest decrease in absolute dollar amounts, while the 0.10 per cent ratio of ODA/GNP was its lowest since such accounting was introduced in 1950.

The Secretary-General points out that some countries, particularly Norway and Japan, "have fully adhered to the principle of additionality of aid resources to Africa as enunciated in UN-NADAF." Norway was the highest aid donor in terms of GNP in 1 994, while France, the US, Germany, and Japan ranked as the four biggest donors Africa.

North Africa plays a significant role in Africa's overall aid receipts. In the 1989-94 period, the five North African countries received major shares of total bilateral ODA to Africa from France (19 per cent), Germany (23 per cent) and Japan (25 per cent), as well as an overwhelming share of US bilateral aid to Africa (56 per cent). While the overall decline in aid flows from OECD countries was significant for Africa, also significant was the fall in aid from Arab countries, of which the North African countries received 87 per cent in 1989-94. Net disbursements from Arab multilateral agencies fell from $25 mn in 1991 to -$3 mn in 1994, while Arab bilateral aid also plunged from $136 mn to $13 mn in the same period.

The Secretary-General has said that the increasingly concessional terms for ODA to sub-Saharan Africa is one positive element in the decline in aid flows. He notes that ODA has grown faster for countries with IMF and World Bank-supported adjustment programmes, a trend which "may be considered in conformity with the donors' commitment under UN-NADAF to support Africa's reform efforts."

Commodities and trade

Higher prices for most major commodities in 1994-95 helped boost Africa's export earnings to an average $99.1 bn per year between 1991-95, a 12 per cent increase over average receipts for the previous five years. At the same time, however, Africa's continued reliance on a handful of primary commodities for the bulk of its export earnings, together with growing competition from Asian and Latin American producers in a shrinking market for many raw materials, resulted in the region's share of world trade declining from 3.1 per cent in 1990 to 2.1 per cent in 1995. The cost of this precipitous fall in market share was nearly $200 bn in potential export earnings.

Resources sorely needed for the continents social and economic development.

Five years after the adoption of the UN New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), which made diversification of commodity exports and increased local processing a priority for the continent's economic development, most African countries continue to rely on the same commodities they did 30 years ago. Primary commodities accounted for approximately 75 per cent of Africa's total foreign exchange earnings over the first half of the decade, while some African countries relied on a single commodity for more than three-quarters of their total exports.

As overall export earnings for international trade soared between 1990-95, the share of primary commodities in global export volume dropped from 25.9 to 19 per cent. While numerous developing countries have been able to reap profits from increasing levels of trade by diversifying production and trading partners, Africa, for the most part, has not. According to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the region "has been bypassed by the conspicuous transformation in commodities traded globally." Indeed, between 1990-95 the regions share in the trade of developing countries fell from 10.9 per cent to 6.4 per cent, while its share of total trade with the European Union (EU) — which accounts for 70 per cent of Africa's total trade — fell from 3.3 per cent in 1992 to 2.8 per cent in 1995.

Long-term trend of declining prices

Africa's average $99.1 bn in export earnings principally came from the sale of raw commodities such as oil --- exports of which grew in value by 11.9 percent in 1995 and now account for 60 per cent of foreign exchange earnings--- as well as agricultural goods, timber, and minerals. Although the long-term trend of declining commodities prices has continued, there was a sharp upturn in 1994-95. Many African countries, however, were unable to take full advantage of the higher prices due to supply difficulties, structural constraints, political instability and the lack of adequate investment in the export section. The depreciation of the US dollar in the first half of 1995 also lessened the real value of the increases for many countries, while exporters that had pre-sold their products derived little benefit from climbing prices.

Prices for most primary commodities had slackened by mid-1996 and it is projected that they will resume their long-term decline, partly due to decreasing demand, for the remainder of the decade. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), average annual prices in 1984-94 were down, in real terms, for tropical beverages (by -10.4 per cent), agricultural raw materials (-1.3 per cent), vegetable oilseeds and oils (-4.8 per cent), and minerals, ores and metals (-1.5 per cent). Technological progress in the production of synthetics and other substitutes for primary commodities can be expected to further depress demand and prices.

Although Africa's exports grew by an average 5.4 per cent a year in volume terms in 1990-94, the annual unit value increase averaged less than 1 per cent. With import unit values up more than 5 per cent over the same period, the purchasing power of exports was severely eroded. Africa's terms of trade therefore suffered further deterioration, falling an average 2.2 per cent a year.

Uruguay Round worries

Troubling many African commodities producers is how they will be affected by the coming into force of the Uruguay Round agreements on international trade. World trade is projected to increase by $210 bn annually in the post-Uruguay trade environment, 30 per cent of which will be shared by developing countries. But it is still unclear what percentage of these gains will accrue to African countries. Since Africa already faces very low or zero tariffs for many exports, the general tariff liberalization called for by the Uruguay Round is bound to lower the value of Africa's preferences and could threaten some exports.

Studies estimate that Africa initially stands to lose up to $3 bn a year due to Uruguay, mainly from hikes in import bills, budget deficits and the cost of lost preferences with the EU. The Secretary-General's report on UN-NADAF notes that although the consequences of the Round are detrimental in the short-term, in the long run, realistic exchange rates for African currencies and market-oriented policies would put it in a better position to penetrate export markets and take advantage of international trade liberalization.

Trade between African countries accounted for less than 9 per cent of the regions total trade during the first half of the 1990s, one of the lowest levels of regional trade in the world. This poor performance is due, among other reasons, to the deficiencies of Africa's roads, ports, railways, waterways and telecommunications; lack of trade financing and poor trade information mechanisms; and trade-related bottlenecks such as non-tariff barriers and stringent rules of origin. *One of the biggest obstacles to increased regional trade has been the lack of diversification, which has resulted in many countries exporting the same or similar commodities.*

But there has been progress in economic integration, and this will have a positive impact on the development of regional markets that could provide export alternatives for local producers as well as enable African countries to negotiate on more favorable terms with other international trading blocs. In 1993, the Abuja Treaty for the establishment of the African Economic Community came into force, and sub-regional groupings are moving ahead with plans to harmonize exchange systems and trade policies, remove trade barriers and set up common transport and communication systems.

Regional groupings such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the recently initiated Secretariat for East African Co-operation (EAC) and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in North Africa have either embarked on or are discussing cooperation in various trade-related sectors. In Southern Africa, the integration of South Africa into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in 1994 was seen as a move towards stronger sub-regional cooperation and development. SADC currently is seeking to eliminate trade barriers within the community over the next two years and to develop a common currency by the end of the century.

Industrial development a priority

According to the Secretary-General’s mid-term report on the New Agenda, industrial development will be central to the structural transformation of African economies. Countries now heavily dependent on the export of primary commodities will have to consider diversifying into more dynamic lines of activity, including the manufacturing and services sector. Vertical diversification, through increased processing, would provide more value-added to primary commodities. Horizontal diversification, through the production of a wider range of goods for the domestic and external markets, including the development of new uses for traditional commodities, would help increase job opportunities and average incomes.

Diversification will require the development of the necessary economic infrastructure, higher levels of labour skills and better access to financial resources. African countries will have to cooperate closely with financial and development institutions and will require increased levels of financial assistance in order to meet the challenges diversification will pose. Industrialized countries also will have to open up their markets to more processed goods from Africa and find ways to give African exporters some relief from cascading tariffs (tariffs that rise according to the level of processing).

Promoting Africa’s efforts in this regard is the Common Fund for Commodities, the sole intergovernmental organization exclusively concerned with commodity issues and commodity development projects. The Common Fund has been active in backing a wide variety of diversification projects, in opening up new markets for existing commodities, and in promoting investment and technical assistance in these areas. While many of the projects that have been initiated through the Common Fund have been successful and show promise of sustainability, further financial resources are sorely needed to support them.

In addition to diversification, Africa also must face up to the challenges of the uncontrolled movement of primary commodity prices, which has led to severe instability in foreign exchange earnings and in balance of payment positions. For developing countries in general, and African countries in particular, the collapse of commodity prices and the resulting loss in export earnings can often exacerbate already severe debt problems.

Past international commodity agreements, hurt by large fluctuations in the value of the US dollar and the setting of the unrealistic price ranges and buffer stocks, have been largely ineffective. According to the ECA, commodity producers are likely to benefits from some current agreements to cut production in order to stabilize the prices. The member of the International Coffee and Cocoa Organization, for example, have decided to abandon the buffer stocks in favour of export retention schemes, and to keep production levels down at least the 1988-89 crop. Such coordination and cooperation in managing the supply of primary products is crucial to stabilizing the prices, especially for commodities of which Africa commands a major share on the world market.

Africa will also have to focus on lessening its dependence on the European market and on developing market in newly industrialized countries, particularly those of East Asia. The demand for primary products is still growing in this region, and its proximity to many African countries should give Africa an advantage over Latin American exporters.

A plan of action for commodities

The African Plan of Action for Commodities, adopted in February 1996 by African ministers responsible for regional cooperation, integration, and tourism meeting in Addis Ababa, addresses many of the above issues. Among the numerous measures that the Plan of Action urges African countries to take in order to ensure a wider export base and intensify regional cooperation are:

- developing export promotion programmes that support enhanced competitiveness at both the product processing and export diversification stages;
- reviewing possibilities for diversifying exports to other developing regions in order to take advantage of the South-South opportunities and help diversify African markets;
- shifting industrial strategies for import substitution to an indigenous model based on the commodities sector;
- preparing programmes between and among countries for promoting commodity export at the regional level.

Although African countries can do much on their own to meet the challenges of diversifying and expanding trade, the international community must also fulfill its own obligations. The Secretary-General's report on the New Agenda emphasizes that the 49th General Assembly adopted a resolution recommending the improvement of existing compensatory mechanisms for African trade losses and the expansion of the Common Fund for Commodities. The resolution also calls on member states to make an initial special contribution to the diversification fund proposed when UN-NADAF was adopted. The fund would finance the preparatory phases of commodity diversification projects and programmes in African countries. The international community should take steps to implement this resolution, the report states, since Africa's views the establishment of a diversification facility as a litmus test of international commitment to implement the New Agenda.

Democratization

Over the first half of the 1990s, Africa's political landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation, with the majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa exchanging authoritarian, one-party states and military regimes for relatively democratic, multiparty systems of government.

Whereas in the late 1980s, there were only a handful of democracies on the continent, by early 1995, 31 of the 42 sub-Saharan countries that did not already have multiparty systems held democratic presidential or parliamentary elections. Fourteen of those resulted in the defeat of an incumbent and a peaceful transition to democratic rule. In 1996 and 1997, close to half of African countries will hold elections at the national or local level.

Perhaps no group of countries has undergone as great a metamorphosis over the past five years as Southern Africa. Once riven by apartheid, civil war and destabilization, the sub-region is now at peace, governed by democratically elected leaders, with the potential to act as a growth pole for the entire continent. The successful transition to majority rule in Namibia in 1990 and in South Africa in 1994, elections in Mozambique and Angola after decades of war, and ballot box victories over entrenched one-party states in Zambia and Malawi have provided inspiration to countries in the region and beyond.

Concomitant with the burgeoning of democratic systems of government has come an explosive growth in the mass media. Once dominated by state-owned newspapers and government broadcasting, most African countries are now home to a plethora of private newspapers and radio stations which have enabled an unprecedented public airing of political issues. In Malawi, for example, the number of newspapers grew from one in 1993 to more than 30 in the period before the 1994 election. Ghana has seen a fivefold expansion in its print media between 1990 and 1995, as has Cameroon, Cöte d ‘Ivoire and many other countries.

In addition, organs of civil society — from trade unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to human rights groups and political parties— have blossomed across the continent, becoming active participants, in some cases for the first time, in the political processes of their countries. Despite the phenomenal growth in political pluralism, however, much work remains to be done to entrench the practice of democracy and improve on governance. Indeed, the experience of the past five years has shown that elections are a necessary, but insufficient condition for the establishment of a vibrant democracy.

In some cases, elections have served to legitimize incumbent rulers through a balloting process so manipulated as to render the results meaningless. And despite the expansion in the media and civil society, journalists in some countries continue to face censorship, fines, and prison terms, as do human rights activists and political opponents.

The UN New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) recognizes that democratization must be strengthened, and the quality of governance improved in order to facilitate greater participation of the people in the development process. Beyond simply holding elections, an institutional framework must be created which guarantees the rule of law, a strong and participatory civil society, a free press, and an independent judiciary, as well as providing for a strong partnership between governments, the private sector, and NGOs.

Needless to say, none of this can be achieved in conditions of conflict. UN- NADAF therefore calls for the strengthening of peace initiatives by African countries so as to create the conditions for development and to facilitate the redirection of resources from military and security purposes to the continent's socio-economic advancement.

During the 1990s, regional initiatives such as the Organization of African Unity Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution have contributed to the peace process in Angola, Comoros, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mozambique, and to some extent in Burundi and Rwanda. The Economic Community of West African States' Monitoring Group in Liberia also continues to work toward a peaceful solution in that country. And other initiatives are being launched by African NGOs focusing on issues of governance, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

Agriculture and food

Agricultural and rural development, and especially the achievement of food security, are among the main priorities of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-

NADAF). With 60 per cent of Africa's economically active population employed in agriculture, and with the continent's cereal deficit projected to nearly double from 27 mn to 50 mn tonnes over the next 15 years, the New Agenda has emphasized Africa's commitment to further improving agricultural policies. These improvements would aim to enhance productivity; establish reliable marketing networks, credit systems and adequate storage facilities; and ensure the provision of necessary inputs to food producers — especially to women farmers, who account for the bulk of Africa's food production and processing.

There have been significant improvements in agricultural policies in many African countries. But overall, production on the continent has risen only moderately, lagging behind population growth and thus reflecting greater food insecurity.

- Over the 1990-95 period, agricultural production in Africa grew annually by an average of 1.5 per cent. This was a significant slowdown from the growth rates in the 1985-89, which averaged 3.5 per cent annually.
- Total annual cereal production in Africa averaged 87.3 mn tonnes in 1990-94, a 9.7 percent increase over the 1985-89 average. Most of this increase, however, was accounted for by the North African countries, with SSA's cereal production only 4.3 percent higher in the 1990s.
- In per capita terms, food production in SSA has actually fallen, the only major developing region to register such a decline. The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) index of per capita food production in SSA, which stood at 100 for 1979-81, had declined to 95.4 by 1990 and to 84.3 by 1994.
- In 1996, it is estimated that some 217 million people in Africa are chronically undernourished, the vast bulk of them in 17 low-income food-deficit countries. Based on current food production and population growth trends, the number of undernourished Africans is projected to rise to some 300 million by the year 2010.

The slow progress in increasing food output in Africa is due in large part to agriculture's continued vulnerability to the weather, as well as to the numerous wars and civil conflicts that have disrupted farming and caused huge refugee movements. Consequently, food aid to Africa has stayed high, averaging some 5.5 mn a year over 1990-93. Africa's cereal imports reached 34 mn tonnes in 1993/94, compared to 23.4 mn tonnes in 1980.81.

On the positive side, there has been a marked change in the overall approach to agriculture, especially in comparison with earlier decades when farmers received few incentives to produce. Wholesale and retail prices of agricultural commodities have been deregulated in many African countries, leading to improved producer prices for numerous food and export crops. Many government marketing monopolies have been abolished, giving greater scope to the private sector. Agricultural extension services are being *consolidated into more efficient national systems, with special efforts to recruit women extension agents and develop services especially designed to assist women farmers.*

Systems for supplying agricultural inputs are being overhauled, although fertilizer, improved seeds and other key inputs often remain too expensive for many small-scale farmers. To improve farmers' access to financing, rural credit institutions are being expanded and strengthened in many countries, while farmer-managed savings and credit cooperatives are growing. By the end of 1994 there were over 5,000 registered local credit unions throughout Africa, operating in over 30 countries, with more than 5.5 million members altogether.

New food security strategies and projects have been launched in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Kenya, and Madagascar, among other countries, involving food-for-work and the provision of better seeds, livestock care, credit and physical infrastructure. The Mali-Sud project has successfully stimulated food crops, alongside cotton, in regions of Mali that previously had to import food. West Africa, overall, has shown remarkable improvements in food security, with the index of food production per capita (1979-81 = 100) reaching 130.2 for the sub-region in 1995. North Africa (including Sudan) came next, at 116.6, with Central Africa at 80.1, Southern Africa at Africa at 67.1, and East Africa at 53.5

Food security and increased attention to rural infrastructure and farming inputs are becoming more central elements in African countries' agricultural development programmes. During the mid-to-late 1980s, however, agricultural reform was determined largely by the macroeconomic priorities of the structural adjustment programmes supported by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These brought a heavy reliance on price incentives and a sharp reduction in state intervention. While some farmers were able to take advantage of the new incentives, production overall did not grow as much as had been anticipated because many farmers suffered from serious constraints: lack of resources to cultivate more land, no credit to finance purchases of higher-priced seeds and fertilizers, poor roads and marketing facilities, and the disappearance of essential state services. More recent approaches to agricultural reform emphasize reducing such constraints, so that farmers are able to respond to market signals. This includes investing in rural infrastructure, alleviating poverty, improving education and health and addressing environmental and natural resource degradation.

There is also greater recognition of the need to make essential inputs more available and affordable, in order to raise Africa's low levels of agricultural productivity. For the period 1993-95, cereal yields in sub-Saharan Africa were only about 41 per cent of those in Asia and 44 per cent of those in Latin America. However, research trials have found that much higher yields are possible in Africa even with existing seed and crop varieties, indicating that the main reasons for Africa's productivity gap include insufficient fertilizer use and irrigation.

As of 1993, fertilizer use in sub-Saharan Africa averaged only around 11 kilogrammes per hectare. With North Africa included, the continental average still reached only 21 kg/ha, compared with 67 kg/ha in Latin America and 129 kg/ha in Asia. There is also considerable scope to expand irrigation, thus making farming in Africa less dependent on uncertain rainfall. In 1993, irrigated land as a percentage of total cultivated area was estimated at 5 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa, compared with 14 per cent in Latin America and 37 per cent in Asia. Not all cultivable land is suitable for irrigation, but it is estimated that some 42 mn hectares in Africa have the potential to be irrigated, of which only 13.8 mn currently are.

Expanding markets for farmers' produce is also considered vital for encouraging greater production. Most national markets in Africa are small, however, while the world market prices for many of Africa's key agricultural exports have been on a downward trend over the past decade, despite a surge in commodity prices in 1994 and 1995. One solution is to strengthen regional markets within Africa. Following the signing of a treaty in Abuja in 1991 to establish an African Economic Community, the Organization of African Unity and the FAO have been working with African governments to develop a Common African Agricultural Programme (CAAP) aimed at integrating African food and agricultural markets.

Environment & development

From well before the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, African countries have been emphasizing that issues of environmental protection and economic development must be addressed together. As the UN New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) noted, "Africa is fully convinced that the problems of environment and development should be tackled in an integrated and balanced manner," a point reiterated in the African Common Position on Environment and Development submitted to the Rio summit. Among these problems:

- Drylands have been expanding through desertification and now cover nearly half of Africa, directly affecting some 300 million people.
- Eighty per cent of pasture and range areas are affected by soil degradation and erosion.
- By the year 2000, soil erosion will have reduced land productivity in Africa by 25 per cent from its 1975 level. In the Sahel region, where soil erosion and vegetation loss are especially severe, land degradation results in an estimated $26 mn in economic losses annually.

- Africa loses 0.6 per cent, or more than 3.2 mn hectares, of its total natural forest land every year. Some 10-20 per cent of this loss is due to commercial logging, and the remainder to environmental causes, cutting of trees for fuelwood or clearing land for agriculture. Reforestation projects replace only about 5 per cent
- As of 1994, an estimated 54 per cent of Africa's population (or 380 million people) lacked safe drinking water, while 66 per cent (462 million) did not have access to sanitation. In the rural areas, the proportions stood at 63 per cent and 76 per cent, respectively.
- Based on current population growth rates, water availability per capita in Africa will fall to half of current levels within the next 25 years.

These realities have determined the specific actions that African countries have taken, as well as the priorities they have sought to advance within the various international negotiations on sustainable development issues. Among the priorities cited by the African Common Position were the attainment of food self-sufficiency and security, greater energy self-sufficiency, rational management of forests, the reversal of desertification, drought monitoring, efficient and equitable use of water resources, management of bio-diversity and bio-technology, development of science and technology, and poverty eradication. And reflecting concern over the "export" of industrial pollution from developed countries to Africa, the Organization of African Unity adopted a convention in 1991 prohibiting the dumping or transporting of toxic and other hazardous wastes in Africa.

Desertification, one of the African continents foremost concerns, hardly featured in the preparatory meetings leading up the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio. But at the conference itself, African countries succeeded in winning agreement that a specific convention on desertification would be negotiated. Such a convention was signed in 1994, setting out an ambitious agenda to reverse land degradation in affected regions.

At the national level, 21 African countries so far have completed the preparation of National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs), and others have various programmes to manage and safeguard natural resources. As of 1994, there were 723 protected natural areas across the continent, in virtually every country, covering some 150 mn hectares of land, forests and wildlife habitats. Hundreds of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) devoted to sustainable development and environmental issues also have emerged on the continent in recent years. African governments and donor institutions are increasingly working with such NGOs and other community groups to combat environmental degradation at the local level, including by building terraces, planting village woodlots, fixing sand dunes, restoring soils and disseminating more sustainable farming methods.

Population

Africa's population growth rate remains the highest in the world, although there are signs that it may be declining very slightly. The continent's total population, estimated at 748 million in 1996, is expected to exceed 830 million by the end of the decade and to double to nearly 1.5 billion by the year 2025.

Such a rapidly growing population, noted the UN New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), places tremendous strains on Africa's development process. Food production, employment, shelter and basic social services have had difficulty keeping up with the expansion. High rates of rural-to urban migration compound the problems in Africa's fast-growing cities. In response, African governments are increasingly recognizing the importance of integrating population policies more closely in their overall development strategies. But the challenges remain enormous.

- Africa's annual population growth rate stood at 2.9 per cent in 1995, according to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and will likely average 2.7 per cent over 1995-2000. Even this projected lower rate will remain far above the rates for Latin America (1.7 per cent) or Asia (1.5 per cent).

- Based on figures of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, in only 17 African countries did average GDP growth rates exceed average population growth rates over 1991-95, while populations grew more rapidly than economic production in 35 countries.
- By 1995, some 34 per cent of Africans were living in cities and towns, compared to 27 per cent in 1980. UNFPA projects that Africa's urban population will grow 4.3 per cent annually over 1995-2000, much faster than the total population.
- On average, a woman in sub-Saharan Africa will give birth to six or more children and in North Africa to four or more; in Asia and Latin America the average is three.
- Only 15 per cent of women in Africa use modern contraceptives, compared to 49 per cent in Latin America and 54 per cent in Asia.
- African women face a 1-in-20 risk of dying during pregnancy or childbirth.

Faced with these daunting realities, there has been a turnaround in official approaches to issues of population in Africa. A decade ago, nearly two-thirds of African governments viewed their population growth rates as satisfactory, and only three countries had explicit national population policies. Currently more than two thirds of African governments view with concern their population growth rates. As of 1995, 26 African countries had adopted specific population policies, while another dozen or so were in the process of doing so.

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt, reflected a new international consensus: that population issues can be effectively tackled only by combatting poverty, involving local communities, improving maternal and child health and raising the socio-economic status of women.

In line with the ICPDs Programme of Action, almost all African countries are now integrating family planning counselling and services into their public health programmes. Among 41 sub-Saharan countries that responded to a recent survey, 29 reported significant progress in expanding their family planning service networks and 22 have reported increases in their contraceptive prevalence rates. Public education campaigns about the risks of HIV/AIDS have contributed to the increase. Improving women's and girls' education also is now viewed as a key component to progress on population issues, a point reinforced by the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995.

Analysts already foresee the beginning of a "demographic transition" in about 10 African countries, with lower infant mortality and fertility levels contributing to a significant slowing in their population growth rates.

The human dimension

In 1996, mid-way through the UN New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, a child born in sub-Saharan Africa is more likely to be malnourished than to go to primary school and is as likely to die before the age of five as to enter secondary school. Behind these compelling facts lies the crux of the challenge facing Africa for the remainder of the decade: an urgent need to redouble efforts to develop the continent's human resources as key to both reduction of poverty and long-term growth.

Africa remains caught in a vicious circle: partly due to poor health, education and nutrition, rapid economic growth has been impossible, and without economic growth, resources to invest in human development have been insufficient. The damage wrought by decades of economic crisis is visible in today's deteriorating health and education infrastructures. It is also apparent in the cost to society of preventable deaths and loss in human potential, and in contributions to development foregone for lack of education and skills.

- only about one-half of school entrants in grade one in sub-Saharan Africa currently finish grade five, and at the primary and secondary levels more than 80 million boys and girls are not in school.

- About 170 million people a third of the sub-region's population —do not get enough to eat; about 23 million children are malnourished and 16 per cent of babies are underweight.
- There is only one doctor for every 18,000 people in the sub-region, compared to 1 for/ every 1,0001 Latin America, and 1 for every 390 in industrialized countries.
- The sub-region has the world's highest maternal mortality rate, 980 per 100,000 live births, as compared to 266 in North Africa and 36 in Europe.

To its credit, Africa has made measurable social progress in key areas: average expectancy in Sub-Saharan Africa continues on upward trend, from 41 in 1960, to 50 in 1987, and 52 in 1993. Adult literacy has more than doubled, from 27 per cent to 55 per cent over the last two decades. The infant mortality rates have fallen from 167 deaths per 1000 live births three decades ago to 103 in 1987 and 93 today. The five countries of North Africa---Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, and Egypt--- have achieved " medium" human development according to the human development index devised by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) consistently scoring higher than their neighbours to the south in standard measures of education, health and social welfare.

But for every gain, there have been setbacks or stagnation. Of the 48 countries in the world which rank "low" in human development, 37 are in sub-Saharan Africa. At current slow rates of improvement, countries like cote d'Ivoire, where in the 1990s, primary enrolment continues to decline after growing steadily from the 1960s to 1979, may require 65 years to attain a level of human development to match industrial countries. Those even further behind, such as Mozambique and Niger, may take more than two centuries to catch up, according to UNDP.

Health and education in crisis

Africa's social sector has remained under great pressure in the 1990s primarily due to major cutbacks in public expenditure on education and health under the weight of economic instability and structural adjustment. Many governments have been prompted to introduce user fees for schooling or social services previously offered free of charge, with the result that the poor often go without health care and must sacrifice their children education.

Problems of efficiency, equity and coverage abound. Public expenditure in the health sector rarely exceeds an average of 5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), or $10 per capita per year, and is more likely to be allocated to curative services in urban hospitals than to preventive and primary care.

In many countries, more than 50 per cent of the population has no access to modern health facilities. Another 54 per cent has no access to safe drinking water and 66 per cent lacks sanitation services that could prevent the spread of some diseases. The impact of weak preventive health care is most severe on the continent's children, who continue to fall ill or die most often from preventable and/or treatable afflictions--- acute respiratory infections, diarrhea, malaria and measles--- in addition to protein-energy and micronutrient malnutrition.

Most diarrheal diseases, for example, are treatable with inexpensive oral rehydration therapy (ORT). But while 16 countries have increased their ORT use rate by 30 percentage points or more over the last decade, recent data indicates that the ORT use rate in sub-Saharan Africa is about 57 per cent, compared to the use rate of 80 per cent by the year 2000 recommended by the world Health Organization (WHO).

Outbreaks of diphtheria and measles as well as pertussis, or whopping cough continue to afflict the continent's children. The latter two illness can lead to acute respiratory infections , including pneumonia ---the single largest childhood killer. But Sub-Saharan Africa's immunization are below targets set by the WHO for the mid-1990s, and significantly below the global average., particularly in rural areas in countries in serious economic crisis or civil strife.

There are, however, improvements: today, about half the children of the subregion are immunized, compared with only 20 per cent in the early 1980s. Tunisia and Egypt have reached the goal of 90 per cent measles immunization by the year 2000, and Benin, Guinea and Uganda have raised the level of measles immunization by more than 25 percentage points between 1988 and 1994.

Guinea worm, a parasitic infection, has been reduced by 95 per cent and could be totally eradicated before the end of the decade thanks to the efforts of a worldwide coalition including UNICEF, WHO, and the US-based Carter Center. The World Bank and WHO are also working to eradicate onchocerciasis, or river blindness, from the remaining 16 African countries in which it is confined. These two campaigns demonstrate what can be achieved by targeted interventions — with the support of Africa's development partners — at a time when national budgets are not meeting even basic health needs.

Malaria remains a major cause of death and incapacitation in Africa. Yet its negative impact on development is being surpassed by that of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) which causes AIDS. Over the past five years, progress has been made in introducing epidemiological surveillance systems, in slowing HIV's spread in some communities by successful prevention campaigns, and in community based responses to the epidemic. However, by killing men and women between the ages of 1 5 and 45, their most productive years, the disease is taking a devastating toll, from the level of the household to the national economy.

More than 13 million people are living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, two-thirds of the global total, and 50 per cent of the 7,500 new infections that occur daily worldwide are in the region. Particularly hard hit are Africa's women, who number close to 8 million out of the 10 million women worldwide living with HIV. They have transmitted the virus to as many as one million children, either in the womb, during childbirth or through breast-feeding.

Many of Africa's health problems, which are exacerbated by emergencies such as drought, famine, and armed conflict, are linked to inadequate access to primary and secondary education, among other factors. Since the 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education for All, most regions in the world have made progress in expanding educational opportunity — with the exception of Africa, where declining enrolment ratios evident during the crisis years of the 1980s have not been reversed.

Public expenditure on education in sub-Saharan Africa is not only the lowest in the world -- $28 per capita, compared with $49 in other developing regions – but also disproportionately skewed in favour of higher education to the detriment of primary education and basic literacy. Gross enrolment ratios at the primary level are actually declining, a trend expected to continue at least until the year 2000. After having increased from 50 per cent in 1970 to 74 per cent in 1982, the ratio was 69 per cent in 1987 and fell further to 67 per cent in 1993. No other region has ever experienced such a setback, although the number of children in primary school has quadrupled since 1960.

Expanding numbers of school entrants, coupled with expenditure cutbacks have caused a near collapse of educational infrastructure. This situation is compounded by high rates of attrition and repetition, a loss of qualified teachers and declining standards. In many countries, there is practically no funding from the central government for primary education, except for teacher salaries and allowances.

A particular problem in sub-Saharan Africa is the fact that 50 per cent of school age girls, a total of 36 million, are out of school, compared with an average 18.6 per cent in North Africa. Even when the same number of boys and girls enroll in first grade, 50 per cent of girls drop out by fourth grade. Sixty-four per cent leave school before they become fully literate. The primary school completion rate for girls is only 34 per cent, and only 10 per cent of girls, compared to 36 per cent of boys, attend secondary school in the sub-region. Four times as many boys as girls continue to the tertiary level.

This situation persists despite the widespread recognition of the catalytic effect on development of girls' education, which is closely linked to fewer maternal and child deaths, better child health and nutrition, later marriage age, higher rates of contraceptive use and reduced fertility, as well as to wider economic opportunities and improved agricultural production. Non-formal education and literacy programmes have also not grown fast enough to make up for the shortfalls in the formal educational system. The number of illiterate adults in the sub-region continues to increase and is projected to reach 146.8 million by the year 2000.

Challenges for the future

UN-NADAF will continue to emphasize improvements in basic health care and education among the key priorities for the remainder of the decade. This will require some reordering of budgetary allocations and shifts in policy orientation. At the 1995 World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen, the "20/20 Initiative" received some support. This was a call for developing countries to increase the proportion of their budgets allocated to human development from 13 to at least 20 per cent, and for industrialized countries to raise the proportion of their aid for the same purpose from 7 to 20 per cent.

African governments have begun taking steps of their own: some have introduced social safety nets, while others are waiving user fees for primary health and education services for the poor and for children under five. In Ethiopia, Mali, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, efforts have been made to reduce military expenditures in order to reallocate resources to the social sectors. And since the 1990 World Summit for Children, 33 African countries have finalized national programmes of action for children, and a further 12 are in the draft or preparatory phase.

Building on the UN-NADAF framework, the UN System-wide Special Initiative on Africa plans to devote 85 per cent of an estimated $25 bn in cumulative resources over the next decade on improvements in basic health and education. It will concentrate on reform of the health sector to strengthen the capacity of health systems and communities to reduce the main causes of morbidity and mortality, including malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and childhood illnesses. It will also focus resources on increasing access to basic education, particularly for girls and women.

NGOs

One of the notable features of the UN-NADAF period has been the dramatic rise in profile of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whose influence has grown due to their resourcefulness, their flexibility, and their work at the grassroots level. Against a background of persistent economic problems, food insecurity and resurgent conflicts, NGOs have played an increasingly dynamic role in such areas as health and nutrition, education and the democratization process. NGOs are also among the most prominent advocates of participatory development, a concept now more widely accepted by governmental and intergovernmental bodies.

NGOs have been effective in reaching specific social groups such as women, refugees and the poor, especially during emergency situations, noted UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in a 1993 speech to the Panel of High-level Personalities on African Development: "Giving greater scope to NGOs in such fields can bring development funds to where they will be most effectively used."

While total official development assistance is declining, bilateral and multilateral institutions are increasingly channeling a growing portion through NGOs. According to *The Reality of Aid, 199*6, an independent review of international aid, NGOs contributed over $7 bn to developing countries in grants in 1994, equivalent to 12 per cent of ODA.

NGOs push for Sustainable Development

Across Africa, NGOs are active in programmes that are vital to the success of UN-NADAF, including income generation for rural women, food security and environmental protection. NGOs also provide early-warning information on potential conflicts as well as distributing emergency relief to displaced and refugee populations and facilitating post-conflict recovery.

NGOs have helped focus attention on the shortcomings of some development policies and have consistently pushed for changes in the design and implementation of development programmes, emphasizing the need for greater participation by African countries and people. They have been especially vocal on the adverse effects of World Bank/IMF supported structural adjustment programmes on poor people.

There is now an international consensus on the important role of civil society organizations, including NGOs, in poverty reduction and sustainable development. In this context, the World Bank has increased its commitment to working with NGOs and now holds consultations with them on some aspects of its work, including country assistance strategies.

Many NGOs have had a longstanding consultative relationship with the UN and its agencies. The UN has also been facilitating greater participation by NGOs in its official forums. For example, the number of NGOs accredited to the major UN conferences on women increased from 300 in 1985 to nearly 3,000 in 1995. And in the preparatory process for the recent Habitat I conference in Istanbul, NGOs for the first time took part in the informal groups drafting the Declaration and Programme of Action. NGO representation at these conferences has also changed, with more community-based groups now active alongside the larger, international NGOs.

Other consultations between NGOs and UN structures in the implementation of the New Agenda have included the UN Economic Commission for Africa/Forum of African Voluntary Development Organizations symposium on the role of NGOs in the implementation of UN-NADAF in November 1994 in Saly, Senegal; the Brainstorming Workshop on NGOs and African Development organized by the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries (OSCAL) in New York in January 1995; the Parallel Event to the High-level Segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on Africa held in Geneva in July 1995; and the NGO Forum and the Fourth World Conference on Women, both held in Beijing in August-September 1995.

New York, 1991