

**Report on the Africa Regional Implementation Meeting [RIM]
on the 16th Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable
Development [CSD 16] on Agriculture and Rural
Development, Land, Drought and Desertification and 'Africa'**

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1.0 Introduction

The Africa RIM organised and hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA] was one of the series of meetings that are being held in all the United Nations Regions and its aim was to regional input into the CSD 16 session next May in New York. The Africa RIM reviewed the implementation, progress, reflected on and identified main challenges, constraints opportunities lessons learned and priority approaches for further implementation of the Africa Agenda 21, the Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 [PFIA21] and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation [JPOI] of the World Summit on Sustainable Development [WSSD]. The RIM focussed on thematic cluster of the CSD-16 issues--- agriculture and rural development, land, drought and desertification and 'Africa': poverty alleviation and socially sustainable development; means of implementation and production, natural resources base of economic and social development; means of implementation and harnessing the interlinkages.

The meeting was attended by member states and Major Groups as identified and constituted by the United Nations whose discussions were guided by the background papers that had been produced by UNECA and covered the following issues: land agriculture and rural development, drought and desertification as well as the regional review report on Africa on the follow up to the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development [WSSD]. In terms of procedure, the RIM followed the usual UN format of meetings that allowed both the member states and the major groups to contribute to the debate. Three side events were held during the RIM and an Africa Regional Statement on the Session was developed, discussed and adopted and forwarded to the CSD Secretariat in New York

2.0 Process

The forthcoming CSD will be a review of the implementation of the Africa Agenda 21, the Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 [PFIA21] and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation [JPOI] of the World Summit on Sustainable Development [WSSD] and was focussed on Africa as it is Africa whose economy and social development is centred on agriculture, is suffering most of the effects of drought and desertification due to a number of reasons and is the poorest region in the world. It is noted that two thirds of the population of Africa still live in the rural areas, subsisting on less than USD2 per day and dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods which is mainly subsistence and suffer food insecurity with 900

million people suffering from hunger and malnutrition and has the lowest production in terms of cereals due to poor agricultural practices as the continent propensity to climatic variabilities of droughts and floods and this has had negative impacts on its agricultural development. The challenges of agricultural development on the continent are made more urgent by the increased land degradation, which has exacerbated desertification reducing soil fertility and food production and increasing the poverty levels in the rural areas of Africa.

Table 1: Production levels in SSA are low compared to other regions: 2001

REGION	YIELD LEVELS
Asia	1230 kg/ha
Latin America	3090kg/ha
EU	5470kg/ha
Africa	1230kg/ha

Source: ECA 2003

Thus the decision of the CSD to focus on Africa was important and relevant as it would provide a vehicle through which governments can be able to address the challenges that Africa is facing and also develop strategies to transform the agricultural sector and the rural economy through adoption of market oriented approaches. The process would also open up opportunities for the integration of agriculture with other sectors and thus provide an increase in value of the sector which as indicated above is largely subsistence. The integrated approach would require the adoption of sustainable development principles as well as national development strategies and this will assist the continent to effectively deal with the barriers and obstacles that are negatively affecting its implementation strategies to increase production and thus reduce poverty and strive to meet the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs].

It was noted that one of the ways that could provide Africa with an opportunity to address its poverty status was through the development of linkages between agriculture and other sectors and this will lead to an integrated economy of Africa that would provide employment, improve food security, address issues of governance [policy, laws and institutional frameworks] management of the ecosystem. In order to fully address its degrading ecosystems, Africa needs to develop policies and instructions that are pro poor and inclusive of the users of the ecosystems. Though this approach the continent could probably begin to play a role in reversing climate change even though the causes of climate change are not solely an African problem. It was noted that drought

and desertification were major challenges on the sustainable development of the continent and there was need to review policies at all levels in order to combat the phenomenon.

The other issues that were raised and pertinent to the Major Groups was the reasons why Africa is unable to meet the MDGs, has failed to implement the JPOI despite governments having made commitments to address the issues raised in the declarations and commitments. The conclusion from this was that Africa requires to stop doing business as usual and that there was need for political commitment at all levels.

3.0 Opportunities for Engagement

The Africa RIM process offered ample opportunities for NGO/Major Groups to participate in the deliberations and the issues/comments raised by the Major Groups/NGOs were taken into account in the final report as well as the statement. The recognition of the Major Groups/NGOs was also demonstrated by the opportunities that were offered to the group to speak in plenary and also to submit comments in writing to the secretariat. There was assurance that the comments from the Major Groups/CSO would be taken into account and this was proved through the statement and the final report of the RIM which contains comments from this group. This was probably because the Bureau was pro-civil society engagement as evidenced by the participation of the Chair of the RIM [Mr. Ali Mohamed] and other government officials and UNECA official in a side event hosted by the Women Major Group; the RIM chair did not only attend this side event but also officially opened it. This was the first such event to be held in the CSD RIM processes. The role of the NGOs/Major Groups was acknowledged by the Chair when he expressed that *'we have also learnt a lot from ... and would want to thank you for inviting me.....'* this paved way for the recognition that participatory approaches were important in resolving the problems that are bedevilling Africa in terms of meeting its obligations at national regional and international levels.

4.0 Shortcomings

While the RIM meeting called for an integrated approach in addressing issues of agriculture and rural development, land, drought and desertification and 'Africa': poverty alleviation it was noted that water resources management was not given the prominence it deserves in the process. The contention of the author was that the management of water resources should have also been part of the issues that the CSD 16 would be reviewing as without sustainable management of the

water resources, agricultural production will not improve, and therefore the poverty levels will continue to increase. It is noted that in the document that addressed 'Agriculture and rural development [E/ECA/ACSD/5/4] efforts were made to address the water issues by acknowledging the efforts made on the continent by the various governments through the adoption of different treaties, protocols etc., but this was in the middle of the report. The relevance of water to the themes of CSD 16 cannot be overemphasised as without water agriculture will not develop and thus the commitments and recommendations that will be made will not be fully achieved at all levels. It has been documented that that by 2025 about 18 countries on the continent will face water scarcity [Dongo M 2003]. This makes it even more urgent to fully address the issues of water resources management in relation to the other sector themes that have been identified as constituting an important factor in the development of the African continent. It is also the contention of the author that it is important that the continent and the world over should move away from just dealing with integrated water resources management but move into addressing 'integrated land and water resources management [ILWRM] as the two resources are key and fundamental to agricultural development, management of the ecosystem among other issues.

The other issue that raised concern was that while CSD is reviewing and developing strategies of addressing improved agriculture and rural development, the side event on Eco labelling threw cold water on the efforts being made by the new requirements that are being developed to deal with agricultural products from the third world;

4.1 The Soil Association proposal

The Soil Association is proposing to ban air freighted products on environmental grounds. The ITC, UNEP and UNCTAD believe that airfreight is not a useful indicator of environmental damage for the following reasons:

4.2 Need to consider carbon footprint from farm to fork

Whilst transport by air or long distances may have a higher use of fuel than from domestic sources, the very low energy usage for farm production in other countries can compensate for this (Saunders 2006). Studies have shown that even when a product is air freighted to the EU it may still have a more favourable carbon footprint than one grown in the EU (Williams 2006). This is

because production uses far less fuel in the South where temperatures are higher and more manual labour is used.

4.3 *Sharing carbon wealth*

National carbon consumption and income levels are strongly correlated. European average incomes and carbon usages are 30 times more per capita than an average Kenyan (World Bank 2007).

Trade is a dynamic way to share the wealth derived from carbon usage. The trade in air freighted products provide large economic gains for farmers whose ecological footprint is tiny compared with the developed world.

The ITC, UNCTAD and UNEP think that banning air freighted product will not mitigate climate change and risk the impoverishment of very vulnerable populations particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

In essence the above shows double standards on the part of the west in that while there is a loud call to improve agricultural development in Africa yet at the same time creating more obstacles for the sector to benefit from the international market..... *The Soil Association certifies UK products that are more energy intensive, beef uses three times more energy than cereal production*

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5.0 Key Messages from the RIM

The meeting as indicated above was fruitful and gave the Major Groups an opportunity to engage with governments but there is need for further national consultations to create ownership and thus pave way for implementation of the outcomes of CSD 16.

The key messages from the RIM can be summarised as follows:

- Adoption of a holistic approach in addressing issues of agriculture and rural development, land, drought and desertification in Africa. This will call for adequate integration of the NEPAD and African Union Commission activities: under the same

It was agreed that there was need to strengthen political, economic and social relations thus decrease inequality, achieve peace and respect of human rights

- Adoption of a participatory approach at national, regional and international levels
- Need to develop pro poor programmes that would assist to alleviate poverty and enhance sustainable development; under this message issues of governance and institutional frameworks that are weak; the importance of sustaining high growth rates to financially empower countries to alleviate poverty
- Need to strengthen natural resource governance systems at all levels; reinforce institutional capacity to include human, technical and financial, adopt and implement effective policies and legislation and foster stakeholder ownership and local participation in natural resources management and development