Africa Tomorrow: Issues in Technology, Agriculture, and U.S. Foreign Aid

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Preface

The United States has a stake in the agricultural development of sub-Saharan Africa. Alleviating hunger and malnutrition, expanding stable markets for U.S. products, and maintaining the availability of critical and strategic materials provide humanitarian, economic, and political reasons for a continuing American interest in Africa. Most African countries are predominantly agricultural and their well-being and future development are tied closely to that sector. Therefore, agricultural assistance probably will continue to be a major area of U.S. involvement.

Food problems in Africa are substantial: in no other region of the world has per capita food production declined steadily for over two decades. The Congress expressed its concern for these problems in 1984 with a major supplemental appropriations bill and the creation of a Select Committee on Hunger. This technical memorandum on agricultural technology and U.S. foreign assistance in sub-Saharan Africa was requested by the Select Committee, with support from the Africa Subcommittee, House Foreign Affairs Committee. OTA was asked to investigate several topics relating to current and future African agriculture: technological needs, successful technology development and transfer, and the roles of public and private foreign assistance.

This paper is the result of 6 months’ work, including: 1) a 2-day workshop with 14 invited experts on African agriculture, 2) a visit by an OTA contractor to the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Nigeria, and 3) additional OTA staff research. We do not pretend that this is a definitive work on specific types of agricultural technologies. Instead the paper outlines major issues constraining the development and transfer of sustainable technologies for low-resource food producers. Our findings reflect broad consensus on which potential congressional action can be based. The problems of food production in sub-Saharan Africa are acute. Opportunities for improving the situation abound, however, and many are available to Congress.

This paper was prepared by Scott McCormick, Ted MacDonald, Phyllis Windle, and Chris Eling, OTA wishes to thank the workshop participants and additional reviewers for their substantial contributions as well as the many others who generously provided information.

JOHN H. GIBBONS
Director
OTA Workshop Participants, Sept. 12-13, 1984

George Burrill  
Associates in Rural Development  
Burlington, VT

Charles Francis  
Rodale Research Center  
Emmaus, PA

Elon Gilbert  
Center for Research on Economic Development  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Thomas Hayden  
CODEL  
New York, NY

James Henson  
International Program Development Office  
Washington State University  
Pullman, WA

Marilyn Hoskins  
Department of Sociology  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute  
Blacksburg, VA

Shelly Kessler  
Urban Resource Systems, Inc.  
San Francisco, CA

Carl Lindblad  
Volunteers in Technical Assistance  
Arlington, VA

Sauveur Mahotiere  
Plant Science Department  
Fort Valley State College  
Fort Valley, GA

Gerald Matlock  
Department of Soils, Water, and Engineering  
University of Arizona  
Tucson, AZ

Robert McDowell  
Department of Animal Science  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY

Uzo Mokwunye  
International Fertilizer Development Center  
Muscle Shoals, AL

Anita Spring  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, FL

OTA Staff  
Barbara Lausche  
Edward F. MacDonald  
Scott McCormick  
Walter Parham  
Phyllis N. Windle
OTA Staff on Africa Tomorrow: Technology and Agriculture

Roger Herdman, Assistant Director, OTA
Health and Life Sciences Division

Water E. Parham, Food and Renewable Resources Program Manager

Analytical Staff

Phyllis N. Windle, Project Director
Scott McCormick, Analyst
Edward F. MacDonald, Research Analyst
Barbara Lausche, Senior Analyst
Chris Elfring, Editor
George Scharffenberger, Contractor

Administrative Staff

Phyllis Balan and Patty Durana, Administrative Assistant
Nellie Hammond, Secretary
Carolyn Swarm, Secretary

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North 1984.
°July 1984.