

Accelerating Africa's agricultural plan

AFRICAN governments generally agree that "agriculture must lead economic development," Ghanaian President John Kufuor told African and international officials and farm experts meeting in Accra. "But the sad truth is that Africa does not seem to have the know-how to let this happen, and the agricultural sectors are inadequately supported."

The conference, held 5-6 May, was called to push forward implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). First released in 2003 as part of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the continental development plan, the CAADP aims to address Africa's agricultural needs, such as greater funding and for access to appropriate farming technologies and knowledge.

NEPAD's agricultural plan aims to boost farm productivity to help spur development and reduce hunger.

The more than 200 delegates — from African governments, key donor agencies, farmers' organizations and agribusinesses — agreed that Africa's five regions should identify and begin implementing early actions over the next 12 months, to give momentum to the CAADP. Prof. Wiseman Nkuhlu, executive head of the NEPAD Secretariat, based in South Africa, emphasized that these regional groups should integrate into their decision-making all key agricultural stakeholders.

Initial proposals for such actions were already raised during five regional CAADP meetings held during the early months of 2005. For example, the mid-February meeting of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), in Maputo, Mozambique, highlighted programmes to expand small-scale irrigation and water harvesting, reform land-tenure laws and help build the capacity of farmers' organizations. Ms. Emily Sikazwe, executive director of a Zambian civil society organization, Women for Change, stressed measures to

redress rural gender inequalities by improving women's access to land, credit and education.

One of the concrete proposals endorsed in Maputo was taken up by the Accra conference and recommended for all five regions: establishment of a budget-tracking system to determine how much African governments are actually spending on agricultural activities. African heads of states agreed in 2003 that about 10 per cent of their budgets should go to agriculture, but since that spending is currently scattered among different parts of national budgets, it is often difficult to monitor the extent to which countries are progressing towards the target. The Accra meeting also underscored the need for Africa's external partners to allocate more of their assistance to the CAADP's four priorities: expanding areas under sustainable land and water management, improving agricultural infrastructure and market access, increasing food supply and reducing hunger, and strengthening dissemination of agricultural research and technologies.

The World Bank has agreed to provide an initial \$60 mn for multi-country agricultural productivity programmes in the countries of SADC and the Economic Community of West African States. The African Development Bank will provide \$150 mn for SADC irrigation programmes. At the Maputo meeting, a representative of the US Agency for International Development reported that US aid to agriculture has increased by a third between 2001 and 2005.

Boosting Africa's agricultural productivity is the "combined responsibility" of both Africans and their development partners, Prof. Richard Mkandawire, NEPAD's agriculture adviser, stressed at the Accra meeting. Raising productivity will contribute not only towards reaching the goal of an average agricultural growth rate of 6 per cent a year, but also help ensure that 200 million Africans "do not further suffer food insecurity." *All Africa*