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**Strategy and Policy Group**

**SAHEL 21: POINTS FOR DISCUSSION WITH THE  
DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION AGENCIES**

**Strategy and Policy Group (SPG) Meeting  
Washington, 15-16 June 2000**

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## **SAHEL 21: POINTS FOR DISCUSSION WITH THE DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION AGENCIES**

### **Club du Sahel Strategy and Policy Group (SPG) Meeting Washington, 15-16 June 2000**

#### **1. Sahel 21: A Participatory Approach to Poverty Reduction in the Sahel**

In 1995, the Council of Ministers asked the CILSS Executive Secretariat to organise a Sahelian discussion on the future of the region, giving particular emphasis to the future of rural development. The aims of this process were to:

- Summarise the conclusions of the main studies on the region;
- Focus on communication with civil society to provide them with better information on long-term thinking;
- Seek civil society's reaction on this thinking in order to develop a new, "internally generated" vision.

This was an especially ambitious and complex approach as it covered simultaneously the nine member countries of the CILSS. The discussion process consisted of a series of iterations between experts and population groups, and between the national level and the regional level, with summary papers produced at regional workshops.

#### **2. Priorities, Approach and Difficulties Encountered**

The participatory approach was an opportunity for the organisers to gather information and gain a closer knowledge of the various partners in their own countries and in neighbouring countries. The exercise highlighted priorities that have sometimes been pushed aside under the dual influence of the short-term view of structural adjustment and OECD countries' development methods. These priorities were summarised in a declaration at the Forum of Sahelian Societies held in Banjul, The Gambia, in 1997:

1. **Promotion of human resources:** to improve access for all to health, housing and safe drinking water, to basic education and functional literacy or vocational training for adults; to develop training and information for all people in positions of responsibility, with special attention for women and young people.
2. **Institutional capacity-building:** to help the region build dynamic, pluralistic local, national and regional institutions, capable of ensuring democracy, peace and security and of promoting both local development and regional co-operation.

3. **Rapid and sustainable development of production in crop-farming, livestock, forestry and fisheries**, through sensible management of natural resources and the products and agri-food industries derived from them.
4. **Economic growth and diversification**, because the transformation of the global economy requires the development of an open, competitive and increasingly diversified economic area.
5. **A more integrated Sahel that is also more open to the rest of Africa and the world.** National economies must be regionally integrated and increasingly involved in the global economy. The obstacles and monopolies that hinder regional trade need to be broken down and communication infrastructures developed.

The approach highlighted the following problems:

- A general lack of information on development forecasts and mid- to long-term prospects;
- Insufficient circulation of existing information;
- The poor ability of civil society organisations to participate effectively in debate: the difficulty of identifying and mobilising people recognised as representatives in their countries;
- The difficulty of managing countries developing at different speeds within a regional approach;
- The difficulty of finding experts capable of listening to groups from civil society and summarising their often contradictory conclusions impartially.

### **3. Implications for Future Participatory Approaches**

#### *Adopt tools for assessing the role of the various actors in the economy and society*

The information available, particularly at the macro-economic level, says little about the various actors involved. It is often presented as abstract aggregates, which representatives of civil society have difficulty relating to their everyday experience. Two things are probably needed:

- Basic training in economics for the representatives of the socio-occupational groups that participate in the debates;
- Simple, clear information.

#### *Circulate information on development and co-operation*

Proper conditions for the dissemination of information need to be created. All too often information on the main development indicators is unavailable, which prevents people from forming an accurate opinion about the country's situation. The same applies to information on the State budget, development aid, etc. There is a general call, for example, for greater effectiveness in development aid. But how can this be achieved when even the current situation is not known? As a result of a lack of reliable information, debate is based on sometimes contradictory "perceptions" of the cost of technical assistance; the amount of aid that finds its way back to donor countries; the proportion consumed by the administration; the proportion that really goes to poor people or to productive investment, etc.

***Work on long-term processes and avoid institutionalising participation***

Participation is a process that takes time to mature. The organisations most active in the Sahel 21 process are those that have already been working on and discussing development issues for a number of years. The process is an opportunity to share their knowledge and to implement forums for dialogue for different socio-occupational groups through the platform concept. Although the platforms have been formally established, much remains to be done: increasing participatory capacity, with access to the information and analyses required for informed views; and ensuring the emergence of leaders capable of both representing the group and enforcing the agreements they negotiate.

**4. The Process from Now Until Bamako 2000**

The follow-up to Sahel 21 is ambitious. The process's capacity to influence action on the ground will be the true validity test of the "participation".

The process is based on two types of structure:

- the national committees, which have organised the debate in their respective countries;
- the socio-occupational platforms, which have organised the debate within their respective groups.

The next phase seeks to consolidate these structures so as to move from establishing priorities to the methods of achieving them and to implementation.

A process to define national programmes of priority actions should involve the following stages:

- Review the current situation and identify the strategic and operational objectives to be attained;
- Analyse the impact of the national programmes associated with these objectives;
- Propose priority interventions (to consolidate current actions or begin new ones);
- Propose a plan/budget and the mechanisms for implementation.

A workshop is planned for August in Banjul to provide a regional evaluation of the national debates.

A document proposing priority regional actions will be submitted for discussion and validated during a second regional Forum of Sahelian Societies to be held in Bamako in November 2000.

At a special meeting between the GMAP and the development co-operation agencies, also scheduled for November 2000, the CILSS will discuss the methods for pursuing priority interventions.

**5. Issues to be Discussed with the Development Co-operation Agencies**

In the discussions with the development co-operation agencies, the GMAP has decided to focus on the proposals for consolidating collective sustainable food security in the Sahel. To build on the achievements in regional food security, priority investment programmes need to address the following challenges:

- ***Population growth and urbanisation:*** Population, which is set to double within the next 25 years with half in cities, is at the heart of the challenges facing the countries of the Sahel.

Local production is only just keeping up with the increase in demand accentuated by population growth, increasing the region's dependence on imports to ensure food supply. The development of more productive and diversified agriculture and the rational use of fish and livestock resources are essential. Production systems are beginning to diversify and small advances have been made in agricultural productivity, with considerable potential for raising the income of rural and peri-urban communities.

- **Poverty:** Urbanisation and monetarisation have put the market in a key position for meeting food needs. A significant section of the population now relies on the market. Even in rural areas, eating patterns are changing. The level of income will be a decisive factor in household food security, yet widespread poverty persists, despite the new economic dynamics. The depletion of ecosystems in the driest areas means that, even in a year of good weather, impoverished rural populations do not produce enough to meet their needs and cannot afford to buy food on the market. Family and community solidarity, once a form of risk management, is disappearing, worsening the exposure of vulnerable population groups, particularly single women, abandoned children, the disabled and the elderly.
- **Environment:** Although production has generally increased in line with needs, this has only been achieved at the cost of a similar extension of acreage. Production systems have only been intensified for crops and industries that enjoy high or guaranteed prices (cotton, peri-urban livestock farming, market gardening). As natural resources are used in this way, soil conservation and soil fertility will depend on the supply of quality inputs. Dependence on rainfall is another factor causing uncertainty and risk. Increased production must be accompanied by better management of water.
- **Withdrawal of the State:** The withdrawal of the State, with the liberalisation of trade and the dismantling of marketing boards, has been a major event of the past fifteen years. However, there is still a lack of a shared vision of the respective roles of private actors, socio-occupational groups, NGOs and the State. Such a consensus is essential for food security. Given the scope of public policy in many areas (economic, social, agricultural, infrastructure investment), the parties involved need to design new forms of multi-sector, multi-actor governance.
- **Regional integration:** Liberalisation has stimulated the development of trade and given a bigger role to the market in supplying households. However as a result of inadequate market information systems it is impossible to gain an accurate picture of this process, and, consequently, to design effective market regulation policies. Higher purchasing power in some coastal countries has attracted trade flows there, to the detriment of consumers in the Sahel. Furthermore, the increasing openness of Sahelian economies to international markets means that local produce is competing more directly with imports. Product competitiveness (including transport costs and formal or informal taxes, which hamper trade) is now especially important.
- **New international context:** The Marrakesh Agreement has helped adjust world markets, with the gradual reduction of export support. However, the markets remain unpredictable and growth in world demand for food could lead to a rise in prices. Trends in countries such as China, and in Asia in general, will partly influence the conditions of supply to the Sahelian countries. The Agreement is about to enter a new round of negotiations. The reduction in subsidies for food products by OECD countries and the degree of autonomy granted to the LDCs in trade policy will be at the heart of the discussions. The Food Aid Convention is also being renegotiated and there is talk of extending it to the whole issue of food security and not just food aid.